

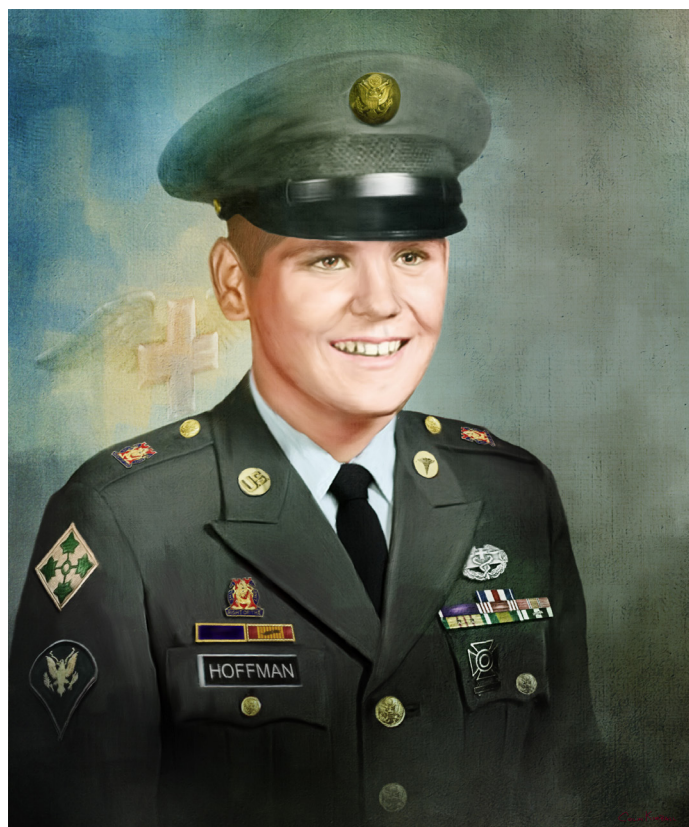
THEY NEVER GOT OLD ENOUGH TO BUY A BEER

by Ronnie D. Foster



In March of 1966, I turned 18 and joined the United States Marine Corps. Two weeks after my high school graduation, my friend Bill Bryan and I reported in to the Marine Recruit Depot, San Diego, California. Three years later I returned to my home of McKinney, Texas, a 21-year-old veteran, very grateful to be back from where I had started. Although physically in excellent condition, I was carrying around a lot of baggage and memories of my tours in Vietnam, Okinawa and the Philippines. Part of that baggage was about my friend Bill. He didn't make it home.

I often think of the last time I saw Bill. After Boot Camp we had been sent our separate ways and it would be about a year before I would see him again. That happened on a Sunday afternoon at an



enlisted men's club at Camp Pendleton, California. We weren't kids anymore; we were United States Marines. So, since we considered ourselves grown men now, we decided to go to the bar and buy each other a beer. The only problem was we weren't old enough to buy a beer, so we settled for a chocolate milkshake instead.

Just about five months later, in January of 1968, Cpl. Bill Bryan was killed in action while leading a seven-man team on a reconnaissance mission deep in the jungle-covered mountains just south of the DMZ in South Vietnam. His small team ran up against a full North Vietnamese Army battalion on Hill 881 North. Bill was posthumously awarded the Navy Cross for his heroic actions that day. He never did get old enough to buy a beer.

On the Wall of Honor at the Veterans Memorial Park in McKinney, Texas, there are 424 names etched into the shiny black granite.

These are Collin County men, and one woman, who died while in the service of our country, dating as far back as the 1840s. As one of my roles in the creation of the memorial, I have spent hundreds and hundreds of hours researching each and every one of those names. One of the most heartbreaking facts I learned was just how many of those heroes never got old enough to buy a beer.

In partnership with the Collin County History Museum in McKinney, Texas, I am writing a series of books telling the stories of all 424 of these heroes. There are many names on the wall whose ages could not be confirmed. Of those we have identified, there are four boys that were only 17 years old. Thirteen were 18, 32 were 19, and 37 died at the age of 20.

In our newest edition, "Collin County Freedom Fighters – The Vietnam War" the stories are told of 28 young men who died during that war. Of those great heroes 13 were under the age of 21.

Royce Scoggins dropped out of school in 1966 and joined the Marines. Royce would not only be the first Collin County boy to be killed in Vietnam, but at 18, one of the three youngest. In March of 1966, as a machine gunner, he would be among the first US Marines to go up against the North Vietnamese Army. Royce was killed by enemy rifle fire while valiantly holding his position against advancing enemy troops in a bloody, hand-to-hand combat situation.

Sp4 Martin Leroy Rodgers, a helicopter crew chief with the 5th

Collin County History Museum
Presents

McKinney
Then &
now

The exhibit is open every Thursday, Friday & Saturday from 10am-4pm
Admission is **FREE!**

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info@collincountyhistoricalsociety.org

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