

HOMEGROWN HERO

By Ty DeMartino

THE SECOND OF JUNE, 1967, WAS A SWELTERING DAY IN THE QUANG TRI PROVINCE OF SOUTH VIETNAM. AS COMPANY F, 2ND

Battalion, Fifth Marines, First Marine Division moved through a large U-shaped rice paddy the size of a baseball stadium, enemy machine-gunfire rang out from the bamboo thicket. A large number of Americans were wounded and killed.

The company's captain, James A. Graham, launched an attack against the enemy. As shots sputtered from two concealed automatic weapons, Capt. Graham rallied an assault unit of 10 men. Ignoring the crossfire, the troop rushed the field and managed to stop the shots from one of the machine gun nests, relieving pressure on the second platoon and allowing the wounded to be relocated to secure areas.

As the second machine gun continued to ring out, Capt. Graham and his small force remained strong. He suffered two minor wounds and was personally responsible for eliminating 15 enemies. But the fire was heavy and constant. It was Capt. Graham's decision to order his men to retreat for their own safety. It was also his decision to remain behind with one man, a lieutenant, who could not be moved due to serious wounds.

His last radio contact reported that he was being attacked by 25 enemy soldiers. Capt. Graham was killed. He was only 26 years old.



Eighteen months later, on an autumn day in October, as sharp winds hinted of the oncoming winter, the family of Capt. Graham reported to the Marine Barracks in Washington, D.C. There, a widow and two small children accepted the Congressional Medal of Honor in memory of Capt. Graham for his "outstanding courage, superb leadership and indomitable fighting spirit." Only 3,400 Medals of Honor have been issued since the American Civil War. Capt. Graham was the 17th Marine to earn the Medal in Vietnam.

The following is the story of Capt. James A. Graham (Frostburg State Class of '63) – family man, friend and, still to this day, an American hero.



JIM

Capt. James A. Graham often thought he was invincible.

Those who remember "Jim" recall his resilience and determination. By all accounts, he was a hard worker, diligent scholar and strong leader – a modern-day Renaissance man who could "do anything."

"Jim could even make his own clothes," recalls childhood friend Harold "Pork" Vance (Class of '62).

Graham's resourcefulness came out of a sad and difficult childhood.

Born Aug. 25, 1940, in Wilkinsburg, Pa., Graham was a little boy when his parents divorced. His mother remained with her family in Pennsylvania, while Graham and his father settled in the town of Accokeek in Southern Maryland. Friends and family recall Graham's unhappiness with his father as the two operated their family-owned grocery store and gas station.

Graham attended Brandywine Elementary School and Gwynn Park High School. In seventh grade, Vance befriended "Jimbo" and witnessed the tension between Graham and his father.

"It was an unhappy home life for Jim," Vance says.

Graham would often run away to his mother's family in the Turtle Creek area of Pittsburgh, forcing his father to come after him. One story recounts Graham jumping from rooftop to rooftop to avoid returning with his father.

At age 15, Graham took his father's car and drove to El Paso, Texas, where he joined the Army.

"He lied about his age to get in," says Vance, noting that Graham was always patriotic. "Jim taught himself to type and became a secretary to an officer."

Graham got a speeding ticket in the "borrowed" car, which led his father to his whereabouts. By that time, Graham had already served 22 months of active duty.

He returned to Accokeek and got his GED and applied to Frostburg State College. He entered in the fall of 1959. Many believe he chose Frostburg to be closer to his mother's family in Pennsylvania, whom he continued to visit.

On campus, Graham was a math whiz and soccer player and member of both Sigma Tau Gamma fraternity and the Marine Corps Reserves.

"He was a serious student. A very solid young man," recalls Dr. James Cotton, former geography professor and advisor to Graham's fraternity. "He was one of the better students at Frostburg at that time."

Classmates remember Graham as quiet, but personable. He stood about 6 feet tall with a square jaw and a short, neat crew-cut.

"When I picture Jim, I think of a bandy-legged man with his feet apart and a devilish grin," remembers Edward Root (Class of '62), one of Graham's fraternity brothers who also served in the Marine Corps Reserves. "Whatever Jim did, he took it seriously. But he also had a good sense of humor. He lit up when he smiled."

