

Letter of Support for Merle L. Jeffries

My name is Ramon Trevino Jr. and I am 59 years of age. I am a retired law enforcement officer and I live at 819 Ripley in San Antonio, Texas, 78212. My telephone number is 210-735-9017. I read and write the English language and I am giving this statement on my own free will and accord.

I wish to state that I am a Marine Corps combat veteran serving in the Republic of South Vietnam from August of 1968 until October of 1970. During that time I was involved in numerous combat operations and survived many life and death experiences. I saw many deaths and injuries to many fellow Marines and many more combat enemy Communist soldiers.

On my 6th month in Vietnam I became a 106 recoilless rifle squad leader with H&S Company 106 Recoilless Rifle Platoon, 2nd Battalion Fifth Marine Regiment of the 1st Marine Division. Our tactical area of responsibility was in the An Hoa Valley approximately 35 miles southwest of Da Nang. Our operations area was called the Phu Ngans in the Thuoc Duc District between An Hoa and the Liberty Bridge at Phu-loc6. During the month of February I received relief reinforcements for my gun squad and one of the men in this relief group was PFC Merle Jeffries.

Up to this time I learned throughout my time in a combat zone that survival for my men and me depended on rapid deployment and response and aggressive action against enemy attacks and insurgency. I trained my men in this fashion and they complied with every aspect of what they learned from me.

In late February our Battalion moved on the Duc Duc district against the enemy 3rd Sapper Battalion and elements of the R-20 Battalion and the 2nd Battalion of the 368B NVA Army. These were elements of the main enemy units we had fought against during Operation Maui Peak in November and December of 1968.

In these series of battles, our 2nd Battalion drove the enemy towards the Song Vu Gia River through enemy held villes. My 106 Recoilless Rifle Squad spearheaded these assaults with our recoilless rifle mounted and deployed from atop the Amtraks that carried my men and our ammunition. We encountered stiff enemy resistance where we recorded eight enemy kills as well as terrific enemy counter fire. On the last knoll we assaulted our Amtrak tripped several enemy anti-personnel booby traps.

At this time Fox Company was with us and we signaled their halt while we ran over the area and exploded as many booby traps as we could. The explosions were loud but the blasts were absorbed by the Amtrak and we avoided injury to ourselves.

When we absorbed as many of these booby traps as we could we signaled Fox to advance but to remain on the tracks of our Amtrak. I remember the area still littered with booby traps and I instructed my men to remain on the Amtrak and not venture out. If they had to leave for personal relief they were to remain on the tracks made by the Amtrak.

After Fox Company came in and set up their defensive perimeter they remained on our tracks which had carved out their perimeter location. As we settled in for the evening several men tripped more booby and were injured. Again our Amtrak ran over the knoll exploding more of the booby traps and giving the Marines more room to maneuver. As we settled in again we observed from atop of our location the commanding officer, his radio operator and his staff conversing approximately 20 to 25 meters to our left front. We saw they were perilously close to a bobby trap just to their right front. We called and yelled at them to warn them but before they could answer they were gone. There were four or five of them, then the blast, and then they were down. I knew two or three of them died that day. It was very traumatic and the image is still very vivid. Because of heavy fire we began receiving all around our perimeter we were only able to safely medi-vac the wounded Marines. The others that died immediately were placed inside our Amtrak and they remained there for what seemed two or three days until we were able to drive the enemy across the river into the Arizona in the first days of March 1969 - I relive the entire ordeal in my dreams still.

With the enemy fleeing across the river we were finally able to load the deceased marines into a medi-vac chopper. Once that was done our assault on the enemy expanded. We undertook the enemy under heavy fire from my recoilless rifle. We fired approximately fifty 106 recoilless rifle rounds consisting of Beehive, High Explosive anti-tank, and High Explosive penetrating rounds. Our Recoilless Rifle was overheating so much that the breech of the weapon was white hot and on fire. Although the risk for our rounds exploding in our face was so great and imminent we continued firing. I didn't even have to press the firing mechanism; the rounds were cooking off as soon as we locked the breech. That was how pressing the situation was and how angry we felt for our dead marines.

Our battalion pursued the enemy across the Song Vu Gia River north into the Tam Ky district more commonly called the Arizona Territory. This valley ran approximately 25 miles from its southwestern tip to its northeast tip approximately ten to fifteen miles from DaNang. Unofficially this became known as Operation Muscogee Meadows.

The enemy infiltration routes ran down from the eastern mountain ranges from Cambodia into this vast and remote valley. The enemy seemed to be everywhere. We saw many combat near death experiences in this valley. Fire was loud and constant. My hearing was mostly a ring by this time. We had no ear protection for the loud blasts of our weapons, the enemy fires, our battalion counter-fire and our air support fire. Our positions were attacked spontaneously and our reply fire was delivered very rapidly for our survival. Our ears received no consideration and we learned to deploy without having to depend upon oral communications. Our recoilless rifle was pre-loaded and our ranges were pre-set. I worried about PFC Jeffries hearing loss because he was my loader and was closer to the rifle back blast than the other three men in the squad. He never complained though, he knew what it took to survive and he went out 100% on every firing mission we undertook.

In late May of 1969, my squad came under heavy enemy mortar fire and because of our position we could not counter-fire. Enemy mortars landed not more than a few feet from me and my men and the noise from their blasts was astoundingly loud and overbearing. One of my men was injured but the men never left their gun position. They absorbed the enemy shrapnel and blasts throughout the attack, one of them even shielding our high explosive rounds with his body.

Although the enemy mortars felt as if they would land right on our backs through the increasing "Swooch" sound they made as they came down on us, PFC Jeffries, PFC Clouse, PFC Morales, and PFC Gonzales displayed astounding bravery and courage by remaining at their combat positions poised for an opening to return the enemy fire which never came. Instead, I ran over the hill to our other gun position that was pinned down from enemy small arms. I could see the mortar rounds the enemy was firing on my gun position on the opposite side. The gun crew manning this other gun position was crouched inside their hole refusing to come out and load their recoilless rifle for me. Suddenly and surprisingly PFC Jeffries was with me. Under heavy fire he loaded while I delivered heavy fire on the enemy. Neither he nor I had ear plugs.

The following morning eight enemy bodies were brought into the perimeter. There were numerous mortar fins around my men where the explosions hit in our midst the night before. I counted at least eight a few feet from our high explosive ammunition and where our heads laid the night before. PFC Gonzales, shielding our recoilless rifle rounds, received a head wound.

No, we had no ear plugs. The Marines at Hue City, our former squad leaders, had no ear plugs. We were issued no ear plugs and if we had them they would have been lost the very first day of attack. Survival and deployment was the key to live, our ears were very low priority. To halt the war in the heat of battle to insert ear plugs was certain death.

I've read this statement. It is true and correct to the best of my knowledge and belief.

Sign

Raymond Trevino, Jr.

Date

3-19-2008

State of Texas

County of Bexar

Sworn to and subscribed before me this 20th day of March 2008 by

Raymond Trevino, Jr. Personally known to me.



Cynthia A. Flores

Notary Public, State of Texas