

Never Forgotten: In memory of a combat medic

By Staff Reports -

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Randy Smith is pictured during the Vietnam War.

By Ron Fischer

Last August, Vietnam War veterans from across the country descended on Seymour for one purpose: to honor a departed comrade.

A former infantry squad leader traveled from northern Alabama; another former infantryman came from Fallbrook, California; and three came from Missouri. A company commander and retired colonel journeyed from Santa Claus; a fellow medic veteran traveled from Pinellas Park, Florida; and two more medics came from Texas.

All told, 10 veterans of the 1st battalion, 50th Mechanized Infantry Regiment joined family and friends in celebrating and commemorating the life of Seymour's Randy Smith at his funeral. The decades had not dimmed the memory of their shared military service.

This is Randy's story.

Growing up in Seymour

Randy grew up in a Seymour household which included three younger sisters, a hard-working father (Randolph) and a mother (Ethel) dedicated to imbuing her children with religious values, regularly attending services at the Church of God at Third and Chestnut streets and making all visitors to her family's home on East 10th Street feel welcome.

Randy's lifelong friend and brother in all but name, Toby Milroy, a frequent house guest, remembers Mrs. Smith's oft-repeated entreaty to eat just one more serving before leaving the dinner table.

Randy spent much time hunting and fishing in the area's well populated fishing holes and woods. From age 12, he brought deer and much small game home to the family table where Ethel's culinary skills never disappointed. He learned from his dad and his uncles how to stalk game and so spent much time in their company.

Randy excelled with cue stick at Al's Pool Hall. He also spent much time at his dad's » Gulf station, Smitty's, located some two miles from the family home. After school, Randy would bicycle to the garage and dispense gas when not at his dad's side learning auto repair and engine overhaul.

Travelogues often note Seymour as the site of America's first train robbery; the crossroads of Indiana; and the birthplace of John Cougar Mellencamp. But it is much more.

Historically, people of Seymour have reflected a sense of community and national service. Patriotic impulse seems to come naturally to Seymour.

A solitary Civil War statue in Seymour's Shields park (named after the city's founder) for many years reminded passers-by of duty to country. During World War II, local high school students collected scrap metal to contribute to the war effort.

During the dark days of the same war, Seymour residents acknowledged a Navy pilot and fallen son who had been killed in the crash of his dive bomber. In tribute to his memory and others who had served, Seymour residents raised \$200,000 which they sent to the Douglas Aircraft Co. for the manufacture of a replacement aircraft. The P-47 Thunderbolt was appropriately christened "Spirit of Seymour".

Seymour remains the only American city to annually commemorate the end of World War II with a V-J Day parade. The city's national spirit, however, is often expressed more subtly. As was made apparent to Randy's comrades in arms, visiting military veterans feel genuinely welcome in Indiana's crossroad city.

Rather than regarding their assignments as temporary stepping stones, teachers in the local Seymour school district during the '50s and '60s more often stayed in the community for their careers. That was not an accident. Robert Bulleit, Seymour School District superintendent during the '50s and '60s, stressed the importance of community. When interviewing teacher candidates, Bulleit looked for quality teachers who would stay and become invested in the Seymour community. So recalls former teacher Bill Lasater who, together with his wife, Mary Jane, joined faculty ranks in Seymour in '65 and remain part of Seymour to this day.

Toby Milroy remembers teachers for instilling a sense of maturity in preparing their charges for life after graduation. "How will you be remembered?" and "Realize how short life is" were themes of teachers' remarks during off-subject class discussions, Milroy now recalls. Sadly, one such teacher, Mr. Hidloft, died of cancer within a year after leading such class discussions. While many high school graduates left town in pursuit of their futures, many others stayed or eventually returned out of a realization that Seymour was a home not easily replaced.

As Randy started his senior year of high school in the fall of 1964, Randy and Toby discussed entering military service following graduation. They were particularly impressed with an older acquaintance who had answered the call to colors and had returned to Seymour in Marine uniform following training.

Many young men at Seymour High School were envious of this Marine; of what he had accomplished and had become; and of the exciting future that lay before him. The Marine's leave was soon over and he eventually was deployed to Vietnam.

