

To Build a Memorial

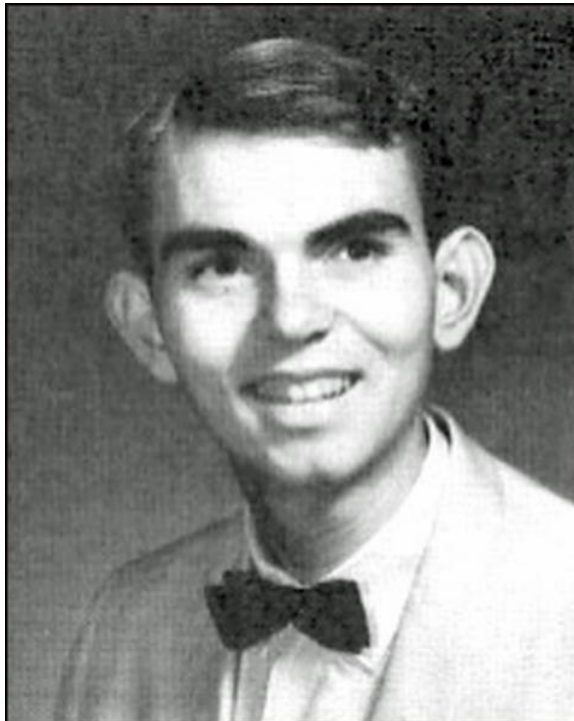


The Pacifica Veterans Memorial Group are four classmates from the 1969 graduating class of Terra Nova High School, who have banded together to establish a permanent memorial to honor Pacifica's Vietnam, Afghanistan and Iraq fallen. Along with a physical memorial, each of these young Pacificans is being memorialized through biography. Read the article about the Memorial Group and the goals of their project, [here](#).

August 20, 2020

The Story of Medford "Med" Chrysler 1947-1967

BY JEAN BARTLETT



Medford Chrysler, Terra Nova High School senior photo. Class of 1965.

The Chrysler kids grew up in a Linda Mar "Rancher" – three bedrooms/one bath. Brothers Medford "Med" and Dennis shared a room, and twin sisters Karen and Kathy also shared a room. Med was the eldest of the four Chrysler kids. He was born in 1947, Dennis in 1951, and Karen and Kathy in 1954. Their parents, both gone now, were Adarine Medford Chrysler and Vivian Louise (Hensley) Chrysler. Eugene Walker, four years older than Med, is their half-brother, their mom's first child. Gene grew up with his dad and his grandparents. All of the family was, and is, tight.

Adarine Chrysler and Vivian Hensley met after the Second World War in San Francisco. Adarine was from Oklahoma and Vivian was from Illinois. Adarine served in the U.S. Army during WWII in Okinawa and the Philippines, and moved to California after his time in the service. The couple married on August 12, 1946 and lived in Hollister, CA. That's where Med was born on January 25, 1947.

"On Med's birth certificate it shows my dad's occupation was cotton picker in Hollister," Med's sister Karen (Chrysler) Demattei said. "He became a carpenter after they left Hollister."

The growing family's next home was in San Francisco, where the family lived on Arlington Street. They moved to Madeira Drive in the coastal community of Linda Mar in 1954. Med was seven.

"My father helped build some of the homes in Linda Mar, so the opportunity to buy a home there worked out for the family," Karen noted.

Author: Jean Bartlett (www.bartlettbiographies.com)

To Build a Memorial ~ The Story of Medford Chrysler

Direct link to the Memorial's Go Fund Me [Page](#)

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In November of 1957, nine small coastal communities – Fairmont, Westview, Pacific Manor, Sharp Park, Fairway Park, Vallemar, Rockaway Beach, Linda Mar and Pedro Point – incorporated as the City of Pacifica. As the population grew, so did the building of all the services needed to support them. Kids attended a number of school locations as the School District expanded. As such, Med's elementary school years were spent first at Pedro Valley School, then Linda Mar School, and he finished at Sanchez School before heading off to the newly built Terra Nova High School. (The High School was established in 1961.)

Med discovered he loved dancing at an early age.

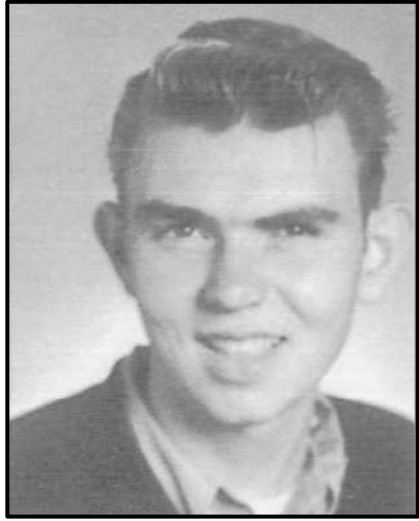
"Between 1960 and 1962, Med and I took square dance lessons," said Beth Shanks Wilson, a neighborhood friend of Med's. "How we got roped into this is still a mystery to me! We would go to our instructor/caller's house off Crespi Drive for a few hours on Saturdays – believe there were about 16 of us, enough for two squares. As we got a little better we were able to venture to other small local places, all in San Mateo County, to show the other groups our moves! What fun we had and this is my memory of Med that I will always cherish."

