

# Timothy George Robinson



Born, *September 20, 1945*

Killed in action

*April 19, 1968* in Vietnam

Tim was an infantryman, a machine gunner.



Tim graduated from Aurora-Hoyt Lakes High School in 1965, and from Staples Vocational School. He entered the Army on September 22, 1967 and shipped out from Oakland, California to Vietnam on March 6, 1968. Tim was assigned to company C, 2nd Battalion, 501 Infantry, 101st Airborne division.



He died from injuries sustained when a hostile mine detonated. Tim was awarded the Bronze Star, Purple Heart, Good Conduct Medal, Combat Infantry Badge, National Defense Service Medal, Vietnam Service Medal, Vietnam Campaign Ribbon, Military Merit Medal, Expert Badge with Machine Gun and Sharpshooter Badge with Rifle Bar and Award of the Second Republic.

At the time of his death, he was survived by his parents (father age 50 and mother age 49), older sister, Nancy (age 23); younger sisters, Peg, (age 20), Ruth (age 18) and younger brother Pat (age 16).

# Preface

I was only eighteen years old when Tim was killed in Vietnam. I remember being sick and home from school when my mother came into my bedroom with tears in her eyes and said, "you might as well know that Tim is missing in action." I thought "what", those kind of things don't happen to our family, they happen to families that you didn't know. One week later those gentlemen walked up our drive way and told us that Tim had been killed in action in Vietnam, he had stepped on a land mine. Our family waited three weeks for his body to arrive home. We kept getting telegrams from the government informing us where his body was and when it should arrive to our town. There were no "we are sorry" in these telegrams. They were just kind of factual, like they maybe they had already sent out thousands of these telegrams to other families.

The pain was further drawn out because of the fact we had two funerals for my brother. The first funeral took place in the small town that we lived in and where all of Tim's friends lived. The second funeral took place in the small town we have moved from and where all our relatives resided and where Tim would be laid to rest.

Not much attention was given to the siblings and there is no one to blame, my parents were busy with funeral arrangements and caught up in their own grief. How hard it must have been for them to bury one of their children. We didn't have grief counselors back then and no one taught us how to deal with the death of a sibling. After a tearful funeral, we climbed in our cars and headed out for the long trip to the town where Tim would soon meet his final resting place. Following the hearse was not easy, as a kid, all kinds of wild thoughts went through my head. *What if they hit a bump and Tim's eyes would open.* What I learned many years later is there were no eyes in that coffin.

When we reached our destination, us kids were shipped out to different homes where there would be sleeping rooms for us. Again, we went through another tearful funeral, it was almost like playing a video tape of the first one, but only with different people. Was all this pain ever going to end for us? We spent a tense week during the time Tim had been listed as missing in action, three weeks in waiting for his body to be returned to the family and now we were on our second funeral. How much grieving could one endure? I remember being at the cemetery and Tim's coffin was draped with the American flag. It was cold and windy that day and a canopy had been put up around the graveside to give us some protection from the cold. I still remember the gun salute and how loud and final it sounded. They gently lifted the flag from Tim's coffin, folded it carefully and walked over to my mom and placed it in her

lap. One could only imagine what she was feeling and thinking at that moment. I now have that flag, still folded the same way it was thirty years ago. I remember walking away from Tim's coffin thinking, *are we just going to leave him there all by himself?* We proceeded to the church where we all gathered in the basement to eat those variety of casseroles and those silly little desserts. How bizarre it all felt to me at that time, just a few minutes ago we were all standing by the graveside listening to *ashes to ashes* and now here we were all eating and chatting away. It was rather a strange concept for a young person to understand.

When I returned back to school after the funeral, nobody said anything to me about the loss of my brother, no "I'm sorry" or "how are you doing" or "do you want to talk about it." From the atmosphere, you would have thought my brother died from an overdose of drugs rather than in giving his life to his country. That day we turned into Vietnam vets—nobody wanted to talk to us about it and nobody wanted to hear what we had to say. I knew then I had to bury all those emotions to be able to get on with life.

*Grief is a title wave that overtakes you, smashes down upon you with unimaginable force, sweeps you up into its darkness, where you tumble and crash against unidentifiable surfaces only to be thrown out on an unknown beach, bruised, reshaped. Grief makes what others think of you moot. It shears away the masks of normal life and forces brutal honesty out of your mouth before propriety can stop you. It shoves away friends and scares away so called friends, and rewrites your address book for you.*

Stephanie Ericsson, *Compassion Through The Darkness*

76% of the men sent to Vietnam were from lower middle/working class backgrounds. The average age of the soldiers serving in Vietnam was nineteen years old and 61% of the men killed there were 21 years of age or younger. The average age of those who

fought in World War II was 26 years of age. Amputations or crippling wounds to the lower extremities were 300% higher in Vietnam than in World War II and 70% higher than in the Korean War.

*I found that the quickest way to end any conversation was to say "I had a son who was killed in Vietnam."*

*Interviewee*

The life expectancy of a machine gunner in combat in Vietnam was said to be seven and a half seconds after a firefight begins.

Tim's letters home

October 1967

Dear Mom, Dad, Ruth & Pat,

We are starting on our second week of basic and it looks like it will be a little better than the first one, but however you look at it, it's still the Army. We have been doing a lot of marching with our M-14 and also learned to take the M-14 rifle apart and put back together. They have given us three hair cuts all the time I have been here and they cost 75 cents every time and they don't take off any more than I do with my shaver at night. Today it started to rain when we started for church and has been raining on and off all day. Whatever you do I hope you can keep my younger brother out of this type of mad world of uniformity and do what you are told and not to think for yourself because that is all what this Army is. We have had four men go A.W.O.L. in the last week and three were back within the next day. But one is still gone. One night I was on fire watch, two of them went A.W.O.L. and I was suppose to turn them in, but if they want to go that's their business. I wasn't going to turn them in.

Love Tim

Dear Mom, Dad, Ruth & Pat,

All this week was zero week and the 24 of November we will be through with basic, this Army life is to close living for me, no room at all. Our wall lockers are full with our army clothes, all of them in order, same with the footlockers. Everyone's has to be the same. In the army one day is the same as the next day except for Sunday we get a little time off so we can write letters, shine boots (which we also do every night). Do you know how I spent my Saturday night — first our platoon marched to the P.X., just to get the things we need, no candy, coke, gum or beer. When we came back I practiced throwing dummy grenades, then a mile run around the field to get in shape. This is about as close to hell for me as I ever want to get. Sure hope I can get home after basic, some will and some won't. Lots of Love Tim

October 22, 1967

Dear Dad, Mom, Ruth & Pat,

I sure would like to sit down and write you all separate letters but my time is small, but I sure love all your letters just as I do all of you. It means a lot to me and I wish that I could pay you all back with a letter but you'll have to settle for one. I got a compliment from our lieutenant during Saturday mornings inspection for having a neat wall locker. I wish I could remember all that you have written in your letters but we can only have three letters in our wall lockers at one time so I have to get rid of them as soon as I read them. Dad are you getting ready for deer hunting? I sure would like to be there for it this year. I am getting to be a fair shot now with my M-14. Last week I zeroed in at nine clicks of elevation and four clicks of windage to the left. This week we start to qualify with them to earn our medals and I hope I can get a Sharp Shooter Medal. Ruth keep me posted on all the new news. its really great to get your letters. Must go for now it's getting late. Sleep tight tonight because I'm guarding the country that you live in.

Love To All  
Tim

Dear Dad, Mom, Ruth & Pat,

Would you send me grandpa Robinson's address so that I can send him a letter. This coming Friday our platoon has to pull guard duty. I don't know just yet what we will be guarding but I'll be out there at some odd hour of the night walking up and down with my rifle in my hand, sounds like a good way to spend a Friday night. Last week we were out to the CBR range where they gave us training with our gas mask and had us go in to a building that was filled with tear gas. Then one at a time we had to take off our mask and repeat our name, rank, serial number and date of birth before we could get out of the building then the tears were in our eyes. Must go now, lights are going out.

Love Ya All

Tim

Tim loved his Grandpa and wrote this letter to him when he was just a small boy

*Dear Grandpa, It is bad that you are sick we all miss seeing you. I can not come and see you so I will write to you. I hope you can get well so we can go duck hunting in the fall although we shot a few wood ducks, they taste good. In the summer I will come and visit you maybe we can have as much fun as we have been. We may miss Butch. But Rex is there. We were late at getting to bed because of the late movie, you did not see all of the movie you went to sleep. It is late I am going to bed now so good-bye and Happy Birthday. Yours Truly Timothy Robinson*

November 6, 1967

*Dear Dad, Mom, Ruth & Pat,*

*How is all that nice snow up north? No snow down here yet but it is cold. Friday night and Saturday night I had guard duty. They put me way out in the woods guarding the G-3 area and the only light within ten miles was my flashlight. We had to walk guard for two hours and then back to the guard house for four hours of rest, had to keep the pace up for 24 hours and I got two hours of sleep in all that time. When I got off guards on Saturday I came back to the barracks they told me I had an off post pass for the week-end, but by 8:00 Saturday night I was in the sack. Bivouac starts this week. That means a sixteen mile hike with a full field pack on, we march out there Tuesday morning and march back at 9:00 Thursday night, boy it is going to be COLD. Last week I qualified as a sharp shooter with my weapon. I could have done better but it's hard to shoot in the rain. It would be nice if you could get down here for Christmas but I think I will be stationed somewhere else by that time and I think I will be home for Christmas for two weeks, they try to let as many as possible go home at that time. Thanks Ruth for the card it was nice of you. Must go now, take care.*

*Love and Miss Ya  
Tim*

November 14, 1967

*Dear Dad, Mom, Ruth & Pat,*

*Hope you like this stationary, I think it stinks, it's hard to write without lines. I'm in the hospital now. I had a bad cold so this is where they put me. I came in Friday and hope to get out Sunday. The days are boring here, only thing to pass the time is TV and magazine reading. My plans of getting out of this place are slim now they are treating me for anemia and are making a lot of blood tests. My orders are here by now but if I don't get back to the company area I won't know where I'm going. I think I will be going infantry because the biggest majority of us are. Is anyone coming home for the holiday? I hope so because I want to call home that day in the afternoon, hope someone will be home. Love Tim*

November 21, 1967

*Dear Dad, Mom, Ruth & Pat,*

*Well they did let me out of the hospital but never said anything for sure but I have to report back on the 24 November the same day we graduate. Just one more week of basic to go now and it's over, from here I go to Fort McClelland Alabama for eight more weeks of advanced infantry training. So it looks like your number one son will be a foot soldier for this war. I still hope to be home for a few weeks for Christmas. How was deer hunting season this year, hope Pat got one. It was nice to get a letter from you Pat. It sounds like basketball season is rough, but don't let it get you down because the army is a lot worse. Just keep up your good grades in school and by all means stay out of the life that they call the Army. I got your letter Ruth, keep up the good news and don't hit any more deer with the car, use a rifle. I'm glad that this eight weeks of training is over but the next eight weeks will be the most important it will be my first test of how to fight and kill in Nam. I will no longer be playing with a M- 1 4 any more, I will be using a M- 16 machine gun. But I hope to God I never have to use it after advanced infantry training. Hope you will be home on Thanksgiving day I will try and get a phone call off to you. Must go now. Love Tim*

December 6, 1967

Dear Mom, Dad, Ruth & Pat,

I thought it was about time that I write home after all the favors I write home and ask for the least I can do is write a letter. I went and made reservations for a flight to the cities, my plane leaves Atlanta at 8:30 and gets in the cities at 11:30 the 16 December. I'm going to spend a few days in Minneapolis before coming home. I would like to do some Christmas shopping but it will be impossible on Army pay, but just to know I'll be home for Christmas will be a joy itself. The last few days its been hot down here, during the day you could run around without a shirt on if they would let us. Now tell me does that sound like Christmas to you? Tomorrow we have to qualify with the 45 pistol and it's a four mile force march out to the range, but my squad has ammo detail so will be riding out. Got to go now, will write this week-end. Love Your Son

Tim

December 12, 1967

Dear Mom, Dad, Ruth & Pat,

I got your money order and I want to thank you for it, but I don't feel that is saying much for parents as great as mine so I'll have to pay your back some way. Thanks Ruth for the picture, it sure is a good one. I wish I had the good looks like my sisters have but I'm satisfied with just having sisters as great as I do. I will be home Monday night or Tuesday. I want to stop and visit some of the boys at work and a few friends and do a few of the old good spots. Dad I hope you got the beer sitting on ice. I am getting tired of drinking this piss they call beer on post here. We have been using big weapons this week. We fired 3.5 rocket launchers or as you civilians would call it the Bazooka and we fired the M-72 low and when you fire this weapon you can be glad you pulled the trigger and not Charlie because your done when it hits. We have to qualify with our M- 16 this week, Charlie calls it the little black gun. That's just what it looks like but when you see what it does, it's no toy. Got to go for now, take care and will see you in a few days.

Love Tim

March 15 1967

Dear Mom, Dad, Ruth & Pat,

Our plane landed in Ben Hoa, from there they sent me to the 90th Replacement Unit to be assigned to a unit. They assigned me with the 101 S Airborne. Now I am up in Phang Rang for five days of training and after this I'll be assigned to another unit of the 101. It's hot and dry over here, it hasn't rained for many months, but the rainy season will be here in a month or so. The water is bad here and it's always warm and a shortage of it. I go around here with dirty clothes and dirt on myself. When you get to shower, half hour later your dirty again from sweat and the dirt blowing around. I got a nice camera today but don't know how to use it yet. But when I do, I'll send the film home to be developed, they say the pictures come out better. I've drank beer every night since I've been here, so thing's are not to bad yet.

Love Tim

March 22, 1968

Dear Mom, Dad, Ruth, Pat,

We are located somewhere around Phu Bai and Hue North. It sure is a dirty hole here, you wear the same clothes until they fall off of you and then they give you a new pair. This country is not worth fighting for but the good we do for Vietnam is good, these people are so far back in the world that it's sad. Over here we don't know even how the war is coming along. Boy would I give everything in the world to be home. That's the place where everyone belongs. "Love" Your Son

Tim

March 28, 1968

Dear Mom, Dad, Ruth, Pat

*I'm in the field now in the hills. From the hill I'm on now I can see Hue, so we are far north. We have a battalion of NVR trapped down in the valley and have been hitting them with mortar and bombs for the last 3 or 4 days. The first day they sent me out here to meet up with my platoon we moved out from the top on one hill to the next and on the way we ran into snipers and had four men killed and four wounded. The good Lord was with me coming down the hill because I wasn't hurt but some of the men in front of me and along side of me were hit. Death is sad over here to see these young men rolled up in a poncho. I had to go out and get one guy that had got hit and then caught on fire, he was still burning when we got to him. It was a sad mess. I've never been so scared in my life as I was that day and I been praying ever since that day. I'm a machine gunner now in my squad. If you think this letter is grubby that's because we live that way. On top of the hills for weeks without shaving, washing, or brushing your teeth. At night you have to sleep with a few grenades in your pocket because you never know when you'll get hit by something.*

Your Son & Brother

Tim

April 7, 1968

Dear Mom, Dad, Ruth & Pat,

*It would be nice to get a package from home about once a week if you could because you son is starving over here. Some of the things you can send are cans of fruit, cookies, apple sauce, hard candy canned meat, anything in cans or jars, honey or some strawberry jam, joke book, hot rod books, papers, baked foods and kool-aid, the water over here taste like hell. About once a month send some stationary like I'm writing on now. I hate to write and ask for food like a pig, but I'm losing weight fast. Love and miss ya all lots. your loving son*

Tim

*P.S. I don't know what good I'm doing over here but I'll keep fighting in hopes that my younger brother may never have to see this damn land.*

**The following is the last letter Tim wrote to his family back home.**

April 14, 1968

Dear Mom, Dad, Ruth & Pat,

*I hope the Easter Bunny doesn't forget me this year because the last 21 years it's been real good to me and will always be so dear to my heart, "right Mom." Remember when we were kids on Easter the girls would be all dressed up in new hats, pretty dresses and new gloves and us boys with new shoes and shirts and off to church we would go and after come home and look for our Easter baskets, what good times. I hope God will bring me back home so that I may marry die girl I love, which will be in March if things go ok, then I can watch my kids all dressed up and headed for church and live them days over again. Holidays are no different then any other day. Everyday is Monday in Vietnam. Must go now, "God Be With You All." Your Fighting Son & Brother*

Tim

**Letter to uncle and family, they thought of Tim as their own son.**

April 17, 1968

Dear Herman, Joyce & Kids,

*I'm a machine gunner in my squad. I hump that and about a 65 pound pack over mountains, across the flat lands through the rice paddies and fight my way through the jungles. We move every where between one mile to about twelve a day. I've been shot at and had grenades flipped at me, helped put dead in ponchos and seen wounded bleed and can tell you for a fact that this war is hell and that more praying goes on over here in one day then it does in a week back in the world. May the good Lord take care of you all as good as He has been taking care of me. Love Your Old Son and Brother*

Tim



FAMILY IS NOTIFIED OF TIME'S DEATH.

April 25, 1968 — Mr. And Mrs. George Robinson —  
Don't phone — don't deliver between 10:00 P.M and 6:00 A.M.

*The Secretary of the Army has asked me to express his deep regret that your son, PFC. Timothy Robinson has been missing in Vietnam since 19 April 1968. He was last seen on combat operation when a hostile mine detonated in area. Search is in progress. Delay in notifying you of your son's missing status was due to the tactical situation existing in Vietnam for the past few days. You will be advised promptly when further information is received. In order to protect any information that might be used to your son's detriment, your co-operation is requested in making public only information concerning his name, rank, service number and date of birth. This confirms personal notification made by a representative of the secretary of the Army. Kenneth Wickman, Major General USA F8 The Adjutant General*

April 26, 1968 — Mr. And Mrs. George Robinson — don't phone —  
Don't deliver between 10:00 P.M. and 6:00 A.M.

