

To Honor Our Fallen

Charles D. Wright, Jr.'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. Charles 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 Charles D. Wright, Jr. 1942-1969

(His story begins with a tribute to his friend, Pacifican Bonnie Campbell)

BY JEAN BARTLETT



Bonnie Campbell, Oceana High School senior photo. Class of 1964. Bonnie never forgot her friend Charles D. Wright, Jr., or his service to his country.

The story of Charles D. Wright, Jr., as it relates to his name on the memorial monument placed at the western end of the parking lot of Pacifica American Legion Post 238, 555 Buel Avenue, really begins with a tribute to the late Pacifican Bonnie Heather Marie Campbell. For it was Bonnie who gave Pacifica American Legion Post 238 and Pacifica VFW Post 10245, Charles Wright's name.

Born in San Francisco in 1946, Bonnie and her parents, Donald and Florence Campbell, moved to the coastal community of Fairway Park in 1955. In 1957, nine small coastal communities, including Fairway Park, 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.

Bonnie loved her coastal hometown. She was in the first graduating class, 1964, of Oceana High School. Personable, with a huge heart, Bonnie went to school with two of the Pacifica boys who died in Vietnam: Larry Foster (1947-1966) and George A. Cabano, Jr. (1949-1968). She never forgot them. Nor would she ever forget her buddy Charles Wright, Jr. Charles had a relative in the north end of town and spent a lot of time visiting.

Bonnie would go on to work for the *Pacifica Tribune*, first in their production department in San Mateo and then in their office in Pacific Manor. She left the *Pacifica Tribune* when Bill Drake, owner, publisher and editor of the *Tribune*, sold the paper in 1989. A single parent, who was extremely proud of her daughter, Cristal, Bonnie volunteered her time, whatever was needed, as a Cabrillo Elementary School parent. When her daughter attended Oceana High School, Bonnie served two years as Vice President of Oceana's Parent Teacher Association.

The Story of Lodi High School student Charles D. Wright, Jr.

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In May of 2009, Bonnie wrote to *Pacifica Riptide* editor and publisher, John Maybury. In her letter to the editor, Bonnie expressed concern that the names of the young men killed in Vietnam, honored aloud annually at the Memorial Service at Chapel by the Sea here in Pacifica, were not to be found in an annual memorial "print version" in the *Pacifica Tribune* or any Bay Area newspaper. She also discovered the list read aloud was not complete. And so she listed the names of her two former schoolmates at Oceana High School, the names of those Terra Nova High School students that she knew, and her friend Charles Wright, Jr. Following Bonnie's letter to John Maybury's Coastside online open forum – Pacifica's American Legion and VFW read those names aloud, every year, at the Memorial Service event. But that list, while researched by Bonnie, was still not complete.

In 2019, Terra Nova's Class of 1969 held its 50th reunion. It was there that four reunited classmates formed the Pacifica Veterans Memorial Group (PVMG). The group's purpose was to honor the lives of Pacifica kids who died in Vietnam and subsequent wars, by building a physical memorial. Each name to be memorialized, but one, was painstakingly reviewed by PVMG for placement on the monument. However, Charles Wright, Jr. was somewhat of an enigma. He did not grow up in Pacifica or go to school here, and when Bonnie died in the fall of 2010, her knowledge of Charles Wright, Jr. passed with her.

But as evidenced by Bonnie's letter, Charles had a connection to Pacifica, and Pacifica's American Legion and VFW had no intention of forgetting him. He has been remembered, in ceremony, in Pacifica, since 2010. This young U.S. Navy man, who served during the Vietnam Era, is now Pacifica's adopted son and he is remembered along with 13 Pacificans on the Pacifica Memorial Monument.

The information gathered here on Charles, and Bonnie, has been my honor to investigate and write. Should any of Charles' relatives discover this tribute, please contact Pacifica American Legion Post 238 so that your comments can be added to this binder.

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Born in Fresno, California on November 15, 1942, Charles Douglas Wright, Jr. was the son of Charles D. Wright, Sr. and Dorothy Lou Wright. Four years after Charles' birth, his sister Charlotte was born.

Charles Sr. was born in Lodi, CA, where Charles Jr. and his sister Charlotte were raised. Prior to the Second World War, Charles Sr. worked in heavy construction on Guam, leaving just ahead of the Japanese invasion. He would return to Guam, as a Seabee, with the first Marine Corps landing.

Charles' mom Dorothy was born in Muskogee, Oklahoma. She was a longtime member of Lodi United Methodist Church and served as president of the Lodi Eagles Auxiliary. She worked retail at JC Penney in downtown Lodi for 30 years and was a favorite with customers. Known far and wide for her cooking and baking – no one could match Dorothy's boysenberry jam.

← Charles Wright, Jr., 1957, freshman year, Lodi High School, Lodi.

Somewhere along the way, when Charles and Charlotte were teens, their parents separated and Charles Sr. moved to Pacifica (8 Cragmont Court). Charles Jr. spent a lot of time visiting his dad in Pacifica. His dad would later note his son made a lot of friends in Pacifica and really got to know the town.

On September 14, 1960, Charles enlisted in the U.S. Navy. Charles was a CTI. The acronym now stands for Cryptologic Technicians Interpretive. Then it stood for Communications Technician Interpretive. CTIs serve as the Navy's experts in linguistics and in deciphering information in other languages. Today's Cryptologic Technician can trace their roots back to the Radiomen who taught themselves the Japanese Katakana code in the early 1920s and established the first intercept station at Shanghai, China. Since its earliest days, a CTIs' job has been to decrypt seemingly impossible codes and puzzles.

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Charles' Naval assignment locations would include Scotland, which is where he married his wife, Margaret, in the village of Johnshaven, located on Scotland's Aberdeenshire Coast. During the Vietnam War, active duty would take him to the Naval Magazine Guam. Since renamed the Naval Base Guam Ordnance Annex, during the Vietnam War it served as a major storage and supply point for many types of weapons. It also served as a refueling and transfer location for military personnel heading to Southeast Asia. During WWII, when American forces regained the island, Seabee construction battalions built Naval Base Guam on the site of the destroyed U.S. Marine Corps barracks. Like his son Charles Jr., Seabee Charles Sr. served on Guam during wartime.

On November 18, 1969, Charles Sr. received a telegram. His son died earlier that day as the result of wounds sustained while deer hunting on Guam. Charles Jr. was 27.

Along with his dad, Charles Douglas Wright, Jr. was survived by his wife, Margaret, his mother, Dorothy, and his sister, Charlotte, who was attending college in Long Beach, CA at the time of her brother's death. His family would also later include: a niece, a nephew, and he is additionally the great uncle of two more Wright descendants. The family requested memorial donations in Charles' honor be given to the Pacifica Boys Club, now the Pacifica Boys & Girls Club.

U.S. Navy CTI Charles Douglas Wright, Jr. held three commendation letters, a good conduct medal with a Bronze Star, and Naval unit commendation medals. He is buried at Lodi Memorial Park Cemetery in Lodi, CA.



Charles D. Wright, Jr., Lodi High School senior photo. Class of 1960.



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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