Soldiers from Troop B, 1st Squadron, 9th Cavalry, 1st Cavalry Division (Airmobile), are dropped from an Army helicopter near Chu Lai, Vietnam, during Operation Oregon, 1967. *(This photo, by SFC Howard C. Breedlove, taken April 4, 1967, was later used in the design of the Vietnam Veterans National Medal.)*

Vietnam combat photographer honored

A former Army combat photographer was honored by the 7th Signal Command at Fort Meade, Md., last month for his famous Vietnam photograph, which was used in the design of the Vietnam Veterans National Medal.

Howard C. Breedlove, a former member of the Department of Army Special Photographic Office (DASPO), was presented one of the Veterans Medals and other commemorative momentos by Col. Robert L. Kelley, commander of the U.S. Army Audiovisual Center, at an open house of the Combat Pictorial Detachment, the successor of DASPO, at Fort Meade.

Breedlove took the photo of the 1st Cavalry Division soldiers exiting a helicopter as it hovered above a ridge near Chu Lai, Vietnam, during "Operation Oregon" in 1967.

"I was working by myself that day," Breedlove explained. "I stayed with the unit, which completed about 10 assaults on villages in the area all day, and shot four rolls of film. That photo came from the best roll I shot in Vietnam."

Addressing the current photographers of the Combat Pictorial Unit, a unit of the 7th Signal Command that is headquartered here, Breedlove said when he first started as an Army photographer, he was told to get that "front view, eye-level shot."

"Don't do it," Breedlove said. "Climb trees, get on the floor, do whatever you have to do to get that special shot."

Breedlove said he hoped that the young Army photographers would use his recognition ceremony as "an example for their own work because they, too, can take that special photograph."

Breedlove's now famous photograph has appeared in numerous books and publications. Many Army officials have said that the photo captured the Army's tactics of that time—move, shoot, and communicate.

It was in one of those publications that Army Cpl. Terrill K. Tritch discovered Breedlove's photo, which he used to design the commemorative medal, according to the director of the U.S. Mint, Donna Pope.

An Army still and cinema photographer for 20 years, Breedlove received an award for the best combat film footage in Vietnam. He also received the Bronze Star with V device and the Purple Heart while serving in Vietnam. Now 48 years old, the retired sergeant first class works as a micrographics technician in northern Virginia.

As part of the CPD open house, combat documentation equipment, historical DASPO motion picture and still photographic documentation, and examples of recent CPF coverage of Army and Department of Defense exercises were on display for the guests.

The Combat Pictorial Detachment was formed in 1961 in response to increasing demands for worldwide photographic documentation of military operations. CPD is the Army's only combat documentation unit and is part of the Army Audiovisual Center at the Pentagon.

During Vietnam, DASPO teams documented many different Army operations in motion picture, still photography, and video. Today, CPD documents major military exercises and activities in support of the Office of the Secretary of Defense, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the Department of the Army, and major Army commands. In the past year, the organization covered some 30 documentation requirements.

—Capt. Wayne M. White