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Brother visits camp named for war hero.



Charles McGovern stands at Camp McGovern, named after his brother, Medal of Honor recipient 1st Lt.

Robert McGovern who fought and died in Korea in January 1951. (Ivana Ayramovic/S&S)

By IVANA AVRAMOVIC | STARS AND STRIPES Published: October 23, 2003

CAMP MCGOVERN, Bosnia and Herzegovina — Sunday was an emotional day for Charles McGovern.

McGovern's brother, Robert, was a Medal of Honor recipient for his actions during the Korean War. On Sunday, Charles McGovern visited the base in Bosnia that bears his brother's name.

"I've almost felt compelled to do it," he said during a visit to the camp in northeastern Bosnia.

It was only by chance that Charles and his family found out that the base was named after Robert. Charles' oldest brother, John, stumbled upon a map of base camps in Bosnia

in 1998. When he saw Camp McGovern, he wondered if the name was related to his brother, Charles said.

John McGovern was unable to get confirmation from the Pentagon, but U.S. Rep. Benjamin L. Cardin, D-Md., finally told them that the base was indeed named after their brother.



Col. Kevin Gutknecht, left, of Task Force Iron, commander of Camp McGovern, presents the U.S. flag to Charles McGovern, the brother of 1st Lt. Robert McGovern, the soldier for whom the camp was named, in a small ceremony on Sunday. In the middle is Charles' wife, Wali McGovern.

On Sunday, Charles McGovern walked with camp soldiers to the sign bearing the name and picture of his brother. A plaque tells the story of 1st Lt. Robert McGovern's heroic deeds as a platoon leader during the Korean War. Robert McGovern fought and died near a small village, Kamyangjan-ni, in Korea.

The 1st Cavalry Division named the camp, established soon after the U.S. troops crossed the Sava River in 1995, after one of their own. Robert McGovern served with the division's Company A, 5th Cavalry Regiment.

Charles McGovern looked at the sign briefly before shrugging his shoulders and taking a step back. With a look of sadness, and mild shaking of his hands, he said simply, "that was a bit emotional."

The soldiers of Task Force Iron, currently deployed to the camp, greeted their visitor with a small ceremony. They lowered the flag flown that day and presented it to Charles McGovern.

Robert wasn't the only McGovern the family lost in the Korean War. Second Lt. Francis Jerome McGovern earned a Silver Star for his actions near Kumwang-ni, Korea, serving with Company I, 9th Infantry Division in 1951. He died less than two weeks after his brother, who died, in February 1951. The oldest brother, John, served during World War II.

"When I think of sacrifices this man's family has done for the cause of freedom ... it's amazing to me," said Lt. Col. Kevin Gutknecht of Task Force Iron, the current commander of Camp McGovern. "We're kinda the legacy that these people left behind."

That legacy is important, said Charles McGovern, who brought with him an envelope full of newspaper clips, photographs, letters and even a copy of his brother's high school transcript. Several articles talk about Robert McGovern's involvement in helping a Japanese orphanage during and after his service there. Others talk about the ultimate sacrifice the two brothers made for their country. Letters from top-ranking military commanders are in the collection, as well as one from then-Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld dated Oct. 28, 1976.

During the two-hour visit with his German-born wife, Wally, Charles McGovern got a tour of the camp and a chance to shop for some souvenirs bearing the family name. Charles took home a T-shirt, an etched wooden board and the U.S. flag with a certificate showing it had been flown that day.

"It was very touching, very nice," said Walli McGovern. "The fact that camp is named after [him] keeps the legacy live."