

### **Memorial Tribute to 1LT Donald F. Van Cook, Jr.**

Donald Francis Van Cook, Jr. was the youngest to join the West Point Class of 1968 and the first of our class to give his life serving our country. Born in May 1947 in Brooklyn, NY, he was killed on June 4<sup>th</sup>, 1969, near Kontum, Vietnam. A constant in Donnie's life was his concern for others and sense of service. When Donnie was four years old, a neighbor's dog ran to attack Donnie's three-year-old brother. The four-year old positioned himself between his brother and the dog and stayed there until an adult intervened.

Donnie was on his high school varsity football team, ran track his Junior and Senior year, and was Vice President of the Class of 1964.

Donnie helped his classmates whenever he could. During Yearling Year, when Donnie's roommate was "turned out" in physics, Donnie gave up his own limited free time in order to serve as tutor. He was successful and his roommate passed this comprehensive exam.

At graduation, Donnie chose the Artillery and volunteered for Vietnam. He believed that being a Regular Army officer, his duty was to serve there. Arriving in Vietnam, Donnie was assigned as a forward observer. While riding on an armored personnel

carrier on a combat mission, a mine detonated, killing some soldiers and wounding Donnie. He was medevacked to a hospital in Japan for two months. Apparently rejecting a chance to return home, Donnie told his parents that he was where he needed to be.

Returned to combat, Donnie became a fire direction officer in C Battery, 6/14<sup>th</sup> Artillery. On June 4, 1969, two North Vietnamese Army Regiments attacked Donnie's fire base with rocket and mortar fire, and Donnie died from a rocket explosion. He was awarded the Bronze Star for his actions during the attack and his second purple heart. An officer on the scene lamented that Donnie was the finest officer on the firebase and messages of condolence came from both fellow officers and Donnie's soldiers.

The "Lt Donald Van Cook Scholarship Memorial Fund" at Cardinal Spellman High School is named in his honor.

For your service and devotion to others, Donnie, we thank you. Be thou at peace.

## Memorial Tribute to 1LT William F. Ericson II

How many of us can say that everyone in the class knew who we were? William Forssell Ericson, II was one such brother—everyone knew Bill. Born in New York City, his high school years were spent in Connecticut where he lettered in basketball, baseball and soccer. Graduating, he enlisted in 1961 to become a paratrooper with the 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne Division before attending the Prep School.

For Bill, from day one West Point was a means to an end—to lead soldiers in combat. Bill excelled in nearly every area—military leadership, athletics and perhaps to a lesser extent, academics. Some of us know that he was instrumental in founding the Military Affairs Club. Even more of us knew him as the Brigade boxing champion, and most of us knew him as the editor of *The Howitzer*—but all of us knew him as the 4<sup>th</sup> Regimental Commander. Can any of us ever forget his leadership of Fourth Regiment as he led the conversion of its image from relaxed on discipline to “Strict, Tough, Military, Proud”?

Bill’s position as head of the Ring and Crest Committee led him to the love of his life, Clare Conlan, then working for L. G. Balfour Company. Even as he met and fell in love with Clare, Bill remained ever steadfast in his focus—to lead soldiers in battle. They were married at West Point and began a career together, Clare as the epitome of the “Army wife” as they moved through Ranger, Basic and

Pathfinder Schools and then on to the 82d Airborne Division. Clare understood that for Bill, his first duty was to the Army—and the Army was in Vietnam.

In May 1969 Bill arrived in Vietnam and was assigned as an infantry platoon leader with the 173<sup>rd</sup> Airborne Brigade. Having moved to a new area of operations his company position was attacked. He immediately responded with a counterattack that silenced the enemy. His actions out front of the platoon saved the lives of a number of his men but resulted in his own death. For his actions he was awarded the Silver Star and Purple Heart. He died a soldier, on July 15<sup>th</sup>, 1969, leading soldiers.

To paraphrase the words of a classmate, “Bill will live in the professional consciousness of us and all those who had the privilege of serving with him. To some he was an inspiration; to all he was the epitome of the complete soldier.”

### **Memorial Tribute to 1LT Denny L Johnson (v3b 17-1-22 n)**

Denny L. Johnson was born January 6th, 1947 and raised in the small town of Bunkie, Louisiana.

As a child he had boundless energy and challenged himself in everything he did. Although small in size at 5' 6" and 150 pounds he was a fighter and showed himself to be a natural leader.

In High School he wanted to play football but the coach told him he was too small. At tryouts the coach was conducting one-on-one drills to see how tough his players were.

Denny came up against a 250-pound first team defensive tackle and the coach said "Denny step aside – he is too big for you." Denny's friends started chanting "Denny, Denny," and finally the coach said ok. Denny took the big lineman down three times and made the team.

Denny demonstrated his outstanding leadership qualities in many ways. He was elected President of the Student Council, chosen to represent Bunkie High School at Louisiana Boys State and voted most likely to succeed.

Denny's hard work earned him a congressional appointment to West Point. There he continued to excel in academics and sports. He lettered in 150-pound football and was awarded a gold star for beating Navy.

Denny volunteered for Vietnam. After graduation from West Point, he earned his Airborne Wings and Ranger Tab

before being deployed. In Vietnam Denny was assigned as the 1st platoon leader of "C" Company, 2/8 Cavalry, 1<sup>st</sup> Cavalry Division on August 3rd, 1969.

