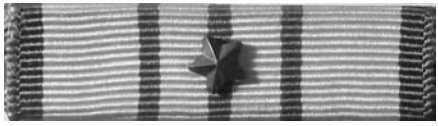
Red Rivers in a Yellow Field



Red Rivers in a Yellow Field

MEMOIRS OF THE VIETNAM ERA

EDITED BY

Robert M. Craig

Red Rivers in a Yellow Field
Memoirs of the Vietnam Era

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EDITOR'S DEDICATION:

To Christopher

AUTHORS' DEDICATION:

To all who served

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INTRODUCTION

THE GENESIS of this volume of recollections of military service during the Vietnam years was a brief email correspondence in 2011 between two classmates of a small high school in St. Louis, both of whom were in the class of 1962. They had served briefly as Navy officers after their college graduation, and then returned to the pursuit of different careers in civilian life. The two had not seen each other for almost half a century, and in 2011 they were about to attend their 50th high school reunion, held jointly with the high school class of 1961. "Why don't we meet with others of our school mates who were in uniform during the 1960s, and share sea stories?" Steve Wells suggested.

Usually 50th high school reunions are times to recall our youth and innocence, share with past friends our lives and careers after school, and simply catch up at a time many of us are nearing retirement. Neither of the two high school friends, who planned the impromptu gathering of former sailors and soldiers, had been "career military," and yet, fifty years later, it was the military experiences of fellow classmates about which they were intent on learning. Steve Wells, son of a Navy captain, had served during the Vietnam era as a demolitions disposal expert, defusing unexploded ordinance. I had been responsible for approximately ten thousand meals per day serving as food service officer on an aircraft carrier, population over 3,000. My ship, USS *Intrepid* (CVS-11), had been sent on three deployments to Yankee Station off Vietnam (I was aboard only at the end of the third deployment), but even then, as I headed for the Tonkin Gulf in December 1968, I was aware that another high school friend and St. Louis neighbor, Peter Van Vleck, was a pilot whose squadron was assigned to *Intrepid* and who, now on the other side of the world, would be there to welcome me aboard the ship, in between his flying sorties over Vietnam.

Looking back, Steve Wells and I realized that crossing paths in this manner was not unusual for our classmates. In the 1960s and early '70s, just months after graduation, friends from Principia[1] (both high school and college) found themselves in Southeast Asian jungles, rice fields, or river deltas rescuing other friends from Principia who were under attack on Swift Boats, or patrolling an Army base near the DMZ, or flying reconnaissance over Laos. Fifty years later, as Steve and I thought about friends from our years at Principia's "upper school" and college, buddies who had donned the uniform to serve their country during the Vietnam era, our conversations ran something like this:

"Did you ever talk to Franke, or Karen Van Vleck's older brother, or Johnnie A. about their time in the military? I'll bet they'll be at the upper school reunion. Franke piloted Swift Boats, of all things — now he returns regularly to Vietnam on business; Peter flew jets — later headed up Adventures Unlimited in Colorado; John was a submariner (like his dad, I think), and then he became a speech writer for Nixon," and on and on the conversation went. And then, thinking beyond the high school reunion, we remembered Principia College friends who had not previously attended the high school but were equally comrades in arms:

"Dick Upshaw flew 'coptors near the DMZ, I heard, and Jim Chamberlin was in 'Nam and then had a career in the state department."

"Remember Roy Kussman and Rick Halladay?" Steve would respond, "They were in the training class behind me, and I later ran into them in the Mekong Delta."

Then Steve and I surmised, "… come to think of it, there seems to have been a lot of us in the late 1960s who kept bumping into each other in Vietnam, or aboard carriers, or on military bases world-wide. Small world, eh?"

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1 Principia Upper School (high school) and Principia College (a liberal arts four-year college) are units of The Principia, a private educational institution for Christian Scientists with units from pre-school/kindergarten through college. The graduation years of authors in this book are indicated by US62 and C66 (meaning upper school/high school class of 1962 and college class of 1966, to give two examples). Authors in this anthology attended either the high school or college, or both, and/or had some other affiliation to the school.

Well, it wasn't such a small world, but it appeared to us that Principia Upper School and Principia College, with as small a population as each campus had in the 1960s (graduating classes of less than 150), produced a notable number of Vietnam era vets. We were a brotherhood of short-term military enlistees and junior officers, who answered our nation's call to duty in the 1960s, before pursuing our intended careers in banking, insurance, education, business, or politics. Steve and I already knew that a significant number of our high school friends (some of whom had gone on to attend Principia College) had joined the Navy, or Marines, or Air Force, or Army soon after graduation. Moreover, we were aware that our classmates' military duties took them all over the world, and repeatedly fellow graduates of the 1960s and early '70s encountered one another in uniform at these distant outposts — in Saigon, or at supply depots and ports in South Vietnam, on Swift Boats in the Mekong Delta, or at homeports or dry docks world-wide. And that was just the Navy, the branch Steve and I had joined! As we contemplated the wider circle, Steve and I concluded that the military record at "Prin," a school with no ROTC program, was not half bad. "Mert was career Air Force; Kiss was career Navy; Brian (our swim coach) joined the Marines and then came back to the college; and Rob Ostenberg enlisted in the Army as a private and rose to the rank of major general, while his brother Chip was a command sergeant major, the highest enlisted rank in the Army." Who knows who may show up at the 2011 high school reunion, we remarked, and who knows what we might learn about guys we knew as teenagers, if we schedule a gathering of vets "to share their stories"?

Our informal email conversations in 2011 encouraged Steve and me to learn more about Principians' role in the military throughout the long Vietnam Era. Many of the boys we personally knew best were in high school as the decade of the 1960s opened and then joined the Principia College classes of 1964, '65, '66, '67, or '68. The latter class of 1968 (two years behind our own) would graduate on the eve of the Tet Offensive and the USS *Pueblo* incident. It was by all accounts a tumultuous time. By 1968 some of us were already in the military,

and we later learned that one of our classmates (academically number one in our class), was in a submerged submarine, the closest Navy ship to the *Pueblo* when the latter ship was captured by the North Koreans. It turned out that the executive officer of the *Pueblo*, Edward R. Murphy, who spent eleven months in captivity in North Korean prisons, was also a Principian.

Among our fellow students, even the most unengaged in contemporary affairs could not avoid an increasing awareness that our school years were becoming a period of personal uncertainty. We were living in a historic period that witnessed the cold war, the space race, civil rights struggles here at home, and an increasingly active war in Southeast Asia. Safe in school, we held our breath during the Cuban missile crisis under President Kennedy, and then we learned (when an art appreciation class was interrupted for the announcement during our sophomore year in college), that John Kennedy had been assassinated. Soon, that very distant country, Vietnam, began to shape our lives personally: as young men, we matured during the presidencies of Lyndon Johnson, who waged the war in Vietnam, and of Richard Nixon, who brought it to an end. High school and college friends, with whom we competed in sports, or acted in plays, or engaged in academic debate, by the later 1960s became grunts and platoon leaders, military intelligence officers, pilots of F-4 Phantoms or Hueys, supply officers, Army artists, line officers on destroyers, admiral's assistants, Swift Boat captains, and chaplains. Barely out of school, our classmates were being sent to Westpac fleets, to Army bases in Germany "to listen to the Russians," to rivers and villages and military outposts in "'Nam," and to military bases and training facilities state-side. Some had to check the atlas to recall where Cambodia or Laos or "Phu Bai near Hue" were located, but soon, for some, the Cà Mau Peninsula became as familiar and horrible as Corregidor or Guadalcanal had been for our fathers.

