

OPERATION GOLD STAR VIETNAM 2011



GOLD STAR MOTHERS GEORGIA BURKES, DOROTHY SHAFERNOCKER AND FRANCES TURLEY

BOB LAUVER

INTRODUCTION

In January 2000, the National Dusters, Quads, and Searchlights Association (DQS), a non-profit organization comprised of US Army ADA (Air Defense Artillery) Veterans with service in Vietnam, in cooperation with American Gold Star Mothers, Inc. (GSM) began Operation Gold Star.

OPERATION GOLD STAR (OGS)

Under OGS, DQS members donate and raise the funds, and make the necessary arrangements for Gold Star Mothers, wishing to travel to Vietnam, to fulfill one of their dreams and desires. DQS members (at their own expense) escort these Gold Star Mothers to Vietnam and to the Area of Operations in which their sons served and where their sons died. Gold Star Mothers have told us how they have longed to travel to Vietnam to see and experience the land their sons knew, and to visit the areas where their sons walked their last steps and took their last breaths. They yearn for the peace of mind and closure that has eluded them all these many years.¹

The Gold Star Mother trip described here is the fifth and last trip to be sponsored by NDQSA, age has taken a toll on the mothers and the veterans. The spirit may be willing but the flesh has become weak. Trips were taken in 2000, 2002, 2 in 2004, and 2011. Twenty three Gold Star Mothers visited the sites their sons were last on this earth. Fourteen veterans, some with their wives and offspring, made the trip, many multiple times. The Gold Star Mothers discovered a reunification with the spirits of their sons and found a closure that they did not know was possible. The veterans relived a time of their youth fraught with danger and memories of terror and carnage. We found ourselves faced with long buried demons as we walked ground that became a time machine that transported us back forty some years. No matter the years that have passed, we each carry a piece of Vietnam within ourselves. When we stand on the land where so many died, where memories were burned into the soul, where actions and deeds tore away the last shreds of childhood; we learn that this country was the forge that formed the steel of the men that we have become.

¹ From "First to Fire, Air Defense Artillery in Vietnam"

The mission was one of closure and memories, a task to give life to sons and comrades long dead but never forgotten.

Vietnam is now old history, a turbulent time that some feel is best left to the dust of the past, an era that is mentioned only in passing in high school studies. Forty years have eroded from the lives of those who experienced the events, forty years to bury those times, those actions, that revolved around Southeast Asia. There are those that remember the times as the best of their lives, no responsibility, free love, getting high, and the freedom to ignore and denigrate authority figures. These individuals appear whenever the military is deployed to trouble spots around the globe, aging flower children holding their signs and attempting to recapture their youth. Some remember the Vietnam era with the shame of decisions made of a desire for acceptance, caught up in a time of rebellion against structure and societal order. Individuals were caught up in a web of polarization propagated by anti-establishment activists seeking to disrupt the normal hierarchy of organization be it college administration or the Government of the United States. Confusion was fed by misinformation from both sides to the extent that trust in media has never been reestablished. There is an innate desire to be one of the group and this peer pressure brought many into the mainstream of anti-war activities while their friends from adolescence were in the armed forces, being wounded and killed while serving in Vietnam. The passing of years has brought a survivors guilt to many of these people, resulting in millions of false claims of having served during the war. There is another group, a part of mainstream America for whom Vietnam is seared into the soul. These are the individuals who served, who sacrificed, gave their sons, gave their blood, and gave years of their lives with their heads held high because they felt that duty had called. It was such a group that gathered at the counter of Asiana Airlines in Los Angeles, California on the morning of 15 March 2011, a group wearing a patch with a Gold Star upon it. Veterans of the National Dusters, Quads, and Searchlights Association whom had served in Vietnam, wives and a daughter, preparing to return to a place of conflict along with a group of ladies seeking an element of peace for a supreme sacrifice made many years ago. These were ladies whose sons were killed in Vietnam, they were members of the American Gold Star Mothers, a sorority with membership requirements that no one wishes to attain qualification for.



The Group, From left: GSM Dorothy Schafernocker, GSM Frances Turley, Luke Clark, GSM Georgia Burkes, Rose Arnold, Lynette Clark, Sue Lauver, Bob Lauver, and Jerry Ashley

VIETNAM

We had gathered from across the United States; Gold Star Mothers Dorothy Schafernocker, Texas, Georgia Burkes, Florida, and Frances Turley, Missouri, Escorts Bob and Sue Lauver, Pennsylvania, Luke and Lynette Clark, Louisiana, the Clark's daughter Rose Arnold, Arkansas, and Jerry Ashley, North Carolina. Sue and I had served as escorts for a Gold Star Mother Trip in 2002, for everyone else the adventure was new. The flight to Incheon, Korea was thirteen hours and twenty minutes with a very short stop before another five and a half hours to Saigon (Ho Chi Minh City), Vietnam. We touched down at about 10:40 PM at Tan Son Nhut International Airport on 16 March 2011, a long and tiring day for ladies in their eighties. **We were met by our Guide "Tony" SGT Dao with the bus and driver at the airport and promptly transported to the Hoang Sen Hotel for a night of much needed sleep.**

The first full day in Vietnam consisted of a city and market tour for the majority of the group while Sue and I took some personal time since we had done the city thing in 2002. I had a strong desire to be able to say I had played golf in the country where I had been at war forty years ago so we were off to the Vietnam Golf and Country Club. I would not recommend that anyone as fat and old as I am to play the first round of the year by walking eighteen in 90 degree heat and 95 percent humidity! We survived although there were times that I thought that golf would achieve what the North Vietnamese could not. We met the rest of the group at the hotel before we cleaned up for dinner. We went to a delightful restaurant named the Indochine. During the meal Luke and Jerry filled me in on the adventures of the day. It seems that a couple of the Gold Star Mothers had decided to do some free-lancing in the heart of Saigon! Caused some anxious moments before they were discovered, of course they knew where they were all along, the rest of the group and the guide were lost. I received the message that there would be no more personal days loud and clear.



