

## Specialist Fourth Class Michael Reinert Blanchfield

1950 - 1969

By Merrilee Carlson, Nathan Hale Chapter, DAR



- **Born:** January 4, 1950, Minneapolis, Hennepin County, Minnesota
- **Vietnam**
- Enlisted: September 25, 1968, Chicago, Illinois
- Unit Company A, 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion, 503<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Regiment, 173<sup>rd</sup> Airborne Brigade
- **Death**
- : July 3, 1969, Binh Dinh Province, Republic of Vietnam

### Early Years

Michael Reinert Blanchfield was born on January 4, 1950, to Robert and Jeannette (Watson) Blanchfield. He has four siblings, brothers Bill and James and sisters Bobby Jo and Patricia. In 1961, his family moved to Arlington Heights, Illinois which is a suburb of Chicago. As a sophomore, Michael dropped out of high school. He enlisted in the Army at the age of 17 and earned his GED while in the Army.

### War Years

On February 20, 1969, Michael was sent to Vietnam as Specialist Fourth Class in Light Weapons Infantry in Company A, 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion, 503<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Regiment, 173<sup>rd</sup> Airborne Brigade.

On July 3, 1969, in Binh Dinh Province, Michael smothered the blast of a hand grenade with his body, sacrificing himself to protect those around him. At age 19 at this death, he was buried in All Saints Catholic Cemetery, Des Plaines, Illinois. For this action, Michael was posthumously awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor. The Medal of Honor Citation Reads:

*“For conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity in action at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty, Sp4c. Blanchfield distinguished himself while serving as a rifleman in Company A on a combat patrol. The patrol surrounded a group of houses to search for suspects. During the search of one of the huts, a man suddenly ran out toward a nearby tree line. Sp4c. Blanchfield, who was on guard outside the hut, saw the man, shouted for him to halt, and began firing at him as the man ignored the warning and continued to run. The suspect suddenly threw a grenade toward the hut and its occupants. Although the exploding grenade severely wounded Sp4c. Blanchfield and several others, he regained his feet to continue the pursuit of the enemy. The fleeing enemy threw a second grenade which landed near Sp4c. Blanchfield and several members of his patrol. Instantly realizing the danger, he shouted a warning to his comrades. Sp4c. Blanchfield unhesitatingly and with complete disregard for his safety, threw himself on the grenade, absorbing the full and fatal*

*impact of the explosion. By his gallant action and self-sacrifice, he was able to save the lives and prevent injury to 4 members of the patrol and several Vietnamese civilians in the immediate area. Sp4c. Blanchfield's extraordinary courage and gallantry at the cost of his life above and beyond the call of duty are in keeping with the highest traditions of the military service and reflect great credit upon himself, his unit, and the U.S. Army."*

In addition to the Medal of Honor, Michael was also awarded the National Defense Service Medal, Combat Infantryman Badge, Purple Heart, Vietnam Campaign Medal and Vietnam Service Medal.



In addition to his family, Michael was survived by his fiancée, Miss Frances Ratz of Wheeling.

Michael made a difference in the lives of the soldiers he saved that day. His story continues to make a difference. On May 27, 2011, the Wheeling High School presented his family with an honorary diploma and a plaque signifying his induction as a distinguished alumnus. The ceremony took place with about 60 history students watching from within the theater, however the entire student body watched from their classrooms. The school administration scheduled the ceremony so that it could be used as a teaching tool as well as an honorary ceremony for Blanchfield. History teacher and Vietnam War veteran Bob Kupon said, "They've seen movies about war, but seeing the movies is not what this is. You touch history." On that day, Michael touched the lives of each of those students.

Bibliography/Sources:  
Medal of Honor Society  
Wikipedia  
Ancestry.com  
Newspapers.com  
Find-a-Grave  
Minnesota Historical Society