*The secretary of the Army has asked me to express his deep regret that your son PFC Timothy Robinson died in Vietnam on 19 April 1968 as the results of wounds received in the incident previously reported to you. He was previously reported missing. His remains have been recovered and positively identified. Please accept my deepest sympathy. This confirms personal notification made by a representative of the secretary of the Army. Kenneth Wickman Major General USA F8 The Adjutant General*

April 27, 1968 George Robinson — don't phone

*This concerns your son Cpl. Timothy Robinson. The Army will return your loved one to a port in the United States by first available military airlift. At the port remains will be placed in a metal casket and delivered (accompanied by a military escort) by most expeditious means to any funeral director designated by the next of kin or to any national cemetery in which there is available grave space. You will be advised by the United States port concerning the movement and arrival time at destination. Forms on which to claim authorized interment allowance will accompany remains. This allowance may not exceed \$75 if consignment is made directly to the superintendent of a national cemetery. When consignment is made to a funeral director prior to interment in a national cemetery, the maximum allowance is \$250; if burial takes place in civilian cemetery, the maximum allowance is \$500.*

*Request next of kin advise by collect telegram addressed: Disposition Branch, Memorial Division, Department of the Army WUX MB, Washington D.C. name and address of funeral director or name of national cemetery selected.*

*If additional information concerning return of remains is desired you may include your inquiry in the reply to this message. Please do not set date of funeral until port authorities notify you date and schedule time of arrival destination. Disposition Branch Memorial Division Dept. of Army WUX MB*

April 29, 1968 George Robinson — don't phone — report delivery

*Remains your son, Timothy, enroute to United States Port. Advise by collect telegram addressed: Disposition Branch, Memorial Division, Department of Army WUX MB, Washington D.C., name and address of funeral director and/or national cemetery selected to receive remains.*

Disposition Branch Memorial Division Dept. of Army WUX MB

May 1, 1968

George Robinson

*Remains your son Timothy will be consigned to Moeglein Funeral Home. Please do not set date of funeral until port authorities notify you and funeral director date and scheduled time of arrival destination.*

Disposition Branch Memorial Division Dept. of the Army WUX MB

May 3, 1968 George Robinson — deliver and report charge

*Remains Cpl. Timothy Robinson escorted by Sp5 Michal B. Baker departing San Francisco, Western flight 490, 10:20 A.M. May 4 for Moeglein Funeral Home Aurora, Minnesota. Arriving Eveleth Minnesota via Mid Continent Cessna, 9:30 P.M. May 4. Request funeral director receive remains and escort at Eveleth nearest terminal to Aurora.*

CG, WA Military Traffic Management and Terminal Service, Oakland Army Base Oakland CA

**These telegrams are in a scrap book and have long since yellowed. But those words still feel new when I read them.**

When I read the letters, they sounded so cold, but then it did come from the Army and I am sure my brother was just another statistic to them. Just another lost soul or dead soul, I think the Army calls it an acceptable loss. I guess what my brother was trying to tell us was he felt too much compassion to live the life of the Army. All we have left of Tim right now are a few memories that get harder to recall with the passing of time and some Army medals that hang on my wall.

## PRESENTATION OF MEDALS

When the Army came to present Tim's medals to my parents one day, my dad left the house leaving my mother alone to accept the medals. I understand now why my dad did it though. It was just so painful for him and rather than face his pain, it is easier to run from it. Tim's Army medals, still in their original case, were tucked away in some out of sight safe place. All of us in the family knew exactly where they were, but if keeping them in a safe place and out of sight caused us a little less pain, then that is where they were going to stay. But of course that only worked so long for me. I was the one who had the need to show how proud I was of my brother, and I was sure my parents probably felt the same way.

I remembered I had just moved back home for a little while and was between jobs. I had received a \$75 tax return and it was the last of my money until I started work again. I secretly took the medals from their safe hiding place and traveled sixty miles to a professional framing store. I had to leave the medals there for a couple of weeks for the job to get done. I was so afraid someone would find out the medals were missing. Don't know why I felt like that, I'm sure no one had looked for the medals in years.

The two weeks passed and it was now time to go pick up the medals. I had just enough money to pay for them. I can remember driving back home and feeling so excited about presenting Tim's professionally framed medals to my parents. It was later in the evening when I got home, my parents were alone in the living room. My mom was watching television and my dad was reading the newspaper. I handed the wrapped package to my mom and said "I got you and dad a present." She opened it up and her eyes got all misty and choking back the tears she said it was beautiful. I turned to my dad who still appeared to be engrossed with what he was reading in the paper and said "Dad, did you see it?" Still holding his newspaper in his hands he glanced over the paper and said "hmmmm." And then went back to his paper.

I remember how hurt I felt, so much planning I had put into it and the last of my money. Nothing was ever said after that and the medals got hung on the wall. And even though the medals were in plain sight now, we still all acted as if they weren't there. That they were still stored away in that safe place.

Tim was awarded the Bronze Star, Purple Heart, Good Conduct Medal, Combat Infantry Badge, National Defense Service Medal, Vietnam Service Medal, Vietnam Campaign Ribbon, Military Merit Medal, Expert Badge with Machine Gun and Sharpshooter Badge with Rifle Bar and Award of the Second Republic.



**Another letter got to me.** The one where they talk about how much you are allowed for burial. They were a bunch of bureaucrats: Disposition Branch, Memorial Division. What the hell is that. Here's what it sounded like to me, *"Okay, your son is dead and we have this body we need to get rid of. Now you can dispose of this body in two different ways but if it cost more than what we allow, you will be responsible for the remaining cost. If we can locate any extra space in a National Cemetery, you can drop him off there, other wise you are on your own in finding a final resting place for him. So you won't be shocked to see what little remains of your son we will put him in a little tin container for you. We have lots of forms for you to fill out so that we will no longer be responsible for your son's remains. If you have any questions in regards to this you can ask but that does not mean we will respond. Please don't make any arrangements to get on with your life until the cargo we are sending you reaches it's proper destination. Of course we don't know when or where this will be, but we will let you know when it is convenient for us."*

### REPORT OF CASUALTY

Date: 2 May 1968

Service Identification: Robinson, Timothy George

Casualty Status: Battle — died on 19 April 1 968 in Vietnam  
from injuries received when hostile mine detonated.

Pfc. Timothy G. Robinson was promoted posthumously to grade of CPL E-4, AUS,  
as of 18 April 1968, under provisions of PL 680, 77th Congress, as amended.

Pay grade shown in item 5 is that of E-3, since additional pay is not involved.

## FACT SHEET

Following is a brief explanation of the aspects of the Personal Property Program in Vietnam which results most frequently in questions from families of deceased and missing personal. The decedents Unit commander collects, inventories and delivers his possessions as quickly as possible to the Personnel Property Division near Saigon. After receipt of the property, a Summary court Officer at the Division is responsible for processing, packaging and shipping the articles to the person designated in official records as the proper recipient.

He and his staff make every effort to serve the family by completing the work as quickly as possible and by forwarding the property in the best possible condition. As a rule, articles which meet postal requirements are forwarded by Registered Air Mail and normally are delivered to the addressee about seven days after their departure from Vietnam. Because of size and weight, some articles must be shipped by surface transportation. These items may be in transit from four to six weeks. Fortunately, most items can be air-mailed.

All usable clothing received at the Personal Property Division is laundered before being packed and shipped except those items which must be dry cleaned. Since dry cleaning facilities are not readily available in Vietnam, some garments cannot be properly processed. These possessions are cleaned as well as possible by men of the *Personal Property Division* prior to being packed.

Because of the climate in Vietnam, clothing mildews and metals rust very rapidly. Everything possible is done to clean and preserve such items before they are forwarded but rust and mildew may again set in between the dates of shipment from Saigon and arrival at destination. The contents of each received wallet are removed and inventoried. Personal papers, licenses, photographs, membership cards and similar items in acceptable condition are placed in a sealed envelope and forwarded to the next of kin with the other property. Wallets and papers that are excessively damaged are destroyed. Money is converted into a US treasury check and forwarded under separate cover. Film is removed from certain cameras to prevent damage to the interior from chemicals. When practicable, the film is also returned with other property.

The *Summary Court Officer* who processes the decedent's property and whose name appears on the inventory form, is required by regulations to withdraw and destroy items having no saleable or sentimental value. For example; used cakes of soap, tooth brushes and tooth paste. These and similar articles such as after shave lotions could damage other property included in the shipment. The Army is very much aware that any item belonging to a deceased soldier has great sentimental value to his family and regrets that some articles must be destroyed. You may be sure that items are destroyed only when absolutely necessary. The *Summary Court Officer* is also required to withdraw from the property all identification tags, identifications cards and items of clothing and equipment which are Government property. If you have additional questions concerning personal property, please address your inquiry to the Summary Court Officer whose name appears on the attached inventory.

### RECORDS OF PERSONAL PROPERTY—COMBAT

#### Quantity Inventory of Property

Pictures, Minnesota car registration cards, driver's license, Social Security card, Minnesota hospital service card, New York Life Insurance company receipt, DA Form, letters, New Testament, wallet, roll of film, Pipe, watch, gold in color, bracelet w/watch & pictures, ring gold in color w/green stone, lighter, ring gold in color w/blue stone, religious cross with chain, souvenir money

**DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY**  
**US ARMY MORTUARY, VIETNAM**  
**APO SAN FRANCISCO**

Mr. George Robinson  
219 Wyandotte Road  
Hoyt Lakes, Minnesota

Dear Mr. Robinson

Regulations require that in the event of death of a military member, a Summary Court be appointed to secure and insure delivery of the personal property of the deceased, to those entitled to take custody. I have been selected for this assignment with respect to Timothy G. Robinson.

As provided by Federal law, in accordance with Title 10 usc 4712, I forwarded the personal property on 23 May 1968 by Registered Air Mail, Receipt Number 1231 59. It should have arrived on or about 31 May 1968.

Regulations require that you be informed that delivery of these articles in itself does not necessarily vest title in you and that they should be retained or disposed of in accordance with the laws of the state in which E-4 Robinson was legally domiciled.

Should this shipment not arrive intact, please inform me at the address shown.

Respectfully,  
Millard B. Byrne  
1 Lt. QMC  
Summary court

**A**fter reading that I thought, yes, *I have a question and that is: Who the hell gave you the right to pick and choose for the family what you think may qualify as sentimental value for us? You say that a toothbrush or his after shave lotion has no saleable or sentimental value? Well, you are wrong, both of those items would be of value to me. You say you remove the film from the camera to protect the camera or is it because you are afraid of what might be on that film? Wallets that are excessively damaged are destroyed why? And what are you going to do with the government clothing he was wearing, is it of greater value to you then to the families? Do you rip his name off his shirt and his unit patch and then pass the clothing onto some other poor soul to wear, to wear the clothing of a dead man? Seems to me that the bottom line here is that you are trying to save the government some postage money. What for? To buy more ammunition to fight your dirty battles for you? I think my government as stepped to far over the line when they start deciding for me what I feel is of value of my brother's.*

Department of the Army  
Headquarters 101 St Airborne  
APO San Francisco

July 21, 1968

Mr. and Mrs. George A. Robinson  
219 Wyandotte Road  
Hoyt Lakes, Minnesota

Dear Mr. and Mrs. Robinson:

The officers and men of the Division express their deep sympathy to you upon the loss of your son, Timothy, who served with us in battle. He was a fine soldier, whose memory we will cherish. Your son went into battle with firm determination and purpose. He was inspiration to all of us. He served his country with honor and distinction.

I pray the strength of his courage and his unselfish sacrifice will sustain you in your grief. He is a credit to your family and to our country. Our thoughts are with you and we offer our heartfelt prayers in your bereavement.

Sincerely,  
O.M. Barsanti  
Major General, USA  
Commanding

Department of the Army  
Company C, 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion (Airborne) 501 Infantry  
2<sup>nd</sup> Brigade, 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne Division  
APO San Francisco

Mr. and Mrs. Robinson:

By this time, I am sure you have been notified of the death of your son, *Private First Class Timothy G. Robinson*. I want you to know that Timothy's death came as a tragic shock to myself and to all of the men who knew him. I extend the deepest and most sincere sympathy on behalf of the entire company. Timothy was one of the most outstanding young soldiers I have ever known. He was hardworking and conscientious in all that he did and his personal courage on the battlefield won him the respect of all the officers and men in our company.

Death came for your son on the afternoon of 19 April 1968 while on a combat operation against a hostile force near the city of Hue, South Vietnam. While walking through the jungle a hostile land mine exploded mortally wounding Timothy. Death came immediately and he did not suffer.

Our Battalion Chaplain will conduct a memorial service in remembrance of Timothy in the near future. His personal property had been collected and forwarded to you. Timothy died fighting for the ideals we all cherished in the United States. I hope the knowledge that your grief is shared by all of us who served with him, will be of some consolation to you.

Sincerely yours

Kenneth D. Buch  
Captain, Infantry  
Commanding



So much of the days that followed after we heard Tim was missing in action is such a blur. From the time we found out he was missing in action until the day we buried him was twenty days. I don't know if having two funerals was such a good idea, but I am sure my family felt it was the only right thing to do. One funeral where we lived and all Tim's family and friends lived and a second funeral where all old friends and relatives lived and where Tim would be laid to rest.

I'm sure we had no idea how very painful all of this was going to be for us. We called the photographer who had taken all of our graduation pictures and also the picture of Tim in his Army dress uniform before he went to Vietnam. Since it was a closed coffin, we ordered a large framed portrait of Tim in his uniform to rest of top on the casket. The photographer later gave the portrait of Tim to my family at no cost. I had my doubts even back then as to who was in that coffin. I still did not believe it was Tim, there had to be some mistake. I didn't learn until thirty years later exactly why they made it a closed coffin. I asked my parents at the time if I could just see Tim's hand. I will never forget the look of his hands, so strong yet so kind and gentle. I guess I needed some kind of proof this nightmare was for real.

I have this terrible guilt I live with thirty years later and that is I didn't give Tim a hug the last time I saw him. My mom and dad and younger brother and I had come down to the cities to see Tim off to Vietnam. We picked up my two year old nephew when we were there and I was in charge of watching him. The last place I saw Tim was at a place where they had a pool table and Tim and my dad were playing a game. When it came time to say good bye to Tim I was holding my nephew and didn't think to put him down to hug Tim, besides I thought, "I could hug him when he came back." That is the way I thought it was going to be, Tim was going to come back from Vietnam and it wasn't suppose to be in a coffin. I can remember when he left for boot camp. I was napping in my bedroom and he came and woke me up so he could say good bye to me. I remember walking him down the driveway and he got in a car and left, I can't imagine what was going through his head at the time. He boarded the bus in the Cities on his 22<sup>nd</sup> birthday headed for the Army, "Happy Birthday Tim." God, I wish I had given him that one last hug. *Oh Tim, I miss you terribly. The tears fall so easily when I think of you.*

Nothing seemed real during those days. I would read in the newspapers; "Former Local Boy Is Killed In Action"; Hoyt Lakes Man Is Vietnam War Casualty"; "Corporal T. Robinson Died In Vietnam"; Hoyt Lakes War Casualty Buried in Sauk Centre"; "Tim Robinson Is Honored Posthumously"; and in all those news articles was a picture of Tim staring back at me. And, of course, the thank you our family posted in the newspaper: Words can't seem to express our deepest appreciation and gratitude to all our friends and neighbors for their great kindness shown to us in our time of need, it helps to ease some of the hurt in losing our much loved Timothy. God bless you."

Yes, burying my big brother was the most painful time of my life. Even though it was May when we laid Tim to rest, I can remember how chilly and windy it was. A tent had been erected to protect us from the elements of the weather that day, it blew and snapped from the force of the wind. After the graveside service we went to the church for a gathering of families and friends. This all seemed so bizarre to me. To be so sad and shedding tears one moment to small talk and eating food the next. I didn't want to talk and I didn't want to eat, I just wanted to be left alone. I wanted to be able to go someplace and cry alone. I didn't need anybody and I didn't want anybody. I just wanted to be able to hug Tim one more time. But instead I was just lost among the mingling people at the church.

To this day I pray we never have another Vietnam, I wouldn't wish this pain on my worse enemy. I don't want someone else's sister or brother to go through the grief I have felt over the loss of my brother. I returned back to school after the funerals and I had missed a lot of days. I remember I didn't ask my mom to write me an excuse for being absent because if the principal's office would have asked me for one, I was ready to kick ass about it. They just better not even dare to ask such a cruel thing of me, after all, everyone knew about it, Tim had been one of the first from the area to be killed in Vietnam. As I walked through the hallways in school, nobody said anything to me about my loss. It almost felt like they were watching me to see if I was going to break down and cry. I thought you son-of-a-bitches, no way are you going to see me cry. I put my head up high and pretended like nothing had happened and I did that for

thirty years. But nothing lasts forever and once I started working on the book "The Faces Behind The Names", all those walls started to crumble. Great, just great! Here I was so many years later finally feeling the loss of my brother and now getting those same looks. But these are the looks from people who are now saying "your loss was over thirty years ago, it's time to get over it." But you know, one never gets over the loss of a big brother, you can get over Vietnam, but you can't get over losing a loved one.

Seems like I had made a complete circle and was back to where I had started. Only difference now I was facing my loss as an adult. But now I also had a curiosity about Vietnam. What I had avoided for so many years now sparked a new interest in me. I found myself going to the computer and getting on the Internet and typing in the word "Vietnam." I was impressed with the amount of information there was. So I just started jumping from one website to another. There were websites for different units in Vietnam, pictures of Vietnam then and now, different message centers for someone you were trying to find from Vietnam you served with to people looking for someone who might have known the ones they lost in Vietnam.

I was visiting websites from families who had posted information about their lost soldiers. I found one website particularly interesting. A brother had done a website for his brother who was killed in Vietnam. There were pictures of him, the last letter he wrote home to the family and a song his brother had written for him. I guess it was the last letter home I connected with. So I responded back to his web page. Soon we were communicating back and forth everyday. We got very close and started calling each other brother and sister. We could relate to each other as we both understood each other's pain.

I had never met anyone who had lost someone in Vietnam. I should reword that, I have never met anyone who TOLD me they lost someone in Vietnam. I'm sure I have come across someone, but the families along with all of America were taught not to talk about Vietnam. Maybe if we didn't talk about it, it would go away. I don't understand that logic though, too many had lost their arms, legs, life and youth to forget Vietnam ever happened. Those soldiers did it for me, for you and for our country. They were eighteen and nineteen years old and were told it was up to them to stop the spread of communism. They couldn't legally vote or drink but they were old enough to put their lives on the line for us. I was glad to have found someone with whom I could communicate and who could understand where I was coming from. When he was feeling down over his loss, I could bring him back up and he was able to do the same for me. We called it our "emotional roller coaster ride".