Of course, there were soldiers and sailors from other Principia classes (earlier and later than Steve's and my high school class of 1962 or college class of 1966), as well as marines and air force personnel and national guardsmen who wore the uniform and served in Europe

or elsewhere during these years. Not everyone saw combat, but what we all had in common extended beyond our Principia education as history or art majors, as star athletes, or as leaders of student government. Life was no longer academic and isolated. From diploma to enlistment was a reality check big time, and our classmates, indeed our generation, embraced the full range of experiences in the military services, wherever duty took us, and whatever we were asked to do for Uncle Sam. It was now a half century later and class reunion time, but on that evening in 2011, the Principia alums were not talking about their 40-year careers since school as businessmen or educators, nor recalling former high school sweethearts, nor sharing current hopes for anticipated cruises or other pleasure travel now that most of us were close to retirement or already retired. That night at our high school reunion, in addition to being alumni, we were vets.

I majored in history in college — Steve in biology — and our real careers ultimately followed those interests. But we were about to find out about episodes that disrupted our lives during the late 1960s, about whether or not our brief military experiences were much different from others among our high school buddies or college friends of a half century ago. The first question was, "Where had the military sent us?" I had seen those posters about "Join the Navy and See the World," and I have to admit I already had a head start as a world traveler, thanks to Principia. After graduation from college I joined a "Principia Abroad" history and art study tour to Athens and Rome, Florence and Milan, Paris and London. Later, after the Navy, and not too many years into my career as a university professor, I went to China, I spent seven months living in France, and I married a lady from England where I return periodically to visit my new English relatives and to look at architecture. But at that high school reunion in 2011, I found myself talking very little about any of that, but, instead, about Cubi Point and Subic Bay in the Philippines, where I first arrived in Southeast Asia in December 1968. I learned that others gathered that night had never been to China or France — even England "where they spoke the language" — but that *many* of us knew about Subic Bay. And when one of us started to tell a tale about Olongapo City, another

vet would interrupt and say, "Ah yes, Olongapo City, I remember the night we crossed the bridge just outside the base…" and off we'd go recounting another "sea story."

Steve was right; we had had experiences in common. Indeed, as an historian, I could conclude that the collective experiences of the graduates of our small liberal arts high school and college in the Midwest was a microcosm making up a small slice of the larger cultural experience of all of America, during what has been called the Vietnam era. We were the children of the "greatest generation," and as we looked back to our military years in the 1960s and early '70s, we discovered a common and sobering theme regarding our individual responses to our country's call to duty. Principians (our fellow alums) appear to have answered that call to service in large numbers. Moreover, no matter what individual path we Principians took in the military, we all sought to ensure, as John McCain has written in his family memoir entitled *Faith Of My Fathers*, that our actions would meet with the approval of our fathers. We were the sons and grandsons, nephews and cousins of the generation that had been victorious in World War II, and we could do no less.

On the other hand, there were conflicting views, during the Vietnam era, about what constitutes patriotism, duty, loyalty, and honor. For some vets, who returned to the states to less than warm reception from crowds of protestors and anti-war activists, there was added conflict at home and returning Vietnam vets met with domestic disapproval, condemned for even being in the military in the 1960s, as though service itself was a disservice. To be sure, even before they signed up, some young men faced dilemmas of conscience, and this may have been especially acute in a high school and college community guided by a firm moral compass. Sara Barnacle's essay about her husband Tom Gallant, entitled "War-Averse Sailor," touches on a universal theme of our generation, indeed, any generation asked to go to war.

In the 1960s, news casts described that some of our age-group were looking for ways to avoid the draft, and a familiar phrase entered anew into the lexicon of the times: conscientious objection. Anti-war

activists suggested to our generation, "Just burn your draft card and disappear — move to Canada — no one will know." Thus, as our student careers at Principia drew to a close, the issue of military service in this, the age of Vietnam, became highly personal. Very few of our generation realized that at the very moment we were weighing our personal decisions about enlisting, a Navy pilot was in a Hanoi prison facing daily decisions about honor and loyalty under far more trying circumstances. "Sign a confession," his captors encouraged in between episodes of torture; "Put your name below a statement criticizing the war and disavow the dishonorable cause that you Americans have been asked to serve," demanded the captors who would beat him again and again when he refused. "No one will know," the Viet Cong interrogators repeated, pressuring the captured pilot to sign. That pilot, now Senator John McCain, has written "… the men I had the honor of serving with always had the same response: *I will know, I will know."*[2]

Before such heroism was even known in the West, but nonetheless sustained by a parallel commitment to honor and character inherited from the greatest generation, the children of that generation, including Principians, did not run to Canada but enlisted; they volunteered for hazardous duty, entered combat zones, and lived the standard of service and good character that their alma mater considered to be central to its educational mission. John McCain, although he had no association with Principia, understood such ideals and principles, and later wrote that "character is destiny." "No one will know," his Hanoi tormentors had promised. "I will know, I will know," McCain repeated, as he experienced daily challenges in his fight to retain the faith of his fathers. Inspired by each other's moral strength, fellow downed pilots, individually and by the dozens, faced sometimes even more severe beatings and torture than McCain in order to persuade them to sign confessions because "no one will know," but they responded likewise: "I will know; I will know." McCain reminds us that this inner thought "is good character." Thirty-five years later, at the end of his book, *Character is Destiny*, the elder statesman McCain

2 John McCain with Mark Salter, *Faith of My Fathers: A Family Memoir* (New York: Random House, 1999), p. 255.

addressed his younger readers of today's generation saying, "I hope it is your destiny, your choice, your achievement, to hear the voice in your own heart, when you face hard decisions in your life, to hear it said to you, again and again, until it drowns out every other thought: *I will know, I will know, I will know.*"[3]

Steve Wells and I understood that the Principians who served in uniform, no matter where or under what circumstances, had shared that sense of duty and good character embodied in the phase, "I will know." As Principians, whose education focused on character, we all knew about the "still small voice." The simple decision, to serve or not, pales in the face of what we now know about imprisoned pilots like McCain or about the capture, incarceration, and sufferings of the officers and crew of the USS *Pueblo*. But for some young men, uncertain of the potential consequences of being in the military, the very enlistment and commitment to an unknown fate was itself an act of courage. In each case, the decision was a highly personal one, and this volume records individual experiences that resulted, without commenting on the rightness or unpopularity of the war itself or the way it was conducted by military or civilian leaders.

What does emerge, for even the general reader unfamiliar with the school that happened to educate this group of military servicemen, is that the collective experiences of Principians in the military, if not entirely typical, is in a large part a reflection of the American experience. Vietnam era vets are part of a national brotherhood and embrace an *esprit de corps* perhaps impossible to convey in words, although Peter Stone and others offer us insight within these pages.

So, Steve Wells's reunion gathering in 2011 opened the door to a wider collection of memoirs and recollections contained herein. Before we left our high school reunion, Steve and I committed to each other that we would try to document and publish, in book form, a representative sample of the personal recollections of Principians in uniform, covering roughly the years from 1960 to the Fall of Saigon

3 John McCain with Mark Salter, *Character is Destiny: Inspiring Stories Every Young Person Should Know and Every Adult Should Remember* (New York: Random House, 2005), p. 300.

in 1975. I would serve as editor, and Steve (whose idea to share "sea stories" it was in the first place) would join a small editorial advisory committee. We would put out a limited call through our alumni network and ask fellow vets to respond. We had no idea what we'd get, but we hoped to have a book in hand by the date of the 50th *college* reunion of some of our authors. This publication finally appears fifty years after the Tet Offensive.

