

To Honor Our Fallen



Stan Childer'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. Stan 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 Stan Childers

1946-1967

BY JEAN BARTLETT



James Stanley "Stan" Childers, Terra Nova High School senior photo. Class of 1964.

In May of 1986, Wayne Karlin – author, editor and Professor of Languages and Literature at the College of Southern Maryland, now retired – left several items at The Vietnam Veterans Memorial, "The Wall," in remembrance of the fellow Marine he knew, Lance Corporal James Stanley "Stan" Childers, when both served in Vietnam. Stan's name is on The Wall located at Panel 15E Line 32.

The items were picked up by the National Park Service and placed in the National Mall and Memorial Parks "Vietnam Veterans Memorial Collection." The collection began during the building of The Wall in 1982, as the public began to leave artifacts to express their heartache, their loss. To date, there are over 400,000 objects in storage.

Karlin, who served as a door gunner on a medevac helicopter crew, left a textile fragment, an M1 combat helmet and a copy of the article he wrote for the *Washington Post* in May of 1986. The article, titled, *A Personal Vietnam Memorial*, was dedicated to U.S. Marine Corps LCpl James Stanley Childers.

In his article, Karlin stated that he wanted to "take a moment to remember James Childers, a boy I didn't know too well, but who died in my place and in your name, one of 57,939 who did the same." (The Wall originally contained 57,939 names, but that number has since climbed to 58,282.)

Karlin wrote that on February 15, 1967, he was scheduled to be on standby flight status that night. Stan was scheduled to fly the next day. Both he and Stan were part of a small contingent left behind as a transition team. The two Marines were literally down to their last few days in Vietnam. Going home was a reality.

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During that final week, Stan and Karlin were "often thrown together on details. We were friendly, but not close – military acquaintances."



For reasons unknown yet not untypical, Stan's section chief asked Karlin if he could switch his standby flight status with Stan. In a letter written a few days later to Stan's parents, Lt. Colonel E. H. Kirby wrote of the events of that fateful night, when Stan flew as the gunner in a helicopter on a mission to resupply Marines in the field who were engaged in operation "Stone."

"As the helicopter approached the landing zone, it was taken under fire and your son was wounded."

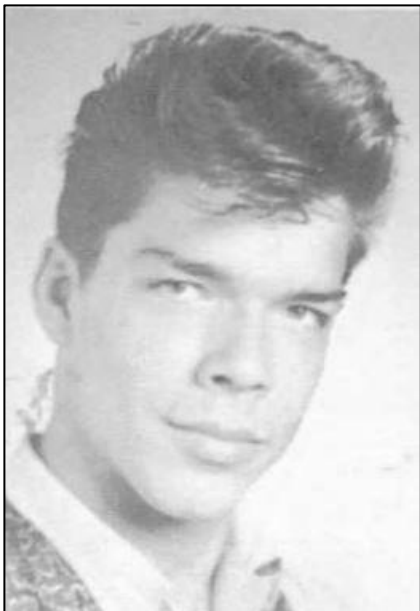
A single bullet had penetrated the bottom edge of Stan's flak jacket. Stan was flown to a hospital where he died an hour later on the operating table.

"I was present," the Lt. Colonel wrote, "as a team of doctors exerted every possible effort to sustain your son's life but to no avail. He received last rites from Father Muccillo at 7:15 p.m., Vietnam time."

Karlin explained in his *Washington Post* article what he was going to do when he went to The Wall on Memorial Day in 1986.

"I'll look at the mass of names; then I'll search out the names of the people who were in my outfit. But I'll be going to see one name in particular, that of James Childers, who died instead of me somewhere near Da Nang in the year 1967."

* * *



Stan, Terra Nova High School junior photo, 1963.

The son of Cyrus and Doris Childers, James Stanley "Stan the Man" Childers was born on August 29, 1946 in Denver, Colorado. He was the second of the Childers seven children: Donna Rae, Stan, Bruce, Frank, Don, Mary Robbin and Rebecca. (*At the time of this writing, information has come in that Stan's three brothers have passed. Should Stan's sisters discover this tribute, please contact Pacifica American Legion Post 238 so that your comments can be added to this binder.*)

Stan began elementary school in Denver and continued in San Francisco following his family's move. When he headed off to high school, the family lived in Pacifica at 1173 Alicante Drive. Stan started out at Westmoor High School on double sessions before Terra Nova opened.

"Stan was a friend to everyone," said Peggy Groves Scott, Terra Nova Class of 1964. "He was kind and gentle, and always happy. He was 'The Fonz.'" (The Fonz, a beloved greaser, was a fictional character on the sitcom "Happy Days," which ran from January of 1974 through September of 1984.)

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"Stan was the class ahead of me," said Lou Siegel, Terra Nova Class of 1965. "I was friends with his brother Bruce and knew him that way, but I also knew Stan because he and I played sports together."