He had done something I found very interesting. He did a search for buddies who might have known his brother in Vietnam. I had been thinking about doing the same thing—only I didn't have much hope in

finding anyone because Tim had only been in country for six weeks before he was killed and that was thirty years ago. It would be like hunting for a needle in a hay stack. After carefully thinking it over, I figured I had nothing to lose in doing my own search. I told myself if I didn't allow myself any hope in finding someone then I wouldn't have to feel any disappointment.

It all started out so simple. I posted a message on one of the Vietnam website pages asking if anyone knew my brother or might have served over there at the same time he was there. I would receive messages from Vietnam vets saying they were in the same unit but not at the same time and would give me names of other vets to contact. I eventually came across a Vietnam vet who had a roster of names from my brother's unit. I obtained addresses for these soldiers and sent out about twenty letters to them asking them if they remembered my brother. I received many responses back but they all said they were sorry but didn't know Tim but they encouraged me to go on with my search. They said no matter how short of a time Tim was there, someone would remember him.

Then one day at work I got a phone call. The voice on the other end had a southern accent and spoke so very gently. He said "I think I might know your brother." Wow, I could hardly believe what I was hearing. Here I was looking for someone I didn't know who had served with my brother thirty years ago during war in a foreign country. I was thinking could it really be this easy, did he really know my brother. This vet wanted to know if I could send him a picture of my brother because for so many years he tried to forget about Vietnam and it was hard for him now to remember names but he never forgot the faces.

He described my brother to me and it matched Tim's description and he also told me about Tim's camera. Tim had told the family he had bought a new camera over there and said in a joking manner as soon as he learned how to use it, he would send us some pictures. Now only his family and someone who had known Tim in Vietnam would know about this camera. So I got a picture of Tim and Federal Expressed it next day to this caller. He told me he would call me right away when he got the picture to let me know if we were talking about the same person.

Funny thing was though he didn't call me the next day and that is when I realized it was Tim he had talked about. I was positive. You see, when I had talked to him the first time on the phone he told me what really had happened to Tim and exactly how he had been killed. And who would know better about Tim's death than someone who was with Tim when he was killed. He told me they had been out on patrol when Tim hit a trip wire. There wasn't much left of him, no blood, he was just gone. He remembered seeing bits of Tim's camera fall to the ground like black confetti.

It was very hard for him to tell me this. I could tell he was choking back his tears. How painful it was for him to tell me and how painful it was for me to hear. But I think it was something we both had to do. He did, however, call me back at work the day after he had received Tim's picture. He said "yes, it was Tim." Some how hearing those words from him was upsetting. I went on a break to gather some courage to make it through the rest of the day. But I found I was not able to stop crying. Having the feeling I knew it was Tim and hearing it was him were two different things. I had to leave work early and cried all the way home.

The drive home seemed to take forever. When I got home, I sat down and wrote Tim a letter, I didn't know what else to do. I had no one to share this information with and I didn't want to tell my family. For thirty years they had come to peace with what they were told about Tim's death and I wasn't going to alter that with the new information I had learned that day. Even to this day I have not told my family any of this. My brother and sister both know I have further information about Tim's death but have never asked me about it. I am glad because this is something I guess I will never share. Just because the truth was good for me doesn't mean it would be good for them. To me the truth put to rest many questions I had thought and felt over the years. Like "did he suffer"; did he lay on the ground a long time before someone found him"; "was it really Tim in that coffin or someone else." So although the truth can be painful it can also be comforting.

I felt like a shell of a person that evening, there was so much I needed to process that I couldn't process any of it. The next day I found myself hating war, my government and even God. It was hard for me to understand why Tim did not come home when he had so much faith in God. I knew it was not God who started that war, nor was it God who killed him. But it was God who took Tim to a much better world than we on earth will ever know.

If you do a search for someone who knew a lost loved one in Vietnam, you should always be prepared for the real truth, If you can't handle it, don't seek it. I know one person who lost his dad in Vietnam. His life in now lived only through his dad's death. It is sad, no one can seem to reach him any more. Every word that comes out of his mouth has to do with the loss of his father. He has selective hearing and only wants to hear things about his dad. He even obtained the autopsy reports of his dad's death and learned his dad suffered before he died. Why anyone would want to welcome further pain over a loss is hard for me to understand. You must always remember that Vietnam is a part of your life and not all of your life.

Unlike many others, I was perfectly happy and content with the one person I found who knew my brother. I felt no need to search any further. In a kind and gentle way, he told me all I needed to know and I will be forever grateful to him. One of the best things I found out from him was he and Tim had laughed at least once over in Vietnam. Gawd, that felt good to hear. He and my brother became close friends very quickly. I can understand why. Tim picked him, they were both very much alike. Many vets told me they were afraid to become too close to those they met over there because you never knew if you were going to survive the day or the next. I suppose getting to close would make the loss much harder. I would think if you were in an environment of war you couldn't help but become friends. You would you need each other for survival and you also needed someone you could tell your worse fears to.

Although losing a brother in Vietnam compared to losing one of your buddies is not the same, but the pain would be just as great. I knew my brother longer then his buddy did and I knew him in a peaceful environment. His buddy knew him at war. They saw him as a person one moment and the next he was non-existent, nothing left of him, just gone. So the pain is different but to the same degree. Tim's buddy told me something very special that tugged at my heart. He said it has been his routine for the last thirty years since being back from Vietnam that every morning when he got up he said hi to Tim and a little prayer for him. As a little sister I couldn't have asked any more then to have my big brother remembered everyday since he has been gone. You know you have lived a good life when someone remembers you everyday since you have been gone. That would be my Tim, so kind hearted and gentle, he was bound to leave an impression behind.

I have always felt it is not what you take from life that is important but rather what you put into it. The feelings I have for my brother's buddy will never be shared with anyone else. He changed my whole life, not on the outside but rather on the inside, the inside nobody has ever seen. Tim's buddy wrote me a very long letter and it was so very well written. It must be hard for him to go back into that pain again for me. I will be forever grateful and indebted to him for the rest of my life. In his letter he wrote:

*My name is Leon Kubin, US Army serial No. US54442505. I served in Vietnam from March , 1 968 to March, 1 969. My account/declaration to the sisters, (especially Ruth Lukkari) brother Pat, the family and friends of my friend, companion, supporter and pal, Timothy (Tim) Robinson, with whom I served with and had the pleasure of his companionship while serving our country, although it was for only six weeks. After reading Tim's letters and the information Ruth mailed to me, I believe Tim took the same route to Vietnam as I did. Through my eyes, I would like to take you from Tim's family and friends to these places. Oakland, California was one of the shipping points (Fort Lewis, Washington was the other one) where soldiers received orders and were being processed to go over seas.*

*After three long days we were bussed to an air base just outside of San Francisco. We drove by the bay, University of California and Berkley campus as everything was very beautiful, I just kept looking out of the bus window wondering if this will be my last look at San Francisco and America. I tried not to think about it. Everyone on the bus was rather quiet and soft spoken. We just smiled at each other knowing that we were all thinking the same thing, "Will we die in this place called Vietnam?", will we see again our parents, sisters, brothers, friends, wives, children and girl friends?" Even the drill sergeants showed us a little respect by not harassing us constantly as usual.*

*The Military Police led us directly to the aircraft, and we boarded the plane immediately. I was seated in front and as I looked to the rear of the plane, I could not believe how long the plane was, wondering if it would be able to take off from the runway. Three seats were on each side with an aisle in the center. It was not a military plane but a private aircraft. The name was "Trans America." The plane carried (as well as I remembered) 276 soldiers, and approx. 32 airline employees (pilots, attendants, etc.). the flight was smooth and rather quiet. I kept looking out the window through most of the entire flight although I'm not sure why. Maybe because the peaceful ocean below was so blue, a beautiful bright blue, extending as far as you could see. This was a perfect time to talk with your creator and to let him know how scared you were of the unknown. Our first stop was Honolulu, Hawaii. It was approximately a five hour lay-over.*

*We were allowed to leave the plane, but we had to stay within the airport compound. Flowers of all colors were everywhere. Their beauty and smell was so sweet and fresh. The trees were all different shades of green and the weather was sunny with a nice cool breeze from the ocean, about 70 degrees... Paradise. The men began to talk and joke more with each other. You could see a bonding among the soldiers taking place. And it grew as time went along.*

*Thus far, the flight has been a good one; no storms or wind turbulence. All the attendants and flight crew have been so polite. They have gone out of their way to serve us food and drinks, answer questions and help to distract us from thinking what was ahead. After trying to catch a little sleep, the captain announced that we will be landing at Midway Island and to look out the right side of the window. There was this little speck of land in the middle of this huge, vast ocean. I kept looking for this island called "Midway" but could not find it. I was in a state of shock when I was told that little speck in the water was Midway Island. The first thing that came to my mind was: "there is no way this giant plane can land on that small island. The runway is too short and we are going to crash into the ocean." Well, we did land safely. I was told that Midway Island was about 2 square miles. We were not allowed to disembark the plane. The island looked so deserted.*

*Our next stop was Wake Island, in the middle of the Pacific Ocean, about 3 square miles. Again, we were not allowed to leave the plane. The islands are getting more desolate. They seem to be getting more uninhabited, bare, deserted with only a few buildings and a handful of people. Such a lonely, forsaken place it seemed. Will it be like this in Vietnam? My body has been numb for days and my stomach feels like its in knots. Will it ever go away?*

*Our next stop was the Island of Guam, with a total area of 209 square miles. We were allowed to leave the plane and stretch our legs. We had to stay within the perimeter of the plane. It felt so good to be able to walk and stretch out. We landed in Manila, the Philippines, and we were allowed to go inside the terminal. The heat and humidity was unbelievable. It's like someone hosed you down with hot water. The temperature was 105 degrees. The humidity must have been 115 degrees.*

*The pilot announced the next stop was Bien Hoa, Vietnam. We were all quiet, not saying much and if we were, it was in a soft, low tone. A lot of us were praying to ourselves:*

*"God, please keep me safe and if I must die, please make it quick so I endure no pain." I wished I could tell my mother, sisters and brother again how much I loved them. We landed in Bien Hoa, Vietnam. It was early afternoon. I'm not sure which shocked me the most: the hot and humid weather or the odor. The smell was awful and I soon realized what the stench was. The entire country smells. Caring out duffel*

*bags, we were escorted to an airplane hanger, where we turned in our boarding tickets. About midnight we boarded busses and made our way through the winding streets. Looking through the windows which were covered with chain link fence and steel bars, we could see the outline of small, one- room shacks, stacked one next to the other. They were built out of anything they could find. Every so often the bus driver would cut the lights off to the bus. After approximately a two hour drive, we arrived at the Military Assistance Command Vietnam (MAVC). Here we would be assigned to a division and given our orders. Over a three day period there must have been around 1,500 soldiers. I tried to write a letter to my family back home but they kept us busy with detail work. The smell, heat and living conditions were very difficult to accept. There were women of all ages (including teenagers) with teeth completely black. It was awful; so awful that it was difficult for me to take a second look at the women. Approximately 95% of the women I saw had their teeth blackened. This procedure was done to women because so many were being raped. This glue like substance came from the root of a certain tree in Vietnam and once applied it stayed forever. Nothing was able to take it off. This was started when the French were in Vietnam.*

*Vietnamese kids were always begging for food, especially chocolate. Soldiers were very sympathetic to the children and would give them their candy and food. All the soldiers would smile from ear to ear when they saw the children's yes sparkle and shine like stars. They would pamper, love, hug, treat and play with them like their own sister or brother. This was the best medicine for us soldiers. We were able to relate to them and feel like kids again. This was a tremendous release for us GI's and we were able to forget about the loneliness in our hearts, the tension we felt, the war and be able to laugh and smile again, even if only for a little while.*

*After two days we were assembled in rows and they began to call our names and the unit we would be assigned. They began calling names to the 1 Infantry, 25th Infantry, 1 98th Light Brigade, 101 Airborne. So many were being assigned to the 101st. The number was four to five times greater than the next division. Rumor has it that they were nearly wiped out in the City of Hue. Hundreds of men were killed and or wounded. Then they called my name. "It can not be, there's an error," I was whispering to myself. As I was walking to get my orders the other soldiers were saying the same, "we did not join the airborne, we did not take jump school or training of any kind." The officer advised us that the orders were correct, the 101 lost so many men in the Northern Zone that they were having to recruit anyone and everyone. He also stated we were going to take jump training in a few days. The four hundred or so of us were stunned and speechless. How could this happen? We were transported to Camp Ray, just outside of Bien Hoa. This was home base, the port of entry and or exit for the 101st Airborne. After arrival, we were herded into rows, given a piece of paper and a small pencil, and told to write to our parents to let them know we made it to Vietnam and that we were alive. We were given ten minutes to write this letter standing up. After the letters were collected we were marched to the supply room where we were assigned our M 16 rifle. They asked for our items which they placed in a personalized duffel bay that would remain locked in a storage room for the remainder of our tour.*

*The next day we boarded a C 130 military cargo plane, destination unknown. In a few hours we were in a dust storm. I thought I was in west Texas. We ate, drank, slept and bathed in sand. The wind was blowing day and night. The city was called Phan Raang. Here, we were given more training with the M16 rifle, M60 machine gun and the m79 grenade launcher. We were given a fast lesson in speaking Vietnamese, their culture, religion and customs and were told this is the place we would take our "P" (parachute) training which never materialized. The officers kept us occupied from sunrise to sunset with very little time for ourselves, much less to get to know each other. Since arriving in this country I have met a lot of soldiers that I would have liked to get to know better, but with orientation, training from dusk to dawn, and being divided into so many groups, its impossible to get to know anyone very well. You are so exhausted after training, all you can think about is sleep. Maybe this was good. You did not have enough time to think about home.*



After several days, we boarded a C 130 transport plane. The destination was north and no other information was available or given to us. We landed on an airstrip outside of Hue, loaded trucks and began our journey through the city itself. Some of the trucks were going south to Camp Eagle, home base for the 101 to be disbursed into other locations, some went to Phu Bai. The rest of us went north to LZ Sally and Camp Evans. The devastation was unbelievable. I think every building in the city was partially destroyed in one way or another. The walls to buildings and homes had holes and/or walls about to collapse or partially standing. The people were use to the "war" environment and seemed to be going about their business as a normal country would. Kids were waving at the American soldiers, requesting food and candy. Most of the bridges were destroyed and we had to cross the main river in Hue on pontoons laid out by the Corp. of Engineers. We made our way north on Highway 1 (the only road connecting north and south). Now Highway 1 is not a concrete highway, rather a small narrow half asphalt, some gravel and some mud road, like you would see in some rural country back road in America where traffic was scarce. The countryside view was breathtaking. All the trees, land, mountains and rice fields were so green. It was picture perfect. The homes of the village outside the camps were nothing but pieces of boards, sheet metal, tree trunks, limbs and straw nailed or tied together. The floors were dirt and about six inches higher than the outside ground which was kept swept with straw.

At LZ Sally, we were assigned to C (Charlie) Company. We took another two days of training and firing the M1 6, M60 machine gun, grenade launchers, anti-tank launchers and throwing hand grenades. In the afternoon we were given instructions on the NVA ( North Vietnamese Army), VC (Viet Cong), their tactics, ambushes, booby traps, and how they treat their own people; all the do's and don'ts that took the army years to learn that we were to absorb in a couple of afternoons. The spare time was spent cleaning latrines, filling sand bags, night watches and cleaning our weapons. The latrine detail was where I met Tim and we hit it off together immediately. We were so much alike and it was nice to meet someone who did not whine or complain constantly.

Most out houses were six to eight holes next to each other. The bottom portion of a fifty- five gallon drum was cut off about eighteen inches high and this was put under each hole. Tim and I would take turns pulling the cans out and just took it in stride as part of our job while other soldiers complained about the job. Everyday it had to be cleaned out. This was done by opening the trap door in the rear and pulling out the can. It was then dragged to a site approximate two hundred feet away where we poured diesel into the can and set on fire. It would burn most of the day and with smoke rising from approximately fifty out houses which served all soldiers within the camp, not just our platoon. The smell lingered constantly, twenty four hours a day. Some of the solders had difficulty working in these conditions while others just took their time and left most of the work for someone else the next day. Tim and I always took pride in our work and I guess we were noticed by our battalion's first sergeant. He complimented our attitude and the way we conducted ourselves. Because of this, he placed us on light duty which gave us more spare time.

Our chopper flight to join Charlie Company was delayed twenty four hours due to the location and the combat action that Charlie Company was under near T-Bone Mountain. At night you could see the red flashes and the sound of hand grenades, mortars and artillery. The action lasted most of the night. Tim and I, when alone, would discuss with each other questions like, "Will I hold up under fire? Will I get scared and run and hide somewhere? Will I be able to kill another human being? Will I be able to endure all this violence day and night for 365 days? If we encounter hostile forces everyday, the chances of being killed are so great. Will I die? And if so, how? Will it be a slow, painful death or will it be a quick death?" We were able to comfort and cheer each other. It was such a tremendous burden lifted off my shoulders knowing we had each other to console with. We decided to stick together as much as possible and leave the rest to our creator.

We were at the landing zone waiting for the choppers to take us out to the field. My stomach was in knots, scared and nervous. The helicopter flight to Charlie Company was breathtaking. The side doors

were left open and the jungle below was a solid blanket of green, hundred's of shades of green. The land looked so manicured, beautiful and peaceful - it left you mesmerized. How could anyone fight and kill in this land of paradise?

Landing near LZ Lyon as well as I recall, we met the Company's first sergeant, Robert Cook (whom I believe was a sergeant major at this time, but not sure) and assigned to the 3( platoon. We met our platoon leader, 2nd Lt. Santos and he spoke to us about the NVA (North Vietnamese Army) and the VC (Viet Cong) in the area; how they set their booby traps and how they fight, the terrain, mountains and jungle, the do's and don'ts. Lt. Santos thought I was a lifer (soldier making a career of the services) since I was 26 years old at the time. We were then assigned to a fire team within our platoon. Being in separate fire teams, Tim and I were not able to see each other but maybe once every other day for a brief chat. We were also given our daily load that we would be carrying: a back pack with approximately five days of ration, poncho, extra pair of socks, mosquito repellent, first-aid kit, blanket, ten magazine rounds, 100 rounds of ammo on a belt that was wrapped around my neck for M60 machine gun, 3 claymore mines, 8 trip flares and trip wire, 6 smoke canisters, 8 grenades, several packs of C4 explosives, anti-tank launcher, 10 rounds of M79 grenade launcher ammo, plus a 45 caliber pistol and my M 16 rifle. This was basic load that most soldiers carried. At times, each platoon carried a starlight scope and a bazooka with rounds. If someone was killed or seriously injured and there was no landing zone for the chopper, we would take turns carrying the body and his load to an LZ or make LZ by cutting trees, bushes, etc.