Vance, who reunited with his childhood friend at Frostburg, remembers getting his nickname from Graham one evening in the cafeteria. When a group turned up their noses

at the main course – pork chops – Vance graciously ate the leftovers. "Jim said, 'Look at that pork disappear!'" From then on, Vance has been known as "Pork."

Graham juggled a job as a cashier and stockman at the Safeway Supermarket in LaVale while maintaining a full college course load.

"He worked 40 hours a week and had super grades," Vance says.

During his early Frostburg years, Graham's mother passed away after a lengthy illness. His campus friends rallied around him.

The Frostburg students from Southern Maryland would get together on campus for parties and pizza. At one of these gatherings, Graham met Janice Pritchett (Class of '63) from District Heights. They started dating.

"He appeared to be much older than he was," Janice remembers. "His eyes were sad, and he held a lot of pain in his heart."

Janice invited Graham to attend services at First English Baptist Church in Frostburg where Graham made friends with the pastor and members of the congregation. He became a born-again Christian.

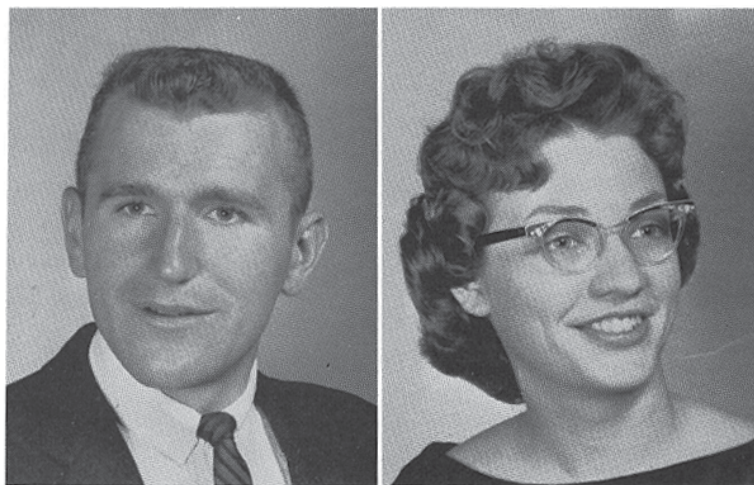
"When I took Jim to church with me, he was very open to it. He found a peace and love that he was missing in his life," Janice recalls.

Graham also found love with Janice and asked her to marry him when the two were juniors. The couple planned a wedding for the summer of 1962 but had to move up the date due to a conflict with Frostburg State officials.

Jim brought a mobile home to Frostburg in January for the newlyweds to live in after their marriage. College administrators were reluctant to allow a single



Graham adored his maternal grandparents from Pittsburgh. As a young boy, he would often run away to visit them.



The 1963 Frostburg yearbook photos of young newlyweds – James Graham and Janice Pritchett Graham.



Janice and Jim on the Frostburg campus.

man to move off-campus. Their decision would have forced Graham to pay both rent at the trailer park and an on-campus housing fee. After persuading Janice's family, the couple moved up their wedding date so they could live off-campus as husband and wife.

"I scratched out the (summer) date on the invitation and wrote in the new one. And I borrowed a wedding dress," Janice remembers.

After their wedding in February of 1962, Janice soon discovered that her new husband had blood that ran true red, white and blue.

"I remember Jim telling me once that he hoped to go to Cuba. I thought 'Who did I marry?' I came from a family where you hope you don't get drafted and here's a guy who is begging to go. But that's the way Jim was. He was a hard player," Janice adds. "And a hard driver."

Graham's other love was cars. When Janice met him, he drove a '57 Chevy. He traded it in for a white Corvette after their marriage and enjoyed fiddling with the engine with little wrenches he carried in his pocket.

"He had a complete and adoring love for Corvettes," Janice says. "We didn't have a lot of groceries. And what we did have were dented cans. But we had a Corvette."

Both Graham and Janice continued their studies at Frostburg. Graham would take his

new bride to visit his mother's family every month. He also enjoyed spending time with his in-laws.

"He liked to be around families. Jim didn't have that growing up," Janice says, remembering how Graham could fall asleep on the floor of her parent's home with his head resting on a basketball – content, as activity buzzed around him. "Having a happy home life didn't start for Jim until we got married. He was anxious to have his own family."