He saw combat action within a few days of his arrival and was wounded on August 17<sup>th</sup> but stayed in the field. On September 1st he came to the rescue of the 3<sup>rd</sup> platoon that was caught in an ambush. Denny's platoon out flanked the enemy and drove them into the jungle. SSG Mays, acting platoon leader for 3<sup>rd</sup> platoon, credited Denny with saving the lives of his men.

The next day Denny's platoon was sent out on a reconnaissance in force mission. His platoon came in contact with the enemy and Denny led the attack. Although seriously wounded, Denny continued to fire on the enemy position forcing them to retreat, before succumbing to his wounds.

For his gallantry in action, he was awarded the Silver Star.

Denny was a devout Baptist and lived by the words of the Holy Bible, John, Chapter 15, Verse 13; "Greater love than this no man hath than to lay down his life for his friends." May he rest in peace.

## **Memorial Tribute to 1LT Kenneth T. Cummings**

Kenneth Thomas Cummings was born on August 20, 1946 in Brooklyn, New York and attended St. Francis Preparatory School, an all-boys Catholic high school. His strong leadership traits began to emerge in high school while serving as a class officer for three years; Captain of the swim team; and as a member of the Honor Society. He was an outstanding swimmer and led his high school team to the city championship in 1963.

At West Point Ken continued to excel as a swimmer and leader of men. Ken was recognized by his teammates and Coach Ryan for his leadership and chosen to captain the 1968 Swim Team. He led the team to a strong record of 11 wins, 2 losses and 1 tie to finish the year as the second-best team in the East.

After graduation from West Point he completed the Infantry Officer Basic Course as well as Airborne and Ranger Schools. Ken joined the 5th Infantry Division at Fort Carson, Colorado, where he met and married Evelyn Bradshaw on June 12<sup>th</sup> 1969 at the Air Force Academy Chapel. Ken had volunteered for Vietnam and shipped out shortly after their marriage.

In Vietnam Ken was a platoon leader with Company D (Ranger), 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, 151<sup>st</sup> Infantry Regiment. On August 12, 1969 his unit encountered a large enemy force in concealed fighting positions. He led the attack and directed supporting fires on their location. His platoon suddenly encountered intense machine gun fire from an

enemy emplacement. Disregarding his own safety, he moved forward through the hostile fire and silenced the position with several hand grenades and rifle fire. For his gallantry in action, he was awarded the Silver Star.

On September 4, 1969, Ken lost his life in a tragic helicopter accident, returning from a mission, when the Huey helicopter he was flying in crashed due to a damaged tail rotor.

The soldiers in Ken's unit remember him well by these comments: "Lt. Cummings was the best platoon leader we had in Nam." "...always encouraged everyone to do their best." "... always had time to listen."

Ken never got to see his daughter Kimberly, but as a classmate noted after meeting her in 2008, she was the personification of Ken with her good nature, infectious smile, and red hair.

His humble and effervescent personality will live on in the memories of all who knew and served with him.



## **Memorial Tribute to 1LT David L. Sackett**

David Lee Sackett, the younger son of Dora Lee and Fred Sackett, was born on October 8<sup>th</sup>, 1946, in Keystone, West Virginia, the heart of the Appalachia coal-mining region. His nurturing homelife emphasized hard work, loyalty to friends and the pursuit of educational opportunities. As a youth, he played little-league baseball and football, enjoyed Boy Scouts, and developed a fierce competitiveness.

In 1960, the Sacketts moved to Welch, West Virginia where David attended high school and was acclaimed for his wonderful sense of humor and generous acts. He excelled at everything, including academics, track, football and basketball, Key Club, and served as a Boys-State representative. He followed his childhood friend and next-door neighbor in attending West Point.

David was a natural at West Point: well-rounded, bright, mission-oriented, and capable of putting everything in perspective. He fervently undertook every endeavor: rugby, Dialectic Society, French Club, cadet radio broadcasting, and the Rocket Society. No one doubted David would be a great leader.

In April, 1969, three months before David deployed to Vietnam, after completing Infantry, airborne, and ranger training, David married Pam Stokes whom he'd met almost a year before, when being sutured by her father for a deep cut on his shin just before a classmate's wedding.

In August, David joined the 25<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division as a platoon leader. At 23 and the old man of his platoon, David asked for and listened to the advice of his men and then made the decisions, earning their respect and admiration. He wouldn't direct something that he himself wouldn't do. Infamously, he was pulled to safety by his men after lowering himself into a presumed "vacant" spider hole where the enemy grabbed him by the ankles. He led from the front and had been awarded, in separate incidents, the Army Commendation Medal for Heroism, the Bronze Star, and the Silver Star, all within three months in country.

Then, on October 24<sup>th</sup>, 1969, a tragic ambush took David's life. On a reconnaissance operation, Company A came under heavy small arms, automatic weapons, and rocket propelled grenade fire from an enemy force in well concealed bunker positions. David led his men in an assault on an enemy bunker, silencing the enemy, but unaware they were invading the supply and assembly point for a North Vietnamese Regiment. As he advanced on another bunker, David was fatally wounded by enemy fire.