One day soon afterwards, our objective was to climb T-Bone Mountain and take over for a company of soldiers who were being reassigned. At the base of the mountain we were ambushed and pinned down. As one of the soldiers tried to sneak past a clearing to get a shot off, he was killed by a gunshot. Another soldier, and a good friend of his, went to his aid and was also shot, dying with his arms around his friend. On my right side, I could see someone trying to go around the ridge behind the sniper. There was a pin from a rifle and all of a sudden this soldier's ammo, grenades and trip flares exploded one after another. He was burned almost beyond recognition. I can still hear his screams to this day even though there was only two or three of them.

The first few weeks we (new troops) were in a state of shock. Trying to adjust to the heat and humidity was fruitless. The average daytime temperature was 110 degrees. In the jungle, there was no breeze and it would reach 140 degrees. Taking your salt tablet every morning was the order of the day and drinking water, if it could be found. Our uniforms were constantly wet, smelly, and torn, sometimes just hanging on our bodies. At night the temperature would drop and you were cold. When the monsoon season started, it would rain constantly for three days without slowing down. The rivers overflowed at their banks and everywhere you would look seemed like a lake. We slept many times when water was over our legs and used our helmets as pillows. And when the water began to flow into our ears, we would find a tree and lean against and sleep sitting up.

Water: I never knew how precious it was until I came to Nam. Most of the time they could not get fresh water to us for one reason or another. We had to get water out of a bomb crater, standing water in a pond, creek, stream or river. Now you must realize that this water is full of leeches, water buffalo manure, dirty mud and sometimes dead VC or NVA. You must drop purification tables in our canteen of water and wait two to three minutes before drinking. Normally one tablet is sufficient but in some areas we had to drop three to four tablets. One night after making contact with the enemy, not having water all day, I crawled to a pond and filled several canteens with water and dropped two tablets in each. After a few minutes I began to drink from my canteen and with nearly all the water gone, I felt something in my mouth. It was two leeches about three inches long, but they were dead. The tablets did their job. The leeches in the area that we worked were from one to twelve inches.

Hot food was seldom, like once every three to four weeks for several months. The rest of the time we ate c-rations. After eating the same food over and over we began to write home for ketchup, mustard,

sauces of any kind, just to make it taste different. You name it, we tried it.

In the field we were ordered to shave every day and to take our boots and socks off whenever time was available (which was once every week). Walking and standing in water for such a great lengths can cause "jungle rot", where your skin begins to peel, smell unbelievably bad and actually rot. A number of us soldiers would have sores, caused by cuts from jungle vines and plants and with the severe infectious disease in the area, the sores would not heal. They just kept getting bigger and worse. We were ordered to Utah Beach to guard a section of the perimeter. I spent a lot of time swimming in the ocean and the sores were painful due to the salty water. But within a few days they were gone. I guess the salty water cleaned out the bacteria.

I remember one instance after two or three weeks (cannot remember the exact number of days) we were told that we would be going to a small base camp in the mountains to receive medals from a general. They said that some hot food would be brought to us, and we would be able to take showers. We were dirty, our clothes raggy-looking after being in the jungle. I guess we looked pretty bad because the general refused to give medals to such a filthy group. We never did get a shower, change of clothes or hot food. The helicopter was fired at when it left the camp and we were ordered back into the jungle.

Charlie Company received orders to make a combat assault in an area controlled by the Viet Cong (VC). We were advised this would be a hot LZ, which means the enemy would be waiting for us. We boarded the choppers and than started the routine flying pattern. Our destination may be only fifteen miles away, but we may fly over 50 miles making zigzag patterns, circles, doubling back, etc. This keeps the enemy guessing where we were going to land. The pilot signaled that the target was ahead and that he would not be landing due to heavy fire by the enemy. We were to jump when given the signal. Tim and I were on the right side standing on the skids of the chopper. There were two more soldiers ready to jump behind us, and the same was true for the left side of the chopper. About twelve feet off the ground, the co-pilot signaled for us to jump. Tim and I looked at each other with disbelief. We were over a large "rice paddy" full of water and we were going to land in this mud. We would not be able to maneuver; just sitting ducks for the VC. Tim immediately pulled the M60 machine gun over his shoulder and than pulled it up over his head when landing. He was trying to keep the gun from mis-firing by not letting mud and water into the barrel and the firing mechanism.

I hit the water and began shoveling the mud off my face. While moving towards the tree line for cover, I also was looking where our fire team and platoon were located, how badly we were being hit by the VC and trying to find Tim. I was trying to sort out all of this in my mind in a matter of seconds time. With my face full of mud, I was having a difficult time of focusing my eyes. I than saw two hands sticking out of the water holding an M60 and a helmet. The water level was between his eyes and nose. He could not pull himself up due to the load that he was carrying and the mud he was stuck in. I got behind Tim and pulled him up. We did make it to the tree line and we never made contact with the enemy as predicated. Thank God almighty, because a lot of us were sitting ducks. Ironically, Tim and I had a good laugh at each other. All I saw of Tim was his eyes and clean white teeth as his view was probably the same of me.

One evening Tim was showing me his camera. He was so proud of it. It has been several days since we saw or spoke with each other. There was no enemy activity the past few days and I received a package of Mom's homemade cookies. Both of us were in good spirits. We managed to feast on the cookies and share some with our buddies.

The next day we had orders to sweep an area that was full of hedge rows and heavily booby trapped with all sorts of mines. Everyone's stomach turned inside out. This was an area we had gone through before and had several wounded soldiers. This was a place that worked on your mind. You could not see or hear anything. All you could do is walk slowly and carefully keep your eyes wide open, your ears at alert, ready to drop to the ground at any sound you may hear. When you sweep this area, keep a large distance between each other because the hidden explosives are usually very large, like 105 artillery rounds. The

word came from the C (Commanding Officer) to be ready to move out in five minutes. We all were telling each other over and over a lot of things: to keep your distance from each other, not to pick up or touch anything between or in the hedge rows, at the first sound of gunfire, hit the ground, don't follow a trail and keep each others backdoor covered.

Tim was approximately one hundred and fifty feet in front of me. There were two other soldiers, one on his right and the other on his left, with these two flanks approximately the same distance from Tim, one hundred and fifty feet to his side and fifty feet further up front. There were soldiers to the right and left of me with several to the rear.

Walking very slowly, we kept our eyes open for trip wire, booby traps and just about anything out of the ordinary. Our blood pressure was probably sky high. I was looking around to see if I was still in my position and I looked to the rear. As I turned towards the front in Tim's direction, I saw his hand reaching for something in the hedges. I immediately began to holler "NO TIM". At that precise moment, a huge explosion occurred. Tim vanished. He was gone. I saw dirt flying in the area and what seemed like thousands of pieces of black confetti (his camera case) floating to the ground. It looked like New York City on New Years Day. I and two others immediately ran where the explosion occurred. We saw just a few pieces of flesh that were charred and burnt like. The largest piece found of his remains was about twelve inches in diameter. We picked up everything we could find, which was not very much, and put into a poncho.

I was numb. This couldn't be. I thought to myself: please Lord, this has to be a dream, not Tim. Why didn't I turn my head faster, why didn't I holler sooner? God, why did you let this happen to my buddy. He was for real, a good, decent human being and so religious. Why did you let this happen to him? What the hell are we doing here anyway?

We found one of Tim's boots about one hundred twenty five feet to his left flank. His body was about ten feet to his right flank from the 105 artillery round which left approximately a ten foot crater in diameter and was about two feet deep. A Medi-Evac chopper was called and all his belongings that were wrapped in a poncho were put on board. And we immediately continued with our sweep of the area like nothing happened. But it did change some of us, for the better or worse. Some of us are still fighting the war inside ourselves and asking question after questions, about WHY?

He also told me about a book Al Santoli, their platoon leader, wrote. It was called "Everything We Had." In the book Santoli wrote about the event of my brother's death. I was also told this information by another grunt from the same unit. So I purchased the book and went right to the section my brother's buddy told me about. This is what Santoli wrote:

*"When the explosion went off, an object was moving through the air towards us. I'm thinking clear. How long will it take? Not very long, I thought. But it was like a long time coming and it was high in the air and this dark object was moving and I was watching it. I was transfixed by it. It was almost hypnotic. Here were two seasoned combat veterans standing there in a crouch watching something come through the air at us. I thought calmly, "it's gonna hit me." We watched it and we watched it and we watched it. It came closer and closer and closer. And at some point I suspect we both realized that it wasn't a bomb, it wasn't... it was part of a body. And we stood there, he and I, about three feet apart. It landed between us. It was a boot with the leg in it sheered at the top of the boot. It landed fucking upright and it was like a goddamn movie."*

**Now if you found this description difficult to read, imagine how I felt, this was my brother he was talking about.**

August 7, 1998

Dear Tim,

*I felt the need to write you another letter today, I only wish you could be here in person instead to talk to but that is not possible. I wanted you to know why I did not continue on with my search for someone who might have known you over in Vietnam. Of course I am sure you already know why, you can probably read my heart better than I can. When I found your buddy Leon who knew you in Vietnam, I could see why you chose him to be your friend, you two are so very much alike. Leon told me the whole story, from the time the plane left California for Vietnam until the time you got killed. He is a brave person for going back into that pain again for me. He told me how you two had some heart to heart talks. He also told me about the time the two of you laughed so hard together one time. And the most important of all, he told me you did not suffer any when you were killed. What more is there for me to know? Any further information I might find out about you will bring no further peace than what he has told me. There are so many kin of KIA's who are doing searches for someone who might have known their loved ones over in Vietnam. But so many seem like they just can't get enough information and they continue to do more searching until they find out their loved ones suffered during their final moments of life. Why would they want to go that far, what is there to be gained from it all? So I hope you understand why I search no further, I learned what I needed to know and I want to make peace with what I have found. Some go so far as to gather death reports and autopsy reports, why does one need that kind of information? The part of you I want to linger onto in my life are the good times. The times when we were kids, the innocent part of our lives. The times when we used to get all dressed up for church on Easter. The times we used to think were fun, like when we got to go along with dad to the dump or the time we caught all those night crawlers and put them in a big bucket to give to dad to use when he went fishing. Except we forgot to put any dirt in the bucket and we put the bucket in the garage and then forgot about them until a week later when dad opened the garage door and it smelled so bad he had to bury the bucket in the back yard. Yes, we certainly knew how to be kids didn't we? And those are the times I want to remember and keep in my heart. I don't want to remember you being at war or dying, I want to remember you as you lived. So, my search ends or maybe my search has just begun...begun to look for the good times and the good memories to always hold dear to my heart. I will always miss you Tim and I will always feel the pain of you being gone, but I will also cherish the little time we had together. I love you Tim.*

Your Little Sister. Ruth

If you were to ask me what I thought we had gained from war, I would have a hard time coming up with a good answer. I love my country but I fear my government. My eight year old grandson was watching television when an ad came on about joining the Army. He said "grandma, I would never join the Army." I asked him why he felt that way and he said "because I don't want to die." What profound words to come from such a little person. With the pain I have already bared, the thought of losing my grandson to war would be more pain than I could endure in my life time. Going back and remembering Tim and Vietnam has been painful. Maybe if I would have never let myself forget in the first place, the pain would be so much less right now. There was even a point in my life where I had taken Tim's picture down from my wall and put it away out of sight. I could barely remember having a big brother and I was forgetting who and what he was like. In forgetting about Vietnam I was also forgetting Tim. I had to learn how to separate the two.

Tim had a life before Vietnam and I needed to concentrate on that. I wanted to remember what it was like when he and I were kids, the happy and simple times of our lives. I wanted to be able to remember his face, his laughter, his kindness and his great sense of humor. I needed to remember him in his 57 Ford convertible and going to the prom with his girlfriend. Tim playing basketball in the drive way with his little brother and hearing him call him "Buzz." War took my big brother Tim away from me, but he did have a life before that and no matter how short it was, I yearned to remember it.

So I got his picture back out and noticed how much it had faded over the years, almost like the memories I had of him. I took the chance the photographer who had originally taken the picture so many years ago would still have the negatives for it. I gave him a call. Luck was on my side, he still had the negatives. Not only did I order one for myself but also for my mom, sister and brother. It was time for my family to bring Tim out of the closet. The photographer told me he had recently been to the VFW that was built and

named after my brother. He told the VFW club he would donate a large color portrait of Tim but they had to hang it in view where everyone could see it as they entered the front door. When I visited the VFW the last time, I felt as if there was something missing on Tim's portrait and that was a nameplate so I ordered one from a jewelry store that read "Corporal Timothy G. Robinson" and donated it to the VFW club. Guess I felt the need to put a name to the face so others will remember my brother also.

There is a saying that goes "that which will not kill us makes us stronger." Maybe the pain and suffering I felt over the lose of my brother helped me to endure the other difficult times I have had to face through my life. Now Tim's picture hangs back on my wall and I am so very proud of him. I have a light on his picture. I turn it on every night as I go to bed and I tell him goodnight and when I wake in the morning I tell him good morning as I turn the light off. It feels good to go through this little ritual everyday. I also made a promise to myself that when the sun is shining brightly and I can feel the warmth of it on my face, I will think good thoughts of Tim. I will remember his smile and hear his laughter.

I wear a KIA (killed in action) bracelet with Tim's name, date of death and location of his name on the Wall. Strangers ask me about my bracelet and I get the strangest reaction from them when I say to them I had a brother who was killed in Vietnam. I tell them it is a KIA bracelet. They have no idea as to what KIA even stands for. Is it possible no one cares about all the men who lost their lives for our country except those that knew them? I try to make others aware of the supreme sacrifices our men gave.

I visited Arlington Cemetery in DC and was overwhelmed by the number of white crosses. I wondered how many of them had never had flowers placed on them. We always take freedom for granted until we pay the price of a loved one for it.

Vietnam became a part of my family's life through no choice of our own. It is sort of like having a missing leg, you can still get around, but now it is a lot harder. Every Vietnam vet I meet I tell them "Welcome Home," and so many of them say "thank you, that is the first time anyone has ever said that to me." Many went over there as young boys and came back as old men and we never even told them thank you. I have heard Vietnam vets ask for forgiveness for what they had to do over there. But it should really be us asking them for forgiveness for what we did to them. They still hide the fact they are Vietnam vets, they hide their feelings and they hide their military medals. All I can say is "I'm sorry, so very sorry."

So many of them talk about survival guilt, that it was just by chance someone else's name was on the Wall instead of theirs. I wish I could explain to them what it would be like for their families to have to read their names on the Wall, maybe if I could they would rid themselves of the survival guilt. I know they would never want their families to suffer the same pain my family has over the loss of my brother. All those

names on the Wall gave up all their tomorrows for our todays. When I stare at the Wall, I see thousands of dreams never fulfilled, hundreds of children never born and tears, so many tears. If you have never been there, go....and if you go, touch a name any name and silently say "thank you."

Memorial Day is a difficult time for me. Maybe there are too many events going on to remind me of my loss. Although it seems that day has lost it's true meaning. There are people around me who are talking excitingly about going camping, fishing, on picnics and out of town. Then they turn to me and ask what I will be doing that week-end. I tell them putting flowers on my brother's grave and going to the Memorial Day services. They don't seem to know how to react to an answer like that one. I on the other hand can't understand why they can not take just one hour out of their long week-end to remember and give thanks to all those who gave their lives for our country. Seems to me one hour a year is not asking too much to remember those who gave the ultimate sacrifice.

Wouldn't it be great if we would all adopt a fallen soldier and once a year make sure his grave is taken care of and some flowers placed on it? Just think what the cemeteries could look like. Instead of headstones over grown with grass and weeds, it could an ocean of flowers or a tiny flag blowing in the wind whispering the words "thank you." George Orwell wrote "you sleep well in your bed at night only because a few rough men are willing to do violent things on your behalf." He is right. How many of us during the Vietnam War went to bed and wondered how safe our boys were over there or if they were scared or hungry or even took the time to say a little prayer for them? Does it take losing a loved one to war to realize the cost we pay for peace? The pain not only hurts but makes you aware.

I have often wondered how involved I would be with Vietnam had I not lost a brother to it. Would I too turn my head like so many other Americans have? Would I be as educated with the horrors that went on over there? Would I be one of those going camping on Memorial Day week-end? I was never given the choice as to whether Vietnam was to be a part of my life or not. It took my brother from me and therefore became a part of me. I would hope even under different circumstances, I would have been compassionate enough to still care. I hate the price we have to pay.

A Vietnam vet who helped me in my search in finding someone who knew by brother over there, sent me duplicate medals of all the ones Tim had earned. I purchased an Army dress jacket to put the medals on so I could wear them to the Memorial Day services. I was so nervous that I would not get the medals and patches on the jacket in the proper order. I asked another Vietnam vet who had retired from the Army for information on the proper placement of the medals and patches. Although he lived in another state, he told me to send the jacket and medals to him and he would make sure they got put on there correctly.



His wife sewed on the patches and he attached the medals and mailed the jacket back to me. It looked great and felt even more special to me because now they had played a part in it also. Feeling a little apprehensive, I wore it to the Memorial Day services. I knew if my brother would have been alive he would have been the one wearing them and wearing them with pride for what he had done for his country. I received many compliments on the jacket and people told me what a wonderful way to pay tribute to my brother. I felt pride. The jacket had my brother's name on it and his unit patch so everyone knew he was infantry, a machine gunner, a tough job.

Talking with some of Tim's friends so many years later educated me even more. The night before Tim was going to be shipped out to Vietnam he was shining his military boots. His friend told me he wondered how Tim could sit there appearing so calm when he knew where he was going and what was to be expected of him. I'm sure although my brother appeared calm on the outside the fear of the unknown was probably running rabid through him on the inside. Shortly before he left he told his girlfriend at the time that he wasn't sure if he could kill someone or not. She offered him a ride to Canada but he told her that was not an option. Yes, he could have run to Canada any time he wanted to because we only lived sixty miles from the border, but that was not of his character.