In April of 1963, Graham and Janice welcomed a son, John, while living in the



Graham, 1965.

trailer in Frostburg. Two months later, Graham received his bachelor's degree in mathematics and set his sights on a career in the military. At commencement, Graham received honors as the top student in mathematics.

Graham's father attended his son's graduation. Although Graham had a new family, academic honors and a college diploma, he still didn't have one thing – a good relationship with his dad.

"Jim always tried to prove himself to his father. Mr. Graham was livid about Jim's plans to go into the military. I'm not sure what his plans were for Jim," says Janice. "I know Mr. Graham loved his son, but I think he just didn't know how to show it."

A year after graduation Graham's father died in a Veteran's Administration Hospital.

As Janice finished her student teaching in Frostburg, Graham joined the Marines full time, graduating from Officer Candidates School in Quantico, Va., in 1963, where he was commissioned a second lieutenant.

The young idealist had big dreams for his life.

"I thought Jim was foolishly optimistic. He talked about sailing the world in a sloop or even becoming President some day," his wife remembers. "He didn't see any limits, but all the possibilities."

HIS DUTY

Graham decided to enroll in Flight School. With his wife and small son, he headed to Pensacola, Fla., for training. But he was faced with one obstacle he could not overcome – airsickness.

"It was very emotional for Jim. He didn't want to give up," Janice recalls.

The family headed back to Quantico for Graham to complete his studies and had their second child, a daughter named Jennifer. Graham was then assigned to the 3rd Battalion, 6th Marines, 2nd Marine Division, Fleet Marine Force at Camp Lejeune, N.C. He served as a platoon commander of Company I, Executive Officer of headquarters and Service Company, and commanding officer of Company M. He reported to Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic, from April to June of 1965, to protect Americans during an uprising.

Graham climbed ranks from lieutenant in 1965 to captain in 1966 – the same year he received his orders to go to Vietnam. On Thanksgiving Day, Graham said goodbye to his wife, 4-year-old son and 2-year-old daughter and headed to Southeast Asia.



John, Janice, Jennifer and Jim in a family photo, which was featured in a newspaper after Graham's death.

In Vietnam, Graham joined 2nd Battalion, 5th Marines, 1st Marine Division, serving as commanding officer of Company H and later, his final assignment, Company F.

Janice remembers speaking with her husband about the differences between him and the other men at war. While others were partying with beer, Graham prayed and drank his tea.

"I think many of the men wondered, 'Who is this guy that is going to lead us?'" Janice says.

The soldiers came to respect their new leader. Graham was a strict disciplinarian and could be hard on his Company, having them

Graham would lead the men in prayer and, at times, offer eulogies at services for Marines killed in battle.

"He was born to lead others in war. He often prayed in private and called us into prayer circles," a fellow Marine once wrote. "In the middle of the bush he would pull ironed and creased fatigues from his pack, shave and read the Bible... A complex and fearless man... Jim was one of the few men who truly found his place in life."

In the spring of '67, Janice got word that she and Jim could meet for "R and R" in Hawaii.

But, as she made plans, something stopped her.

"It was very strange," she remembers. "I couldn't get flight reservations. If I would be shopping for something for the trip, I would put it back. It was like subconsciously I didn't expect to go."

Janice never made that trip.

The details of what happened the afternoon of Friday, June 2, 1967, are varied with accounts from different perspectives of those involved in Operation Union II. What's undisputed is that Graham died a hero that day in Vietnam.

As Graham and his Company, F, moved through the large rice paddy, in Quang Tri, enemy machine-gunfire rang out from the bamboo thicket and many Americans were wounded and killed.

Graham launched a counter attack. As shots sputtered from two concealed automatic weapons, Graham created an assault unit of 10 men. Ignoring the crossfire, the troop rushed the field and managed to stop the shots from one of the machine gun-nests, relieving pressure on the second platoon and allowing

wounded to be evacuated.

As the second machine gun continued to ring out, Graham and his small force remained steadfast. He suffered two minor wounds and was personally responsible for eliminating 15 enemies. As



Graham (second from left) and members of Company F.



At the An Hoa airstrip, Vietnam, April of 1967.

repeat training drills and stressing the importance of their physical conditions.

Half a world away, Graham's thoughts were never far from home and his family. In a Sigma Tau Gamma newsletter, Marine Capt. James Scuras of Illinois remembered meeting fraternity brother Graham in Vietnam. He wrote, "Many nights when things were quiet, Jim and I would sit somewhere and talk about anything that came to mind. He was quite naturally proud of his wife and two children and liked to show pictures of them. He also had a picture of his yellow Corvette that he carried with him and told about races he had won with it."

