

FALLEN HEROES TRIP

JULY 2-30, 2018

**A Memorial Journey
For USMA 1969 Classmates
Who Made The
Ultimate Sacrifice
For Their Country
During The Vietnam War**

***by*
*RAY DUPERE***

Fallen Heroes Trip Summary

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In an email sent to me two days before I left, one of our classmates asked me how the trip got organized. I took his question to be asking why I was going on the trip. The following is my answer to that question.

“The idea was born in my heart when Ed Quinn asked me back in early March to organize the memorial service for our reunion next year. I was so humbled to be asked that I wondered what I could do as a thank you to the class for being given such an honor. Initially I was just going to visit the graves on my own and then speak about it next year. But West Point trained us properly so I decided to check with the reunion committee chain-of-command first. Once Ed and then KC Brown heard about it they encouraged me to open it up to the rest of the class and now in two days time it will become a reality.

However, I would be remiss if I did not mention that this trip is also a way for me to say thank you to God as well. On May 18, 1972, I asked Jesus to come into my life and be my Savior, and I became a new person. The person I was back when we were cadets is not the person I am now. I would never have been asked to do the service next year if not for that ... and for God subsequently calling me to study for and become a full-time minister of the Gospel of Jesus Christ ... and eventually a Chaplain in the Army National Guard. I will close by saying that I continue to feel humbled by the response of you all who are making plans to join me at the various gravesites.”

That's how the trip came to be. Now to give you a summary of what happened. The attached pdf file contains a PowerPoint program with pictures of each of the gravesites, and of all attendees, and of our classmates for the eleven different services. So I am not going to reiterate all of those things here. Rather, I would like to share some thoughts relating to each service to give you a feel for the trip and how it played out as I went along. These will not necessarily be about the classmate being honored, but rather anecdotal stories of various topics.



Wednesday (July 4) – Barry McGee's Service in Detroit, MI

The first two days of the trip leading up to the first service left me wondering whether I might have bit off more than I could chew. In an effort to save on expenses, I had originally planned on camping for six of my 28 nights on the road. But after the first night of pouring rain and waking up at 3:00am, I decided to throw my sopping wet tent in a garbage can and book hotels instead. Then, when I arrived in Detroit with some time to kill due to my early start, I decided to do a recon of the cemetery so I would be better prepared for the first service the next day. I spent about an hour scouring the section of the cemetery where Barry's grave was supposed to be before finally deciding to ask for help. The cemetery office was able to scribble some names on a piece of paper which should be near Barry's grave. The section did not have any upright grave markers, so trying to find one particular grave among all the flat markers was not easy. But in due course I did find one of the scribbled names, which eventually led me to Barry's grave under a small tree. It was all by itself with no other family markers nearby as best as I could tell. It was covered with dirt and small branches and some overgrown grass, so I fetched my Leatherman from my car and began cutting away the grass and cleaning up the debris. The next day was a beautiful day for Barry McGee's memorial service. There were nine people in attendance and the service went well, which was for me an encouraging start.



Judy Riley & Bob Griffin, Jim Stelter, Bill & Monica Selecman, Eric & Sally Robyn, Jim Hillebrand.



Thursday (July 5) – Terry O'Boyle's Service in Gary, IN

During the open sharing time, George Coan shared that he and Terry were roommates during our Firstie year and close friends as well. George told the story of how he had previously met his wife, Pam, when he was in Annapolis for an Army-Navy baseball game. He had met her the night before the game and he ended up having a hard time concentrating on the game the next day. After that he and Pam began to see each other as much as possible given the distance between West Point and Annapolis, and in due course George began to think he would like to ask Pam to marry him. He asked Terry for his advice, and Terry's response was that Pam was a great girl, and that George would be an idiot if he didn't ask her to marry him. George said that it was because of Terry that he decided to ask Pam to marry him. They have now been happily married for 48+

years. This is why when he first heard about the proposed trip, George decided that he simply could not miss out on the opportunity to be at the memorial service for Terry O'Boyle.



