

## **Colonel Bruce P. Crandall, Medal of Honor recipient visits Oak Ridge**

On Monday, November 12, 2012, I was honored to provide Colonel Bruce Crandall a low-key tour of historical elements of Oak Ridge's three government sites and a driving tour of the city of Oak Ridge. This is the man who, on November 14, 1965, commanded a flight of 16 helicopters lifting troops into the landing zone X-Ray, near the Cambodian border.

This was the first major battle with a large North Vietnamese force and is the subject of the book, *We Were Soldiers Once...And Young* on which the movie, *We Were Soldiers*, is based. The Colonel flew his unarmed helicopter into the heat of the fight to rescue wounded and bring in ammunition. By flying into the battle 22 times in 14 hours, he saved the lives of many and ensured that the ground troops had sufficient ammunition to sustain the struggle.

Colonel Bruce Crandall is one of 80 Medal of Honor recipients in our nation.

The primary reason Colonel Crandall came to East Tennessee was to promote *Character Counts*, a character-development program created by educators for the Medal of Honor Society. Cedar Bluff Middle School was the first school in the nation to be recognized as an "Uncommon Valor School" for its implementation of *Character Counts*, and Colonel Crandall wanted to personally recognize the school and further encourage the students there.

He also visited other schools in the area promoting the program. The Six Pillars of the program are: Trustworthiness, Respect, Responsibility, Fairness, Caring, and Citizenship.

The group that brought him to our area is a committee that was formed to compete for holding the 2014 Congressional Medal of Honor Recipients' Convention in the Knoxville-Oak Ridge area. The group created a powerful video promoting our area with its historical connection to the military and excellent supporting materials featuring the various elements of Knoxville and Oak Ridge.

This collaborative effort between Knoxville and Oak Ridge led to a successful bid that won the competition to hold this prestigious convention in our area in 2014. You will hear and see more about that as time draws nearer. The convention was held in Hawaii this past year.

An invitation only lunch with Colonel Crandall was held at the Y-12 History Center where WSI-Oak Ridge Deputy General Manager Jim Rackstraw was among the guests. Rackstraw served with Crandall in Vietnam and was flown out of that specific battleground by Colonel Crandall.

As the two men hugged and recalled how fate had placed them together, Jim told the Colonel that he tells his family often that but for Crandall, he likely would not have made it out of that battle alive. Jim's son is collecting information about his father's Vietnam experience and had sent copies of the movie poster and books for autographs. The colonel obliged the request of a co-participant in the battle.

Those autographs were the only "official duty" we asked of the Colonel during the four-plus hours we toured him through Y-12, the Oak Ridge National Laboratory (featuring the Graphite Reactor), K-25 (East Tennessee Technology Park) and the city of Oak Ridge. Our goal was to provide him a quiet and relaxed afternoon to honor him with our history and to let him rest from his travels to get here.

It was a wonderful time spent with a most humble and appreciative man who continually asked insightful questions regarding Oak Ridge and who seemingly enjoyed being allowed to relax and let us give him something of which we are so very proud. He readily grasped the tremendous technological advances that resulted from the Manhattan Project at Oak Ridge and further scientific developments of the Nuclear Age.

As a side note, Huey, the colonel's small white service dog, was a delight to have on the tour as well. He entertained everyone. The dog serves as a companion, is placed on the beds of wounded soldiers and

helps connect with children at schools. Huey is a key element in Colonel Crandall's approach and is good at doing his part.

The honor of providing this tour has to be a highlight of my time as Y-12 Historian. I have been asked to do many tours and I certainly do enjoy doing them, but this one was extra special.

I am glad to say that I served in Vietnam in the U. S. Air Force. I never saw battle in the way the Colonel did, but the death and destruction I did see has stayed with me. Watching "We were Soldiers" was tough. I don't generally watch Vietnam-era movies, but I wanted to be prepared for my visit with Colonel Bruce Crandall. He is certainly one of our nation's heroes, and I am honored to have met him.