The heading for Part I, "Children of the Greatest Generation," brings focus to our generation's inspiration from our fathers, men who journalist Tom Brokaw called the "greatest generation," a now commonly accepted reference to the military of the World War II era. Based on interviews and information that he collected from this "greatest generation," Brokaw authored a series of essays about World War II vets both well known and unknown. Our compilation differs: Steve and I asked the military personnel of the next generation to write their own stories, to recount events as "first hand" recollections of the experiences they lived. The children of the greatest generation are those individuals who served their country throughout the Vietnam Era. We sought, in this small sample, to include the experiences not just of those who served in combat or even only those men who went to Vietnam, but to sample the whole generation who wore the uniform, serving in any military duty assignment anywhere during the period. What notably characterizes the sample, is that each author attended the same school.

What follows below are the stories of over thirty authors, presented as essays, poems, short stories, and short memoirs. My opening essay, "The Wall," offers a dedication to our high school (1962) and college (1966) classmate John Sweet, who died in Vietnam following the crash of his helicopter, and to others who lost their lives as a result of their military service. The memoirs in the main body of the book are organized in seven parts, the first inspired by the theme of our fathers passing the baton to our generation. The relationship to the military experience of World War II is implicit in my poem about D-Day entitled "When I was New and Only Eight Days Old," a poem written on June 6, 1994, the 50th anniversary of the Normandy

invasion. The connection to our generation's fathers is made explicit in Dave Nysewander's essay, "Full Circle," and Barrie L. Cooper's reminiscence. In the "In country Vietnam" section of this volume, it is perhaps Allen Orcutt who best captures the spirit and sense of duty embraced by many of this second generation, in his quoting of the inscription, *Nulla Quiat Alibi*, "No Rest Elsewhere." "There would be no rest elsewhere for me," Orcutt writes, "but in doing my duty…" The several authors contributing to Part I of this volume, in their individual ways, speak to the pride and sense of duty implicit in their service in the military and in their continuation of the spirit of "the greatest generation," finding honor in walking in the footsteps of their fathers.

Members of Rackham Court West, Principia College, singing house song, "Um Yah." Left to right: Jim Johnson, Bill Franke (USN), Nelson Smelker (National Guard), Mike Workman, Bill Franks, Steve Metcalf (Air Force), Jay Anderson, Bill Bollinger, Marv Harris (career Air Force). Photo: *Principia Sheaf,* 1964, courtesy The Principia

Another classmate, Bill Franke, graduating a month behind me at the Navy's Officer Candidate School [OCS] in Newport, told me at

my commissioning that he intended to volunteer to serve as a Swift Boat officer in the rivers of Vietnam. "Are you crazy?" was not an unexpected response. "That's about as dangerous as it gets," I reminded him, but Franke was determined to serve. Almost thirty years later, his alma mater's alumni magazine, *Principia Purpose*, published an account of a rescue effort involving Franke's Swift Boat and two escort boats under attack in the Mekong Delta, a story reprinted here. The account became one of the inspirations for this book, telling the first of many stories of Principians in the military, many with different jobs to do, unexpectedly encountering other Principians in uniform. Franke's rescue may have been one of the most dramatic, but collectively, as Rod Carlson and Mike Kneeland suggest, the young men of this second generation comprise a brotherhood of a kind that most of us could not have imagined a few years earlier when we were studying in the more isolated world of a bucolic Principia College campus at Elsah, Illinois, overlooking the Mississippi River, or singing rousing fraternity house songs on a late weekend night.

Parts II and III recount experiences in "officers' boot camp" [OCS], assignments in Europe or state-side, and activities at non-combatant posts. "In Country Cambodia" and "In Country Vietnam" announce the themes of Part IV and V, with journalist Elizabeth Pond's news articles recounting her capture by the Khmer Rouge and Steve Heubeck's essay "Beetle Bailey Isn't Funny Anymore" providing another reminder that Principia's vets' active duty comprised more than just an inconvenient, three-year disruption in our lives. "In country" essays are from Army, Navy, Marine Corps, and National Guard authors, both enlisted and officers, and cover episodes and military assignments both ordinary and hazardous. Some of our authors returned home with Purple Hearts, various commendation medals, and, in the case of Dick Upshaw, as many as thirty-seven air medals with combat V following thirteen months in combat in Vietnam. Part VI "At Sea" continues with accounts of service on ships written by carrier officers, carrier squadron pilots, submariners, and others. The concluding Part VII draws the memoirs to a close, suggesting that memory is "still on patrol," and referencing something of the afterlife of the Vietnam era.

My own ship, USS *Intrepid* CVS-11, as does USS *Ranger* CVA-61, appears more than once in these pages; Principians were aboard these carriers each in different capacities over the years. Dubbed "the oldest and the best," *Intrepid* is an *Essex*-class carrier whose history during World War II included surviving several strikes by *kamikaze* planes; *Intrepid*'s role as a recovery ship included retrieving returning space capsules during the space race, and its final deployment to Vietnam, the third of three, is recorded in these pages. *Intrepid* was decommissioned in the 1970s, but the ship was soon resurrected from moth balls and today provides a venue of military history in New York as the *Intrepid* Sea, Air, and Space Museum. It is now a place for us to revisit the storied history of the carrier, including exhibits about the sailor's life aboard *Intrepid* during the 1960s, the latter based in part on a scrap book I kept and shared with curators allowing the ship museum to reconstruct some of the mess decks I had remodeled in the late 1960s when I was aboard as food service officer. My wife notes that she had to go to the New York museum, push the button on a kiosk showing my BUPERS mugshot in uniform from 1968, in order to find out what her husband did in the Navy. She can now read in these pages about my role as "interior decorator for a warship." This "sea story," as well as other more light-hearted accounts narrated in these pages, seeks to depict the other side of military service in the Vietnam era.

A few classmates with whom I corresponded about this book declined to participate. They served during the Vietnam era, but however raw their memories remain, however sensitive or classified their work was, and for whatever personal reasons, they declined, and we respect their wishes and are reminded by them that the era was fraught with issues of war that were both universal and personal. Those absent from these pages remind us of the full picture, and in prefacing the collection of essays with this editorial foreword, I am encouraged to paint with a wider brush and put these essays in a larger context.

As noted above, the 1960s and early '70s was a controversial time, with anti-war demonstrations, civil rights controversies, and domestic unrest often at odds with patriotic attitudes of loyalty, duty, and service held by those in uniform. During the 1960s, while still in high school or college, some of us were folk singers, and as we listened to

popular tunes that we liked melodically, and as we admired guitar work and harmonies behind the lyrics, it was sometimes less apparent to us that Pete Seeger and Peter Paul and Mary were actually singing protest songs. We might recall that the anti-war anthem, "Blowin' in the Wind," was written by Bob Dylan in 1962 and made even more famous by Peter Paul and Mary in 1963, the years that Franke, Orcutt, Nysewander, and many other authors of this volume entered college. At the time these men graduated and joined the military, a counter culture was widespread, and domestic turmoil was marked by repeated crises. Martin Luther King was assassinated while Franke and I were at our first Navy assignment at Officers Candidate School in Newport, and two months later, while I mustered for morning reports at the Supply Corps School in Georgia, it was announced that Robert Kennedy had been killed in Los Angeles. As we were then wearing the uniform of our country, many of us wondered whether we would have an immediate change of duty, assigned to respond to domestic unrest and violence, not to action in a foreign war. The following year, in 1969, while Principians and others were in the Mekong Delta, or on a fire base near the DMZ, or stationed near the border of Laos, John Lennon of the Beetles recorded a hit single, "Give Peace a Chance." And from August 15th to 18th of that year, ten days after our Principia classmate, First Lieutenant John Sweet, was killed in Khanh Hoa province, an event took place in a muddy field in upstate New York: "An Aquarian Exposition: Three Days of Peace and Music," a venue known ever since as simply "Woodstock."