It was long after that Randy again saw his older friend. The friend had returned home following Vietnam and a lengthy hospital stay. He no longer appeared the invincible warrior. He had been horribly wounded and was barely recognizable. He had been lucky to survive. Randy's impression of war as a glorious proving ground changed. Randy would serve his nation in far off Vietnam if called, but he would do so out of a sense of duty and with no illusions.

Following high school graduation in the spring of 1965, Randy applied for work at Cummins Engine Co.'s nearby Columbus facility. Jobs at Cummins were coveted and difficult to score, especially for someone who didn't have any inside connection.

Randy submitted his job application to the Cummins' personnel office and then waited for a reply ... literally, on the steps leading to the company's offices. Sometime after, a Cummins manager asked Randy why he had chosen the company's steps as a perch. Randy explained his background in mechanics and his interest in working for Cummins. Soon thereafter he was hired, and he began an association with Cummins which was to last some 42 years, interrupted only by his military service.

Military service

In the summer of 1966, Randy was drafted into the U.S. Army, coincidentally at the same time as Milroy.

He and Milroy were formally inducted on Aug. 1, 1966. and both reported to Fort Knox, Kentucky, for basic training. Boot camp was arduous, but Randy was physically fit and prepared. He survived the drill sergeants' hectoring, the long hours of physical training and the forced lack of sleep. His experience with hunting weapons transitioned into his achieving an expert marksman rating. He was easygoing but direct with his fellow trainees and was designated a squad leader.

At the conclusion of eight weeks of basic training, all within his company had been assigned to their advance individual training except Randy and Toby. They were summoned to the company first sergeant's office for their individual job training assignments. They would now learn how they would spend the next two years of their lives. Infantry and related training would probably mean deployment to Vietnam.

As Randy described the event during a visit to Fort Sam Houston in September 2016, he and Toby stood in front of the first sergeant's desk as Randy recited his experience as a mechanic, both in working in his dad's Gulf station and at Cummins. He also vouched for Toby's aptitude as a mechanic.

In Randy's opinion, the Army would be best served if he and Toby worked as mechanics.

The first sergeant appeared persuaded, "We could use you guys in our motor pool right here at Knox."

Randy began thinking of weekend passes home for fishing and hunting. The sergeant began to write what appeared to be assignment orders ... until Toby spoke up and asked the sergeant what other options they had.

The sergeant paused, looked up from his desk and replied they might serve as medics, since "They're always looking for medics", in which event, he explained, Randy and Toby would be sent to Fort Sam Houston outside San Antonio, Texas, for training. Undeterred by Randy's dumbfounded stare, Toby forged ahead, "Hey, Randy, we've never been to Texas. Wouldn't it be neat to go there?"

The sergeant had heard enough. He proceeded to fill out another piece of paper pulled from a different part of his desk, "Gentlemen, I wish you luck at Fort Sam Houston."

Randy and Toby would serve their country as combat medics.

Fort Sam Houston

Since the end of World War II, Fort Sam Houston has served as the principal training facility for combat medics for all U.S. military branches.

When Randy and Toby reported for the start of nine weeks of medic training in the fall of 1966, the faculty at Fort Sam Houston faced a formidable challenge: How to quickly prepare these young trainees to treat critically injured soldiers in the midst of combat.

Randy had received basic training which would serve him well when he was deployed to Vietnam since he would be both infantryman and medic, but he had no background in medicine. Somehow, Randy and his fellow trainees needed to learn to cope with combat casualties affected by all forms of weaponry and be alert to illnesses endemic in a tropical country where the indigenous population was mostly unaware of basic hygiene.

Under watchful eyes, Randy learned diverse skills such as how to take blood pressure, apply intravenous fluids, stem hemorrhaging with use of local pressure, compacts and tourniquets, intravenously feed blood plasma and whole blood and other tasks calculated to stabilize a casualty's condition until he could be medivacked. The medic trainees learned the mantra which would guide them — "Stabilize and evacuate."

As best as could be accomplished through exposure to actual combat video, the training faculty also attempted to introduce the future medics to the gore of combat. Mostly, these medics would not be afforded the luxury of treating the wounded in a safe, hospital setting but instead in the din and panic of firefights and battle. As may be guessed, much of their training would only be accomplished "on the job" in Vietnam.

"We're combat medics!"