Bob Griffin, Jim Hillebrand, Paul Kessenich, George Coan



Friday (July 6) – Ed Northup's Service in Corning, IA

In the early stages of my planning process I was working without a “Next of Kin” list simply because I never thought to ask. This meant that by the time I finally found some relatives it was somewhat late in the planning process. The case of Ed Northup's service is an example. I did not get in contact with his sister, Linda Pershin, until almost two months after the planning process had begun. Consequently, I was never sure that we would have more than a handful of people in attendance. On the off-chance that a local paper might be interested, about a month before the trip was to start, I contacted the editor of the Free Press, the local weekly paper in Corning, IA. Mark Saylor was very interested in my planned trip, and said that he would be glad to write up an article about the memorial service. True to his word he wrote a very nice article and gave it top billing on the front page and published it the weekend before the planned service. In a conversation with Ed's sister about a week before the service she thought that there might be 4-5 people in attendance; but as a result of the newspaper article, almost 40 people showed up at the appointed hour. When we saw the crowd that began to arrive, our classmate, Mike Swaim, whom I had stayed with the night before, said, “Welcome to Iowa!” Ed Northup's service turned out to be the most well-attended of the eleven services.



The 35+ people who came out, including 4 sisters, cousins, other relatives, high school friends & a grade school teacher. Mike Swaim took the picture.



Saturday (July 7) – Art Nabben's Service at Ft. Snelling National Cemetery in Minneapolis, MN

I arrived in Minneapolis early enough for a quick visit to the Ft. Snelling National Cemetery which was still open on Friday afternoon. The cemetery, which has over two hundred thousand graves and is the second largest of all our cemeteries was absolutely beautiful. I was amazed at how perfectly kept up it was, and just being in the cemetery was quite moving. A couple hours later I was visiting with Dave Dalum and Karla Wagner, my Minneapolis hosts. During the visit, Karla's grandchildren, Alexandra and Markus, were being quite lively. So much so that at one point Karla apologized to me for the fact that she was not going to be able to attend the service the next morning because of the grandchildren. I told her that I completely understood, but then suggested that she might want to consider bringing the kids anyway. I said that I thought the cemetery might have a calming affect on them, and that if it turned out to not work then she could simply slip away with them and go off to the car. The next morning she did bring the kids, so during the few minutes before the service was to start I took the kids off and played a game with them. I told them to look for someone who had served in the Navy or Air Force, or someone who had won the Silver Star or Purple Heart, etc. After running around for a few minutes we went back over to Art Nabben's grave and began the service, and the kids were absolute angels. We had the fewest number of adults present of any service, but having Alexandra and Markus there made it very special.



Dave Dalum & Karla Wagner with Alexandra & Markus and Mike Lynett



Wednesday (July 11) – Tom Dellwo's Service in Choteau, MT

Tom's service was very special for a couple of different reasons. The first was because our nearest classmate was 350 miles away, and due to family commitments was not going to be able to attend. But, three classmates from A-3 went out of their way to be at the service because Tom was a very special person. One drove up with his wife from Texas, one flew up from Chicago, and the third flew up from Florida. The other reason the time in Choteau, MT, was special was because of a very touching story that Mary Ann, one of Tom's sisters, told me. Laura Dellwo, Tom's widow, never remarried. Instead, she devoted her life after Tom's death to raising their daughter, Susan, who was born three months after Tom had deployed to Vietnam. Mary Ann told me of how Laura moved to Choteau for several years so Susan could get to know her dad's family and the place where he grew up. She moved there when Susan was a baby and returned to the East coast when Susan was about 8 years old. This gave Susan a wonderful chance to bond with her cousins, many of whom were at the service. When Laura passed away about three years ago, their daughter Susan had her mom buried next to her dad. Choteau was not a foreign place to her since it had once been her home when she was a little girl.



**Ray, Phil & Lettie Brant, Tom's sister Mary Ann Ries,
Jim Hillebrand, Pete Miles & sister Diane Richter**



Monday (July 16) – Bill Pahissa's Service at Holy Hope Cemetery in Tucson, AZ

I thoroughly enjoyed all of our classmates and their wives that I stayed with, so the fact that I am singling out Hop and Mary Bailey for this story does not in any way take away from any of my other hosts. They were all great! Hop and Mary were typical in that they were willing to host me sight unseen. Of all of our classmates who initially agreed to host me, I only really knew one of them as we had been in the same company for our first couple of years. So naturally I chuckled when Hop told me that he had contacted Ed Quinn to make sure I was legit before agreeing to have me. Those of you who have had a chance to ever visit Hop know how passionate he is about his work at the space exploration labs at the University of Arizona. I was with Hop and Mary for two days, and on Sun-

day he took me over to his offices at the university and gave me the grand tour, which I thoroughly enjoyed. As it happened, and due to his passion, during the month of my trip, Hop had arranged for an internship for a USMA Cadet at the space labs. The cadet on the internship was a young woman from the Class of 2019; and on Monday morning, she was able to be at the service for Bill Pahissa. This means that with her presence our Affiliate Class was officially able to be a part of our Fallen Heroes Trip.