"HE WAS BORN TO LEAD OTHERS IN WAR... JIM WAS ONE OF THE FEW MEN WHO TRULY FOUND HIS PLACE IN LIFE."

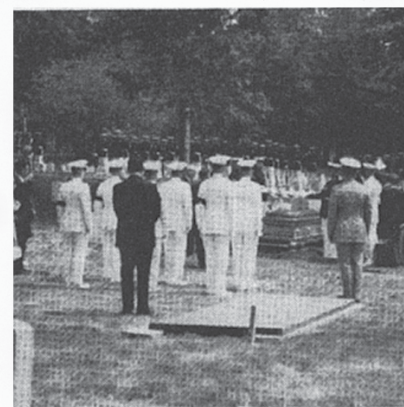
the fire was heavy and constant, Graham ordered his men to retreat for their own safety. He remained behind with one man, a lieutenant, who could not be moved due to serious wounds.

His last radio contact reported that he was being attacked by 26 enemy soldiers. Graham was killed at age 26. Reports say that Graham's body was found huddled over the lieutenant – protecting him.

On Sunday, after church, Janice put John and Jennifer to bed and read *The Washington Post*. An article on the front page reported of a huge skirmish in Vietnam.

"I read the story, but it didn't register," she says. "I think God spared me one more day."

That next morning as the family ate breakfast, Janice listened to the "Today" show on television. Newscaster Garrick Utley gave his regular



Graham's funeral, with full military honors, at Arlington National Cemetery.



Janice Graham accepted the Congressional Medal of Honor from Navy Secretary Paul Ignatius at a ceremony at the Marine Barracks in D.C. on Oct. 29, 1968. Right, Ignatius shows the award to the Graham children Jennifer (hidden) and John.

update of the Vietnam War. She heard him describe a battle, 25 miles south of Da Nang. She heard an interview with a Marine Captain. Then she heard Utley signing off.

"He said, 'That was Captain *So-and-So*. He's the only Marine Captain to return unharmed.' Right then, something didn't feel right."

Janice still did not hear any word of her husband's status the entire day, but she still had the feeling "something was terribly wrong."

The next day as John and Jenny took a nap, the doorbell rang.

Janice greeted a major, a woman Marine and a chaplain. Although she knew the reason for the visit, she followed protocol, as her husband would have.

"I invited them in and we sat down. And I waited for them to tell me."

Janice learned her husband was killed in action, but she did not know the details.

John and Jennifer were later told about their

father, and friends from Camp Lejeune and church gathered to offer support.

An official telegram arrived days later regarding Graham's death, but it did not contain details. "It said he had died from a gunshot wound to the head. I pictured him going through the jungle. Maybe shot by sniper fire. I didn't know."

The family waited 13 days for Graham's body to be returned to the United States. A funeral was held three days after. Graham's childhood and college friends attended.

"It was the first time a lot of people knew someone who had died in Vietnam," Janice says.

On the night of the funeral, someone told Janice that the latest edition of *Newsweek* contained information on her husband's death. Stopping by a newsstand, she picked up the magazine, which gave an account of the fight at Quang Tri and her husband's heroic acts. She read first-hand the account of how he rallied his men, saved many who were wounded

and gave his life for his country.

A long funeral brigade, accompanied by a military escort, made its way through Washington, D.C. The family stood by his graveside as Graham was laid to rest in Arlington National Cemetery.

A HERO

For Janice, reality sat in.

"At 25, I was a widow with two children," she says. "I'm amazed now at how young I was. I had so little clue about who I was or where I was heading."

Janice returned to the District Heights area with John and Jennifer to be closer to family and pick up the pieces of her life.

A little over a year later, she received word that her husband would be presented with the Congressional Medal of Honor, the highest award for valor in action bestowed upon those in Armed Services. Graham was the 17th Marine to earn the Medal in Vietnam.

On Oct. 29, 1968, limousines chauffeured the Grahams to the Marine Barracks in Washington, D.C., for the ceremony, which brought out over 100 family, friends and associates. National newspapers covered the event.



