



Ohio nurse's legacy lives on 50 years after death in Vietnam

BY JESSICA HOLBROOK
ASSOCIATED PRESS

CANTON, Ohio — A 7-foot-tall monument stands in a courtyard outside of the Aultman School of Nursing.

It's topped by a life-size bronze statue of a young woman dressed in an Army uniform. Its base is inscribed with the names of 110 Stark County servicemen, and one woman, who died during the Vietnam War.

Sharon Lane, a first lieutenant, was killed 50 years ago — June 8, 1969 — when a rocket hit the 312th Evacuation Hospital's Vietnamese ward in Chu Lai. She was 25.

Lane, a U.S. Army nurse, was the only American servicewoman killed by direct enemy fire during the Vietnam War.

"I think she represents that caring heart. That caring, compassionate side of nursing," said Dr. Jo Ann Donnenwirth, dean of the Aultman School of Nursing.

"I wish all of our graduates would have the characteristics Sharon Lane exhibited."

Lane was born July 7, 1943, in Zanesville. She was raised in Stark County and graduated from Canton South High in 1961 and Aultman in 1965.

She took a job in the obstetrics unit at Aultman but didn't like the work. So Lane switched to secretarial work, which she found tedious. She returned to nursing and joined the U.S. Army Nurse Corps Reserve in 1968.

Lane was looking for something more exciting and challenging, Donnenwirth said.

"It was a turbulent time," she said, noting the protests and unrest in the U.S. "People were dying in Vietnam but they were soldiers, not support staff and certainly not health care workers."

Lane was first assigned to the Army's



Lane

Fitzsimons General Hospital in Denver where she cared for patients, mainly former soldiers, in the tuberculosis wards and intensive care units. Lane several times petitioned to go to Vietnam and in April 1969, the Army finally assigned her to the hospital in Chu Lai.

Some nurses and doctors didn't want to tend to the Vietnamese civilians and prisoners of war in the hospital — they didn't want to assist the enemy — but Lane volunteered for the job, said Patricia Powell, vice president of the Sharon Lane Memorial Chapter 199 of Vietnam Veterans of America.

The Canton-based organization is the only VVA branch named after a woman. "She was a very loving caring person. I don't think she ever looked at what nationality people were. She was there to help," Powell said. "She was a very dedicated nurse. If you needed help, that's what she did."

Lane was finishing up a night shift in the Vietnamese ward when the hospital was hit. She was killed instantly by shrapnel while trying to move patients to safety.

Eight American servicewomen would die during the Vietnam War; Lane was the only one killed by enemy fire.

Lane was posthumously awarded the Purple Heart, the National Defense Service Medal, the Vietnam Service Medal, the National Order of Vietnam Medal, and the Vietnamese Gallantry Cross with Palm. She was the only servicewoman at the time to receive the Bronze Star with valor; according to the Purple Heart Foundation.

In 2003, she was inducted into the Ohio Military Hall of Fame.

Though women served in the military during Vietnam, they didn't always get

the same respect or recognition as men who served, Powell said.

"She was just as much a hero as all of the veterans," Powell said.

"She should be honored for her service to America. That she was willing to go and serve in the capacity she did: healing. She didn't go into battle, but she battled for her patients."

In the 50 years since Lane's death, women have gained more equality in the military. They have opportunities now they didn't have during the Vietnam era, she said.

It wasn't long after Lane's death that Canton began plans to honor her.

"Fund Drive Set for Memorial to Viet Heroine," read a May 16, 1971, headline in the Canton Repository. Canton City Council approved plans for the memorial, which would be inscribed with the names of all Stark County residents killed in the war; later that month.

The drive set a goal of \$15,000 for a bronze statue. Aultman offered land for the monument.

The Denver hospital where Lane began her military career had already dedicated the Lane Recovery Suite in her honor. And a plaque was placed at the evacuation hospital where she was killed.

After months of fundraisers, door-to-door campaigning and donations, the statue was finished in 1972.

On May 29, 1973, about 250 people gathered in a courtyard at Aultman for the monument's dedication.

