

Joseph G. Clemons

U.S. Army
Colonel – Infantry



7th Infantry Division



23rd Infantry Division "Americal"



Ranger Tab



Combat Infantryman Badge (Two Awards)

Master Parachutist Badge

Distinguished Service Cross		Silver Star
Legion of Merit	Distinguished Flying Cross	Bronze Star

Joe Clemons, West Point Class of 1951, was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross (DSC), for his actions as a rifle platoon leader in the 7th infantry Division in Korea in October 1952. The DSC is second to the Medal of Honor (See citation below.) In April of 1953, Clemons, then a company commander, was ordered to retake an objective nicknamed Pork Chop Hill because of its shape. The

Hill had recently been overrun by the Chinese army. Clemons retook the Hill at great cost with only seven able-bodied soldiers left to defend it.

S.L.A. Marshall, a military historian, wrote about the battle at Pork Chop Hill. Marshall's writing became a book and then inspired a screenplay for the movie, *Pork Chop Hill*. Gregory Peck bought the screenplay and produced the movie with him portraying Joe Clemons in the lead role. Joe Clemons, still on active duty, was assigned by the Army to serve as a technical advisor to the movie. The movie came out in 1959 and was a success. It was followed by *To Kill a Mockingbird*, in 1961 where Gregory Peck won an Oscar for his portrayal of Atticus Finch.

During the Vietnam War, Clemons commanded a brigade in the 23rd Infantry Division. A young lieutenant colonel Norman Schwarzkopf was one of Clemons' battalion commanders. A general in the 23rd wanted to relieve Schwarzkopf during a disagreement on tactics but Clemons interceded and saved Schwarzkopf's career. This incident is revealed in later four-star General Schwarzkopf's autobiographical book *It Doesn't Take a Hero*. Clemons retired as a colonel and eventually moved to Hendersonville, NC in 1988 where he passed in 2018.

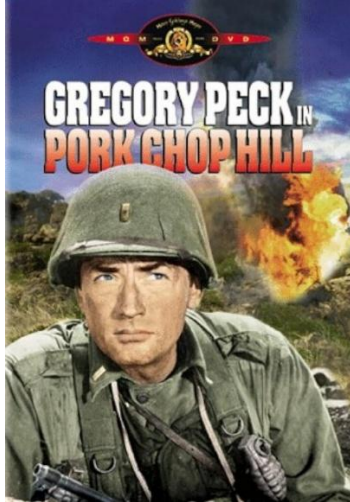
Distinguished Service Cross
AWARDED FOR ACTIONS
DURING [Korean War](#)
Service: [Army](#)
Rank: [First Lieutenant](#)
Battalion: 3d Battalion
Division: 7th Infantry Division



GENERAL ORDERS: Headquarters, Eighth U.S. Army, Korea: General Orders No. 616 (June 30, 1953)

CITATION:

The President of the United States of America, under the provisions of the Act of Congress approved July 9, 1918, takes pleasure in presenting the Distinguished Service Cross to First Lieutenant (Infantry) Joseph Gordon Clemons, Jr., United States Army, for extraordinary heroism in connection with military operations against an armed enemy of the United Nations while serving as a Platoon Leader in Company K, 3d Battalion, 31st Infantry Regiment, 7th Infantry Division. First Lieutenant Clemons distinguished himself by extraordinary heroism in action against enemy aggressor forces in the vicinity of Kumhwa, Korea, on 28 October 1952. On that date, Lieutenant Clemons, a platoon leader, led the attack platoon in a counterattack on a vital position which had been overrun earlier that night by the enemy. As the platoon neared the first enemy bunker, Lieutenant Clemons silenced its occupants with accurate and deadly fire and then led the men up the trenches, neutralizing each bunker they encountered. Upon nearing the crest of the objective, the group encountered heavy fire and was forced to withdraw. Discovering that their ammunition was almost exhausted, Lieutenant Clemons divided the remaining supply between the men and then led a volunteer group back into the trenches in a fierce charge, only to be repulsed by the enemy. Displaying superior leadership and aggressiveness, he reorganized the men and urged them into another assault. Constantly exposing himself to hostiles fire, he shouted words of encouragement and engaged the enemy in hand-to-hand combat, fighting viciously until the numerical superiority of the foe again forced the platoon to withdraw. Lieutenant Clemons superior devotion to duty in leading his men time and again into hand-to-hand combat in the face of overwhelming odds was an inspiration to all those with whom he served.



Clemons with Peck on movie set

Excerpt from *It Doesn't Take A Hero*
by General Norman Schwarzkopf

It was my brigade commander – a legendary combat infantryman named Joe Clemons, who had become a national hero and won the Distinguished Service Cross in the battle of Pork Chop Hill during the Koren War. The battle had been the subject of a best-seller by S.L.A. Marshall and a Hollywood movie in which Clemons was played by Gregory Peck. P. 157.

One day while Colonel Clemons was visiting my headquarters, the general flew in from Chu Lai and announced, “I figured out why you’re not making more enemy contact. The VC have broken down up into two- and three-man groups. So, I want you to break your battalion into two- and three- man groups as well and station them all over the area. You’ll kill a lot more enemy.”

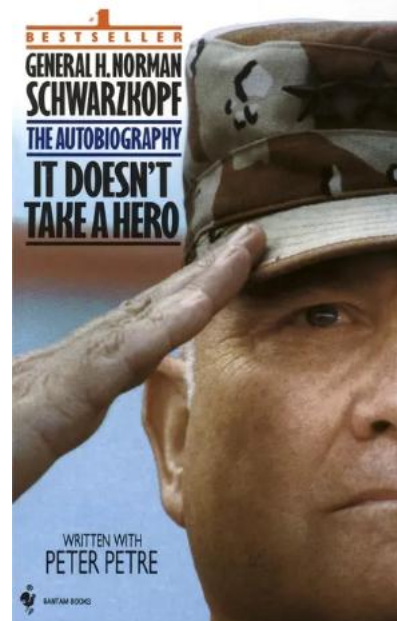
I explained that I’d just found that I needed to *increase* the size of our patrols. “Sir, if you send these men out in two- and three- man groups, they’ll be scared to death and won’t fight. On top of that, very few know how to read a map. They won’t be able to tell us where they are, and we won’t be able to fire our artillery without endangering our own men.”

This made the general furious: “Well that just sounds like a leadership problem to me! Obviously, you need to exercise firmer control over the men in this battalion.”

Stung, I was on the brink of saying, “General I’m sorry, but I cannot obey your order.”

Luckily, Colonel Clemons stepped in and said, Sir, Schwartzkopf’s analysis is absolutely correct. What you are suggesting would not be a wise course of action.” The general stormed out of the bunker, too angry to speak.

If Clemons hadn’t interposed himself, my career might have ended on the spot. The general was just vindictive enough to say, “That’s insubordination. Since you refuse to obey my order, you are relieved



of your command. “Instead, Clemons took the heat. It was the right thing to do—a commander sticks up for his subordinates when they are right – yet it required tremendous moral courage.

...A year and a half later, when I was a personnel officer at Infantry branch at the Pentagon, Joe Clemons came in to check his file. It included the general’s report, which by military standards was so lukewarm that Clemons was not selected for promotion to general. He knew he never would be, and he eventually retired as a colonel – a terrible loss for the Army and its troops. Pp 167-8



Left is a photo of Clemons when he was living in retirement in Hendersonville. Below photo was taken when Clemons was a brigade commander in Vietnam in the late 1960s. On the left is LTC Norman Schwartzkopf, who was one of Clemons’ battalion commanders.