I also learned before my brother was drafted he had talked to my uncle about the National Guards. My uncle advised him that Tim would probably not like it and that it probably wasn't for him. When my uncle found out Tim had been killed in Vietnam, he went and sat on the steps and cried. My aunt told me that was the first and only time she ever saw him cry. My uncle died before anyone told him that my brother had attended a couple of National Guard meetings and had decided on his own that my uncle was right and it was not for him. My uncle died thinking if he had not given Tim the advise he had, maybe we would still be alive today.

I also learned new information from a friend who was my brother's girlfriend at the time of his death. When Tim's body was returned to the family it was marked closed coffin. There was no viewing of Tim. My brother's girlfriend did not know this information at the time. She thought our family was able to view the body. For thirty years she thought our family got to see Tim until I told her no one got to see him. How sad she didn't think we thought of her as part of the family and would have included her in with they viewing had there been one. After all, this was the girl Tim wanted to marry and spend the rest of his life with. I recently saw his girlfriend and she told me she still dreams about Tim at least once a month. I envied her when she told me this because I never dream about Tim anymore. I guess for so many years I buried the pain of losing him so deep it will no longer surface. Maybe with time and more healing, I too, may someday have my dreams about Tim. One can only hope.

To everything there is a season,

A time for every purpose under the sun.  
A time to be born and a time to die;  
A time to plant and a time to pluck up that which is planted;  
A time to kill and a time to heal;  
A time to weep and a time to laugh;  
A time to mourn and a time to dance;  
A time to embrace and a time to refrain from embracing;  
A time to lose and a time to seek;  
A time to rend and a time to sew;  
A time to keep silent and a time to speak;  
A time to love and a time to hate;  
A time for war and a time for peace.

*Ecclesiastes 3:1-8*

Yes, this has been a rough journey for me. Sometimes it is hard to understand what to do with all these new emotions I am feeling. Can't share them with my family because they don't talk about it. Can't share it with my friends because they don't understand them. So when things get really rough for me I will sit down and write a letter to my brother Tim. I know he understands me more than anyone. It may sound a little strange but it helps me cope and allows me to shed those tears I have held back for so many years.

*Dear Tim,*

*I miss you so much; I have cried a thousand tears since you have been gone. There seems to be no answers to the questions I ask. How does one let go of the pain, but still hang on to the memories, are they not separable? The other day I heard a little boy walk past our flag and tell his friend, "oh, it's just the stupid American flag." Does this mean your death was in vain? I tell myself, "today I am going to be strong," and as I say those words, tears start falling down my cheeks and I miss you all over again. I know you wouldn't want to see me suffer but what is a kid sister to do? I see your name on these monuments, but does it mean something to only me? I can't imagine the thousand of memories of you that I have had to give up in the name of war. How can I pray for peace when I have no peace within me! I would like to go to the Wall, they say it is peaceful and beautiful, but I am afraid that I will not see my reflection. Ashes to ashes, dust to dust, no stone unturned. I will miss you till the day I die.*

*Love your sister. Ruth*

*Dear Tim,*

*You have been gone now more years than you lived. Everywhere I turn I see your name etched in granite. We are suppose to feel proud that you gave your life for your country. A country that told you lies and exchanged your life for a few medals. Who is it that determined how much your life was worth? Purple Heart - \$29.95 — including shipping and handling. The government who has no record of your existence. And the politician who made the decisions in the Vietnam war now lies on the beaches of the Caribbean enjoying his retirement. Torment, pain and suffering all free to the families of those who lost a love one to war. Monuments, flags and politicians can all be bought, but the human soul is not for sale. Keep your medals and your glory and give us back our loved ones, I think it is a fair exchange.*

*Love your sister. Ruth*

Dear Tim,

You left me to make my journey on my own. I know it was not your choice. I suppose it should make me a stronger person. But instead, it has left me with emptiness so deep that nothing in life can fill it. I hold a special love for you that can not be shared with anyone else. When you died, I found out many years later a part of me had been washed out to sea. To remember you, think of you and talk about you always brings tears. I know you would never want to see me in pain for you were such a gentle person. In the Bible it says, "To everything there is a season, and a time for every purpose under heaven... a time to kill, and a time to heal... a time to love and a time to hate; a time for war and a time for peace." But it does not mention the price we have to pay.

Love you Forever!!!

Your Sister Ruth

August 29, 1997

Dear Tim,

Well, here it is 29 years, 4 months and 14 days since you were killed in Vietnam and I finally learned the truth, the whole truth. They say "the truth is better than where our imaginations could take us." But it hurts just as much.

I had been doing a search for someone who might have been with you in Vietnam. You had only been there for six weeks when you were killed by a land mine in Thua Thien. I knew my search could be a difficult one since you were there for only a short time, but every Vietnam vet I talked with said "someone will remember him, no matter how short of a time he was there." So, with their encouragement, I set forth on my journey to find that "someone." Well, today I found him.

This someone was kind and spoke with a gentle voice and he was honest enough to tell me the truth. God bless him. He said that you had tripped on a trip wire and was blown to pieces, there was no blood and the biggest piece left of you was an 8x8 piece and your foot still in your boot. He talked about the camera you carried with you and were so proud of and how the pieces of that camera fell like little black pieces of rain. They tried to find as many pieces of you as they could and then they placed you in a little pouch. He said you were a good soldier and he wasn't telling me that because I was family, he was telling me because it was the truth. He said you were a good machine gunner and treated your machine gun like a baby. You took good care of it and cleaned it all the time and they could rely on you because they knew your gun would not jam when it was needed to protect them. He said you were a proud soldier and did a good job and did not do drugs or smoke. He talked about how you two used to share your rations with each other. He also told me about the time you jumped off the helicopter and landed in a rice paddy and all he could see was the top of your helmet in the water, he said the two of you really laughed about that. Now I know when I go to visit you at the cemetery exactly how much of you is there. But it does not matter because I know where the best parts of you are.

With time I know that what I have learned today will get easier, for nothing will ever hurt as much as seeing those two soldiers walking up our driveway the day we found out you were gone.

I always knew that you were a good soldier, for when you left you said "I will do the best job that I can.

AND YOU DID

Forever in my heart...

Airborne

Your kid sister —

## Working on “Faces Behind The Names”

It seems like a hundred years ago, yet feels like it was yesterday. I can remember the first time the author of the book “Faces Behind The Names” contacted my family. He had obtained names and addresses from the Minnesota Vietnam Memorial committee. The committee had built and dedicated a beautiful monument to the Minnesota men who had lost their lives in the Vietnam War. My brother, Timothy George Robinson, is on that monument and my family had been invited to the dedication services. Tim’s name appears on four separate monuments which is a great honor, but it does not make the pain of missing him any easier.

Letters were sent to the families informing us of someone who wanted to publish a book of Minnesota’s fallen soldiers of the Vietnam War, if interested, we should contact him. This letter was sent to my mother (my father had passed away in 1986), she passed the letter on to my older sister who in return gave the letter to me. The letter said the book would be composed of stories written by family members along with a picture of the fallen soldier. I remember thinking how great it would be to have a book published containing my brother’s picture and story. I was proud of my brother and missed having him in my life. The thought of having him in a book would help keep his memory alive and let others know what a gentle and caring person he was.

What I did not understand was why my mother and sister passed the letter on to me, why didn’t they share the same enthusiasm I felt. It wasn’t till later that I learned that we all handle our pain and suffering in different ways. I came home late that night and could hardly wait to call this gentleman the next day. I had no idea where that first phone call was about to take me. As I sit here writing, I wonder if I knew where that first phone call was about to take me, would I have still made the call. Even though the journey was a very painful one, I still, to this day, would, choose to *walk the walk*.

I remember that I had an older brother, but I was forgetting who he was and working on that book brought back so many memories, and I learned many more things about his life—it was all a blessing in disguise. I did not think about Tim very often over the last 28 years, something that I am not proud of, but something I admit too.

I talked with many families while working on this book, we talked, we cried, we laughed and we exposed our angers and prejudices, we are only human. I began to take the weight of their loss on my shoulders. I can remember coming home from work one day and putting the key in my door and saying to myself, “oh God, please don’t let there be any messages on my answering machine, I can’t do this. any more.”

Today I am grateful he chose to ignore my request, I have learned that God does not give me more pain than I can endure. I guess He knew better than I and this was a road I had to take to face my fears and all those emotions I had buried for so many years. But most important of all I was beginning to remember who my brother was and he was now much closer in my heart and this time I won't forget. I remember how hard and painful it was to get people interested in this type of book, I thought by now America was ready to talk about Vietnam, especially this type of book written by the families of those who died for our country. The families were ready to put their pain on paper for all of America to see and read. To me this book was going to be the ticker tape parade home that they never received.

When the book, the *Faces Behind the Names* was being put together, it was the family members who were asked to write stories about their loved ones who were lost in Vietnam. Out of seven of us in the family there were only five of us left now. Tim had died in 1968 and my dad had passed away in 1986. That left my mom, three daughters and one son left. All except my younger brother wrote something for the book. I do not know why my younger brother choose not to do it. It really doesn't matter either, there is no right way with dealing with pain, we all handle it in a different manner. But these were the short stories submitted by the rest of the family:

*So many years have gone by since you were taken from us, leaving words unsaid and plans unfulfilled. We miss you so much; the pain of losing you never goes away so we cope by remembering the good times when were together. You were always a peacemaker, because your heart was kind. You had patience and truly cared about other people. It made me happy to see how protective you were of your brother and sisters, and they loved you for that. Until we see each other again, I will always love you, Tim.*

Your Mom

*Tim came over to say good-bye. It was early spring, a cloudy afternoon. My two little ones napped while we talked, colored Easter eggs and snacked on chocolate frosted peanut butter bars. I've never been able to understand how he could drink a beer with that sugary stuff. I hugged him good bye and told him to be sure he came back. He told me he would and then walked down the sidewalk to his car while caring over his shoulder the Army dress pants I tapered for him. I guess I should have said, "come back alive." Tim had a tender spirit and would have made a great daddy. I know he's with Jesus and knowing I'll see him later is the only thing that gives me peace in my loss.* Tim's oldest sister

*I remember that last night—the bleakness of it all, and the muffled scream inside of me. He sat on the couch in my apartment, shining his shoes and his brass. Slow and methodical. It was his style, of course. The screaming inside was saying, "he'll never come back." Why wasn't he showing even the slightest of my fear? If this little sister didn't know he wasn't coming back, how could he not know his own fate? Where was his protest? Tim was a peaceable man—very slow to anger. Never positioned for defense, but always open and inviting. Gentle. So Gentle. Who declared such a man a jungle soldier? Who determined his sacrifice? My feelings remained silent. The next morning, I held him and said my last three words, "I love you." He walked out of my life. He never received my subsequent letters. He was gone. To this day, I still feel the rise of that self-loathing for my own cowardness—cowardness that kept me from begging him to follow me to Canada. Would that have kept him in my life? I'm left to live with that question.*

Tim's second to youngest sister

*I was thrilled to take part in the making of this book, but I never knew how difficult it was to be. They wanted military and personal information. I told myself, "I can do that." So I asked my Mom about the military information. She handed me a box containing my brother's personal belongings, and said I would find the information inside. I brought the box home, set it aside and went about doing other tasks. Later that evening seeing the box again, I thought I would quickly search for the military information I needed. After a few minutes of going through his personal belongings, I began to cry. I cried through so hard I even scared myself. Thought it had been almost 30 years since his death, the pain was no less that night than the day I first learned Tim had been killed. The contents of this box was all that was left of my brother. Inside was his military dress hat, the American flag that had been draped over his coffin, military and personal information and pictures, his wallet and shaver. A letter I had written to him and letters he had written to our family. Twenty two years of young man's life contained in one small box. Again, I found myself asking why? What did we gain? Our loses were plenty. It cost us our brothers, sons, and fathers: too much humanity to be replaced with just a Purple Heart and a Bronze Star. Where are you today, those of you who made the decision to send our loved ones over to some God forsaken country to die a violent and lonely death? Are you sitting by your fireplaces and spending time with your grandchildren, something our boys will never have a chance to experience? Are you ever sad like us, and do you ask yourselves, "who gave us the right to play God?" Tim, I wish I could touch your face one more time. I will love you forever.*

Tim's youngest sister

I didn't tell my family about this book, I still had that need to protect them. Before I started my search it use to upset me that I couldn't get my family to start talking about Tim and Vietnam. I thought my pain is no less then theirs. What I didn't understand at the time was we all deal with our own grief in a different manner. They choose to keep their grief buried and I choose to face it. There is no right or wrong when it comes to this, it is what is best for each individual. I must admit they have come around a little bit now, every once in awhile at a family gathering, Tim's name will come up. Probably doesn't seem like much to an outsider but to my family to talk about Tim after so many years of silence is a big step. One day I saw my sister wearing a lapel pin of the Screaming Eagles unit, the one my brother was in. Before I started looking back to Vietnam I don't think anyone in my family, including me, could have told you Tim's unit.

Now twenty eight years later and getting involved with the publishing of that book, I didn't know I was about to open Pandora's box, nor did I realize that I was about to face my fears. I called the gentleman who was putting the book together and told him that I would like to submit a story about my brother. We talked a long time and I told him if he needed any help to give me a call. I think this was the point where I went from submitting a story to becoming totally involved with the publishing.

It all started out so simple, I sent letters to the families of those who lost someone in the Vietnam war, told them I would be helping in getting their stories told and that I also lost a brother in Vietnam. In no time at all these families were calling me regarding the book. They were such wonderful people and we all seemed to share a common pain. Of course not all things ran smoothly, I did receive threats from two families. What they said to me I will not repeat, but one must wonder if they are in such pain that they just want to pass it on to others. Those two threats haunted me for a long time, but I learned to put them aside and focus on the book and how much healing it would be for the rest.

I was so excited that someone was finally going to hear our stories. I recall one father telling me the quickest way to end any conversation was to say "I had a son who was killed in Vietnam." But, now we were finally going to get our chance to tell our stories about our brothers, sons, fathers, husbands, uncles, cousins and friends that were killed in Vietnam. I felt like I was on a mission here and no one was going to stop me. How sad it is these young men gave their lives for their country, the very country that was not willing to listen to our stories.

I remember composing letters and hand addressing hundreds of letters to VFW's, American Legions, high schools, historical societies, and mayors of each town who had lost a fallen soldier. Basically I was in search on anyone with interest who would be willing to buy a book and help get these stories out to the public. I was shocked to see such a lack of interest. Most of the VFW's and American Legions did not even acknowledge the Vietnam vet, they looked at them as someone who had lost a war. I don't know how anyone could be expected to win a political war. I liked what Westmoreland said one time, "The

Vietcong knew they could win the war in our country politically because they knew they could not win the war on the battlefield." Our young men were asked to fight for our country and they did it well.

I talked at a VFW post, it was hard for me to stand there in front of these members with their free drinks sitting in front of them and expose my emotions. My tears fell as I read them stories that were going to be contained in this book. When I finished the first question proposed to me was, "What about the Korean War?" I thought what the hell difference did that make, you would think a book about fallen soldiers would be an interest to this group no matter what war it was. The Vietnam War had touched me personally, it was my way of helping pay tribute to these soldiers. I was disappointed in the reaction of this VFW club.

I also spoke to a VVA (Vietnam Veterans of America) group, such a difference. Again I had taken the risk of exposing my emotions and again I was not strong enough to keep the tears from falling. When I was done speaking these men came up and hugged me, oh how wonderful that felt. They saw my pain in losing my brother and felt it also. I soon learned the VVA was formed because of the lack of acknowledgment of the Vietnam vet by the VFW and American Legions. I thought there would have been a certain bonding or understanding between any soldier who had seen combat. Don't get me wrong, not all the clubs feel like this and those who don't have my utmost respect. The clubs do plenty good, but it was hard for me to understand why they donated money for such doings as fireworks for the Fourth of July but were not willing to purchase a book that would pay tribute to the Minnesota men who gave their lives in Vietnam. It made me angry, what did our boys do in Vietnam that was so wrong.

Did America still think, after so many years, our soldiers had any control on what was going on over there? It was a political war, one our soldiers never had a chance of winning. God forbid we ever have another war, I think the sons of our senators, governors, representatives and all other politically held positions who would have any say in war, should be put at the top of the draft list, then lets see how anxious they are to lead our country into war. I have many different personal feelings and opinions about the Vietnam War but with the loss of my brother I feel I am entitled to them. Like the draft dodgers and the conscientious objectors. To me there is a big difference in the two of them. The conscientious objectors believed in their country but did not believe in killing but served their country in another way. The draft dodger did not believe in getting killed or dying for their country. The biggest excuse used by the draft dodger was they did not want to get killed in Vietnam, and I have not personally ran across any Vietnam vet who served over there that did want to get killed; but they still served their country. Many of the draft dodgers are having feelings of guilt today and I think that should be their punishment for not serving their country.

This might sound a little harsh, but you must keep in mind I lost a brother to that war. He was protecting the very same country these draft dodger were running from only to return after the war was over and given amnesty. Then there were the protesters, the ones that wanted to bring our boys home." I am sure there were a number of genuine protesters but history shows when the draft was abolished the number of protesters also declined even though the war was still going on. Every soldier in this book felt a duty to



their country and family, they were told it was up to them to stop the spread of communism to our country. I remember when my brother went he said "if I have to go, I will do the best job I can." Little did he know when he mouthed those words he would never come back.

It is estimated 40,000 Canadians may have served in the United States armed forces during the Vietnam era. Etched on the Wall of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial are the names of many of those Canadians killed in Vietnam. I can't help but wonder what the families of these soldiers must think of the United States draft dodgers, maybe they are more forgiving. I was surprised with the things I learned about the Vietnam War. For instance, the size of South Vietnam, how could so much death occur in such a small country. It was a poor man's war, 76% of the men sent to Vietnam were from lower middle/working class backgrounds.

The average age of the soldiers serving in Vietnam was nineteen years old and 61% of the men killed there were 21 years of age or younger. The average age of those who fought in World War II was 26 years of age. Amputations or crippling wounds to the lower extremities were 300% higher in Vietnam than in World War II and 70% higher than in the Korean War. Strange how we thought these young men were responsible enough to fight our wars but not old enough to vote or drink. I regret I wasn't old enough or responsible enough to do more for our boys in Vietnam during that time.

