

BURKE

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Marine, mechanic, machine gunner, hero and patriot.*

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In the brief yet vaunted annals of the 27th Marine Regiment, only six men – five Marines and one Navy Corpsman - have ever earned the Medal of Honor. While attached to the 5th Marine Division, five of these heroes were awarded The Medal for their exemplary service and sacrifices on Iwo Jima as America battled its way onto Japan’s distant home islands in early 1945. A generation later in 1968 Vietnam the 27th Marine Regiment was attached to the First Marine Division. The sixth Medal of Honor recipient in this elite set, PFC Robert C. Burke of the 27th Marines’ Third Battalion proved his mettle and became the most recent member to be so awarded. At the age of 18 years, 6 months and 10 days he became the youngest American to receive the Medal of Honor during the Vietnam War. Far from being the typical, hard corps Grunt, this Marine held ‘Motor Pool Mechanic’ as his primary military job. But as the adage goes, and as the 29th Commandant of the USMC, General A.M. Gray stated... “Every Marine is, first and foremost, a rifleman. All other conditions are secondary.”

This is the story of Robert Charles Burke... teenager, brother, son, Marine, mechanic, machine gunner, hero and patriot.

May 1967 – Monticello, Illinois

Bobby Burke, age 17, had that “morning after” feeling as he awoke to a foul taste in his mouth, a splitting headache, groggy sleep in his eyes and a rancid odor in the dank grayness of his cell.

His CELL? ? ? ! ! ? ? ?

“What am I doing in here?”, he mumbled half to himself, half to the policeman standing over him. Before his question was answered, a rugged, sympathetic, knowing, and reassuringly deep voice was heard just behind the deputy.

“I can get you out of here, son.”

The voice was familiar. It belonged to the local Marine Corps recruiter. As Robert’s eyes slowly focused on the crew-cut man in the outstanding blue uniform with gleaming medals and ribbons, he suddenly attained a realization. Last night’s episode of underage drinking, his older friend driving way too fast and then wrecking the car, and Bobby finally getting nabbed on foot while his buddy got away, might just make this the time to face the facts of the situation.

“I’m ready when you are, Sarge”, soon to be recruit Private Burke replied. He had previously enlisted in the Marine Corps while still a senior in high school. Opting for the ‘delayed entry’ plan would allow him to graduate and have a few extra months at home. The time was to have been well spent with his two best pals, his

parents, his seven brothers and sisters, and his best girl. His buddies and his hobby of working on cars to make them go better and faster than they probably should be going would have been a plus. Due to his unexpected early entry into the USMC, Robert did not finish high school at home, but later earned his G.E.D. while stationed in California. He was well liked by his teachers at home, and was popular with the ladies as well. But for now, the vacation before entering service was over. His trip to San Diego Marine boot camp was imminent.

During boot camp and the two-week infantry-training course required of every Marine in crew served & individual weapons and tactics, Robert excelled. His attitude was that of a hard charging, gung ho Marine who took his new role very seriously. He enjoyed the challenges of being a Marine rifleman and he was good at it. His aptitude tests, however, revealed a propensity toward those things mechanical.

Following his duties in advanced infantry training at Camp Pendleton, and a short leave back home in Illinois, he was assigned to the Motor Pool Truck Mechanic School in San Diego. Autumn 1967 was now approaching and Bob knew that it would be only a matter of time... weeks perhaps or at the outset, months... until his assignment would take him to the far off lands for which all Marines had signed on. After Motor Transport school his primary MOS led him briefly to an assignment as a truck mechanic with the 5th Motor Transport Battalion. All too soon, this would give way to Company "I" of the 3rd Battalion, 27th Marine Regiment, and an emergency "temporary" reassignment as a Combat Marine in Vietnam during the Tet Offensive of 1968.

