



Col. Franklin Waters Trapnell Jr

December 21, 1937 - May 31, 2014

COL (R) Franklin "Buck" Waters Trapnell Jr., 77, died Saturday, May 31st 2014, of a heart attack while visiting family near Richmond, Virginia.

Buck was born in Baltimore, Maryland to Emily Willson Rieman Smith, of the Riemans of 19th century privateering and Baltimore Clipper ship success, and Franklin Waters Trapnell, an attorney and OSS/CIA officer whose English heritage has been traced to the Norman Conquest. His father taught him chess at the age of six, and his parents emphasized that his duty to his family, especially to his younger brother, was absolute. Rising to the rank of Colonel over 34 years in the US Army, service to his country was an extension of that dedication to duty.

He grew up primarily in Berlin, Germany and Vienna, Austria after World War II during the military occupation and Berlin Blockade and Airlift where he attended German, Austrian, and American schools. Though barely a teenager, Buck routinely, if very unofficially, assisted his father with his intelligence work. From tasks as seemingly innocuous as being a courier, to sabotaging enemy car batteries, debriefing refugees, changing out wire-tap batteries and tapes throughout the city sewer systems, and standing guard for East German defectors with his father's pistol, his unorthodox upbringing developed a remarkably open mind and an exceptional grasp of adaptive tactics.

Buck's kaleidoscopic education in over two dozen different schools in the three nations culminated in a bachelor's degree thirteen years after he first started college without benefit of a high school diploma and a master's in

International Relations. He is a graduate of the Army Command & General Staff College and War College. Such was the emphasis he placed on all forms of education that his myriad children, grandchildren, great-grandchildren, nieces and nephews, and innumerable adopted family received support and encouragement of every conceivable kind. Whether tutoring in multiplication tables or advanced calculus, supplementing tuition, guiding them through taxes and investments, or leading them through historic sites and battlefields, he was devoted to educating and expanding the horizons of his entire family. He enlisted in the Maryland Army National Guard's 29th Infantry Division while still in high school, serving as an infantryman and later as a tankerman in the California Guard's 40th Armored Division after starting college.

Ever one to defy convention, he eloped with Elizabeth Florence Rich Flannery in Baltimore in 1957, and went on to raise five children with her.

Buck enlisted in the active Army in 1961, completing training as a light infantryman and then jump school before assignment to Ft. Bragg, NC. There he completed Special Forces qualification as a weapons specialist and served in the 5th Special Forces Group, undergoing cross training in communications, demolitions, medical and intelligence and training with the Navy SEALs and the British SAS. At the behest of his uncle, LTG Thomas "Trap" Trapnell, he applied for Officer Candidate School.

He was commissioned as an infantry officer and assigned as a Pathfinder Detachment Commander and then as a Rifle Platoon Leader in the 11th Air Assault Division, the forerunner of the airmobile 1st Cavalry Division. His first tour in Vietnam was with the 1st Cav from July '65 until August '66, during which he participated in the Battle of the Ia Drang Valley during the Pleiku Campaign in October and November of '65. This, the first pitched battle between the US Army and the North Vietnamese Army, was made popular in the book turned Hollywood film "We Were Soldiers." He is still remembered by his former soldiers and subordinate leadership as a hard-nosed, tactically savvy commander and a genuinely caring mentor. During the rest of his first tour, he served as Company Executive Officer, as S-3 Air and as Company

Commander.

On returning to the states, he was assigned to the 82nd Airborne Division as an Intelligence Officer and Company Commander for the second time.

Following a course at the Foreign Service Institute, he volunteered for another eighteen month tour in 1971-1972 as a District Senior Advisor. So renowned was he for his professional integrity that even the locals trusted him, and would routinely deliver their gold savings and valuables to his safekeeping whenever a Viet Cong attack was in the offing. Recognizing the situation as a harbinger of impending attack, he used the forewarning to prepare for and repel the subsequent attacks, after which he faithfully returned the valuables to the local chiefs. In later years he served as ROTC Professor of Military Science and instructor at Johns Hopkins University, Battalion and Brigade Operations Officer in the 24th Infantry Division at Ft. Stewart and as Plans and Operations Officer in HQ, US Army Europe.

From 1982-1984 he commanded 1st Battalion, 41st Infantry in the 2d Armored Division at Ft. Hood, which was the first line battalion in the Army to be equipped with the Bradley Fighting Vehicle. As Chief of the Bradley New Equipment Training Team and TRADOC System Manager for the Bradley, he earned high praise from the generals staffing his Congressional hearings on Bradley live fire testing and survivability in the late '80s.

Finally, he commanded an ROTC Brigade for twenty colleges in the mid-Atlantic. Buck retired from active duty two days before Iraq invaded Kuwait, which he considered to be exceptionally bad timing.

Renowned for a near flawless memory and making an unforgettable first impression, his intense fascination with people of all walks of life led him to happily interrogate anyone at all about their entire life and everything in it. His capacity for recognizing and appreciating decency and ingenuity in others was rivaled only by his capacity to commune with mechanical devices of all kinds. Since retiring he has immersed himself in family businesses and settled in the house he designed and built in Manassas, VA.

Colonel and Mrs. Trapnell were married 55 years. Many of their children and grandchildren were inspired by his devoted service to likewise serve in the Army as infantrymen, a tanker, a medic and an attack pilot. One fought in the first Gulf War. Two have fought in Iraq and Afghanistan.

A visitation has been arranged at the Pierce Funeral Home on Friday, June 13, 2014 from 4:00 p.m. – 6:00 p.m. An informal reception to express your condolences to his family follows at their Manassas home. Funeral services will be 11:00am Monday, June 16, 2014 at Church of the Nativity Episcopal Church, 419 Cedarcroft Road, Baltimore, Maryland. Interment will follow at Dulaney Valley Memorial Gardens.

In lieu of flowers contributions can be made to:

la Drang Scholarship Fund http://www.lzxr.com/scholarship_contr.htm

Fisher House <https://www.fisherhouse.org/ways-to-give/>

USO https://www.uso.org/Donate_in_Honor_or_Memory.aspx?LangType=103

Previous Events

Visitation

JUN **13**. 4:00 PM - 6:00 PM (ET)

Pierce Funeral Home
9609 Center St.
Manassas, VA 20110
(703) 257-6028
pfh@piercefh.com
<https://www.piercefh.com>

Service

JUN **16**. 11:00 AM (ET)

Church of the Nativity Episcopal Church
419 Cedarcroft Road
Baltimore, MD 21212

Tribute Wall

HT

“ I was a young Army Major assigned to the Army ROTC department at the College of William and Mary. Colonel Trapnell was our brigade commander. He was a terrific officer and leader, thoughtful and a great mentor to me. I recently found out about his passing and wanted to pay my belated respect.



Hughes Turner - April 05, 2025 at 02:53 PM

ML

“ I served under Col. Trapnell as a company XO/maintenance officer and later, as one of his team leaders on the New Equipment Training Team (approx 1983-1986). He was absolutely brilliant, resourceful, creative and professional. I used to hang on every word. I modeled the rest of my career on him and his former Battalion XO, Jan D. Beer. I miss him.

Millard LeMay - December 20, 2020 at 05:44 PM

AT

“ Audrey Trapnell lit a candle in memory of Col. Franklin Waters Trapnell Jr



Audrey Trapnell - March 02, 2015 at 06:38 AM