We will always remember that wry smile, his intuitive leadership, and that "I've got your back" demeanor for which he is loved. We miss him.

## **Memorial Tribute to 1LT Peter M. Connor**

Peter Michael Connor was the oldest of the five Connor kids. Brother Robby said he can't remember a time when it wasn't expected that Pete would attend West Point. His dad was a career Army officer serving in Vietnam when Pete was at West Point.

In high school, Pete wanted to serve others as a member of Goodfellows helping disadvantaged children and the Key Club, an international club with a goal of making the world a better place through service to the community.

At West Point, Pete supported his classmates by providing academic assistance or being a morale boost, often with his humor, when needed. He was really funny. Sister Lizz says: "Pete was so much fun. He could be a party all by himself. He was outrageous." He always showed a willingness to assist someone in need.

Pete was an amazing individual in many ways. He was an excellent athlete, especially as a runner. Pete was on the handball club for three years and ran track one year. He had a sharp mind, retaining a multitude of facts that he would unload on you when you least expected it, a strength leading to success on the debate team. With an interest in international affairs, he participated in the Model UN Forum and the Student Conference on US Affairs.

While at West Point, Pete became engaged with plans to marry upon return from Vietnam.

Pete followed his father into the Infantry. For his first assignment, Pete chose the First Cavalry Division, very

much entrenched in Vietnam. After Infantry Basic, Airborne, and Ranger training, Pete went to Fort Campbell to await orders to Vietnam.

In Vietnam, Pete wrote about his first Purple Heart, calling his minor wound a “Cav Special.” He was awarded his second Purple Heart and Silver Star for action in which he ran across an open area under fire where an NVA position had the company pinned down. Despite multiple wounds, he neutralized the enemy before succumbing to those wounds.

A classmate serving in the same company with Pete said Pete’s soldiers adored him because he was a commonsense combat leader who stood up for his men. He was fearless in firefights, dying doing something that he wouldn't let any of his men do.

His childhood friends, family, and classmates remember a smart, funny, engaging man who went way out of his way to help others succeed. Well done, Pete, be thou at peace.

## **Memorial Tribute to 1LT James Alfred Gaiser**

James A Gaiser was born June 16, 1946, in Salamanca, NY, the adopted son of a Methodist minister. His family instilled in him strong Christian values, especially a love and concern for others.

He always had a beaming smile on his face, even under the most rigorous conditions. Jim's love of sports enabled him to excel at baseball, basketball, swimming, and horseshoes at his public high school in East Washington, PA, and to find additional challenges at West Point.

Jim eagerly joined the West Point Parachuting Team and made over 300 free-fall jumps. During the 1967 National Collegiate Parachuting Championship Jim won 1<sup>st</sup> place in Advanced Accuracy and led the team to winning the overall championship.

He joined the Military Affairs Club to increase his knowledge and his preparation to lead his soldiers. Jim selected Artillery as his branch and, after graduation, earned his Airborne Wings and Ranger Tab. He volunteered to go to Vietnam which was not a surprise to any of us. He wanted to be with soldiers and felt confident that his training and professionalism could save lives on the battlefield.

During his service in Vietnam, his troops knew he cared deeply for them. In the worst of conditions, Jim would stand knee-deep in mud carrying artillery rounds and bags

of powder to ease the burden on his soldiers. Jim would risk his safety, if necessary, to ensure the safety of his men.

During the early morning hours of November 7, 1969, Jim's firebase near the Cambodian border in the Central Highlands came under intense enemy rocket and mortar fire. We lost Jim while he directed the defensive strategy of the perimeter forces when an enemy mortar round landed near his position.

Every soldier in the battery, to a man, was visibly shaken by the loss of their beloved lieutenant. He was posthumously awarded the Vietnam Cross of Gallantry, the Purple Heart, and the Bronze Star Medal for valor for his heroic actions that day in stopping the Due Lap offensive.

After Jim was interred at the West Point Cemetery on November 16, 1969, the people of Scranton, PA, named the gymnasium in the newly renovated YMCA the *Lieutenant James A. Gaiser Gym*, which contains a memorial window with Jim's medals, class ring and photos.

Rest in peace, dear friend.

### **Memorial Tribute to 1LT William F. Little, III**

William Francis Little, III was born November 23rd, 1946, in Rahway, New Jersey. He attended The Pingry School where honor and character were valued highly. Bill played football, lacrosse, and excelled on the swimming team.

As a Cadet, Bill sought vigorous physical activity, excelling on Company F-1's soccer and triathlon teams. He earned jump wings; branched Infantry; and volunteered for Vietnam.

After a few months at Fort Campbell, Bill completed Jungle Warfare School in Panama enroute to Vietnam. In May 1969, he joined 2nd Battalion/3rd Infantry in the 199th Light Infantry Brigade, as a rifle company platoon leader.

In October, Bill led the Battalion's reconnaissance platoon, Echo Recon, operating from Fire Base Blackhorse near Xuan Loc, Military Region 3. SGT Pat O'Regan, a platoon member, said: "On Blackhorse, 1LT Little sat with his soldiers at mealtime. He was solid, at ease with himself, friendly - but in command. He had the respect of his men."

