

Vignettes from Our Nation's Wars

Veterans Day 2016

Introduction:

Veterans Day originated as Armistice Day, which was set aside by the United States, Great Britain, and France to commemorate the ending of World War I, November 11, 1918. After World War II it was recognized as a day of tribute to the veterans and the dead of that conflict as well. In 1954, after the Korean War, the date was officially designated in the United States as Veterans Day to honor servicemen of all U.S. wars.¹

Observance during the day has become a means of remembrance for all those who have served in our nation's wars with special encomiums for those who gave their lives in service to the country.

World War 1

Although victory was declared over Germany on November 11, 1918, the German people did not comprehend that the war was lost but rather a time-out had been negotiated. Missourian general John Pershing perceived the mood of the German people:

On November 9, 1918, a new republic was established in Berlin, and German Kaiser Friedrich Wilhelm sought and acquired asylum in Holland. Pershing warned that the fighting needed to continue until the Allies obtained an unconditional surrender, not a cease-fire. "What I dread is that Germany doesn't know that she is licked. Had they given us another week, we'd have *taught* them." But it was out of his hands. At 11:00 A.M. on November 11, 1918, a silence fell over the boldly battlefields of Europe, ending the costliest war in human history.²

¹ "Veterans Day," in *The New Encyclopaedia Britannica: Micropaedia*, 15th ed. (Chicago: Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2010), 12:340.

² Larry Schweikart and Michael Allen, *A Patriot's History of the United States* (New York: Sentinel, 2004), 520.

Medal of Honor

For World War I, I have selected this Medal of Honor citation awarded to a citizen of Missouri: **Harold L. Turner**, Corporal, U.S. Army, Company F, 142d Infantry, 35th Division. Near Etienne, France, 8 October 1918. Born: 5 May 1898, Aurora, Missouri.

Citation: After his platoon had started the attack Cpl. Turner assisted in organizing a platoon consisting of the battalion scouts, runners, and a detachment of Signal Corp. As second in command of this platoon he fearlessly led them forward through heavy enemy fire, continually encouraging the men. Later he encountered deadly machine gun fire which reduced the strength of his command to but 4 men, and these were obliged to take shelter. The enemy machinegun emplacement, 25 yards distant, kept up a continual fire from 4 machineguns. After the fire had shifted momentarily, Cpl. Turner rushed forward with fixed bayonet and charged the position alone, capturing the strong point with a complement of 50 Germans and 4 machineguns. His remarkable display of courage and fearlessness was instrumental in destroying the strong point, the fire from which had blocked the advance of his company.³

World War 2

Pearl Harbor, 7:51 a.m. Clearing the crest of the Waianae \wī-ä-nī\ Range, Strike Leader Fuchida could see it now! It was the harbor, straight ahead. So intently studied on maps, the models, photographs, all of it so stark and clear now. He could see it!

At an approach average speed of just over three miles per minute he was closing at what seemed an amazing speed. What was shadowy, dulled by morning mist was now beginning to stand out clear, the “West Loch,” Ford Island, the naval yard, and battleship row. Already he could see three clusters, two ships moored side by side, as studied in the maps and photographs, their high gunnery-control spotting towers indeed looking like pagodas. He looked to the east. The first of the Zeroes were now directly over Ford Island, singing up, breaking into the classic split S, the diving roll into a strafing attack to clear the way, behind them a formation of Vals⁴ preparing to do the same. Not a single burst of anti-aircraft fire coming up, not a single American Air Corps green or navy blue aircraft in the sky. Not a single one! They had done it! (p. 301)

³ *The Congressional Medal of Honor: The Names, the Deeds* (Forest Ranch, Cal.: Sharp and Dunnigan Publications, 1984), 538.

⁴ “The Aichi D3A (Allied reporting name “Val”) was a World War II carrier-borne dive bomber which participated in the attack on Pearl Harbor and U.S. bases in the Philippines, such as Clark Air Force Base. Vals sank more Allied warships than any other Axis aircraft” (Wikipedia, “Aichi D3A,” [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aichi_D3A] accessed November 11, 2016).

Pearl Harbor, 7:53:30. A distant thump, more felt through the soles of his feet than heard. Turning to look north, it was up toward Schofield, Wheeler Army Air Corps base. Was that smoke. The first notes of the “Star-Spangled Banner” drifted across the waters, white-clad band on the fantail of the *Nevada*, they were starting a few minutes early this morning, someone must have lowered the signal flag. Lieutenant Commander James Watson looked at his watch, calculating from Tokyo time, it was still nearly five minutes before eight. Shops’ bells began to echo, flags started to go up, dozens of flags, from the smallest tug and submarine to the fantail of *Oklahoma* directly across the bay.

