

# Honoring Those Who Serve

## Marine Who Fended Off Vietnam Ambush, Dies at 71

**R**ichard A. Pittman, a Marine who earned the Medal of Honor for charging into a North Vietnamese ambush under heavy fire and fending off dozens of enemy troops in 1966, died on Oct. 13 in Stockton, Calif. He was seventy-one.

His death was confirmed on the Congressional Medal of Honor Society's Website. It did not specify a cause, but he had open-heart surgery some years ago, a family member said.

On July 24, 1966, Mr. Pittman was a lance corporal in Company 1's Third Battalion, Fifth Marines, First Marine Division. His unit was moving down a narrow jungle trail near the demilitarized zone when Marines ahead of his position were attacked by a larger, concealed enemy force.

The Citation continues:

"Hearing the engaged marines' calls for more firepower, Sgt. Pittman quickly exchanged his rifle for a machinegun and several belts of ammunition, left the relative safety of his platoon, and unhesitatingly rushed forward to aid his comrades. Taken under intense enemy small-arms fire at point blank range during his advance, he returned the fire, silencing the enemy position. As Sgt. Pittman continued to forge forward to aid members of the leading platoon, he again came under heavy fire from two automatic weapons which he promptly destroyed. Learning that there were additional wounded marines fifty yards further along the trail, he braved a withering hail of enemy mortar and small-arms fire to continue onward. As he reached the position where the leading marines had fallen, he was suddenly confronted with a bold frontal attack by thirty to forty enemy. Totally disregarding his safety, he calmly established a position in the middle of the trail and raked the advancing enemy with devastating machinegun fire. His weapon rendered ineffective, he picked up an enemy submachinegun and, together with a pistol seized from a fallen comrade, continued his lethal fire until the enemy force had withdrawn. Having exhausted his ammunition except for a grenade which he hurled at the enemy, he then rejoined his platoon. Sgt. Pittman's daring initiative, bold fighting spirit and selfless devotion to duty inflicted casualties, disrupted the enemy attack and saved the lives of many of his wounded comrades. His personal valor at grave risk to himself reflects the highest credit upon himself, the Marine Corps, and the U.S. Naval Service."

He was discharged in April 1968, re-enlisted in 1970 and retired as a master sergeant in the late 1980s. For many years he lived in Stockton, California, where an elementary school was named after him.

### Article Source:

Congressional Medal of Honor Society and information from The New York Times. Photo of Sgt. Pittman: Wikipedia.

### Master Sergeant Pittman's awards include:



Medal of Honor

National Defense Service Medal

Vietnam Service Medal (two bronze stars)

Republic of Vietnam Campaign Medal



**Lieutenant Colonel (Ret.) Richard Cole** (pictured right) was one of eighty men led by then Lieutenant Colonel James Doolittle, assembled to execute a surprise attack over the islands of Japan in 1942. It would be the first time any of them would take off from a carrier. Armed with enough fuel for a one-way trip to Japan and a landing in China, they planned to launch off the USS Hornet about 450 miles from Japan. The U.S. ships were spotted early and the Doolittle Raiders were forced to depart about 650 miles from their intended target. The B-25s arrived from varying directions, confusing the Japanese. The bombers hit their targets and escaped Japan of their own accord. The mission was a success and it turned up the spirits of Americans during World War II.



### Tokyo Fliers

On 18 April 1942, airmen of the US Army Air Forces, led by Lt. Col. James H. (Jimmy) Doolittle, carried the battle of the Pacific to the heart of the Japanese empire with a surprising and daring raid on military targets at Tokyo, Yokohama, Yokosuka, Nagoya, and Kobe. This historic attack against these major cities was the result of coordination between the Army Air Forces and the US Navy, which carried the sixteen North American B-25 medium bombers aboard the carrier USS Hornet to within take-off distances of the Japanese Islands. Despite the rough seas his B-25 bomber becomes airborne on last leg of its journey to the Japanese mainland.



A vintage B-25 Mitchell bomber flies near the National Museum of the U.S. Air Force at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base, Ohio. (Photo by Wright-Patterson Air Force Base, Ohio.)