

The Fitzgerald family believes in recycling. But they've taken it to a new level.

For the third time in seven decades a member of the Fitzgerald family has pinned on a Combat Infantrymen's Badge—the *same* combat infantrymen's badge.

R. Leon Fitzgerald originally earned the badge during World War II and gave it to his son, Col. (Ret.) Ray Fitzgerald, after he fought in Operation Just Cause. Ray Fitzgerald's son, Capt. Shawn Fitzgerald, S3 Air officer for the 173d Airborne Brigade currently stationed in Iraq, has now pinned on the same award.

"My grandfather served in World War II," Fitzgerald said. "He was awarded his CIB after serving on the German front. He was 17 when he signed up and it happened to be just before D-Day. His training was rushed because they were trying to get soldiers ready. He shipped out weeks before D-Day and fought his way across France, fighting in the Battle of the Bulge."

Time passed and R. L. Fitzgerald was able to hand the award to his son for his service in Panama.

"My father was awarded a CIB while serving in Panama," said Fitzgerald. "In a very similar set of circumstances. My grandfather mailed it to my father so he could have it for the award ceremony."

The tradition carried on for Operation Iraqi Freedom, he continued.

"When it looked like we would be awarded the CIB in Iraq, my father mailed the badge to me," he said. "There had been talk of my getting the award and I hinted around about it a few times before we left because I wanted to carry on the tradition. Not that going to war was a goal of mine, but I am the only male Fitzgerald in the immediate family who didn't have a CIB."

"My father and I discussed it," said Ray Fitzgerald and R. Leon Fitzgerald in an e-mail interview. "The only concern we had with mailing the CIB was the possibility that it would be lost in the mail."

"My family is proud of me and said This isn't necessarily a tradition you hope your family will follow but we're proud of the work you're doing," said Shawn Fitzgerald. "It was more of a pride kind of thing."

"Every parent has concerns and fears when faced with this situation. Our close-knit family is no different," said Ray Fitzgerald. "But we took great comfort in the fact that our Soldier's are superbly trained, magnificently led and well equipped. This is especially true for the 173rd. The BDE Officers, Non Commissioned Officers and Soldiers reflect the infantry creed in everything they do and we knew they would be enormously successful in accomplishing their mission and taking care of their Soldiers. So the answer is, of course we were concerned and worried, but we were confident in the 173rd taking good care of our soldiers."

The tradition of handing down badges doesn't stop though with the CIB, Shawn's father has also shared many of the badges he earned while serving with this son.

"It was clear when Shawn decided to be an Infantryman that he would attend many of the same badge producing Army schools that I attended decades earlier," he wrote. "With this in mind we decided to start a family tradition. The first item we shared was when he wore my Infantry Cross Rifles when he was commissioned and later, my Blue Infantry Cord when he was Infantry qualified. As Shawn was awarded other badges

(Airborne, Ranger, EIB, etc) our tradition became more and more important. The only change to this tradition and practice came when he pinned his AIR ASSAULT Badge on me when I completed the air assault course at Ft Campbell several years after he had been awarded the badge.

"The only badge we had not shared was the CIB. Clearly my preference was that Shawn would never be exposed to conditions that would facilitate the award. But the reality of the world's situation suggested that was unlikely."

There are some unsung heroes in all this though, heroes that Shawn's father and grandfather were careful to point out.

"Final comment...I can not say enough about the incredible courage and support demonstrated by the wives, husbands and children of the deployed soldiers," they wrote. "These family members deserve great credit and attention for their sacrifices and pain."

Specifically they pointed to their daughter-in-law Nicole.

"We are extremely proud of Nicole, our daughter-in-law. She has reflected tremendous grit throughout this deployment which at one point created double anxiety for her when both her husband and brother were in the combat zone," they said.

Although Shawn Fitzgerald isn't yet a father he said about the prospect of one day giving the award to his son, "I really hope not. But if he makes those choices then I would definitely be proud to."