On November 10th, Echo Recon helicoptered from Blackhorse in search of enemy. On November 11th, they found the 274th NVA Regiment. Taking heavy fire, LT Little called in artillery and gunship fire support. Bill paused fires twice to medevac wounded soldiers.

SGT O'Regan wrote - as if speaking to Bill: "Under your direction, Lieutenant, the artillery fire froze the enemy in

bunkers. A third man was wounded. Then everything became eerily quiet. You said: 'Hold your fire. We're going to check the area.' You and three men moved forward. There was a sudden barrage of enemy fire," and Bill was killed - Veterans Day 1969.

His Distinguished Service Cross citation tells us: "He suddenly saw an enemy soldier aiming at his companion. LT Little pushed the unaware soldier to the ground and, in doing so, was seriously wounded. As LT Little fell to the ground, he fired his weapon and killed the enemy soldier." He was immediately subjected to hostile fire and was mortally wounded.

In the book "Vietnam 1969-1970: A Company Commander's Journal," Michael Lanning, calls Bill an elite soldier who led men courageously in fierce combat, giving his own life for his men. We honor his valor.



## **Memorial Tribute to 1LT Donald R. Colglazier**

Donald Robert Colglazier was the second of five children. Both of his exceptional parents were Marines who instilled in Don and his siblings, patriotism, high moral and ethical standards, and commitment to academic pursuits.

In high school, he excelled in academics, sports, Boy Scouts, and other activities. As he grew older, he embraced religion, exemplifying Christian values in his life.

At West Point, Don provided leadership and guidance to his fellow classmates. His leadership abilities were evident in intramurals and academics. He was dedicated to helping others, particularly those facing academic challenges. He was a star man, meaning he was in the top 5% of his class academically, graduating 29th. His leadership and compassion were key traits in his selection by classmates as the company honor representative all four years. In his Firstie year, he was executive officer for Company A-1.

During difficult times, Don would make an offhand remark that would make others smile inside. He knew when a slap on the shoulder or a quiet word would communicate that unspoken message that you were not alone, that he would be with you when the decisive moment came.

Don branched Armor, and after Ranger, Airborne, and Jumpmaster Schools (where he graduated first in the class), and a stateside assignment with the 82nd Airborne Division, Don arrived in Vietnam in June 1969 and was

assigned as platoon leader of E Troop, 17th Cavalry, the ground reconnaissance element of the 173rd Airborne Brigade. Don was killed in an ambush on QL-1, the major highway from Saigon to Hanoi, control of which was crucial to limiting enemy activity. The day Don died, he attended a tactical briefing at a battalion firebase.

Although the route back to his unit was controlled by the enemy at night, and despite the entreaties of a classmate to wait until daylight, Don felt he had to return to his troops given their critical mission of securing a bridge in defense of other brigade units.

We would not have expected less. He is missed by all who knew him. Our lives are richer because he was part of them.

## **Memorial Tribute to 1LT Jeffry R. Riek**

Born March 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1947, Jeffry Randal Riek grew up as an Army brat; living in California, Georgia, Turkey, Virginia, and North Carolina. Through this worldly exposure, he developed an intense idealism and devotion to country. A natural athlete, Jeff developed a love for running and physical fitness. Creative, mischievous, and enterprising, Jeff savored a life of serious and amusing adventures.

By the age of 10, Jeff was an entrepreneur. His sister recalled: "He always had money in his pocket." Mowing lawns with his brother, he developed a keen interest in making money and, later, in the stock market. In high school, he proved to be a skilled distance runner, making the varsity cross-country team as a freshman. This expanded into track, triathlons, and general fitness at West Point - one time holding the Obstacle Course record.

At the academy, Jeff sharpened his fidelity to Duty, Honor, and Country. He was fiercely optimistic, romantic, and positive. He developed strong and loyal friendships, eagerly helping with classmates' studies and their relationships with the ladies. Jeff skillfully juggled academics while enjoying a busy athletic, extracurricular, and social schedule.

As a prankster with an infectious sense of humor, Jeff tweaked cadet regulations to the breaking point – often getting caught. He earned Century Club honors (100 hours of walking tours), in each of his first three years.

Jeff was commissioned Infantry by his proud father. After Infantry, Ranger, and Airborne Schools at Fort Benning,

he led a platoon for six months at Fort Riley. He left well-prepared for Vietnam.

As a platoon leader in Vietnam, he gained a reputation for taking care of his men. Known for his bravery and competence, he was chosen to be the battalion recon platoon leader. A fellow officer recalled: "He was the best officer I've ever known."

On February 25<sup>th</sup>, 1970, Jeff's platoon encountered an ambush. Under heavy fire, four allied soldiers in the formation were wounded. Fearlessly and selflessly, Jeff and his radio operator provided covering fire for the rest of the platoon to seek cover in a bomb crater. Jeff was killed leading from the front. His awards include the Army Commendation Medal with oak leaf cluster, Air Medal, Purple Heart, Bronze Star with 3 oak leaf clusters, Soldier's Medal, and the Silver Star.

Today's tribute remembers a brave officer and valued friend whose life was tragically cut short. God rest his soul.

## **Memorial Tribute to 1LT Harry E. Hayes**

Harry Ellis Hayes was born November 10<sup>th</sup>, 1945, and grew up in Alexander City, Alabama.

