



# The Life of “Colonel Fred Van Cherry”

1928-2016



# Early Life

Col. Cherry was born on March 24, 1928 to a farming family here in Surprising Suffolk, Virginia. Growing up he attended racially segregated schools.

In 1951 he graduated from Virginia Union University and attended the Aviation Cadet Training Program of the U.S. Air Force.

Cherry was commissioned as a Second Lieutenant and earned his pilot wings, from Webb AFB in Texas in October of 1952.



# Military Career

Later, Col. Cherry flew F-184 Thunder Jets representing the 58th Fighter Bombers in the Korean War with over 100 combat missions.

His next mission was in the Vietnam War in October of 1965 when his F-105 Thunder Chief fighter bomber was shot down in North Vietnam.



# Tragedy Strikes

Col. Cherry ejected and landed with a broken ankle, wrist, and a crushed shoulder. He was quickly captured by the N. Vietnamese militia.

His captives soon realized that he was the first and highest black officer among the US Prisoners of War during the Vietnam War. They wanted him to make public comments regarding race and when he refused, Cherry spent 702 days in solitary confinement.

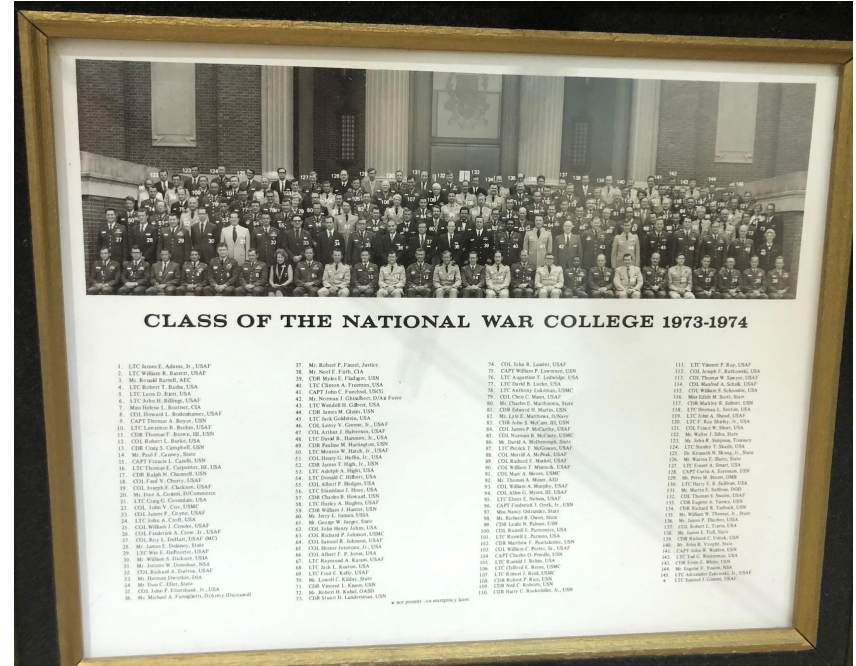
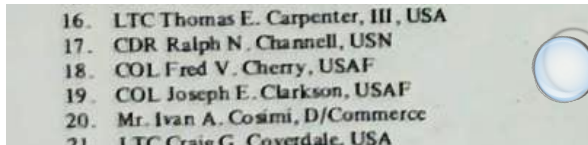
Ninety -three of those days he was tortured and punished daily.



# Relief at Last

After seven years as a Prisoner of War, Col. Cherry was finally released in 1973. When he returned home, it was discovered that has been declared missing by the Air Force and his wife. Once reestablished, he attended the National War College and was assigned to the Defense Intelligence Agency.

Col. Fred Cherry retired from the Air Force with 30 years of service in September 1981.



# Recognition

In 1982, the US Courts of Claims found the Air Force at fault and awarded him \$34,448 in compensation, far short of the \$129,000 awarded to his then wife.

Following his retirement from the Air Force President Ronald Reagan appointed Cherry to serve on the Korean War Advisory Board.

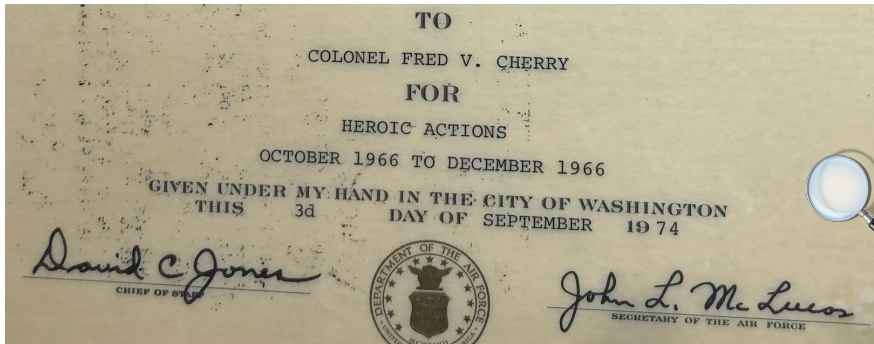




# Recognition

Colonel Fred V. Cherry was featured in the documentary "Return with Honor".

The President of the USA authorized section 8742, US code takes pleasure in presenting the Air Force Cross to Col. Fred Cherry of the US Air Force for his heroism in military operations against an opposing armed force as a prisoner of war.



# The End of An Era

Unfortunately, Colonel Fred Vann Cherry died on February 16, 2016 in a hospital from cardiac disease in Washington, D.C.

This is to certify that the accompanying flag was flown over the United States Capitol.

At the request of the Honorable Robert C. "Bobby" Scott, Member of Congress, this flag was flown in honor of Col. Fred V. Cherry, Vietnam Prisoner of War, March 24, 2018.





# In His Honor

In 2018, in his home city, Suffolk, a state of the art middle school is named after him for his service in the U.S.A.F as a Fighter Pilot.

Colonel Fred V. Cherry Middle School.

