

A Herndon Military Hero

By Barbara Glakas

Because next Sunday is Veterans Day, we thought it would be appropriate to tell the story of Congressional Medal of Honor winner Wesley L. Fox, a legendary hero within the Marine Corps whose roots are in Herndon.

The Medal of Honor is the highest award that can be bestowed upon an individual serving in the Armed Services. One of those medals was awarded to a Marine who was born in the Herndon area—Colonel Wesley L. Fox.

The oldest of 10 children, Wesley Fox was born in 1931 to John Wesley and Desola Lee Fox. They lived off Dranesville Road, not too far outside the Town limits. John, a bricklayer by trade, had a small farm of about 50 acres where he raised cattle, hogs, wheat, and corn. John's brother, Dave—who lived nearby—also was a farmer. Dave often helped John with his farm.

In a recent interview, Fox said that he enjoyed his childhood in Herndon, where the family lived in an old four-room farmhouse with no electricity or plumbing. He recalled sleeping in a small upstairs bedroom that was lit with a coal oil lamp. He also recalled how he and his family would load into a horse-drawn buggy every Saturday night and go into Town to get groceries and supplies.

He attended first grade in Herndon, when local children of all ages attended the same school on Locust Street (now the site of Herndon Middle School). He recalled how one of his older cousins—referred to as “Junior”—made sure he got to school that first year. Fox said he was not prepared for school when he first attended, and he ended up failing first grade. He said his only bad memory of Herndon was that first year of school.

His family left the Herndon area by the time he was eight years old and moved to Front Royal. Even while he lived in Front Royal, however, he would return to the Herndon area during the summers to work on his Uncle Dave's farm.

Fox enlisted in the Marine Corps in 1950, shortly before his 19th birthday. In 1951, he was wounded in action during the Korean War. He later returned for a second tour of duty in Korea. After the war he served in several different locations, including Okinawa and France, and he rose through the ranks, holding all but one enlisted and officer rank from private to colonel.

As a First Lieutenant, Fox was ordered to Vietnam, where he first served as a battalion advisor and later as a company commander. It was during that assignment that Fox's actions earned him the Medal of Honor, which was presented by Present Nixon in 1971.

His Medal of Honor citation reads, in part, as follows:

FOX, WESLEY L.: For conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty while serving as commanding officer of Company A, in action against the enemy ... Fox's company came under intense fire from a large well concealed enemy force ... Capt. Fox was wounded along with all of the other members of the command group, except the executive officer. Capt. Fox continued to direct the activity of his company. Advancing through heavy enemy fire, he personally neutralized 1 enemy position and calmly ordered an assault against the hostile emplacements ... When his executive officer was mortally wounded, Capt. Fox reorganized the company and directed the fire of his men as they hurled grenades against the enemy and drove the hostile forces into retreat. Wounded again in the final assault, Capt. Fox refused medical attention, established a defensive posture, and supervised the preparation of casualties for medical evacuation. His indomitable courage, inspiring initiative, and unwavering devotion to duty in the face of grave personal danger inspired his marines to such aggressive action that they overcame all enemy resistance and destroyed a large bunker complex. Capt. Fox's heroic actions reflect great credit upon himself and the Marine Corps, and uphold the highest traditions of the U.S. Naval Service.

In addition to the Medal of Honor, Fox received two awards of the Legion of Merit, a Bronze Star, three Purple Hearts, and numerous commendations.

After his return to the United States, he served as an instructor at the Marine Corps base in Quantico, Virginia. He retired in 1993, after 43 years of service. For eight more years he served as the deputy commandant of the corps of cadets at Virginia Tech in Blacksburg, Virginia, where he and his wife currently reside. He is the author of two books, *Marine Rifleman: Forty-Three Years in the Corps*, and *Courage and Fear: A Primer*.