But some of the flag raisers were not watching to their duty, they were pausing, looking, pointing.

Clearing the treetops lining the north end of the harbor, a dozen planes skimmed down low, full throttle, a shining hum, heading straight for Ford Island, a winking flash from their wing tips. (p. 302)

The bandmaster started to swing his baton wildly, speeding up the anthem, as the plane banked over *Nevada*. Watson saw the red sunbursts on either wing.

Suddenly dozens of planes were crisscrossing back and forth in every direction. A plane turned toward *Nevada* opening fire on the formation of bandsmen.

“*Over the land of the free and the home of the brave.*” The last notes trailing out, now the sound of gunfire, a Zero strafing *Nevada*’s deck, bandsmen scrambling. (p. 303)

And in those few seconds of trying to absorb so much, the formation of Kates⁵ swinging out from the narrow channel and into the loch, aiming straight for battleship row, began to release their loads. One torpedo, another, another ... a dozen of them. He could see the splashes. But didn’t someone say it was impossible to effectively drop torpedoes in shallow harbor?

But they surfaced, he could see the trail of oxygen bubbles as they streaked across the narrow loch at over forty knots, the planes continuing to race straight toward their targets then pulling up, banking away.

The flash was startling. In an instant a column of water soared upward from the port side of the *Oklahoma*, impossibly high it seemed. My God, not my ship!

⁵ “The Nakajima B5N (Allied reporting name “Kate”) was the standard carrier torpedo bomber of the Imperial Japanese Navy. The B5N achieved particular successes at the battles of Pearl Harbor, Coral Sea, Midway, and Santa Cruz Islands” (Wikipedia, “Nakajima B5N” [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nakajima_B5N] accessed November 11, 2016).

From a quarter mile away, the roar of the explosion hit him a second and a half later but already he was staggered by the impact, as the concussion raced across the channel, slamming into the soles of his feet as he stood at the water's edge. Another towering explosion amidships of the *Oklahoma*. (p. 305)

The vast bulk of the *Oklahoma* seemed to actually lift clear of the water, then sagged back down.

The concussion of the four explosions hit him with near simultaneous blows and staggered him so that he was driven backward. Antlike figures seemed to be caught up in the rising columns of water, fire, smoke, torn metal; men who had raced up onto the deck, some in uniforms, some just in skivvies, blown clear off the ship, tumbling through the air.

The great ship lurched like a punch-drunk boxer taking the killing blow, seeming to stagger and then just slowly began to fall. (pp. 305, 308)

Oklahoma was rolling over. Her deck was now visible. She rolled, turning over, the three great gun turrets tearing free of their mountings. A foaming wave, capped with flickering fire, black with oil, rolled out and away as the *Oklahoma* turtled and sank down to rest on the muddy bottom ... hundreds of men, still alive, most of them dying, trapped inside. The ship was in her death roll. (pp. 308–309)

James could not think he could not even begin to absorb the vision nightmares that were searing into him. He barely noticed *West Virginia* or *Maryland*, engulfed in flames.

And then, in that instant, the *Arizona* just disappeared. The flash of the explosion was so intense, so blinding, he shielded his face from the heat. Within its flame he could see glimpses of the entire ship, forward of the bridge, lifting into the air, clear out of the water and then the shock wave hit, staggering him backward.

Jagged hunks of metal soared out of the fireball, splashing into the water, there was a momentary glimpse of a plane, wing sheared off, perhaps caught in the blast, tumbling in a spiraling dive, slamming into the harbor, engine howling, propellers sheering off and spinning out and away ... bodies falling from the sky ... damned souls descending into the fiery pit, for the harbor was now awash with flaming oil.

The fireball spread outward and then was gone, replaced by a plume of oily black smoke boiling up, the blown-out wreckage of the *Arizona* collapsing inward upon itself, the twisted pagoda tower leaning over drunkenly, boiling steam hissing as it settled to the bottom. (p. 311)

And then ... they were gone. The tormentors were just gone. Already the Kates and Vals were winging off, disappearing back into dots. Over the airfields the Zeroes still wheeled and turned like hawks, looking for some prey that had escaped their first pounce as if offering a challenge to any that remained within the smoking wreckage to come up and offer a fight challenge ... but the rest were just simply gone. And the fleet before him was gone as well.⁶ (pp. 311–13)

This surprise attack on Pearl Harbor and Kaneohe Bay on the island of O’ahu left America’s Pacific fleet devastated. Recovery to take up the fight against the Japanese imperialist empire took both courage and resolve to restore and regain the advantage necessary for victory.

