

Heroes Among Us...

As We Honor Our Veterans This Veterans' Day, We Remember Alumni Who Served in Vietnam

by William "Bill" Clark, DDS, Class of 1965

The University of Texas Dental Branch (now The University of Texas Health Science Center at Houston School of Dentistry) produced at least three combat heroes during the Vietnam War. There were probably others. As a member of the class of 1965, my information is restricted to the the classes of 1965 and 1966. Also, the details that I will share are second and third hand and will therefore be incomplete and have inaccuracies.

Our first hero, **Navy Lieutenant Robert Perry Mills, Jr.**, made the ultimate sacrifice, losing his life while serving in a combat Marine unit. He was assigned to the 3rd Marine Division and was



providing dental care at the Cua Viet Base approximately five miles south of the Demilitarized Zone in the Quang Tri province. Dr. Mills was from Arlington and was a member of the class of 1966.

Being one of only four dentists to be killed in Vietnam he was the only one of two that I know of who was killed under combat conditions. Dr. Mills was survived by his wife, daughter and mother. The dental clinic where he worked was named *The Robert Perry Mills Memorial Dental Clinic* in his honor. It was destroyed when the North

Vietnamese forces captured the area. Sometime later *The Robert Perry Mills, Jr., Medical and Dental Clinic* was established at the Naval Air Station in Fort Worth and it is still in operation.

Of note, two dentists died in combat in the Korean War and two were MIA. There were 116 dentists killed in WWII and one of them received the Medal of Honor.

I am told that every able-bodied male member of the nation's dental school classes of 1966 was drafted. My class had many volunteers and a number who did not volunteer were drafted in 1966.

Our second and third heroes were members of my class and were close friends of mine. Both were Houston natives. **Army Captains Mark Davis** and **Alvis McConnell** served together as members of the First Infantry Division, the so-called *Big Red One*. They fashioned a sign that read "If you have to have a cavity, have a Big Red One." They used the motto of the First Infantry Division (No Mission Too Difficult. No Sacrifice Too Great. Duty First!) as inspiration for their dental motto: "No extraction too hard. No cavity too big. Anesthesia First."

I was serving stateside in the Fifth Infantry Division, Mechanized, and trying to use the foot-treadle operated dental units of the day while in field operations. At the same time, Mark and Alvis were fabricating dental chairs out of 55 gallon drums and added Jeep seats while adapting compressed gas-powered, high-speed hand pieces to the field environment. They were responsible for designing new equipment to serve troops in the field and adapting modern equipment to the field environment. They received recognition and awards for their work and photographs of them working on patients in the back of a two and one half ton truck were featured in several publications.



Unlike many of the dentists who served in Vietnam, they worked in the field, not in cities. They came under hostile fire on numerous occasions and performed some heroic feats during some of those attacks. Alvis received at least one metal for valor in combat. Both received Bronze Star Metals for their service.

After their military service, both returned to Houston to practice General Dentistry. Alvis practiced in Houston until his untimely death in the 1970s. Mark practiced in Houston for a few years and then moved to Miami, Florida, where he served his fellow veterans by providing dental care in the Miami VA Healthcare System. After 20 years in Miami, he moved to Central Florida where he continued working for the VA system for 10 more years while serving on the part-time faculty of the School of Dentistry at the University of Florida. After retiring from the VA system with 30 years of faithful service, he became a full-time faculty member at the University of Florida.

I overlapped with Mark for two and a half years while serving on the Medical School faculty at Florida. He thought that I was in San Antonio and I thought that he was in Miami and our paths did not cross despite the fact that the Medical and Dental Schools are under one roof and the ENT clinic shared a hall and a restroom with the dental school.

Mark led many Christian Dental Missionary trips to Nicaragua during his time in Central Florida. He is now enjoying retirement with his wonderful wife, Della.

While we may question the wisdom of those who sent our alumni into battle, we cannot question the valor, dedication and braveness that these three fine men showed in service to their country.

Congratulations

to the following nominees for the Distinguished Alumnus Award

Michael Anton	Webster
Mance Cutbirth	Corpus Christi
Michael Goulding	Fort Worth
Ron Hill	Houston
Ernest Luce	San Antonio
Anne Lyon	Austin
Dwight Peccora	Missouri City
Shelley Seidel	Houston



UTSD Alumni Association Board of Directors

Dr. Ron Collins, *President*
Dr. Elizabeth Hunsaker, *President-Elect*
Dr. Carol Price Dupuis, *Secretary/Treasurer*

Dr. David Fray,
Immediate Past President

Directors-at-Large
Dr. Matthew Franzen
Dr. Lynn Hammond
Dr. Karen Walters

Tricia Fullerton, *Executive Director*
Kathy Zwiag, *Assistant Executive Director*

Bonds and Bridges is a publication of
The Alumni Association, UTSD
P.O. Box 56667
Houston, TX 77256

Upcoming Events

Friday, November 17, 2023
Dinner with Friends
Petroleum Club of Houston

Saturday, January 6, 2024
White Coat Ceremony
University of Houston Campus

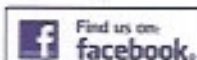
March 2024
2024 Senior Social

April 2024
CE Program

May 16-18, 2024
Texas Dental Association Meeting
San Antonio, Texas

Star of the South Meeting
July 26-27, 2024
Marriott Marquis, Houston

SmileCon/ADA Meeting
October 17-19, 2024
New Orleans, LA



Contact your Alumni Association for Class Reunions in 2024

In Memoriam

Class of 1961

Eugene H La Geese, Jr.

Class 1964

Arthur Leroy Baer, Jr.

Stanley L. Jones

Leonard Jackson "Jack" Williams

Class 1966

Hubert Carl Askew, Jr.

David M. Garrett

Class 1967

Tommy L. Thomson

Class 1968

Geoffrey O. Drake

Class of 1969

Larry Steve Steinberg

Chew on These Fun Facts!



A Really Big Mouth

Minnesota's Isaac Johnson holds the Guinness record for the world's largest mouth. He can open his orifice 10.196 cm. (4.014 in.), large enough to fit his fist, an orange, or four stacked McDonald's cheeseburgers.



Musical Teeth

The quijada, a Latin American musical instrument, is crafted from dried skeletal remains of a donkey's jawbone. Teeth are loosened and broken to create rattling sounds when shaken.



Paleoproteomics

Teeth can preserve antibodies for centuries, enabling scientists to learn more about historical diseases and contributing to the field of paleoproteomics. A recent University of Nottingham study revealed that functional microbodies from 800-year-old teeth still recognized viral proteins.



FROM YOUR
UTSD ALUMNI ASSOCIATION

Serving our Alumni since 1957

P.O. Box 56667
Houston, Texas 77256

utsd
ALUMNI
association