



# Vietnam veteran receives Bronze Star

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A Vietnam veteran was honored for his valor in combat with the pinning of a Bronze Star during Retiree Appreciation Day at Patrick Henry Village, Heidelberg, Germany, on Oct. 17, 2009.

Retired Staff Sgt. Alfred Pankey Jr., a former U.S. Army Europe cavalry scout, was formally recognized for the courage and leadership he displayed during a four-hour firefight against North Vietnamese forces during a battle while deployed with the 3rd Squadron, 11th Armored Cavalry Regiment, on June 19, 1967.

The 9th Infantry Division originally cut orders in August 1967 for a Bronze Star recognizing Pankey for his bravery; however, he did not receive the decoration until July 2009.

Brig. Gen. Allen W. Batschelet, USAREUR deputy chief of staff for operations, presented the award in front of a room full of retirees, family members and current Soldiers at the Village Pavilion.

“Even though it was a long time in coming, I feel like I have earned it,” Pankey said. The 3/11th ACR annual historical summary stated that about 1 a.m. June 19, 1967, the 1st and 2nd battalions of the 274th Viet Cong Regiment, reinforced by their regimental heavy weapons company and the 5th Viet Cong Division anti-aircraft weapons company, attacked the 3rd Squadron’s perimeter along Highway 2 near the Cambodian border.

According to the 3/11th’s report, the squadron “was attacked from three sides and subjected to an intense volume of fire. Team K and Headquarters Troop, which were manning the perimeter, reacted quickly and laid down a heavy volume of suppressive fire.”

The 9th Infantry Division’s award citation, published on Aug. 24, 1967, said the enemy attacked furiously and without warning.

“Sgt. Pankey and his fellow Soldiers were subjected to mortars, rockets, recoilless rifles, automatic weapons and small-arms fire from an estimated battalion of Viet Cong,” the orders state. Exposing himself to the enemy, Pankey directed his platoon’s fire and helped evacuate wounded Soldiers from the firefight.

Pankey’s platoon leader and sergeant were mortally wounded during the onslaught. Realizing the situation had become critical, Pankey rallied his men and maneuvered them to strengthen a vital sector of the perimeter, according to the award orders.

Manning a .50-caliber machine gun, Pankey fired in the direction of the incoming attack during the four hours of non-stop fighting.

“I thank the ‘old man’ above,” Pankey said. “Bullets were flying that night and not one hit me. It could have happened.”

The next morning, Pankey’s team patrolled the battle site. He was one of the first to see the devasta-

tion.

“A sweep of the battlefield at first light revealed 56 Viet Cong bodies,” the squadron reported. In addition, two wounded prisoners were taken, nine troopers in the squadron were killed and 32 were wounded. This battle was known as the Battle of Slope 30.

The former cavalry scout worked his way through the ranks and voluntarily served two more 12-month tours of duty in Vietnam. In 1979, Pankey served along the border with the former East Germany.

After retiring in Germany in 1982, Pankey began a mail and telephone quest for his medal that ended with a surprise note in his Bamberg post office box in July.

Pankey, who lives in Erlangen, Germany, with his family, said the award he received is not for him but for those he served with in Vietnam.

The 42-year wait was worthwhile, he said.

“Heidelberg has made me happy,” he said. “They did a good job. I enjoyed it, and my family enjoyed it, too.”



Photo by Dave Melancon

U.S. Army Garrison Baden-Württemberg Command Sgt. Maj. Annette R. Weber thanked retired Staff Sgt. Alfred Pankey Jr. for his service after he was presented the Bronze Star during the annual U.S. Army Europe and USAG Heidelberg Retiree Appreciation Day on Oct. 17, 2009.