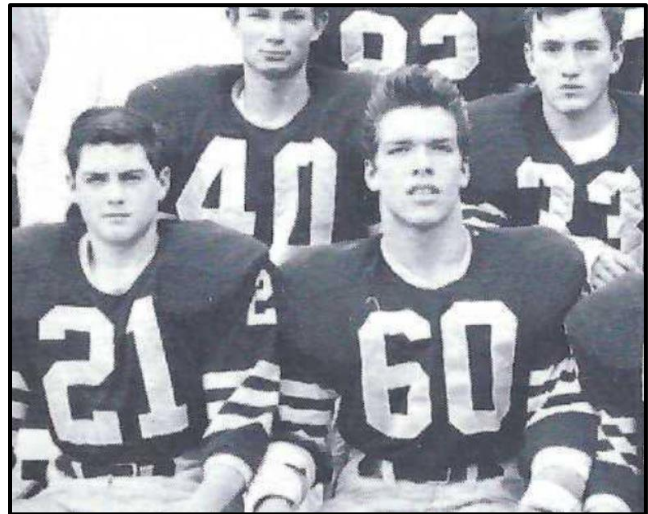
"I played football, but really Stan played football and the rest of us sat on the bench," Lou said with a laugh. "Then there was wrestling. He was one of those guys where his competitor would just look at him and lay down on the mat and say, 'I'm done!'"

"The thing about Stan was he was just an all-around nice guy. He was thoughtful. He was sympathetic. He listened when people talked. He also had the perfect build! He should have been a model. His body was better than Brad Pitt's when Brad was younger. In fact, Brad Pitt wants Stan Childers' shoulders!"

"I don't know anybody who didn't like Stan. You just liked being around him."



Stan, top row, third from left, pictured with some of his wrestling teammates, Terra Nova, 1963.



Stan, No. 60, Terra Nova, 1964.



Stan Childers, No. 60, made the sports page of his hometown paper many times. This particular *Pacifica Tribune* photo is dated October 30, 1963.

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Along with football and wrestling, Stan also did track. His friend George Mason, Class of 1964, noted that he and Stan played basketball one year together on the Junior Varsity team.

"He was a good man," George said, "honest, caring and with a full and glowing smile."

In addition to playing sports, his parents told the *Pacifica Tribune* that Stan had worked at Ed and Jim's Union Station and later for a moving van company. Following graduation, he attended College of San Mateo (CSM) for a year and made their varsity football team.



"Stan enlisted in the Marines," Lou said. "He had always wanted to be a Marine. By the time Stan died, I was an Army medic. I was trained as a combat medic but I was stationed in Japan. We got a lot of Marines in our hospital. These guys would lie out in the jungle waiting to be picked up for days. They were always undersupplied." (When Lou got out of the Army, he went to CSM for a couple of years and he also learned to fly in Half Moon Bay. He then went back into the military where he served as an Air Force pilot. Later he flew for Western Airlines.)

George talked about the last time he saw Stan.

"Stan came to visit me while I was a student teacher. He had joined the Marines and was on his way to Vietnam. I can't tell you much about what we spoke about, but I do know he was proud to be serving, and proud I'd said no to serving. I wished him the best and we warmly shook hands as he left. Several years later I learned of his engagement and his fateful final days."

Judy Heiney, Terra Nova Class of 1965, was Stan's fiancée. The two were also high school sweethearts. A little more than a week before she heard the news of Stan's death, she had driven to Carmel and reserved a honeymoon cottage for August 19. Stan and Judy planned to marry 10 days before Stan's 21st birthday.

To add to the tragedy of Stan's death, his family first heard about it from the letter Lt. Colonel Kirby wrote. Standard military procedure when presenting notification of death, missing, or duty status whereabouts unknown – is first carried out in person to the next of kin. Notification officers wear a formal uniform. For the Marine Corps, that uniform is the Service Alpha uniform.

When the Lt. Colonel's personal letter arrived by the mail carrier, Stan's dad thought at first it was recruiting information for one of Stan's brothers. The family was devastated. Stan's dad phoned Judy's dad and Judy rushed to be with the Childers. Judy was with the Childers when Marine Sergeant Major Puckett arrived the next day with the official notification.

Stan's parents told the *Tribune* the last time they saw their son was in Los Angeles, the prior Easter, when he left for Vietnam. "He had been voted the outstanding member of his platoon in training." They also noted that he served in Vietnam with Unit HMM-263, MAG-16, 1st MAW, III MAF as a Motor Vehicle Operator.

The sad news traveled quickly. Pacifica Mayor Harland Minshew adjourned the City Council meeting in memory of "the Pacifican who was killed in Vietnam. It is the City's way of paying respects." It was the third time the City had done such a dedication. Terra Nova High School flew the American flag at half-mast. The *Tribune* reported that former Terra Nova Coach Floyd Gonella, who had remained a good friend of the star lineman, called Stan "a tough, confident, self-assured boy with a lot of potential." The newspaper went on to note that Stan was a defensive end the

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very first year Terra Nova had a winning team. It was the same year that Coach Gonella was named coach of the year.

The family shared more of what the Lt. Colonel had written. "Excellent standards which James kept won him many friends and the respect of his fellow Marines. His devotion to duty, his optimistic attitude, and his courage and willingness to carry his share of responsibility will long be remembered by those of us privileged to serve our country in his company." (Stan, who went by James in the Marines, also had several nicknames among his squadron mates, which included "Jimmy" and "Stash.")

Following a rosary and church service, the Pacifica boy who died at the age of 20 defending his country in Quang Nam Province, South Vietnam, February 15, 1967, was laid to rest at Golden Gate National Cemetery in San Bruno, Section B, Site 916.

"I loved Stan," said his friend Lou, the father of two sons who both served in the military as aviators, and whose middle grandson is currently starting week five of the Army. "Stan would have done great things if he had had the chance. As a medic, I saw more than what anybody should have to see but I came back whole a year later. A lot of my life is in appreciation of the kids who went to Vietnam but didn't get to come home."



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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