Bob and Sue Lauver at The Vietnam Golf and Country Club

MEMORIAL FOR MICHAEL E. SCHAFERNOCKER

The next morning we boarded the bus and headed west toward Cambodia. The travel through the countryside gave everyone a chance to see the markets, rice paddies, and gardens. The veterans realized that the gravel roads had been paved and that the grass hooch's were now substantial masonry buildings. The Vietnamese Cambodian border had a feel of **"Checkpoint Charlie" with government buildings on each respective side, counterbalanced gates, and a hundred yard "no mans" stretch in between.** The immigration process was tedious both coming and going with mad searches for passports at every stop. The process was handled and we managed to walk across the strip without incident. On the Cambodian side we were met by local guide Kong Vitheany and a bus to transport us

to our destination. Cambodia looked much like the Vietnam the vets remembered, the roads were not paved, the hooch's were grass, rice paddies were on both sides of the road and amply populated with water buffalo. After a few false turns with the need to ask the locals for directions, we met a moped police escort, drove through the village of Teng Mao and into the bush. The road we were on was little more than a cow path with old rice paddy berms crossing it frequently. The path had numerous washouts, was covered with a half of foot of talcum powder dust, and the bus bottomed out several times. As we drove further into the rice fields I began to recognize some groves of trees from pictures Dorothy Schafernocker had sent to me. I knew that we were close. The bus stopped in a dry rice paddy and **"Theany" told us that this was the spot I looked at the terrain and thought "this is it, we can pick an area and honor Dorothy's son". I looked for a**

suitable location when I noticed a local walking toward us. He had on a green camouflage boonie hat and what appeared to be an old uniform shirt. Slung over his shoulder was a worn canvas satchel. I was reminded of us many years ago with a spare pair of socks tied together, filled with our ration cans and worn across our



"The Witness"

chests. His face was lined from years of life lived in the shadow of the Ho Chi Minh Trail and the killing fields of Cambodia, his eyes were furtive and his manner was tentative. He and the guide talked and he pointed, moving away from where we were standing. We followed him in a strung out column until he pointed to a small stick with a piece of colored cloth attached, Theany said that this was the spot where he had witnessed the helicopter go down forty two years ago. The guide explained that he had been in the area of some trees a couple of hundred meters away when he saw the impact. He had previously identified the spot to two different American teams doing excavations in attempts to recover remains. The excavators recovered some skeletal remnants and teeth that were later identified as belonging to **Dorothy's son and other members of the crew. As I listened to the**

interpretation of what he was saying I, and I am sure some of the others, wondered "Was he a happenstance witness or was he the man behind the machine gun that brought down the aircraft?".

On 28 April 1969 Aviation Ordnanceman Second Class Michael E. Schafernocker, United States Navy "Seawolves" was serving as a door gunner and crew chief on the UH-1B helicopter "The Delta Mauler". His aircraft had engaged suspected Viet Cong sampans when it was hit by a massive amount of enemy fire. The aircraft was heavily hit and descended rapidly. It struck the ground and immediately burst into flames. Attempts to reach the burned out helicopter were unsuccessful. Michael Schafernocker's remains were never completely recovered. We were now standing on the exact spot where this happened. I gave Dorothy a small American Gold Star Mothers Flag and she placed it in the ground. The other Gold Star Mothers and group members placed American Flags. I hugged Dorothy and told her that this was the exact spot where her son was last on this earth. The group joined hands and sang "God Bless America". Luke Clark produced a plastic bag and assisted Dorothy in the collection of a small amount of soil from where her son had died. I looked around and found that we were surrounded by local herders and their cattle. The water buffaloes were still and looking in our direction. Candy and tee shirts were given to the children who had gathered. Their appreciation and obvious delight lightened the mood.



Dorothy Schafernocker reads a poem written by her son

We returned to the village we had passed through earlier for lunch. The place where we stopped was a Buddhist Temple and school. I pulled Theany aside and asked her if she would explain the traditions of honoring the departed to the Gold Star Mothers. The Mothers lit joss sticks and were



GSMs Dorothy Shafernocker, Georgia Burkes, and Frances Turley are intent on learning the Buddhist Customs from Guide Theany

seated on a rug in the middle of the Temple while Theany explained the customs. They said the experience was rewarding and that they felt that it **couldn't hurt.**

There were tables in an area shaded by trees where we sat and had our box lunches. A type of chicken sa-tay with rice and

fresh fruit was served in a woven bamboo container that was primitive but attractive. We had noticed that the monks and the school children were very busy cleaning up the area, hanging decorations from the buildings and trees. Sue struck up a conversation with a young man who was with his wife and holding their baby. It turned out that he had grown up in this village and now held a state government job in Oregon. He and his family had returned for his mother's funeral which was to be held the next day.

THE CENTRAL HIGHLANDS

We had a long breakfast at the hotel with great French bread, fresh fruit, omelets, and the strong but tasty Vietnamese Coffee. We packed everything up and headed to the lobby to wait for the bus. We had our first casualty! Georgia had been bitten on the sole of her foot by something and it was inflamed and swollen. For the first time I realized that Frances was a nurse. She promptly took charge and sent Jerry and Luke to a drug store for first aid supplies. Frances and Luke fixed the flat and got Georgia back on her feet. It is not to be the last time that their services will be required.

The flight was short and we arrived in Pleiku in the evening. Our guide was a Jarai Tribesman, Siu Cham "Cham", one of the groups of ethnic minorities collectively known as Montagnards. We checked into a HAGL hotel, the Hoang An Pleiku. The next morning we drove West toward the Cambodian Border on highway QL512. We made a stop at a village to pick up **"Wen", another tribesman familiar with the border area. The ladies have discovered that the operative phrase is "Happy Stop!". They are learning new terminology and techniques. A water closet is not a storage place for unprocessed H₂O, and after the first couple of stops with cries of "Hey, there isn't any paper in here!", they found that the hose beside the hole in the floor has a purpose. There are many rubber plantations and cassava fields in this region. We are informed by "Cham" that the scars on the trees are from the collection of the sap, raw latex. Cassava is also called tapioca or manioc and is utilized primarily for the production of monosodium glutamate (MSG). This is the substance that I feel contributes to frequent calls for a "Happy Stop".**

Emotion from memories of times less pleasant was evident in Jerry's eyes as we passed Dak To and made the turn into the former CIDG camp at Ben Het. Ben Het was in an area known as the **"Triangle", the point where the border's of Cambodia, Laos, and South Vietnam meet.** Jerry served from January of 1969 to January 1970. He spent the majority of his tour at these two locations. We left the bus and walked up the hill to where the Special Forces had the primary encampment for their Montagnard advisees. Luke and Jerry inspected artifacts that may have dated to the time served here. There were shreds of the sandbags used to protect positions, a rubber cleat from a track,