On January 28, 1960, Med and Beth's photo ran in their hometown paper, the *Pacifica Tribune*.



The caption under the photo, read as follows: "Judy Carr, Jimmy Carr, Beth Ann Shanks and Medford Chrysler, all of the Ranch Hands Square Dance Club, link elbows and wait for the music. They were four of over 60 youngsters who turned out to have a turn at square dancing in the classes beginning this week at Sanchez School, under the sponsorship of their group and the Recreation Commission. Starting at 7:15, on Monday nights, for youngsters from nine to fourteen, the classes are still open."

That Square Dance Club won some prizes, and Med's interest in dance and school-sponsored dances continued through high school. During his senior year at Terra Nova, he won a dance contest.



Med did not play sports in high school but his sisters noted he was very competitive when it came to playing basketball with neighborhood kids. He also liked playing drums and bongos. And, as mentioned, he loved to dance.

←Sophomore year, Terra Nova High School, 1963.

"I remember the night Med went to Prom," Karen said. "His buddy picked him up with their dates. We all stood in the front yard and watched them pose for pictures. Of course they all looked amazing!"

In 1967, in a story that ran July 5, his folks told *Pacifica Tribune* reporter Bill Galstan that Med was interested in mechanical things. He loved motorcycles and had his own for a while.

His siblings remember that right before he enlisted, he bought a Scrambler motorcycle, and that their dad wasn't exactly thrilled with the purchase. "It was canary yellow," his brother Dennis recalled with a smile.

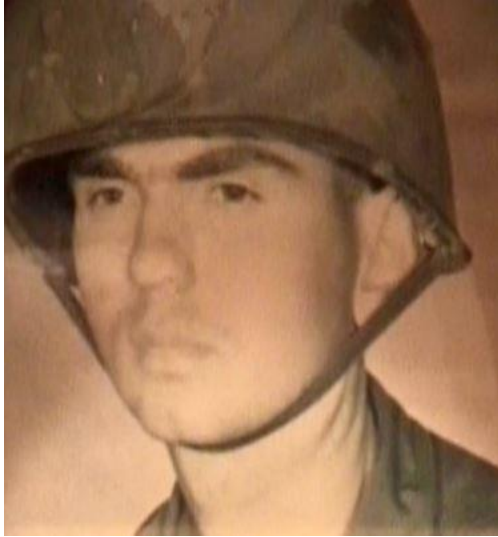
Med's parents noted in that 1967 interview that after graduation, Med had a couple of jobs. One was with Lou's 76 Station in Linda Mar and the other was with Alex Discount Store in Daly City. They also told the reporter that when Med received his draft notice he decided to join the Marines. "He didn't like the idea of being drafted into the Army."

His sisters believe he joined the Marines with his buddy from the neighborhood, and fellow Terra Nova High School graduate, Stan Childers. Another kid from their Linda Mar neighborhood was Dave McKay. He was a few years younger than Med and Stan, but he also attended Terra Nova High School, and would additionally become another childhood friend who headed off to Vietnam. All the families knew each other.

Med did his basic training at Camp Pendleton near San Diego, CA. His family attended his graduation. He was home from October 19 until November 8, 1966. On December 7, Med boarded a military ship to Vietnam.



New Marines, Camp Pendleton, 1966. Pvt. Med Chrysler is second from right.



Mrs. Chrysler wrote her son nearly every day. She also sent him care packages, where Toll House chocolate chip cookies were a main staple. His dad told the *Tribune* that Med wrote home a lot. "He didn't complain about anything but he was counting the days until he could come home. His tour of duty in Vietnam would have been up in December. He still had two and a half years left to serve active duty in the Marines."

"He was upset that he might have to go back over there," Med's mom said. "He didn't think he could stand it."

"It's putting it very mildly to say that we were worried about him," Mrs. Chrysler went on to say. "I don't think there was a day that went by out of our lives when he wasn't in our minds."

Every week, Med received his hometown paper by airmail. He liked to keep up with Terra Nova sports and his friends from the neighborhood. The news from the February 22, 1967 *Pacifica*

Tribune hit Med hard. Marine Lance Corporal Stan Childers had died in Quảng Nam Province, South Vietnam, Wednesday, February 15, 1967. Stan was serving that day as a gunner in a helicopter "on a mission to resupply Marines in the field," when the helicopter came under attack. Stan was 20.

