

OUR ELEVEN

Over fifty years ago, in 1954, the first Indochina war ended. Little did our country realize that from this modest beginning, the U.S. would become entangled in its longest war, a conflict that would cost it dearly in lives and treasure. Although technically never a declared war, it seems trivial to call it a “conflict” after the loss of over 58,000 Americans. Of these, 11 hailed from Perry County, Pennsylvania. These are the stories of those men whose personal histories have merged with the history of a country 10,000 miles distant.

Over its 2,000 year history, Vietnam had been no stranger to foreign intervention and war, and the U.S. would become one of the players in this country’s tragic history. With French involvement in what was then called “Indochina,” the U.S. first sent advisors and money to assist them in fighting Ho Chi Minh. In the atmosphere of the Cold War, Ho Chi Minh’s formation of a Communist party was a red flag for those U.S. officials who ascribed to the “domino theory.” If the Vietnam domino were allowed to fall, as the theory predicted, other nations would tip into the Communist camp, eventually resulting in a red wave. By 1954, the U.S. was paying for nearly 80% of the French military involvement in Vietnam, but it was not enough to stave off the defeat of the French. The fate of Vietnam now passed into the hands of the United States.

As the North Vietnamese Army strengthened, the U.S., through money and advisors, built a countervailing force in the South, the Armed Forces of the Republic of Vietnam. By 1963, U.S. advisers in Vietnam numbered 16,000 and found it impossible to avoid getting drawn into combat. In the pivotal year of 1964, the role of the U.S. military took a dramatic turn with a controversial incident involving a possible attack on U.S. warships by Vietnamese coastal craft in the Tonkin Gulf. The resulting Tonkin Gulf Resolution gave President Johnson the power to take “all necessary measures to repel any armed attack against the forces of the United States and to prevent further aggression.” With this blank check, the president escalated the war in Vietnam, with an average of 5,500 bombing missions a month. In 1965, Gen. William Westmoreland was given the green light for the first U.S. combat troops to enter Vietnam, two Marine battalions. By the end of 1967, the U.S. had 500,000 troops “in country.”

In South Vietnam, the guerilla tactics of the Vietcong frustrated a U.S. military that had trained mainly for conventional warfare. Booby traps, mines, tunnel complexes, civilian fighters, hit and run tactics, and no obvious “front line” put American soldiers in very difficult and dangerous situations.

PSG Joseph Lester Hockenberry
10/17/33-4/2/67

“Daddy, I miss you and I really never knew you. At my age I find that I miss you more every day. Sometimes I feel like you are in the room with me, so I talk to you. Mom didn’t teach me to be rude!! You have 4 grandchildren, one who looks like you. They are all good kids. You and everyone on that Wall are my heroes. I love you. Your daughter and only child, Leslie Jo (little Joey).” This posting can be found in a memorial website to her father, Joseph Hockenberry.

He was born in Oliver Township in 1933, but attended school in Duncannon. Life was not kind to Joe Hockenberry. His father died when Joe was 13, and the state removed him and his two brothers from the family, placing them on a farm. He hated it, so he subsequently ran away, left school at 17, and found a home in the United States Army, enlisting on February 5, 1951. He would eventually receive his G.E.D. in 1953, after serving for a year in the Korean War.



P/Sgt. Joseph L. Hockenberry
of Duncannon served in the Army and died April 2, 1967 in Vietnam.

Joseph Hockenberry received his baptism of fire in Korea with Co. K, 279th Infantry Regiment, 45th Infantry Division, and was awarded the Bronze Star:

“Sergeant First Class JOSEPH L. HOCKENBERRY...distinguished himself by meritorious service in connection with military operations against an armed enemy, in Korea, from September 5, 1952 to July 27, 1953. Sergeant HOCKENBERRY’S outstanding leadership and willingness to accept responsibilities were exemplary. His unique ability to utilize manpower and supplies and his cheerful yet vigorous approach to his many problems won him the respect and admiration of all with whom he associated. Sergeant HOCKENBERRY’S devotion to duty and superior performance reflect great credit upon himself and the military service.”

He returned to service in Korea from 1952-53 and in the 1960s, he served two tours in Germany, where he wed Gisela, a German citizen. They would have a daughter, Leslie Jo.

On June 21, 1966, Platoon Sergeant Hockenberry was sent to Vietnam. He was serving with B Troop, 1st Squad, 9th Cavalry Regiment, 1st Cavalry Division on Sunday, April 2, 1967, when he was killed in Binh Dinh Province, South Vietnam, by enemy small arms fire. He was one of three men lost in B Troop that day and one of about 9,000 U.S. soldiers killed that year in Vietnam. At the age of 33, this veteran of two wars was laid to rest with full military honors in Evergreen Methodist Cemetery in Duncannon. A chaplain from Carlisle Barracks officiated. Hockenberry was survived by his wife, Gisela; mother, Mabel; five sisters; two brothers; and two stepsisters. Joseph’s mother died three years to the day after her son’s death in Vietnam. The mother, father, and son now rest together.

Platoon Sergeant Joseph L. Hockenberry was awarded a posthumous Bronze Star for heroism, the Military Merit Medal and the Gallantry Cross with Palm from the Government of the Republic of Vietnam. These honors are proudly displayed on his daughter’s memorial website. Joseph Hockenberry’s youngest grandson posted this message on the Virtual wall website when he was 12: “...as I look at your flag sitting on our mantel I wonder what you were like.”

1SG Jack Ivan Maguire **9/7/24-8/30/67**

Jack Maguire is described by his half-brother as “army”- strict, with rules that he expected would be followed.

Jack was born in Harrisburg in 1924. His father was Charles A. Maguire, who eventually settled in Marysville. Jack’s civilian occupation was listed as a laboratory technician, motion picture or shipping clerk. Jack’s age made him eligible for service during three wars. He enlisted in the Army on May 7, 1943 in Harrisburg. In World War II, Jack told of using a truck to avoid capture by the Germans after he and his comrades were trapped behind enemy lines during the epic Battle of the Bulge. His mother noted how, after this experience, he had the “shakes” after he returned. Jack Maguire was then breveted a Captain. Besides World War II, his tombstone also mentions Korean service.

He married his wife Dorothy (“Dottie”) soon after World War II. Their first child was born in 1947. The couple made their home in Marysville, with their two children attending Susquenita High School. Duty, however, would take them far from Perry County to Germany; Milwaukee, Wisconsin; and Anchorage, Alaska.