Following their medic training, Randy and Toby were assigned to the 1st Battalion, 50th Infantry Regiment (Mechanized) at Fort Hood in Killeen, Texas. The unit's mechanized designation denoted overland mobility and firepower. Mobility was achieved through the use of the M113 armored personnel carrier — a diesel powered conveyance which was typically equipped with a .50 caliber and two smaller caliber M60 machine guns. The tracked M113 was designed for combat over difficult terrain. Its lesser weight was achieved through the use of alloyed aluminum armor, resistant to small arms fire but easily penetrated by rocketry and heavier ordnance. The APCs were amphibious, thought to be ideal for traversing rice paddies, narrow, slow-moving rivers and streams.

Randy's battalion was attached to the famed 1st Air Cavalry Division, already proven in fierce combat in the Ia Drang Valley in November 1965. Now, with the addition of the 1/50, the storied 1st Air Cavalry would have an overland strike capacity to complement its air mobility. The 1/50 would serve as the cavalry division's fire brigade, the first to be called upon to rescue other units under ambush or at threat of being overrun.

The approximate 900 soldiers of the 1/50 boarded the troop ship, USS John Pope, in Oakland, California, on Sept. 1 and began their three-week trek to the Republic of Vietnam. En route, the Pope visited the port at Okinawa to take on supplies.

Many of the troopers were afforded the opportunity to get off ship for a several hour shore leave. Most enlisted headed to bars near the dock area.

Randy and Toby were in a bar, but separated from each other. Randy was in the immediate company of some equally festive Marines, one of whom was in artfully attempting to strum a guitar.

As Randy later described, he ever so politely suggested that he could far better play the instrument; at which comment the Marines took offense and commenced swinging at him. Randy was struck from all sides and started thinking he would perhaps not make it to Vietnam after all.

Suddenly, from the back of the barroom, Randy heard a familiar and thunderous voice. Toby crashed into Randy's assailants, knocking one of the attackers to the floor with a well-placed punch to the jaw. Toby and Randy squared off against the remainder. Pandemonium was everywhere.

Seeking to escape, Toby and Randy headed toward the bar's main entrance but reversed field when they saw a gaggle of Navy shore patrol approach from the outside, wielding truncheons. They narrowly escaped through the back door, just before the military police gained that exit.

Arriving later at the gangplank to the Pope, Randy was confronted by a first sergeant who noted the marks left on Randy's face by the guitar: "How does the other guy look?" To which Randy replied, "First sergeant, we may be medics, but we're combat medics!"

LZ Uplift

USS John Pope arrived at Qui Nhon on Vietnam's south central coast Sept. 22, 1967. The temperature was 100 degrees when the ship docked. The 1/50 was to assist the 1st Air Cavalry Division in securing South Vietnam's Binh Dinh province.

The battalion was soon based at Landing Zone Uplift, a primitive base camp measuring one-half square mile, in an area that had long been considered an enemy haven, most recently to thousands of North Vietnamese regulars who had infiltrated the area in advance of the long planned Tet offensive. The 1/50 was tasked with securing hamlets whose inhabitants felt more in common with their northern relatives than with a distant Saigon regime.

Typically, troopers entering villages would be greeted by young children who would excitedly run to them, begging for candy and spare rations; the unsmiling adult villagers would however view them suspiciously and if possible, avoid any communication. Not friendly, but also not openly hostile.

The 1/50 troopers were right to feel disappointed in their reception. After all, they were there to defend the country against North Vietnamese aggressors. They needed the villagers to alert them to enemy weapon caches, to imminent ambushes and to lethal mines and traps. Such assistance was seldom afforded. Some 239 troopers of the 1/50 are honored at Fort Benning's Memorial Plaza in Columbus, Georgia, for having paid the ultimate sacrifice in Vietnam.

With its perimeter marked by coils of concertina wire stacked in pyramid form, LZ Uplift offered only the barest of necessities. Bunkers dotted the area inside the perimeter wire. These were manned by troopers

who during brief respites from missions in the field served nighttime vigil on guard duty. The weather added to the troopers' discomfort. The heat was oppressive. Seasonal monsoon rains inundated the camp and its ubiquitous red clay, exacerbating the need for ever more sandbags to replace those rendered sodden and formless. When not on missions outside the base camp, troopers were tasked with such chores as burning barrels of human waste, filling sandbags and repairing bunkers. Nonetheless, the base camp afforded the troopers hot food, a relaxing beer or two, a shower, a change into clean clothes, the chance to catch up on correspondence home and, most importantly, temporary relief from the exhausting tension and fear of combat missions in the field.