Such contrasts describe two worlds in the late 1960s, and those who respectively encountered each, clearly held differing views about Vietnam. Rod Carlson, Mike Kneeland, and Steve Wells describe one of those worlds as a remarkable coincidence of Principians unexpectedly meeting in foreign places, classmates who answered the nation's call and who, in so doing, formed a special brotherhood lasting to this day. However, few if any of us heard then a phrase that we overhear more frequently today, whenever we encounter active military personnel in airports or near Army or Navy bases: that unsolicited remark from a stranger, "Thank you for your service." This salutation

did not characterize many soldiers' and sailors' and pilots' receptions home as Vietnam veterans. For those mates not found within these pages, as well as to the authors here represented, we say now, if we failed to say then, and in all sincerity, "Thank you for your service."

Robert M. Craig, May 2015
Ocean City, Maryland

Dedication: the Wall

ROBERT M. CRAIG

THE DAY WAS WARM, but not hot, certainly not one of those sweltering humid summer days for which Washington is famous. I was doing what I loved to do, touring old buildings, photographing every angle and picturesque view of the city's architecture, famous and not, thinking that some day, for some class or academic conference paper, this new photograph will be indispensable to my job as a teacher of architectural history. The cloudless blue sky and sharp shadow lines cast against white marble were especially striking that day. Washington is a city of monuments and columns, classical in the tradition of ancient Greece and Rome. Today's sky and clarity of bright white architectural forms appeared almost to reach the levels of Mikonos or Santorini; it was a splendid Kodachrome day.

I was near the west end of the reflecting pool and intent on seeing the Vietnam Memorial — The Wall, it was called, and a controversial monument because it was black in a city of white. Maya Ying Lin had been an architecture student at Yale, and rumor had it that she got a "B" for the project that developed into the Vietnam Memorial. I had never been to The Wall before, and I thought, dismissively, "there's probably not much to it — not up to the standards of Robert Mills or Henry Bacon,[4] but what memorial designs these days were as noble as theirs? Admirers of classicism and traditionalist writers had called The Wall, with a critical grumble, regrettably modernist and abstract, fabricated of polished black granite from Bangalore, India, when half of Washington shone with Georgia white marble or Indiana limestone. How inappropriate the black wall was, the critics had argued, a misguided memorial to a misguided war. After a quick visit, I could check it off my list, and maybe still have time for another viewing of

4 Robert Mills was the architect of the Washington Monument, and Henry Bacon designed the Lincoln Memorial.

Daniel Chester French's seated Lincoln nearby. Now *that*'s a monument! — the famed president, who presided during a different war, memorialized inside a glorious temple on the hill. But first, the Wall.

I had walked a fair distance from the central mall and across an open lawn, when I glimpsed for the first time the dark slab slicing across the landscape, low at one end, and from my vantage point, hidden by trees at the other. I wondered if a knife or bayonet metaphor was intended. But it was starting to get hot, so, before visiting The Wall, I wandered off to seek some shade in a copse of trees. Within minutes, I happened upon a realistic bronze casting of three, over-life-sized soldiers,[5] their bodies profuse with sweat from the jungle heat, one bearing an M-60 machine gun across his shoulders, canteen on his hip, belts of ammunition, and a broad-brimmed hat; the second figure, an African-American; and the middle infantryman, a Marine with holstered pistol on his hip, wearing body-armor vest and poised with his body weight shifted to his left leg in a distinctly male stance that I had seen so often before. Each man was alert — no, rather, tense — hesitating at mid-stride with strong arms whose pronounced veins seemed to pop out in ridges as rugged as the wrinkles on the uniforms. Energy flowed over biceps and forearms down to monumental hands, embodying in these youth the potential power that Michelangelo had brought to his figures centuries ago. There was a toughness and humanity expressed in each soldier. They appeared to have just returned from a mission, bodies were slightly turned, and a frown on the forehead of the middle soldier seemed to draw you into his eyes. What was he looking at? What had they all three momentarily paused to observe, as they emerged from the jungle?

And then I saw The Wall. The soldiers, in fact, were looking at The Wall, and their momentary pause was to lend respect to their fallen comrades. The eyes of the central figure, the Marine, were instructing me to look to the northwest, to move to The Wall, much

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5 "Three Servicemen," sometimes known as "Three Fighting Men" or "Three Infantrymen" is a larger than life-size sculptural group by Washington sculptor Frederick Hart, unveiled in November, 1984. The piece was cast by Joel Meisner and Company Foundry.

as the Marine might, in silence, and only with his eyes, instruct his platoon to head out.

At first The Wall appeared ordinary—dark, and from this distance somewhat bland. Sunlight was highlighting certain sections, and the spotlighting almost immediately displaced the infantrymen as the object of my attention. Had the abstraction of The Wall won over the unmitigated realism of the infantrymen? Which one of these was the real Vietnam monument? The infantrymen were so tangible, I could almost smell the jungle odors. The GI tropical trousers, the GI towel across the shoulders of the African American soldier, the tropical "Boonie" hat—all these were familiar to in-country Marines and combat troops, and conveyed that guerilla warfare, like these soldiers, was raw, virile, and male. But the soldiers themselves had paused with a certain solemnity to look across the opening to their brothers in arms—sailors, pilots, Marines, and Army infantrymen—who had come home, at least in name, to this place.

I found myself drawn to The Wall, walking slowly to its west end. It was a magnet like no other monument I had experienced, pulling me forward on a personal journey along its length. Thousands of inscriptions came into view, one of which, for every visitor here, had respectively drawn thousands of others like me, in search of a familiar name. The Wall was abstract, and yet each name recorded fully articulated narratives, like the one in which I was about to play a part, just as I had played a small part in the Vietnam war. This memorial was not about the black granite, or the surface sheen, or the formal relationship of architecture or sculpture to the landscape, the latter so prominent in Maya Lin's intentions. It was all about the names.

I felt totally unworthy even to be here. Yet, I *was* a Vietnam veteran, and only then did I begin to understand, in part, what that designation means, at least what it means to me. It was an appellation I had rarely considered relevant to me, because such an honor belonged to the heroes. But here I was, with scores of other Washington tourists, visiting one of the city's many monuments, but like some of them, I had come here as a Vietnam veteran. As a consequence, I was very much a part of this place, more so than I knew.

When I got to the west end of The Wall, I became aware of others around me, and I almost laughed out loud, realizing that neither I, nor they, appeared properly dressed for this honorific place. Some wore army-navy surplus camouflage, and I wondered if any of them were ex-military at all. Others sported baggy shorts and tee shirts, baseball caps and sleeveless undershirts——the summer "dress uniform of the day" of "the ugly American" as sculptor George Segal has so humorously depicted "sartorially challenged" American tourists. What *was* the preferred dress code for Everyman? It seemed not to matter. Everything about this crowd, and this place, was different from what I expected. It was a public park, but no one was slouching, brazen, rude, or loud. There was no boom box or skate board, pan handling or fowl language, no flirting teenager or oblivious lout bumping into strangers. It was wholly a place of respect.

And then I noticed the hush, the total silence. Even the city street traffic seemed distant. Except for the rustle of leaves as limb brushed against limb in the near-by wood, all was silent. The three infantrymen were frozen in time. The path to The Wall beckoned as though inviting one to join a funereal march, and if anyone spoke, it was in a whisper, as though we were in some ancient *temenos*. The Wall itself was a landmark, marking the land as a sanctuary and holy ground.