Jerry Ashley and "Wen" inspect the remnants of a light anti-tank weapon at Ben Het

evidence of artillery fire missions, and a piece of an expended LAW. Items were collected and bagged to be reflected upon at a later date. Jerry pointed out Duster positions as we walked around the hill. We came to a saddle between the main camp and an outlier position known as the West Hill, Jerry told of the events of 3 March 1969. In March 1969 American Forces stationed at Ben Het included the Special Forces Detachment A-244, elements of the 69th Armor, 175mm guns and 8 inch howitzers from the **15th Field Artillery, and two Dusters from Jerry's unit, Bravo Battery, 4th Battalion, 60th Air Defense Artillery.** The evening of 3 March had been preceded by a period of relative calm at Ben Het with incoming rounds focused on the arrival of the resupply convoys. However, on this evening there were six hundred and thirty nine rounds of mixed artillery, mortar, and recoilless rifle fire. The word came that there were sounds of armored vehicles in the valley. Around 2300 hours the units began receiving fire from tanks. Jerry was manning Duster 221 on the West Hill. He told of an incident during the battle where they could see a North Vietnamese PT-76 Tank circling their position via a valley. They attempted to fire on the enemy vehicle but were in a position where the guns would not depress enough to acquire the target. While under fire, the crew backed the track out of the parapet and pulled into the concertina wire as far as they could without fouling the tracks. From this vantage point they were able to put high explosive **40mm rounds on the enemy. Jerry said they don't know if they got it** but the tank took a direct hit and burst into flames. The North Vietnamese forces were defeated with the remains of two PT-76 tanks and the burned out hulk of an armored personnel carrier left on the field of battle.



Jerry, Wen, and Rose Ascend the West Hill

This was the only tank to tank battle of the Vietnam War.

During the summer of 1969 Ben Het continued to receive artillery, mortar, and rocket fire. Bravo Battery, 4th Battalion 60th Air Defense Artillery manned their positions with two to six dusters and attached quad

fifty .50 caliber machine gun mounts from E Battery 41st Artillery. From 23 June to 11 July the base was surrounded and cut off from ground supply in a siege condition. Needed rations and ammunition was delivered by air drop and helicopters. Incoming forced the defenders underground. The siege was broken by bombs, napalm, and rockets. Late in the summer of 1969 Jerry told of a moonlit night when they could hear the drone of an aircraft motor and see the outline of a surveillance plane. When the report was radioed to command, confirmation came back that there were no friendlies up that night and Track 221 was given permission to fire. The plane was hit several times and spiraled down toward Laos. Patrols the next day came back with reports of the wreckage of a North Vietnamese light aircraft carrying photographic equipment. Although not officially substantiated, to the best of my knowledge this is the only time during our deployment that the air defense artillery units fired upon and brought down an enemy aircraft.

During Jerry's time at Ben Het and Dak-to he was hit five different times by shrapnel from incoming rounds and received the purple heart for each wound. He said that the moment that was most meaningful to him was when he, Rose, and Wen had walked up to the West Hill and he had **seen where his duster's position had been. He walked down over the escarpment** to the area where they had repositioned the track and fired on the North Vietnamese Tank. He stopped and reflected.

On the way back to Pleiku we stopped at the fire base at Dak To. Jerry pointed out the approximate positions where the dusters had been stationed for perimeter defense. The airfield was still in place, however it was covered by a foot deep layer of cassava placed there to dry.

The next morning we traveled South to Mang Yang Pass. Luke had the bus stop and pointed out an area at the top of a hill where the bodies of the members of a French Convoy had been buried. The battle of Mang Yang Pass is considered to be the last official battle of the French Indochina War. The ambush



Mang Yang Pass

is featured in the opening scenes of the Movie "We Were Soldiers". There were hundreds of French dead. The graves were dug with a post hole digger and the bodies were buried upright facing France. They have since been disinterred and returned to their homeland. We drove to the top of the pass and walked to a vantage point where we could see down into the valley. Luke pointed out the ambush sites on the turns of QL 19. As we were returning to the bus I looked down and picked up a shed snake skin. I said "This is about the size of "Charlie two step, the Bamboo Viper." The return to the bus was quickened.

In the late morning we went to a Montagnard Village, Lang K'Tu, of the Bahnar tribe that was located outside of Pleiku. At first glance it would seem to be a village that we would have remembered from our service, but



Sue Lauver giving the kids tee shirts

on closer inspection that was not to be. The gate to the village was made of concrete stained to resemble wood, as was the community house. We talked of the persecution of the ethnic minorities by the Vietnamese. It would seem that this was a display village for the tourists. One of the interesting things that we saw in the village was flattened out 175mm powder

canisters being utilized as siding. Sue handed out some "Mifflinburg Cats" tee shirts to the Bahnar kids. Lunch was in the outskirts of Pleiku after which we said farewell to Cham and flew to Danang.

Hoi An, Tang Binh, and the Que Son Valley

On arrival in Danang we met a temporary guide by the name of Tran Thanh, he was young and inexperienced, but seemed to know his way around. Luke Clark told the guide of some of the areas which he would like to re-visit from his first tour in 1965 when he worked as an advisor with the South Vietnamese. We boarded a bus and headed South on QL 1. As we drove near the town of Tang Binh, Luke became intent on searching the area to our left, a stretch of sandy terrain toward the South China Sea. We approached a rutted gravel road and Luke said: "Turn here, there is a

shallow lake ahead". We drove several kilometers East on the road until we came to an expanse of white sand. Luke asked the driver to stop the bus and we got out. Luke explained that they had worked with South Vietnamese in this area in 1965. The sand we were looking at was the old lake bed. On the horizon was a tree line, cemetery, and a village. Luke told the story of an Australian advisor that he worked with and whom he considered a friend. While on patrol in November, 1965 the Australian was killed by a



Luke Clark Explains the Events

sniper from the tree line we were looking at. Luke and his group of Vietnamese moved through the village toward the trees. Luke stated that he avenged his friend. We stood by the side of the road and Luke placed an American Flag in the sand. He stepped back and saluted.

We stopped at a village pre-school after we left the lake bed. The children were having lunch. The mothers handed out candy and hugs, I thought that they would try to smuggle a few of them back with us.

We return to QL 1 and continue South. We then turn toward the West on a road that goes from Tang Binh to the village of Que Son. The road, houses, and paddies are very reminiscent of 40 years ago. We approach a small village called Kyme, Luke stops the bus. He places two flags in the ground and was overcome with the memory of the event. The people of the village were cooperating with the South Vietnamese forces. One night there was a call of trouble. Luke and his forces approached the next morning. There were masses of bodies. The Viet Cong had massacred the women and children as a demonstration to the population of the area. It was a story too painful to tell. We drove to the center of Kyme. Again we disembark. Again Luke plants two flags in the ground. On two different occasions Luke had his radio operators killed by small arms fire in this vicinity. While they were standing at his side. We paid them honor with a salute. On the West end of the village we again stop. There was a non-commissioned officer from the 5th regiment advisor team that Luke worked with. He was killed near here. The flags are placed in a small bed of tomatoes. We pay homage to a comrade in arms. This



Luke Clark Explains the Tragedies of Kyme Village to His Daughter Rose Arnold

has been a long emotional morning for Luke. You could see that the memories were painful. His eyes glistened when he would tell of the events that transpired.

