

JOSEPH G. CLEMONS

Throughout a lifetime of service, Colonel Joseph G. Clemons, West Point Class of 1951, has exemplified the ideals of the United States Military Academy. In combat during two wars, in the Army's training schools and in other, high-level assignments, in supporting West Point as a graduate, and in his community, he has served others with courage and selflessness. In his words and, most important, in his deeds, Joseph Clemons has truly earned selection as a distinguished graduate of the United States Military Academy.

In 1951, after graduation from West Point, where he was an academically distinguished cadet, a leader in the Corps of Cadets, and a stalwart on athletic fields, Joe Clemons pinned on the crossed rifles of Infantry branch. Shortly after completing officer basic training at Fort Benning, Georgia, and an assignment in the 82nd Airborne Division, he reported to A Company, 31st Regiment, 7th Infantry Division in Korea. There, Lieutenant Clemons heroically led a series of attacks to retake a tactically and strategically critical outpost in the fiercely contested Iron Triangle. His platoon suffered many casualties, but Clemons repeatedly reorganized, rallied, and led his men in ferocious hand-to-hand combat. His courageous leadership earned him the Distinguished Service Cross. Six months later he would be fighting again on similar terrain. On 17 April 1953, Lieutenant Clemons, in command of K Company, led his Pork Chop Hill before being relieved by another unit. For his actions in command, Lieutenant Clemons received the Silver Star.

Upon returning to the United States, Joe Clemons served on the staff and faculty of The Infantry School until 1957 when he volunteered for Ranger training. In later years, he commanded a mechanized infantry battalion in Germany and attended the Army War College, before earning a Master's Degree in economics from the University of Maryland. He was also with the Institute for Defense Analysis and on the staff of the Vice Chief of Staff of the Army.

In 1969, Joe Clemons returned to combat duty; this time in the Republic of Vietnam. A colonel, he was initially assigned as commander of the Americal Division's Support Command, then later commanded the 198th Infantry Brigade. His awards during this period were numerous, many of them stemming from his imaginative use of helicopters to support combat. In particular, he was highly respected for directing that his personal helicopter be flown in support of medical resupply and evacuation missions. On one such mission in 1970, he landed to assist a unit pinned down by intense enemy fire, directing that his pilot land, pick up the wounded, and evacuate them. Meanwhile, Colonel Clemons remained with the embattled unit, directing fire support. For his courageous actions, he received the Bronze Star with V device for valor. In addition to being known for leading from the front, Colonel Clemons also was respected for choosing the harder right and for supporting subordinates, traits that would characterize his life after the military, as well.

Among the assignments concluding Joe Clemons' illustrious military career, was Battle Staff Commander of the Airborne Command Post in the Pacific area of responsibility. Characteristically, he organized and led the staff to achieve the highest level of proficiency.

Joe Clemons' civilian life has been multifaceted and service-oriented. In addition to skippering his 44-foot yawl on a long voyage from California to Hawaii with his wife, Cecil, his son, Mike, and brother-in-law, Pierre Russell, he continued his interest in aviation, flying his own Cessna aircraft. He also piloted a 1946 NAVION with US Air Force markings at numerous air shows.

Colonel Clemons has retained his connection to West Point and the Army. A guest of the Department of History in 1997, he spent time with cadets in class and addressed the entire Corps of Cadets in Washington Hall. A leader in his community of Henderson, North Carolina, he was elected by fellow parishioners to lead the vestry of St. James Church, personally organizing transportation for senior members of the parish and serving as an usher and on the finance and outreach committees. In 1999, he was inducted into the Ranger Hall of Fame, and in 2000, he was made a member of the Legion of Valor of the United States of America, a congressionally-chartered organization.

Colonel Joseph G. Clemons' life has been an example of the ideals associated with Duty, Honor, Country. As a combat leader, the head of a family with a rich record of military service, and as a model citizen, he is truly a distinguished role model for cadets and other citizens, as well.

Accordingly, the Association of Graduates takes great pride in presenting the 2007 Distinguished Graduate Award to Joseph G. Clemons.