

DISTINGUISHED MEMBER OF THE SPECIAL FORCES REGIMENT

COMMAND SERGEANT MAJOR GALEN C. KITTLESON

Inducted 9 July 2009



Command Sergeant Major Galen C. Kittleson was born on August 14, 1924 in Mitchell County, Iowa, near the small farm community of St. Ansgar. Following high school and one year of college, he enlisted in the United States Army, becoming a qualified paratrooper. He was initially assigned to the 503rd Regimental Combat Team in the Pacific Theater, where he earned his first Silver Star on Noemfoor Island for carrying a mortally wounded comrade out of the dense New Guinea jungle. He subsequently volunteered for and was selected for the Sixth U.S. Army Special Reconnaissance Unit, better known as the Alamo Scouts, a forerunner of modern-day U.S. Army Special Forces.

While serving with the Alamo Scouts, Command Sergeant Major Kittleson began to foment his reputation as a POW camp raider when he participated in two successful prisoner liberations. The first in Dutch New Guinea, where two teams of Alamo Scouts freed the Dutch Colonial Governor and 65 Dutch, Javanese, and French civilians from the Japanese at Cape Oransbari. Four months later in January 1945, Command Sergeant Major Kittleson and the same scout teams, along with 121 Rangers and Filipino guerilla units, liberated 513 Allied POWs - men who had been on the infamous Bataan Death March - from the Cabanatuan POW Camp in a brilliant night raid. The camp, which was 25 miles behind Japanese lines, was garrisoned by 250 Japanese soldiers and was within minutes of 2,000 more.

Following World War II, Command Sergeant Major Kittleson returned to Iowa, married, and went into farming. He stayed home during the Korean War, but in his heart he was still a Soldier. In 1956, he reenlisted and was assigned to the 101st Airborne and later to the 10th, 6th, and 5th Special Forces Group (Airborne) where his reputation as a POW camp raider continued to grow.

During the Vietnam war, Command Sergeant Major Kittleson participated in two raids to liberate POWs. In March 1968, as a Master Sergeant, he led an attempt to find and liberate a fellow Special Forces officer, First Lieutenant Nick Rowe, who was being held by the Viet Cong. Upon his return from Vietnam and while assigned to Fort Bragg, at the age of 45, Command Sergeant Major Kittleson beat out Green Berets half his age and was selected to participate in the attempt to liberate US servicemen from the Son Tay POW Camp outside of Hanoi. This would be his fourth and final raid, and his experience, reputation, and expertise led to his selection to be on the assault element during the raid.

In 1973 he was promoted to Command Sergeant Major of the 1st Special Forces Group (Airborne) in Okinawa, and later of the 7th Special Forces Group (Airborne) in Fort Bragg. Kittleson, serving in that position until his retirement in July 1978.

In retirement, Command Sergeant Major Kittleson returned to his rural Iowa with his wife, Darlene where he enjoyed raising Hereford cattle. He also formed the Boy Scout troop the "Alamo Scouts" of St. Ansgar, Iowa, in 1982.

Command Sergeant Major Kittleson died at the age of 81 in May 2006 as the only US Soldier to participate in four POW liberation attempts in two wars, and was one of Special Forces' best known and most decorated soldiers, having earned three Silver Stars, three Bronze Stars, and the Purple Heart. A book by former Green Beret and military journalist Charles Sasser, named "Raider" came out in 2002 and depicts Command Sergeant Major Kittleson's life as a soldier and POW raider.