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Fallen Vietnam vet - Idaho OCS graduate honored

By Maj. Stephen Pratt

Idaho Guardsman 2nd Lt. Jimmy Nakayama of Rexburg, Idaho was honored by officer candidates from the Idaho Officer Candidate School Aug. 17, for Nakayama's ultimate sacrifice for his country during the Vietnam conflict.

During the ceremony, candidates from class 58-14 presented a display case, which they had constructed as a memorial to his sacrifice and contains several personal items donated by Nakayama's family.



Trudie Olson (left), widow of 2nd Lt. Jimmy Nakayama stands next to Eric Nakayama, Jimmy's brother and Nikki Nakayama, Jimmy's daughter during the Aug. 17 memorial ceremony honoring 2nd Lt. Nakayama for his ultimate sacrifice made during the Vietnam conflict. Nakayama served as an engineer officer in the 116th Engineer Battalion. Photo by SPC Michelle Brostmeyer

After graduating from the Idaho Military Academy Officer Candidate School 50 years ago, Nakayama accepted his commission as a 2nd Lt. and engineer officer in Company B of the 116th Engineer Battalion in Rexburg, Idaho. Later he went on to serve in Vietnam, going into battle with the 1st Battalion, 7th Cavalry Regiment; the unit highlighted in the book and movie, "We Were Soldiers Once, and Young."

Nakayama was born during WWII to Japanese immigrants living in Tacoma, Wash. Shortly after the attack on Pearl Harbor, they were forced to relocate to Idaho. Because his family had ties to Sugar City, they were allowed to stay there rather than the Minidoka internment camp. Both his father and uncle served in the U.S. Army in the 442nd Regimental Combat Team of Japanese-Americans.

In 1965, 2nd Lt. Nakayama wanted to serve in the active duty Army as the Vietnam conflict was brewing. His state commission was not federally recognized and to join the active Army, he had to join as an enlisted soldier with hopes that his rank would be restored and he could serve as a commissioned officer. He entered as an engineer in C

Company, 8th Engineer Battalion, as part of the 1st Cavalry Division.



The Jimmy D. Nakayama memorial display case located in Building 307 on Gowen Field. Photo by SPC Michelle Brostmeyer

On Nov. 15, 1965, at Landing Zone X-Ray in Ia Drang, Vietnam, Jimmy Nakayama was fatally injured when a F100 Super Saber dropped napalm on his position, burning 95 percent of his body. His last words that day were of his wife and soon-to-be born child. Jimmy Nakayama was unaware that his wife Trudie had given birth early to his daughter Nikki on Nov. 7, 1965. He died of his wounds two days later on Nov. 17, 1965 in an Army hospital.

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