Secretary of the Navy Paul Ignatius presented Janice with a blue leather case holding the Medal. One newspaper commented that Ignatius hugged Jennifer and tried to explain the honor to John, saying, "This is for your daddy."

Janice remembers the outpouring of love from family and friends on that day. She has scrapbooks filled with professional black and white photographs of the ceremony. Graham also received other honors – the Purple Heart, Armed Forces Expeditionary Medal, Presiden-



The Medal

The Medal of Honor is the highest award for valor in action against an enemy force which can be bestowed upon an individual serving in the Armed Services of the United States. Generally presented to its recipient by the President of the United States of America in the name of Congress, it is often called the *Congressional Medal of Honor*.

To date, 3,400 Medals have been presented since the Civil War.

The History

On Dec. 9, 1861 Iowa Senator James W. Grimes introduced S. No. 82 in the United States Senate, a bill designed to "promote the efficiency of the Navy" by authorizing the production and distribution of "medals of honor." On Dec. 21 the bill was passed, authorizing 200 such medals be produced "which shall be bestowed upon such petty officers, seamen, landsmen and marines as shall distinguish themselves by their gallantry in action and other seamanlike qualities during the present war (Civil War)." President Lincoln signed the bill and the (Navy) Medal of Honor was born.

Two months later on Feb. 17, 1862, Massachusetts Senator Henry Wilson introduced a similar bill, this one to authorize "the President to distribute medals to privates in the Army of the United States who shall distinguish themselves in battle." Over the following months wording changed slightly as the bill made its way through Congress. When President Abraham Lincoln signed S.J.R. No 82 into law as 12 Stat. 623-624 on July 14, 1862, the Army Medal of Honor was born.

Courtesy of The Congressional Medal of Honor Society. www.cmohs.org.

tial Unit Citation, Navy Unit Commendation, National Defense Service Medal with one Bronze Star and the Republic of Vietnam Campaign Medal.

While the headlines heralded Graham's accomplishments and the nation honored his memory, Janice, as a wife and mother, questioned her husband's actions on that rice paddy.

"I often thought, 'How could you just run out there? You knew you wouldn't come back,'" she asks. "I don't know what was going on in his head."

Over the years, she has come to terms with his actions. "There were times when Jim thought he was invincible. He did save a lot of lives."

For John and Jennifer, it was sometimes difficult living in the shadow of their war hero father of whom they have little memory. (*See story, right*).

"They grew up with this 'John Wayne' type of dad that they didn't really know. But they certainly have his drive and attitude," Janice says proudly. "They're Grahams."

John received a bachelor's degree in mathematics from FSU (Class of '85), and is now a lieutenant colonel and Cobra helicopter pilot in the Marine Corps., following a similar path as his father. He is on active duty with Joint Forces Command in Norfolk, Va., where he works as an action officer in the Operations Directorate. Jennifer also pursued a military career. She graduated from the Air Force Academy in 1986 and is currently a lieutenant colonel stationed at Laughlin Air Force Base in Del Rio, Texas.

In the summer of 1999, John and Jennifer traveled to Vietnam, visited the battlefield in

Quang Tri and buried a time capsule filled with letters, photos and personal belongings on the site of their father's death.

Janice eventually remarried and had another child, a son. She worked at a law firm across from Andrews Air Force Base before retiring and now resides in Fredericksburg, Va.

Even though her life has moved on, Janice knows that she will always be connected to her first husband. In the late 1980s, the family attended a ceremony at the Marine Corps Base in Quantico for the dedication of Graham Hall, named in Jim's memory. Graham's high school and many local organizations have also honored him throughout the years. Janice has been asked to lecture at colleges and schools on her husband's honor and deals with occasional inquiries about Capt. Graham. It's a role she has accepted.

"One day the phone will ring and it will be someone with a question about Jim," she says. "Being his wife will always be part of my identity."

Thirty-five years later, others still reminisce about Graham's bravery. A posting on a Medal of Honor Web site recalls Graham's actions and thanks him.

One Marine writes: "If a man ever deserved the Medal of Honor, Capt. Graham did. If not for this man and his actions... all of us would surely have died. The fire was so heavy [that] time seemed to stand still. I think of him often. God bless him forever."

This ripple effect continues to amaze the Grahams.

In the beginning of June each year, Janice, with family and friends, visits Graham's grave in Arlington. The white marble headstone is adorned with gold lettering to signify that the man laid to rest has received our nation's highest military honor.

