

Veterans Day 2015

By Jack Estes

I tend to drift a little on Veterans Day. My thoughts are more intense, more real as I imagine the young Marines I left behind. And not just my boys but all of the other young men whose names are etched on walls and living in the memories of folks they once knew. But I love the changing of the season, when the fall colors burst in an explosion of oranges and yellows, and the air smells damp and good and clean.

This year, like almost every year, something touching seems to grace my life. I'm 66 years old now and beat up. But in 1969 I was 19 and living in a Vietnamese village, with ten other tough Marines and a Navy Corpsman. We were fighting the local Viet Cong and NVA on a fairly regular basis. One of my buddies was a guy named Jack Cargile. I wrote about him once in a story published in the Wall Street Journal. We were attacked one night on a small hill looking over a grave yard and in the morning there was just Jack and me and a kid named Bigham left. Jack and I were wounded. Anyway this article was about Jack and how I searched for him for decades and finally found him. We were going to get together in the spring. A few months later his wife called to tell me he was dead. He rolled his tractor coming down a hill in the snow.

Two days ago Jack's daughter in law calls, I didn't know her or even knew she existed. She found me on the internet and phoned to tell me she found the article that I wrote - in Jack's gun safe. His wife must have put it there. His son Shan never knew about the article, because his family split up and he wasn't close with his dad. I spoke with Shan and his wife Amanda from their small farm in Mississippi. Maybe it was once Jack's farm, I didn't ask. But his son wanted to know more about his dad. I told him all I knew and that his father was heroic and loved by his Marines.

These fall days and Veterans Days are changing, as I look back on them and grow older. I was at a veterans' event today full of flags and music and little kids like our grandson Alex. He made me laugh, which was different and very cool for another Veterans Day.