We returned to Tang Binh and stopped at a roadside garden eatery for lunch. The establishment was furnished with pediatric sized plastic tables and chairs, some more substantial wooden **"Adirondack" style seating, and hammocks**. I viewed the chairs at the tables and came to the conclusion that the maximum rating was about seventy pounds, my three hundred would convert them to Vietnamese siding. I could see Sue and Georgia eyeing up the **hammocks and thought: "This is gonna leave a mark"**. They managed to get in and with help they got out. The entre' was a thing they called a hot dog. Nothing like this was ever served at Coney Island. Had there been a dog about he would have received a treat. Thank God for French bread and fruit.

During the afternoon we make a turn through the Que Son Valley. I spent a little time here in 1967 and 68. We entered the valley in the area where LZ Baldy had been located and drove West through a mixture of rice paddies and jungle like terrain. I wanted to see the location of a firebase known as LZ Leslie. We reached a mountainous area and the guide informs me that this was the area of Leslie. On 20 January 1968 I was acting as a Section Chief with Battery G, 65th Artillery, a Quad Fifty unit with the 1st Battalion, 44th Artillery, a Duster (twin 40mm) unit. We were supporting the Americal Division in the Que Son Valley. On this night both LZ Ross and LZ Leslie were hit with rocket and mortar fire combined with a concentrated infantry assault. I was at LZ Ross and we managed to fight off the attack. LZ Leslie was partially over run with sappers inside the perimeter destroying emplacements with satchel charges. The Squad Leader told me that as his Quad Fifty was firing at the attacking forces attempting to penetrate the perimeter, he was turned and firing his personal weapon at the

enemy inside the base. There was a picture of that Quad Fifty in one of the newspapers of the time showing expended brass piled to the lower barrels. Time has removed the name of the squad leader from my memory. I am attempting to research the story of that night for the heroism of that crew is not documented. I took numerous pictures of the area in hopes that they can be utilized at a future date. On our return East we stopped at the location of LZ Ross. When I was in this area in 2002 the hill was a Vietnamese Army Base and could not be approached. It is now a monument to the North Vietnamese and Viet Cong Forces. The area surrounding LZ Ross is developed with many houses. I climbed all over that hill following gravel paths and cow trails. I saw nothing that was familiar to me. We returned to the beautiful Ancient House Resort in Hoi An. That evening I took the Gold Star Mothers to a silk shop. The tailor was up a flight of narrow, steep stairs that had us very concerned. We played center field behind the mothers as they climbed up, ready for the catch. The Mothers were measured and photographed every way possible for custom made silk, Gold Star Blouses to be delivered in Hue.

While we were in the city I requested that we go to the Hoi An Hospital. Gold Star Mother Florence Johnson was on a previous trip to Vietnam and that group had gone to this site to memorialize her sons death. Edward Johnson was a Marine MP stationed at Danang. He was sent to the Hoi An Hospital to provide security for a group of physicians from a hospital ship who were coming ashore to provide medical care to the Vietnamese. That night there was a mortar attack

on the Army Republic of Vietnam's barracks located directly behind the hospital. One round fell short. Edward Johnson was killed. On that trip with Florence Johnson was a former marine named Mike Sweeney. He was the Sergeant who had ordered Edward Johnson to Hoi An. At dawn of the day we held the ceremony, Mike and Florence had walked from the Hotel to the Hospital. They had a private remembrance.



The Gold Star Mothers at the Memorial Site for
Florence Johnson's Son Edward

DANANG TO DONG HA

Early the next morning we had the opportunity to enjoy the hotel. The ladies discovered that there was a spa with very reasonable prices. Hair was restructured, nails were painted, and bodies were massaged. There were a lot of oohs and ahaas when we got back together, Dorothy and Georgia said that they wanted to do that spa thing once a week. Sue and Rose agreed. We met our guide for the Northern part of the trip, **Ton Phuoc Tho, whom we anointed "Taw"**. **After a quick tour of the city we started North on highway 1.** I asked Taw to make a quick stop at one of **the shops on Marble Mountain, big mistake, I didn't think we would ever get** everyone out of there. Lynette was shopping for Jade, and Frances was taking it all in. Sue and Rose had an armload. Luke was at a table arranging for the shipping of a six foot, white marble eagle for his garden. The shopping and bartering were in full swing when I learned that Georgia had fallen down some steps. We managed to get her to the bus and inspect some of her wounds. She had bruised her shoulder and knee and had a nasty contusion on her upper arm. After making sure that there were no broken bones Nurse Frances took over, she and Luke were back in action. After the first aid was completed we went North to Danang. Driving past Danang we could see many of the aircraft revetments remaining from the war. I remember those but not the hotels and the Montgomery and Norman designed golf resorts that lined the shore of the bay. There had been a great increase in development in and around the city since the war and even since 2002. The bus pulled over at China Beach very near where the marines had an in-country rest and relaxation (R & R) center in the sixties. The beach could have been in California with chaise lounges and volleyball nets. **We walked through the sand and I thought: "I've been here before."**



Bob Lauver
China Beach 1967



Bob and Georgiana Carter Krell
China Beach 2002



Bob and Dorothy Schafernocker
China Beach 2011

We wound through the hairpin turns of Hai Van Pass and looked back at the port of Danang before we were blinded by mist and fog near the top. We pulled over at the little shops at the summit by the war scarred French bunkers. Taw must have been receiving a kick back from the proprietor because he did a good job of selling the "Worlds Best Coffee" . We sat at the open air tables and sipped the "Milk Coffee" while the rain intensified. The normally beautiful drive up the coastline was marred by limited visibility.

From Phu Bai to Hue I told the story of my experiences of the first day of the TET Offensive, 31 January 1968. Two Quad Fifties from G/65th and two Dusters from Delta Battery, 1st Battalion 44th Artillery fought their way into the city supporting two companies of marines from the First Marine Division, Alpha 1/1 and Golf 2/5, and the supporting M-48 Tanks. The small unit of some four hundred or so men had no way of knowing that we were facing eight to twelve thousand North Vietnamese and Viet Cong. The two marine companies suffered 66 casualties that first day of fighting with many of them suffered on the Nguyen Hoang Bridge over the Perfume River. Our Quad Fifty went across the bridge to provide covering fire for the marines to move back to the South side. During that action I suffered injuries to my left leg and was transported by helicopter to the USS Repose, a hospital ship, the next day.

