

To Honor Our Fallen



Bob Curry's name is engraved on the Pacifica Memorial Monument, located at the western end of the parking lot of Pacifica's American Legion Hall—555 Buel Avenue, Pacifica, California. Bob is one among fourteen remembered. The monument, dedicated on November 11, 2021, at 11 a.m., was built to honor Pacifica's Vietnam and Iraq fallen. Finis Vitae Sed Non Amoris.

November 11, 2021

The Story of Bob Curry

1945-1966

BY JEAN BARTLETT



Bob Curry, freshman year of high school.

Who was Bob Curry? Who he became after he joined the U.S. Marine Corps is more evident. Had he lived beyond his Vietnam experience, those who knew him in his troubled youth would undoubtedly talk about the kid who turned his life around.

Robert "Bob" Erven Curry was born in San Francisco on August 6, 1945 to Sara Curry, who went by "Sally," and Marion Carlyle Curry. Bob's mom, whose maiden name was "Savala" according to the record of her marriage to Marion Curry, was born in San Diego in 1912. Marion was Sally's second husband. Born on July 14, 1909 in Odessa, Texas, Marion entered the U.S. Navy in June of 1927 and served in the Second World War in the Far East. He retired from the Navy in March of 1949 as a Chief Boiler Tender. Following Marion's marriage to Sally, their divorce in 1945, and then a second marriage in the late 1940s and subsequent divorce, Marion moved to Helena, Montana in 1949. He remained in Montana until his death in 1989. Marion and Sally had two sons: Roy, born in 1938 and Bob, born seven years later. Bob's parents divorced around the time of Bob's birth. When Bob was six months old, his mother remarried. His name was Ken Forney. He was a Navy seaman serving on the USS Princeton.

As reported in the *Pacifica Tribune* on January 11, 1967, when Sally and Ken wed in 1946, 19-year-old Ken took on a family of five. (Given the list of family members who survived the death of Bob in Vietnam, Sally also had two daughters from her first marriage.) Sally and Ken Forney would go on to have two sons: Kenneth, born in 1948, and Claude, born in 1950.

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Bob's father Marion, and Marion's second wife, also gave Bob another half-sister.

In 1954, Bob and his family moved from San Francisco to the coastal town of Pedro Valley, living first at the corner of Alicante Drive and Capistrano Drive, then later at 1096 Anza Drive. (In 1957, nine small coastal communities, including Pedro Valley which became Linda Mar, incorporated to become the City of Pacifica. Those communities, now neighborhoods, are: Fairmont, Westview, Pacific Manor, Sharp Park, Fairway Park, Vallemar, Rockaway Beach, Linda Mar and Pedro Point.)



As the nine small coastal communities grew in size, schools were being built to accommodate the expanding student population. Bob began his Pacifica school years at the temporary Oddstad Portable, then attended Pedro Valley School, Linda Mar School and finished eighth grade at Sanchez School.

←Bob's first "Pacifica" class photo at Oddstad Portable.

With Terra Nova High School not yet complete, Bob spent his freshman year at Westmoor High School in the Westlake neighborhood of Daly City before heading to the newly-built Terra Nova. He did not graduate.

Some of his classmates who knew him back when, described him as a "punk."

Art Eggen, Terra Nova High School, class of 1964, who like Bob served in the Marine Corps during Vietnam, said that his fellow classmates' description of Bob as a "punk" was an accurate description.

"He lived in my neighborhood," Art said. "He was in my class but a year older. He liked to go by the nickname, 'Bud.' If he wanted to be called 'Bud,' nobody in the class would have argued with him because he carried a switchblade in his pocket.

"I first ran into him in 8th grade at Sanchez School. I did not see him again until sophomore year at Terra Nova, which was the year Terra Nova opened. I suspect he was incarcerated through most of his freshman year. He spent a lot of time in juvenile hall. I believe he was caught stealing. But there was no reason in the world for him to be stealing because his family appeared to be affluent. His mom had a new Buick every year and I believe she had a good job. Sophomore year was the last time I saw him."

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Bob in third grade.

His classmates thought Bob grew up in a fatherless family. While Bob's dad lived in Montana, his Navy stepdad Ken was in Pacifica, when he was not on extended operations outside of his home port.

When Bob was 19, he went to work in San Francisco as an usher at a downtown theater. Later that year he went to vocational school to become a plumber. He didn't stick with it.



Kathrine Pond, a friend of Bob's since childhood, told the *Pacifica Tribune*, "He never had much of one interest at a time. He was looking for something he liked."

He found that interest when he became a Marine.

"After he joined the Marines, he changed completely," Kathrine went on to tell the *Tribune*. "He became a different guy. He became interested in one thing instead of being a roamer."

In June of 1965, Bob trained at Camp Pendleton in San Diego County, California. Six months later he was on a ship to Vietnam.

←**In fifth grade, Bob was a Safety Patrolman.**

He was supposed to be home for Christmas in December of 1966, his mom Sally told the *Tribune*. "His tour of duty was up."

