

DISTINGUISHED MEMBER OF THE SPECIAL FORCES REGIMENT



**SERGEANT FIRST CLASS
EUGENE ASHLEY JR.**

Inducted 28 June 2012



Sergeant First Class Eugene Ashley, Jr. was born in Wilmington North Carolina on 12 October 1931. Not long after his birth, his family moved to New York City where Ashley attended Alexander Hamilton High School. Ashley joined the Army from New York City in 1950 and served in the Korean War with the 187th Regimental Combat Team.

Joining Special Forces, SFC Eugene Ashley Jr. was assigned to Company C, 5th Special Forces Group (Airborne), 1st Special Forces. Prior to volunteering for Special Forces, he had been assigned in a variety of positions including infantryman, ambulance driver, anti-aircraft ammunition handler, and specialist in heavy weapons and parachute repair. He served as a cavalry and an armored battle group squad leaders and company sergeant with an airborne battalion.

The Lang Vei Special Forces camp, located in the northwestern corner of South Vietnam a mile and a half from the Laotian border, was established in late December 1966 as a result of the Special Forces Detachment A-101 having been displaced out of Khe Sanh by the arrival of Marines. Throughout 1967 and into the beginning of 1968, Lang Vei and the surrounding area was constantly battered by North Vietnamese and Viet Cong artillery fire. The camp's population was swelled, holding 24 Special Forces as well as 14 South Vietnamese military, 161 man Mobile Strike Force commanded by Lieutenant Paul Longgear, 282 CIDG (Bru Montagnards and Vietnamese) members, 6 interpreters and 520 Laotian military and civilians belonging to the 33rd Laotian Volunteer Battalion who had streamed across the border. Shortly after midnight on February 7, 1968, a combined NVA infantry-tank assault drove into Lang Vei. Although the team radioed for help, they could not convince anyone in Khe Sanh, the Marine base nearby that tanks were indeed "in the wire." This was the first use of tanks by the North Vietnamese in the war. Additionally, the Laotians refused to participate in the defense of the camp until after daybreak.

SFC Eugene Ashley, Jr., a Special Forces intelligence sergeant in Khe Sanh, volunteered to help relieve the camp. Assisted by two assistant medical specialists, their first assault failed when a NVA machine gun crew opened fire on them. Ashley, however, was not deterred, leading five aggressive assaults to free the camp. Joined by SFC William T. Craig and SSG Tiroch who escaped from the Lang Vei, as well as others who were fleeing from the surrounding area, he began counter attacks, supporting the camp with high explosives and illumination mortar rounds. Between the second, third and fourth assaults, Ashley directed airstrikes on the NVA defensive line and his own position. Simultaneously, he continued to direct the other Special Forces soldiers and Montagnards for yet another attempt. On this fifth counterattack, Ashley was mortally wounded only thirty yards from the command bunker. Without this steadfast commitment to fight to rescue his fellow Special Forces comrades, it is agreed, there would have been no survivors.

When comrades were asked to describe Ashley, they responded that he was "a professional noncommissioned officer who took care of his troops and exuded a fatherly image."

His family received the Medal of Honor posthumously. In 2001, the Eugene Ashley Jr. High School, located south of Wilmington near Carolina Beach was dedicated in his honor.