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**MEDIA RELEASE: Maneuver Center of Excellence celebrates award upgrade for Ranger legend**

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**FORT BENNING, Ga.** – Retired Col. Ralph Puckett, 94, a Ranger icon and legend across the Army has been nominated for a Congressional Medal of Honor for his actions at Hill 205 during the Korean War. President Biden called Puckett to deliver the good news.

After graduating from the U.S. Military Academy at West Point in 1949, Puckett was sent to Japan and answered a vague call for volunteers to support the war effort in Korea.

“I said ‘Sir, I volunteer to be a sergeant or rifleman if you’ll take me in to that Ranger Company,’” recalled Puckett during a 2012 interview.

Impressed by the young leader volunteering to do any job, Lt. Col. John H. McGee tapped then 2<sup>nd</sup> Lt. Puckett to lead the new Ranger unit that would serve as the model for Ranger units to come. The company was established to combat the North Korean commandos infiltrating and disrupting war efforts behind United Nations lines. Within a short timeframe, Puckett selected 73 of the volunteers to join his ranks based on weapons qualifications, athleticism, and duty performance.

Three days after organization at Camp Drake, Japan, Aug. 25, 1950, Puckett’s Rangers began seven weeks of specialized training at Pusan, South Korea. Upon arrival at “Ranger Hill” the men honed their skills in reconnaissance, navigation, long-range patrols, scouting, roadblocks, concealment, and indirect fire. As part of their training, they were tested during live fire exercises day and night to simulate raids, ambushes and infiltrations. Adopting techniques established during World War II, they worked grueling 60 hour weeks, running five miles each day and frequently undertaking 20 mile speed marches. Of the original 76 volunteers (three officers and 73 enlisted men) just 64 completed the training Oct. 1, 1950.

During the following two months, the Rangers joined the 25<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division and fought pockets of guerrillas as they swept through villages near Poun, helping to push the North Korean offensive back north of the 38<sup>th</sup> Parallel. With South Korea liberated, the men became the tip of the spear as coalition forces advanced into North Korea.

“I looked at it as post-graduate work for our training program,” said Puckett. “It was exactly what we had spent our time on.”

November 25, 1950 saw the 51 remaining Rangers moving north, capturing famed Hill 205 from light Chinese resistance. That evening, an estimated platoon-sized element from the Chinese 39<sup>th</sup> Army signaled with drums and whistles before launching their attack. Within the hour, the Rangers repelled the attack. With many wounded during the battle, including Puckett, they regrouped and readied themselves. Puckett refused to be evacuated.

Minutes later, a second attack was pushed back by the Rangers. An hour later the third attack came and was quelled by the men. Each wave of assault was estimated to be the size of a company. The next attacks grew in size and ferocity but Puckett’s men continued to inflict heavy casualties on the enemy as they stood their ground. Running low on ammunition and supplies, while suffering additional casualties and wounded men, the Ranger’s defended Hill 205. Puckett insisted he stay with his men.

During the early morning hours of November 26, a wounded Puckett gave the order to “fix bayonets” in preparation for the next attack. The Chinese Army’s sixth and final attack brought a heavy mortar barrage resulting in significant Ranger casualties. The incoming fire was followed directly by a battalion of 600 combatants attacking the objective. As the position was overwhelmed by the opposition, the Rangers carried a critically-injured Puckett to safety as the Chinese forces attempted to capture him. The Rangers suffered over 80 percent casualties at Hill 205. Of the 51 men that captured the hill, 10 were killed or missing and 31 were wounded.

Puckett, from Tifton, Georgia, retired from the Army in 1971 after 21 years. He became the Honorary Colonel of the 75<sup>th</sup> Ranger Regiment during January 1996, serving in that role for 12 years. His awards include two Distinguished Service Crosses, two Silver Stars, two Bronze Star Medals with V device, and five Purple Hearts. He was an inaugural inductee into the Ranger Hall of Fame in 1992. He received the Doughboy Award in 2007 and was an inaugural inductee in the Georgia Military Veterans Hall of Fame in 2013.

He authored two books – “Ranger: A Soldier’s Life” and “Words for Warriors.”

Puckett credits his success in life to his wife, Jean. During the June 2010 ceremony renaming Dixie Road to Colonel Ralph Puckett Parkway he spoke candidly about his love for his wife.

“She’s the wind beneath my wings,” said Puckett. “She’s my hero – I’d be nothing without her.”

The National Defense Authorization Act 2021 authorizes the president to award the Medal of Honor to Puckett, upgrading the Distinguished Service Cross he received for his valorous acts of Nov. 25-26, 1950, in Korea on Hill 205.

To hear Puckett’s story, in his own words, please visit <https://youtu.be/iHNqj9qZ4Gc>

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