Randy and Toby were among the 26-man medical platoon commanded by battalion surgeon, Capt. Ray Cave, from Leitchfield, Kentucky. A combat medic was assigned to each of the line platoons and so shared all the dangers of search and destroy missions lasting from a week to a month. The remaining seven or eight medics assisted Capt. Cave at Uplift's battalion aid station.

Normally, medics were transferred from the field to Capt. Cave's battalion aid station near the end of their year-long tour. Assignment to the battalion aid station was most welcome. It meant the medic would likely survive Vietnam. Medics at the battalion aid station treated and triaged the more seriously wounded to trauma hospitals. The medics at Uplift also attended to troopers who suffered from a variety of tropical illnesses ranging from mosquito borne malaria to dengue fever and dysentery. Cognizant of the needs of the nearby villagers, Capt. Cave also had an aid station, principally manned by medics, erected outside the wire to accommodate local Vietnamese.

Randy was assigned to Delta Company, Toby to Bravo Company. As platoon medic, Randy was charged with overseeing the troopers' health needs. He made sure the men took their daily salt tablets; they inspected each other for leeches which would attach to and seek to invade their bodies; and they deposited iodine tablets into any water before consuming it. Randy also looked out for trench or immersion foot, an omni-present danger when slogging through Vietnam's tropical environs.

When in combat, Randy and his fellow medics were the wounded troopers' lifeline. They saw to clearing and safeguarding medivac landing zones. They were the first to treat and triage casualties. Randy later remarked that often his most anxious moments were when he had to set priority for casualty evacuation.

When assigning Randy and his fellow medics to individual platoons for service in the field, Capt. Cave ordered them to decline infantry assignments. After all, they were medics and had pressing responsibilities. The medics nodded in agreement and then promptly forgot Cave's instruction. The line between combat medic and infantry was blurred in Vietnam. The U.S. military seemed to recognize the ambiguity. Differing from their WWII and Korean War forebearers, Vietnam combat medics did not wear distinguishing uniform insignia. Except for conscientious objectors, the medics were armed. It was better that medics recognized they were targeted by the enemy.

Only three infantry tasks were not expected of medics in the field: Walking point, carrying ammo for the platoon's machine guns and mortars and exploring enemy tunnels as "tunnel rats"

Otherwise, the medics did all that was expected of their "11 Bravo" brethren. That's not to say medics couldn't have refused other infantry assignments, but two factors weighed in. They didn't want to stand out from their brethren, and there was peer pressure to share in the rigors of combat missions.

Randy's Delta Company did not see combat during its early field missions, at least not the type experienced in pitched battle. Nonetheless, there were lethal moments.

Mick Hawkins from Marceline, Missouri, remembers an incident in November of 1967. His heavy weapons platoon accompanied several APCs while approaching a village. A mine exploded near one of the APCs, sending searing shrapnel into Hawkins' backside. He felt a numbing pain and he fell prone. Randy arrived. He tore away the blood drenched trousers and examined the wounds.

To Hawkins' relief, Randy informed him that everything would be okay, that no arteries had been severed. He cleaned the wounds with peroxide and, one by one, extracted the shards of shrapnel with forceps. He applied gauze and taped the area. The event was of sufficient moment that Randy asked Hawkins if he wished to be put in for a Purple Heart, which he declined. Hawkins was appreciative and was not offended by Randy's blunt post-operative assessment: "Hawkins, you have the ugliest butt in Vietnam."

Battle of Tam Quan

Delta Company experienced its first pitched battle in December 1967. On Dec. 6, the 1st Air Cavalry received intelligence that the NVA's 22nd regiment had taken up position near the village of Dai Dong. The Division, supported by the 1/50, aggressively attacked and closed with the North Vietnamese regulars. Thus began a two week long battle.

On mid-afternoon of Dec. 10, Randy's Delta Company joined with two South Vietnamese battalions in an attack near the village of Tam Quan. As Delta company advanced, lead APCs came under heavy rocket attack. One of the APCs was struck by an RPG 40 (hollow charged) rocket, wounding the vehicle's four occupants. The driver lost control and the personnel carrier lurched nose first into a ditch, perched at an oblique angle with its tail end high in the air. All along the line, troopers were engaged to their immediate front. The wounded APC seemed on its own.