Jack would eventually become a military instructor in State College in the mid-1960s. His half-brother Dan would occasionally visit, and he recalls Jack’s devotion to his family and his love of fishing. Given his age (42), Jack was a bit surprised when he was issued orders for Vietnam. He arrived “in country” on August 12, 1966. His combat



F/Sgt. Jack I. Maguire
of Marysville served in the Army and died August 30, 1967 in Vietnam.

experience and his age (23 years beyond the average of a G.I. in Vietnam) gave Jack a unique perspective. In communications home, he lamented the loss of men who were so young. His obituary records his death in a U.S. Army hospital in Japan on August 30, 1967. By October of that year, he would have completed 20 years in the service. His death is officially listed as a result of illness/disease.

Coincidentally, his half-brother Dan received the news from a drill sergeant just before his graduation from Marine boot camp at Parris Island. He was given an emergency leave to attend the family funeral. First Sergeant Jack I. Maguire was buried in Evergreen Cemetery in Duncannon. This seasoned veteran was survived by his wife Dorothy M., two sons, (one serving with the army in Germany), his mother and father, living in Marysville, and two brothers, (one serving in the Marine Corps at Parris Island). A sense of duty was strong in this family. Jack's half-brother Dan, a graduate of Susquenita High School, would go on to serve with the Marines in Vietnam during the famous siege of Khe Sanh in 1968. He was twice wounded.

PFC Clarence David Sheibley
5/22/46-9/21/67



Pfc. Clarence D. Sheibley
of Elliottsburg served in the Marines and died September 21, 1967 in Vietnam.

On October 31, 2001, a "girl on the plane" posted the following message under David Sheibley's name on the Virtual Wall website: "I'll always remember David as the boy with the big smile. We only knew each other for 30 minutes during a plane ride on his way to ship out to Vietnam. He wanted me to write and we did. The last I saw of David was his hopeful smile as he left the plane. He had dreams and plans for a future..."

Clarence David Sheibley, the youngest in the family, was named after both his grandfathers, but he was "Davey" to most friends and relatives. His mother describes her son as an ordinary boy. From ages 8 to 16, he was a paperboy, delivering *The Evening News* in Elliottsburg. 1956 was a pivotal year for the Sheibleys. The father, Charlie, would succumb to heart problems in July, leaving his wife with four children, ages 10 to 16. Making ends meet would be a struggle. Social Security did not go far. His mother, Helen, worked at the state hospital in Harrisburg as an attendant and later as an LPN.

Davey attended the two-story schoolhouse in Elliottsburg and graduated in 1964 from Green Park Union High School. He certainly left his mark. He played the bass horn in concert and marching band (making county band three years in a row), participated in choir, track (440 yard dash and the mile), yearbook (*Montourian*), senior high play (*Three Act Comedy*- played the lead & voted best actor), Chess Club, and served as treasurer of his

class both junior and senior years.

Gary Peterman and Davey were lifelong friends, growing up across the street from one another in Elliottsburg. Gary remembers: "At age 9 we both joined the Landisburg Lions little league baseball team. Since he was the star catcher and I was one of the pitchers, the coach would loan us the catcher's equipment and we would spend hours behind his house practicing for when we would both 'eventually enter the major leagues.' And Davey's back yard was our playground. It was perfect for our football games, had a basketball net for our games of '21' and 'horse.' Our Junior High School years were filled with many camping adventures. Often times we would just grab a blanket and head into the woods, find a suitable place to camp, build a campfire and spend the night. Of course, no camping trip is complete unless we made a midnight 'raid' on someone's garden so we had something to eat. During the summer months, hide and seek were the games we would play. I know this sounds like a small child's game, but our hide and seek was taken seriously. I recall one time we could not find Davey and called all in free only to see him climbing down from the top of a telephone pole! ...During the Christmas and Easter holidays, we formed a brass quartet with my brother and Dan Reiley and would visit nursing homes to perform songs of the season for the patients.

"...The game of golf was our favorite sport during those high school summers. We both bought used sets of golf clubs from the Elliottsburg auction house and would set up our own golf course at the West Perry soccer field. With no putting greens, we would place tin cans around the field and hill which served as our targets.

Paul Hurley was our high school principal at the time and lived across from the high school. One day he came over and offered to take us to Carlisle to a real golf course (he was feeling sorry for us because we played golf at the high school every single day). Well, with our first exposure to a real golf course, there was no going back to the high school soccer field to play golf. Since Davey got his drivers license shortly thereafter and we now had transportation, we would spend almost every Sunday playing golf at a 'real golf course'."

After Davey's loss of his father, the Rev. Russell Kerns, pastor of Mt. Zion Lutheran Church, took Davey under his wing. He held a Sunday evening Bible study class and questioned the students if they missed Sunday services. His mother describes Pastor Kerns as Davey's "father/confessor." Pastor Kerns even made it a point to spend a day with Davey each time he came home on leave, and he continued to communicate with Davey while he was in Vietnam. Perhaps Davey's hope of becoming a minister was inspired by Pastor Kerns.

Gary Peterman recalls: "After graduation from High School, Davey attended Harrisburg Area Community College and I went off to Potomac State College in West Virginia. However, we would both come home every other weekend and spend Saturday nights and Sunday afternoons at the Hi-Way Theater in Ickesburg shooting pool...I joined the Marine Corps in Dec. of 1965 and Davey followed shortly after. Davey was stationed at Camp LeJeune, N.C., and I was stationed at Beaufort, S.C."

After graduating from HAAC in 1966, Davey began his service in the Marine Corps on October 17, 1966, expecting that the G.I. bill would later pay for his last two years of college. His mother was resigned to his decision. For the struggling single mother, it was an instant empty nest- her oldest son was already married, one daughter left for California, another daughter got married, and Davey joined the Marines.

Gary Peterman remembers when his friend got his orders: "When he wrote me a letter that he was being sent to Vietnam, I made sure I got leave and came home to spend several days with Davey doing all the things we did in high school- shooting pool at the Hi-Way Theater prior to his leaving for Vietnam. I still have the picture of we two just as he was about to leave for the airport, the last day I saw him alive."

Making Davey's departure for Vietnam even more difficult was a "Dear John" letter he received shortly before he left from a girl that he had been dating for about a year. At the airport when Davey was going to San Diego (from which he would leave for Vietnam), he told his mother that he didn't want to see any tears. PFC Sheibley arrived in Vietnam on August 8, 1967. He wrote home often (not telling his mother about heavy fighting), and his mother wrote almost every day. He was in country only six weeks when he was killed instantly on Thursday, September 21, 1967, one day after his mother's birthday. That day, 2nd Regiment, 4th Battalion, 3rd Marine Division, engaged an NVA force near Con Thien in Quang Tri Province near the DMZ. In ferocious fighting, 16 Marines were killed and 15 were missing in action. Marines returned to the battlefield twice, on September 26 and October 9, and were able to recover the bodies of 14 of the missing Marines, including PFC Sheibley of Golf Company. The remains of the fifteenth, who had been captured and died of wounds in a North Vietnamese hospital, were brought back to the states in 1986, but were not identified until 2002.