Each time, Janice finds a surprise left by an anonymous visitor – a small stone on the top of the grave marker, a customary sign of remembrance and reverence.

"Someone who I don't know remembers that special day and makes a point of visiting," she says. "Jim's actions have touched a lot of people. His reach is wider than I will ever know."



Janice today



His grave marker is adorned with gold letters, signifying Graham's Medal of Honor.



A SON AND DAUGHTER'S JOURNEY TO THE PAST

John (Class of '85) and Jennifer Graham have little memory of their father, Congressional Medal of Honor recipient Capt. James A. Graham.

While there are the stories from family and the men who served with him in Vietnam and the many photographs, awards and official citations, the siblings did not experience a sense of closure with their father's death until they stepped foot on Vietnamese soil.



John (left) and Jennifer (right) Graham visit with children during their trip to Vietnam.

"We had a strong presence of our father from the people who knew him and loved him," says Jennifer, who was almost 3 when her father was killed. "He was so much a part of our lives on a daily basis."

Both John and Jennifer chose careers in the military – the Marines and Air Force respectively. It has been both challenging and comforting to serve in the shadows of their heroic father.

"Growing up in the shadow of a memory is quite different than seeing and being with a real person... I grew up in the shadow of legend – a perfect person who did no wrong and was above reproach," says John, who strongly resembles his father in both looks and mannerisms. "When I joined the Corps, there were people still around who knew my father, so I was singled out often and had to toe the line. Was I going to measure up?"

While their motivation for joining the military differs, they know their father would have approved. John wanted to find out "why a man would abandon his family, go to an unpopular war and get killed for it." He found out that the military is about "commitment, dedication and brotherhood."

For Jennifer, she saw it as her duty. "I feel as if there was a bit of debt John and I had to pay back. The U.S. Military has taken care of us since the days we were born. They made a large investment in us," she says. "I think we're

serving in a capacity in which our dad would be proud."

John posed the possibility of going to Vietnam to Jennifer one morning as they jogged.

"I just needed to know what it was like – where he was," says John. "[I wanted] to feel some closure about the whole experience."

The two began a yearlong process to visit the country – from booking the tickets to joining an organized tour. The biggest challenge was to find the exact location of where their father was killed. The two made phone calls, researched their father's official military maps and posted messages on Web sites. Their research was successful.

In June of 1999, John and Jennifer left on a 10-day tour with a small group of Vietnam War veterans and their wives. The men served in the same area as Capt. Graham and shared stories. Others, impressed by the dedication of these younger people, told their own stories to John and Jennifer.



The children of Jim Graham, John and Jennifer, traveled to the location of their father's death in Vietnam (above) and buried a time capsule on the site (left).

"It was amazing. It was the first time some of these men ever talked about their experiences in Vietnam. Even their wives didn't know the stories," Jennifer says. "It was an incredibly healing experience."

John and Jennifer took a bus into the interior of the Quang Tri Province and then hiked several miles, passing bomb craters and remnants still there from the war.



Jennifer Graham washes her father's name on the Vietnam Memorial Wall.

"The battlefields are right in the middle of someone's rice paddy. They aren't hallowed grounds as they are in this country," says Jennifer.

The two eventually reached the site of Union Operation II, dug a hole and buried a time capsule filled with letters, photos and keepsakes for and about their father. Both came away changed by the experience.

"It was quite touching and emotional," Jennifer recalls.

Despite their loss, the Graham siblings know they are fortunate to have both information about their father and the opportunity for closure.

Through their involvement in "Sons and Daughters in Touch," an organization for children who lost fathers in Vietnam, they realize how others continue to struggle.

"There are other kids who lost their fathers and know nothing, and they have these feelings of anger and bitterness," says Jennifer. "I see how lucky we are."

Both John and Jennifer have frequented the Vietnam Memorial Wall in Washington, D.C. Jennifer has taken part in ceremonies to wash the Wall on Father's Day and appreciates that the 58,229 names are equal on the black granite Memorial.

"Everyone is treated equally there – all the men who represent a great part of our American history," she says. "Not one life is different from another."

(To find out more about "Sons and Daughters in Touch," visit online at www.sdit.org).

— Ty DeMartino

Graham's son, John, and grandchildren take a rubbing of Jim's name from the Wall.