Suddenly, a solitary figure sprinted across open ground to the APC. Somehow, Randy avoided enemy fire and boarded the APC. He pulled one of the wounded from the wreck and dragged him a short distance out of the enemy's line of fire. As Randy explained to his son R.J. many years later, he was surprised he had not been hit and so decided to go back for another wounded. He pulled another from the carrier to the protected area. He repeated this two more times. As the result of Randy's quick action, four lives were saved. Shortly after, Randy was in another APC which was struck by a rocket, knocking him

unconscious. Randy was medivacked to the battalion aid station. The Army recognized Randy Smith's heroism by awarding him the Bronze Star for Valor.

Following a short stay at Uplift, Randy returned to Delta Company, in time to witness what happened to Pfc. Harley Standridge. According to Mick Hawkins, Standridge was the last person to suspect of falling victim to a self-inflicted accident. He had enthusiastically embraced all details of the assigned weapons and their proper handling. He could recite weapons' specifications and every manner of weapon maintenance.

On the morning of Dec. 16, Standridge retrieved a claymore mine from the perimeter of his platoon's night position. He carried it to a nearby APC and tossed it aboard, but without first removing the detonator.

Randy was one of the first to respond to the resulting explosion, but there was nothing he could do. He performed the least heralded of the medic's chores. He gathered his friend's remains and placed them in a heavy duty, black body bag for transport to LZ Uplift. He knew Standridge's remains would eventually be respectfully placed in a coffin for return to a grieving family in Temple, Oklahoma, along with a slip recommending the coffin not be opened.

Battle of An Loc

On the morning of Jan. 2, 1968, Delta Company was ordered to join other units in attacking a large enemy force in the village of An Loc. As the company prepared to join in the attack, Randy noticed Pfc. Bill Stainer of Columbus, Ohio, praying with an intensity Randy had never before witnessed, almost as if Stainer sensed his end was near. Stainer's hands were visibly shaking as he appeared in deep meditation. However, upon being ordered to board the APCs, a calmness seemed to envelope him. Delta Company proceeded to the assault.

Though veteran and experienced, the Viet Cong and North Vietnamese had not chosen their position well. A large lake left them little room to maneuver upon being attacked. The enemy fought with an intensity borne out of desperation. Among the 42 American casualties, Stainer was killed by small arms fire and Randy was wounded by exploding canister. He was medivacked to Uplift with multiple shrapnel throughout his legs.

Initially, it seemed Randy's injuries would mend with medical treatment "in country" and he could shortly return to Delta Company. Complicating his recovery, however, Randy suffered a seizure. His shrapnel injuries also were numerous. It became clear Randy could best be treated at the large U.S. Army hospital at Camp Zama, outside Tokyo.

In January 1968, Randy was sent to the very well-staffed Camp Zama. In a matter of weeks, Randy was well on the road to recovery from his shrapnel injuries. He sought to be sent back to the 1/50. His doctors,

however, were very concerned about Randy's recent injury-related seizure history. They could not return him to combat. Randy evolved from patient to medic at Zama, and he tended to other patients.

In February, he was transferred to the military hospital on Okinawa. He worked till July when he was transferred home and discharged July 24, 1968.

Life after Vietnam

Randy resumed his civilian life where he had left off. He returned to Cummins, where he would work as a welder-fabricator until retirement in 2007. He found the work to be satisfying and rewarding. He seemed especially proud of Cummins' role in our country's defense. He would point out to his friends Cummins played a major role in the design and manufacture of the Bradley vehicle.

Soon after his return home he met the love of his life. He and Mary Jane Gladden were married Feb. 21, 1971. They had two sons, Randolph "R.J." and Adam, in whom he took great pride.

In the mid 1990s Randy resumed his association with those beside whom he had served in Vietnam. He joined the 1st Battalion, 50th Infantry Regiment (Mechanized) Association and regularly attended reunions at Fort Benning. He served as its president for a term. The medic inside him never left. He was there for his former comrades and he reached out to and assisted those veterans in need.

Sadly, he lost Mary when she passed away in December 2015.

In May 2017, the National Infantry Association awarded Randy the Order of St. Maurice in recognition of his service to country. He greatly appreciated this honor and was humbled by it. Other St. Maurice honorees included Generals Mathew Ridgeway and Colin Powell.

