A Ranger Born: Col. Robert Black

Robert W. Black was born 15 June 1929, in Carlisle, Pennsylvania where he grew up on a rural farm outside of the town. His father worked as the chief engineer for the C.H. Masland plant in Carlisle.

Growing up in the country, Black learned to love the outdoors and became an accomplished hunter. To the farm kids with whom he attended the area’s one-room schoolhouse, Black was a “city slicker.” He soon learned to fight and in these schoolyard scuffles he learned how to take a blow and that sometimes the best defense is a good offense. These lessons would serve him well in his Army career.

Black’s family had a long history of service to our Nation. Some of his ancestors fought in the Revolution and two of his great-grandfathers fought in the Civil War, one for the South and one for the North. His father, Frank Black, served in the Navy in World War I. His older brother Frank and brother-in-law Paul both served in World War II.

Robert Black enlisted in the Army in 1949 as an Infantryman and volunteered for Airborne School. When the Korean War broke out, Black was assigned to the 82nd Airborne Division. Black chaffed at the idea that he might have to sit out the war. “I knew the Korean War and I were made for each other” he wrote, so he volunteered for one of the newly formed Ranger companies.
During the Korean War, the Rangers were organized into companies that were attached to larger units to provide them with special operations capabilities. Rangers specialize in patrolling, the art, as Black puts it of “small groups of men moving by stealth on a reconnaissance or combat mission”. The specialty meant that Black would see plenty of action in Korea. Interviewed by the 8th Airborne Ranger Company's commanding officer, Captain James Herbert, Black was accepted into the unit and assigned to wield a Browning Automatic Rifle (BAR) for his squad.

In 1954, Black received a direct commission as a 2nd Lieutenant of Infantry. He served in various stateside and overseas assignments until 1966 when he was assigned to Military Advisory Command, Vietnam (MACV). Together with his Korean War experience Colonel Black saw combat actions in eight campaigns. Twice awarded the Combat Infantryman Badge, he holds the Silver Star, three Bronze Stars (two for valor), the Legion of Merit, the Air Medal, the Joint Service Commendation Medal, two Army Commendation Medals, the Vietnam Cross of Gallantry, and the Vietnam Cross of Honor.

Colonel Black spent his last four years in the Army as second in command of the garrison at Carlisle Barracks in his hometown. He retired in 1978 and was promoted to Colonel upon retirement.

Today Colonel Black continues to distinguish himself as the foremost historian of the American Ranger. He is the author of "Rangers in Korea", and "Rangers in World War II". He founded the Ranger Research Collection at the United States Military History Institute which includes the largest collection of Ranger photographs in existence. Colonel Black was the founding President of the Association of the Ranger Infantry Companies (Airborne) of the Korean War. Black's distinguished service reflects great credit upon himself, the Rangers, and the military service.

Sources:


“Sustained combat saps the aggressive spirit...panic can strike any man or any unit. A unit or man may fight with ferocity one day, flee in terror the next, and fight bravely on the third occasion.”

-Col. Robert Black