

From the Front Line to the Home Front

A Veterans Salute **VIETNAM**

The Clinton Chronicle

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Spillers hung from cable at 2,500'

By Bristow Marchant

Staff Writer

Today, Jack Spillers carries an oxygen tank just to help him breathe. But 40 years ago, he could hang on to a cable hanging 100 feet below a helicopter 2,500 feet off the ground as it flew on a 10-mile journey over North Vietnam.

"If they had shot my arms off, the crew would have pulled in two hands, because I had a death-grip on that thing," he said.

Spillers was a combat pilot who flew 220 missions over enemy territory during two deployments to Southeast Asia at the height of the Vietnam War. The two years he spent there as a wartime Air Force pilot was the fulfillment of a dream going back to his boyhood in Clinton.

"I always wanted to be a pilot," Spillers said shortly before he was inducted into the Laurens County Hall of Heroes on Veterans Day.

One comment from his father Rev. J.W. Spillers, a Baptist minister, still stands out in Spillers's mind. "When I was 6 years old, my brother Joe, myself and my father were standing in the front yard when this old biplane flew



Flyboy: Spillers the pilot stands next to his plane in 1967. Spillers flew more than 200 missions over enemy territory during the Vietnam War, and volunteered for a second tour of Southeast Asia after being shot down in North Vietnam.

over. He looked at that and said 'Boys, I hope one of you becomes a pilot, and one becomes a preacher.' Since I was the oldest, I decided to take the coward's way out and become a pilot."

Using the money he earned working at the Dixie Home Store in Clinton as a teenager, Spillers started taking flying lessons at Laurens County Airport. Making \$10 a week, his father made him tithe one dollar to the church, leaving Spillers with \$9 for the

\$10 flying lessons. His instructor told him, "In your situation, I'll make an exception."

On his 16th birthday in 1947, Spillers took his first solo flight. After only four hours of flight training, his instructor allowed Spillers to take a flight around the airport by himself. During his flight, Rev. Spillers pulled up to where the instructor was standing.

"He said, 'Do you know Jack Spillers?'," the younger Spillers

remembers. "My teacher said 'Yes, sir.' And he said 'Do you know where he is?' And my teacher pointed up and said 'He's right up there.'"

Spillers graduated from Clinton High School in 1949 and from Clemson A&M College in 1953 — "It was an all-military school then," he said. "There were 3,000 cadets." — before he was commissioned as a second lieutenant in the U.S. Air Force.

Then-Maj. Spillers was first posted overseas in December of 1966, when he was sent to Korat Royal Thai Air Force Base in Thailand, from which American bombers flew dangerous missions over North Vietnamese targets. Spillers would go on to fly 114 missions over the course of his eight-month stint in Southeast Asia.

It was on the 46th such mission — Easter Sunday, as Spillers recalls — that he was shot down in North Vietnam. After ejecting from the plane and spending a harrowing hour and 45 minutes hiding in the brush, a rescue helicopter came to pick him up.

"They lowered down what they called a tree-penetrator," Spillers said. "It was a cable with a kind of belt you were supposed to get around you, but before I could get it on, the war started."

Taking enemy fire, the helicopter was forced to take off, making a beeline over the ocean to get away from Vietnamese positions, with Spillers dangling 100 feet behind them. Only when the chopper was safely over the waters of the South China Sea did the crew pull in the cable.

"When the guy saw me hanging on he said 'What are you doing here?'" Spillers said. "And I told him 'Shut up and pull me in!'"

When they came under fire, the helicopter crew had canceled the rescue mission and taken off without realizing Spillers was at-



Coming home: Col. Jack Spillers, Ret., and his wife Pat stand on the square in Clinton on Veterans Day. Spillers came from Sumter to be inducted into the Laurens County Hall of Heroes. -- Photo by Bristow Marchant

tached to the tree-penetrator. It was only after flying 10 miles out to sea that the crew realized their mission had unwittingly succeeded.

"The pilot radioed back to base and said 'Guess what we found'," after Spillers was on-board, he said.

The incident didn't deter Spillers from finishing his tour of duty and volunteering for a second in 1969-70, leaving a position in the Pentagon to fly another 106 combat missions over Vietnam.

"My commanding officer asked me why. He said a second tour wouldn't help my career any," Spillers said of his Pentagon commander. "I told him that over there, I could at least shoot back."

Another person who didn't appreciate his decision was

Spillers's late wife, Jean Wilson of Laurens. "It was hard for her with two teenage girls and a young son. She had to take care of it all by herself," he said. "After my second tour, she told me I wasn't going back until every other pilot had been at least once."

Spillers remained in the Air Force until 1984, retiring from Shaw AFB in Sumter with the rank of colonel. He stayed in Sumter, earned a degree in environmental control from Sumter Technical College, and ran a heating and air business from 1985 to 1994. Now happily retired, he still remembers the helicopter crew who rescued him all those years ago.