Sixteen men, among the thousands who bravely fought back on that fateful morning of 7 December 1941, were awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor. Each of them displayed the resolve, dedication, and bravery required for the United States armed forces to regroup and reload. Here are three of those citations.

Medals of Honor

Captain Samuel Glenn Fuqua, U.S. Navy, USS *Arizona*. Born, Laddonia, Missouri.

For distinguished conduct in action, outstanding heroism, and utter disregard of his own safety above and beyond the call of duty during the attack on the Fleet in Pearl Harbor, by Japanese forces on 7 December 1941. Upon the commencement of the attack, Lt. Commander Fuqua rushed to the quarterdeck of the U.S.S. *Arizona* to which he was attached where he was stunned and knocked down by the explosion of a large bomb which hit the quarterdeck, penetrated several decks, and started a severe fire. Upon regaining consciousness, he began to direct the fighting of the fire and the rescue of wounded and injured personnel.

Almost immediately there was a tremendous explosion forward, which made the ship appear to rise out of the water, shudder, and settle down by the bow rapidly. The whole forward part of the ship was enveloped in flames which were spreading rapidly, and enemy bombing and strafing, at that time, Lt. Comdr. Fuqua continued to direct the fighting of fires in order to check them while the wounded and burned could be taken from the ship and supervised the rescue of the men in such an amazingly calm and cool manner and with such excellent judgment that it inspired everyone who saw him and undoubtedly resulted in the saving of many lives. After realizing the ship could not be saved and that he was the senior surviving officer aboard, he directed it to be abandoned, but continued to remain on the quarterdeck and directed abandoning ship and rescue of personnel until satisfied that all personnel that could be had been saved, after which he left his ship with the boatload. The conduct of Lt. Comdr. Fuqua was not only in keeping with the highest traditions of the naval service but characterizes him as an outstanding leader of men.

⁶ Newt Gingrich and William R. Forstchen, *Pearl Harbor: A Novel of December 8th* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2007), 301–313 *passim*.

John William Finn, Lieutenant, U.S. Navy, Naval Air Station, Kaneohe Bay. Born, Los Angeles, California.

For extraordinary heroism distinguished service, and devotion above and beyond the call of duty. During the first attack by Japanese airplanes on the Naval Air Station, Kaneohe Bay, on 7 December 1941, Lt. Finn promptly secured and manned a .50-caliber machinegun mounted on an instruction stand in a completely exposed section of the parking ramp, which was under heavy enemy machinegun strafing fire. Although painfully wounded many times, he continued to man this gun and to return the enemy's fire vigorously and with telling effect throughout enemy strafing and bombing attacks and with complete disregard for his own personal safety. It was only by specific orders that he was persuaded to leave his post to seek medical attention. Following first-aid treatment, although obviously suffering much pain and moving with great difficulty, he returned to the squadron area and actively supervised the rearming of returning planes. His extraordinary heroism and conduct in this action were in keeping with the highest traditions of the U.S. Naval Service.

Jackson Charles Pharris, Lieutenant, U.S. Navy, U.S.S. *California*. Born, Columbus, Georgia.

For conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty while attached to the U.S.S. *California* during the surprise enemy Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, Territory of Hawaii, 7 December 1941. In charge of the ordinance repair party on the third deck when the first Japanese torpedo struck almost directly under his station, Lt. (then Gunner) Pharris was stunned and severely injured by the concussion which hurled him to the overhead and back to the deck. Quickly recovering, he acted on his own initiative to set up a hand-supply ammunition train for the antiaircraft guns. With water and oil rushing in where the port bulkhead had been torn up from the deck, with many of the remaining crewmembers overcome by oil fumes, and the ship without power and listing heavily to port as a result of a second torpedo hit, Lt. Pharris ordered the shipfitters to counterflood.

Twice rendered unconscious by the nauseous fumes and handicapped by his painful injuries, he persisted in his desperate efforts to speed up the supply of ammunition and at the same time repeatedly risked his life to enter flooding compartments and drag to safety unconscious shipmates who were gradually being submerged in oil. By his inspiring leadership, his valiant efforts and his extreme loyalty to his ship and her crew, he saved many of his shipmates from death and was largely responsible for keeping the *California* in action during the attack. His heroic conduct throughout this first eventful engagement of World War II reflects the highest credit upon Lt. Pharris and enhances the finest traditions of the U. S. Naval Service.⁷

⁷ *The Congressional Medal of Honor: The Names, the Deeds*, 322–23, 316–317, and 422.

