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# LARRY CRAIG

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NEWS RELEASE

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## **Major Ed Freeman Was a True Hero** **by Senator Larry Craig**

Retired U.S. Army Major Ed W. Freeman of Boise died on Sunday, August 20. His death came decades after he volunteered to fly 14 incredibly dangerous supply missions to support and rescue a Cavalry battalion pinned down in a battle zone in the Ia Drang Valley during the Vietnam War in 1965.

And his passing came seven years after President George W. Bush awarded him the Congressional Medal of Honor in recognition of his gallantry.

But Major Freeman never expected to be singled out for his valor. He just thought he was doing his job.

Then-Captain Freeman on November 14, 1965, was at the controls of an unarmed helicopter and flew through what was later described as the most intense gunfire ever seen in Viet Nam to bring water, ammunition and supplies that saved many lives of an Army battalion. As President Bush would note, he didn't fly through that gunfire just once, but 21 times, and later, he flew more than 70 wounded soldiers to safety.

In the immediate aftermath of that battle, Captain Freeman was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross, but the men he rescued and his commanding officer pushed for a more proportionate honor. I agreed and joined in petitioning the president to award Captain Freeman the Congressional Medal of Honor.

I was in attendance at the White House on July 16, 2001, when President Bush awarded the Medal of Honor to Major Freeman. His path to service was not typical. As a boy of 13, watching military men on maneuvers pass by his native home in Neely, Mississippi, he knew he wanted to be a soldier.

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At age 17, he enlisted in the Navy and shipped off to sea. He came back home to finish high school and then enlisted in the Army and fought in Korea as an infantryman, though he was a Master Sergeant in the Army Corps of Engineers at the time. A battlefield commission he won after the Battle of Pork Chop Hill gave him the opportunity to achieve his goal of applying to flight school, a dream briefly delayed because he was two inches taller than Army regulations proscribed to enter flight school, giving rise to his nickname, "Too Tall." But when the restrictions were eased, he earned his wings.

On November 14, 1965, when his fellow soldiers were taking heavy casualties and the fighting was so great that Medevac helicopters refused to retrieve the wounded, Captain Freeman alone volunteered for the mission. His helicopter took many hits to rescue soldiers who otherwise would surely have died.

"Hero" is a word too often misused in today's popular culture. Its literal meaning is "protector," "defender" or "guardian." Sports or movie celebrities aren't heroes. But Ed Freeman is. On that chaotic day in 1965, in the jungles of Viet Nam, Ed Freeman was a hero who in the face of danger and adversity displayed the courage and will for self-sacrifice to put the survival of his band of brothers ahead of his own.

Major Freeman chose to spend the last 30 years of his life in Boise and flew helicopters for the Department of Interior, lending his lifesaving talents to protecting his neighbors from deadly forest fires. His country is a better place for his service, and we in Idaho are greatly missing the hero who walked among us.