In early May, Med was in Hong Kong for Rest and Recuperation leave. He phoned home. What did everyone want? Everyone had a request and Dennis remembers that his brother planned to order a couple of dress suits for himself. "He also bought two matching jade rings," Karen noted, "one for our Mom and one for a girlfriend. The one ring for his girlfriend was mailed directly to her. She ended up giving the ring to my mom, which I still have. The other items, including the suits and one of the rings, were paid for but the merchant never mailed them."

Private First Class Medford Adarine Chrysler served with the 3rd Marine Division, 1st Battalion, 9th Marines, Alpha Company. His specialty was Rifleman. In the early hours of Sunday, July 2, 1967, Alpha and Bravo Companies, 1st Battalion, 9th Marines, patrolling parallel to each other, were in the Con Thien area of South Vietnam, in the Quảng Trị Province. On that morning, Pfc. Chrysler served as grenade launcher and fire team leader of his platoon. They were near the DMZ (Demilitarized Zone), which separated North and South Vietnam. The Companies made their way along Highway 561 and secured a crossroad, their first objective. Suddenly, sniper fire broke out. They were under siege. Hostiles fired flamethrowers, setting the hedges along the highway on fire and forcing Bravo Company out into the open. The People's Army of Vietnam battered the Company with artillery, mortar and small arms fire. Slightly further west, Alpha Company had tripped two booby traps trying to get to Bravo Company and they too were under attack. July 2 was the first day, of the 13-day battle, Operation Buffalo. July 2 was the worst one-day loss for the Marines in Vietnam. Pacifican Med Chrysler was killed in the ambush. His family later reported that their son/brother was shot five times. Med died immediately. But on July 2 in Pacifica, the Chrysler family didn't yet know of their heartbreak. July 2, 1967 was their mom's birthday. Vivian turned 41.

On Tuesday, 8:45 a.m., on the Fourth of July in Pacifica, Dennis was still sleeping. His sisters and parents were in the living room. Karen and Kathy were watching television. All at once, time stopped. A car pulled up in front of their home. Karen, Kathy and their parents watched as officers got out of a car and walked to their front door. No one spoke. They knew. They stared in silence as the colonel told them that Med had been killed just two days earlier when a North Vietnamese regiment of at least 3,000 attacked Marine lines, inflicting heavy casualties. Their brother, their son, was gone. At that point, the colonel did not have much more information. Then the silence broke.

"My mom woke Dennis up, hysterically crying that Med was killed," Karen said. "I will never forget hearing my father sobbing in his bedroom."

"I remember Dad sitting in his chair in the living room that day," Kathy (Chrysler) Bendele recalled, "just staring off in shock."

Two days after the family's entire world turned upside down, Kathy and Karen turned 13. "It was an extremely difficult, sad time," Kathy, Karen and Dennis said.

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Direct link to the Memorial's Go Fund Me [Page](#)

©2020. (Page 5)

A memorial service was held at Nauman and Lincoln's Chapel by the Sea Mortuary in Pacifica. Marine Private First Class Medford A. Chrysler was buried with full military honors at Golden Gate National Cemetery in San Bruno. Hundreds of people attended. Med's older brother, Eugene Walker, then 24, and a Navy seaman serving on the USS Chevalier (DD/DDR-805), attended in full uniform, as did U.S. Army SP4 Brent Hensley, Artillery MOS (Military Occupational Specialty), Vietnam. In the service at the time of Med's passing, Specialist Hensley obtained leave to be there for his cousin. The funeral was also attended by numerous Terra Nova High School students/graduates, including Med's dear friends: Beth Shanks, Nick Calia and John Vallero. The latter, John Vallero, is very well known in Pacifica, like his dad before him, as a legendary Little League and Terra Nova coach.

Med's death devastated his family and all these years later, it still affects them. Mr. and Mrs. Chrysler, who are now buried with their son at the National Cemetery, would find some comfort in traveling to Washington, DC and locating their son's name on the Vietnam Veterans Memorial (The Wall). Their children have been to the traveling, three-quarter scale replica of The Wall (The Wall That Heals), when it toured the country. Dennis and his wife Linda also have been to the Wall in Washington, DC, as has Karen and her ex-husband. Med will never be forgotten.

"We are extremely proud of Med," Karen said, speaking for them all. "We are proud that he served our country to protect us and any opportunity we have, we are proud to say that we lost a brother in the Vietnam War."

"When you go to Golden Gate National Cemetery, you pass Stan Childers' gravesite first," she continued, "then Dave McKay's and then you arrive at Medford's. The three were buddies. The three boys are together."



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.