In less than two hours, approximately 350 Japanese warplanes wiped out 10 percent of the entire U.S. Pacific Fleet, including almost all of its battleships, and killed an estimated 2,400 Americans, many of whom were burned to death or drowned when the *Arizona* exploded and sank. The bodies of over 900 sailors remain entombed there to this day. Lt. Cdr. Paul E. Spangler, M.D., a surgeon stationed with his family at Pearl Harbor, provided the “Izee Reds,” his hunting buddies back in Portland, Oregon, with firsthand account of the historic event. Although the letter was typed ten days after the attack, Spangler decided to wait a year before mailing it due to censorship.

Izee Reds:

Just a note to tell you hams that you ain't seen no shootin' yet. We had a little disturbance out here a week ago Sunday and it was sumpin. I must hasten to tell you that we all survived it without a scratch but I expected see my maker most any moment that Sunday morning. They are beginning to evacuate those who want to go but the family will stay here until ordered home

I was resting peacefully in bed when I noticed rather more “practice fire” than I had heard before and then I realized that it was strange to be practicing on Sunday morning. About that time Clara and the kids came home from Church and their curiosity was aroused. Then I got the fatal word to report to the Hospital immediately. I still was not certain what was going on until I came off of the hill on my way to the Hospital. Then I saw smoke from the several fires and saw the anitaircraft shells exploding. I opened her up then and with my Pearl-Harbor plates on I had the right of way and I was out there in nothing flat. I arrived just in the lull between waves of attacks about 30 minutes after the first shooting.

There was one big Jap bomber in the sky flying over Hickam Field and Fort Kamahamaha but no one seemed to be doing anything about it. One Jap plane was down in flames at the Hospital and it had fired the Laboratory and one of the quarters which fortunately had been vacated because they were starting a big new dry dock. I met the Exec. At the door and he told me to go up and take charge of the Surgery. I hurried up to the Surgery and all ready the casualties were pouring in. I did the first operation on a casualty in this war if that is anything.

I spent the next 72 hours in four-hour shifts at the operating table. During my first shift we were under almost constant bombing and the A-A fire kept up a constant din. They didn't actually hit the hospital but one explosion was so close it blew all the windows out of the workroom which was right next to the room I was operating in. I thought my time had come for sure. It was hell for a while. These poor devils brought in all shot up and burned. Many of them hopeless. We gave them plenty of morphine and sent them out in the Wards to die. The others we patched up as best we could. Some we opened their bellies and sewed up perforations in their bowels. It was all a nice party but personally I don't want to see any more like it.

You have read the official accounts given by the Secretary of the Navy. I note relief in the mainland that it was not as bad as feared. If the truth were known I don't think they would be so optimistic. Don't quote me, but this is the real dope. We have just three battleships that can fight right now. The *Arizona* and *West Virginia* are shambles. The *Oklahoma* is belly up and I doubt she will ever be of further use, if so it will be a full year. The *California* is sitting on the bottom but is still upright and may be salvaged. The *Nevada* is aground just across from the Hospital and they hope to float her this week but it will be a year before she can be fighting again. The *Utah* is a total wreck but she was not used except for training anyway. I think they thought she was a carrier as she was tied up at the carriers berth and they certainly gave her plenty. Four cruisers are badly damaged. The hangers at Hickam Field, the mess hall, post exchange are all shot to hell. Many Flying Fortresses destroyed.

If you think these damn "Japs" didn't do a thorough job, guess again. They certainly knew where they could hurt us most and they dropped their bombs and torpedoes right there. They had all the information. They needed even to the exact location of the most vital targets and as of our sip movements and disposition. I can't understand why they soft pedal things back there. I think the people should know the truth. They would be roused to the necessary pitch to bring this thing to a successful conclusion. It is not going to be an easy job in my opinion. I only hope the country will now take off their coats and go to work. We have the ability and skill but it is going to mean many sacrifices for all and a long hard pull. What we need is planes, carriers, and subs. Thousands of them.

Things are pretty calm here now. There are subs in the waters about and we don't know how many we have but it is quite a number. The *Enterprise* came in yesterday and I hear they think they have sunk about forty since the war started. They have touched none of our carriers. Many reinforcements have come over in the shape of bombers that can fly over but the fighters will have to be shipped over and they are short now. The morale his very good. The Jap situation is well handled and the FBI and Naval intelligence has been very active. No sabotage of any moment. We are under strict military law. Blackout every night. Food and gas rationed but that is just the last few days. Schools are closed so the kids are home with Clara all day long. No liquor or beer is sold but fortunately I have an adequate supply for New Year's if I live that long.