His mother was a teacher and his father a World War II veteran; his younger brother, Jim, a retired Marine Corps LTC...the Hayes men were no strangers to “selfless military service.”

Early on Harry showed a competitive spirit for sports. He played the cornet, but sports overtook music in High School where he received varsity letters in football, baseball, and basketball, and was named an “All Star” in football and baseball.

He was President of his Junior and Senior classes, a member of the National Honor Society, and named the Kiwanis Club “Athlete of the Year” his senior year. After his death, this award was renamed the “Harry Hayes Athlete of the Year Award.”

Harry was a natural leader. At West Point he quickly excelled in every aspect of academy life. Nonetheless he was a low-profile kind of guy. His “down home, southern” personality concealed his hugely competitive spirit yet a highly compassionate heart.

His goal...simply graduate! He played 150 lb football as an All-League running back, and he thoroughly enjoyed fun times with good friends while avoiding “the area.”

Harry branched Infantry upon graduation and following a memorable summer leave with classmates, reported to Fort Benning, GA, for Basic Officer, Airborne, and Ranger training.

In January 1969, he became a platoon leader with the 24<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division in Augsburg, Germany.

Midway through his assignment he married the “love of his life,” Gretchen Klinkert, in Seattle, WA.

Harry deployed to Vietnam in February 1970 and was assigned to the 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne Division. On Easter Sunday, one month later, in Thau Thien Province, Vietnam, Harry was leading his platoon when enemy soldiers, hidden in spider holes, opened fire taking the lives of Harry and two other soldiers. He was subsequently awarded the Bronze Star Medal for Valor and the Purple Heart.

Harry Hayes was a very special guy...every bit an honest, charming, competitive, courageous man...and *really funny sometimes*! He was an inspiring leader full of positive energy and a bright mind, but most especially a deeply loyal friend and...

We Miss Him Immensely!

## **Memorial Tribute to CPT Richard A. Hawley**

Richard Aspinall Hawley, Jr. had three missions in life: to become a West Point Cadet, a paratrooper, and an Infantry officer in the 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne Division. He accomplished all three.

In high school, Rick played football, managed his school's newspaper, and was an avid deer hunter and fly fisherman. He succeeded in gaining an appointment to West Point by enlisting in the U.S. Navy's submarine service and submitting his third application to West Point from the USS Nautilus at the North Pole.

As a cadet, Rick struggled with mathematics and engineering. Semester after semester, when other classmates with academic problems gave up and resigned, Rick tenaciously persevered. His unwavering determination to graduate from West Point, moral courage, and joyous and friendly spirit won him our high regard.

Rick was serious and fun. He had a deep religious faith and wry sense of humor. He loved to play practical jokes and participated in many cadet activities, including being Special Projects Editor for our class yearbook, the Howitzer. When Rick crossed the stage at graduation as our class goat, the last man in the class by Order of Merit, he held his diploma high in triumph. Rick represented all of us when his photo was chosen as the first page of our Howitzer.

After commissioning in the Infantry, Rick persuaded the director of the Airborne School to allow him to attend airborne training even though he did not have an airborne unit assignment. When the director said he was sorry he could not arrange an airborne assignment for Rick, Rick stated he would take care of that problem himself.

When Rick arrived in Vietnam in the Summer of 1969, his orders mysteriously disappeared. Without authority, Rick left the replacement center, hitched a flight to the 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne Division headquarters, and reported for duty as an Infantry platoon leader. In combat, Rick showed personal courage under fire and heartfelt concern for his soldiers that won him their loyalty and respect. In recognition of his combat leadership, Rick was selected to lead his battalion's recon platoon. Tragically, Rick was killed during a ground attack on his firebase on May 6th, 1970.

After Vietnam, several classmates named their sons and later one grandson after Rick. Today, whenever classmates gather, we still tell Rick Hawley stories and remember him with admiration, affection, and respect. Rick lived the motto Duty, Honor, Country.



## **Memorial Tribute to 1LT John E. Darling**

John Edward Darling lived an adventuresome life, packing into just 24 years what others needed a lifetime to accomplish. Described as a prankster with a mischievous sense of humor, John became a standout athlete in football and wrestling at Michigan's Fremont High School. As an Eagle Scout and later at West Point, he developed a leadership style that exuded both a confidence and an energy that inspired seniors and subordinates alike. John then married his hometown sweetheart, trained to be a soldier and went to war where he was brave in battle, died in combat, and honored on multiple occasions since as a soldier and a friend.

Astute and fearless, in any physical contest he would jump into the fray and lead his team; academically he handled himself in any debate no matter the challenger. As a soldier, his courage and character were immediately challenged. During an enemy assault on Fire Support Base Ripcord, Vietnam, his Battalion's Tactical Operations Center received a direct hit. John quickly took charge.

He administered first aid to casualties and despite facing constant incoming fire, carried a wounded soldier to a MEDEVAC helicopter and then without hesitation returned to the command post to direct the helicopter Extraction Operation. For his gallantry in this action, he was awarded the Silver Star. Two months later, on the eve of his R & R, John again demonstrated his bravery and selflessness by voluntarily returning to a Fire Base that

was under attack, only to lose his life when his helicopter was shot down.

