



Col. Mitchell Paige

Decorated Vet Finally Gets Eagle Scout Award

After earning enough merit badges for Eagle Scout, Mitchell Paige left his hometown to join the Marines in September 1936. Six years later, he was awarded the Medal of Honor while commanding a machine gunner group against the Japanese during World War II. But he never heard a word about his Eagle Scout award. Sixty-seven years later in March 2003, after an investigation by an FBI agent determined his eligibility, the retired Marine colonel finally received the Boy Scout's highest honor at a ceremony in Jacksonville, FL.

On October 26, 1942, Paige was leading a 33-man platoon when 2500 Japanese broke through the line directly in front of his position. Paige received the Medal of Honor for continuing to fight against the Japanese, even though all his men were either killed or wounded. He moved from gun to gun, continuing to fire until reinforcements arrived. He then led a bayonet charge and drove the Japanese line back.

A few weeks after the battle, Maj. Gen. A.A. Vandergift, commander of the 1st Marine Division and later commandant of the Marine Corps, commended Paige: "Son, that was an important hill that you and your men held. It was the last major Japanese effort to dislodge us and capture the airstrip." Paige was given a battlefield promotion to second lieutenant and was one of 440 Medal of Honor recipients in World War II, 250 of which were awarded posthumously.

Along the way, Paige wrote a book, "A Marine Named Mitch," and was the model for a GI Joe Marine doll. In a 2003 telephone interview from his home in La Quinta, California Paige said over the years he has spoken proudly of being an Eagle Scout and mentioned it in speeches he made as a Medal of Honor winner.

A few years ago, Paige spoke to a gathering of Boy Scouts aboard the USS Constitution. "I told them I was proud to address them as an Eagle Scout," Paige said. After the speech, Paige was shown a book that contained the names of everyone who had received the Eagle award. His name was not in the book. "I was ready to collapse and die right there," he said. "That was the saddest time in my lifetime.

Paige didn't know what happened to the paperwork that was supposed to have been sent all those years ago for his Eagle Scout award. It took an investigation by an FBI agent to determine that Paige, then 84, was eligible for the honor. Thomas A. Cottone Jr., a special agent with the FBI working on a project with Paige to expose Medal of Honor imposters learned of his disappointment and secretly began investigating the case. "I didn't know he was working on this," Paige said.

Paige's scoutmaster in 1936 had died, but Cottone was able to find a classmate to verify his story. She was at school the day it was announced that Paige had completed his Eagle Scout work and soon would be receiving his award. Cottone's connection with an official of the National Eagle Scout Association in Jacksonville resulted in the North Florida Council No. 87 handling the paperwork for Paige's award, which was later approved by the BSA National Advancement Committee.