We stopped in Hue for lunch at a very nice place that Taw was obviously familiar with. He told us that his Grandparents were successful property owners and business people in Hue before the TET Offensive of 1968. He told more of his families history later. After lunch we continued North on highway 1 past the turn off to Camp Evans, through Quang Tri, to Dong Ha. We checked into the Mekong Hotel, the best place in town, which was rated a very generous three stars. Attitudes were much different than in the cities we had previously stayed in, much more reserved. The rooms were basic, and not very clean. The mattress could have been produced at Marble Mountain for all the comfort it provided, the pillows were by Kotex. Our meal that evening was at the attached Mekong Restaurant. The experience brought us back to earth after the superb meals we have had since our arrival in Vietnam. The next morning I was up before dawn and walked up and down the streets surrounding the hotel. It was hard for me to get my mind around the growth that had occurred and the fact that our huge base was gone, nothing left but a Quonset hut where the airstrip had

been. I went back to the hotel and went up to the sixth floor. I realized that the city extended far past the outside perimeter of the old 3rd Marine Division base and that the suburbs extended to Cam Lo. I went down for breakfast and noticed that most of the vehicles looked official or military. I watched the people who exited the lobby and went into a meeting room beside the restaurant. Most were either in uniform or suits, I thought this must be the official Communist Party meeting place.



Downtown Dong Ha 1967



Downtown Dong Ha 2011

GIO LINH, CON THIEN, AND ROCKET RIDGE



Jim Tweed (L) and Bob Lauver in Kuala Lumpur a few weeks before Tweed was killed

We had breakfast and then we drove North toward Gio Linh. Halfway between Dong Ha and the DMZ I started watching for an area away from houses and people. We came to an opening with rice paddies and grass. I asked the driver to stop along the road. My best friend through training and Vietnam was Sergeant James Lee Tweed from Findlay, Ohio. We went on R & R to Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia in August of 1967. On 9 September 1967, Jim was killed by a sniper during an ambush on Highway 1 between Dong Ha and Gio Linh. I wanted to stop and have a talk with him. I placed a Flag in the

ground and saluted my friend. When I give talks about Vietnam I always close with "Good bye Jimmie, I hardly knew ya"



Bob Lauver at Memorial Site for His Friend SGT James Lee Tweed

From Highway one we took a road right through what was "The McNamara Line". This brain storm cost a lot of Seabee, Marine, and Army lives. The road would take us to QL-17. In 2002 earth was just being moved for construction of a new high-way from Cam Lo to Hanoi. The proposed route of QL-17 went very close to a Marine firebase called Con Thien.

During the summer and Fall of 1967 Con Thien was in a state of siege. We lived in underground bunkers and trench lines. Drinking water came from collected rain water since it was too dangerous to make the several hundred meter trek from where we were to the water point. Chances were that if you did go, the water container was already drained from numerous shrapnel holes since it was well zeroed by the North Vietnamese gunners. In September the rains were continuous, the trenches filled with water and mud and the water was within a few inches of the top of the bunks in the bunkers. I turned twenty one at Con Thien. On the morning of my birthday we were cleaning the guns when we heard the sounds of rounds leaving the tubes all around the hill. We dove off the back of the truck; by the time the last incoming round had impacted we had received some twelve hundred artillery and mortar shells. The resupply helicopter brought mail that day, 27 September 1967. My Dad had sent me a bottle of Black and White Scotch well packed in popcorn, also in the package was home made salami and pepperoni from family friend, restaurateur Tony Cambrioti. I was very popular for a short while. On a typical evening we were on 50 to 100% alert because of nightly probes, at 0700 hours we would always receive a couple of artillery rounds to let us know that we were not going to get any sleep during the day either. By the time night would roll around again we would have been the recipient of four hundred to fifteen hundred combined mortar, rocket, recoilless, and heavy 122mm and 152mm artillery rounds. I received my first Purple Heart at this base in September when a 152mm round impacted the side of our bunker a few feet behind me. I thought I was dead. Con Thien means "Hill of Angels" There was an Angel on my shoulder that day.



Con Thien 28 September 1967
Photo by David Douglas Duncan Life Magazine

It was important to me that I found the old French Bunker that was at the hill top at Con Thien. The only reference I had for the casualty site of **Frances Turley's son was that it occurred on a hill called "Rocket Ridge" 5 kilometers SSW of the firebase. Taw and the driver said "We know just where it is". I had questions when we turned North on QL 17. I knew that we were headed to Hanoi. I finally informed them that we were in the former North Vietnam and that we were going the wrong direction. We turned around and went South to Cam Lo, I told them that we had passed it. We turned around again and they finally asked some locals for directions. We drove a few kilometers North and pulled off at an area that I could not recognize. Of course in 1967 it was all scrub and rice paddies, not mature rubber trees. By this time it was raining pretty good so Taw and I decided that we would make the search ourselves. We walked for about a mile and left the trail to climb a hill to our right. We went all over that hill and had ourselves just about convinced that this was it. I could not get any idea of orientation because the fog and mist had brought visibility down to hand in front of your face status. We started back to the bus and had not gone more than a hundred meters when we looked to our left and there in the open was the old concrete bunker. On another hill. We climbed up and I stood on top. The mist had just lifted enough that I could get a bearing on where to go. Taw said that there was a road in that vicinity so I told him to have the driver take us to where the hill just started to rise and that would be our destination. We started back to the bus. I asked Taw if he had ever been in the military and he asked why. I said because you are avoiding a possible ambush by returning by a different route. He said the bus is this way. I said OK. I could tell by the way he turned around in a 360° circle every so often that he was not real sure. We were going through the heart of the trees when we could just see the bus. I believe that the relief of not **being lost created the need for a "Happy Stop" for Taw. I continued toward the bus. Just as I left the tree line onto a path I saw an elderly Montagnard lady walking toward me. She had on traditional dress and was carrying one of the wood handled, curved knives that I remembered. She was looking over her shoulder wondering what was up with the bus as she walked toward me. She turned just as I emerged. I think that the shock of seeing a six foot two, three hundred pound, soaking wet, American, dressed in green, coming out of the bush from Con Thien was almost more than her heart could take. She is still talking about "The Hill of Angels".****

MEMORIAL FOR FRANCIS EDWIN "DUKE" CORTOR, JR.