I did a extensive search to find as many of the families as I could for the book, but at some point I had to stop so the book could get published, it was disappointing to me that I could not locate all the families, but it was thirty years later and many of the parents had already passed away and trying to locate a sister or brother was even more difficult. I did my best in trying to locate these families but I still feel sadness in the ones I might have missed. There were 1124 men from Minnesota killed in the Vietnam War and we were able to locate over 400 of those families. Some families we contacted did not submit stories because it was too painful for them.

Working on this book gave me the opportunity to also help out in other ways. I had contacted a sister who had lost her only sibling to the Vietnam War. She had recently moved because the apartment she had been living in had caught on fire and she lost everything. I called one of my sisters and asked if she would go through her clothes and I would do the same so we could help her out. We gave her lots of nice clothes and she was so grateful and just couldn't stop thanking us enough but I was glad to be able to help her.

I contacted a mother who had lost her only son and child in the Vietnam War. Her husband had died a few years earlier and she was all alone. She told me she had lost her Gold Star Mother Pin when she moved and how awful she felt about it. I told her I would try and find out where she could get a replacement pin and would let her

know. I started with the VFW and American Legions associations but the pin did not come from them and they did not know where I could get another one.

I then called the Army Recruiting center and got a young gentleman named Schumacher on the phone. Again I repeated my story about the Gold Star Mother pin and where I could obtain one. He told me he would do some research on it and call me back. I thought for sure this was just another dead end. But to my surprise he called me back in thirty minutes and gave me the address and phone number to the Gold Star Mother Headquarters in Washington DC. I don't know who was more excited, him or me. He was such a nice person and I thanked him very much.

I called the headquarters and again repeated my story and had them send me some forms for this mother to fill out to obtain another pin. When I got the forms I called the mother and told her I was sending them to her to fill out and if she needed any help with it I would be glad to help her. About four months later, she called to tell me she just got her Gold Star Mother pin and she was so very happy and just wanted to thank me for all my help. She was proud to be a Gold Star Mother and I was happy that I was able to help her.

Another mother said she was happy someone was finally doing a book of this type. She always intended to make a book out of the letters she had saved that her husband had sent her while he was stationed in China and the letters from her son who was killed in Vietnam that she had been saving for 26 years. It was all too painful, her husband had passed away and she had lost another son in a trailer fire. I sent her one of those books with the blank pages inside and told her to start her own book to pass on to the family so her son's memories could live on, she thought it was a great idea. I had never been to the Wall in Washington DC, I never felt emotionally strong enough to do it, but working on this book had given me the strength and curiosity to want to go. So I started saving my money and had saved enough to go, but then we ran into some financial difficulties with getting the book published so I gave my trip money towards the book to help make sure this book would get published, to me that was more important. Every extra minute I had outside of my forty hour a week job I spent on the book. I was dragging both emotionally and physically. All my sorrow of losing my brother thirty years ago were beginning to surface but I had no time to deal with them because we had a book that needed to be published. So, again I buried my emotions but it would not be for long as they would again surface.

How hard it must have been for our soldiers to be in combat in Vietnam. They would see their buddies and friends blown away but were never given any time to grieve for them. They had to put them in body bags and pick up their own rifles and move on, it was all about survival. Then they returned back to the

states and were expected to act normal again as if nothing had happened. They were in Vietnam during the most influential time of their lives, and we were telling them to just forget about Vietnam.

What a strange concept, I would think that would be a little impossible to do. We will never know what it was like for these men, they had already seen more death in a year than one would in a life time. Maybe if we would have greeted them with hugs instead of throwing garbage at them when they came home, they would have had an easier time at adjusting.

Putting all the stories on diskette was a difficult task for me. I lived all their stories and would cry and type and cry and type, I could hardly see my keyboard. By the time I had reached my brother's story I was sadden so much by grief that I ached all over. It still brings tears to my eyes now as I write about it. That is the first time I realized not all the casualties were listed on the Wall, some of us were still living. On every Memorial Day my mom, sister and I would go to the little town my brother is buried at and plant flowers on his grave. That year was the most difficult one for me. I remember digging up the dirt and my tears falling on his headstone and I was telling my sister, "I shouldn't be putting flowers on my brother's grave, he should still be here." Everyday he was not able to live his life was another day he was not in mine.

The following year when we traveled to Tim's grave, it was much different. I don't know if it was because I was further along in my healing process or if it was just because last year had been so painful I didn't want to go through it again. This year we bought our usual flowers to plant but we also left more things to leave behind for him. My brother Tim used to love candy circus peanuts, you know those orange soft peanut shaped candy that is nothing but sugar. He also had a black lab dog named "Smokie" he used to take hunting with him, and he also enjoyed having a beer now and then. So we planted the flowers, put a little American flag by his headstone and added a little tiny wind chime that had a black lab on it and left him a jar of circus peanut candy and a can of cold beer. My dad is buried by my brother so we left him a beer also, we didn't want them fighting over the same can of beer. We sat there and laughed and told stories and talked about how people probably thought we were crazy for doing this, but is sure helped with the pain. We joked about how next year we would remember to bring the beer and lawn chairs and a grill and have us a party. Yeah, it all sounds a little strange, I guess you just had to be there and keep in mind we all deal with our grief in different ways.

That year I also attended the memorial services at the Minnesota Vietnam Veterans Memorial. This was my first time there, I did not go to the initial dedication of the Wall because it was too painful for me to attend. The services were beautiful. They had speakers, fly overs by jets, cargo planes, helicopters and they did something called the re-dedication of a flag. They would take a flag that had been draped over

the coffin of one of the boys whose name was on the Wall and still folded in its original manner and they would unfold the flag and raise it up the flag pole for the duration of the services. Then they would lower the flag at the end of the services and re-fold it and present it back to the family.

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I used to hate the sound of a helicopter, it always used to remind me of the 6:00 news during the time of the Vietnam war where everyday they would tell us our fatality numbers. I told this to a Vietnam vet one day and he said, "oh no, they were the angels of mercy." They would fly us out when we would get trapped and take out our wounded and bring us food and ammunition, they saved our lives. After that, those helicopters took on a whole new sound for me. I stayed a long time after the services and talked with a variety of people there. I recall standing at the *Wall* all by myself and crying and this lady came up to me and told me she had been a nurse in Vietnam. She hugged me and told me she was sorry she couldn't have brought my brother home for me. Seems like the ones who were responsible for that war are never at these services to say they are sorry, but the ones who gave it their all are the ones there telling us they are sorry when they have no reason to be.

Later I remember watching a program on public television interviewing the nurses that served in Vietnam. They said these young soldiers always needed new boots because they had out grown their old ones. I thought, wow, these guys hadn't even finished growing yet. They also talked about how hard the war was for them, the nurses never knew what happened to so many of the guys they took care of. Some times they would pin notes to the soldiers pajamas telling the family to let them know if the soldier was okay, but they never heard back from any of them. It must have been really hard for these nurses to go to the *Wall*, where they would learn the ending to so many of their questions.

At the services a Vietnam vet said me crying and said to me, "do you think your brother would want to see you this sad?" I don't think he knew my grieving as an adult was new to me and I was sad because I was realizing what my lost had been. A Vietnamese gentleman came up to me and shook my hand and

said thank you. This was the first time I started to realize that they too were fighting side by side with our soldiers.

I guess the saddest and hardest experience I had working on this book was with several phone conversations with a Vietnam vet who had lost his brother in Vietnam. He told me he joined the service when he was seventeen years old because his brother had been killed in Vietnam, and he felt he had a score to even. He had to get his parents to sign a waiver so he could go to Vietnam. He remembered getting off the plane in Nam and hearing this pinging noise going past his head, they were bullets and he ran for cover since he had not been issued a weapon as of yet. He explained to me what it was like the first time he saw a dead little boy laying on the ground. He started to cry on the phone and tell me how he should have been able to save all those little children over there.

We were well into our conversation when he suddenly started having flashbacks. He was instructing me to be real quiet because he could hear the enemy coming. I kept talking to him until he came back to reality. This is when I realized this war was not over for some. He was so surprised how much I cared about him and didn't think anyone did anymore. About a month later he called and told me he had just killed his dog and was going to kill himself also and he couldn't talk very long on the phone because it was long distance and he couldn't afford it. I told him to hang up and I would call him back right away and he said "no you won't." But I did and again he was surprised that someone did care. We talked on the phone for about two hours until his wife came home and then I knew he was safe. He went to Vietnam as a young man with a score to even and he came back an old man with nightmares.

I don't think we have any idea what these young men saw and had to do over there for our country, for us, for freedom. People don't seem to realize how many people were affected by the Vietnam War. You would have to take all of those 58,000 plus names on the Wall and add mothers, fathers, sons, daughters, husbands, sisters, brothers, aunts, uncles, cousins, grandparents, friends, teachers and then you would have to take the 2.6 million who served over there and add all their relatives and acquaintances. I guess it is kind of like a domino effect.

I remember talking with a mother who had lost a son in Vietnam, and she also told me she had lost another son to suicide. He apparently had a very hard time dealing with his brother's death. Seems her son had left home and just dropped out of society. They contacted the Salvation Army Search Team to help locate him. But they found him a month too late. He had destroyed all of his identification before taking his life with a gun shot to the head. She only has one son left now and I pray he may be strong enough to survive all the sadness caused by this war.

The sadness, loss and pain had no age limit in this book. Another incident a husband had called me and said his wife lost her first husband in Vietnam. They had dated in high school and were married shortly after graduation. He said he didn't know if his wife could write the story, he wanted her to, but he thought it might be too painful for her. I sent her a card of encouragement, but it was for encouragement to do what was right for her. I told her if it felt right and caused no further pain she should write her story. But, if doing it made her sad, then she shouldn't. Told her I was here for her if she needed help writing the story and I certainly understood if she decided not to do it. Well, she wrote the story and when I read it I understood why it must have been so hard. She was pregnant when her first husband left for Vietnam. She had the baby three days after she buried her husband. During the time she was in the hospital several of her husband's buddies who were still in Vietnam got together and sent her a telegram and several savings bonds for her newborn. What a wonderful gift. Here these soldiers were thousands of miles from home in a war and they were thinking about some tiny little baby who was just born and would never get to know her father.

War has its boundaries, but with love, compassion and concern, there are none. Sometimes goodness can come out of sadness. I recall talking with a sister who lost her brother in Vietnam. She said her brother and his buddy in Vietnam made a pact with each other. If anything were to happen to either one of them, the surviving buddy would go and look up the other's family. He kept his promise to his buddy and when he returned from Vietnam he went to visit his buddies family and he fell in love with his sister and they were married. What a lovely ending to such a tragic beginning.

When I worked on this book my house was filled with the spirits of these young soldiers. They were the driving force behind me. It was like they were relying on me to get their stories told. I felt this to be true because after the book was printed all these spirits were gone.

The story about the identical twin hit home for me because I have identical twin nephews. Both of these twin brothers joined the marines, one got his orders to go to Vietnam so the second twin signed a waiver to allow him to go to Vietnam also. One was a grunt and the other a radio operator. One of the brothers had become ill and was hospitalized and when he gained consciousness he told the medic he knew his brother had been killed. The medic was taken off guard by his comments because that was the reason he was there, to tell him his twin brother had been killed. You have to wonder what things these twins shared together while growing up and what life will be like for the one surviving twin. It must be hard for him, knowing people look at him and also see his brother. It must be like looking in a mirror and seeing no reflection.

I also met a POW from the Vietnam War. It was a great honor for me. He had been captured along with one of our soldiers from Minnesota. The Vietcong captured them in an ambush. This Minnesota soldier became ill while in captivity and died in his arms. The Vietcong took the body and laughed as they threw it in the jungle. It shows the Vietcong had no respect or feelings for our soldiers, dead or alive. The POW and this soldier's family were finally united thirty some years later.

While talking with another father who had lost his son in Vietnam, I told him how our family was told my brother's body was not viewable. He said he had been told the same thing but was not going to bury his son without knowing for sure it was him in that coffin. He talked about the two guards who had traveled with his son's coffin, how one said "no please don't open it" and began to cry. The father told him if it was too upsetting for him he could step out of the room, which he did. The father continued to tell me how he opened the coffin and his son was in a bag, he made a slit in it to see his son's face and was him. It didn't look like him, but it was him. He told me he wished he had not done it because he would rather have remembered him as he last saw him when he was alive. I told him it was kind of hard for me to understand since there was little closure and seeing is knowing for sure he is gone.

We only had a colored portrait on top of my brother's coffin and there wasn't much closure in it for me. I was only eighteen years old but I remember telling my family if I could just see my brother's hands, I would know it was him. I could never forget those gentle hands. But no one opened the coffin and we laid him to rest.

I had no favorite stories in the book because they were all my favorites. You couldn't connect to just one story when you were connected to all of them. It still amazes me today the amount of pain that war has caused, You read the stories and they tell you how a soldier threw himself on a grenade to save his buddies or how one drew the enemy fire towards himself or how they were killed trying to save someone else's life. Unless you were there, you it would be hard even comprehend what these young men went through. One vet told me when he got to Vietnam the new guys would pass out from the heat. They would put them in cool down pool and gave them one week to acclimate to the **temperature before they** would be sent out into the fields. A couple of grunts told me about how they would run out of food and water. They would eat certain bark from trees and suck on smooth rocks from dried up water beds to fool themselves into thinking they were not thirsty. They would wear their uniforms until they were rotting off. They had no showers and sometimes couldn't even brush their teeth for months. It is hard to understand how our soldiers we sent to war were going without the basics, these men were fighting for our country, yet it was us and not them who were enjoying the life of not only luxury but also just the basics. But these sol-

diers didn't blame anyone, they said sometimes the weather was too poor to fly in supplies and if it were them, they wouldn't fly in bad weather either. They made a lot of sacrifices for us and of course the ultimate one being those who never made it back.

On one of my first initial phone calls I was talking to a wife who had lost her husband in Vietnam. You could tell the experience had been very difficult on her. She really wanted to write her story and was asking me for some kind of direction. I gave her some ideas to start with and told her when she got going on her story the rest of it would come and she would know what to write. She said she was going to ask a friend to come over and help. About two weeks later she called me back and said she was stuck, she just didn't know what to write. I started asking her things about her husband and every once in a while I would add in some conversation about my brother to keep her going. She opened up a lot and told me many things about her husband. After a forty-five minute conversation, I said "you know what you just did don't you?" She didn't understand my questions. So I told her "you just told me your whole story." She was so excited and said "you are right, you said it would just come to me." She wrote one of the most beautiful stories I have ever read. She put so much emotion and feeling into it, so much love, pain, tragedy and grief in such few words. She did a beautiful job and I was so very proud of her.

A brother told me his brother had been missing in action. Years later they finally told him they had located the remains of his body and sent them home to the family. There wasn't much there other than a jaw bone and a few other small pieces of bone. But the jawbone still contained many teeth and these teeth had many fillings. He knew this was not his brother's remains because when his brother went to Vietnam, he only had a few fillings and the remains of these teeth had more than twenty. He called his brother's dental office hoping to get his old dental records. But the dental office had just moved and had destroyed all the old records from those years. So he said there was not much he could do other than to claim those bones as his brother, but he knew they were not.

I guess the only thing worse in knowing how your brother was killed and not being able to view his body would be in not knowing what happened to him or not knowing if he was dead or alive. It must be very hard on the families of MIA/POW's how could they ever find any closure or peace.

I thought it would be great for everyone to meet the families of these fallen soldiers, but it never came together and that I regret. I guess the circumstance never allowed it to happen. During the whole time I worked on the book, I never did get to see the pictures of these soldiers that were sent with the letters until the book went to press. I had read all their stories many times over but never got to see their faces. At the end of working on this book, it was time for me to match the stories and letters with the pictures and



send them back to the families. It was truly amazing, I would pull out a picture and look at it and think "I know this person." I even went as far as to get out my school year books and look for these faces. It finally dawned on me I knew these faces through their stories. I had gotten to know them from the inside-out.

What handsome men they were and the one thing they all held in common was how very young they all looked. I might not get to heaven but I walked with a few angels while working on this book. Some of the comments the families made to me during the time I worked on the book still remain in my memory and heart today. They are as follows:

● Not a day goes by we don't think of him  
● We can only hope that our country will never make that same mistake again. ● Our lives have never been the same without him. ● He is more than just a name on the *Wall*. ● He left behind three little boys. ● We miss him so much. ● His daughter grew up knowing her father through pictures and memories. ● My Mom/Dad died of a broken heart. ● He was killed on Mother's Day. ● It was hard for me to accept the fact that he was never coming back. ● He could have gone to Canada, but thought he owed it to his country not to go. ● We found out on Easter morning. ● He would have made such a wonderful father. ● A road/park/bridge was named after him.

Many thanked me for working on this book. But it was I who was thankful. Thankful they confided in me and trusted in me to get these soldiers stories out. I felt honored. The greatest thing they did for me though was to give me back the memory of my brother Tim and for this I will be forever grateful.

September 20, 1998

Dear Tim,

*Well, today you would have been 53 years old, so much time has past since your death, I hope I don't forget what your face looks like or your smile. I went and bought flowers for your Mom like I do every year on your birthday, just wanted to try and make that day a little easier for her, It must be so very hard to bury one of your children; it is not suppose to be that way you know. Last year when I went to the floral shop to order her flowers it was really hard on me. I came out of there crying and thinking how I should be buying you a birthday present and not flowers to ease Mom's pain of missing you. This year I felt stronger when I went to order them, this year there were no tears at that time. Last year on your birthday my eight-year-old grandson came over to my house and saw that I had been crying. He said "grandma, why are you so sad?" I told him today Tim would have been 52 years old. He looked at me and said "grandma, he is 52 years old today!" With a statement, he at least made me smile once that day. I guess when I miss you as much as I do; your birthday will always be hard on me. It makes me start to think of all the good times we have missed out on together. All the family celebrations you missed and how I never got to grow old with you and watch our kids and grandkids grow up. I know you would have liked my grandson, he is a lot like you, he is sensitive and compassionate and I hope he never loses those qualities. That way I can always see a little of you in him. On days like this it reminds me of the last time I saw you, I never thought for one moment that you were not coming back home again. I remember I did not hug you goodbye or tell you how much I loved you. I will always regret that, no amount of words will ever make that go away. Guess at that age you think life is going to go on forever. Now, after so many years all I have left of you is a few pictures and a few memories and I pray to God those memories won't fade, as I grow older. I still don't let on to the family just how much I do miss you. I cry like this only when I am alone, no sense in causing them any further pain than they have already had to bear. I wish I could see you just one more time, to touch your face and give you a hug and tell you how much I love you. I will always miss you big brother. Love Your Little Sister , Ruth*

I remember reading his letters for the first time in 27 years. I was glad to be alone at the time because I cried almost uncontrollably. I was really feeling his loss. All those buried emotions were now beginning to surface. It was so painful. I was mad, angry, hurt, sad, depressed, any thing opposite of happy I was feeling. Later I realized this was the beginning of my grieving as an adult. I found those letters in a small box that contained my brother's belongings. I recall putting this box together many years ago when we helped my mom move out of her house. There hadn't been time during the move to look closely at all the contents of the box. All I really knew was they belonged to Tim.