"She has paid the supreme sacrifice and we join in tribute to someone we have loved; she was one of our own," eulogized Canton Mayor Stanley Cmich.

The memorial was later moved to Aultman's Seventh Street entrance where it remains today. The hospital has exhibits dedicated to Lane in its main lobby and inside the school of nursing.

"It's interesting to me that she was just

a simple girl from Canton South who made a huge impact," Donnenwirth said.

The college ensures that new students know about Lane and her sacrifice.

"Her legacy is alive and we certainly honor and respect that here at Aultman," she said. "I hope it goes on a long time. It certainly will while I'm dean."

Donnenwirth has spoken with Aultman nursing alumni who went to school with Lane. They remember her as being smart, quiet and introverted.

"I haven't found one person say a negative word or negative thought about her," she said. "She just sounds like a sweet person and looking, at 21 or 22, for a little adventure in life."

"I'd like to have a beer with her," she added.

Museums, including the Wm. McKinley Presidential Library & Museum in Canton, have gathered artifacts from Lane's life. This year, the U.S. Army Medical Department Museum at Joint Base San Antonio-Fort Sam Houston opened an exhibit about Lane.

Lane's legacy also isn't forgotten in Vietnam.

The Sharon Anne Lane Foundation built a hospital in Chu Lai, near where Lane was killed, in 2002.

Powell, a member of the now-closed organization, remembers stepping off the plane in Vietnam worried that they'd be greeted with weapons. But the Vietnamese people embraced them.

The facility is dedicated to women and children in the region. At the time, a pregnant woman who needed a caesarean section would have to be transported by bicycle to a hospital down the mountainside. Now, they can receive all the care they need at the clinic, Powell said.

The hospital is thriving, Powell said.

A fitting tribute to someone who's legacy is "her kind compassionate consideration for all people."

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Soldier who battled in Fallujah to receive highest military honor

BY JOEL LACDAN
ARMY NEWS SERVICE

WASHINGTON — Former Staff Sgt. David Bellavia will be awarded the Medal of Honor for his bravery during some of the deadliest fighting in Iraq, President Donald Trump announced Monday.

Trump will present the Medal of Honor to Bellavia on June 25.

A squad leader during the second battle of Fallujah, Bellavia, now 43, exposed himself to enemy fire as he defended his soldiers on Nov. 10, 2004.

Third Platoon, A Company, Task Force 2-2 was with U.S. Marines facing about 1,500 to 3,000 insurgents who had been using the mostly abandoned city as cover. A Company learned six to eight insurgents were hiding somewhere in a block of 12 buildings, and the company would have to search each one to try and find them. After unsuccessfully searching the first nine buildings, platoon members entered the next structure and encountered heavy gunfire from within.

Bellavia used his M249 squad automatic weapon to suppress and counter the insurgent attack, allowing Third Platoon members to escape the house.

The platoon then began taking fire from insurgents on the house's rooftop. Bellavia, realizing the only way to keep his platoon from taking casualties was to eliminate the enemy, re-entered the house.

The intensity of the situa-



COURTESY OF DAVID BELLAVIA

Staff Sgt. David Bellavia, left, in Iraq. Bellavia will be presented The Medal of Honor on June 25 for his actions during the second battle of Fallujah.

tion and the close combat that followed shocked Bellavia, who had limited experience with enemy contact at the time.

"Never in my life had I seen anything like that," he said of the fighting.

Bellavia called for an M2 Bradley Fighting Vehicle to provide suppressing fire with its 25 mm cannon as he headed

inside. He then fought his way up three floors, using his rifle and grenades to kill four enemy insurgents and mortally wound another. The first insurgent Bellavia killed had been loading an RPG launcher to fire upon Third Platoon. Bellavia's actions ultimately saved three squads of Third Platoon.

For his actions during the firefight, Bellavia received the Silver Star. His other commendations include the Bronze Star and the New York State Conspicuous Service Cross.

The native of Waterport, New York, grew up listening to stories from his grandfather, a World War II veteran who still resides in the area. He became

enamored with the military life at a young age and at 23, he left college and enlisted in the Army in July 1999.