I must close now and get this on its way. Please do not broadcast the source of this information as I am in a bad spot I guess if I was caught sending this sort of dope. But I thought you all would like to know the real dope and I think you should.

I hope this note gets through the route I have chosen. It certainly would not by the regular channels. We all send you our love and best wishes. We wish you a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year. And remember Pearl Harbor. Paul⁸

The U.S. involvement in World War II lasted until early May 1945 in the European theater when Germany surrendered to the Allies. The war in the Pacific theater officially ended in early September 1945:

⁸ Carroll, *War Letters*, 184–87.

A surrender document that had been signed on April 29 while Hitler was still alive finally brought the fighting to a conclusion on May 2. The surrender of the German forces in northwestern Europe was signed at (Gen. Bernard) Montgomery's headquarters on Luneburg \lū'-ne-burk\ Heath on May 4, 1945; and a further document, covering all the German forces, was signed with more ceremony at (Gen. Dwight) Eisenhower's headquarters at Reims \rēmz\, in the presence of Soviet as well as U.S., British, and French delegations. At midnight on May 8, 1945, the war in Europe was over.

On August 10, 1945, the Japanese government issued a statement agreeing to accept the surrender terms of the Potsdam Declaration on the understanding that the emperor's position as a sovereign ruler would not be prejudiced. In their reply the Allies granted Japan's request that the emperor's sovereign status be maintained, subject only to their supreme commander's directives. Japan accepted this proviso on August 14, and the emperor Hirohito urged his people to accept the decision to surrender. By September 2, formal surrender ceremonies took place. (President Harry) Truman designated (Gen. Douglas) MacArthur as the Allied powers' supreme commander to accept Japan's formal surrender, which was solemnized aboard the U. S. flagship *Missouri* in Tokyo Bay.⁹

Vietnam

There are endless tales to be told and heard from those who fought in the engagements of World War II. Most veterans of any wartime experience are usually unwilling to discuss their involvement in battles fought either won or lost. Regardless, those who fought in World War II to this day are revered and held in high regard.

Those who saw battle in Vietnam, not so much. U.S. involvement on a large scale began in 1965 where previously it only provided military advisers. Following the assassination of President John F. Kennedy in 1963, his successor, Lyndon B. Johnson took it upon himself to micromanage the conflict. Under his mismanagement, the war dragged on for almost another decade before U.S. forces were being literally chased out of Saigon.

A lot of blood was shed for no discernable reason. Almost 60 thousand American military personnel were killed during the ordeal. By 1971, over 71 percent of the American public believed the nation had "made a mistake" by entering that war.

These citizens' displeasure were directed at the politicians who were totally to blame for the complete failure to prosecute the war but the people went further with their discontent by turning against those whom the politicians drafted and sent into battle.

⁹ John Graham Royde-Smith, "World Wars," in *The New Encyclopaedia: Macropaedia*, 15th ed. (Chicago: Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2010), 29:1021; 1022.

It was bad enough that the war was a complete disaster but to pour salt in that literal and often psychological wound was the imputation of disgrace upon those who simply followed their superiors' orders and did their duty.

The American people have by and large been are a shallow bunch since the widespread loss of thought synthesized in the souls of so many during the 1960s. Progressivism has become the substitute for biblical guidance and its principles are in direct opposition to the principles of establishment truth and the doctrines of the Word of God.

Because of the results of the recent national and state elections, the putridness of that cosmic thought has again expressed itself in rebellion. It is the same mentality that took hold in the time of the Vietnam War and it has never been quenched but rather adopted by the souls of our nation's children.

I use the term, "loss of thought" and by that I refer to the absence of doctrine in the souls of so many. The better expression might be the "exchange of thought" for those who once knew biblical principles but failed to teach their children its power.

Replacing parental guidance has been the indoctrination of five decades of children's souls of the Progressive lie. Offspring of those five decades now express psychosis. Their indoctrination on the one hand seeks a "safe space" but over the course of one evening they transform themselves into rioters, looters, assaulters, and some even contend that murder ought be on their agenda.

What do those who fought in the jungles of Vietnam think of this? I'm not qualified to say but I do know this: they are now witnessing the very same thing they saw in the late 1960s when returning home from combat.

So let's salute these men who fought a war for their country. Once back in country, they were blamed for doing the duty the politicians assigned them to do.

