

11 October 2002

Mayor Christopher Dickneite
City of Westphalia
P.O. Box 236
Westphalia, Missouri 65085

Dear Mayor Dickneite:

I traveled to Washington, D.C. recently, and as I always do when time permits, stopped by the Viet Nam Memorial – the ‘Wall’. If you’ve visited the memorial you are aware that there are concessions nearby that sell military, and in particular, Vietnam War memorabilia.

As I struck up a conversation with the aging veteran tending one of these concessions, I began to scan through the engraved bracelets with the names of those U.S. servicemen who remain among the missing in action from that conflict. I came across a bracelet bearing the name of Bernard H. Plassmeyer, Lt. USMC, and that is why I am writing to you.

I was struck by several coincidences and wanted to write to the Plassmeyer family to express my gratitude for Bernard’s service to our country. I hesitate to do so because the last thing I want to do is evoke painful memories. In this regard, I am asking for your guidance. The coincidences I mention are several and personal as well. We lived only a few miles apart as youngsters and were similarly only a few miles apart when Bernard went missing.

I was born and raised in St Louis, but moved to Jefferson City in 1954 at the age of 14. I spent 22 years in the U.S. Army and am now living in Florida. I have a sister living in Loose Creek, not far from Westphalia.

The most striking coincidence is that I was in Viet Nam at the same place and time as Bernard. I know that he was a U.S.M.C. pilot of an A4E Skyhawk and went missing on September 11 1970, quite likely during a mission in response to our desperate situation. I can recall the period vividly.

I was assigned to the U.S. Army’s 101st Airborne Division. July through September of 1970 was a most difficult time for us. Our major fire support bases were at the eastern edge and southern approach to the A Shau Valley, near the Laotian border. It was a heavily fortified and well-defended stronghold and sanctuary of the North Vietnamese Army. The previous year the 101st Airborne sent troopers into the A Shau Valley for operation Apache Snow. A major battle would soon ensue at a place marked on the map as Hill 937, Dong Ap Bia, that would later be known to the world as Hamburger Hill.

In July 1970 the NVA opposed us in tremendous strength around Hill 1000 and Firebase Ripcord. The 101st Airborne Division suffered casualties but, with the help of U.S.M.C air support, was able to inflict even heavier casualties on NVA forces opposing our positions. These same Marine flyers provided air cover when the 101st Airborne Division found it prudent to evacuate Firebase Ripcord. U.S. Air Force B52's obliterated the firebase after our withdrawal.

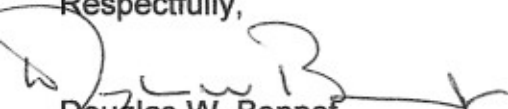
In August 1970, I moved a small reconnaissance team, previously located at Firebase Ripcord, to Firebase O'Reilly. There were four American Enlisted Men and one Australian Army Officer at this firebase manned by elements of the 1st Infantry Division, Army of South Viet Nam. We were under siege from the first week in September 1970, until the firebase was closed in early October because of the inability to re-supply during the heavy Monsoon rains beginning in October.

The siege of Firebase O'Reilly was as fierce and relentless as that of Firebase Ripcord, with continuous rocket and mortar attack followed by Sappers and massed Infantry attacks by the North Vietnamese Army. Two of my three team members were severely wounded during that siege, as were many of the South Vietnamese Army defenders. However, the firebase was not abandoned as a result of NVA combat actions, but because of the onset of seasonal monsoon weather. Tactical air support provided by U.S.M.C pilots flying from their base in Da Nang made the difference.

The tactical skills of these dedicated Marine pilots were critical to our survival as well as the successful fulfillment of our mission. These combat actions are now but a footnote in the history of this troublesome era. But those of us who were there on the ground, will never forget the selfless and heroic actions of these Marine flyers who supported U.S. and allied Army forces. We relied on their help and they gave it skillfully, without question, without hesitation.

I didn't know Lt. Bernard Plassmeyer but I wish I had. There is a kinship among those who have experienced hardship and sacrifice together. The strongest of these bonds are among men who have experienced horrific combat against a most determined foe. I am grateful for his service to our country and profoundly saddened by his sacrifice. I feel Bernard's loss as deeply as many others that owe him a debt of gratitude we can never repay. This is what I would like to convey, with deepest respect, to those of his family that may still reside in Westphalia. I leave it to your discretion to pass this message to them or to destroy it if you believe it may cause even a moment's anguish.

Respectfully,



Douglas W. Bonnot
1SG, US Army (Ret)
Lauderhill, Florida