Bellavia left active duty in 2005 and currently hosts his own radio show in the Buffalo, New York area. He is also the co-founder of Vets for Freedom, a conservative political advocacy organization.

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Army recruiter receives Distinguished Service Cross

BY AMANDA SURMEIER
U.S. ARMY RECRUITING COMMAND

DETROIT — Life flipped upside down for Sgt. 1st Class Gregory Waters on July 30, 2008, when an improvised explosive device caused massive damage to his vehicle in Afghanistan, leaving him and his fellow soldiers injured and unconscious.

Waters, a native of Indianapolis who now serves as an Army recruiting station commander in Eastpointe, Michigan, was initially awarded a Silver Star Medal for his follow-on actions that day; however, a recent Pentagon review board determined his acts of valor were worthy of the Distinguished Service Cross.

Instead of running for cover after the explosion, then-Spc. Waters ignored his own injuries and engaged the enemy while dragging three injured soldiers from the vehicle to safety. Under intense enemy fire, Waters provided cover for the rest of his platoon until air support arrived, stabilized the injured soldiers and continued to engage the enemy while directing the medical evacuation.

Maj. Gen. Frank Muth, who leads the U.S. Army Recruiting Command, presented the Distinguished Service Cross to Waters June 5, during a ceremony at Selfridge Air National Guard Base in Michigan. The award is the second highest military medal a soldier can receive, just below the Medal of Honor.

“People who don’t understand sacrifice or commitment to service may think Sgt. 1st Class Waters was in the wrong place at the wrong time. I believe he was in the right place at the right time,” Muth said. “His decision to join the Army ensured he was right where he needed to be when he was needed. His skills and training enabled him to maintain his composure and get his



Maj. Gen. Frank Muth adjusts Sgt. 1st Class Greg Waters newly pinned Distinguished Service Cross Medal.

fellow soldiers to safety that day, saving their lives.”

Like many who receive medals for heroic actions, Waters maintains he was just doing his job.

“I was a medic and I did my job taking care of wounded soldiers,” he said. “I would not have changed anything. Someone had to be in that seat; if I wasn’t me, I would be putting someone else in harm’s way.”

Saving the lives of fellow soldiers in Afghanistan was not something Waters ever thought he’d do. Growing up in Indiana with two Air Force veteran parents, Waters hadn’t planned to follow their footsteps into service. He dreamed of attending art school, but he knew to fulfill that dream, he needed financial assistance. He enlisted in the Army

Reserve in 2003.

While a soldier in the Army Reserve, Waters took classes and worked for home construction and rock climbing companies. Eventually, though, he transitioned to active duty and moved to Fort Campbell, Kentucky.

“The soldiers I met there became my second family,” he said. “I never had to eat a meal alone. It was a tight-knit community of soldiers and families.”

He and his “family” deployed to Afghanistan, and the 12-man platoon experienced the impact of July 30 together. Waters still keeps in contact with those soldiers.

“We take care of each other, whether it is a wounded soldier on the battlefield or someone struggling in garrison, we take care of our own,” he said.

Since that day, Waters has done everything he can to live up to his distinguished award.

“My dad always told me that if you’re going to do something, do it right, and if you tell someone you’re going to do something, do it,” he said. “I told him that I was going to be a good medic, so I did it, and I just applied that to the rest of my life.”

Waters’ career took a turn in 2013 when he transitioned from an Army combat medic to an Army recruiter.

“As a recruiter, I tell worried parents that their child will always have someone to look after them,” he said. “If your child doesn’t show up for work, there will be an entire team of soldiers sent out to find them, just like you would do if they didn’t show up for dinner. We are a family, and we take care of our own.”

A means for educational funding turned into a career and a sense of fulfillment knowing that each day how he makes a living truly matters.

“The family-like nature of the Army makes it easy to continue serving,” Waters said.

Waters knows no soldier gets far in their career without a support system, and he credits his parents, sister and wife as integral parts of that system.

“I’m a direct reflection of my mom and dad’s parenting,” he said.

Both of his parents served in the Air Force; his dad was an engineer and his mom was in the medical field. Waters’ sister currently serves as a military policewoman.