The person that I want to present as an example of absolute courage and intrepidity in the face of conflict is from Montgomery, Alabama. To convey the details of this man exploits I refer to information from his Web site for remembrances of the man and his service to the country:

Robert Lewis Howard (1939–2009)

[This website is dedicated to Robert L. Howard, one of America's most decorated soldiers. He served five tours in Vietnam and is the only soldier in our nation's history to be nominated for the Congressional Medal of Honor three times for three separate actions within a thirteen-month period.](#)

The first nomination was downgraded to the Distinguished Service Cross. The second nomination was downgraded to the Silver Star. The third nomination was downgraded to a 2nd Distinguished Service Cross but later upgraded to the Medal of Honor.

He received a direct appointment from Master Sergeant to 1st Lieutenant in 1969, and was awarded the Medal of Honor by President Richard M. Nixon at the White House in 1971. His other awards for valor include the Distinguished Service Cross - our nation's second highest award, the Silver Star - the third highest award, and numerous lesser decorations including eight Purple Hearts. He received his decorations for valor for actions while serving as an NCO (Non-Commissioned Officer).

Robert L. Howard grew up in Opelika, Alabama and enlisted in the U.S. Army in 1956 at age seventeen. He retired as a full Colonel in 1992 after 36 years of service. During Vietnam, he served in the U.S. Army Special Forces (Green Berets) and spent most of his five tours in the super-secret MACV-SOG (Military Assistance Command Vietnam Studies and Observations Group) also known as Special Operations Group, which ran classified cross-border operations into Laos, Cambodia, and North Vietnam. These men carried out some of the most daring and dangerous missions ever conducted by the U.S. military. The understrength sixty-man recon company at Kontum in which he served was the Vietnam War's most highly decorated unit of its size with five Medals of Honor. It was for his actions while serving on a mission to rescue a fellow soldier in Cambodia, that he was submitted for the Medal of Honor the third time for his extraordinary heroism.

Robert L. Howard is said to be our nation's most decorated soldier from the Vietnam War. He was the last Vietnam Special Forces Medal of Honor recipient still on active duty when he retired on Sept. 29, 1992. His story is told in John Plaster's excellent book, SOG: The Secret Wars of America's Commandos in Vietnam.

It is important for future generations that we remember our military heroes and the great sacrifices they have made for us in the name of Freedom.

Excerpts from John Plaster's recent book *Secret Commandos: Behind Enemy Lines with the Elite Warriors of SOG*, - p. 303:

"The day that President Nixon draped the Medal of Honor's pale blue ribbon around Howard's neck, I sat before the TV in my parents' living room watching the evening news. Coming on top of his previous decorations - the Distinguished Service Cross and multiple Silver and Bronze Stars, plus eight Purple Hearts - Howard's combat awards exceeded those of Audie Murphy, America's legendary World War II hero, until then our most highly decorated serviceman. At last, Howard would get his due. I flipped station to station, but not one of the networks - not CBS or NBC or ABC - could find ten seconds to mention Captain Robert Howard or his indomitable courage. I found nothing about him in the newspapers.

Twisted by the antiwar politics of that era, many in the media believed that to recognize a heroic act was to glorify war. They simply chose not to cover the ceremony. It might as well not have happened."

Medal of Honor

Citation: For conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity in action at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty. 1st Lt. Howard (then SFC.), distinguished himself while serving as platoon sergeant of an American-Vietnamese platoon which was on a mission to rescue a missing American soldier in enemy controlled territory in the Republic of Vietnam. The platoon had left its helicopter-landing zone and was moving out on its mission when it was attacked by an estimated 2-company force. During the initial engagement, 1st Lt. Howard was wounded and his weapon destroyed by a grenade explosion. 1st Lt. Howard saw his platoon leader had been wounded seriously and was exposed to fire. Although unable to walk, and weaponless, 1st Lt. Howard unhesitatingly crawled through a hail of fire to retrieve his wounded leader. As 1st Lt. Howard was administering first aid and removing the officer's equipment, an enemy bullet struck 1 of the ammunition pouches on the lieutenant's belt, detonating several magazines of ammunition. 1st Lt. Howard momentarily sought cover and then realizing that he must rejoin the platoon, which had been disorganized by the enemy attack, he again began dragging the seriously wounded officer toward the platoon area. Through his outstanding example of indomitable courage and bravery, 1st Lt. Howard was able to rally the platoon into an organized defense force. With complete disregard for his safety, 1st Lt. Howard crawled from position to position, administering first aid to the wounded, giving encouragement to the defenders and directing their fire on the encircling enemy. For 3 1/2 hours 1st Lt. Howard's small force and supporting aircraft successfully repulsed enemy attacks and finally were in sufficient control to permit the landing of rescue helicopters. 1st Lt. Howard personally supervised the loading of his men and did not leave the bullet-swept landing zone until all were aboard safely. 1st Lt. Howard's gallantry in action, his complete devotion to the welfare of his men at the risk of his life were in keeping with the highest traditions of the military service and reflect great credit on himself, his unit, and the U.S. Army.¹⁰

My good friend, Jim Lawrence, was one the early arrivals in Vietnam in the spring of 1965 when President Johnson decided to pick up the pace. Jim and fellow members of the 7th Cavalry were destined to write their names in Army lore as combatants in the famous Battles of the Ia Drang Valley.