Robert Burke was the fifth of Walter and Helen Burke's eight children. His parents also had a total of five other children from previous marriages, but the five stepbrothers and stepsisters had all grown up and moved away by the time Robert arrived. He and his younger sister Marilyn became the best of friends. Whether it was chasing each other under the kitchen table and around its ten chairs while pre-schoolers, or Robert later teaching Marilyn to ride a bike but forgetting to mention the brakes, the two were inseparable. They never argued, as siblings are often likely to do. Robert was older and bigger than his little sister. He had a deep, ingrained love and respect for her and instinctively protected her. As a hard and fast rule even in his early life, Marilyn remembers that Robert always took care of and protected the under-dog and the lesser fortunate. This admirable attribute would later earn for him praise and honors when it mattered most.

Robert as a teen had a girlfriend, younger than he. Marsha and Robert were forced by her parents to break off their relationship upon his entry into the Marine Corps. The two continued to correspond and keep in touch with each other for quite some time after he began his service. She and Robert's sister Marilyn still remain close friends some four decades later.

During his last leave at home before being called to Vietnam and destiny, he autographed a well-worn 45-RPM copy of Bobby Vinton's song "Coming Home Soldier" for Marilyn. They had listened to it repeatedly during what was to be his final furlough. Robert and Marilyn adopted it as their own promise to each other that one day soon, he would be returning home to a more secure and much more settled life. The grooves now show signs of great wear, yet she still dearly holds onto the disc to this day.

The Burke family lived in a rural area in east-central Illinois. Farming was the main occupation of the citizens of Piatt County, of which Monticello is the county seat. Robert spent his summers working with his dad on the family farm, building fences and baling hay, and he had his share of chores to do after school and on weekends. He had a brief career at the local grocery three miles from home, and he rode his bike to and from work before he had a license to drive. But his first love was to work on cars, and he spent as much time as possible doing so.

Robert as a teen in Illinois stood out in a crowd, being handsome and muscular with engaging bright blue eyes. He showed a sometimes devilish grin, especially when he joked with friends or pulled pranks on his mother. He was not at all shy and always let people know what he was thinking. He defended those in need of defense, and never walked away from a fight.

February 1968 – Camp Pendleton, California

A month or so into a 'normal' schedule of military and mechanical activities, PFC Burke was content to work on trucks and Jeeps at the 5th Motor Transport Battalion at Camp Pendleton. Yet, he longed for something more. He was adventuresome and had joined the Marine Corps for the opportunities of excitement and travel not yet realized. The 1968 Tet Offensive in South Vietnam would soon provide him with the opportunity.

North Vietnamese and Viet Cong forces chose their own most holy Tet holiday as a springboard for *the* major offensive of what the Vietnamese would come to call "The American War". Although U.S. troop strength in Vietnam more than quadrupled in the two years between Dec. 1965 and Jan. 1968, President Lyndon Johnson was concerned about the extended and bloody battles for Khe Sanh and the ancient Imperial city of Hue'. He quickly called upon a stateside brigade of the Army's 82nd Airborne Division and a Regiment of Marines for immediate overseas deployment in order to shore up the defenses of the half-million Americans already there. The 27th Marine Regiment, located at Pendleton's Camp Margarita, was the only logical and available choice. The regiment had been re-activated following a 20-year hiatus after World War 2 on June 1, 1966. The 3rd Battalion was not reactivated until that Nov. 10. The 27th Marines was being used essentially as the west coast training ground for Vietnam bound replacement combat Marines. Its

absence from Camp Pendleton would be hugely apparent. This was an emergency situation, the type of undertaking where Marines have always shone brightly. This instance would be no exception.