John's bravery was not forgotten. In 1994, the U. S. Army Signal Center and Fort Gordon dedicated the "Darling Soldier Service Center" (now the Darling Hall Welcome Center). At the same time, the Silver Order of Mercury, the Signal Corps Regimental Association's highest award, was presented to John's widow Cathy, for his conspicuous contributions to the Signal Corps. Also, in 1971, Fremont High School began presenting the John Darling Award to the wrestler who best displayed DIGNITY, RESPECT, HARD WORK and LOYALTY, attributes John displayed throughout his life.

We lost John far too early. But while he lived, his flame burned bright, serving in the best traditions of a soldier: leading with professionalism, caring for those around him, disregarding danger while protecting others, and giving his life for his country. John's life is an example to all as we honor him now with love and admiration.

## **Memorial Tribute to CPT Donald R. Workman**

When you first met Donald Renay Workman, you knew you were in the presence of a man born to be a soldier.

Don was born in California and raised in Missouri. He came from humble beginnings, and though excelling athletically, he put sports on hold to work after school and weekends to help with family finances.

Graduating from high school in 1961, and impatient to jumpstart his professional life, he dropped night school to enlist in the Army.

After Basic and Advanced Training, he served in Germany as a nuclear weapons technician. Don's commander recognized his outstanding potential and recommended he attend West Point. Don applied and successfully completed the Prep School at Fort Belvoir where he earned the moniker "boss of lacrosse."

At West Point, he focused on preparing to lead soldiers in combat, and it was clear from the beginning he possessed all the necessary traits of leadership – particularly leading by example.

Don attained the cadet rank of Captain as the 3<sup>rd</sup> Regiment commander. He was also a three-year starting goalie on Army's nationally ranked lacrosse team. Don was elected team captain his senior year. After Graduation, completion of Airborne and Ranger schools, and a brief assignment with the 24<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division, he arrived in Vietnam in August, 1969, to command a rifle platoon in the 101<sup>st</sup>

Airborne Division. He later commanded the battalion's recon platoon and ultimately Delta Company, 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion 506<sup>th</sup> Infantry.

Don saw more than his fair share of combat.

One platoon leader described Don this way: "He was the consummate professional - calm, firm but fair. He expected my best... I felt I was learning from the master."

Don was approachable, an officer who enjoyed drinking a beer and shooting the breeze with his men. He had a keen sense of humor and a fondness for *Hav-a-Tampa* cigars.

A squad leader noted: "He was a big brother to everybody in Delta Company."

His final mission was the Battle for Fire Support Base Ripcord where his company reinforced a brother battalion engaged in a hard-fought battle against North Vietnamese regulars. Delta company was called on because it was well-trained and commanded by Don, the most experienced company commander in the battalion.

Don was Killed in Action on July 21<sup>st</sup>, 1970, leading his company as it was being extracted by helicopter under heavy fire from numerically superior enemy forces.

Rest in peace, brother warrior.

## **Memorial Tribute to CPT David T. Maddux**

David Thornton Maddux was a man of single-minded purpose, to serve his country.

He was born into an Air Force family at Tinker Air Force Base, Oklahoma. His early life was a succession of schools as the family moved frequently. He was a scrappy kid, not afraid to stand up to bullies and stick up for others. He demonstrated athletic prowess in high school by lettering in baseball and wrestling.

West Point was fortunate to get Dave as his first love was the Air Force, but his eyes denied him the opportunity to attend the Air Force Academy. He was well-regarded by his classmates in C-4. His active participation in the French Club, Chapel Choir, Outdoor Sportsman's Club, Scuba Club and Fencing team showed his diverse interests.

He particularly loved Scuba whether breaking through the ice to dive in winter in Lusk Reservoir or enjoying the warm waters off Mallorca, Spain. Dave always went above and beyond. As a member of the fencing team, he would add additional layers of clothing during practice just to intensify his workout.

He selected Armor as his branch and became Airborne and Ranger qualified. He served first in Germany after graduation before going to Vietnam and being assigned to the 1<sup>st</sup> Squadron, 1st Cavalry Regiment, of the Americal Division. He was initially assigned to a staff position and

subsequently as a Troop Commander. He quickly gained the respect of his soldiers.

On August 9<sup>th</sup>, 1970, while on offensive operations in Quang Nam Province, north of Chu Lai, Dave's lead platoon unknowingly entered a minefield and triggered an explosion that wounded several soldiers. Disregarding his own safety, Dave moved forward and took charge of evacuating his wounded and extracting his track vehicles from the minefield. While supervising the removal of a disabled track vehicle a second mine went off killing Dave and wounding his platoon leader. For his bravery in action and his Vietnam service, he was posthumously awarded the Silver Star, the Bronze Star, the Purple Heart, and the Combat Infantryman Badge.

His childhood best friend Jim Lancaster, a 1968 Air Force Academy graduate, said it well: "He...was driven, courageous and gallant. He was always going to do the right thing."

As a friend, classmate, and soldier, Dave is remembered for his integrity, character, and commitment to his soldiers and the West Point ideals of Duty, Honor, Country.