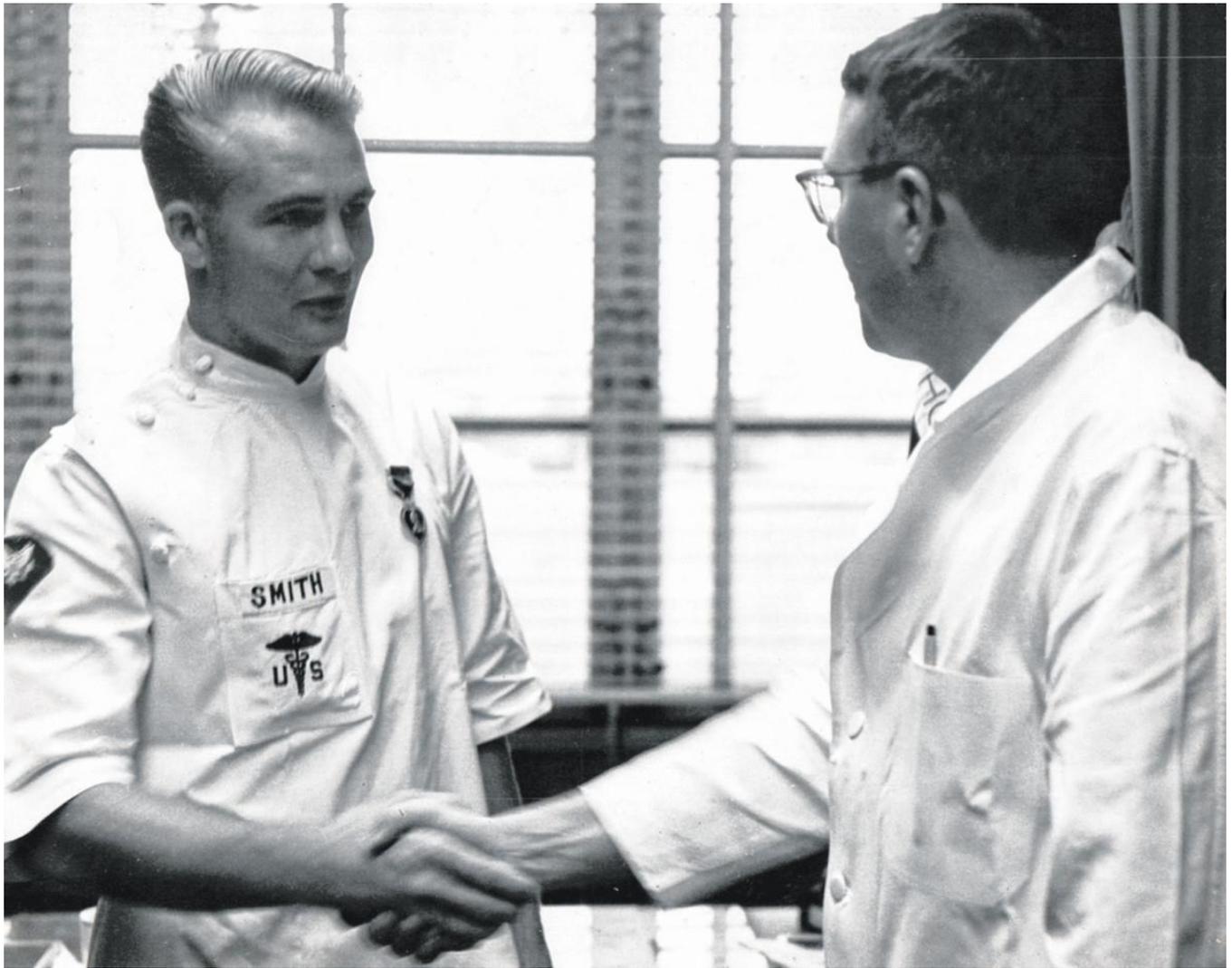
Randy passed away last Aug. 21. His body was discovered on the floor of his home on Third Street.



This group of Vietnam War veterans attended the funeral of Randolph J. "Randy" Smith III in August 2017 at Voss and Sons Funeral Service in Seymour. They are from left, Jim Segars, Albertville, Alabama; Jim Sheppard, Fallbrook, California; John Topper, Santa Claus; Robert Melendez, Georgetown, Texas; Larry Curtis, Indianapolis; Mick Hawkins, Marceline, Missouri; Toby Jordan, Gideon, Missouri; Dennis Apana, Belton, Texas; Toby Milroy of Seymour and Gary Quint Kirkwood, Missouri.