John Sweet is here somewhere, I remembered. He was a high school classmate from Louisville, Kentucky, and later a Buck House brother studying at the college during the mid 1960s when I was in Rackham West.[6] Because Principia College was so small—a little over 500 students when John and I attended—everyone there knew everyone else. So I knew John, although not very well. He signed his contemplative picture in my high school yearbook, and his college yearbook picture shows him with a broad smile on his face, looking out the window of a convertible automobile, eyes embracing you as a friend, and happy as a clam. He died in Khanh Hoa province in coastal south-central Vietnam on August 5, 1969, three years after he graduated from Principia College. I wanted to find his name here on The Wall.

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6 Lillian Brewer Buck House and Rackham Court West were two men's residence halls at Principia College, in many ways comparable to college fraternities.

At first I chastised myself, wondering if this was mere curiosity, but I began to think of nothing else, here in this place, and no one else but John Sweet, and the life he might have had. I had no flowers or tokens to leave here, but John was here, and I guess I just wanted to say good bye.

I looked him up in the directory of names to determine on which panel his name was inscribed, and I started walking along The Wall. The unexpected length of the polished black granite invoked a spirit and solemn gait akin to a religious pilgrimage. Many had come great distances to this sacred destination, a site that was their personal Santiago de Compostela.[7] For all these Vietnam era pilgrims, the sacred journey ended not at the realistic sculpture of three infantrymen, but at the black granite wall. Like hundreds before them, many that day had brought letters, personal keepsakes, and tokens of remembrance, and these oblations lined the base of the wall. There was no graffiti nor any evidence of tampering with the personal items that family members of servicemen had left here. In all, there was a level of respect that not even Maya Lin could have anticipated. And the silence was palpable. Only the shuffling of feet, occasional whispers, and muffled sobs could be heard as fellow veterans, brothers, fathers, and sons were remembered.[8]

I had come here alone, and I approached John's panel with a macho attitude that the quiet weeping I could hear further along the path, and other emotional reactions were somehow "them," and I was different, in control, and besides, I hardly knew the guy. I checked my scrap of paper again for the panel number, which was still several panels away, and I started paying more attention to the roses, and letters, and flags, and teddy bears—an endless row of offerings, extending along the base of the granite, each momento

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7 The reference is to the shrine of St. James in Santiago de Compostela, Spain, the goal of medieval pilgrimage routes extending from Paris, Vézelay, and other French Romanesque sites, southward and across the Pyrénées, then westward across northern Spain to Santiago.

8 There are eight women on the wall, seven Army nurses and one Air Force nurse. 7,484 American women served in the Vietnam War, according to the memorial's website.

leaning against the wall below a soldier's or sailor's, or airmen's, or marine's name. There were so many names.[9] The panels were taller in the center of The Wall, which meant even more names displayed, and each was somebody's son or father or boy friend or husband. I continued my slow gait, looking at the endless rows of names, but still not finding his. John was, indeed, a casualty of the war, but, because of The Wall, he would not be anonymous. I suddenly realized that I didn't even know how John was killed. What does it matter *how* he died, I told myself, he was here among heroes, killed I learned later when the helicopter he was piloting crashed. Some here were still MIA, some (God forbid) had been killed by friendly fire, some died in accidents, but the inscriptions seemed endless. There were so many names, recording that so many had died. Some names have rightfully been added to The Wall many years after the end of the war, recorded here too, because their death occurred after the war but was attributed to war injuries or effects of Agent Orange or other war causes. I still couldn't find John's name.

And then, there it was: panel 20 west, row 99: John H. Sweet. I stared at the name carved in gray against the black polished surround, and all the other names disappeared. I was suddenly overcome with grief. My arms felt a chill, I wanted to take a deep breath but could not, my shoulders and legs tensed, and I felt tears welling up in my eyes, uncontrollably. I sobbed, and then I cried openly, as I reached out to touch the name. And I just stood there alone, not caring who was around me, or who heard me, or who thought this wasn't manly, and the incised letters of John's name started to blur through tears I could not control. *I hardly knew the guy*, I heard myself thinking, as though my rational side was asking my emotional side what was going on. But it made no difference. I felt a loss that seemed to embody the losses recorded on the entire wall. John was a fellow Principian; he had gone to Vietnam; and he had not come home. I felt my shoulders

9 As of Memorial Day, 2017, there are 58,318 names listed on the Memorial, including approximately 1,200 missing in action (MIAs), prisoners of war (POWs), and others.

pulsating as I wept. Someone handed me a tissue, and then disappeared, leaving me, again, alone.

I don't know how long I stood there in front of John's name. But I started to remember what I had read about The Wall before coming here — the magazine articles and the critiques in architectural journals that spoke of the black memorial, and the black war, and the black cause, and I thought, almost out loud, *They just don't get it, do they?*

Vietnam Memorial "The Wall," John H. Sweet inscription.
Photo by Robert M. Craig

When I finally regained my composure, a lady was standing next to me, and ever so slowly turned to me and said, "Which one did you know?"

"John Sweet," I said, pointing. "We were in high school and college together."

"I'm sorry," she said.

John Sweet was my connection to a realization that this might have happened to me, and I started to hate myself for wondering whether that is why I had cried. But John's name on The Wall was not only about sacrifice, about duty, and ultimately about loss. As the focus of my pilgrimage, John had given me part of himself. John's gift to me that day was a bond sealed by a moment of remembrance — remembering

a yearbook picture and a broad smile, a shared moment between two college kids whose lives crossed at one of life's happiest times, and then crossed again here, at one of its saddest moments. Since those halcyon days at college, John and I, and so many others, had graduated into a world that called us all into war. What I learned at The Wall was that even though I didn't know him well, that kid in the Austin Healey 3000 and I are both Vietnam vets, part of a brotherhood that brought challenges to us when we were far too young to contemplate the possibilities. Oh, yes, we were innocent, and the Vietnam War carried some of our fellow vets "to hell and back,"[10] as Audie Murphy described his World War II experience. But for John, and so many others here, there was no return.

At The Wall, I stared at the inscribed "John H. Sweet" now standing out again in focus against the black granite background. I then stepped back to see the full panel, and then looked right and left to see the long range of other panels and the countless names. These thousands of names, in quiet dignity, proclaim a national sacrifice at a scale not easy to comprehend; the seemingly endless wall both approximated and personalized our national loss. All our comrades who died, or who are still missing in action, are listed here, and First Lieutenant John Sweet is here. I suddenly thought how relatively inconsequential my own military role had been during those same years, how short in duration my time off the Vietnam coast had been, where I had been a supply officer aboard *Intrepid*, the aircraft carrier which, ever since, I have considered "my ship." However dangerous work aboard an aircraft carrier really was, my war experience paled by comparison to what in-country infantrymen had gone through, or what skippers of river patrol boats experienced, or what pilots engaged in night sorties lived through, or what ordinance disposal teams endured. Some of these men recount their experiences in this volume.

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10 "To Hell and Back" was the title of a 1955 Cinemascope [Universal-International] film, starring Medal of Honor recipient Audie Murphy who played himself, depicting Murphy's war experiences in World War II, as detailed in Murphy's autobiography, also entitled *To Hell and Back*. (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1949).

John Sweet was in the Air Force, as were some others from his and my college class. I joined the Navy. By joining the military, we all knew that our civilian lives were being put on hold for two, three, or more years. Throughout the country, soldiers, sailors, air men, and marines did the same thing by the hundreds of thousands, but from a small school in Elsah, Illinois, a remarkably high percentage of college men had volunteered, and each did their fair share. No one in my acquaintance had given more to his country than John Sweet, and his name on the Vietnam Memorial Wall conveyed to me that day as powerful and personal a message of heroism, as any monument in this city of monuments. That I share John's status as a military man who served in Vietnam is an honor, and for what John and these other heroic souls on The Wall did, in the mere act of serving, I am very proud.

