

(From the Greeley Tribune, Greeley Colorado)

# Stan Cass, founder of Honor Flight Northern Colorado, dies at 84

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hoto courtesy of Cecily Cass

**Retired U.S. Army Col. Stan Cass stands at the edge of his property in northern Colorado in November. Cass, the president and founder of Honor Flight Northern Colorado which works to fly U.S. Veterans to see various war memorials in Washington, D.C., died Saturday. He was 84.**

## **MEMORIAL SERVICE**

A memorial service in honor of Stan Cass will take place 2 p.m. Wednesday at Eaton's Evangelical Free Church, 1325 3rd St. in Eaton.

Sometime during one of Stan Cass' tours of duty in the Vietnam War, he agreed to use his helicopter to install an antenna on a German field hospital. The antenna was

important because it would open communication between the hospital and the German base. But in the touch-and-go world of the Vietnam War, the installation would be dangerous.

Cass agreed to fly the antenna to the roof of the hospital anyway.

"If the wind came up they would have all perished," his wife, Cecily Cass, remembered Sunday.

Cass didn't have to install the antenna for the hospital's staff, but he did it anyway. He didn't have to assist 26 Vietnamese veterans in their immigration to the U.S. either, but he did that, too. [And he was certainly never paid or was asked to found Honor Flight Northern Colorado, but he shouldered that responsibility and worked it like a full-time job.](#) He helped bring more than 2,500 veterans to Washington, D.C., to see war memorials since 2008.

Before his death Saturday, Stan Cass had plans to go on another honor flight in early May. He died about 11:30 a.m. Saturday, Cecily Cass said Sunday. She said, although he had been ill, she was unsure what the exact cause of his death was. He was 84 years old.

Though he spent almost three decades in the military and much of his retirement working to help veterans, Stan Cass didn't grow up dreaming of becoming a soldier. He was born to a farming family in Briggsdale and spent his youth working on the property where the family grew wheat, then switched to forage crops. He attended Briggsdale High School, but he hadn't chosen a career by the time he graduated. Then someone mentioned the U.S. Military Academy at West Point to him, and he decided to apply.

The school accepted him after he did some coursework at Colorado A&M, and he graduated from West Point in 1957. He was stationed first in France and Germany, but with the outbreak of the Vietnam War, he was transferred there for the first time in 1966, where he commanded a helicopter unit.

That was where he installed the antenna for the German hospital. It was also where, in November 1972, he met his wife, who worked for the Central Intelligence Agency. Cecily Cass said although they knew each other at that time, they didn't get married for years because she was transferred to Italy, while Stan Cass moved back to the United States and later worked in the Pentagon. During his time there, he developed the Hellfire missile system, still the primary air-to-ground missile system for the U.S. military.

But by 1986, his father was no longer able to work on the family farm, so Stan Cass retired to Weld County with his wife. They lived first in Ault then settled in Eaton.

Stan Cass, though, remained just as busy in retirement as he had during his career.

"He just continued," Cecily Cass said. "That's the way he was."

At first, much of his community involvement had to do with preserving the land his family had worked for decades. Cass served on a conservation district for Weld County's government, said Lee Seward, one of his close friends and vice president of Honor Flight of Northern Colorado.

But he also cared about veterans. He was instrumental in the creation of the Weld County Veterans Memorial near Greeley's Bittersweet Park, which was dedicated in 1997. At one point, when it appeared the project might stall for financial reasons, Cass prepared to donate his own money to it, said Steve Teksten, one of Cass' friends.

"Everybody kind of said, 'No, Stan, you don't have to do that,'" Teksten said.

So Teksten wasn't surprised when Cass said he wanted to put the honor flight together in 2008. Teksten joined the project and served as a guardian on the flight, which meant he helped the veterans travel to Washington, D.C.

Cass went on the flights, too. Before each flight, he studied the military records of the veterans involved, and then he talked to them about their individual careers, Seward said.

"He was passionate about serving veterans and seeing that mission was accomplished," Seward said.

He saw the honor flight as a serious service, and because of that he cared deeply about structure and rules. Weld County Commissioner Julie Cozad laughed when she remembered how he told her she wasn't allowed to attend the 2016 honor flight because she'd missed a mandatory meeting. She pointed out she'd gone on the 2015 honor flight, so she knew how the process worked. He told her she'd still missed a mandatory meeting and thus would have to wait until next year's flight (which she did attend).

It reminded her a bit of her own father — himself a military veteran — and she said Stan and Cecily Cass were mentors and in some ways parental figures for her. She said she admired their love for Weld County.

"They've done so much for our community," she said. "I really appreciate that."

It's more than that, though, she said, because they've also mentored people to take their places. For that reason, the honor flight is still scheduled for this May.

"It's going to be a hard honor flight and a very emotional honor flight," she said, "but our job is to carry on his legacy."