The first conflict occurred on November 14 at Landing Zone X-Ray where a the 450-man 1st 7th Cavalry Division Airmobile arrived to seek out and defeat North Vietnamese brigadier general Chu Huy Man's army. On Wednesday, the fourteenth, 450-men of the 1st Battalion, 7th Cavalry, landed in the Ia Drang Valley. This LZ turned out to be extremely close to Man's base camp and the general had brought with him two-thousand men who the next day would ambush the battalion that was outnumbered four to one.

¹⁰ Excerpts taken from the Web site of Colonel Robert L. Howard, <http://www.flhtribute.com/index.htm>, accessed November 12, 2016.

The events that transpired over the next forty-eight hours are the things of legend. That battle was portrayed in the popular motion picture *We Were Soldiers*. The commanding officer, Lt. Col. Harold G. Moore, Jr., was played by Mel Gibson. That battle's story ended with the evacuation of the 1st Battalion from LZ X-Ray.

As bad as that encounter had been the worst was yet to come. Replacing the 1st Battalion was the 2nd Battalion of the 7th Cavalry Division. Its officers included 1st Lieutenant James T. Lawrence, Executive Officer of Delta Company, 2nd Battalion. He and his battalion marched from X-Ray to LZ Albany where they were to be airlifted back to base camp.

Upon arrival at Albany, the 2nd battalion suffered the same fate as did the 1st at X-Ray. It, too, walked into another ambush and they were not prepared to defend themselves from what turned out to be ordinance incoming from three sides. The mauling continued unrelenting until the battalion was reduced to only about twenty percent of its original force.

Each and every man still alive on that field, American and North Vietnamese, was fighting for his life. In the tall grass it was nearly impossible for the soldiers of either side to identify friend or foe except at extremely close range. Americans in olive-drab and North Vietnamese in mustard-brown were fighting and dying side by side. It may have begun as a meeting engagement, a hasty ambush, a surprise attack, a battle of maneuver—and, in fact, it was all of those things—but within minutes the result was a wile mêlée, a shoot-out, with the gunfighters killing not only the enemy but sometimes their friends just a few feet away.

There would be no cheap victory here this day for either side. There would be no victory at all—just the terrible certainty of death in the tall grass.¹¹

Jim Lawrence survived this battle. He was airlifted to the Philippines where he recovered from his wounds. But his close friend, Donald Cornett, lost his life that day. In the harsh scrum of intense combat at Albany, not many survived that day. Jim wrote a book in which he put to print his thoughts about that day when the trees erupted with fire and lead and put an end to many a good man including 1st Lt. Donald Cornett.

Jim's book is entitled *Reflections on LZ Albany: The Agony of Vietnam*. In the chapter "LZ Albany," it is my perception that the subject of the closing pages is Lt. Cornett:

The young lieutenant knew what to do. He had been trained for moments just like this. He was trained to assess the situation, make a decision, accomplish the mission, preserve his men. The mission and the men. He knew he had to get his men out of the killing zone of the ambush.

¹¹ Harold G. Moore and Joseph L. Galloway, *We Were Soldiers Once... and Young* (New York: Random House, 1992), 249.

The young lieutenant placed the butt of his weapon on the ground as he rose to survey the scene, moving above his sheltered, prone position, which was limited to only a few yards by the tall elephant grass. As he began his upward movement, the enemy machine gunner, tied high above in a tree and hidden by the green canopy of the intertwined treetops, saw the lieutenant's ascension and sighted down on him as his next target of opportunity.

The first machine gun round hit the left side of the young lieutenant's helmet, penetrating and exiting the steel pot, grazing the lieutenant's left temple just above the ear, a stinging wound, blood flowing down into his olive drab shirt. The second round smashed into his left shoulder, shattering his collarbone near the joint and sending red hot, then white hot flashes of pain all through the left side of his body. The young lieutenant fell backwards, slammed to the ground by the two hits, already screaming in pain, and absolutely amazed that someone had actually shot him.

