



Motto of the 2nd Battalion 8th Cavalry "The Stallions"

50th Year Commemoration

PFC William J. Makowski

October 16, 1951 – October 21, 1971

Dear family members, neighbors, friends, fellow Vietnam Veterans, who are here to commemorate and mark the 50th anniversary when William John Makowski, "Bill," was killed in direct action with an enemy force in Binh Tuy Province, Republic of Vietnam on 21 October 1971.

We stand here on very Hallowed Ground, this Field of Valor! Fifty-Five of our nations combat fallen have been laid here to rest. Bill Makowski was interred here on 28 October 1971 leaving behind a deeply bereaved mother and father – and two sisters. And he also left behind comrades in arms --- who immensely respected his valorous actions -----in the late afternoon/early evening hours of 21 October 1971.

Try to imagine being back in Vietnam in 1971. It is September, you are 19 years old and reporting into a 1st Cavalry Division air cavalry infantry unit, Delta Company, 2nd of the 8th Cavalry, The Angry Skippers, engaged in combat. Most of the time there were 45-day operations in the triple canopy jungle

around Highway 1 North East of Bien Hoa – actively operating against the 33rd North Vietnamese Regiment, the 274th Viet Cong Regiment and 122mm Rocket Units. Bill was in RANGE (2nd) Platoon, which was composed of a cross section of America – Navajo Indians, Hispanics, African Americans from the south and the northern cities, and sons of rural and Middle America – all thrown together.

They were all bound by one desire – do their job as the country asked them to do, do it well, and get home safely. They were not draft dodgers, nor had fled to Canada.

They believed in service to the nation, undertook the hardships, and bonded as other generations had done before them – into battle buddies, - comrades in arms. They shared water, canned “C” rations, onions, Tabasco sauce, and Long-Range Patrol Rations, laughed at the misery of incessant monsoon rains, leeches, scorpions, bamboo vipers, and prepared for the worst when firefights seemed eminent with the enemy. They displayed honor and courage – on the ground and in the air assaults when we took enemy rounds.

Four weeks after arriving in our unit, Bill was part of a Security Patrol headed by his Squad Leader Doug Hilts on 21 October 1971. The Squad’s mission was to conduct the final patrol around his Platoon’s Night Defense Perimeter. They were part of RANGE, the 2nd Platoon, Delta Company 8th Cavalry, The Angry Skippers.

Bill's job in his squad was a very important one – M-60 Machine Gunner – the trusted fire power one needed in any firefight. He had just taken on the M-60 Machine gun, from a departing Squad member. He had put his newly assigned weapon, along with the Assistant Gunner, through the paces with a series of live fire drills on the firing range at Firebase Jeffries before we went out on this particular 45-day combat mission rotation into the foothills of the Nui Be Mountain Range where there was a suspected, major VC/NVA base area. He carried the M-60 across his chest, at the ready, and he had a full bandoleer of ammunition slung around him and chambered in his Machine gun – all for quick reaction response in case of a contact with the enemy.

His platoon had found fresh cuttings in the triple canopy jungle that day – a sure sign that an enemy was somewhere nearby. So, the squad was cautious, careful, and quiet as it executed its security patrol duties.

Suddenly a rolling sound of AK-47s was heard – both by the rest of RANGE Platoon, and further away, by me, then with CAT (3rd) Platoon – some 400 meters away. This was followed two seconds later by a crescendo of M-16 rifle and M-60 machine gun sounds lasting some time – a firefight in progress with an enemy force.

The enemy had spotted the Security Patrol squad and had opened fire first, along with a Rifle Propelled Grenade (RPG). Bill Makowski, after firing a burst of M-60 Machine Gun in

direct fire against the enemy ---was hit. His squad leader, Doug Hiltz, along with the radio operator, Jean “Dizzy” Blais, were able to drag Bill Makowski behind the cover of two fallen trees – and then got him back inside his platoon perimeter where the platoon medic treated him – as best he could.

The wound was so serious, the bleeding could not be stopped, and Bill passed away among his RANGE Platoon battle buddies. That evening his body was hoisted from the battlefield into a helicopter by our battalion commander, Col. Tom Blagg.

Much later we learned that the Squad leader had a bullet or shrapnel ricochet through his helmet and the Squad’s radio operator had a small shrapnel splinter in his facial tissue – sure signs that a claymore mine had also been detonated.

The next day we did run up against an immense, defended bunker complex. While artillery and air strikes pounded it for 24 hours – our company was brought back to Firebase Jefferies to hold our Fallen Soldier ceremony for Bill Makowski.

It was a quiet, touching ceremony with the Company in formation. In front of us --- Bill’s helmet, on top of an M-16 rifle with affixed bayonet in the ground, muddy jungle boots in front of the rifle - as the final Roll Call was made, and Taps were sounded.

All of us were lost in deep thought of how fleeting an Infantryman's life can be with a determined enemy opposing us. Our prayers were for him, and his grieving family – left behind in the United States. Bill was but 20 years old and had just celebrated his 20th birthday – five days prior.

That evening, on Firebase Jefferies – I wrote the official letter of condolence to his mother. As a commander, it was truly the hardest thing *I ever, and I mean ever,* did in 30 years of service to the nation.

Here was Bill, in the prime of his life, the only son in his family, who had volunteered for the Draft, taken away from us – in such an untimely manner – not only from us – his comrades in arms - but especially his family whose hopes and dreams for Bill – had been shattered in a split second. *And, whose sacrifice was not appreciated by the American public.*

In short, two lives had been ended – the physical life of William John Makowski, and the life of hopes and dreams for Bill – that his classmates from Kensington High school, the staff at Arcata Graphics that he had worked at, his National Guard unit, his girlfriend (JoJo), his bereaved mother, father, two sisters and extended family --- all had for him in the years ahead.

So, as we gather here today at his gravesite, let us reflect on William's sacrifice for his nation, his comrades in arms, and all the people that were dear and near in his life.

**Bill exemplified the motto of the 2nd Battalion 8th Cavalry --
Honor and Courage!**

We named a Firebase for Bill, Firebase Makowski, for that reason in his honor. His death was a truly devastating loss to us, his fellow soldiers, and his family and friends, especially so since it occurred in the waning days of our nation's commitment of combat forces in Vietnam.

Today, on this day of the 50th Anniversary of his death, is therefore a special day, one where we can pray to our Lord in Heaven that Bill's soul is indeed resting in peace, that his family has comfort in the knowledge that his "brothers in arms" deem him a very brave and worthy combat soldier, ---- and that our nation sorrows his untimely death and loss to his loved one's.

In closing, we as aging veterans --- of an era half a century ago ---- have the opportunity to ensure that our nation truly values and honors the services and sacrifices not only of young men such as our brother in arms, William J. Makowski, but also all our nation's soldiers, airmen, sailors, marines -- and their families – that respond to the Call of Duty.

And, finally, -- Bill --when it is our turn to join you again – we want to hear a loud "Welcome Home Brother."

**Wolf D, Kutter
Commander, Skipper 6, D/2-8th Cavalry
21 October 1971**