Betty Peterman, the mother of David's best friend, who lived across the street from them in Elliottsburg, saw the two Marines at Helen Sheibley's door on Monday evening, but Helen was not home. When Helen returned from work in Harrisburg, Betty told her about their visit. The Marines came back later that day.

Gary Peterman was also serving in the Marines and, at the request of Davey's mother, he was allowed to accompany the body home. When Helen Sheibley asked Betty Peterman, Gary's mother, if it was okay to ask him, Betty said that he would be disappointed if she didn't. The closed casket viewing was held at Myers Funeral Home in Newport. It was full inside the building, and people spilled out onto the street. A lot of high school friends were there, a testament to the many lives he had touched during his 21 years. David was honored with a full military funeral and burial at Elliottsburg E.U.B. Church graveyard. Speaking at the funeral was his "father-confessor," Pastor Kerns. David was survived by his mother, one brother, two sisters, and a maternal grandfather. Soon after the funeral, David's pregnant sister Virginia told her mother that she shouldn't tell her this, but she hoped she would have her baby on Davey's birthday and that it would be a boy. It happened just as she predicted, and she named him "David."

SP4 William Bernard McGarvey
4/24/45-11/18/67



SP4 William B. McGarvey
of Loysville served in the Army and died November 18, 1967 in Vietnam.

Shortly after Willam McGarvey's mother, Freda, passed away in 1984, a family friend wrote: "It was evident that the trauma of Billy's death had weighed heavily on her."

Freda McGarvey gave birth to William Bernard McGarvey and raised this son along with three other boys and three girls on the family farm in Loysville. Growing up, "Billy" loved to socialize. A classmate recalled a laugh so distinctive that you didn't need to see who it was; you just knew it was Billy. His laugh would go on and on until he had everyone in stitches. He was popular throughout school and was a track & field athlete, running cross country. In fact, he and his friends would arrange to arrive early at school to play dodge ball. He attended Blain Union High School, graduating in 1964. Throughout his life, he was an avid hunter; he was always on the river hunting ducks or in the woods with his hounds.

After his graduation from high school, Billy worked for C.H. Masland Co. in Carlisle. He held this job for two years until he enlisted in the U.S. Army in May, 1966, receiving his basic training at Ft. Jackson, South Carolina. He became SP4 William McGarvey, following his three older brothers into the military. He was serving with the 5th Battalion, 60th Infantry, 9th Division from April 1967 until his death in November of the same year in a firefight in the Mekong Delta.

SP4 William Bernard McGarvey was survived by his parents, three brothers, and three sisters. His parents accepted several awards on their son's behalf. One Bronze Star was specified as being given for "meritorious service" from April 25, 1967 to November 18, 1967. The second medal presented to his family was a posthumous Bronze Star with V device. The official citation states: "Specialist Four McGarvey distinguished himself by valorous actions during the early morning hours of November 18, 1967 while serving as a listening post leader in support of fire support base Cudgel in Dinh Tuong Province in Vietnam. At approximately 2:00 A.M. an estimated reinforced battalion of Viet Cong launched a vicious mortar, automatic weapons, and small arms ground attack upon McGarvey's unit. Although hit and seriously wounded in the initial mortar barrage, McGarvey courageously held his ground and returned the fire. In total disregard for his own safety, and shrugging off the pain of his wounds, he ordered his men to seek more favorable positions while he provided covering fire. He courageously continued to pour a hail of fire into the dense vegetation until an enemy round took his life." In addition to these two Bronze Stars, his family was also presented with two Purple Hearts. A concerted effort was also made to have SP4 William McGarvey awarded the Medal of Honor, but all those involved in the effort, including a former teacher, were told that too much time had elapsed.

A classmate recalls the somber mood among Blain Union students when news reached them of Billy's death. The funeral services were held at St. Bernard's Roman Catholic Church in New Bloomfield, and the burial took place in New Blain Cemetery at a family plot. A military guard of honor from Indiantown Gap Military Reservation attended the services. After her son's death, Billy's mother, Freda, recalled how Billy, the youngest of her seven children, looked on his 22nd birthday as he stood in the kitchen doorway of their home. It was the last time she saw him.

With military and political leaders claiming "a light at the end of the tunnel," 1968 was a rude awakening for U.S. military forces and the American public. On January 30, the Vietnamese New Year (Tet), an estimated 80,000 NVA (North Vietnamese Army) and Vietcong fighters launched a widespread and

coordinated surprise attack on South Vietnam. It included major cities in the South, 12 American bases, and even the U.S. embassy compound in Saigon. Although the Tet offensive was put down, resulting in the death of an estimated 50,000 North Vietnamese combatants, it was a public relations fiasco for the U.S. Besides damaging morale among the U.S. military, it forced the public to seriously question the credibility of its political and military leaders. College campuses became hotbeds of protest, with the draft becoming a focal point of their anger. The country was tearing apart.

CMH3 Richard Michael Sprout 12/13/44-8/26/68



CMH3 Richard
M. Sprout
of Duncannon
served in the Navy
and died August
26, 1968 in Viet-
nam.

Before leaving for Vietnam, Richard gave his sister Carrie a set of rosary beads. His intention after returning home was to become a Catholic priest. In Vietnam, Richard Sprout was one of about 700 Seabees serving at Camp Barnes at Dong Ha, Quang Tri Province in South Vietnam, about 7 miles from the North Vietnamese border. As a Seabee, Richard worked as a construction mechanic at the sprawling camp.

Richard was born in 1944 to Mr. & Mrs. Roy R. Sprout of Dauphin. They later moved to Millerstown, where they ran what is now Pittman's Campground on Old Hwy. 22. Later, Richard was raised by his mother in Houston, Texas, attending St. Thomas High School. While in Texas, he especially enjoyed deep sea fishing in the Gulf. One of his sisters describes him as being comical, with a great personality. His service photo reflects this. She said that he also loved kids and enjoyed his young nephew and his niece, Faithann Sheesley, who was also his goddaughter. Richard moved back to Perry County from Texas around 1966. At the age of 21, with the help of his priest, Richard made contact with his sisters in Pennsylvania. They had precious little time together before his departure for Vietnam.

His decision to join the military in December 1967 came from a sense of duty and family tradition, as both his father and grandfather had served. His choice of the U.S. Navy perhaps came from his interest in the sea, and his training as a Construction Mechanic 3rd Class in the Seabees mirrored his work as a machinist in civilian life. Carrie, Richard's sister, remembers that "Richard liked the idea of being a Seabee because he felt he was building something and not destroying..." Being a Seabee also meant that it would be less likely that he would have to take a life. This was especially important to Richard because of his intention to enter the priesthood.

