

MEMORIAL DAY BRAVERY

(Adapted from Reader's Digest)

Only a fraction of the brave men and women who put on a uniform ever receive America's highest decoration for bravery: The Medal of Honor. That's as it should be. Since WWII to the action in Somalia, only 839 people were awarded the Medal of Honor 513 died earning it.

One of the recipients of the high honor is Lt. Col. Joe Jackson. He began in the military as a aircraft mechanic in WWII, flew combat missions in the Korean War, and also piloted the U-2 spy plane. But it was during the Viet Nam Conflict, that Lt. Col. Jackson distinguished himself while flying the C-123 transport plane.

It was mid May 1968 when Lt. Col Jackson heard the call over his radio. The North Vietnamese forces had overrun Kham Duc, and the evacuation of American and South Vietnamese troops was almost over, except for a three-man Air Force rescue team that was left behind. The runway was blocked by debris from eight US aircraft that the enemy destroyed. It appeared there wasn't enough room to land a plane.

When Jackson heard the call, he didn't hesitate. Below him he looked through the thick black smoke to see the shortened runway. He put his C-123 into a steep dive, avoiding the bullets from below. He touched down and rode his breaks until the plane stopped and immediately U-turned the plane to take off again. The three airman dodged the bullets and got on board before Jackson headed down the runway again to get the plane back in the air.

About the landing Jackson said, "I've never thought of myself as brave so much as I've thought of myself as scared. If scared is a criterion, then I've been brave lots of times."

Like most men of valor, Jackson is humble about his bravery. Bravery isn't not being scared. It is doing the right thing even when you are.