"I thank the good Lord for them," he said. "They were the bravest people in the world."



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Caring for our am★rican hero★s

The past is not dead for Martin

By Trevor Baratko

Staff Writer

It's a gruesome scene straight from The History Channel — a soldier's first mission in Vietnam. It's supposed to be a trouble-free mission. His company, the 75th Infantry N Company, is to enter a vacant enemy base and check the area. It's just some recon work is all.

But as the chopper lowers, it's apparent the base is not vacant. Shots spew.

The doorman is hit upwards through the middle of his body. He's dead. His blood sprays through the interior of the chopper - landing on the other soldiers. The troops wear the blood of a one of their own. Why?

But this isn't a documentary on TV — it's Laurens County resident Benjamin Martin's first mission in Vietnam in 1969. He was sitting next to the doorman.

"That scream was one of the loudest I've ever heard," said Martin. "The blood was everywhere. It was the last time that helicopter ever flew a mission."

Martin heard a lot of screams during his time in Vietnam, but there was one he didn't — his best friend's.

Because there wasn't time. His best friend died from stepping on a grenade - two weeks



Shaken by war: Benjamin Martin, left, witnessed horrific images during his year in Vietnam. His best friend, far right, was killed after stepping on a grenade two weeks before he was to return home.

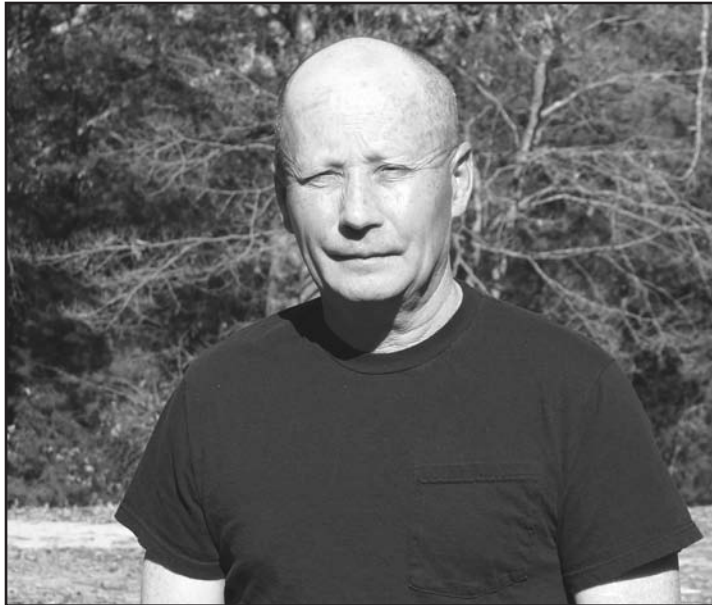
before he was to return home.

"That day I said to him, 'I don't feel comfortable walking around these trails,'" recalls Martin. "I told him I had a bad feeling, but he just said, 'it's fine, I have it under control.' He wasn't but 50 feet away when the grenade just blew him up."

No time for screams.

In the army you don't leave behind a fallen soldier, so Martin connected his friend to the ladder coming down from a helicopter before grabbing on himself. He held onto the ladder for two or three miles before reaching the base.

"I was pretty scared riding on the ladder. I was worried I would either get shot down or I would-



n't be able to hang on. I didn't think I would make it."

"I was crazy." That is Martin's response as to why he signed up in the first place. "That's really the only answer I can give, I was crazy."

He said there was little down time during his tour from June 1969 to June 1970.

"It was difficult to relax knowing what was ahead," he said.

He was with the 173rd Airborne Brigade, eventually mov-

Trying to forget: Martin retired from B.F. Shaw two years ago. He said the extra time has caused him to think more about his days in Vietnam.

ing on to the Airborne Rangers.

One of the lone bright spots included letters from his mother - and other women.

"I had a lot of girls that would write me," he says. "That helped a little bit, but you still had to go back to the war."

Somehow June 1970 arrived and Martin was alive. Time to go home.

He returned home to Laurens County where he grew up.

He met his wife, Ruby Ann, with whom he has four children - Cindy, Ben, Tanya and Timothy.

"I was relieved to be home. Of course, I was glad it was over. I had heard a lot about the negative treatment veterans were receiving," he said. "But fortunately I didn't experience any of that."

William Faulkner once said - "the past isn't dead; it isn't even past." Unfortunately, these words resonate for Martin.

He spent almost all of his working days at the B.F. Shaw plant before retiring two years ago. Most people fantasize about retirement, dream about the free time.

But for Martin, the past is not dead.

"I think the free time has given me more time to think about the war," he said. "It's hard, I think I have thought about it more the last two years than I did previously."

A 38-year old has lived his entire life since Martin witnessed the horrors of war, but the years have done little to ease the memories.

"I'll still get flashbacks," he said. "I still have some nightmares."