Randy Smith with his wife, Mary Jane Gladden, and sons, Randolph "R.J." and Adam, in October 1987.



Medic Randy Smith of Seymour receiving the Purple Heart during a ceremony at Camp Zama, Japan, in 1968. Submitted photo



Randy Smith of Seymour, third from left, with some of his buddies, including Toby Milroy, also of Seymour, second from left, at Fort Hood, Texas, before they were deployed to Vietnam. Submitted photo



Medic Randy Smith of Seymour stands beside a M113 armored personnel carrier in June of 1967 at Fort Hood, Texas.

The Price Paid: Agent Orange Takes Toll on Vietnam Vets

Harley Standridge's mangled body survived Vietnam, if only in medic Randy Smith's haunted memory — along with all the other friends whose corpses Randy placed in rubberized bags.

Not all Randy's injuries were psychological.

Doctors were unable to remove all the shrapnel from his legs. It's unknown the extent to which it bothered him thereafter because Randy was not one to complain.

Randy continued to suffer from intermittent seizures for some 20 years following his return to civilian life. Thought to have resulted from his concussive injury at Tam Quan, the seizures ended in the late 1980s.

Agent Orange, the popular name given the clorophenoxyacetic-based herbicide/defoliant, was widely used in Vietnam. All were told it was harmless to humans. It was sprayed outside the perimeter wire at Uplift in order to create a fire zone in case of enemy attack. It was also applied on either side of Highway 1, the arterial lifeline that connected Uplift with other basecamps, again to forestall enemy ambush.

Finally, it was sprayed over parts of the surrounding countryside to deny the enemy a necessary food source.

Soldiers of the 1/50 trekked through areas that had been recently sprayed, coming in contact with the toxic dioxin. Delta Company troopers dipped their canteens into streams that had been polluted with the poison. While they were careful to deposit iodine tablets into their newly acquired water, the iodine was only an anti-bacterial agent. The iodine did not ameliorate in any way the chemical's lifethreatening effects.

Given the lack of knowledge, Agent Orange was particularly insidious. Randy and his fellow troopers within Delta Company ate chicken, hot dogs and hamburgers cooked on a grill which had been made from halves of a used Agent Orange barrel. They had no inkling.

Epidemiologists now identify Agent Orange as causative of many diseases, including but not limited to ischemic heart disease, high blood pressure, diabetes mellitus, Parkinson's disease, amyloidosis, multiple types of cancer and offspring birth defects, often occurring many years following exposure. A ticking timebomb.

In 1977, Randy and Mary had a daughter stillborn with spina bifida, a classic effect of Agent Orange exposure.

Randy suffered from heart disease, diabetes mellitus and atrial fibrillation. The extent to which his Vietnam service contributed to or accelerated his death can only be speculated.

Randy's comrades joined the Seymour community in celebrating his life.

Comrades from across the country arrived in Seymour to join Toby Milroy and Randy's family in commemorating his life at the funeral on Aug. 26, 2017. They were warmly welcomed. Following the service at Voss & Sons Funeral Home, they reminisced with Randy's family and friends about a life well spent. They next went to Veterans of Foreign Wars Post 1925 where they were shown the seat normally occupied by Randy. A thoughtfully constructed shrine had been erected to his memory, including a vase with a single rose, photo and a beer stein. They met the post commander who told them any food or drink would be free of charge.

In the evening the veterans ate at the Rails Craft Brew & Eatery. The singer-entertainer announced their presence to others in the audience and they were applauded. The veterans were among Randy's friends, now their friends. At the end of the evening, they asked for their check, which they expected would reflect the excellent food and drink they had enjoyed. They were told the check had been paid by others. They asked who had paid, but their server indicated the benefactor or benefactors wished to remain anonymous.

These veterans had come from afar to pay homage to their friend. In turn, the Seymour community paid honor and respect to Randy by showing hospitality to his Vietnam comrades, as if they recognized these veterans were cut from the same cloth.

To the people of Seymour: Thank you.

Ron Fischer is a writer and journalist who lives with his wife, June, in McMurray, Pennsylvania.