## **Memorial Tribute to CPT Douglass T. Wheless**

Douglas Terrell Wheless was born July 18<sup>th</sup>, 1946 in Shreveport, Louisiana, the second of three brothers, where he grew up and graduated from C. E. Byrd High School in 1964.

A lifelong friend described him as “hard working, talented and smart as a whip – a Renaissance man who could quote Virgil and build a stereo amp.” He had a great sense of humor; his smile could light up a room and his laugh could energize it.

In high school, he was a three-year member of the Junior ROTC drill team and was a cadet Colonel commanding the Battle Group his senior year. He was a member of the National Honor Society, a National Merit Scholarship Finalist, an Eagle Scout and active in his church. Doug earned a scholarship to Michigan State, but instead decided to attend West Point.

Doug carried forward his high school accomplishments at West Point as a member and later president of the Karate Club as well as Senior Editor of the Howitzer for class history.

He was also a member of the Scoutmasters Council, a Sunday School teacher and a member of the Russian Club. He took Russian as his language requirement, but struggled with it early in plebe year. He said he never mastered Russian, but he *did* learn to take the tests.

He was a man who cared about others. In the summer after plebe year, as part of our branch training, we went to Fort Knox for armor training. Doug overheard a classmate talking with a First Classman about guard duty he had been assigned which would cause him to miss the only chance to visit family who were stationed at Fort Knox, and Doug volunteered on the spot to take the duty.

After graduation, he attended the Armor Basic Course, earned his jump wings and Ranger Tab and was assigned to the Third Armored Division in Germany.

Doug got orders for Vietnam and was assigned to the 11<sup>th</sup> Armored Cavalry Regiment in March 1970 where he initially served as a platoon leader. Upon promotion to Captain in June, he served on 3rd Squadron staff and later took command of I Troop.

In November, during a sweep operation, Doug was severely wounded while attempting to disarm a booby trap and died of his wounds several days later on November 22, 1970. He was awarded a Purple Heart, three Bronze Stars during his tour, and the Combat Infantryman's Badge.

Well done, good and faithful servant. We miss you!



## **Memorial Tribute to CPT William F. Reichert**

William Francis Reichert was born February 18<sup>th</sup>, 1947, and hailed from Valley Stream, New York. His favorite sport was football which he played at Central High School. He was an outstanding student, especially in History, and faithful to his religious beliefs which shaped his character.

Bill had two brothers, Chris and Dwayne. Chris provided the following reflection on his brother's character:

“Throughout his years, Bill had developed a strong feeling of right and wrong, a strong devotion to principles that evolved within him as he was growing up, and remained with him during his time at West Point and after.”

Bill, or Ace as he was known to his West Point classmates, was a big guy with wavy blond hair and a hazel-eyed gaze that never wavered. Most of Bill's company mates became close to Bill's family since they frequented his home not far from West Point. As many of his classmates and several of his fellow soldiers noted, Bill was genuine, candid, and easy going.

Bill graduated in the upper half of his West Point class and was commissioned a Second Lieutenant in Armor. In the summer of 1970, after being promoted to Captain, he received his orders to Vietnam and was assigned to the 1st Squadron, 10th Armored Cavalry Regiment near An Khê. Bill wanted to lead troops in combat. Fulfilling his call to duty, he took command of C Troop in December of 1970.

His Troop's combat missions included convoy road security and jungle reconnaissance.

Bill's Troop had serious discipline and morale problems that had preexisted for some time before he took command. Bill understood that soldier indiscipline could result in troops being endangered on the battlefield and confronted the problem head on. In a heinous act of violence, one of his soldiers who hated the authority that Bill represented shot and killed him. Bill was a true hero who died acting on principles, doing what had to be done. One of Bill's soldiers, Robert Dorris, posted to the "Wall of Faces" website that "Captain Reichert was a respected professional soldier and exceptional leader...his integrity and loyalty were without peer." His soldiers mourned his loss.

Bill was a real hero who was posthumously awarded the Bronze Star Medal for his meritorious service in Vietnam and was interred at Long Island National Cemetery.

He truly lived and died the West Point motto: Duty, Honor, Country.

## **Memorial Tribute to CPT David L. Alexander**

David Lee Alexander grew up on a Pennsylvania farm, the eldest son of seven children. Farm chores and cow pasture ball games filled many summer afternoons.

Everyone wanted to be on Dave's team: brothers, sisters, and classmates. He possessed innate wisdom, kindness and joy. No one who ever knew him will ever forget his infectious grin.

Dave was Mr. Everything in High School: Class President, A-student, three-sport athlete, star wrestler, Captain of the football team, and he even marched in the band. His high school coach described him as the "most honest, reliable and respected player I ever had in our program." After his death, his high school classmates had the school sports complex named for him.

Dave's official list of Academy accomplishments include Class Committee, Howitzer staff, England Summer Exchange, Company Commander, Brigade Staff, and top 20% of his class academically.

However, we remember him more for the humorous action-filled capers he and fiancée Louise "Louie" Waltman undertook. Dave and Louie were a great team. Both had a flair for adventure and they often included classmates and their dates in zany low-budget weekend activities. During the First Class trip, Dave rented a panel truck so that he and eight cadet followers could make a weekend dash to Florida's beaches.