We stopped at the base of hill 174 which the Army had dubbed "Rocket Ridge". We left the bus and I handed out flags. Francis Turley's son, *Sergeant Francis Edwin "Duke" Cortor, Jr., 3rd Platoon, Bravo Company, 1st Battalion, 11th Infantry Division, was involved in operations against North Vietnamese Forces on 21 October 1969. Elements of his unit had suffered casualties during an enemy mortar attack. Although the injured were not from Sergeant Cortor's platoon, he voluntarily made repeated efforts to recover the bodies of fallen comrades. He gave up his life attempting to save others.* Duke Cortor was awarded the Silver Star, our Nations 3rd highest award for Gallantry in Action. We gathered in the grass at the base of "Rocket Ridge". I read the eulogy for Sergeant Cortor. Frances placed the Gold Star Mother's Flag. Other members of the group and the Gold Star Mothers placed American Flags. I hugged Frances and pointed to the ridge line. I told her that this is where her son heroically died. Luke assisted Frances with the gathering of a sample of soil. The vets stepped back and saluted the honor of a fallen comrade, The Gold Star Mothers hugged and placed their hands over their hearts. They shared the grief that only they know. We left the flags in place to honor our fallen and to let the Vietnamese know that we have not forgotten our dead. We returned to the bus and continued to Cam Lo.



"You are walking in the footsteps of your son"

MEMORIALS TO THE FALLEN ALONG HIGHWAY 9

When we reached Cam Lo we turned right onto Highway 9. We went just a few kilometers and pulled along the road. Steve Moore was a Platoon Leader with Charlie Battery, 1st Battalion, 44th Artillery. He had wanted to make this trip but was prevented from doing so by medical problems.

We stopped at a location where there had been an ambush on 24 January 1968. During Lt. **Moore's time on the DMZ Charlie Battery** lost 23 men. We stopped to honor not just the men that had been killed under **Steve's command but to pay our respects** to all the men of our units that had lost their lives along this road and at the DMZ firebases. We placed an American Flag in the ground and with the Gold Star Mothers, paid our respects to the fallen. We retrieved and marked the flag for display at the NDQSA reunion in Boston, July 2011.



Dustermen Luke Clark and Jerry Ashley Salute their comrades along Route 9 and the DMZ

We pull onto the turnoff to the left toward J. J. Carroll. This was the home to a Battery of Dusters, Section of Quad Fifties and searchlight jeeps during our time in Vietnam. There is nothing left now but the concrete pad of the mess hall. The Vietnamese have erected an unmaintained memorial to the ARVN Traitors who surrendered the base. The road winds through a pepper plantation and is lined with masonry houses. I took pictures of the mountains to the North so that those who served here could recognize the area. We continued west toward Khe Sanh. The road now has two lanes and is paved. It makes it hard to even recognize it as the road of so many ambushes and so much sorrow. I point out the landmarks of **The Rockpile, The Razorback, and Mutter's Ridge. We passed through Ca Lu and up into the mountains to Khe Sanh.** Our time in Khe Sanh was limited by the weather. By the time that Luke, Jerry, and I went through the first section of the museum we were so disgusted by the misinformation and propaganda that we were ready for the bus.

We stopped at a Montagnard Village of the Bru Tribe that was located on the North side of Highway 9 just West of Ca Lu. It had taken several requests to get the driver and the guide to make this stop. We wanted to let the Gold Star Mothers meet the people and children of the village. There were some obvious differences from the Bahnar display community we had

been at in Pleiku. The housing was more of the tradition that I remembered and there were no modern display structures. The people were a little guarded at first but tee shirts and candy soon had them trooping toward us. I noticed that Taw was nervously watching the traffic as it passed. There was an unmarked vehicle with an official looking type in it parked along the road several hundred meters away. He seemed to be observing us. Made me wonder if we have been shadowed for the whole trip. Taw hastily came over to us and said: **"We've got to get out of here!"** I asked him why. He said: **"You're not supposed to be talking to these people, they think that you are handing out literature."** For the first time it really hit me that we are being totally controlled. I feel sorrow for these people who were our allies during the war. The ones that have made it to America have excelled.



Luke Hands Out Candy as the Kids Clutch their Tee Shirts

Further down the road we stop at the Dau Mau Bridge that was built at the time the highway was reconstructed. To the left were the remains of an older span, one lane to a vehicle of any size. We knew it as the Khe Gio Bridge. We place an American Flag at the end of the old bridge. Luke begins to read the following Citation for Sergeant Mitchell W. Stout, Charlie Battery, 1st Battalion, 44th Artillery, for actions of 12 March 1970: ***"Sgt Stout distinguished himself during an attack by a North Vietnamese Army Sapper company on his unit's firing position at Khe Gio Bridge. Sgt. Stout was in a bunker with members of a searchlight crew when the position came under heavy enemy mortar fire and ground attack. When the intensity***



Honor is Paid as Luke reads the Citation for Sergeant Mitchell W. Stout

of the attack was so intense that the searchlight crew was unable to maintain their position and the position was abandoned. Sgt. Stout was the only member of the searchlight crew to survive the attack. His actions were instrumental in the successful defense of the position and the survival of the searchlight crew. Sgt. Stout's actions were a fine example of the courage and determination of the men of the 44th Artillery. He is a true hero and a credit to his country."

of the mortar attack subsided, an enemy grenade was thrown into the bunker. Displaying great courage, Sgt Stout ran to the grenade, picked it up, and started out of the bunker. As he reached the door, the grenade exploded. By holding the grenade close to his body and shielding its blast, he protected his fellow soldiers in the bunker from further injury or death. Sgt. Stout's conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity in action, at the cost of his own life, are in keeping with the highest traditions of the military service and reflect great credit upon him, his unit, and the U.S. Army." The Citation was for the Medal Of Honor. As Luke read, he was overcome with emotion and was unable to continue, Jerry helped finish. Honor was paid by the veterans and the Gold Star Mothers. The flag was marked and collected for the Boston Reunion. As we walk to the bus, Taw relates a story about the Dau Mau Bridge. After the new bridge was in place there was a series of unexplained events. A man on a bicycle stopped and sat on the bridge to have his lunch. He felt a hand on his shoulder, he turned, no one was there. A trucker approached the bridge, as he came onto the bridge he felt a force wrench the wheel and the truck went over the edge. A series of crashes occurred, apparitions were seen, people became afraid to drive on **the road. Taw explained that the local community erected a "Spirit House" for joss sticks and offerings. Afterward the events stopped. Jerry, Luke, and I looked at each other and thought; "Mitchell stopped fighting the war".**

Another kilometer and we stopped again, this time to Honor the son of Georgiana Carter Krell, a friend of these Gold Star Mothers and a woman who had made the trip with Sue and I in 2002. Private First Class Bruce W. Carter was a member of the United States Marine Corps. On 7 August 1969 he gave his life to protect his comrades. He threw his body on an enemy grenade and absorbed the full effects of the blast. He was posthumously awarded The Medal of Honor. Georgiana Carter Krell is The Director of Volunteers at the Bruce W. Carter VA Center in Miami, Florida.