John Sweet, college yearbook picture, *The Sheaf* 1966. Photo courtesy The Principia

I found a scrap of paper and a pencil, and I slowly raised them to the level of his inscription. I carefully started to rub, and the name John H. Sweet appeared outlined in charcoal gray. John made the wall personal. I stuffed the rubbing into my pocket and stepped back. Then, forgetting that I was not in uniform, I stood at attention, raised my arm, and I saluted John Sweet.

As I started to leave the Wall, I saw a woman with two young children in hand, a little boy and his slightly older sister, walking toward a nearby panel.

"Where's Daddy?" the little boy asked in a tone both serious and childlike.

"He's just down here," his mother said, and her voice appeared to break just slightly.

"No, I mean, where's Daddy really."

The woman stopped as both children looked up at her awaiting their mother's response. She put her arm around her daughter's shoulder, almost needing the child's support as she faltered, and then turned to face her innocent son. She slowly placed her other hand over her heart, and the woman said, "He's here, my darling. He's right here with us, because we remember."

ROBERT M. CRAIG is what is sometimes called a lifer — not in the Navy but at Principia. He began school in Principia's kindergarten and continued his education at Principia through the Lower, Middle, and Upper Schools and on to Principia College where he graduated in 1966 with a double-major degree in History and Education. His father taught Latin and mathematics at Principia's Upper School (high school) and was Captain of the Ocean City [Maryland] Beach Patrol throughout his career. The younger Craig earned a master's degree at University of Illinois, Champaign-Urbana, in 1967, breaking away from graduate school in the fall of 1967 to attend Principia Abroad in Europe. He taught history briefly at Meramec Junior College in St. Louis in the fall of 1967 before beginning officer's training at the Navy's Officer Candidate School, Newport, Rhode Island, in January, 1968. In preparation for his work as a supply officer, Craig attended the Navy's Supply Corps School in Athens, Georgia, and upon graduation was assigned to USS *Intrepid* (CVS-11), then operating off the coast of Vietnam. After discharge from the Navy Craig earned a PhD (1973) in the history of architecture and urban development from Cornell University, the first doctorate awarded an architectural historian in this new field of study. Hired immediately by Georgia Tech, Craig remained at the Atlanta university for thirty-eight years, retiring in 2011, although he continues to advise doctoral students as Professor Emeritus.

Craig is the author of three books and co-author of three others. Considered a founder of SESAH (the Southeastern Chapter, Society of Architectural Historians), Craig also served on the board of directors of the parent national society (SAH) for fourteen years, ten years as secretary of the society. Active throughout his career in the Southeastern College Art Conference, Craig edited the society's scholarly art journal [*SECAC Review*] for five years during the 1980s. He has also served as President and later Treasurer of SESAH, President and later Treasurer of the interdisciplinary Nineteenth Century Studies Association (NCSA), and President of the Southeastern Society for Eighteenth Century

Studies where he was instrumental in founding the academic journal, *New Perspectives on the Eighteenth Century.* Considered a specialist more on the early twentieth century, Craig is best known for his books on architects Bernard Maybeck, John Portman, and Atlanta architect Francis Palmer Smith, as well as his book on Art Deco Atlanta. He has presented more than 160 academic papers throughout the country, lectured at venues from China, Australia, Canada, France, and throughout the United States, and recently served as architecture editor for Oxford University Press's five-volume *Dictionary of American Art*. Craig has recently completed work on the Georgia entries for *Archipedia,* an online encyclopedia of American architecture, and is working on *The Buildings of Atlanta* and *The Buildings Georgia*, all three projects for SAH. He is editor of the current collection*, Red Rivers in a Yellow Field: Memoirs of the Vietnam Era.*

Like many of the authors represented in this collection, Craig's military career involved a six-year commitment during the Vietnam era including three years active duty. I*ntrepid* was just completing its third deployment to Vietnam when Craig reported aboard to serve as disbursing officer, one of several supply corps positions aboard the carrier. Six months later, Craig was transferred to become Food Service Officer, and among his accomplishments in this area was his remodeling of the ship's mess decks and lounge spaces for enlisted crew; some of these features of the ship's interior, have been reinstated by curators of the *Intrepid* Sea, Air, and Space Museum (founded 1982) in New York, who are preserving the carrier and have consulted with Craig in their effort to document "the sailor's life" aboard ship in the 1960s. While Craig was Food Service Officer, *Intrepid* was recognized in the Ney Award competition as the best food service operation among all Navy large ships afloat, world-wide, and *Intrepid* took third place in the awards program among all Navy food operations (large and small ships afloat, as well as Navy shore facilities). Craig's wife, Carole, a Brit, remains "gobsmacked" declaring "he can hardly boil an egg."

After Vietnam*, Intrepid* spent time in the Philadelphia dry docks, engaged in exercises in the Caribbean, trained pilots in the Gulf to execute carrier launches and landings, and even sailed up the Mississippi River delta to New Orleans for Mardi Gras. Soon after Craig's discharge in 1970, *Intrepid* was decommissioned and temporarily put in moth balls, but the "Mighty I" was resurrected and moved to New York where visitors today can go to Pier 86 W 46th St. and 12th Ave. to tour the *Essex*-class aircraft carrier, as well as to see Craig's remodeled and now partially reinstated mess decks.

"Three Servicemen," Frederick Hart, 1984, Vietnam Memorial, Washington, DC. Photo by Robert M. Craig

PART I:
Children of the Greatest Generation

Help in the Line of Duty

WILLIAM E. FRANKE & STEVE SANDBERG

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On September 5, 1969, Lt. (jg.) Bill Franke (US'62, C'66) was thinking about his college days, and his friendships at Principia as he was about to take his Swift Boat out to sea and up the coast of Vietnam to a U.S. Navy repair facility in Cam Ranh Bay for overhaul.

Between the battering sea and enemy fire, Bill's boat was beat up, and he wondered if it could last the three-day trip.

Since he was in an area controlled by North Vietnamese and Viet Cong military forces, he would need two boats to accompany him as escorts for safe passage from the river to the ocean.

As his boat approached the mouth of the river, Bill and his crew entered an ambush. One of the two escort boats became disabled and had to be pulled out of the ambush. Six crew members suffered wounds that were life threatening.

Being on open water, Bill requested Sea Wolf helicopter assistance to lift those most in need to safety and care. To permit the helicopters to carry the additional load, Bill hand-signaled the gunner's mates in the helicopter to jettison their munitions and everything else of any weight into the river.

"Loading these men into a helicopter over the water was difficult," remembers Bill, "not only because of our exposed position, but because the blades of the copter barely cleared our radar and only cleared our whip antennas when the antennas were held back.

"There was no more than a 12-inch clearance — not very much with a bouncing boat and a helicopter being buffered by the wind and updrafts caused by the blades. It took tremendous skill on the part of the pilot," he recalled as if it were yesterday.

Standing on the munitions bunker after lifting the last of the men into one of the helicopters, Bill looked at the pilot to signal for him to get going. The pilot was intensely engaged in keeping the helicopter close to Bill without being swept into the boat or crew.

"The skids of his copter occasionally brushed my legs," Bill added. It was an incredibly skilled and heroic effort on his part. He had to do it perfectly."

Bill Franke college yearbook picture, The Sheaf, 1966.
Photo courtesy The Principia

As Bill focused on the pilot's face, he had a strong feeling that he knew him. "My recollections of his concentration," he says, "his selfless act of patriotism and his concern for these sailors remains to this day very emotional for me. There were so many dramatic images of that series of events. The one that remains crystal clear in my mind, though, was the pilot's calming influence upon me."

"The noise of his engines was deafening. The up-blast off the water was overpowering. The anguish of the wounded and stress of the circumstances were huge. But that pilot at that moment provided me with the resolve and the strength to complete what had to be done. I will never forget it."