Richard wrote often while in the service. One time, after returning from leave, he struggled to express his feelings after being dropped off by his parents: "...after Mom and Pa let me out I felt like I was all alone. I sure didn't want to get out of that car." After parting with one of his sisters, he wrote: "For some reason I felt as if I had lost the one thing most dear to me. I guess I was just feeling sorry for myself." Soon after his arrival in Vietnam on July 11, 1968, he wrote: "It is Hot and the red dust is bad. You can't keep anything clean...Oh you should try taking a bath in salt water. It is really something you can't do anything with your hair and the soap just doesn't suds up...The only fresh water is for drinking and it is like gold. As far as cool water to drink forget it...Now the dining hall-In my friends word it smells like a farmer's barn...the food...is plum rotten. So most of the time we eat C rat's if we can get them. And it is so hot in the dining hall you can't eat anyway...P.S. IT IS HOT!" In a letter to his parents, he elaborated: "We were put on a 7 day work week and that sure doesn't give us much time off. I am on watch now...I don't have any time to write except when I am on watch...By the way last week we got hit by V.C. artillery. But they can't hit anything so don't worry. I can take care of myself...I went to town the other day to work and you just would not believe how the people live here. Most of them don't even have clothes or anything to eat half the time and most of the ones that do get them from the Jarheads [Marines]...The kids don't go to any kind of school...I work 14 to 18 hours a day and then have guard duty 2

times a week so I don't have much time..." To a sister he wrote: "...boy am I tired. But things are quiet tonight and at least I will be able to get a few hours of good sleep. That is if they don't start firing the big guns. I was just thinking how nice it would be to be back in the states. Boy I sure can't wait to get back. And have clean clothes and a nice bath. Boy that sure would be great."

It was a hot, sunny day on August 26, 1968, at about 5:30 PM, when about 50 rounds of artillery (about 30 of these rounds hit Camp Barnes) rained down from North Vietnam, which was only 7 miles away. Very few Seabees worked in Camp Barnes during the daytime; most worked out on the roads or other job sites. There were probably no more than 75 Seabees in camp that day. Richard Sprout and Richard Davis were probably trying to get to a bunker near a hut for protection. Jim Piccotti, a Seabee who was in Camp Barnes that day, describes the bombardment: "I was about 100 yards from them. At first I couldn't get to a bunker. I was too far away from one. The rounds were coming in too fast and I just lay on the ground until I got a chance to get into one. Richard Sprout and Richard Davis didn't get that chance. I didn't know that these two Seabees got killed until sometime later. I knew that someone got hurt bad. You could see the medevacs come in. We were still getting hit as the medevacs were coming in. A few Seabees got wounded that day. Our camp got hit many times." Of about 700 Seabees (MCB-7) at Camp Barnes, Richard Sprout, age 23, was one of four killed in action.

Earlier, Richard Davis had written the following to Richard Sprout's sister Mary on seeing her picture: "I was with him when he got your pictures and I saw your picture and thought you were very good looking and from what your brother said you are a real nice girl...From what he said you and him are very close and it was his idea that I write you...and maybe when we get back I might even get to see you, I hope." The letter was dated four days before the friends were killed together in the same attack.

In his last letter to his sister Carrie, Richard wrote: "...we don't do any fighting as yet. But, it could start any day at any time...It is getting late and I still have four more letters to write, so until next Sunday I will go for now...please don't think that I have forgotten you, OK?"

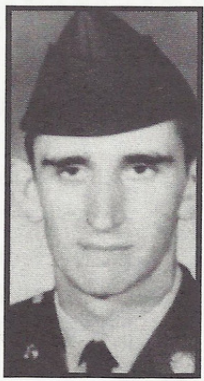
Word first reached the Sprout family by phone. Military officials apologized for the breach of etiquette. Two military officials arrived and formally delivered the sad news. In the time capsule behind the Vietnam monument at West Perry High School is a vial of dirt from Camp Barnes, helping us to connect to that place halfway around the world. It was collected by a Gold Star mother of a Seabee who also lost his life at Camp Barnes.

His sister Carrie recalls: "We can only imagine what life would have been like for us...if he had survived the war. I think that he would have made a really good priest. He not only had a really good sense of humor, but he was a terrific listener and cared deeply about people."

PFC Richard Leroy Fry
1/2/49-3/6/69

Nora Fry, Richard's mother, relates how hard it has been, but how the years have made it easier. She still does not like to see soldiers or war movies.

Richard Leroy Fry, whose Perry County roots extend to his father's parents, was born on January 2, 1949. He was the son of Nora Hockenbrock Fry, a graduate of Millerstown High School, and Chester "Pat" Fry, from Donnally Mills. Richard's parents lived for a few years near Donnally Mills. Besides Richard, they would have two more sons and a daughter. Tragically, Richard's father died in an automobile accident in 1965 and did not witness his son Richard's graduation from West Snyder High School in Beaver Springs in 1967. Afterwards, Richard, who is described by his mother as an easy going and quiet young man, made concrete blocks at the Beavertown Block Plant. Outside of work, Richard had a passion for working on cars, of which he had several, and woodworking. The family treasures items that Richard made.



PFC Richard L. Fry
served in the Army and died March 6, 1968 in Vietnam and is buried in Eschol Cemetery.

Private First Class Richard Fry began his tour of duty in Vietnam on November 13, 1968. He served with the 1st Battalion, 28th Infantry Regiment (“Black Lions”), 1st Infantry Division. Richard wrote many letters home, his last talking of upcoming R&R (rest & recuperation) and being back in Beaver Springs. It was a Sunday morning when two men from the Lewistown Armory delivered the news that Richard had been missing in action since March 6, 1969. Three days later at work, Richard’s mother was called to the office. As she walked through the factory, she could see the same two men. The news was worse, but there were many to comfort her. PFC Fry’s personal effects, including undeveloped pictures of him with his men, South Vietnamese soldiers, and a Vietnamese girl he had befriended, arrived soon after.

PFC Richard Leroy Fry, age 20, made his final journey to Eschol Cemetery to rest beside his father and near his grandparents. Also in the cemetery is a fellow Perry County Vietnam veteran, James Swartz.

