



Col. LaVerne Griffin

HALL OF HEROES INDUCTION CEREMONY

November 8, 2023

11:00 a.m.

William S. Middleton Memorial Veterans Hospital and Clinics

**The William S. Middleton
Memorial Veterans Hospital
Hall of Heroes Committee welcomes
family members of Col. LaVerne Griffin.
We are honored to celebrate
his heroism with them.**

HALL OF HEROES

INDUCTION CEREMONY

November 8, 2023

Welcome

Jim Bove

Presentation of Colors

American Legion
Post 360 Color Guard
Waunakee, WI

Greetings

Abe Rabinowitz
Hospital Assistant Director

My Life My Story

Thor Ringler

Biography

Mary Griffin

Distinguished Flying Cross

Mary Griffin

Formal Induction

Jim Bove

Closing

Jim Bove

You know how kids say “you’re not the boss of me?”

We grew up knowing the Air Force **was** the boss of all of us. My dad was an Air Force pilot, and we were an Air Force family.

The Air Force values honor and discipline and service to your country, and those were my father’s values, and subsequently ours. The Air Force also values taking care of its own, and for my dad, service meant taking care of the people he worked with.

My dad was a **very** good pilot and served his country well with his flying skills in the Air Force, the Marines and the Air National Guard. He was also a very good leader, and possibly served his country even better with his mentoring and management skills.

He knew how to lead without using his rank. He helped pilots become better pilots. He improved safety and morale and cooperation in his squadrons. He helped lookout for the families of men missing in action. He was asked for, and gave, career advice, personal advice and technical advice. He worked hard to develop his people, regardless of rank, color or creed. He gave them the tools they needed to succeed in their jobs and enough runway to do it.

He gave far more than the Air Force asked of him. His service to his country and his Air Force family was much deeper than his achievements as a pilot, and that’s the legacy he left us.

We appreciate what the VA is doing to recognize Veterans in our military family in Wisconsin.

-Mary Griffin (daughter of Col. LaVerne Griffin)

A hero is a person who is admired or idealized for courage, outstanding achievements or noble qualities.

While all the Veterans that come to the William S. Middleton Memorial Veteran's Hospital have demonstrated sacrifice and courage on behalf of our country. There are some who stand out for especially heroic actions during their service.

The Hall of Heroes is where we honor these brave Veterans.

We thank you for joining us in honoring a heroic Veteran today.

Excerpts from: The Story of LaVerne "Griff" Griffin

(as recounted by his daughter Mary Griffin on 10/12/2023)

My dad loved to fly. He did something that takes a very skilled pilot to do, but it wasn't until 50 years later that anyone knew about it. He led three top secret overflights into the USSR and took photographs of Soviet air bases in Siberia. He was awarded a Distinguished Flying Cross for each of those missions, but what they were awarded for was a secret too.

When the documents and photos finally did get declassified, they had a symposium about the overflights in Washington, D.C., and my dad got to go. He was very proud of the fact that he took the first photos from those flights, but I also know that he thought it was just part of his job. A cool part of his job, but his job was flying. It wasn't until relatively recently that people started saying, "Oh! He's a hero." But I don't really think of my dad that way.

He was just such a straight-up guy. There wasn't anything phony about him. He'd look you in the eyes, shake your hand and expect you to do a good job. He didn't want to hear about the little stuff. And people in turn would do a good job for him. They'd rise to the occasion for him, because he just assumed that you were going to do your best. Not perfect, but your best.

Mom and Dad met when he was stationed at March Field, California. She was married to a friend of his at the time. That friend later died in Korea when his plane went down, and Dad would check in on her and her two girls when he came home to visit his parents. They ended up getting married. Dad adopted her daughters - Martha and Nancy - and he and Mom proceeded to have three more kids: my brother Jack, my older sister Janet and me. We were pretty much all in a row.

My dad was close to all his siblings. There were four of them in a bunch and then, twenty years after my dad, came my Aunt Ruthie. After everybody retired, they'd fly from all over the country just to spend time with each other. For the pleasure of each other's company. They were NOT a dysfunctional family [laughs], they were a very functional family.

Once he retired and moved back to Wisconsin, he discovered curling and just finessed the hell out of that. Every 10 years, the U.S. goes over and competes with the Scots, and he was on the senior men's team that went to Scotland. It's not like a team that's competing around the world, but it was a big honor to be chosen.

He coached high school kids in Portage in curling. He didn't have any connection to those kids, and he didn't need to give them his time and energy. He taught the kids next door how to curl. They love it, they're both really good curlers. He helped kids get interested in flying. I know he helped somebody get a scholarship to flight school.

He died in December of 2019, five days after he turned 91. In September of that year, he bought a new Pitts acrobatic plane, a two-seater. He was going to teach all the guys in his aero club to fly aerobatics. He didn't really have time to do that. He took off for Europe in early October with his wife. He came back and went to my daughter's wedding in early November. He was still walking two miles a day. And he was still curling in early December. He watched his weight, and he could still fit into his pilot's uniform - his "party suit."

During Dad's eulogy my brother Jack talked about how many times he heard people say, "Oh, your dad was so much help," or, "Your dad made this happen for me." With personal and professional problems, my dad helped all kinds of guys who worked for him, with all kinds of things.



VA

U.S. Department
of Veterans Affairs

***To fulfill President Lincoln's promise
to care for those who have served
in our nation's military and for their families,
caregivers, and survivors.***