On that same day in September, 1969, Lt. Steve Sandberg (US'61, C'65) received an order to head up the river for a medevac of crewmen from a Swift Boat that had been ambushed.

En route he was figuring out "how to hover over the back end of the board in order to get the wounded crewmen into the helo."

When he first saw the boat, "It was not a pretty picture," he says. "I thought, 'Is that a Swift Boat or just scrap metal floating on the surface?!'

Steve Sandberg college yearbook picture, *The Sheaf*, 1965.
Photo courtesy The Principia

"On board the Swift Boat, those still able to stand were getting ready to lift the first badly shot-up crewman. I was, at the same time, trying to get close enough and low enough to place the helo's landing skid on the aft end of the boat without whacking it with my rotorblade or [hitting] the boat's pilothouse, radar box, and antennas, as this floating scrap heap bobbed up and down, up and down.

"As I looked down from my airborne perch, I sighted a familiar face. And although it was heavily disguised with a full growth, it rested atop that six-foot four-inch body I had not seen since '65 but had known growing up at Principia Upper School in the late '50s and the College in the '60s.

"Bill, with help from another, was able to body press the crewmen above shoulder height in a maneuver necessary to get the wounded up and into our helo's cargo door opening — up, over, around the helo's rocket pod, M-60 machine guns, and canister of ammo.

"I heard later that the wounded crewmen lived to tell their stories!"

Postscript

While many Principia alumni served valiantly in Vietnam under the United States Air Force, Army, Coast Guard, Marine Corps, and Navy, this story was about two Principians meeting under difficult circumstances in the line of duty. The story would not be complete, however, without the mention of two other Principians, referred to by Bill and Steve. Lt. Doug Dixon (C'62) was the executive officer on the LST (landing ship tank) that helicopter pilot Steve Sandberg was assigned to. And Lt. (jg.) Rick Alt (US'64, C'68), a diving officer with the Navy's Harbor Clear unit, helped raise one of the Swift Boats that sank due to the heavy damage in the ambush referred to above.[11]

11 Rick Alt was the brother of CNN correspondent Candy [Alt] Crowley, a journalist who was the second female to moderate a televised presidential debate [Obama/Romney, October, 2012)] and was anchor for the CNN interview program, "State of the Union" that aired on Sunday mornings. An alumna of Principia (kindergarten through high school (US66), Crowley retired from CNN in late 2014, after 27 years with the network.

"When I was new and only eight days old"

ROBERT M. CRAIG

written on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of D-Day
June 6, 1994
printed here in tribute to the "Greatest Generation" [our fathers]

When I was new and only eight days old,
Below the darkened clouds, on misty sea,
Where fate was poised along the destined shore
On sandy thresholds of eternity,
The gods of virtue stopped, to hold their breath,
Among great battleships of lifeless gray.
From each, surveying eyes searched distant points—
Each soul, his separate imprint on this day.

When I was new and only eight days old,
A thousand leadened vessels offshore lay,
Nine hundred thousand brothers wait aboard,
And thousands more above in peppered gray.
Each soldier, sailor, fly-boy innocent,
With tear-filled eyes of youthful memory,
Now faced events that storied heroes make,
Each nameless face to rewrite history.

When I was new and only eight days old,
On sandy Utah beach and Omaha,
Where salt-foam-reddened stains at high tide line
Marked waves of onslaught nature never saw,
The landing craft of time's immortal force
Slapped steel-hinged gates against the shallow shore,

Disgorging men whose shoulders bore the hope
And war machines and armament and more.

When I was new and only eight days old,
The cliffs grew tall, no longer viewed from sea,
Each Joe looked up against the spitting fire
To find a courage never known to me.
With rope and spike beyond the hallowed beach,
They clawed their way up rocks in swarming mass,
To rest forever on these liquid hills,
Now marked in rows of white in sea of grass.

Now, I am fifty years and eight days old;
In hardened eyes of men to shore returned
I see the memory undimmed by time
And hearts in which each story has been burned;
They lift their weary arms in last salute
Above the crosses, stars, goodbyes longed craved;
And through these tear-filled eyes I learn the truth:
When I was eight days old, the world was saved.

D-Day, Normandy Invasion. Photo: National Archives,
Franklin D. Roosevelt Collection

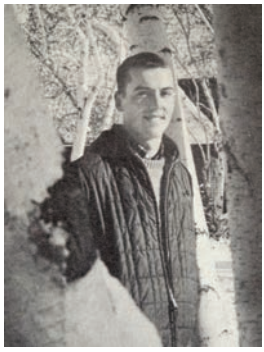
Full Circle

DAVID R. NYSEWANDER

In some ways, my Vietnam war experience comes full circle in my mind back to my father's service in World War II. He spent three years overseas as a military chaplain: a year in Australia, a year in New Guinea, and a year in the Philippines during World War II. In fact, the first time he ever met me was when I was three years old when he returned briefly just before the end of the war. I am told that I cried when this strange man came in and hugged my mother when he returned. Before then, "Daddy" was a photo on the fireplace mantle. I do remember seeing glimpses of him later in Indiana when I was a kid. After the grownups bundled the children off to bed, Dad would entertain folks and church members with his stories and photos of his experiences overseas, memories and narratives mixed in with other socializing and card games of Canasta. It all seemed sort of exotic and mysterious to me. My father passed away when I was sixteen years old, and so I did not have a very long time with him. But as you may see, in many ways his influence persisted after his passing, and he still affects me to this day in many little ways.

When I finished my college days at Principia College and graduated in 1965, my draft board in Indiana was "pursuing" me, so I began to ponder how I should meet this required service for our country. Military service seemed like a big detour from the type of work I loved, working with wildlife, as I was a biology major at Principia. Just after graduation, I was working at the college during the Principia summer sessions where people would occasionally come up to me, recognize my last name, and comment on how my dad had helped them during their time in World War II. I began to wonder if being a chaplain was a better way to fulfill my service requirement than just being a foot soldier. I was not a conscientious objector and did not want to shirk from what I perceived to be my duty. I decided to become a military chaplain.

Although I went through the chaplaincy training, attended related graduate school, and eventually became a chaplain—a non-combatant status to be sure—I chose the service (U.S. Army) and training (air-borne qualified) that I thought would put me right where the majority of other troops were, whether front lines or otherwise. Possibly because of my youth, conditioning, and the airborne qualifications, I was sent to Vietnam; indeed, there was some consideration of assigning me to Green Beret units when I first arrived in South Vietnam. Eventually the decision was made for me to be stationed at a large logistical center, Cam Ranh Bay, from which the U.S. supplied all of its troops scattered between the South China sea and the Laos/Cambodia border in what the U.S. military called II Corps; this includes the coastlines, mountains that came closer to the coast there, and the upland forests and grasslands that existed between central Vietnam and the Saigon area. As it turned out, this was fortuitous in that I was freer and more likely to be able to serve both the Protestant aspects of my chaplaincy as well as Christian Scientists who might be stationed at a number of different Army units and who would pass through or be associated with this area.



Dave Nysewander, college yearbook picture, *The Sheaf*, 1965. Photo courtesy The Principia

I served as a Protestant chaplain primarily for several logistical supply units (fuel, ammunition, and the like) based out of Cam Ranh Bay from February 1970 to April 1971. My experiences were neither heroic nor battle-filled but may parallel those of the large number of support personnel who stood behind, supplied, and cared for the combat soldiers in Vietnam. It has been said that some nine to ten support personnel like me, whether supply officers, repair and maintenance personnel, administrative staff, or chaplains, served for every one combat soldier or front-line fighter, a ratio higher than the 4:1 ratio of World War II or the 7:1 ratio in Afghanistan. In this light, it would seem that my experiences likely reflected what many soldiers

in Vietnam encountered during their Vietnam service experiences, a day-to-day life most would not characterize as heroic.