He writhed on the jungle floor, gasping for breath, his heart beating furiously; his head up against the base of a tree. All of his feelings and fears now subordinate to the hurting he felt in his head and shoulder. The sergeant was back again. He crudely placed a bandage on the lieutenant's wounded shoulder and yelled again; "Sir, what do we do?"

Fighting through the agony and the shock of his wounds, the young lieutenant looked straight up the trunk of the tree, saw that its bark was flying from three sides, pointed his good right hand in the only direction that the tree was not receiving fire, and issued his only battlefield order: "Sergeant, move the men that way."

He knew he could remain no longer in this precarious position; he knew that he had no defense out here, that it would only be a matter of time; he knew that if the enemy did not finish him that his own men might. He knew he had to move. Pushing up with his good right arm, the pain of his two wounds somewhat dulled now, he struggled to his knees to try and see a way out of this horrible place.

The enemy machine gunner, still tied to his hidden perch in the trees above the young lieutenant's location, saw his last and final movement of the young officer, pointed the long barrel of the weapon at the center of the struggling man on the ground, and pulled the trigger. Two rounds, fast and heavy, struck the young lieutenant flat in the chest, on just above the other, smashing and tearing almost every vital organ in a killing, mortal wound.

His body falling dizzily through time and space. The red fading to purple, the purple darkening to black; no thoughts now, the blackness of the moment of death upon him. And then, suddenly, amazingly, all stopped. The pain, the battle, the death spiral, all gone. His downward fall ceased. Reversed. Now being lifted upward with a movement so comforting, so unexplainable.

The young lieutenant was full conscious and complete now, and bathed in a brilliant glow of white that he had never before experienced, encompassed in the invisible arms of a force more comforting than his own mother's embrace,

Then he heard a powerful voice that spoke directly to him, a voice with more authority than he had ever known, and yet with a calming tenderness greater than he could ever imagine, that brought him into a state of complete peace.

"Be still, young soldier;



Be still and know;
Your battle is over.
You have given all,
For our men,
For your army,
For your family,
For your country.
You will hurt no more.
You have fought the good fight,
And you have won
Because you are now with Me;
I have taken you out of that place,
That hell on earth,
To spend eternity with Me,
Where there are no guns,
No battles,
No enemy,
No wars,
No pain,
No death.
I am proud of you, young lieutenant,
Very proud of you.
You deserve the eternal peace
Which now begins.”

And the young lieutenant went to be with God.¹²

¹² James T. Lawrence, *Reflections on LZ Albany: The Agony of Vietnam* (Atlanta: Deeds Publishing, 2014), 151–57.

Heavenly Father, our services today have sought to pay homage to those who have given their lives in defense of the freedoms we enjoy in this client nation. We retrospectively salute those who have engaged the enemy in both victory and defeat and in so doing giving their very lives on our behalf during our country's history. Each who fell in fray weaves a long and storied tapestry of ultimate sacrifice: the struggles for independence against the British from Lexington to Yorktown, the internecine family feud of Blue and Gray from Sumter to Appomattox, the sludge and mire of trench warfare against German aggression in World War I and the ultimate victory against both Nazism and Japanese Imperialism in World War II; the battles against communist forces from Inchon to the stalemate at P'anmunjom in the Korean War, the prolonged jungle conflict in Vietnam from the Gulf of Tonkin to the withdrawal from Saigon; and finally the incessant and enduring conflict in the Middle East from Desert Storm to present-day Afghanistan.

Today we remember these, we salute them, we offer our gratitude and we do so with the firm realization that at their expense this nation has remained free, not only by their efforts, but also by any who have served in our nation's armed forces.

Father, we are humbled by the ultimate sacrifice offered by so many within our Nation's history so that we might remain free. We acknowledge that their humility did not see themselves as heroes, but their devotion to duty, honor, and country insists that they were. Yet, their absence affects the lives of so many who lost a dear loved one at the highest cost. Mothers and fathers, sisters and brothers, wives and children, friends and relatives are left to fill the void that only cherished memories struggle to provide.

We owe each of them a mental salute for the price they paid so that we who remain might live in peace. Your Son and our Savior warned us there would be wars and rumors of wars until His return. Thus, others, some yet unborn, must one day pick up the guidon and plant the colors where the colors never flew.

Father, we solicit your gracious mercy to comfort surviving families during this lachrymose time. Enable them to recall reveries of good times past while suffering the absence of the ones who gave their all. May the sorrow this day solicits be diminished by the joyous expectation of the promised future reunion. We pray Your matchless grace and the power of Your Word will sustain them during the interim.

And we lift our prayer gratitude in the name of Jesus Christ who is *'Athonay Sebaoth*, the Lord of the Armies. Amen.