The urgency of the situation required non-conventional methods. There were simply not enough Marine 0311's – Combat Infantrymen – to satisfy the quantity of riflemen needed to fill the entire Regiment. The 1st Battalion of the 27th Marines was stationed in Hawaii and would deploy to Vietnam from there. The 2nd Battalion was much closer to T/O strength since most of 2/27's riflemen were indeed already 'actual' 0311's. The 2nd Battalion left for Da Nang a day or two earlier than the newly reinforced 3rd Battalion. This gave the officers and Staff NCO's of the 3rd Bn. the opportunity to shore up their ranks with men whose primary MOS was not "Rifleman". But, "every Marine is a basic Rifleman", and all Marines are trained in infantry skills even before they are trained in their primary military jobs. The diversity of the unit was almost unprecedented, with cooks, mechanics, office clerks, engineers, drivers, and many others making up the majority of the infantry fire teams, squads, platoons, and Companies of 3/27. Robert Burke was one such non-grunt, a mechanic who watched the Company Clerk rubber-stamp his Service Record Book with "MOS – 0311" and never blinked an eye. However, his respect for his mother's feelings and fears prompted him to lead her to believe that he would be safe in Vietnam as a mechanic in the guarded rear echelon. He was actually a machine gunner in a rifle squad. She would not learn the truth until after Robert had distinguished himself as one of the conflict's finest warriors.

Late February-March-April- 1968, Quang Nam Province, Republic of Vietnam

The first three months at 3/27's home base near Cau Ha were treacherous at best. The 27th Regiment was assigned to the First Marine Division, which would merit a total of twenty Medals of Honor and two Presidential Unit Citations while serving in Vietnam. Other infantry units also with the 1st MarDiv were the 1st, 5th, and 7th Marine Regiments. The 27th Marines as battalion sized units were dispersed throughout I Corps, including inside the Imperial City of Hue' as the battles begun during Tet continued.

Third Bn. / 27th Marines was assigned to the Rocket Belt area south of DaNang to patrol for possible rocket and mortar attacks on the city and its vast US air and ground forces buildup. During the final ten days of February, fourteen booby-trap casualties, including one who later died of his wounds, accounted for 3/27's baptism by fire. March, the unit's first full month in country, showed a marked increase of patrols and related action. During that month alone the Third Bn. suffered 136 Marines wounded and six killed. This amounted to ten percent of the battalion suffering casualties in one month.

Robert went on patrols with his Company "I" platoon within the Rocket Belt. For 3/27 the TAOR (Tactical Area Of Responsibility) was an arc five miles south of the major U.S. airbase at DaNang. Limited contact was sometimes made with the

area's scattered and elusive Viet Cong forces, but virtually none with NVA (North Vietnam Army) troops. Most of the casualties in 3/27 during this time were the results of isolated snipers and prolific booby trap activity. Trip wired munitions and buried pressure-release explosive devices accounted for Marines' loss of life and limb in significant numbers. This area was later verified by MACV Headquarters as having the highest booby-trap concentration in South Vietnam. The worst, however, was yet to come.

May 1968 – Go Noi Island

Go Noi Island, although technically not an island was notorious as a staging ground for enemy forces. May 1968 on Go Noi saw fresh, well trained, well equipped and well outfitted troops from North Vietnam, preparing for a follow-up attack on DaNang after the Communists' perceived successes during Tet. No US or ARVN activities had been exercised in the previous year to control the build-up of enemy troops and materiel. This small plot of desolate land now hosted much of the 16th, 36th, and 38th Regiments of the elite 308th NVA Division, one of Ho Chi Minh's finest units. Additionally, elements of the R-20, the V-25, and the T-3 Sapper Viet Cong Battalions were on hand. Operation Allen Brook was launched May 4 by the First Marine Division to alleviate this threat. The 2nd Bn. / 7th Marines was the first unit committed to Operation Allen Brook, on May 4, 1968. Limited contact and limited activity were the initial results.