My routine as a chaplain and our challenges in this support, were more related to boredom, drug overdose, accidents, keeping morale up, and finishing our thirteen-month tour. We lived in a very beautiful exotic setting, a large protected bay set in the tropics with a mix of palm trees, villages, occasional larger cities, green rice fields, blue mountains, sand dunes, and sandy beaches, with jungles and pine forests up 5,000 feet in altitude only fifty miles to the west. However, the nature of guerrilla warfare meant that it was hard to recognize and distinguish the good guys from the bad guys, so to speak. And so the American troops would have their own bases and were often kept mostly segregated during their off hours from the general Vietnamese public. I had more leeway in this respect, and would use my greater contact with some of the Vietnamese locals in my job both to benefit my troops as well as to broaden my own experience there.

I was part of the administrative staff of officers in charge of base troops, and we were involved with keeping up morale and alertness. We organized a wide range of activities including volleyball contests and snorkeling along the tropical sea coasts. We were available for counseling and arranged for troops to work with the local Vietnamese civilians through orphanages and other such outreaches. We did not have to worry much about attack on our main base for a number of reasons that ranged from having trained dolphins patrolling our docks, to the extensive activity on and around our main base. Located on a remote outer peninsula in a spectacularly beautiful bay, the bases appealed to and were used by German, French, Japanese, and other navies over the years. The bases were beyond the range of the type of rockets that the communists were able to carry down from North Vietnam via the Ho Chi Minh trail. As a result, there were only ten deaths in my three battalions over the year I was there (three accidents, two drownings, two drug overdoses, and three losses of life from explosions, the latter associated with the convoys we would run inland up 5,000 feet into the mountains of Vietnam from the coast). There was sort of a "wild-west" feeling associated with our supply

convoys—wagon trains going through some mountain passes to the interior. These were the most likely occasions when some improvised explosive might be used to harass the convoys and perhaps injure someone. I would sometimes go on these convoys or travel by helicopter or plane to supply bases scattered inland and along the coast, but more often I would find myself occupied on the main base: counseling, giving training sessions, conducting religious services, attempting to help resolve personal issues among the troops, or simply going out to visit and help keep awake duty guards at night, stationed at the fuel tanks in case this was the one night when a "sapper" might try to sneak in and blow up a fuel tank in order to score some propaganda points before an upcoming election.

Dave Nysewander in Vietnam, 1970.
Photo courtesy Dave Nysewander

In some ways, I liked the informality in dress, ceremony, and schedule of the Army in Vietnam, so much so that I thought of extending and finishing out my service time there, but the military was not letting officers extend at that time. I remember meeting Jim Brown, a Principian, in Saigon; Jim was working in Vietnam as a civilian, and I wondered if I might return and do similar work since I had some growing affection for the country and its peoples. At any rate, I returned to Fort Lewis, Washington, and finished out

my active service requirement there. When other things beckoned, I did not go back.

In the end, my Vietnam experience was more than just a series of vignettes in the life of an American soldier just doing his job and fulfilling the duties that his country requested of him. My time at Cam Ranh Bay became a window into another culture for me, perhaps in a *Lord Jim* Conrad-esque way, but also in a way that allowed me to see my own culture differently for a while. I remember when I first returned from Vietnam after thirteen months away and was whisked away from the airport, how fast freeway traffic seemed after having never gone more than twenty-five to thirty miles an hour for the last year. I wondered at the greater solidity of the buildings, how colors seemed darker and different, how even the American people, especially women and older folks looked differently to my eye, having been around mostly younger American men and the Vietnamese people for such an extended period of time. This feeling lasted for only a week or two before everything seemed normal again, but this was probably the only time I had been outside my own culture long enough actually to see my own culture and country, however briefly, as outsiders' eyes might.

Dave Nysewander at Cam Ranh Bay, Vietnam, 1970. Photo courtesy, Dave Nysewander

One hears of lots of different reactions by Americans to the Vietnamese people, some positive and others not so much, depending upon the experiences of the troops, or the wartime stress they may have faced. The Vietnamese people I knew while in Vietnam opened my mind and heart to their uniqueness, beauty, history, and culture, so much so that a number of years later when my first marriage dissolved, I eventually remarried, this time to a Vietnamese lady I met in the United States. Now, after thirty-two years of marriage with her, through all the ups and downs that any relationship seems to face, I am grateful that we made this journey together, and I wonder

in my mind whether it might ever have occurred, if I had not spent time in Vietnam. I do remember kindly the warm mild nights, the blue mountains and green fields, the eyes on the small wooden Vietnamese fishing boats, the small child-like appearance of the Vietnamese women, the sandy beaches and sparkling seas, the old French Colonial style roof-tiled buildings, the ancient Cham temple ruins scattered here and there, the water buffaloes in the fields, the statues of Buddha in Nha Trang, and all the other exotic images that float in the back of my memories.

Sixty-five years after World War II and thirty-five years after the Fall of Saigon, I viewed the many episodes on HBO cable television of a 2010 series on WWII in the Pacific. I watched, in part wondering if I would gain any new insight into my father's experiences. Partway through the series, the episodes cover troops recovering between battles at some bases in New Guinea, just back from the front lines, and the images captured the ambiance of that place and time. It struck me that there were a number of strong similarities between those scenes in New Guinea and what I experienced at Cam Ranh Bay in Vietnam. I sensed that in some ways I was truly a child of the "greatest generation," as Tom Brokaw characterized the WWII troops, that my dad's experience had come full circle in my Vietnam experience. I do not know if I fulfilled the promise when my time came. I only know I tried and that I am the person I am now, the offspring of my father, in part because of it.

DAVID NYSEWANDER'S father was a military chaplain during World War II, and David followed in his footsteps, serving in the Army from 1969-72 including a tour in Vietnam. Nysewander attended Army Chaplain School in Fort Hamilton, New York, as well as airborne training at Fort Benning, before taking on his own responsibilities as a protestant military chaplain at Forts Benning and Lewis, and at Cam Ranh Bay, Vietnam. He was awarded a Bronze Star for Service, and the Vietnam Service Medal for his tour in 'Nam.

Born in 1943 in Indianapolis, and raised there, Nysewander attended Principia College graduating in 1965 with majors in biology and geology. His sister Bobbi would follow as a graduate of the college class of 1969. He was a member of Phi Alpha Eta, the scholastic honorary society, served as substitute reader one quarter in the college chapel for services sponsored by the Christian Science College Organization, played intramural sports, and spent much of his free time in "assorted wildlife related activities." A member of Brooks House South, he was a housemate of Steven Heubeck who graduated the year after Nysewander and also joined the Army, Heubeck as a member of the Eight Special Forces Group Airborne.

Nysewander went on to earn a Bachelor of Sacred Theology degree from Boston University before his military service and an MS in wildlife science from the University of Washington after his departure from the military in 1972. He married for the second time Lanh T. Nguyen in 1981, a Vietnamese woman he met while visiting friends in the state of Washington in 1980, and has one step son, George Dixon, and three grandchildren through this relationship. Nysewander has lived either in Alaska or in the state of Washington since 1972, active as a U.S. Fish and Wildlife Biologist and Supervisor 1975-92 in Alaska and a Washington state wildlife biologist and project leader 1992-2010 specializing in marine mammals, birds, and waterfowl work during all of these years in both regions. He is currently retired, living in Olympia although his list of activities and interests would hardly suggest so: marine wildlife, boating, gardening/farming, rescue of large working dogs, bicycling, and outdoor survival.