

NORMAN LANE JR. MEMORIAL PROJECT

"FOR THOSE WHO FIGHT FOR IT, LIFE HAS A
FLAVOR THE PROTECTED NEVER KNOW."

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To Friends of Norman Lane,

Last September Allen Willyerd recalled his very early morning arrival, by Greyhound bus, at Parris Island (PI), South Carolina. The date was Friday, September 2, 1966. Norman Lane was finishing his second week of OCS at Quantico, and Richard Carlton and I were beginning our freshman years at Haywood High School back in Brownsville, Tennessee. Allen had graduated there in 1964, and Norman had taught there over the 1965-1966 school year. Allen's introduction to the Marine Corps went like this, in his own words (with slight edits for easier reading):

It is still very dark, somewhere I guess around 05:00; I can see the lights, in the distance, of the main base. As we got closer I was seeing these real small lights, like lightning bugs moving, too far away to tell what they were. The closer we got I could tell they were going up and down, moving along, what could that possibly be? Well when we got closer I could tell that it was 60 to 70 guys running with flashlights. OK must be some different group, something I guess like Recon or Seals out running that time of morning. Well anyway we pulled up at a building, and a smallish Marine maybe a little over 5 feet came in the door, with a voice that I know you could hear for at least 5 miles. Now when you get really scared your knees will shake . . . they really will, really, I know mine have done that 2 times in my life, and now they were going 100 mph. What have I gotten myself into? All I could think of is, where is my Momma? About 2-3 hrs later they let us eat, scrambled

<http://www.normanlanejrmemorialproject.org/>

eggs with shells and burnt bacon, Momma!!!! Now as for sleep, it was 2 more days before I saw my first bed, or rack as the Corps calls them. We were picked up by our Drill Instructors, and I was in Plt 1053. That was when we got to our rack that nite, after 21:00. Did I sleep . . . not sure, just passed out.

And as far as that bunch of special Marines out running, well I found out that it was all Marines at PI. Always had to get up and run 1-3 miles every morn and then go eat. I wanted to tell them that I would just skip breakfast if I could just sleep a little longer and not have to run, as I really didn't like breakfast anyway. But decided that I probably didn't need to say that.

Fifty years later, on another Friday, in October, 2016, Allen Willyerd is visiting the Vietnam Veterans Memorial for the first time – with his wife Mary, my wife Terry, and myself. We are there for a special Wreath Laying Ceremony – in memory of Norman Lane and the 46 other men from his OCS and Basic School classes who gave their lives in Vietnam. We find Norman's name, and then there is the name of Allen's radioman, Charles Russell Jerome Menton III, who was mortally wounded on Hill 689. Terry is taking pictures, and it will be several days before they are downloaded to a laptop at home. Going through them, I look at the photo of Norman's name on the Wall – Norman E Lane Jr – Panel 47E, Line 2. In the instant that Terry had snapped the photograph (see photo, page 1), Allen's reflection was frozen on that section of the memorial. Two days later, at an emotional Memorial Service in Leatherneck Gallery, National Museum of the Marine Corps, Allen spoke in behalf of Norman Lane:

It's quite an honor for me to come to Quantico and see where the elite trained, and slept. It's been a pleasure to be up here . . . but I'm reminded of the cost that was paid for me to be at this podium, and it was paid by your classmate and my friend – Norman Lane.

In his recollection of his first day at Parris Island, Allen also remembered the day he graduated, in the top 10% of his training class:

10% of your class makes PFC out of PI . . . that was 7 in my class of 70+. I was one of them, so I did adjust. And the last day at your graduation, for the first time, after being called the lowest form of life for 10 weeks you are called a MARINE. A very proud moment after all the hell that you have endured, a moment that you never forget . . . and from that day forward you are always a proud MARINE.

Semper Fi

Five years ago, on Monday night, February 3, 2014, after more than a few failed searches and attempts to make contact, the caller ID on our home television set lit up. Immediately recognizing Allen Willyerd's Arkansas area code and number for the first time, I jumped up. We talked as people from Brownsville usually do, as though we had known each other forever. That conversation, in my mind today, was the beginning of this Project.

* * *

I have spent a good bit of time over the last month, taking almost all of the stories that I have distributed – from January 11, 2015, to December 21, 2018 – and arranging them in a thematic order. There is new writing, both in terms of short introductions to these themes and to specific stories, and in terms of a beginning and an ending. The Contents of the new Index follow:

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"Index to Stories: January 11, 2015 to December 21, 2018"

Pages (within the 30-page Index)

1- 5	The Families, the War, and the Remembrance – Part I
5- 8	The Vietnam War: Eighteen Months – July 28, 1965 to January 27, 1967
8-17	Norman Lane, the Marine Corps, and Vietnam – June 22, 1966 to March 29, 1968
17-23	"The odyssey continues . . . past Scylla and Charybdis, and on to the Island of the Sun . . ."

- 23-24 "In the beginning . . ."
24-25 "Two years passed . . ."
25-30 The Families, the War, and the Remembrance – Part II

To access any one story, you can click on either the link given within the Index or on the thumbnail photo/image for that story.

Since the Index itself is 30 pages, I decided not to attach it to this e-mail. To access the Index, just follow this link:

<https://tinyurl.com/Index-Feb-3-2019>

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In closing, I will say that none of this would ever have taken place without that first phone call from Allen Willyerd. A very large number of people have contributed in many ways to the Project to this point, and all of you have my heartfelt thanks. As the first phase of the work concludes, the second phase has already begun.

Thank you.

Al Claiborne, Professor Emeritus
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