Nine days later on May 13, India Company of 3/27 joined the fray under operational control of the 7th Marine Regiment and paved the way for the rest of their own third battalion. Upon arrival by helicopters on Hill 148 overlooking Go Noi Island, India Company quickly took casualties from some large surprise firing devices. Two Marines were killed in one incident, and L/Cpl Tim Davis lost both legs in another. NVA soldiers were sighted only at a distance and they appeared to move about the island at will. A brief firefight with elements of the 7th Marines and the ensuing air and artillery strikes dispatched the enemy as India Co. Marines observed from an overlooking hill. The next day - May 14 - was uneventful except for India Co. suffering two more casualties to booby traps. The extreme heat of the day and the fact that resupply of ammunition, food and water was slow in coming added to India's woes and to their heat casualty numbers. Companies G/2/7 and I/3/27 linked together near the end of the day and each unit was happy to have the company of the other for the evening watch.

On 15May, 3/7 took operational control of Operation Allen Brook, although there were actually no 3rd Bn. / 7th Marine units on Go Noi Island at the time. Robert Burke and the other remaining men of India 3/27 were still the only unit of the 27th Marines in the offensive. The greatest enemies they faced were not only the indigenous forces and the land mines on the island, but the topography of the island itself. Heavily wooded areas, elephant grass ten feet high, dried up riverbeds, and

open fields difficult to traverse undetected due to lack of cover created a hostile natural environment for the attacking Marines. The first few days into the operation, scores of men had already been victim to heat stroke, heat exhaustion, and heat prostration. Safe drinking water was a rare commodity, and about to become even more precious as the days pressed on.

The ploy concocted by the CO of the 7th to have the Marines pretend to permanently leave the island by 5 p.m. only to sneak back in at midnight had mixed results. Early May 16 saw those results, like the ambient temperature, begin to boil. The morning dawned hot and muggy. Soon it was above 90 degrees F. with humidity in the 90's. Over the next few days the heat would prove to be a major factor in the battle, with temperatures reaching 124 degrees F. Shade and water for the Marines were in short supply. One can only guess at how the heat affected the NVA with their underground spider holes and tunnels for temporary thermal relief, but judging from their ferocity in the fight they must have thrived on it. By the end of Phase One of Operation Allen Brook (6 June) hundreds of Marines from 3/27 were victims of the heat. Of the heat casualties, almost all returned to the battleground within a day or so to fight again.

By 9 a.m. it appeared that the tactical deception of a well announced exit from the island and a clandestine midnight re-entry was either a fantastic success, or a colossal failure. In reality, the results fell somewhere in between. The CO of the 7th Marine Regiment, Col. Reverdy Hall, was ecstatic at its success. If closing with the enemy at dawn was the intent of the maneuver, it succeeded well. If doing so to surprise the NVA was paramount, the results were dubious. The enemy forces by 0500 already knew that the Marines were back. Who surprised whom is a matter of perspective. Contact was soon made.

Casualties began to mount on both sides. During the morning firefight, PFC Burke exhibited his character and spirit by standing erect against an NVA occupied brick building 50 meters away. He fired his M-60 machine gun while exposed to enemy fire in order to ease the pressure on Hospital Corpsman 'Doc' Finch as he made his medical rounds. Burke and Finch freelanced their talents in aiding wounded Marines, with Robert's M60 machine gun providing security for Finch's applications of medical expertise. Burke's concentrated fire squelched the incoming automatic weapons fire from the brick enclave. Once again, as he had inherently demonstrated since his youth, Robert scurried to the defense of the downtrodden. His finest moment was however yet to come on the next day.

Apparently abandoning their usual tactics of occupying two or three Marines with one shot intended only to wound (one Marine wounded accounted for at least another one or two other men needed to attend to him), the enemy was now aiming for the kill. Many if not most Marines hit were fatalities on this day, typically shot in the head or the heart. Most were thereby killed, with only a small percentage of the casualties afflicted being non-life threatening wounds. This may have been an indicator that either the NVA felt threatened by the presence of even a numerically

inferior U.S. advance, or it may have meant that they were deadly serious and perhaps desperate about keeping Go Noi Island for their very own at all costs.

May 16th saw scores of Americans and North Vietnamese killed in action, and countless others wounded.