Dave was our leader. He had an amazing ability to stay calm and confident regardless of pressures or obstacles. His room was a meeting place to discuss problems. He never disparaged anyone, and was always willing to listen.

After graduation, true to form, Dave and Louie eloped and married in San Antonio enroute to the Air Defense school. On the way to his first assignment outside San Francisco, and much to Louie's chagrin, they made an unscheduled overnight hike to the bottom of the Grand Canyon!

Later they attended the aviation schools required of Dave to become a heavy helicopter pilot. In October, 1970, Dave left for the war in Vietnam. Day after grueling day he piloted his huge CH47, ferrying men, munitions and supplies. Less than five months later, while flying one of those helicopters, we lost him.

Perhaps we remember first his crazy escapades. But more importantly we remember Dave's deep concern for people, his decency, his wisdom, and his leadership.

For all these reasons he remains a cherished memory as one of the finest people we have ever known, and at least three classmates named a son after him.

## **Memorial Tribute to CPT Louis J. Speidel**

Louis John Speidel, usually called John by his family and friends, was born in London, England, to Captain Louis J. Speidel II and his British bride Ann. Soon thereafter they returned to Milford, Ohio, where he grew up as the oldest of three children. His sister Sandy remembers him as kind, generous, honest, caring, sensitive, and brave.

He shined in high school with track, the school newspaper and yearbook, and was elected Vice President of the senior class. He placed third in state-wide exams in Ohio in Biology. He was also the lead drummer of his rock band Satin Tones.

As a cadet, John was the roommate everyone wanted. He was a gifted communicator and was always willing to help classmates with difficult ideas or concepts.

One of his roommates remembers him as a great leader and friend to everyone. He was a member of several clubs and particularly liked the Rocket club, cadet band, and hop committee.

He branched Armor with an initial assignment to Germany. Upon returning from Europe, he married his high school sweetheart, Ellen Early, and entered flight school.

Ellen remembers John as one of the finest people she ever knew, a gentle person who had a wonderful sense of himself.

Upon graduation from flight school, he received orders to Vietnam and arrived in December 1970. He was assigned to the 17<sup>th</sup> Cavalry, 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne Division.

John flew Light Observation Helicopters the first few months in Vietnam and then transferred to Hueys. John loved his unit and mission.

On April 25th, 1971, he performed an insertion resupply mission to a Ranger unit on a hill in the Ashau Valley.

Upon lift off his helicopter encountered intense fire that caused it to impact a tree and crash on the downslope of the ridge.

Enemy activity was so fierce that it took 48 hours to reach the crash. John was gravely wounded and was eventually evacuated to Okinawa.

While in Okinawa he learned that his daughter, Gretchen, had been born. When able to travel, Ellen went to see John only to be paged in the San Francisco airport to learn that John had succumbed to his wounds.

In a letter to Ellen, his commander said he was an outstanding officer and exceptionally brave man. He was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross, Bronze Star and Purple Heart for his bravery and actions on that day.

John lives on with us in the amazing family he created with Ellen, their daughter Gretchen and grandson Andrew.

## **Memorial Tribute to CPT Henry M. Spengler III**

Henry Mershon Spengler III was born into an Army family at Fort Leavenworth. Henry's father, a brigadier general and himself a West Pointer whom Henry modeled himself after, died in a helicopter crash when Henry was fifteen.

The family moved to Alexandria, Virginia, where Henry enrolled in Hammond High School.

He had a warm personality, was very easy-going, and made friends quickly. Henry was smart, made good grades, but didn't sweat things.

He participated in three sports – rowing, cross-country, and track – and helped coach the Freshman Football Team.

Henry attained the rank of Star Scout, sang in his church choir, and served in Hammond's Student Forum.

At West Point, Henry continued his proficiency in academics, permitting him to select Engineers on graduation. He sang in the Protestant Chapel Choir and Glee Club, appearing on the Ed Sullivan Show.

Henry was an avid handball player. And since his death, The Captain Henry M. Spengler Memorial Award has been presented annually to the academy's top handball player.

It was during plebe year that Henry began dating Bette Scott, and they married three weeks after graduation.

After their wedding, Henry completed Ranger School, Engineer Basic Officers Course, and Airborne School.

He then first served as platoon leader and company commander with the 23<sup>rd</sup> Engineer Battalion in West Germany.

Henry and Bette's 1st child, Shawn, was born during this tour. Their daughter, Lissa, was born after Henry's later death.

On his U.S. return, Henry attended flight school for AH-1G Cobra attack helicopters.

In August 1971, he deployed to Vietnam, joining the 1<sup>st</sup> Cavalry Division's 79<sup>th</sup> Aerial Rocket Artillery -- callsign BLUE MAX.

On April 5th, 1972, when North Vietnam's Spring Offensive crossed the Cambodian border, BLUE MAX was given the mission to delay the advance. As his helicopter engaged the enemy, it was struck by hostile fire and crashed with no survivors.

Captain Henry Spengler was the last Engineer and last member of the Class of 1968 to lose his life in Vietnam. For gallantry in action, he was awarded the Silver Star.

His unit's Executive Officer praised Henry: "Hank Spengler was a hero . . . and I was proud to have served with him."

Henry's remains were recovered 17 years later and now lie buried in Arlington National Cemetery near his father.