I searched through the box looking for items of Tim's that would help me understand and make me feel closer to him. The first thing I pulled out was his wallet still containing his social security card and driver's license which bore his signature. Knowing how meticulous he was about his writing, how every letter had to be perfectly formed, I could visualize him signing them. Thinking about his writing soon brought me to remember what his bedroom was like at home. Unlike his three sister's bedrooms, where

you had to tie a rope around you waist and then tie it to the door knob so you could find you way back out through the mess, Tim made his bed every morning, nothing was ever lying around on his floor and his dresser drawers were all neatly in order. He made his sisters look really bad. In his closet all his shirts were hanging on one end of the closet while his pants hung on the opposite. His shoes were perfectly lined up in a row on the closet floor. He never had a hair out of place and took great care in his appearance. He used to get up for school before any of the rest of us, he told my mother if he didn't get in the bathroom before his three sisters he would be late for school. Tim had a great sense of humor and showed it often. I don't ever remember him being angry, it was a side of him I never saw.

The box also contained his shaver and two smoking pipes and a small tobacco pouch with his tobacco still in it. I suppose he always thought he would have time to finish it. I know some of the items in there were sent back from Vietnam but there were other items in there Tim must have saved from high school. There was his high school letter he earned playing hockey. After school a bunch of guys used to get together and go to the outside hockey rink and get a game going. One year during one of these hockey games my brother was playing on a team opposite of the one my boyfriend was on. The next day at school I was very surprised to see my boyfriend walk down the hall towards me with his arm in a sling. I asked him what happened. He told me Tim had checked him against the rink wall when they were playing hockey and he broke his collar bone. I didn't know if I should laugh or cry. This was my very first boyfriend and I was wondering if it was an accident or a warning. I was Tim's little sister and he always kind of kept an eye on me. This could have been a strong suggestion to my boyfriend to treat me with kindness.

In this box was also a little trophy he and his girlfriend had got at the prom, this was the girlfriend he was going to marry when he got back from Vietnam. I remember that prom year because not only did Tim go but also my sister and I. We have some old 8MM movies of us all dressed up for prom, what an expensive event that must have been for my Mom and Dad. We all had to have new clothes and shoes and wanted to look our best. My brother had worked all day washing, waxing and cleaning my Dad's car to take to the prom. It looked newer then the day my Dad bought it. That was a good time in my life, I wish I could go back just for that one day.

There was also a Bible and some small religious posters in there, he must have bought them just before he left for Vietnam. I am not sure if Tim became closer to God when he went to war or if he was just more open about it. Doesn't really matter, you could tell he had faith. There was a letter in the box I had written to him when he was over in Vietnam. Funny he choose to save that letter, I read through it and couldn't see anything special I had written. Tim wrote home asking if we could send him some food. He

said he was hungry and losing weight fast. When he left for Vietnam he was over six feet tall and weighed 154 pounds. He had broad shoulders and narrow hips, there was no room for losing weight. I sent him a shoe box full of goodies, I bought him some slim jims, kool-aid because he said the water tasted so terrible over there, car magazine and anything else I could cram into that little box. He was killed before he received the package. It came back tattered and smashed and undeliverable, it looked like it had been through war, guess that is because it had been. We remembered my Grandma had told us she had baked Tim some of his favorite cookies and sent them to him. So we quickly called the post office in the little town she lived in and told them the circumstances and when her box came back undeliverable if they could just throw it away. Guess maybe we wanted her to believe he got her cookies.

Yep, I always thought my big brother Tim was pretty cool. This incident happened when he was in tenth grade and I was in sixth grade. Tim had wrote a letter to our Grandma and put the letter on the kitchen table to be mailed. I saw the letter and he addressed the envelope to Grandma, her street address and her home town, state and zip code. I thought that was pretty cool, instead of putting her name on the envelope he just wrote Grandma instead. A few weeks later I was writing to our Grandma and remembered how he had addressed the envelope to her. I wanted to do the same thing. So I got my envelope and wrote Grandma, her home town, state and zip code. But I neglected to put in her street address on the envelope. The funny part of it is my Grandma did receive that letter, obviously the post office must have recognized the town from which it came from and knew my Grandma had relatives living there. All the adults laughed and thought it was remarkable my grandma got the letter. I didn't think it was that funny, after all I was just trying to be like my big brother.

In this box I also came across his certificates for his Bronze Star and Purple Heart, my emotion now changed to anger. I had this silly vision of our government calling up some print shop and nonchalantly putting in an order for 100,000 Purple Heart certificates. The shop runs them through the press at about 100 per minute and with a little overtime involved they have the job done in one day. They then shipped them out to some governmental personnel building where they are received and distributed out to a clerical group who are probably paid minimum wages and one by one they would type in all the names of those killed in Vietnam. These certificates then are to be given to the families. We receive them and feel very honored and spend about \$150 to have it framed to hang on our walls. When you think about it, it is kind of ironic that we would pay so much money to have a certificate framed that probably cost our government \$5 to produce and that included their shipping and handling costs. Not a single name typed on those certificates meant anything to anybody other than those who knew them.

By now I was drained, too many emotions and too much sorrow and pain. That is what I called my first ride on my emotional roller coaster. My curiosity got the best of me though and the next evening I found myself continuing to go through the rest of his box. Reading his letters he wrote home was the hardest of all. He talked about God and mentioned the good Lord many times. I sometimes get angry at God when I read those letters, I saw how much faith Tim had in God and where it got him. I know all those sayings and have heard them dozens of times: God doesn't start war, man does; sometimes God takes them early in life to save them from a painful future; God needs all ages in heaven, blah, blah, blah. Still makes me angry and I tell Him. Maybe I am just not far enough along in my healing process to understand. All my life I tried to do what was right, give more than I take, thank Him everyday for even the smallest of things and never bother Him about trivial things.

I remember at work one day a co-worker came up to me and out of the blue she asked me if I prayed. I was taken back that someone who knew so little about me would ask such a personal question. I told her yes I did pray. She said good and asked if I would pray her house would sell. She lived in a house worth over a quarter of a million dollars and wanted to sell it so she could buy a house on the lake. I remember thinking there is world hunger, war, homeless people, disease, death and dying and she was asking me to pray for her house to be sold. I always thought if I didn't bother God for the trivial things He would listen more carefully to me when I really needed Him. I read Tim's letters and cried and got angry at God and then a day or two later I felt guilty. I wondered if I would get angry at God every time I read those letters. He probably knows the answer to that question, I am sure He knows me better than I do.

I took a lot of those things in that little box and made a scrap book. It wasn't that big of a scrap book, since he died when he was just 22 years of age. There was a little clipping of his hair from when he was a baby. The hospital bill when he was born for \$91.40. A letter Tim wrote when he was a little boy to his grandpa and lots of newspaper clippings telling of his death. His death was pretty big news back then because he was one of the first boys killed in Vietnam from northern Minnesota where we lived.

I sometimes think my mom must have known or felt something the rest of us didn't. When Tim was home on leave before going to Vietnam, my mom insisted he have his picture taken professionally in his Army dress uniform. None of us kids liked having our pictures taken, but I think he did it for my mom. When I was in eighth grade, us five kids decided we would have a professional picture taken of all five of us kids and give it to our parents for their anniversary present. We were very secretive and planned it carefully, all of us kids would have to leave the house at approximately the same time but with five different really good excuses so our parents would not suspect anything. My oldest sister who graduated from

high school and was living in the Twin Cities was to be our driver. Each one of us kids told my mom a different excuse to get out of the house and then we walked to the different corners of the block and my sister drove around the block and picked us up. Now, keep in mind this was the days before polyester. My mom had to iron and starch all of my brother's white shirts, it was a very time consuming job for her. Tim had been to a school dance the night before and had worn one of his white shirts. He always wanted to look his best. Well, Saturday morning he came out of his bedroom with another clean, starched, white shirt on. Poor Tim, my mom flipped her lid and went into this routine about how long it took her to press just one white shirt and how he just wore one last night and now he was wearing another one this morning.

We left the house and my sister drove around the block and picked us up and we were secretly off to get our picture taken. Neither Tim or my younger brother owned a suit jacket, so they borrowed the ones at the photographers. The jackets were too big for the boys so the photographer took some wooden clip clothespins and pulled the back of the jackets tighter and clipped those pins on in the back of the jacket where they would not be seen, yet the jacket would fit better. From the front view it looked like a perfect fit. About a month later we gave the picture all wrapped up to my mom. When she opened it she began to cry, she really loved it. And then she remembered the day she yelled at Tim for wearing two white shirts two days in a row. She felt kind of bad about it but all of us five kids just laughed, even Tim. It is funny the things you can remember that happened so many years ago. My family doesn't talk about Tim or Vietnam very much. I think in the beginning when we lost Tim we wanted to talk about it, but Vietnam was such a controversy at the time we felt we had to remain silent.

## If you want to know the cost of freedom - touch a name on the Wall!!

I can still remember how painful Vietnam was for me. Although I never talked about it, I am sure it must have been obvious. I would never watch anything about the war on television, watching war movies in my house was forbidden. Wouldn't even watch MASH, too much of a reminder of what war was all about. Guess I would rather live with the unknown than the known. Kind of like what you didn't know couldn't touch you. Even my daughter at a very young age knew not to talk about war to me. Once she started telling me about his really great movie she watched and as she was relaying it to me would remember there were things about war involved in the movie and would just end the conversation with "you probably wouldn't like it."

For years after my brother was killed I remember every night on the news they would show footage of

Vietnam war and you would always hear the sound of those helicopters as they reported our death tolls for the day. I hated the sound of any helicopter for many years after, the sound always brought me back to Vietnam and all the pain and suffering it caused.

The Vietnam War ended and our soldiers started to come home. No ticker tape parades for them, it was like the government slipped them in the back door to the states. Made them feel like they should be ashamed of what they did. Only 25% of our soldiers in Vietnam were drafted. The rest went willingly to fight for our country and our freedom. When told "ask what you can do for your country" they did and they did their best. They gave a year of their young lives and fought to survive and when they returned home, we turned our backs on them. I hope America will always feel the shame of what they did to our young boys in Vietnam.

Many years later, Vietnam monuments were being built to show gratitude to our young soldiers of the Vietnam War. It started out quiet and subtle. First it was just a bridge, road, park, or maybe a VFW post named after the town's local boy who was killed in Vietnam. It then began to grow to state and then national monuments. I remember the first time I was to see my brother's name etched in granite on one of those memorials. It was the Minnesota Vietnam Memorial. Etched at the top of this wall was "We Were Young, We Have Died, Remember Us." One thousand one hundred and twenty names etched in granite who gave up *all their tomorrows for our todays*.

So many who gave up all the dreams, who never came home to marry the girl they left behind and never knowing would what it would have been like to be a daddy. No one to carry on their image, their personalities or their names. I can't imagine what it would be like to die at the age of nineteen, hardly time to have formed your own opinion on anything. Our family received a letter from the committee responsible for getting the Minnesota Vietnam Memorial built, they invited us to the dedication. My family wanted to know if I would be attending but I told them no, it would be too painful for me. I was surprised my daughter, mother and sister went to the services. I knew seeing his name on that wall would make me realize just how much I have missed him.

The next Vietnam memorial was built in Duluth. This memorial was for the boys of northern Minnesota who were killed in Vietnam. It sounded like it would be a great memorial and since we originally came from northern Minnesota, my family was again invited to the dedication. This time I decided I would go, I was tired of not paying honor to my brother just because it was so painful for me. I wanted others to know how proud I was of him, I wanted to be able to be his voice. My mother, two sisters and my little grandson and I were all going to attend. We got to the dedication and after only twenty minutes into the ceremony I

had to leave. Tears were already beginning to fall and one thing about me, I don't like people to see me cry. I worked too many years at holding those tears back and I was determined not to let them show now. So using the excuse my grandson getting too restless, I took his tiny little hand and walked away and again no one knew my real reason for leaving. My grandson and I went down by the lake and played a game of tossing stones in the water and I knew once again I was safe, safe from having to face my pain over the loss of my brother. My grandson is much older now but he still remembers the fun we had that weekend. I remember also but not in the same way, it had been another attempt at me trying to be brave.

Okay, now we have two memorials built with Tim's name on it and so far I had not been able to touch his name on either one. By the time I was to make my third attempt at visiting yet another memorial with Tim's name on it, I had already finished working on the book. I heard the moving wall was going to be in a town about two hours drive from where I lived and at the last minute I decided I wanted to go. I asked my sister if she would go with me. On the way there we ran into a road detour and we headed the wrong direction on it and had to turn around and back track. Next we ran into a terrible rainstorm. It was coming down so hard most cars had to pull over to the side of the road because of lack of visibility. Finally we reached the little town where the moving wall was going to be displayed. To my amazement, as we pulled into town, the rain had completely stopped and the sun was now shining very brightly and it felt warm on my face.

As we approached the wall, there was a welcome tent you went through. They showed a short video, had literature and someone to help you to locate a name on the wall. We grabbed a piece of paper and pencil to get a rubbing of my brother's name off the wall. As we walked over to the panel which listed Tim's name, we saw three other people standing in front of that particular panel. We didn't think anything of it because on the moving walls the names are in very small print, they could have been looking at any one of a number of names on that panel. All of us were just kind of standing there in silence. My sister then asked me "should I see if I can get a rubbing of his name?" Although I was lost in my own thoughts about Tim I managed to say yes. As she gently covered his name with the piece of paper, the gentleman who had been standing there suddenly said, "did you know Timothy Robinson?" I was startled by his comment and for the first time looked to see who was really standing there. I told him Tim was our brother. He proceeded to tell us how him and Tim were best friends up till the eighth grade when Tim moved away. He told us stories of the things they use to do as kids. This gentleman had also traveled two hours to come to the moving wall just to see Tim's name. I remember thinking what were the chances we would both be at the moving wall at the same time to see the same name. Had it not been for the detour and the rainstorm we would never have met. I wondered if there was a power above who had brought us together, someone



who knew part of our healing would begin with this encounter. It felt good to know besides Tim's immediate family, someone else did care and remember Tim.

As the score stands now, out of three memorials having Tim's name, I was finally able to walk up to one of them and touch his name. Probably doesn't sound much of an accomplishment to an outsider but to me it was a very big step and one that was going forward. I felt like I had a new found braveness and something stirred in me saying I now wanted to go to *The Wall* in Washington DC, I had thought of *The Wall* many times over the years. So many who had been there had described their experiences to me. They all talked about how you could see your reflection in the Wall no matter the time of day or night or the conditions of the weather.

I feared going to the Wall, thinking maybe I would not be able to see my own reflection in it. And would seeing Tim's name on that national monument with 58,000 other names make my loss too real and so final? The more I feared going to *TheWall* the more I fought for the courage to do it. I had a lot of good excuses as to why I couldn't visit the Wall. No money, no vacation time, hadn't found the right person to make the special trip with, and wasn't ready. Seems like I was doing or saying whatever I could to keep me from going. But working on the book made me realize the timing would never be just right and I was making excuses not to face my fears. I was now ready to make the trip.

It was almost like a challenge to me now to see if I could save the money. I even set a goal date as to when I wanted to be there. I was never so ready in my life to make the trip I had dreaded for so many years. Then I was told the book was running into financial difficulties in getting published. So I took all the money I had saved and donated it towards the book. The Wall wasn't going any where and I made a promise to myself someday soon I would gently touch Tim's name engraved in the black granite on panel 51 east, first row.

Months later after the book had been published, I kept my promise to myself. I bought tickets for Washington DC and for once in my life I was going to face the pain of losing my big brother. My niece told me she would go with me and I was delighted, for I could not have picked a better person to make that journey with me. She was a special person to me and knew me well, but that didn't stop her from liking me. My younger brother drove us to the airport. They knew I was not fond of flying so they were talking about how more people died on the roads each year than in plane crashes. I told them, fine, just so I don't hear the flight attendant making an announcement asking if anyone knew how to fly a jet. When my brother dropped us off at the airport, I made sure I gave him a hug and told him I loved him. You see, when my brother Tim left for Vietnam, I forgot to hug him and tell him how much I loved him, something I have regretted for the last thirty years of my life. I thought he was coming back and I assumed he did also.

We boarded the plane and take off was normal. Once we were in the air I looked out my window. The clouds below us looked like a Minnesota lake in the winter, frozen over with about a foot of drifted snow blowing over the top of it, it was pretty. They were now serving breakfast. You had your choice of a bagel, cold cereal or yogurt. I was hoping for something a little more homemade like my mom's pancakes. My brother Tim was a very clever person because he was the first to get up before his sisters to be able to get into the bathroom. That meant he had more time before we had to catch the school bus. So my mom always made him a hot breakfast and he still would beat his sister to the bus stop.

We landed safely in DC and found our way to our hotel. We picked up our room key at the front desk and headed to our room. When I opened the door there was a dozen long stem roses waiting there and the card had my name on it. They were the most beautiful roses I had ever seen in my life. They reminded me of the saying "God has given us memories so we may have roses in December." The roses were from a friend who I had never met. He had posted a message on a Vietnam home page saying he was going to *The Wall* for the first time and was going to give thanks to all those names on *The Wall*.

After reading the message he had posted, I responded back. I told him I had never been to the Wall but my brother's name was on there and would he please tell him hi for me. We began to communicate back and forth. He told me he would take some pictures of The Wall for me and get a rubbing of Tim's name. He mentioned he had a high school friend whose name was on *The Wall* but other than that he knew no one else on there. But through our communicating he said he felt like he had begun to know who my brother was and going to *The Wall* would now have even more meaning. He took his cell phone to DC with him and as he was approaching *The Wall* for the first time he surprised me by calling me. He described *The Wall* in detail for me and counted the panels to me until he reached the one with my brother's name. It brought tears to my eyes, this was the closest I had been to the Wall.