LOCAL CHAPTER OWN RIGHTS TO FAMOUS MEMORIAL PAINTING

Vietnam Veterans of America Chapter 172, based in Cumberland, Md., is one of the most successful chapters in the nation, thanks largely to an artist who created a work that stirred such strong emotions that he couldn't bear to profit from it.

The artist is realist painter Lee Teter, and the work is "Reflections," a widely recognized image of a veteran leaning in grief against the Wall of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial. Reflected in the wall are the ghostly images of his compatriots who died in Vietnam.

Teter poured his admiration for the veterans he knew into the painting, according to the story of "Reflections" on the VVA Chapter 172 Web site. Despite the months it took to finish, Teter felt the experience related by it could never be used for his profit. A Cumberland resident at this time in the late 1980s, he decided to donate it to the town's small chapter of Vietnam Veterans of America.

The men pictured in "Reflections" are all actual veterans. Six are members of Chapter 172, who modeled for Teter. One additional image is taken from a family photo of a man who died in Vietnam.

In addition, to get sales off the ground, he helped organize the selling and promotion within the chapter, supervise the printing and signed thousands of prints. In addition, he gave them a license to reproduce and distribute the prints. Even though he didn't ask, the chapter soon bought the copyright from Teter using proceeds from print sales, giving them complete control over the print.

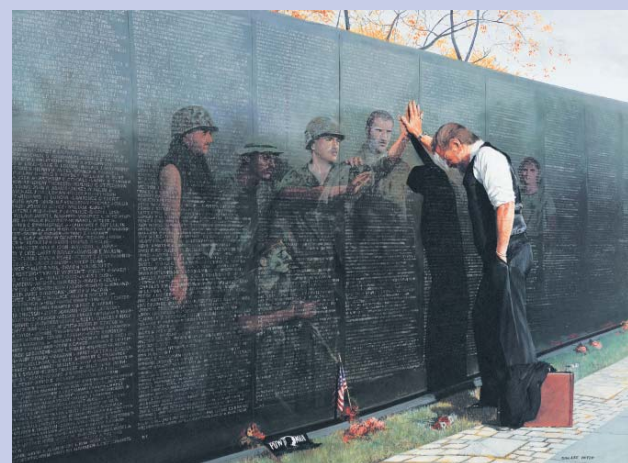
"Our overwhelming success is largely due to Lee Teter and his allowing us the rights to the print 'Reflections,'" says Bruce Whitaker, immediate past president of Chapter 172 and Maryland State Council President. With that, we have the necessary funds to provide a number of different services for Vietnam Vets."

Among its services for Vietnam Veterans is a food pantry for veterans, an annual contribution toward the volunteer coordinator position at the local Veterans Affairs clinic, a monetary assistance fund for members in crisis, providing transportation for veterans to the VA Hospital in Martinsburg, W.Va. and an honor guard for veterans' funerals.

They provide significant support to Re-Entry, a counseling group for combat veterans suffering Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. They bought and

refurbished a building in downtown Cumberland, then donated the building to Re-Entry.

In addition to its numerous services for Vietnam Veterans, VVA 172 is active in a number of community charities. They provide scholarships for Vietnam veterans and their descendants to FSU and Allegany College of Maryland. Members



Reflections by Lee Teter, reprinted with permission of Vietnam Veterans of America.

frequently volunteer at area charitable events, including bell-ringing for The Salvation Army, road cleanup and an information booth at Heritage Days.

The local chapter boasts 490 members, second in Maryland only to Baltimore. At one point, Baltimore and Cumberland were first and second in membership nationally. 172 was national chapter of the year in 1998.

Chapter 172 was founded in the mid-1980s, just a few years after the national organization was started. Vietnam veterans received a lukewarm response, at best, from other veterans' service organizations, and their particular needs were largely ignored by governmental organizations.

"Our motto is 'Never again will one generation of veterans abandon another,'" Whitaker says. "That gives you a pretty good idea."

For more information about Chapter 172 and "Reflections," visit the chapter's Web site at www.vietnamreflections.com. The Web site for the national Vietnam Veterans of America is www.vva.org.

The "Reflections" print can be purchased online by visiting www.vietnamreflections.com/ or you may call 1-800-482-VETS. All proceeds benefit the Vietnam Veterans of America.

— Liz Douglas Medcalf