May 17, 1968 – Le Nam (1) Hamlet

The column of three companies moved before dawn with India the lead element. The point man noticed unusual activity in the dim light as they approached a hamlet. Cooking fires and the rattling of pots and pans mixed with women laughing alerted him that they had surprised more than a dozen NVA soldiers eating breakfast. The forward elements of India opened fire and killed most of the enemy as they scurried about in a mad dash to retrieve their weapons and either escape or assume a fighting posture. The Americans captured several female members of a medical unit in the process. Enemy mortars soon were activated and a few Marines were wounded, none seriously.

This is believed to have been a staged and intentional event on the part of the NVA in order to determine U.S. strength. This small forward unit was a vanguard for a larger force located in the village of Le Nam (1). As the NVA probably expected, the Marine patrol swept to the south in search of the escaping NVA survivors. The larger NVA forces there had set up a fortified ambush against the approaching Marines. As the day wore on, this proved to be an extremely effective maneuver.

Approaching Le Nam (1) Marines encountered ten feet high elephant grass, an open area fifty feet across, and then a dry riverbed. The other side of the riverbed revealed a steep embankment beyond which was a crest near a tree line. The hamlet of Le Nam (1) was just beyond the tree line. What the Marines didn't see were the pockets of NVA in machine gun emplacements disguised at that tree line. There were no obstacles to the enemy field of fire as the Marines approached from the open land.

Enemy snipers were selective in their choice of targets. As with the previous day's activities, certain Americans were shot with the intent of killing them. But now, due to the open areas the grunts had to cross, the old NVA tactics were reverted to and some Marines were singled out as bait. Many Marines were shot, some wounded and some killed. Many men died trying to rescue the wounded from where they lay in the open. Air support was available but according to some it appeared to be partially suppressed although it was a hot, clear day. The Marines had to rely on close-in artillery fire.

Crossing the dry river bed in two columns as ordered by Capt. Thomas Ralph, Jr., India Co. CO, several men made it across the open area to the opposite bank when multiple machine gun emplacements hidden in the tree line opened fire on them. The NVA ambush had begun. Mortars, rocket-propelled grenades, and small arms fire also rained upon the trapped Americans. This murderous fire originated from

the enemy's entrenchments and reinforced bunkers in the tree line just beyond the crest of the steep dry riverbank. Several Marines were immediately hit and went down. Others, such as PFC Tom Hanson, spun in their tracks and headed back then dove into some shallow impressions in the sand earlier made by a tracked vehicle. He was quickly joined by wounded Corpsman 'Doc' D. Price, Sgt. Marron Phillips, and L/Cpl Steve Easton. Others scrambled toward either the safety of the rear area they had just left or the far left side of the river bank where the enemy fire could not as easily angle into them. Approximately three dozen men made it across the riverbed, but of that number about half were wounded and some killed.

Lt.Col. Barnard, CO of 3/7, ordered his Company G to advance to the aid of India. Medivac choppers were being blown out of their intended LZ's forcing the wounded to wait even longer for aid. G/2/7 Marines suffered heat stroke trying to inch their way to aid wounded men of Co. I. Capt. Thomas Ralph, CO of India 3/27 and 2ndLt. Marcus Fiebelkorn were killed by surprise enemy machinegun fire, then a Corpsman was also ripped to shreds by machinegun fire as he rushed in to help them. Another of Capt. Ralph's platoon commanders, 1st Lt. Lanny Dee Cummins, moved up to take command. Before he could advance, he was shot through the heart and killed instantly by a sniper. 1stLt. Stephen Thompson was the only officer left in Co. I, and he stepped up to take the reins as the acting Company Commander. He now had his hands full.

