

Council Member Jim Merritt
November 23, 2009

Dear Council Members:

On this day, Thanksgiving, November 23rd 1967, while serving in the military I was wounded while being deployed in a combat zone in South Vietnam. As this is the 42nd Anniversary of my being injured I am proposing that the Town of Chapel Hill consider establishing a Memorial/Monument commemorating the service of all veterans from the Chapel Hill community. This will be a salute to my comrades in arms and to veterans everywhere.

For your information I have attached a reference to Combat Chaplain's book, "A Thirty-Year Vietnam Battle", which outlines the events of this day, 42 years ago, for those of us serving in the Ninth Infantry.

I appreciate your consideration of this petition.

Sincerely,



Jim Merritt
Council Member

THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 23, 1967: For as long as I can remember, and until I left home, the ritual of Thanksgiving Day was hog killing time for my father. He has always prided himself on being able to raise good cattle, chickens, vegetables and fruit. Pop, however, was always proudest of his hogs.

Being a mill worker, he was always off work Thursday and Friday of Thanksgiving week. Since it was also cold enough to keep the meat from spoiling, Thanksgiving day was the day, year after year, that we killed hogs. From early morning before daylight, we did the whole works. We boiled the water in a huge black vat with fire underneath, shot the hog, delicately shaved off all the hair, completely dressed, cut up and processed the meat, including doing our own sugar curing of the hams. Friday morning after, we always had pork brains and eggs for breakfast, along with fresh sausage. What a treat!

As I get up this morning, I wonder if Pop has killed hogs today. Man, I miss the tradition. As I shave, I long for Thanksgiving at home instead of here in Vietnam. I guess I also long for my Pop.

However, today I have a busy day. We're bringing the My Tho orphans to Dong Tam for the first time. We've planned a big party for them with lots of food, games and entertainment.

We send a chopper to pick up Pastor Ha and his family and send several two and one-half ton trucks to get the orphans. We have a wonderful Thanksgiving day worship service, traditional Thanksgiving meal and then entertainment for the kids. In mid afternoon, we take the kids back to My Tho. They are filled with American turkey, dressing, all the trimmings, gifts, and we hope, a lifetime of memories of this day. I take a photo of Pastor Ha's family and a good time is had by all; except Echo Company, who is out on defensive patrol.

I get the all too familiar call that Echo Company has encountered another mine booby trap and casualties will be coming into the hospital via dustoffs. Four wounded are flown in, all with fragment wounds. Then, they unload the bodies! We have three KIAs!

What is worse, is that two of these dead soldiers had a very unique relationship that dates back to their basic training. One lived near their basic training camp and he and the other took weekend passes and visited his home. The buddy fell in love with his friend's sister. Their visits continued through advanced individual training and they both received orders to Vietnam together. Just before leaving for Vietnam, the sister and the friend became engaged.

Upon arriving in Vietnam, these two buddies requested assignment together and they ended up in the same division, brigade, battalion,

company, platoon and squad together. They were fast friends, and now one VC mine has ended both their lives and one young woman has lost her brother and her fiancé all with one blast in a dirty war 12,000 miles away. This had the makings of a movie love story. Now, it's a horror story.

FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 24 1967: I see the four who were in yesterday's booby trap. They're still shaken knowing that three buddies were killed.

MONDAY, NOVEMBER 27, 1967: Today's memorial service for Wallace, Simpson and Daugherty, the three soldiers killed on Thanksgiving day, is especially difficult for me because I keep thinking about one sad young woman in the states who has lost a brother and a fiance.

Joe Jenkins schedules a company party later in the afternoon to help neutralize the feelings of loss for his soldiers. It's quite a party. One soldier there has a motto that is also mine. He periodically yells out, quite proudly, "If'n you ain't country, you ain't." He's proud of being from the country and so am I. I haven't always been, though. When I was in college, most of my football teammates were from large cities up north. I thought of these guys as somehow being superior to me because I was, "from the country."

The party has much food, booze, volleyball, and it is good for the troops to unwind. Not too far underneath our fun are the feelings of what this morning's memorial service represented; that we are all very mortal and only one blast away from injury or death.

TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 28, 1967: I go to My Tho and talk with Pastor Ha about a Christmas party we want to give for the kids. We visit his church, which is being renovated. It's a beautiful little church with pink highlights, and he obviously is thrilled to show it to us. Much of our service offerings have been given to help finance their renovations. He has really become a good friend. He's so courageous in what he's attempting to do in his little pink church; living out the gospel in action.

WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 29, 1967: Just before I left Dong Tam yesterday, I learned that 'Branch,' the outhouse terrorist of four months ago, is still in LBJ. We'd been told that he'd already been sent to Leavenworth. It's been several weeks since I've seen him, thinking he was no longer here. I don't want to, but I go by to see him. He's been sentenced to twelve years in prison. Still, I feel sorry for him. He's obviously a sick man. I hope he'll get help when he gets to Leavenworth. But, at least he cannot hurt my guys again.