Over 30 years later, Michael Fry, Richard’s brother, was stunned when he read a posting by John Petty on the Virtual Wall website. John had been with Rich when he was killed. On Memorial Day, 2003, John Petty wrote the Fry family about the day their unit left Camp Oran (artillery fire base) by Huey helicopters. Arriving at the LZ (landing zone), they moved through the sweltering heat to their evening positions: “We carried our personal gear: M-16 rifle or M-79 Grenade Launcher or M-60 Machine Gun, 2 to 3 hand grenades, a colored smoke grenade (to mark our location for helicopters or air support jets), lots of ammo (20+ magazines of 17 rounds), 3-4 quarts of water, food for 2 to 3 days, TP and for some, cigarettes...Each person carried about 50-60 pounds...Richard and I were both ‘on point,’ leading our columns through a brushy area with a few scattered trees...Richard and I could see each other and we glanced at each other frequently...We came upon a small clearing in the trees and brush. There was a mud termite mound...between us, about 20 feet away...this one was about 5 feet tall and about 5 feet around...We had paused and were looking at this strange sight when there was a rapid burst of AK-47 rifle fire and Richard fell down. He was killed instantly, which I could tell because he did not move at all...we gently gathered poor Richard in a ponch liner and...I...and three others helped carry him to a secure LZ that afternoon, where a helicopter could come to bring him home to you. After suffering a tragedy in the midst of a fire fight, things get pretty quiet among us. One thing I do remember hearing is that one of his squad buddies said that he had recently gotten a letter that had made his day. What I’d like you to get from my story is this. Richard was out there doing a very tough job under extreme conditions. As his fellow point man that day, I realize it could have just as well been me that they chose to fire at. I was right next to him the whole time and can swear to God that he absolutely did not suffer from his injury. And you can also rest assured that he died knowing in his heart that people at home cared about him and loved him... I hope that I have provided your family with some comfort. It was an honor and a duty of love to bridge this gap.”

As the military measured progress in “body counts,” guerilla tactics blurred the line between civilians and combatants. Free Fire zones were declared, which permitted targeting anything that appeared threatening. With the average age of the G.I. at 19, these young men were forced to make life and death decisions in an instant, the consequences of which they would have to live with for the rest of their lives- if they survived.

One way of defeating this jungle enemy was defoliation. Between 1965 and 1970, the U.S. military sprayed nearly twelve million gallons of Agent Orange, a defoliant containing dioxin. It would be used to deny the enemy the cover of the jungle canopy, destroy his food supplies, clear landing zones, and establish open perimeters around base camps. Tragically, it would affect more than just the enemy. It would have a devastating effect on the future health of American soldiers.

As President Nixon took office in 1969, he planned for a negotiated settlement to bring an end to the war. One month after taking office, in order to force the North Vietnamese to negotiate seriously and deny the enemy safe haven in neighboring Cambodia, the administration commenced a secret bombing campaign in Cambodia. Seeking an honorable end to what had become America's longest war, the Nixon administration also initiated a new plan called "Vietnamization." It called for the stepped-up training and supplying of the South Vietnamese armed forces, so that American forces could be drawn down. By the beginning of 1970, 100,000 Americans had been brought home. However, when it was announced on April 30, 1970, that U.S. ground forces had entered Cambodia, protests erupted around the country. Dissenters viewed this offensive as a widening of the war. Some blamed the soldiers for the war, to the point where veterans were insulted and compelled to hide their service. A presidential commission declared that the fissures in American society were now "as deep as any since the Civil War."

PFC Edwin Cloyd Hockenberry
5/18/48-8/18/69



Pvt. Edwin C. Hockenberry
of East Waterford, RD 1 (Horse Valley) served in the Army and died August 18, 1969 in Vietnam.

Edwin "Jake" Hockenberry had premonitions of his death.

He was born on May 18, 1948 in East Waterford, Horse Valley. He came from a poor family with seven brothers and seven sisters. All the children needed to work on a nearby farm to help support the family, often for 50¢ /hour. The work was difficult, mostly done by hand, such as picking corn and cutting the stalks. Jake attended school in Blain, but wasn't much interested in the classroom. His attention was drawn to the outdoors. He was an avid sportsman, enjoying hunting and fishing. He also liked working on cars, especially his not-so-late-model Ford. A friend remembers Jake as a "skinny guy" who was quiet and low-key. He also remembers their big snowball fights at school, complete with forts.

Prior to commencing his tour of Vietnam on July 24, 1969, Jake told one of his brothers that he probably would not be coming back. A friend advised him to do what he needed to survive. While being driven to the airport in Philadelphia, Jake also told his cousin that he would be coming back in a pine box. His premonition came true. Jake Hockenberry's unit was ambushed on August 18 in Quang Nam province. Private First Class Edwin Hockenberry was among the fallen. His official casualty record states "Died while Missing in Action." He was a member of Co.E, 4th Battalion, 31st Infantry, 196th Infantry Brigade, Americal Division. Not quite a month "in country," he became a posthumous recipient of the Bronze Star and Purple Heart. His Bronze Star citation reads: "Through his untiring efforts and professional ability, he consistently obtained outstanding results. He was quick to grasp the implications of new problems with which he was faced as a result of the ever changing situations inherent in a counterinsurgency operation and to find ways and means to solve those problems." A brother, home from the Air Force, was told by a military representative: Your brother is gone now. Then the messenger left; he had another visit to make that day. Jake Hockenberry was interred at Concord Cemetery in Franklin County. Ray Earnest, a boyhood friend, posted the following message on the virtual wall website about his friend, Jake Hockenberry: "He was killed in action while I was at boot camp and I'll never forget that day my sister told me of it. He will live in our memories for as long as we live and beyond, because I have a son that I call 'Jake' to honor his memory."

SGT Claude Bruce Landis II
10/4/48-10/26/69



Sgt. Claude B. Landis II
of Elliottsburg served in the Army and died October 26, 1969 in Vietnam.

Claude Landis of Elliottsburg was born in 1948. He hated the name “Claude,” so his family called him “Butch,” and he was “Bruce” to his friends. His family was originally from Elizabethtown, Pennsylvania, but moved to a farm near Eshcol around the time Bruce was in fourth grade. A friend describes him as being fun and having a good personality, which won him a fair number of friends. He loved the outdoors and would take advantage of all the hunting seasons, sometimes traveling to Lancaster County. At West Perry High School, a classmate remembers: “He loved history especially Mr. Frederick’s classes. Sitting in the front left of the room, Bruce was in love with the subject of history. He aced the history courses and received a history award upon graduation.” After graduating from West Perry in the class of 1966, Bruce’s parents wanted him to attend college. He did attend HACC for a while, but dropped out. He was uncertain about what he wanted to do with his life. Before entering the service on June 18, 1968, he was employed in the parts department of Garber Motor Co. of Elizabethtown near where his grandparents lived.

Bruce took his basic training at Fort Dix, New Jersey, where the army recognized his leadership potential, offering him O.C.S. (Officer Candidate School), but he turned it down. He did, however, attend N.C.O. (Non-Commissioned Officer) school. He began his tour in Vietnam on June 6, 1969. His early letters described the adventure and excitement of being in a different part of the world. The tone of the letters gradually changed over time, however, when he would talk about the men they had lost.