The heat was unbearable. Water became even more scarce as the day dragged on. Heat casualties mounted as the unforgiving sun lingered overhead. L/Cpl Dale Camp became "Corpsman for a day" as he moved about in aid to wounded men, including Corpsman Mike "Doc" Lutz whose arm had been shattered by an AK47 round. The exposed slope of the dry riverbed continued to be problematic. Marines hit by enemy fire lay in the sun for hours trying to not flinch for fear of being shot again. Many lay still for hours in the hot sun to avoid attracting attention, then moved almost imperceptibly, and were shot again. Charlie was watching them carefully. Marines trapped in the dry bed or just behind it in the barely concealing shrubbery provided target practice for the NVA from their fortified ambush positions.

PFC Robert Burke, teen-aged truck mechanic turned machine-gunner, had seen enough. Even though his squad leader, Sgt. Ray Allison told him not to leave his position on the far left side of the riverbank and to provide security for the unit, he bravely and autonomously snuck away and began a one-man assault on the NVA positions. Initially he set out to squelch a single sniper position. With his M60 machine gun and all the ammo he could carry he climbed the side of the crevice and one by one, applied intense suppressing fire upon the entrenched enemy units. Totally exposing himself to enemy fire, Burke's own rate of fire was so punishing that entire clusters of NVA were forced to back off to protect themselves. This provided a brief respite from enemy fire and allowed many wounded Marines to be pulled away by their comrades from the open riverbed area. The casualties could then be brought to the relative safety of the rear areas. Burke ignored the return fire and strove forward. He administered ceaseless fire into the enemy positions, to

the point of forcing more NVA out of their nests and into a futile escape run. Robert cut three of them down with one burst from his M-60.

A cadre of enemy snipers focused their full attention on Robert at this time. Burke's response was to calmly walk back and forth along the line of enemy fire, in a lateral motion along the length of the riverbed crest, eliminating one enemy nest after another. Enemy fire was again quelled briefly by the ferocity of Burke's attack, and then Robert's machine gun malfunctioned from the constant firing. Quickly reverting to a rear position, he traded the jammed M-60 for a wounded Marine's M-16 and several M-26 fragmentation grenades. While his machine gun was being field stripped and repaired of its malfunction by his comrade in arms, Burke took the M-16 back to the crest of the riverbed and again opened fire. Lobbing grenades at the enemy bunkers was no panacea as they were too heavily fortified and resisted the blasts. Realizing that one-on-one contact would be required, although dangerously exposed to enemy fire Robert then used the M16 rifle, firing from the hip, to knock out another enemy position and kill another two fleeing NVA. During this distraction from the wounded Marines in the open expanses of the riverbed, Marines seized the opportunity to regroup and hastily moved into the kill zone to rescue several more of their downed brothers from further enemy aggression.

By this time his fellow Marine had cleared the M-60 of its malfunction and it was ready to go, so he grabbed two more strands of belted 7.62mm ammo and the gun. Maneuvering back to the crest of the bank, he saturated the areas containing NVA soldiers bunker by bunker with extremely accurate and suppressing fire placement. Two more NVA fell to Burke's onslaught. An enemy sniper from some remote location fired and stopped Burke's assault. The NVA, seeing that their nemesis was now hit and down, unloaded on him. He was hit in the torso area four or five times, mortally wounded. By redirecting the fire upon himself and by eliminating many enemy positions, he had allowed the men of his Company to regroup and stage an effective assault upon the enemy positions.

Robert Burke exhibited on that stiflingly hot day in mid-May the courage, the presence of mind, the initiative, and the 'never-say-die' attitude of a United States Marine. In recognition of his selfless efforts and his actions to not only save the lives of his fellow Marines but to provide a foothold for U.S. advancement beyond a seemingly impenetrable obstacle, PFC Robert C. Burke of Monticello, Illinois was posthumously awarded his nation's highest award for bravery. The Medal Of Honor was presented by President Richard Nixon on behalf of the Congress of the United States. He was the youngest recipient of the Medal of Honor during the Vietnam War, and he remains the only member of the 27th Marine Regiment to receive it after World War Two.