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America is a great nation because we are a free nation. Our freedom is due to the brave men and women in the armed forces who have sacrificed to protect our ideals, defending our country from the Revolutionary War to the current war on terror. With gratitude and respect, we salute each and every one of these veterans.

Front row kneeling:

Mike Reddeck, US Marines
Bill Duckett, US Air Force
Josh Byers, US National Guard
Tim Switzer, US Army

Second Row:

Butch Pressley, US Army
Blane Crawford, US Air Force
Josh Kay, US Air Force
John Dowdle, US Army
Carroll Kuykendall, US Army
Truman Owens, US National Guard
Del Snelgrove, US Navy

Third Row:

Curtis Simmons, US Army
Marion McMahan, US Army
Phil Hasty, US Navy
Donnie Simpson, US Army, National Guard
Michael Addison, US Army, National Guard
Casey Wilbanks, US Marines
Charles Campbell, US Air Force, Army, National Guard
Kenneth Merideth, US Navy

Not pictured:

Eddie McGee, National Guard
Sonny Ledda, US Army



Hartman's hearing reminds of war

By Bristow Marchant

Staff Writer

Rick Hartman has a constant reminder of where he was during the Vietnam War. He was a munitions specialist at an airbase in Thailand, where his job was to load and unload bombs on planes for attack missions as they sat with engines blasting on the runway.

"That's how I lost my hearing," he said. "We had earmuffs, but they were hollow on the inside. When you had a jet out there and you'd go to arm or dis-

arm it, then you'd give the pilot the thumbs up, and he'd do Mach 4 and your truck would slide across the concrete."

Born and raised in Indianapolis, Hartman enlisted in the Air Force in 1966 after finishing high school. "My dad was a pharmacist, and I worked in his store for a while at the soda fountain and decided that wasn't my bag," Hartman said. "I wanted to see the world."

He was trained as a weapons mechanic, munitions specialist and "missileman," before being shipped out to Udorn, Thailand, in the summer of 1967 as part of

the munitions specialty team attached to the 555th Tactical Fighter Squadron. His mission was to keep the weapons system operational onboard the F-4C Phantoms, fighter jets used to support ground troops in Vietnam.

"That was the main 'bird' used in Nam for dropping bombs," Hartman said.

Hartman was named chief of his own four-man crew. Before any "bird" took off for a bombing run, his crew would meet it at the end of the runway and arm its weapons. When the plane returned, they would meet it again on the runway and disarm any remaining bombs before it could return to base.

Life at Udorn was often rough. Even as his crew was named munitions crew of the year for 1967, Hartman was one of 50 men sleeping in a one-story barrack hall on what he called a "two-inch" mattress.

"It reminded me of M*A*S*H," he said. "We had an open water tank on base, and only the sunlight to keep it warm. It just collected rainwater and whatever would fall in there during monsoon season."

Monsoons were another unique hazard during Hartman's 19-month stay in Southeast Asia. "It would rain for a week at a time," he said. "You could see all the rice paddies around the base flooded."

Rain was also not the worst thing airmen at Udorn had to worry about. Although technically on the other side of the border from the war zone, the base was for all intents and purposes on the frontlines, and often drew unwanted attention.

"Whenever I saw night flares, it scared the hell out of me," Hartman said, "because that's when I knew we were under attack. Sometimes it would happen three times in a week. They'd keep coming back, right



Still tinkering with loud machines: Rick Hartman now in his garage at home. Hartman moved south after the Air Force to work, married and bought five acres near Gray Court. -- Photo by Bristow Marchant

up to the barbed wire on the other side of the line from the base."

After leaving Asia, Hartman received a posting on a different kind of frontline. He was assigned to the Strategic Air Command (SAC) at Minot AFB, North Dakota, where he loaded weapons onto long-range B-52s. Minot was an "alert base" at the height of the Cold War, prepared to defend against or respond to any attack on the continental United States.

"We had to keep the B-52s loaded, because they'd be in the air for up to 20 hours," Hartman said.

In the event of an attack, the bombers were equipped to respond immediately. "The pilot was up there with just K rations to eat, and when he came back we'd load another. I assume they still do that. I don't know where they went, but I know they

didn't go up and circle the base for 20 hours."

Hartman got out of the service at the end of 1969 because "I didn't want to load bombs for the rest of my life," he said.

"When I got out, they didn't have what they offer now. They didn't offer you an education, so I never went to college. I had to come back and go to work."

Went he got home to Indianapolis, Hartman got a job painting water towers for a company that had the perk of sending its contractors south to do work during the winter. That's how the former munitions specialists first made his way to South Carolina.

"I worked on the Belton tower near the old mill," he said. "That's when I came to Gray Court and met my wife."

After settling down, Hartman worked for 10 years for South-

ern Contractors, a crane company, in Mauldin, and then got a job as shop equipment superintendent for Ashmore Brothers in Greer. In 1980, he bought himself a five-acre homestead near Gray Court.