"On November 8th he told me he had volunteered for a combat unit," Sally continued. "He kept writing, '*Don't worry, Mom, I'm alright.*' He wrote that he had signed up for another six months and wouldn't be home."

"I'm sorry I can't be with you all on Christmas," Bob wrote, "but next year I will be. This war has to come to an end and I want to help stop it. Your Christmas gifts will be a little late, but you will get them."

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Bob's stepdad Ken Forney told the *Tribune*, "Bob was in Okinawa for 'rest and recreation' leave when he signed up for another tour."

A week before Christmas, Bob wrote his mom that he had met someone pretty special.

"What would you think about having one of these Vietnamese girls as a daughter-in-law? Don't worry, Mom, I'm only thinking about it."

"I wrote him, 'If you want to marry her, she must be pretty special,'" his mom said. "Just think about it real hard, you're the one that'll have to live with her."

Mrs. Forney went on to tell the *Tribune*, that when her son had come home on leave, he had tried to recruit all the boys in the neighborhood. That's how much he loved being a Marine. Bob had also told his mom that the kids he had met in Vietnam meant a lot to him and that he meant a lot to them. He asked his mom to send toys. He would be happy to repair them. "These Vietnamese children don't have anything."

In the first days of January, 1967, a telegram was sent to Sally and Ken Forney of Pacifica, CA, and Marion C. Curry of Helena, MT.

"I DEEPLY REGRET TO CONFIRM THAT YOUR SON LANCE CORPORAL ROBERT E. CURRY USMC DIED 31 DECEMBER 1966 IN THE VICINITY OF DONG HA REPUBLIC OF VIETNAM. HE DIED AS A RESULT OF A GUNSHOT WOUND TO THE HEAD . . . I WISH TO ASSURE YOU OF EVERY POSSIBLE ASSISTANCE AND TO EXTEND THE HEARTFELT CONDOLENCES OF THE MARINE CORPS IN YOUR BEREAVEMENT." - Wallace M. Greene, Jr., General USMC, Commandant of the Marine Corps.

In a more detailed letter, Bob's family learned that on December 31, 1966, their son and two other Marines were returning from Quang Tri when their vehicle ran into a ditch. The two other Marines departed on foot while the Lance Corporal remained with the vehicle. Lance Corporal Curry was found dead in the road when they returned to the site; a victim of hostile fire.

"The thing about Bob as a kid was he had that tough aura about him," his classmate Art recalled. "But he was not unintelligent and when I look at his military record, I see that he made lance corporal in a year. You don't do that if you are a screwup. It took me a year and a half to make lance corporal. I believe he turned his life around."

Leadership and experience make a lance corporal. The expectation of a lance corporal is that he or she will set a good example and use his or her skills and knowledge to mentor and help junior ranks. They may qualify for "promotion to a corporal by receiving a qualifying score on a composite skills and leadership assessment."

Bob told his mom that he planned to make the Marine Corps a career.

"I know that if he had his choice, he'd rather have gone this way than any other," Bob's mom told the *Tribune*, "because he was proud of what he was doing. He was so proud to be a Marine. He was trying to better himself."

"Bob's older brother was in the Army," Sally Forney went on to say. "His father, Marion Curry, was a Chief Petty Officer in the Navy. I used to always tell Bob, 'Son, be somebody. Make people proud of you.'"

Bob's family was so proud of him.

On Wednesday, January 11, 1967, 21-year-old Lance Corporal Robert Erven Curry, USMC, was laid to rest at 3 p.m. at Golden Gate National Cemetery, Section B, Site 827-A, in San Bruno, CA. As reported by the *Tribune*,

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Bob was "survived by his mother and stepfather, Mr. and Mrs. Kenneth Forney, Pacifica; his father, Marion Curry of Montana; his brothers Roy Curry, 28, of San Francisco, Kenneth Forney, Jr. 18, and Claude Forney, 16, of Pacifica; and his sisters, Mrs. Rose Marie Lucas and Mrs. Shirley Wallen of South San Francisco and Mrs. Marian Fletcher of Denver, Colorado."

The Lance Corporal served his unit – FLSU 1, 3rd Service Battalion, FLSG Alpha, Force Logistics Command, III MAF – as a Motor Vehicle Operator. U.S. Marine Sergeant David Thomas, a veteran of the Korean War and the man who "recruited Bob Curry," served as Honor Guard at the burial ceremony. Lance Corporal Curry is honored on Panel 13E, Line 104 of The Wall.



Lance Corporal Robert Erven Curry, USMC.

Author's note: If any of Bob's relatives discover this tribute, please contact Pacifica American Legion Post 238 so that your comments can be added to this binder.



Jean Bartlett is a longtime Bay Area features writer: Pacifica Tribune, Oakland Tribune, San Jose Mercury, San Mateo Times, Portraits & Roots, Marin Independent Journal, Twin City Times, Ross Valley Reporter, Peninsula Progress, Coastal Connections, Contra Costa County Times, Bay Area Business Woman and Catholic San Francisco. She is additionally the author of two historical biography books on some of the more than 370,000 interred at Holy Cross Catholic Cemetery in Colma, CA. Visit her website at www.bartlettbiographies.com.

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