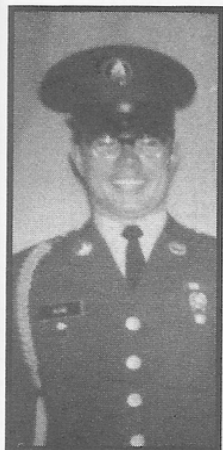
On Sunday, October 26, 1969, at the age of 21 years, SGT Landis was lost out-right as a result of small arms fire in Binh Long province. At the time, he was serving with Company D, 1st Battalion, 28th Infantry Regiment, 1st Infantry Division.

Allen Riddagh, who served under SGT Landis, recently recorded his memories: “...I knew SGT Landis. He was my squad leader. I arrived at my company and was assigned to lima platoon around the third week in August. I was assigned to SGT Landis' squad at that time. So I knew him for about two months at the time of his passing. I only have good memories of him... I have thought of this day many times over the years and also wondered about his family. I know what a terrible loss that must have been for them...I have a vivid memory of that terrible day. Also, if you will, please convey my own personal sense of loss to his family for me...I am among a few in this world, who may have recollections regarding SGT Landis at the time of his death, and I feel it my duty and obligation to finally convey what I have had in my memory all these years, to others who have an interest in these events. Maybe it is one last service I can render a fallen soldier...It seems we may have made contact on the second day out of the fire support base. (I think it may have been Fire Support Base Apollo)... Our company (Delta Company) was working with a unit of ARVN [Army of the Republic of Vietnam- South Vietnamese] soldiers. The ARVN were walking as lead element when they walked dead on into an NVA base camp. An ARVN officer was hit with a rocket propelled grenade and was killed instantly. This was the beginning of a not so good day. As I recall, we backed off and called in tactical air support and artillery. I remember being pinned down in a large crater (made by a very big bomb) with a Lieutenant Armstrong who was our platoon leader... One of our guys came running and jumped into the crater yelling that they (the NVA) were right behind him and that we were all dead men...At some point during the afternoon, word went around that Landis had been killed and that they had not yet recovered his body.... I remember also that our Platoon Sergeant was hit by AK 47 fire and that a few guys and me had carried him to an opening in the jungle where he could be hoisted into a waiting medical evacuation helicopter.” As he spent a harrowing night remaining absolutely still and quiet in the jungle, Private Riddagh thought of Sergeant Landis and tears welled up in his eyes.

A Requiem Mass was held in his memory at St. Bernard’s Roman Catholic Church in New Bloomfield, followed by burial in New Bloomfield Cemetery. He was survived by his parents, a sister, two brothers,

paternal grandparents, and a maternal grandmother. Bruce Landis became part of the history of his country and his community. His name can be found on the Vietnam Memorial in Washington, D.C., panel 17W, line 121, and on the Vietnam monument at West Perry High School where he loved to study history.

SSG David Samuel Kline
3/6/48-11/20/69



S/Sgt. David S. Kline
of Landisburg served in the Army and died November 20, 1969 in Vietnam.

There are numerous testimonials to the character of David Kline. Mike Atherton, a comrade, remembers: “He never wavered in the performance of his duty, was well liked and respected by his fellow soldiers. He took his job seriously, with a focus on the well being of those around him. SGT Kline would perform the same tasks he asked of others, but was not required to perform. He was easy going, soft spoken and had a serious side when necessary. Recently, I have made contact with other members of RECON and when we discuss our experiences, Dave’s name always comes up. One common thread we seem to all recall about Dave, is that he was one of the real nice guys we had in our unit. In my mind, he was a true measure of a soldier, a friend and had what it takes to be a good man. We, who served with Dave are better for the time that we knew him.”

Another comrade-in-arms recalls: “David was a quiet easy going guy soft spoken always with a smile [whose] only [immediate] goal was to go home and marry his girl we talked a lot, wish we had talked more.”

The Klins lived on farm across from Wentzel’s Mill in Bridgeport where they raised heifers and grew corn and wheat. David’s mother recalled that he liked school and had good grades. In his spare time, David was an avid hunter in all seasons in the county, and he had a motorcycle that he usually rode on Sundays. He also liked hanging out with his friends in a cabin in the woods. Richard Sanderson, a friend of David, describes him as a very, very good soccer player who could run all day and who could have made All-American; on the field, David would cover your position if you were tired and never ask you to do anything; he would just do it himself. David’s brother described him as easy-going and the quietest one in the family. After graduating from West Perry High School in 1967, David was employed by Sunnydale Farms in Elliottsburg before entering the U.S. Army on April 17, 1968. He was first stationed at Fort Polk, Louisiana, arriving in Vietnam on March 17, 1969.

SSG Kline was in command of an APC or Armored Personnel Carrier. They were light-skinned vehicles that were designed to transport troops just as an air cavalry unit used helicopters. The APCs usually carried 5-8 men, although they were designed for more. After insertion by an APC, the soldiers would carry out patrols like any other infantry unit. Unfortunately, because of their thin skin, APCs were vulnerable to mines and rocket propelled grenades, so the men would ride on top; it was far too dangerous to be inside if it was hit. SSG Kline was in charge of the main weapon on the APC, the 50 caliber machine gun in the center hatch.

Staff Sergeant Kline’s duties are described further by Mike Atherton: “Sergeant Kline and I were in the second squad. I was on track 006 and he was TC [Track Commander] on 004, meaning he was the fifty gunner and in charge of that track. During our tour of duty SGT. Kline, and other soldiers of RECON performed many duties such as search and destroy, night ambush, road security, blocking force, securing Roman plows [huge bulldozers used to raze the jungle] and opening Route 7A and Highway 1.”

The glowing personal testimonials to David are matched by his official military record as a member of Recon Platoon, Headquarters & Headquarters Company, 1st Battalion, 5th Infantry (“Bobcats”), 25th Infantry Division. He was awarded an Army Commendation Medal by his division commander for action near Cu Chi on July 19, 1969, and he earned his first Purple Heart after an arm injury. Staff Sergeant Kline’s distinguished military career came to an end on November 20 in Hua Nghia province in South Vietnam. His posthumous Silver Star citation reads: “While on a reconnaissance operation, Sergeant Kline discovered several bunkers and tunnel complexes. After destroying the enemy emplacements he maneuvered through the area and observed two enemy soldiers duck into a tunnel. He immediately placed heavy fire on the hostile position and with complete

disregard for his own safety exposed himself to the hail of fire as he crawled forward and silenced the position with a hand grenade. His various actions contributed immeasurably to the success of the mission and thwarting of the hostile force.” A fellow soldier remembers the day: “He made one tiny mistake pulled a rifle out of the ground that he found on a recon mission one day and it was wired to 100 pounds of explosive. He had just taken over my job as Recon Platoon Staff Sergeant.” SSG Kline passed away from his wounds in an army medical facility at Cu Chi.