"When I bought this land, it was \$300-an-acre," he said. "Now property around here is selling for \$9,000-an-acre. If I'd known that, I would have bought 50."

Hartman thinks if it hadn't been for his service in the war, he would have never moved south.

"In Thailand when I left it was 146 degrees. In San Francisco it was 90-something, and then back in Indiana it was 30 below. That's a long heat range to cover in three days," he said. "I was glad to find out I could go south. Now I kind of enjoy the weather."



Missileman: Sgt. Rick Hartman during his time in the Air Force in the 1960s. Hartman was a munitions specialist who armed bombs on airplanes flying over Vietnam.



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VIETNAM



Honoring his country: Tony Vincent raises and lowers the flag each day at ACI in Laurens. He said he takes pride in the flag because he spent a year risking his life for it.

—Photo by Trevor Baratko

Respect

‘I fought for that flag’

By Trevor Baratko

Staff Writer

When Laurens County resident Tony Vincent got off the plane in Washington D.C. in 1969, he was handed a meal ticket.

“It was to some little local restaurant. I think it got you a steak dinner and a baked potato or something like that,” Vincent said.

He wasn’t interested.

“I handed it to some other guy, I told him I’m heading straight for South Carolina.”

Vincent grew up in Clinton, was born on Beaugard Street.

As an 18-year old in the late sixties, his life was in limbo. He said he couldn’t really do much until he knew whether or not he would be drafted.

“More likely than not, it was only a matter of time before my number was called,” Vincent said.

He decided to stop waiting and enlist — taking matters into his own hands.

“When you’re 18 years old, you think you can take on the world,” Vincent said.

Vincent handled a variety of duties during his tour in Vietnam. He was supposed to be in a recon outfit, but things changed when he arrived.

“I stepped off the plan and

they handed me a radio and a 45,” he said.

The most frightening times during Vincent’s year?

“When you’re the point man,” he said. “Going through tunnels and through the jungle ahead of every one else. After being there for a year and still being alive, I felt blessed.”

Vincent’s mother sent Texas Pete hot sauce and pre-made Kool-Aid packets as a subtle reminder of the life he left.

“Eventually I realized the Kool-Aid was just making me more thirsty, I told her to just send the Texas Pete,” he said. “When you’re over there, you just do whatever you can to survive, anything to get you through the days.”

After spending a year fighting in Vietnam, Vincent was more excited for Laurens County than a steak dinner. After all, he would marry Reba Penland in just two short months.

“They don’t make many like her,” Vincent said. “We kept in touch through letters. I didn’t even tell her I was in the army at first. She had come to the Winn Dixie where I worked to see me. One day after I had been gone she asked a friend where I was. He told her I was in the service.”

After returning home, Vincent spent time finishing his

term in Fort Sills, Oklahoma.

The re-enlistment officer offered him \$10,000 and a rocking chair to re-up.

Thanks but no thanks, Vincent said.

“I already had a rocking chair and I didn’t want the money. There was nothing they could’ve given me to sign back up,” he said. “One year over there was more than enough. Those days, people didn’t really want anything to do with you when you first got back. It was hard.

“In war, you do what you have to do to survive. People don’t realize that people went AWOL over there. I don’t know where you go in the jungle but it happened.”

As you might imagine, Vincent doesn’t care much for recollection.

“I’ve probably talked more with you than anyone else about it,” he said. “When they brought the wall to PC last year, that was one of the hardest things for me to do. There were a lot of my friends’ names on that wall,” he says fighting the tears.

“That was one of the few times my wife really saw me struggle with it. Before I came in here today, she said, ‘you sure you want to go through with it?’”

But it’s essential Vincent go through with it. The young generation in this country must be conscious of what their fathers, their uncles, their neighbors sacrificed.

Vincent has spent the bulk of his working days at ACI in Laurens. He’s proud that the county still honors the veterans and gives advice for those, like his 28-year old son who recently enlisted, who continue to fight for our nation.

“Be careful, and make sure your life is in order,” he says. “You never know what will happen once you’re in a war.”

Vincent continues honoring his country each day by raising and lowering the flag at work.

“It bothers me when I see people using the flag as decoration or not respecting it. I drive by so many places that just raise the flag and then pay no attention to it. I keep buying a bigger flag every year,” he said. “I fought for that flag. I respect it.”



Half of unit was lost in one battle

By Bristow Marchant

Staff Writer

Freddie McLendon has always been an avid hunter. His home on Skyland Drive in Clinton is filled with stuffed and mounted animals of all varieties. But if there's one trip out into the woods McLendon got no enjoyment from, it was the year he spent in the late 1960s in the jungles of Vietnam.

"I wasn't scared," he said of the day he received his draft papers in the mail. "I'd rather it was me than my brother, because he was scared of snakes and rats and things, so I knew he wouldn't make it over there. I was always hunting or out in the woods."

