

MISSOURI STATE SOCIETY DAUGHTERS OF THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION

Proudly Honors



DAVID LIGHTLE

UNITED STATES ARMY

SPECIALIST 5 (E-5)

MAY 2, 1967 – MAY 1, 1969

WOUNDED IN ACTION FEBRUARY 2, 1968

as

PURPLE HEART PATRIOT

JULY 2025

Honoring His Service and Sacrifice

Sponsored by: Valley of the Meramec Chapter, NSDAR



Specialist 5 David Lightle served in Company C, 2nd Battalion, 3rd Infantry (The Old Guard) and then served in the 199th Light Infantry Brigade in Long Binh, South Vietnam from October 1967 to February 1968.

December 21, 1967

I'm 23 years old and in the ARMY. I'm pulling the first guard watch in a hostile jungle place halfway around the world in a country called South Vietnam. It's hot and smelly and the mosquitos are terrible. Last February I graduated from college and started a career. In May, I left a girlfriend and civilian job with the USDA and answered my country's call. I took an oath to serve and defend my country for two years or ultimately pay that obligation with my life, which ever comes first.

Everything about this place is unfamiliar and foreign. I don't want to be here. I'm anxious and edgy. I'm an 11 Bravo, Light Weapons Infantry soldier with Charley Company, 2nd Battalion, 3rd Infantry, of the 199th Light Infantry Brigade. We carry our M16 rifles, ammo, hand grenades, smoke grenades, C4 explosive, canteen, poncho and a change of underwear and socks, and a day's C rations in our packs. I'm also carrying a 25 pound radio and spare battery as I'm RTO for the Platoon Leader, LT Hume. He and I are the only 2 college graduates in the 4th Platoon. There are small people here dressed in black pajamas and round pointy straw hats called Viet Cong, "Charley" or VC that are trying to kill me and my Army brothers in all kinds of nasty ways. Everything I see, smell or hear could be Charley.*

There are no cell phones, computers, telephones or Skype. I write letters home when I get

time and get a reply in about 3 weeks. We pulled out of our relatively secure Mekong Delta village location right after Thanksgiving and are now Northeast of Long Binh in more tropical woodland or jungle terrain.

14 January, 1968,
FireBase Camp Nashua

Dear Folks,

Things have been pretty hectic lately and I couldn't write. It's pretty tonight and the moon and stars are bright, so I'll try to get a little written before guard.

I remember gazing at the stars and constellations thinking that this is the only familiar thing I'd seen since arriving in Viet Nam and that God is watching over me. I pray for my safety and for my buddy's and sort of remembered a Bible verse from Sunday School or MYF** that gave me some comfort:

"For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future." Jeramiah 29:11

2 February, 1968 93rd Evac Hospital

Dear Folks,

Hope you have been notified by now about me getting hurt. ...It was about 2 AM this morning as my Company was escorting a group of Armored Personnel Carriers down a road to help out another company who were surrounded by VC about 2000 meters north of Ben Hoa.There are an awful lot of North Vietnamese Army soldiers in the area. The 200 we killed the night before last were all NVA.They blew up the AMMO depot at Long Bien and mortared the airfield at BenHoa Air Force Base. No doubt there was news about the attack on Saigon. Seems to a big push by them to take over the capital.

(This was the beginning of the large scale simultaneous attack on all US facilities in South Viet Nam to be known as the Tet Offensive in 1968.)

I got hit in the right forearm just above the wrist and the medic was close by and used my radio to call in the dust-off. They Flew me right in to the 93rd Evac at Long Bien and operated on my arm at about 3AM. There is no feeling in the back of my right hand now so the piece of shrapnel about an inch and a half long that went clear through my arm, must have cut a nerve. I'm trying to write with my right hand but it feels like I'm using a dead stump. I'll keep you posted on how I'm getting along. Don't worry though, they'll probably have me back in the field in a couple of weeks.... Hope you're feeling better Grandma. Sorry I couldn't write a little more cheerful letter.... Love, David

"I was treated at the 93rd Evac Hospital at Long Binh and flown to a hospital at Camp Drake near Tokyo Japan a day or two later. The



doctors there decided to send me back to the states because of the nerve damage in my arm and hand. I was feeling survivor guilt, mild depression while also feeling relief that I'm going home.

I transferred to Irwin Army Hospital at Ft. Riley, Kansas to recuperate and got to go home a couple times on convalescent leave. It was on one of those trips that I was spit on by a skinhead protestor at Lambert Airport in St Louis.

I also got a "Dear John" letter from my girlfriend, Karen, sometime in March 1968. Except it started out *"Dear Dave...I'm sorry you got wounded and happy you're home, but I found someone else while you were gone and don't want to see you."*....She had a child late in the summer 1968.

Because many of us were individual replacements serving 1 year tours there were no expressions of thanks for our serviced, no redeployment ceremonies, no welcome home parades, no standing ovations at airports or cheering crowds. We flew home and faded back into the population after finishing our time. Viet Nam vets resorted to welcoming each other home since no one else did.

I served my remaining 13 months at Ft Benning, Georgia and wrote back and forth to my buddy, John Siotkas, back in my old platoon several times and learned that quite a number of the 4th platoon were killed or wounded during the spring and summer of 1968 after I was evacuated. I got on with my life, married the office secretary where I worked at Ft Benning and buried the memories of Viet Nam as best I could in back corners of my mind. I got out of the Army in 1969, went back to my civilian job and went to church sporadically. Between 1969 and 2010 I moved 7 times and climbed the government employee ladder, divorced and remarried, and had occasional flashbacks and unpleasant memories from 1967 and 1968. Sandy and I started going to church again in the late 1980's. We've been active members of Aldergate UMC in Lincoln, NE and First Washington UMC totaling more than 30 years.

I still struggle with flashbacks today and bruised ribs when Sandy elbows me when I scream during nightmares in the middle of the night.

Just the effort it took for the 77 year old me to read the letters from the 23 year old me and to share these events with you that I associate with this time of the year have been helpful. I'm still a work in progress but I'm gaining a better understanding of God's plan for me mentioned in Jeramiah 29:11. His plans are sure, true and faithful but this scripture doesn't mean you will never experience problems or trials in your life. God's plan for you is to prosper and grow you spiritually in Christ in the very situation you are in right now."

David received his Purple Heart February 2, 1968, in his hospital bed at the 93rd Evac Hospital.

Excerpts taken from a talk given by David on December 21, 2021