The battle for Go Noi Island continued to rage on for the rest of the day of May 17. Several wounded Marines were still trapped, some until after dusk, in the riverbed area even after Burke had paid the ultimate price to give many of them a second

chance. First Marine Division and 27th Marine Regimental commanders had decided that it was time to commit the rest of the 27th Marines to the operation and give a breather to beleaguered troops. Companies K, L, and H&S had moved out from the Cau Ha Battalion Headquarters at dawn May 17 to aid their sister unit India Co. and companies of the 7th Regiment. Mike Company, 3/27 remained at the Cau Ha base camp for security until the virtually decimated India Company began its return. The men of Mike Co. would soon head for Go Noi and their own personal taste of Hell.

The 7th Marines handed operational control of Allen Brook to the 27th Marine Regiment on the evening of May 17. The last units of friendly troops would leave the island on June 6, after three more weeks of fierce battles, high casualties, prolific acts of heroism and tragically shattered dreams. India Co. returned to the island in July with other units including engineers to level the area and thereby deny it to enemy forces. But May 17, 1968 became the day to which all future references by Burke's beloved Company I to Go Noi Island would always be based. As former L/Cpl John George stated in *Every Marine: 1968 Vietnam – A Battle For Go Noi Island...by Robert A. Simonsen:*

“17 May 1968 was probably the scariest and bloodiest day of my experience in Vietnam.”

There were many heroes, and many more heroes unsung, who went above and beyond the call of duty during the second half of May 1968 on Operation Allen Brook. In addition to Burke's Medal of Honor, the Navy Cross – the nation's second highest award for bravery in action - was awarded to both Richard W. Buchanan and Charles R. Yordy of 3/27. Fifteen Silver Stars, ten Bronze Stars, and a Legion of Merit were also presented to Marines of the Third Battalion, 27th Marines. Numerous Navy Commendation Medals and Navy Achievement Medals were also earned, as were hundreds of Purple Hearts. Not all Marines deserving of praise were honored. Every Marine on Operation Allen Brook exhibited exceptional bravery, fortitude and perseverance. To single out a few heroic acts as exemplary proved to be an impossible task.

In the words of former H&S Co. 3/27 Cpl. Michael O. Chance, “Never again will I see such courage”.

Sadly, some of the men whose lives were saved by Robert Burke that day did not survive the rest of their tours in Vietnam, and some survived only to die during subsequent tours. But many of the men saved by Burke's heroic actions on Go Noi went on to become husbands, fathers, successful businessmen, advocates for veterans' rights, engineers, teachers and other types of productive, all-around good Americans. To a man they, and their families, are eternally grateful to Robert for giving each of them the chance to live beyond that day, at the cost of his own life.

The Medal of Honor marks Robert Burke's sacrifice for his country and his brothers. In addition, the honors to his memory are numerous. In his hometown of

Monticello, Illinois, a wall in the Piatt County Courthouse displays his photos and awards, including the actual Medal of Honor he earned on Go Noi Island. A City Park in his hometown of Monticello was renamed in his honor. His name graces buildings and halls in USMC bases at the USMC Recruit Depot in San Diego, California, the Marine Base in Quantico, Virginia, and a street at the Camp Miramar Training Facility in California.

Recently the 3/27 Reunion Committee learned that one of Robert's nephews was undergoing recruit training at MCRD San Diego. The veterans arranged for an impromptu reunion and insisted upon visiting with the nephew. Receiving guests is a rare treat indeed to be afforded a recruit in training, even for one of legacy status. Everyone knows that Every Marine is created equal.

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About the author: Terry W. Rigney is a former Marine Sergeant and Combat Intelligence Analyst. He served in Vietnam with the S-2 (Intelligence) section of 3/27 from Feb. - May 1968. At the onset of Operation Allen Brook he served with the 27th Marines Regimental S-2 and spent three weeks (May 19 – June 6) with the Regimental Forward Command Group at Liberty Bridge, Go Noi Island, in support of the combat operation.