McLendon lived his entire life in Clinton, except for a period his family spent picking fruit in Florida when he was in the fourth grade. Although he and his brother didn't work alongside their parents in the fields, there was still money to be made when the produce reached the canning plant.

"We made almost as much as they did," McLendon said. "When the trucks pulled up, they let us walk them down off the truck. We made \$5 a truck, and there were sometimes nine or 10 trucks a day."

But for most of the time he was growing up, McLendon's parents worked at Clinton Mill as textile workers. It seemed like that would be his future too, until the U.S. government decided he was needed for something else.

"My wife's daddy was a postman, and when he got my induction papers, he held on to them for one day so we could go to senior prom night before I had to report," he said.

McLendon was inducted into the U.S. Army's 101st Airborne



Remembering the fallen: Freddie McLendon, second from left, visited the Vietnam War Memorial in Washington in 1987 with Paul Patterson of Florida, Wayne Holden of North Carolina, and John Perkins of Georgia. McLendon remembers the trip as the first time he was thanked for his service.

Division — the famed "Screaming Eagles" who descended on Normandy during the D-Day landings of World War II. Even though the Eagles are primarily a parachute and air assault division, McLendon did not have time for jump training before his company shipped out. Instead, he went through advanced basic training at Fort Jackson before being sent to Southeast Asia on June 18, 1968.

Private McLendon was stationed at Camp Sandy outside Hui, South Vietnam, an area of the country that had witnessed heavy fighting during the Tet offensive earlier in the year.

"'69 was a bad time to be there, too," McLendon said.

As part of an airmobile unit, McLendon's mission was to move out into the thick Vietnamese jungle and engage North Vietnamese forces. "We would fly from one place to another, walk two or three clicks (kilometers), blow out a pad in the jungle for the helicopter to land, and take off for somewhere else," he said.

McLendon was there for a month before he saw his first major firefight. Moving through a mountainous valley, his unit suddenly found itself at a disadvantage to the higher-placed Vietnamese.

"A friend of mine from Georgia was laying down a Claymore mine right next to me, and he

took a shot right in the face," McLendon said. "Then this guy from Pelzer, he was the sergeant, he jumped up to grab a machine gun, and he got shot too."

They called in a Cobra helicopter for air support and popped smoke canisters to identify the enemy's position. But on that windy day, the smoke blew back over the Americans' heads, and the helicopter began firing aerial rocket artillery at their position.

"We went in with 30-something people, and came out with 18 or 19," McLendon said.

Hui was a violent place, and McLendon went through three lieutenants in a two-month period. One night deep in a rice



Decoration Day: Freddie McLendon stands next to his medal case at his home in Clinton. McLendon earned several decorations for his tour of Vietnam with the "Screaming Eagles" of the 101st Airborne, including the Purple Heart, the Bronze Star, and the Republic of Vietnam Campaign Medal.

-- Photo by Bristow Marchant

paddy possibly surrounded by North Vietnamese, a new lieutenant fresh out of officer training school switched on his flashlight.

"You could probably see it for miles around," McLendon said. "I was six guys back from him, and I told him 'if you hold that up again and don't put it under your poncho or put a refractor on it, I'll shoot you myself.' Two days later he was standing next to the radioman when he stepped on a concussion grenade. The radioman was killed and the lieutenant was so wounded they sent him home."

After he returned home, McLendon married his wife Debbie, the postman's daughter, in July, 1970. "I didn't know if I was ready to get married," he said. "After coming back from that, I was worried about sitting down to dinner and cussing in front of my mama. But she waited for me the whole time I was gone, so I decided I couldn't do that to her. We've been married 38 years."

He worked for a couple years

at the NAPA store in Clinton, and then for four more in a mill in Woodruff, before he followed in his father-in-law's footsteps and went to work for the post office. But he always remembered his time in Vietnam.

"I can still see my friends' faces, when they were leaving or before they got shot," he said. "A few situations still haunt me, but that's something you have to deal with... Jesus can get you through anything."

In 1987, he and some old army buddies traveled to Washington to see the Vietnam Memorial. When they went into a restaurant wearing their uniforms, four beers immediately appeared on their table, followed by four more, compliments of a woman at the bar.

"I went up to this lady and asked her 'why are you sending us all these beers?' he said. "She said 'I just want to say thank you for what you did for your country.' That was 1987, and I think that was the first time anyone had thanked me for doing that. That meant a lot."

America's veterans are a precious heritage for our nation.

Their sacrifices during the Korean Conflict and Vietnam War are an example for all of us.

They faced danger, death and destruction at the call of their nation, but unlike their brethren who fought against the tyranny of Nazism and imperialism, it was years before the veterans of Korea and Vietnam received their just accolades for service.