The Gold Star Mothers at the Memorial Site for Bruce W. Carter

HUE

We drove to Hue that evening and checked into the beautiful Huong Giang Hotel. The front desk had a package for us, the items ordered from the silk shop in Hoi An had been delivered as promised. The next morning we were to be treated to a tour of Hue. The weather remained wet and chilly. We were on the South shore of the Perfume River and crossed on a new bridge to the North. I could look to my right and see that damned bridge from my nightmares. We parked outside the Citadel and passed through the gate. A group of school children on a field trip happily posed so the Gold Star Mothers could take their pictures. We paused outside of the Throne Room of the Imperial Palace to give the crowd a chance to disperse. We found an area of shelter from the rain and Taw gathered us in a group.

I expected the usual “guide speak” history lesson on Hue and the Citadel. Instead Taw started talking about his family again. They were descended from the Mandarin Society. His Grandparents owned a cinema and were propertied people. He told of the events of TET 1968. The North Vietnamese came into the city with lists of marked individuals who were working with the American Forces and/or the South Vietnamese Government. They had also targeted the educated and successful. Physicians, attorneys, professors, and business people, both foreign and domestic, were gathered. The prisoners were bound and marched into the countryside, executed, and buried in mass graves. It is now estimated that over five thousand individuals were assassinated in the early days of the Battle of Hue City. Taw said that many members of his family were targeted. Some successfully hid from the searchers. He told of one Uncle who was taken, shot, thrown into a grave, and covered with other bodies. Although he was wounded in the shoulder, he feigned death and was able to later escape. Many members of his family now reside in California. We were a somber collection as we continued our tour. The mood was brightened as members of the party noticed the citadel shops. We returned to the bus with many carrying bags. We had lunch inside of the walls at an old restaurant called Y Thao. We



Ton Phuoc Tho is Reflective After Telling Us of the Events of 1968

walked through an exquisite garden to a wonderful presentation of spring rolls, steamed shrimp, and royal roast duck. Sue was not particularly enthralled with the “green bean” desert.

After lunch we went to the Military Museum. This was of special interest because there was a Duster on display. The question is, of course, if this had at one time been manned by the soldiers of The 1st Battalion 44th Artillery. Luke pulled Taw aside and was giving him lessons on the firing of the 105mm howitzer. We made a quick visit to the Ancient Thien Mu Pagoda since it is considered to be a symbol of Hue. While there the Mothers were able to see the boat traffic



The Clark Family at Thien Mu Pagoda

on the Perfume River and the Dragon Boats pulled up on shore. The shops and street vendors soon caught the attention of all. After a whirlwind spat of shopping it was time for our return to Saigon from Phu Bai International Airport.

SAIGON

“Tony” was waiting for us at the airport. We were going back to the Huong Sen Hotel for one more night. After the cool dampness of the North it was a relief to be back to the heat and humidity. After we checked in, we went to dinner at an upstairs restaurant in downtown Saigon called Sandals. This was our last night in Vietnam so we celebrated the last two weeks with three bottles of Champaign. The food was very good, but what struck me about this place was the Manager. I believe that she got the impression that there was something different about this group, so she came over and introduced herself. When she heard our story she was suitably moved and hugged the Gold Star Mothers. Then she told her story; she was a nineteen year old Afrikaner that had left South Africa to make her way in the world. She had a level of maturity and competence that was way beyond her years. I told her that if she ever made it to the States that there would be a job waiting for her. We returned to the hotel and went

up to the roof top bar for one more drink while we looked at the lights and listened to the sounds of the city.

We had what was called an “assistant driver” in the Central Highlands. We suspected he was a spy to make sure that the Americans did not get out of line, but he had a personality. We were assured that neither he nor the driver could speak a word of English. They both always laughed when one of us cracked a joke. Made us a wee bit suspicious. It seems that word had gotten around that they needed to keep a tighter control on us. We met Tony and the driver in the morning but we had a new presence. This guy was not even introduced to us. Forty years ago I would have known immediately that he **was VC. I promptly dubbed him “Nyugen the Communist”.** He had a definite effect on Tony. The first time we were in Saigon he was very loquacious and relaxed. This time he spent a lot of time with the new guy and was much more guarded.



Nyugen Did Not Like Having
His Picture Taken

MEMORIAL FOR MARION FRANK WALDEN JR.

The Gold Star Mothers got on the bus wearing their new white silk blouses, very nice. We drove in a Northwesterly direction to Binh Duong Province. We made a stop on the way and Tony has us walk down a rough, uneven road on a sight seeing excursion to a ferry dock. I was unsure what the real motive of this was, but found the walk interesting. When we approached the dock I saw a couple of young men fishing. That always catches my attention. I had to find out how they were doing. They had a **bucket containing what I would consider bait, turns out that’s what they were catching.** They looked like some kind of goby to me, Luke said they **were snakeheads so we’ll just say they were fish out of the Song Be River.** There were quite a few floating houses on the river and as we were watching the ferry came across from the other side. It was crammed with the ever-present mopeds. They managed to create a traffic jam just getting off the boat. On the way back to the bus I stopped to observe some lemon grass that had just been planted along the road. As I walked over to it I had to shake my head at what I saw, a guy was giving a chicken a bath! With soap and water! The chicken did not seem to appreciate this. It was

apparent that this was a fighting cock and probably a valuable bird. We returned to the bus and drove a few kilometers through Di An and stopped at a park like area on a canal. This was very near the location of Luke's Castle Firebase. This base was located on an island formed by the canal and the Song Be River. It was near this spot that Iris Walden's Son was killed. *On 13 December 1968 Private First Class Marion Frank Walden Jr. was engaged in operations against Viet Cong forces in what was then Bien Hoa Province, Vietnam. While patrolling with a squad of Alpha Company, 1st Battalion, 18th Infantry Regiment, 1st Infantry Division in the area of Luke's Castle Firebase, the squad triggered an 81mm mortar round booby trap. Private Walden was Killed In Action.* Private Walden was 19 years old. Iris Walden is from Tennessee. She very much wanted to come on this trip. She was one of the original Gold Star Mothers that I talked to and was



Gold Star Mothers Georgia Burkes, Frances Turley, and Dorothy Schafernocker Honor the Son of Iris Walden, Marion Frank Walden Jr.

on my original roster. She was prevented from making the trip for medical reasons. Frances knows Iris well and she placed the Gold Star Mothers Flag at the memorial site. Other members of the group and Gold Star Mothers Dorothy Schafernocker and Georgia Burkes placed American Flags. The eulogy was read and the Veterans saluted the site while the Gold Star Mothers grieved. Luke provided a baggie and helped Frances collect soil from the spot. Frances picked a white blossom from a nearby vine and took it, the soil sample, and a marked flag to give to Iris.