Cecelia Croman (USMA 2019), friend of family, sister Chris, niece, brother-in-law Bob, cousin Mike, Hop Bailey, Greg & Patty Binder, Ray & Vic Smith.



Wednesday (July 18) – George Bass' Service at Ft. Sam Houston National Cemetery in San Antonio, TX

During the course of my preparations and the trip itself I probably read each of our fallen classmates' Legacy book memorial articles a half a dozen times or more. I don't think I ever read a single one without feeling a mixture of pride to have been a part of a class that contained such a group of men, and humility that I should be the one to be traveling the country to honor them. That was especially true when it came to the article for George Bass. George was the most decorated of all of our classmates in Vietnam with a Silver Star, five Bronze Stars Medals for valor, three Bronze Star Medals, three Purple Hearts, the Air Medal and four Army Commendation Medals for Valor. Without question I wanted for every service I did on the trip to be truly honoring to the individual being remembered; but for

some reason as his service approached, I especially wanted that to be true for his. The article mentioned that George was someone who appreciated poetry, as do I. So with that in mind I picked out Psalm 42 as the scriptural passage I would use for the devotional for his service. It's one of my favorite psalms and quite poetic. On that very sunny day as we all stood in the middle of Section X at Ft. Sam Houston National Cemetery, I think George would have been pleased with the result of our efforts to honor his memory.



**Front: Phil & Lettie Brant, Karl & Sally Ivey, Laurie (sister) & Tom Wagner, Steve & Arlene Vitucci
Back: Joe Gelineau, Dan Meischem, Hap Gonser, Vic Smith & Onita, Charlie Watton**



Thursday (July 19) – Glen Ivey's Service in San Marcos, TX

One of the aspects of the trip which always had the potential to be problematic was the fairly rigid nature of the schedule that I had put together. Problematic because there was not really going to be much room in the schedule for changes. With eleven services spread out over 7,200 miles of driving, I was simply not going to be able to try to accommodate any need for changes if the schedule just did not work out for various family members along the way. Such was the case when I first contacted Karl Ivey. He told me that due to previous family commitments he did not think that he would be able to be at the service for his brother in San Marcos. But then about six weeks later he emailed and said that it looked like he would be able to be there after all. I was very pleased to hear that because of all the potential family members to be at any one of the services, he was the one

single person that I always felt most strongly I wanted to see standing there. The reason for that is very simple. In the end, this trip was meant to honor those fallen members of our class not buried at West Point. It was born out of our connectedness as brothers in arms of the USMA Class of 1969. Family would absolutely be wanted and welcome; but it was first and foremost a class event. This is why for me I found it very moving as I watched and listened to Karl read the legacy story about Glen. In that moment for me the whole trip came together. We were honoring a classmate. A fellow classmate was doing the honoring. And the classmate doing the honoring was doing so for his own brother, and a twin brother at that.



Mike & Happy Matthews, Dan Meischen, Vic Smith & Onita, Chris Franzen, Karl & Sally Ivey, Art Allert (Glenn & Karl's half-brother), Jay Olnier, Steve & Arlene Vitucci and Phil & Lettie Brant.



Thursday (July 26) – Guy Hester's Service in Winona, MS

Elsie Lynn Hester Ervin has only ever dated two men in her life, and she married both of them and been widowed by both of them as well. She is the subject of this little vignette. I had actually gotten to know Elsie Lynn (that's her name by the way ... not Elsie, but Elsie Lynn) through several phone calls well before the day I actually met her face-to-face. Interestingly, she had been following me in her white SUV for twenty or more miles as I was finishing my drive across Mississippi to Winona. While she was following close enough to make out my Connecticut plates I remember wondering if this person following close behind me might be Elsie Lynn. It was. Later, after meeting in the hotel parking lot, the two of us went out to supper with Bob Harper. He was there as the class photographer, but also because he himself was from Mississippi and he knew Guy

Hester well. While at supper, Elsie Lynn told the heartbreaking story of receiving the phone call that Jon Shine had been killed. Guy's funeral had been earlier that day and Elsie Lynn and others had settled down back at her house. Jon Shine and Guy Hester were good friends, so among those present was Gail Shine, who had flown down from Boston to Winona for Guy's funeral. The phone rang and Elsie Lynn answered it. On the other end of the phone were Jon's parents calling to say that they had just received word that Jon had been killed in Vietnam. It was Elsie Lynn Hester, who had just buried her own husband, who ended up having to tell Gail Shine that her husband had been killed as well. One week later she and Guy's father attended Jon's funeral at West Point.