Now that we face a different 21st century foe, we can nevertheless look back to our veterans as examples of resolve, discipline and courage.

Their bravery and sacrifice will never be forgotten.

"We cannot do more, we should never wish to do less."

Senator Danny Verdin

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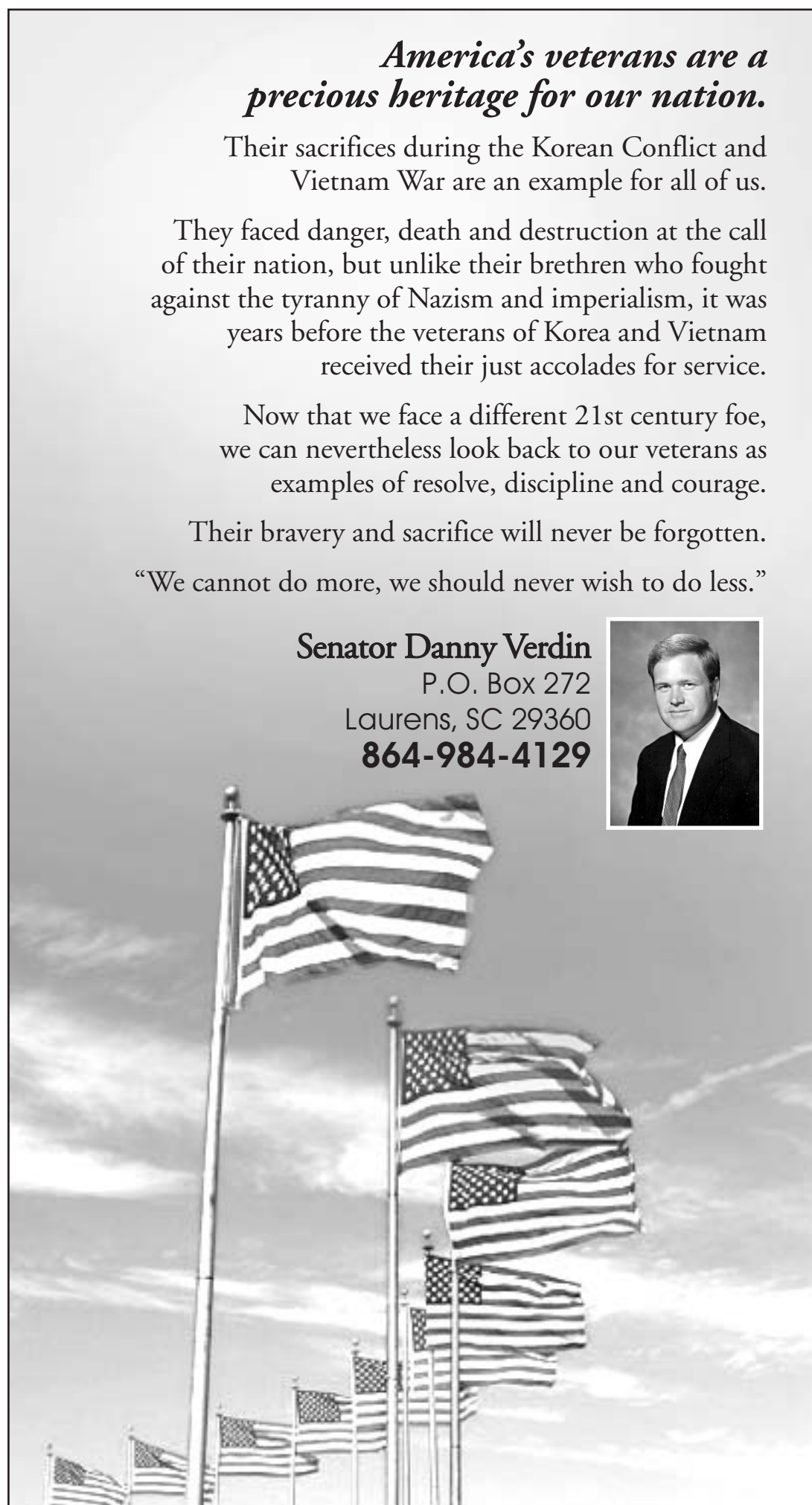
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Merideth was shot down 3 times

By Trevor Baratko
Staff Writer

Arlie Merideth wanted to make one thing clear when he sat down for an interview for the Veterans Salute section. “I’m no glory hog,” he said. “I was just doing my job. I enjoyed jumping and I enjoyed training.”

It’s hard to believe that he, or anyone, enjoyed their time confronted by war — especially someone who did two tours in Vietnam.

To realize how much time Merideth spent next to death, all you need to know is that he owns 14 air medals. To receive one, you must be in combat for 50 hours.

“I consider myself very fortunate,” Merideth says. “I was shot down three times. I feel

lucky to be alive.”

Merideth enlisted in the army in 1954 when he was 20 years old.