“His Army story is reflected in the lives of the soldiers he saved that day. It’s reflected in his sister’s decision to serve. It’s reflected in his beautiful family,” Muth said. “His story is his parents’ sacrifice, his guidance counselor’s advice and his family’s legacy.”

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Rangers among first leaders of America's Army

BY GARY SHEFTICK
ARMY NEWS SERVICE

WASHINGTON, D.C. — When Congress established the Continental Army on June 14, 1775, the original 10 Rifle Companies were composed heavily of frontiersmen and some of the militia leaders already fighting were veterans of a unit known as Roger's Rangers.

Roger's Rangers were skilled woodsmen who fought for the British during the French and Indian War. They frequently undertook winter raids against French outposts, blended native-American techniques with pioneering skills and operated in terrain where traditional militias were ineffective.

The American ranger tradition actually began back in the early 17th century on the frontier, according to historian Glenn Williams at the U.S. Army Center of Military History.

"They would 'range' between one post and another," said Williams, explaining that the rangers were usually full-time soldiers drawn from the militia and paid by colonial governments to patrol between frontier posts and "look for Indian signs" to provide early warning of hostile Indian intent.

In 1675, Benjamin Church of Massachusetts established a unit that mixed frontiersmen with friendly Indians to carry out raids against hostile native Americans. Some consider his memoirs — published in 1716 by his son — the first American military manual.

ROGER'S RANGERS

When the French and Indian War began, Capt. Robert Rogers of New Hampshire recruited frontiersmen in 1755 for companies that could support the British Army by conducting long-range patrols through the wilderness in all weather and difficult terrain to gather intelligence, take prisoners or conduct raids.

The Rangers also attacked the villages of hostile Indians such as the Abenakis, in retribution for raids against settlements. Later, Rogers moved the Rangers west to capture Fort Detroit for the British, along with a number of other French posts on the Great Lakes.

When the American Revolution broke out in 1775, some colonial militia units were led by veterans of Rogers Rangers. One of these was John Stark.

JOHN STARK

John Stark commanded the 1st New Hampshire Militia at the outbreak of the American Revolution. His unit was involved in the Battle of Bunker Hill before it became part of the Continental Army.

Stark gained fame during the Battle of Bennington, in 1777, by enveloping a British infantry force that included Indians, Tories and Hessians. The American victory across the New York



U.S. Army Rangers get to shore after swimming across Victory Pond during the Best Ranger Competition, April 12, 2019, at Fort Benning, Ga. SARAYUTH PINTHONG | AIR FORCE

border from Bennington, Vt., was one of the most strategic in the early years of the Revolution, according to CMH historians.

The British were marching toward Bennington to acquire horses for their cavalry and supplies for their main Army, Williams said. Their defeat in Bennington kept the main force from receiving much-needed supplies and contributed to the eventual surrender of the British Northern Army following the Battles of Saratoga.

Stark went on to become a major general and commander of the Northern Department of the Continental Army. He later coined the phrase "live free or die," which became the New Hampshire state motto.

RIFLE COMPANIES

When the New England militias found themselves battling the British at Lexington and Concord in the spring of 1775, Continental Congress gathered to discuss a unified effort. On June 14, they authorized the establishment of 10 Rifle Companies: six from Pennsylvania, two from Virginia and two from Maryland.

"They figured (the rifle) was a weapon that would strike terror into the British defending Boston," Williams said.

Rifles, at that time, were used primarily by frontiersmen in the middle colonies of Maryland, Pennsylvania and Virginia, according to Williams. The New England militias strictly used muskets, he said. Muskets were more effective for massed volley fire, he explained,

and could be reloaded three times as fast. The sturdier, stouter muskets could also mount bayonets.

Rifles, though, had three times the range and could be effective up to 300 yards away. The sharpshooters in the Continental Army companies often picked British officers off from a distance, Williams said, bringing complaints that the colonials "didn't fight fair."

In effect, the Rifle Companies functioned much like the Army Ranger units today, he said.

"They were specialized light infantry," Williams said, that conducted independent long-range scouting missions, because they were accustomed to operating that way on the frontier.

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