In the very center in black, white & red dress is Elsie Lynn Hester Ervin (Guy's widow). To her right is Judge Roy Moore & wife Kayla, Ray is on far left and Bob Harper took the picture.

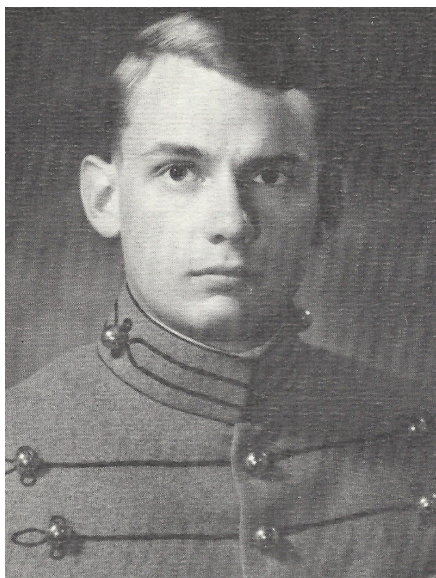


Saturday (July 28) – Jim Smith's Service at Blue Ridge Memorial Gardens in Beckley, WV

One of the things that I found fascinating on the trip was the interconnected nature of life. Some of those things I have touched on as they became some of my most poignant memories; and this was especially true when it came to the service for Jim Smith in Beckley, WV. Had Dave Ohle (Class of 1968) not been at the service, I'm not sure that the service would have been quite as meaningful. It's one thing to hear guys share a memory from when we were cadets, or perhaps from Ranger School or Airborne School, but it's another thing to have our fallen hero's Vietnam Ranger company commander do the sharing. To hear the story of Jim's sacrifice from a fellow West Pointer who had walked the same halls we had walked at the same time as us was special. To hear him say that Jim was one of the finest young officers he had ever worked with was special. To hear him tell the story of how he himself was supposed to have been on the chopper doing the rescue mission, but how at the last minute Jim intervened and asked for permission to go instead, because the man on the ground needing help was one of Jim's own men. That was special. And to hear the story told with the precision and passion of one who had a first-hand experience of the situation made the sharing time extra special. We each have our part to play in life, and on that day at that moment Dave Ohle played his part very well.



Teddy Smith (brother), Dave Ohle '68 (VN Ranger Co CO), Susan Smith (wife of Johnny Smith), KC Brown, Johnny Smith (brother), Ray, Mike McGovern and Steve Bosshard.



Monday (July 30) – Hank Schroeder's Service at Arlington National Cemetery

The final service at Arlington National Cemetery was special for a number of different reasons. Certainly, the fact that it was the final service of my trip, and that it was to be followed by a reception where I would get the chance to share some of the stories from my adventure made it special. The fact that it was actually at Arlington National Cemetery made it special as well. I had only ever been to Arlington one other time in my life back in 1964 when my dad took me up to Washington to try and walk the halls of Congress to find somebody who might give me an appointment to West Point. That trip proved fruitless which is just as well because otherwise I would have been in the Class of 1968 instead of the Best of the Line. It was, of course, encouraging to see such a nice turnout; and especially gratifying to have my wife, Avril, with me so she could be a part of the final event as well. When the service itself was over we had to wait for several minutes for a funeral cortege and I got to see my first ever real-life military caisson with the white horses, et al. Interestingly, someone from my church in Connecticut actually knew the family associated with that particular funeral. The daughter knew I was due to be at Arlington and wondered aloud to her mom that I might have seen the funeral. She was quite pleased when later on I posted on Facebook the fact that I had finished my final service and seen the cortege. It was as if God had brought my trip to a full circle close by connecting the last event in the trip with my starting point back home in Connecticut. In every way imaginable, Arlington was special, and I would be remiss if I did not thank Ed Quinn for making that final event possible.



McGovern, Bazzel, Balog, Spann, Ferraro, Robella, Modeen, Foss, Steele, Frykman, Dolton, Heesch, Cox, Wallestad, KC Brown, Jerry Mailey, E4 Taylor, Dupere, F3 Taylor, Helsel, Quinn, Gulakowski, McDonough, Seitz, Anstrom, Murphy, Nardotti, Prosch, Bolger, Coyle, Bob Harper.
Photo by Linda Cox; camera furnished by Bob Harper

***“BE THOU
AT PEACE”***