We drove South through Saigon and the interminable traffic. We started to leave the city when we stopped at a "not for tourists" roadside café for lunch. We walked in to some surprised looks from the customers. Lunch was "Pho", a traditional Vietnamese meat broth over cellophane rice noodles. Normally this is served with fresh greens on the side; mint, cilantro, cucumber, sliced hot peppers, and whatever is in season to be added at ones preference along with a couple of shots of Nuoc mam and a squeeze of

lime juice, makes a fine meal. Unfortunately we did not trust the water used to rinse the greens so we just had the broth and noodles. I did have to throw in some hot peppers and lime juice to pick it up. Probably the best soup of the trip.

MEMORIAL FOR DAVID RONALD BURKES, JR.

We continued South on Highway one into Long An Province. We turned off on Highway QL1A (highway 4 at the time of the war) toward the town of Ben Luc. We came to the old bridge over the Song Vam Co Dong River, known as the Ben Luc Bridge. I had limited details about the casualty site for Georgia Burkes' Son. The information was sketchy and incomplete. I had talked to her son's commanding officer and he did not know the exact site. I finally asked the NDQSA historian to contact the unit historian for Corporal Burkes' unit. I received information that pinpointed a location that was SW of the bridge. I had explained that all to Tony previously and while we were in the North he had traveled to the area and found the site for our memorial. We turned off QL1A on to a dirt road. We traveled for a couple of kilometers and stopped between two dwellings. I held Georgia's hand as we walked through rice chaff to some dry paddies about a hundred and fifty meters from the bus. We went toward a location where there were a couple of banana trees growing out of the paddy berm and Georgia picked that as the spot for her son's memorial. *Private First Class David Ronald Burkes, Jr., Company A, 4th Battalion, 47th Infantry, 9th Infantry Division was involved in a search and destroy mission on 28 June 1968. The goal of his unit was to engage and eliminate Viet Cong forces that were threatening the bridges on Highway 4 at Ben Luc and Tan An.*



We Join Hands and Sing God Bless America at the Memorial Site for David Ronald Burkes, Jr.

PFC Burkes was Killed In Action by small arms fire 3 km SW of the Ben Luc Bridge. David Ronald Burkes, Jr. was Posthumously promoted to Corporal. Georgia placed the American Gold Star Mothers Flag in the ground. Others each placed an American Flag. I placed all the flags that I had left in the ground. These flags are now authenticated to be displayed at our reunion. **Georgia collected a soil sample. We joined hands and all sang "God Bless America". I put my arm around Georgia and said "You have now walked in the footsteps of your son".**

As we walked back to the bus the gentleman whose property we were on came out and wanted to meet Georgia. As they talked I noticed that **"Nyugen" was holding back. I saw confirmation of something I had suspected at the site for Frank Walden.** He waited until we left and then pulled all the flags from the ground and stuffed them in his bag. Tony came up to **where I was standing and said; "We have to leave, we are not allowed to talk to this man". I was furious, the disrespect shown to our flags coupled with the demand that we not converse with local residents just about put me over the top.** For the first time in two return trips to Vietnam I was **made to feel as "persona non grata", here only at the pleasure of the Vietnamese Government.** I also realized that I was at the mercy of that Government, that I had no rights here. The concepts of Constitutional Freedoms that we take for granted are foreign, not just to us as tourists, but also to the citizens of this country.

We returned to Saigon to pack our things and prepare to leave. As we gathered in the lobby Tony made a presentation to each of us. He had prepared a memento of our time in the Saigon area, bound, personalized, and complete with a map and photographs. We passed these around to have each individual in the group write a note. I did not want to overlook giving the driver and Tony a deserved gratuity. So I pulled them aside and **screwed up one last time. I got the driver and "Nyugen" confused and tipped the wrong guy twenty bucks!** A major faux pas. The guy probably thought that I liked him! I made things right with the driver later. One last bus ride, we stopped for dinner on the way to the Tan Son Nhut Airport, said goodbye to Tony, and boarded our plane to Korea. We had a long lay-over at Incheon so we took a tour of Seoul and sampled Korean food. That evening we were off on the long flight to the States, arriving in Los Angeles at 11:30 AM 28 March 2011. **Mission Accomplished!**

"Since You Went Away"

Your room looks so lonely since you went away,

Everything except you is still there-

Your pictures, books, and things on the table,

Your jacket on the chair.

My Son, how I miss you, since you went away,

The tears so easily start-

Your going has hurt so very much,

There's a burning pain in my heart.

It seems I can hear your steps at night,

Coming up the stairs-

I turn on the light and open the door,

But of course you are not there.

By now you're thousands of miles away,

Off in a foreign land-

And I'm here alone, amid all the things,

That have felt the touch of your hand.

May God watch over you is my prayer,

It's all that I can do-

My days will oh, so lonely be,

Until this war is through.

There are many other Mothers,

Who feel the same as I-

They've said good-bye to precious sons,

And sent them out to die.

Sent them out to die for freedom,

Upon some battle ground-

In mud and filth and crawling things,

Where no comfort can be found.

But every Mother, I am sure,

Before she goes to sleep-

Asks a Great and Mighty God,

Her son to safely keep.

And prays that somehow very soon,

This awful war will cease-

Our sons will all be safely home,

And we can live in peace.

Lou Ceille Lauver, January, 1968

POSTSCRIPT

The trip was very rewarding for all involved. Sue and I look back with the pleasure of meeting great people and becoming a surrogate son and daughter to three more outstanding and wonderful Gold Star Mothers. Luke and Lynette Clark made the comment that; " I went on this trip to help three Gold Star Mothers have some closure after these many years. Actually, it was they who helped me". Dorothy Schafernocker wrote; "Seeing Mike's actual burial site was a very big step in my healing...Bless you and thank you" . Rose Arnold wrote; "...I am returning home a changed person...". Jerry Ashley was a right hand person along with Luke. Jerry demonstrated sensitivity and concern with the Mothers. Georgia Burkes wrote; "...a trip I'll never forget. It meant a lot to me. Seeing & knowing where he was killed put a lot of my fears to rest.". Frances Turley said; "Just can't begin to tell you how much the trip meant to me—after all these years.



Michael E. Schafernocker



Francis Edwin "Duke" Cortor, Jr.



Marion Frank Walden Jr.



David Ronald Burkes, Jr.



Georgia Burkes