Born in Kentucky and raised in Chicago, his wife was quick to note his status.

“He’s what we call a Yankee around here,” said Roberta Merideth.

I guess love overcame.

He began his first tour in Vietnam in 1966, came back home a year later, and reported back in 1969.

While serving in the war, Merideth was a Falcon — meaning he was responsible for covering the Cowboys as they lifted troops into the gunship (helicopter).

“You just kept hoping you weren’t going to get shot,” he said. “You never knew what was going to happen.”

In his second tour, he served

as a technical inspector.

“I didn’t have too many friends,” he said. “I had to tell people when they weren’t doing their job right to do it over again.”

Fortunately, Merideth did have a nice gift waiting upon his return home — his kids.

“The first time they ever really saw him was when he came back,” says Roberta. “They were little when he left so they didn’t remember him. It was just called the Greenville Airport back then and security was nothing like it is now. They let us out there on the runway. We all ran up to him once we saw him step off the plane.”

The flight attendant on the plane held the rest of the passengers back on to let Arlie off first. His kids, and his wife, rushed into his arms.

“I was glad to be back,”



Home in the chopper: Merideth served as a Falcon while in Vietnam. He covered fellow soldiers while they lifted troops from the ground into the helicopters.



Recognition: Arlie Merideth, left, receives induction into the Laurens County Hall of Heroes two weeks ago during the ceremony at Laurens District 55 High School. He is shown here shaking hands with Laurens County Veterans Affairs Officer Cary Bolt. -- Photo by Trevor Baratko

Merideth said. “There were times over there when you wondered if you would ever get back.”

“It was definitely difficult having him be gone twice, but we got through it,” Roberta said.

The two wrote letters to keep in touch and even the occasional tape recordings.

“The first time the boys heard his voice was over a tape recorder,” she says.

Reflecting on his days in war and in the military, he says — “It wasn’t easy. One thing I can say is once you have a friend in the military, it’s a friend for life.”

“Nearly every state we go, there are military friends we know,” adds Roberta.

The military has taken the couple all over the country — Kansas, North Carolina, Virginia, New Jersey, Texas and

overseas to Germany.

When he returned from Asia, Arlie said it was difficult to find work.

“Everyone kept telling me I

was over qualified for the jobs,” he said. “I couldn’t believe it.”

But by 1981 when Arlie retired from the service, two things brought the couple to Laurens County to settle down for good.

“My family was here,” said Roberta, a native, “and he’s near a racetrack. That was all it took.”

He ended up working for a food service company, then the post office and on to NAPA.

Arlie is pleased with the services provided for local veterans.

“I wish nationally and statewide the government would do a little more for veterans,” he said. “But I think (Laurens County Veterans Affairs Officer) Cary Bolt and the VA here have some great services for us.”



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We honor and give thanks to all veterans who served and sacrificed to ensure our freedom.

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Hall of Heroes visit Wall of Heroes: Freddie McLendon of Clinton wears a t-shirt from his induction into the Hall of Heroes in 2006. The photo on the shirt is of McLendon and his army buddies on a trip to the Vietnam War Memorial in Washington in 1987. — Photo by Bristow Marchant

Honor: Tony Vincent of Clinton continues honoring his country each day by raising and lowering the flag at work, at ACI in Laurens. Vincent handled a variety of duties during his tour in Vietnam. He was supposed to be in a recon outfit, but things changed when he arrived. “I stepped off the plan and they handed me a radio and a 45,” he said.

- Photo by Trevor Baratko



We wish to express our
deepest gratitude
to all the veterans
in Laurens County.

Your service, commitment
and sacrifice will never be
forgotten.

“The Lord knows the way I take, and when He has tested me, I shall come forth as gold.” - Job 23:10



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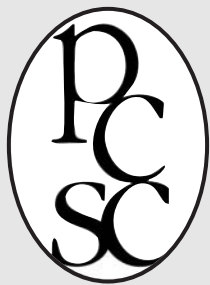
218th Infantry honored at 2008 Hall of Heroes



Laurens County Hall of Heroes 2008 inductees

Andrew H. Ellis - US Army - SSG, WWII
Maxie P. Armstrong - US Marine, PFC, Korea
Roy C. Waldrop - US Army, PFC, WWII
Robert E. Byrd - US Army, SSG, Vietnam
William T. Lynch - US Army, T-SGT, WWII
Albert King Dixon II - US Marine, Lt. Col, Vietnam
Harold E. Pearson Jr. - US Navy, Ensign, WWII
Robert C. Person - US Army, Cpl, Korea
Arlie K. Merideth - US Army, SFC, Vietnam
Benjamin W. Martin Jr - US Army, SP4, Vietnam