David’s parents were notified of their 21 year-old son’s death on Saturday, November 22. David’s older brother first got word from a military representative and then the two of them went to break the news to the parents, who were at an uncle’s house butchering a pig. David’s friend, Richard Sanderson, while serving in Vietnam, learned of his friend’s death in *Stars & Stripes*. David was survived by his parents, three brothers, one sister, and his maternal grandfather. Rev. Russell Kerns presided over the services for David Kline, just as he had done two years earlier for C. David Sheibley, another son of Perry County lost in Vietnam. David was laid to rest with full military rites by a unit from Fort Indiantown Gap. He was interred at Mt. Zion Lutheran Church Cemetery in Landisburg.

John Johnson rode in the APC that David Kline commanded. On November 24, 1969, John wrote the following letter: “Dear Mom & Dad, It’s one o’clock in the morning. I’m on radio watch...I’m tired and feel very low. Yesterday we had memorial services for my best friend. Do you remember Sergeant Kline my T.C.? ...He died on the 20th of this month. He hit a booby-trap while we were searching out an area behind An Doc...I was about ten feet from him or a little farther away checking under a bush. I was almost flat on the ground when he hit it so I didn’t get any of the shrapnel. The concussion though sure messed up my ears for a while...I usually worked with SGT Kline but he went on ahead of me. We sort of had a friendly competition going on to see who could find the most crud. He had found two sealed tunnels that day. There was a lot of stuff in both of them. Including an M-1 carbine. He sure was happy when he found it. It was in a tunnel in some really thick bushes. He called me over to show it to me. He was all smiles as usual. That was one of the things about him that really made him a great guy to know. He had the most fantastic personality of anyone I’ve ever known. He was always happy and smiling. He never got mad no matter how much the lifers yelled at him...Nothing really bothered him. I was always messing around with him. Harassing him about his height. He was only about 5 feet 4 at the most. He was pretty well built though. It’s just not the same without him. He was a great guy and everybody loved him. I did and I’ll never forget him. I knew him better than anyone else. I’d been on his track since I got to this god forsaken hole. I pulled bunker guard with him the morning of the 20th. I was trying to convince him to move to California when he got out of the service. He only had three months left over here and in the service...I finally saw what kind of platoon we had when the First Sergeant told us he was dead. I had gathered up all his stuff off the track to be sent into Cu Chi to him. I took it over to the Platoon Sergeant’s hooch. He was standing outside. He was crying. I didn’t know he died yet as they were about to have a meeting to tell us. I gave the baggage to him and walked off to the meeting. I guess I knew then SGT Kline had died but I didn’t want to believe it. The whole platoon got together and the First Sergeant came out and told us. There were a lot of grown men, combat veterans and others you’d never expect it of crying that evening. I couldn’t help it...As I looked around at the platoon I saw many red, watery eyes. Everybody knew him and loved him. A part of me died with him. We’ll never be the same. We lost our guiding spirit. The only one who knew how to get us going when we didn’t want to. If there was an area we were afraid of he’d realize it and get off the tracks first. We would have followed him anywhere. And we did...I know this is a rotten letter but it’s the only thing I can think about at this time. It’s the strangest situation I’ve ever been in. I don’t like it. I could never get used to see my friends die. I’ve lost two friends now. Both died within a month of each other. The other was Larry Dart...Sergeant Kline was there when Larry got it. I’m glad I wasn’t. I wished I had been the first one to get to Sergeant Kline. All I could do was yell for our medic. It’s the worst feeling in the world...not being able to do anything but yell...Forgive me for writing this letter. I don’t want you to get all scared about me. I used to take a lot of chances but now I’m through...I’m scared now. Everyone is. Too much has happened to us lately...Part of me has already died with SGT Kline. The rest of me is going to come back to you guys. Just like I left. Maybe a lot more of a man than when I left. I know I learned a lot from SGT Kline about people

and getting along with them. I hope I can remember it all. I'll never forget him... Well I'd better close for now... I love you guys very much and miss you terribly."

Recently, John remembered: "Shortly after Dave died Mark, the medic that first attended Dave in the field, and I wrote to Dave's mom to let her know what had happened and to express our sympathy. In return we received a huge box filled with home baked cookies and brownies which we greatly appreciated and shared with all of Dave's friends and brothers in arms. Mrs. Kline also wrote us a very nice letter."

In thinking back on what had happened in Vietnam 37 years ago, John reflected: "One thing that has stuck with me all these years is the effect that Dave's death had on me at the time. Until this one I had always ended my letters to my folks as 'The Jungle Fox.' My youthful bravado ended the day Dave died." At the end of the November 24 letter, he wrote: "Your son, Johnny. No longer the Jungle Fox."

In May, 1970, the Army War College Commandant at Carlisle Barracks presented David's parents and his brother Thomas with the medals that represented his distinguished service.

LCpl James Albert Swartz, Jr.
9/9/48-4/2/70



**L/Cpl. James
A. Swartz**
of Elliottsburg
served in the Ma-
rines and died April
2, 1970 in Vietnam.

Jimmy Swartz was born on September 9, 1948. He had a difficult childhood. The Swartz family had seven children, and they lived in a small house that had no indoor plumbing or even a well, so they had to haul water from a spring or creek. A boyhood friend, however, recalls that the house was clean and the food was good. Jimmy's father worked on the railroad. The Swartz children were considered "farm kids" and were looked down on by the "town kids" from Ickesburg. It was particularly bad when they switched to the high school bus at Eshcol. Jimmy would not hesitate to fight in defense of his brothers and sisters. Jimmy first went to Ickesburg and then Green Park Union High School.

The "farm kids" stuck together, playing games like hide and seek, running for hours. They also frequented a swimming hole at the Boy Scout camp near Roseburg. Jimmy, being one of the older members of the group, would rig up a junk car and drive the group of a dozen or so down to the creek. Jimmy owned many cars during his short life and spent much time working on them. One boyhood friend recalled how they would push a '49 Plymouth with a battery, but no transmission or engine, up a hill and then they would all pile in and coast about two miles down an isolated back road with the radio playing.

For four or five years, Jimmy worked for Eugene Comp Sr., going into the mountains to cut greens for florists. Jimmy was a hard worker. He was also a very good pool player. Along with many other young people, he would hang out at the Hi-Way Theater in Ickesburg, with its bowling alley, pool tables and soda fountain.