It was an emotional experience for both of us and I will never forget that phone call. Months later I told him I was going to the Wall, he gave me words of encouragement and told me I would do okay. Once when I was talking to him about how I felt over the loss of my brother, he said to me what so many others have said to me also over the years, "I know how you must feel." But then he quickly corrected himself and said, "no I don't, I have no idea what it must feel like." Finally someone understood that they really don't understand at all. When my brother was killed, adults would come up to me and make comments like "maybe it is better this way, he could have come home with missing legs or an arm." I wondered who they were to pick the quality of life my brother would have been happy with after coming back from Vietnam, seems like not coming back gave him no alternative. Sometimes during the loss of a loved one you

could say more to those grieving a loss by keeping silent and just giving a hug. Now that I have chosen to deal with the unfinished loss of my brother, people don't understand. They tell me it has been thirty years since his death and I need to get over it. They don't seem to understand for 30 years I avoided my loss to be able to survive. If anyone was to mention to me something about the loss of their mother, father, grandmother, grandfather or anyone who was close to them, I would never tell them they need to get over it and I wish I could have the same respect in return. But because my brother was killed in Vietnam and not a drunk driver or disease, I am suppose to forget my loss. Just because so many people want us to forget Vietnam ever happened does not mean we can also forget those who died over there. The loss of my brother will always be a part of my life as he was, I don't live my life through his death but do remember him daily to keep him close in my heart.

We signed up for the Washington DC after dark bus tour. The tour took you through DC and stopped at several of the monuments. One of those stops being *The Vietnam Memorial Wall*. It was dark and raining and we had forgot our umbrellas, but we each had remembered to take one of those beautiful long stem roses to leave at the Wall. We arrived at the park and the first monument I saw was the *Korean War Veterans Memorial*. Since my brother was a grunt in the fields, I felt this powerful bonding to this monument. The monument consists of nineteen soldiers depicting a squad on patrol. They were wearing ponchos which seemed to fit in so well with the rain that was falling on us that evening. On a granite wall bears the message "Freedom Is Not Free." Those words laid heavily in my heart as I knew what it had cost me.

We were now approaching the *Vietnam Memorial Wall* and I was beginning to feel a little apprehensive about it. I could feel my fears beginning to mount inside. What was it going to look like, how was I going to feel and was I going to totally fall apart? It was so dark and rainy as we entered the west end of the Wall. My brother's name was located on the east side. You could read the names on the west side very clearly but as you got to the apex of the Wall and started up the east side, all the panels appeared blank. None of the names were visible because of the direction of the rain hitting the Wall.

It took some time to locate panel 51 east, we had to keep rubbing the panel numbers until we got to our location. When we finally reached my brother's panel, I knew exactly where his name was located and when I wiped the rain from it his name seem to appear like magic, "Timothy George Robinson." As I touched it and read his name I felt an overwhelming sadness come over me. It was easy to hide my tears in the rain that night because the tears and rain drops mingled as one and no one even knew I was crying. As I stood there touching his name, the tears just kept falling and I felt they would never end. I felt some of

thirty years of feeling my loss was really true, after all it was sketched in granite right before my eyes. That *Wall* represented everything I had been avoiding for thirty years, no wonder it was hard for me to go there. We each laid a red rose in front of his panel and we each got very silent for a moment with our own private thoughts running through our minds. As I started to walk away from his panel and continue down the walk way, I found my emotions beginning to change. I was faced with the enormity of what this war cost us. Thousands and thousands of names, one after another. The price we paid for peace. I felt sadness again when I wondered how many of these names on *The Wall* had never been touched by a loved one.

As I stood in front of these huge panels and read name after name I felt many angels flying close to the ground. We came back a few days later to *The Wall* on Veteran's Day. I placed some flowers in front of some other names on the Wall and then headed down again to my brother's panel. I gently placed more roses, the book "Faces Behind The Names" (Tim's picture was on the front and back of the cover) and left a teddy bear with a letter I had written to Tim attached. While I was standing there deep in my thoughts a young man about twenty years of age came along and knelt down to read my letter to Tim. As he was reading it, he was wiping the tears from his eyes. It felt odd to see a complete stranger so affected by my loss. He got up and let out a big sigh and disappeared into the crowd. A few minutes later a Vietnam vet came along and he too knelt down to read the letter. He also cried and when he finished the letter he took several close up pictures of it. Watching others feel the sadness I had over the loss of my brother was a new experience for me. But I was glad to see they too could feel the loss this war had cost so many of us.

The Wall never felt underground to me, nor did it feel cold, black and naked. I felt more like it protected me from the elements of the weather and stretched out like two big arms to protect all those who came to visit those names. I could see this was a place to honor the dead and to help the living heal. I touched *The Wall* and felt its warmth and the warmth seemed to be coming from the other side of it, as if all their smiles, hopes and dreams were radiating through.

Everyone has their own personal reaction to the Wall. I have seen those who are still very angry inside and don't want anything to do with the Wall and the Wall can do nothing for them until they can dissolve their anger and seek inner peace. I have my times of anger also. It would be so easy to let anger consume my life. Living in the promise land got my brother 22 years of life and a death so quick and violent he didn't even have a chance to whisper a dying word.

I must also remind myself God did not start war, man did. I know I can't change the past and I want to

enjoy my todays in happiness and my brother would have wanted the same for me. I suppose how one reacts to the Wall would depend on the relationship they have to the name on it and maybe where they are in their healing process. Everyone who goes to the Wall feels something different and each walks away with something different.

That week at the Veteran's Day services a Vietnam vet rode his horse down the pathway to the apex of the Wall. While in Vietnam he and his buddies made a pact that when they got back to the states they would all get together and drive across the country with each other. Except his buddies never made it home. So this vet mounted his horse and carrying the United States flag, rode across the country to The Wall. As he reached the apex of The Wall, he dismounted his horse, stood in front of his buddies names and said good-bye and hello to them. He had kept his promise to his buddies. I know he felt in a way I could not feel but could relate. We both had lost someone very close to us, yet our losses came from two different worlds. They knew them in a foreign land of war, death and violence. They saw him get his first rifle and go off into his first battle. The families on the other hand knew him in our home land of peace, happiness and love. We saw him get his first car and go out on this first date. So although we suffer from the same loss, our losses are much different.

I know I will go back to The Wall again someday, I still have some unfinished business there. Everyone should go there if not to seek peace then to make sure that every name on the Wall is touched by a human hand and see the enormous price we pay for freedom. Everybody wants to feel the freedom but no one wants to look at what it costs us.

After visiting the Wall we walked over to the Vietnam Veterans Statue. This is a statue of three servicemen that not only represent the racial make up of our soldiers in Vietnam, but their uniforms also show the different branches of the service. There was such a controversy over the design of *The Wall* this statue was built two years later as a compromise. The three soldiers appear to be looking at the Wall as if protecting all the names on there. I noticed no matter which direction I stood from these three soldiers, their eyes always seemed to be following me. The longer you looked at this stature the more feeling you get from it. To me it emitted youth, strength, determination, confusion, sorrow and pain. I guess that would be the elements of war.

We then walked over to the Veterans Women's Memorial. On the Wall are eight names of military women who died in Vietnam. This statue was built to honor all the women who served in Vietnam. It is very painful to look at this statue. There are three women, one is holding and attending to a wounded soldier while yet another looks skyward, I imagine looking for a helicopter to do a medivac to bring this soldier to a hospital I am sure these women saw their fare share of death and dying over there.

You could see that from the looks on their faces. Although they were not in combat themselves, they surely did see the after affects and tolls it took. How they were able to day after day see the results of what that war was costing us is beyond me. I looked at this statue and thought to myself at least with my brother's death where there were no remains, it was one less face of death they would have to face. Even though there were five of us kids in the family, it has never seemed like a family again after my brother was killed. He left a huge void in our lives and his empty chair is noticed everyday. How different life would have been had he come home. Nothing or no one can ever take the place of a human soul.

One week-end my mom and sister, niece and I went camping. That evening after dark we were all sitting around the campfire. Between the comfortableness of it being dark and the mesmerizing affect of the campfire, I was able to get the nerve to ask my mom and sister if I could ask them some questions about Tim and Vietnam. I never drink alcohol, but thought maybe a wine cooler would give me the courage I needed to talk to my family about an issue that seemed to have become so taboo in our family for so many years. I was nervous and struggling with the wine cooler bottle. My niece took the bottle and opened it for me and told me "the trick Auntie is you have to be smarter then the bottle." Ah, youth, where do they get their sense of humor.

As I got out my pen and paper, I remembered thinking I was feeling pretty strong emotionally about being able to ask them questions and was hoping they were feeling the same way. As I asked my first question and started listening to their answers I was surprised at how my silent tears began to fall. It was not them who was crying, but rather me. I thought I was going to be the strong one here, after all, it was me who first started talking about Tim and Vietnam.

Maybe all I really did was open up the wound of the pain. But as usual I was able to gain my composure, guess that is what us survivors do the best. Damn, how I hate that war, it's ugly grip just can't seem to let go. I asked my sister Peg where she was when she found out Tim had been killed. She said she was out of town and that our oldest sister had called her on the phone and said "he's gone." When my sister said those words it felt like an icicle being pounded through my heart. How hard it must have been for one sister to tell another sister that their brother was dead. We, as siblings, suffered more pain then many will ever know. After all, they thought we were young and resilient. But inside we were really hurting, not only did we not understand, but we didn't know how to handle it either.

My sister was the one who had to go and find Tim's girlfriend and tell her of his death. My mom and dad were both home when two military men came walking up our driveway the first time to tell them Tim was missing in action. They said they knew it was not good news when they saw them getting out of the

car. My brother's best friend came over everyday during this time. Until one day we had to tell him Tim had been killed. His knees buckled and he dropped to the floor, he could not believe the sad news. My dad was the one who had to go to the small local airport to meet Tim's coffin. I'm glad I can't remember that part of it because it must have been so very painful for my dad to see that coffin supposedly containing the remains of his young son.

An honor guard had accompanied Tim's coffin, his job was to stay with the body until it reached its destination. The honor guard's name was Mike and my dad brought him back to our house. Mike turned out to be a very special person to our family and we liked him a lot. He just fit in so well with our family, I am sure if Tim would have been alive and met him, he too would have liked him. Being an honor guard must be a very difficult job not knowing what kind of emotions you would be facing from the family and friends; sadness, pain, anger, silence or all of them. My family knew Mike had nothing to do with Tim's death and he was welcomed in our house and he became a very special friend to our family. I can remember one night my sister, younger brother and Mike and I were all sitting around the kitchen table, this was a very popular spot in our family. My brother, who at the time was only sixteen, asked my mom if he could have a beer that night. My mom thought since he was home safe, what harm could it do. My brother ended up drinking about six beers and I can remember him lining up the empty beer bottles in front of him on the kitchen table. My little brother did a lot of talking that night and it was probably good for him to be able to vent. He had told me earlier that day he felt it was up to him to carry on the family name now that my older brother was gone. That must have felt like a lot of pressure for a sixteen year old kid. We were all just kids when Tim was killed.

My mom recalled my little brother just staring out the window one day looking very lost. She said he used to follow Tim around like a puppy dog. Tim called my little brother "Buzz." They used to shoot a lot of basketballs in the driveway together. In the house I could always hear the sound of their laughter coming from outside. When my mom found out about her son's death, she said she threw herself on the bed and cried. Both my Dad and my oldest sister had to be medicated during this time. The doctor told my mom it would be better if you could get through this without the medication. I suppose he was thinking you had to face your grief sooner or later, but he couldn't possibly be able to feel the enormity of the pain and grief my family was feeling. My brother Tim's best friend made the comment that my dad would never be the same after Tim's death and he wasn't. Apparently my oldest sister had to make most of the funeral arrangements, quite a responsibility for someone who was only twenty four years old. The news of my brother's death hit many newspapers around the state. We received hundreds of cards and letters in the

mail, many from people we never knew but wanted to help lessen our sorrow. My mom answered every card and also started sending her own cards to any family she heard about who also lost someone in Vietnam. She said it was her only way of keeping her sanity.

How hard it must be to bury one of your own children, that is not the way life is suppose to be. Just before the start of Tim's wake, we found my brother's girlfriend sitting all alone in front of Tim's coffin. When she signed the funeral guest book she wrote "Save room in heaven for me." She was very special to Tim and I am sure he has a spot saved for her. My mom told me during this time she hated waking up every morning feeling the way she did and she wondered if she could make it through another day. My sister said she felt like everything was moving in slow motion without anyone saying a word. Because my brother's casket was a closed coffin and someone at the funeral asked my mom how she knew there weren't just rocks in there. I think if someone else has thoughts like these they are best kept to themselves.

At the funeral my sister was worried about my younger brother, she had to take his hand and lead him out of the church, he was almost robotic. My mom remembered the town's men's choir singing at Tim's funeral and how beautiful they sounded. At Tim's first funeral I remember the pallbearers were friends of Tim, my sister's and mine. To those young men carrying Tim's coffin it must have been a slap of reality that life has no guarantees.

At Tim's second funeral, after we left the church to go to the cemetery, the funeral procession of cars was so long you could not see the end. They did a gun salute at Tim's graveside. My mom couldn't stand the sound of guns, said they sounded too loud and violent. I watched as the soldiers carefully lifted the flag from my brother's coffin and folded it oh so carefully. Then they turned around and gently laid it in my mom's lap, I could see she was startled by this, she had assumed the flag would go to my dad. I have that flag in my home now in a case, folded the exact same way it had been thirty years ago.

The odd thing is that two of my brother's friends he hung around with before his teen years were both killed before they were twenty five years of age. And during his late teen years the group of boys he hung around with, three of them were all killed before the age of twenty five. So much tragedy and so much youth gone forever. My mom hates the sound of the word "Vietnam" even today, she says it sounds so depressing. There was still a lot of military paper work that had to be done after Tim's funeral. My mom had to do it all alone because my dad couldn't or wouldn't do it. My brother had taken out a \$10,000 life insurance policy through the Army and it was made out to my dad. My dad ended up having to pay income tax on the money he got from Tim's policy. My dad was very, very angry about that. He talked about



it for many years and sometimes through a drunken stupor the rage of it all would surface and it would scare me to see how enraged he could become. My dad became a very bitter person after his son was killed. I think he spent a lot of time thinking about all the things he didn't do with Tim rather in the things he did do with him. My dad died a long time before his death, he just kind of lost the will to live. My sister told me the week-end we were camping that while I was working on the book "Faces Behind The Names", that she thought I was very brave to go back to such a painful time in my life and put words on paper that were so close to my heart. She said it took guts and she would never have had the courage to do it herself. I asked my sister what was the one memory she has about Tim. She told me when she was very young, one of her girlfriends had a crush on Tim and gave him a present. My sister thought she liked her brother also and should give him a present too, so she did. She said Tim just kind of had this odd look on his face when she did it, but he never said a word.

My mom said my sister and I were always asking Tim if we could borrow his sweaters when we were in high school. He use to say we always left bumps in the front of his sweaters when we gave them back. I can just see him making fun with that, he had such a great sense of humor.

You know writing all about Tim and his death is so very painful. Many times I have sat down to write something and had to quit because it was too hard to see and write through my tears. It all seems so real but at the same time it feels like one big nightmare. I can remember the day I found out Tim was missing in action. I was in twelfth grade and was not in school that day because I was home sick. My bedroom was downstairs so I was away from any activities that were going on upstairs at the time. I was laying in bed under the covers when my mom walked into my bedroom and stood by my door. She said with tears in her eyes "you might as well know. Tim is missing in action" and then she was gone again. I remember thinking "that's it, that's all you are going to tell me about it?" I stayed in my room because I was to afraid to see what was happening upstairs. But all of a sudden our house felt very strange to me, like some big cloud had just drifted over it and it was never going to go away and it didn't. The next day I went to school, I had to keep myself busy and my mind off from Tim until they found him. I knew it was only going to be a matter of a few days before they told us it was all a big mistake, that Tim had been found safe. Tim hadn't been over there very long and I was sure it was just a terrible mix up.

Everyday I went to school and everyday I rushed home hoping to hear my mom and dad would tell me Tim had been found and that he was safe. I never did get to hear those words. I went to lunch with the same girlfriend everyday at school. We were standing outside the bowling alley up town when her mom pulled up in her car, got out and told me my mom had called her and asked if she would and find me and

have me call home right away. This was it, this was the moment I had been waiting for, they had found Tim and they wanted me to know about it I thought. I went to my girlfriend's house to call home. They had found my brother all right but he was dead. Still I was thinking "no, that can't be right, this kind of thing only happens to families we read about but didn't know!"

No, not my family, not my brother, I felt so numb. I remember I didn't go back to school that day. My next class after lunch would have been my English class. Somehow my English teacher found out about the news of my brother and he went to the principal's office and looked up my afternoon schedule of classes. He then proceeded to go to each one of my classes and told my teachers what had just happened and asked them to excuse me from their class and not to mark me absent. I didn't realize until many years later what a wonderful thing he had done for me, he was truly concerned about my feelings that day. The next few days seem like a total blank to me, I can hardly recall much of them. It is probably nature's way of protecting us by making us forget our deepest, darkest most painful days of our lives. If one had to carry those days along with them for the rest of their lives it would be impossible to live.

## CITATION

### *BY DIRECTION OF THE PRESIDENT*

### THE BRONZE STAR MEDAL

Corporal (then private first class) Timothy G. Robinson

**For distinguishing himself by outstanding meritorious service in connection with ground operations against a hostile force in the Republic of Vietnam during the period 6 March 1968 to 19 April 1968.**

**Through his untiring efforts and professional ability, he consistently obtained outstanding results. He was quick to grasp the implications of new problems with which he was faced as a result of the ever changing situations inherent in a counterinsurgency operation and to find ways and means to solve those problems. The energetic application of his extensive knowledge has materially contributed to the efforts of the United States mission to the Republic of Vietnam to assist that country in ridding itself of the communist threat to its freedom.**

**His initiative, zeal, sound judgment, and devotion to duty have been in the highest tradition of the United States Army and reflect great credit on him and on the military service.**