James W. Satterfield - US Army, Sgt, Vietnam
Lee Brouillette - US Marine, Sgt, Korea
William Fred Chapman Jr. - US Army, 1Lt, Korea
Jack C. Spillers - US Air Force, Col, Vietnam
William P. Dagnall - US Army, PFC, WWII
Richard V. Hartman - US Air Force, SRA, Vietnam
Edwin B. Gilchrest Jr. - US Navy, LCDR, Korea
Samuel Harden Lyons - US Army, SSG, Vietnam
William H. Bell Jr. - US Army, PFC, WWII
John A. Lancaster Sr. - US Army, SSG, WWII

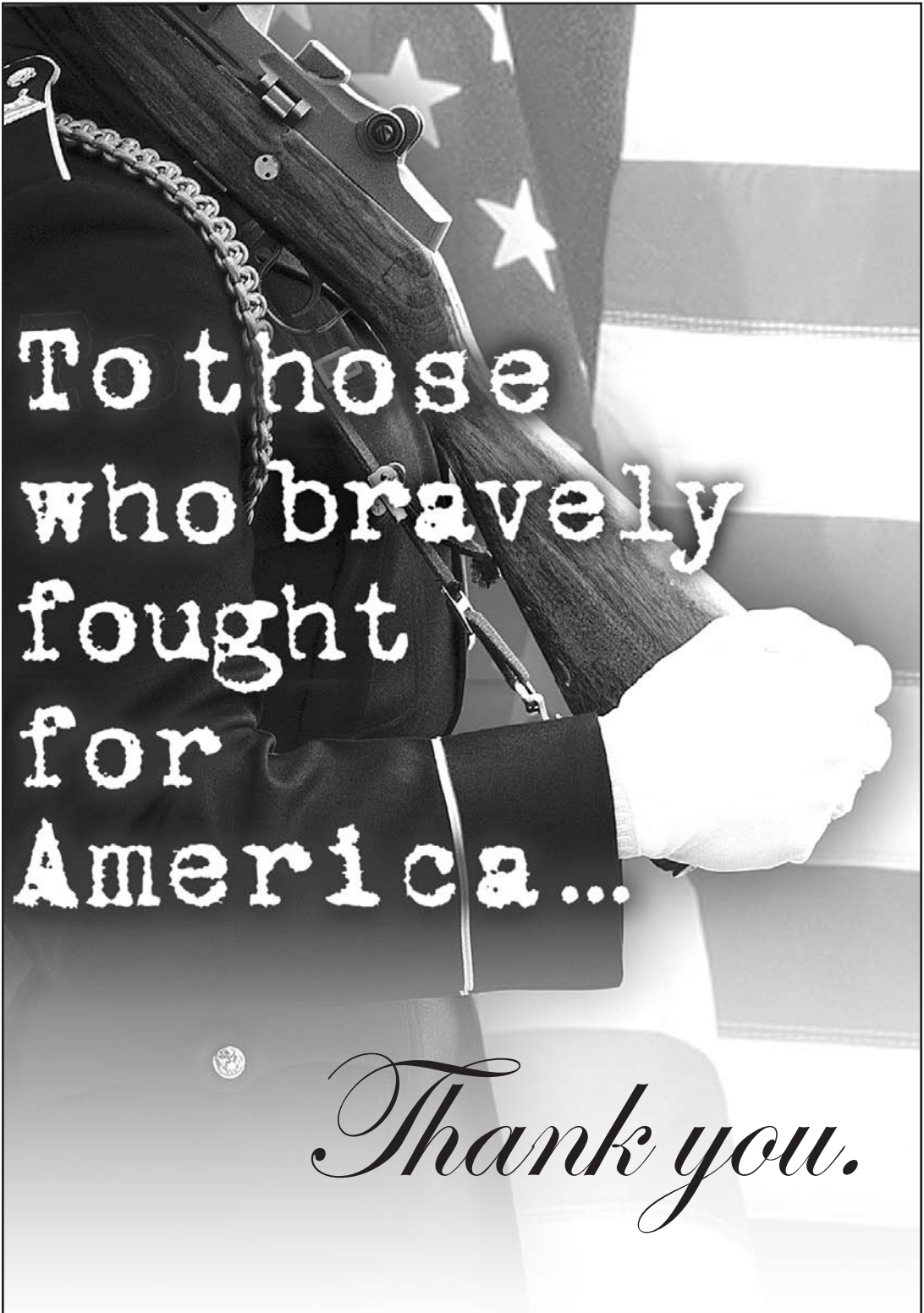


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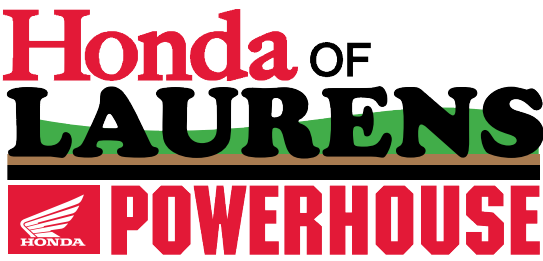
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