

# What is this Thanksgiving to you?

By Andrew B. Wilson

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Gary E. Quint displays a photo of his platoon's armored personnel carrier after the unit was ambushed in May 1968 by North Vietnamese troops. Soon after his return from Vietnam in 1968, Quint joined the Kirkwood police department, where he worked for 43 years as patrolman and a detective. He retired in 2011.



Army Capt. Jay Copley (right) was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross in 2011, after which Harry Wilson presented him with the flag of their unit, Charlie Company, during the 50th reunion of the Army's 1st Regiment.

Within his own band of brothers, my brother Harry is one of the best-loved people I know. There is Gary Quint, for

instance. Quint is a retired Kirkwood police officer, 71 years old. He says he wouldn't be here today — and his two grown sons would never have been born — if it weren't for my brother. Fifty years ago, Harry gave him an unexpected gift.

The way that Quint looks at it, Harry and a few others gave him his life back when he was on the verge of losing it.

Quint remembers a scene of death and destruction unlike anything he would later experience in 43 years of police work. One moment, he was standing within an inch of his commanding officer in the open area behind the turret of an armored personnel carrier; the next, the officer's head was split by a sniper's bullet. Right before he died, the officer gave his last order, which was for everyone to “leg it” — meaning to get the hell out of the vehicle and run for cover. But there was no good place to hide during a major ambush in an open rice paddy field. Lt. Harry B. Wilson — a platoon leader — and others from another company arrived in the nick of time to save Quint and 37 other soldiers from certain death.

Then there's Capt. Jay Copley, a legendary figure in the Army who is living today in Columbus, Ga., a youthful and still-feisty 86. Copley won the Distinguished Service Cross for his actions in leading that rescue mission. He also took (and somehow managed to survive) a bullet through the throat. Copley says he will remember Harry to his dying day. Having served four tours of action — two in Korea and two more in Vietnam — Copley says that Harry was “a tremendous young combat officer — one of the finest I have seen and fought with.”

Though I am his brother, I am not part of his band of brothers — having never served in the military. But listening to these other men makes me realize some of things that I have missed in my own life.

I have always liked adventure and prided myself on my willingness to take risks. But these guys — these other brothers — have had adventures and taken risks that go far beyond anything I have experienced.

I admire kindness and modesty in others and I have seen plenty of those virtues in getting to know a few of these brothers. It seems to me that they have been softened as

well as toughened through their time in the crucible of war. At a three-day reunion of Harry's battalion that I attended a few years ago, I was continually impressed by the tenderness of their concern for each other — particularly for those who had been most scarred or traumatized by their wartime experiences.

As boys, though only a year apart, Harry and I weren't best friends. The competitive fire in each of us kept that from happening. But if the chips were down in any large confrontation with other boys, we would always fight for each other.

Probably the one year in our lives when Harry and I were farthest apart — psychologically as well as physically — was 1968. When he was in Vietnam, I wasn't busy thinking about him or what he might be going through. I was finishing college at a place on the West Coast, where most people thought the war was a terrible waste and should be wound down as quickly as possible. I thought the same way.

I don't think that I wrote more than a single letter to Harry when he was over in Vietnam. I cannot remember what I

was doing on Thanksgiving Day in 1968, but I don't think that I was giving heartfelt thanks on that day for the fact that Harry would be back in the States — whole and intact — before the end of the year.

But I do give thanks for that now. And I give thanks to Quint, Copley and others in the band of brothers who have helped (I hope) to make me a better brother.

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