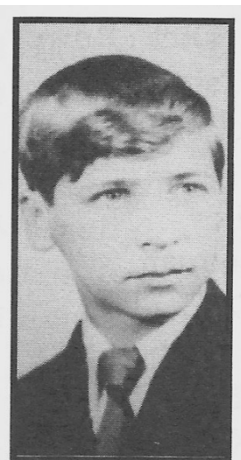
Jimmy was described as a "rough" kind of guy, but he had a kind heart. One friend remembers a pep talk that Jimmy gave her when she was going through a particularly rough spot in her life. Jimmy's toughness and physical fitness drew him to the Marine Corps. He was offered the opportunity to attend O.C.S. (Officer Candidate School), but he turned it down.

Lance Corporal Swartz started his tour in Vietnam on August 18, 1969. Jimmy wrote from Vietnam about the poor condition of the country. Being kind-hearted, he helped the locals set up a system to purify their water and was recognized for his efforts. Also, he complained about how difficult it was to identify the enemy. A week or two before he was killed on April 2, 1970, he wrote to Eugene Comp Sr. asking to have his old job back. After serving in Vietnam for seven months, Jimmy Swartz was killed by small arms fire at the age of 21 in Quang Nam province. His funeral service was conducted by Rev. T.V. Miller at Myers Funeral Home in Newport, and he was buried in Eshcol Cemetery near a fellow Vietnam veteran, Richard Fry. He was survived by his parents, three brothers, three sisters, and a half sister.

April is still a difficult month for his mother.

SP4 Michael Dale Wright

1/18/50-3/24/71



**SP4 Michael
D. Wright**
of Duncannon
served in the Army
and died March 24,
1971 in Vietnam.

In 2001, a classmate of Mike from Susquenita High School recorded his memories of Mike: "He was indeed a fun guy to be around... I remember when I found out he was killed, unbelief just doesn't cover it. I still become emotional when I think of him and when I occasionally see his grave...I have visited "The Wall" in D.C. and seen his name there. My eyes filled with tears when I saw his name. He is greatly missed and always will be. Rest in Peace Mike!"

Michael Dale Wright was born on the 18th of January in 1950 in Buck's Valley. He spent much of his early life in Duncannon before his family moved to Texas. While the Wrights resided in Texas, Mike and his brother Don would go surfing in Galveston almost every weekend. Mike was athletic and became a good surfer. Even if the brothers couldn't get a ride with a friend, they would hitchhike to the coast to enjoy themselves. Mike moved back to Duncannon with his mother after his parents separated. He attended Susquenita High School where he was an accomplished wrestler and graduated as a member of the class of 1968.

Following graduation, he and his brother Don moved back to Galveston, and Mike worked as an apprentice pipe-fitter. In 1969, Michael received his draft notice and was inducted into the service in May. He left behind a '55 Chevy that he was customizing. Three other brothers also served in the military: Don, who served in Germany, and twin brothers Terry and Tom. Tom served in Vietnam and was awarded both a Bronze Star and

a Silver Star for his service.

During his time in Vietnam with Co. C, 4th Battalion, 3rd Infantry, 11th Brigade of the Americal Division, Mike counted down the days on a calendar. His tour began on October 7, 1970. He was a little more than halfway through when he was killed. SP4 Michael Wright, just 21, died on the 24th of March, 1971, in Khe Sanh as result of a mortar attack. His platoon leader, James D. Ronan Jr., remembers Mike and that tragic day: "I served with Michael in Vietnam. Michael was our radio telephone operator (RTO). Michael was a man of courage, humor, and dignity. I spent many nights talking to him. I liked him, respected him, and trusted him. Whenever we were in a firefight Michael was right there with the radio, always ready when needed. On March 24th, 1971, he accompanied SGT Ayers out on a patrol to retrieve claymore mines that we had set out on a hill that had signs of NVA activity. We were a small search and destroy patrol. Part of the squad went on the patrol and the rest of us began breaking our night defensive position. We heard machine gun fire and explosions and three of us grabbed our M-16's and ran up the trail to help. When we broke out of the jungle we could see NVA advancing over the crest of the hill towards the small patrol. Apparently they believed we were a larger unit because they stopped their advance. When we got to the patrol it was clear that four of the guys were over the crest and had not returned. I crawled up to see if they were alive and found Michael there with the radio next to SGT Ayers. Although I was not able to bring them back down at that time, everyone was evacuated later in the day by helicopter. Michael's humor, strength, and friendship helped bring me through Vietnam. I called him "Little" Wright. Obviously the platoon had another Wright who was bigger. Michael died doing his job. It took courage and purpose to go forward as the RTO as he did with SGT Ayers. As I write this it has been 28 years and I still remember him, with a smile and with tears."

Michael was survived by his parents, three sisters, nine brothers, his maternal grandparents, and paternal grandfather. Michael's funeral services were held at Asbury United Methodist Church in Duncannon, and he was buried in Union Cemetery with military honors. Mike's brother Roger inherited the Chevy he had been customizing.

On June 24, 1970, the United States Senate voted overwhelmingly to repeal the Tonkin Gulf Resolution. An American-supported South Vietnamese operation into Laos in early 1971 spawned further anti-war protests. The morale of U.S. troops continued to decline along with their numbers. By 1972, 70,000 U.S. troops remained in Vietnam; only 6,000 were combat troops. Following another North Vietnamese offensive, President Nixon ordered massive bombing raids, a naval blockade of North Vietnam, and the mining of Haiphong harbor. A negotiated settlement now seemed near, but when talks again broke down, the president ordered the greatest aerial bombardment in the history of warfare in December, 1972. Fifty thousand tons of bombs rained down on North Vietnam. Finally, on January 27, 1973, a peace agreement was signed in Paris, and the last U.S. ground forces were withdrawn on March 29. In early 1975, as the N.V.A. began to test the strength of South Vietnamese positions, they met little resistance. By the end of April, a North Vietnamese armored column entered Saigon, and South Vietnamese allies of the U.S. scrambled to get out of the country. The U.S. presence in Vietnam was officially over. We had lost over 58,000 Americans in Vietnam. More than 300,000 Americans had been wounded, with some 10,000 losing at least one limb. Approximately 2,000 Americans were listed as missing. Insidious psychological wounds, in the form of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, manifested themselves in chronic anxiety, insomnia, flashbacks, depression, and substance abuse.

The war may have ended 30 years ago, but we still live in its wake. We cannot escape history. The best that we can do is face the past and make our peace. We owe it to those who suffered and died, including our eleven, to remember Vietnam and learn its lessons. To those among us who served in those trying times, we offer a belated but heartfelt “Welcome Home.”

Editor’s note: Letters and website messages have been edited for spelling.

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Edited by Joan Popchock, with assistance from Amanda Neely and Jennifer Morrison
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