

50 YEARS LATER

A Healing Journey — Arlington to Vietnam by Jackie Wright

WHEN PHYLLIS WRIGHT CAMERON SIGNED UP FOR THE University of California, East Bay's Global Innovators MBA Program, she had no idea that her educational path would lead to a new understanding of her father's legacy in the Vietnam War. Phyllis was six months old at the time of Sp5 Wyley Wright Jr.'s death on Monday, March 9, 1964. She was the youngest of four, with siblings ranging in age from 5 to 10. Growing up, Phyllis had heard only brief whispers about the terrible blow the death was to her mother, Ouida, who died just six years after her beloved husband. As she grew, Phyllis' point of reference for her parents was a long-ago anniversary gift: two 8.5x11 hand-painted photos by a Vietnamese artist.

A 32-year-old career soldier, Wyley Wright was two weeks from coming home, having completed a year of service with the 114th Aviation Company. The 114th, "Knights of the Air," were known as "the first to come and the last to leave" Vietnam. The demands on the unit, which built the first airstrip in rough terrain in Vinh Long, about an hour-and-a-half south of Saigon, were grueling. Wright, a helicopter crew chief from Jacksonville, FL, had been chosen as an honor guard for Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara. He died with his comrade, 21-year-old PFC John Francis Shea, when their helicopter crashed into the Mekong River. News headlines at the time stated that McNamara saw the helicopter go down.

The Wright Family did what most military families do when their loved one dies at war. They honor the dead and march on, speaking very little about the loss. The Wright children, having lost both their parents at an early age, felt doubly compelled to be "good little soldiers" with "stiff upper lips." But their silence was shattered at a rare family reunion held in Jacksonville over the July 4th weekend in 2012. Suddenly, their father became the subject of conversation when they discovered that he was buried in an unmaintained grave in a segregated Jacksonville cemetery. They felt that their father, recipient of an Air Medal with 13 Oak Leaf Clusters, had not sacrificed a segregated life and should not be in a forgotten grave.

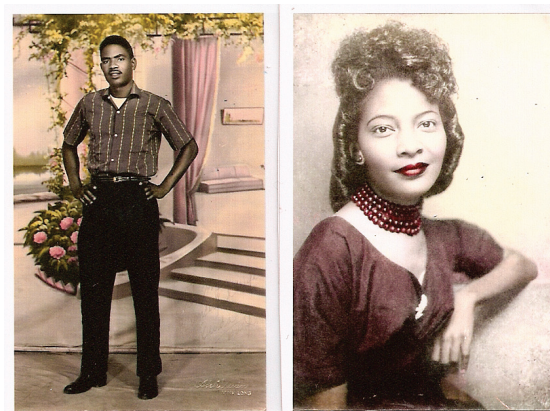
The Wright children, Jackie of San Francisco; Joe, a US Army Veteran, of Columbus, GA; Stanley of Orangeburg, SC; and Phyllis of Antioch, CA, began pooling their

resources to move the remains of both of their parents (Ouida was buried in the Green Acres Cemetery in Columbus, GA) to Arlington National Cemetery. During the 150th Anniversary of Arlington National Cemetery, on March 10, 2014, after fifty years of separation, the couple were joined together in a ceremony entitled "Love Separated in Life...Love Reunited In Honor."



Months after Arlington, Phyllis' MBA Program announced that students would travel to Vietnam for their international project. Phyllis and Jackie decided to go four days ahead of the MBA group to try to find the US Army base known as "Shannon Wright Compound." Until recently, the siblings had had no idea that his comrades honored Wright by naming the base named after him and 1Lt. Kenneth A. Shannon, a helicopter pilot who died at age 25 on March 15, 1964, leaving a wife, a babe in arms and a toddler.

After 50 years, in a single day, the sisters found the Shannon Wright Compound, as well as the family of the photographer, Quan Van Phat, who made the anniver-



sary photos their dad had signed: "To Ouida, The Love of My Life." They explained to Quang Thi Anh Dao, a photographer herself, that her father's work is treasured in the Wright family.

From Arlington to Vietnam, the Wrights say the lesson learned was that military families should

not hide the pain of war. They should talk about it and they will surely find points of inspiration to help them march forward. For more details of the Wrights' story, search online for Sp5 Wyley Wright Jr.



From top: Sp5 Wyley Wright Jr., US Army and Ouida Wright; Military Honors for Sp5 Wyley Wright Jr. and his wife, reburied at Arlington National Cemetery; Jackie Wright and Phyllis Wright Cameron at the Shannon Wright Compound gate, Vinh Long, Vietnam

Marine Day Luncheon Features Brigadier General David Ottignon

14 JANUARY MARKED THE FIRST meeting of 2016 for the Marine Corps Coordinating Council of the San Francisco Bay Area. Colonel (Ret.) Al Cruz presided over the luncheon where Staff Sergeant Henry Tassinari was honored as the Coordinating Council's Marine of the Year, while Brigadier General David Ottignon was on hand to provide remarks as guest speaker. Henry served with distinction in the Korean War and continues to lead Marines, especially in 2015, which proved a busy year for Bay Area Council events. Following the ceremony, at which Henry received a standing ovation, Brigadier General Ottignon updated the Council on the priorities of the 37th Commandant, General Robert Neller. He also shared some facts about our current Corps of Marines. As of January, the

service was just over 182,000 active duty Marines with 29,000 deployed overseas in 31 countries and afloat. Seven Marine Expeditionary Units provide combatant commanders with mission scalable and tailorable forces to respond to contingencies and crises. Two Special Purpose Marine Air Ground Task Forces are deployed in Europe and the Middle East, conducting Theater Security Cooperation and Partner Nation Support missions. They are also prepared to respond to contingencies. General Ottignon's discussion also addressed recruitment and budget. Only one in four Americans in the military service age range are physically qualified to join the Armed Forces. Less than 2% of citizens nowadays opt to serve in the all-volunteer force. The Marine Corps remains one of the youngest



of the services, with over 61% of Marines being 25 years old or younger. Thirty-seven percent of Marines hold the rank of Lance Corporal (E3) or below. The Corps comprises 7% of the DoD budget, and from that, provides 21% of the Department's infantry battalions, 15% of the fighter and attack aircraft, 11% of the artillery battalions, and a force in readiness deployable by sea. Brigadier General Ottignon's entire presentation to the Council is available at www.marineclub.com/videos/.

L-R: CAPT Tom Snyder, USN (Ret.), SSgt Henry Tassinari, Marylou Tassinari, BrigGen David Ottignon, and retired Col Al Cruz



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