

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](#).

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The Story of Larry Foster 1947-1966

BY JEAN BARTLETT



Lawrence "Larry" Eugene Foster, Oceana High School, 1965.

"It's been a long time since those days back in Westview!" Larry Foster's elementary school classmate Suzy Baker wrote on The Virtual Wall, on Valentine's Day, 2008. (The Virtual Wall is an online Vietnam War memorial.) "We all had a lot of fun, didn't we? I never thought we would lose you. You were one of the sweetest people around."

"My brother, Dewey, went to Vietnam also, but we were lucky enough to get him back," Suzy went on to write. "I wish your family had been as lucky. Always know you will never be forgotten and you will always be loved."

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Lawrence "Larry" Eugene Foster was born in San Bruno, California, to Sam and Lena Foster on June 23, 1947. Larry was the eldest of Sam and Lena's four sons: Larry, Pete, Cornell and Nathan. The family lived at 468 Glasgow in Pacifica's Westview neighborhood. Sam worked for Doelger Enterprises.

Pat (Daniels) Lind and Larry met at Pacific Heights Middle School in San Bruno.

"Larry and I spent a lot of time laughing in the back of the room in middle school, particularly in eighth grade," Pat recalled.

"Though somehow," she said, "we never got in trouble for it! Larry had a great sense of humor and a beautiful smile. He always struck me as sensitive and a little shy."



Larry, Pacific Heights Middle School, 8th grade, 1961.

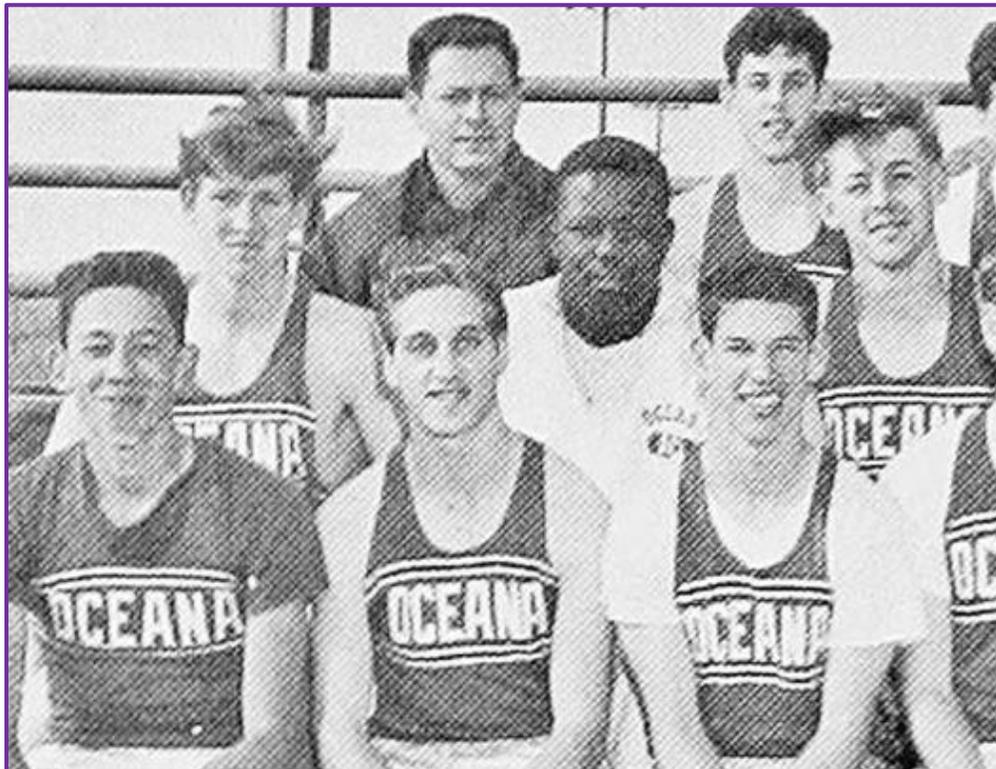
Like Larry, Pat also went to Oceana High School in Pacifica. The two remained friendly though they didn't have any classes together. Pat remembers one of their last conversations.

"When we were juniors, I heard that Larry was enlisting in the Marines," Pat said. "I saw him in the school office. I asked him to please consider staying in school until at least he graduated and then think about it. I tried talking him out of going but his mind was made up. I always felt so badly about it."

Larry joined the Marines right out of his junior year. In August he left Pacifica for his recruit training in San Diego. Home in December, he spent Christmas with his family. After the holidays, he stayed for a short while with his Aunt Beatrice in Los Angeles. "He was so fond of her," his mom would later tell the *Pacifica Tribune*.

His mom and dad, younger brothers, and his aunt were all there when Larry deployed from Camp Pendleton in January to serve his country in Vietnam. He was given a number of little gifts to take with him and his youngest brother, Nathan, who was all of 6, did not want to be left out of the gift giving. So Nathan reached into his pocket and gave his big brother all the money he had been saving – 12 cents. This is the last time Larry and his family truly shared a heartfelt laugh.

Larry had a brief stop in Hawaii and then he and his fellow Marines took off for Da Nang Air Base in Vietnam.



Larry, second row, middle, track and field varsity team, Oceana High School, 1965.

United States Marine Corps 0311 Rifleman Private Lawrence Eugene Foster served with D Company, 1st Battalion, 9th Marines, 3rd Marine Division. He was in Vietnam long enough to receive and be thrilled with the three boxes of records his mom sent. He also wrote his mom that he couldn't believe someone he had never met before, "a girl in Wisconsin named Kay," had sent him a package. His mom was just getting ready to send her son another package when the telegram came. It was Saturday, May 21, 1966.

"Your son, Lawrence Foster, was injured in the vicinity of Da Nang. He received fragmentation wounds in the back, both legs and the right hand from an unknown explosive device while participating in an operation against hostile forces. He is receiving treatment at the station hospital in Da Nang. His condition is serious and his prognosis is guarded. You will be kept informed."

On Sunday, May 22, there was a knock on the Foster's front door. It was Sergeant Major Shoemaker from the Marine Corps Reserve Training Center. He quietly asked for permission to enter and suggested the family be seated. They learned that Larry had been flown from the station hospital in Da Nang, to Clark Air Base on Luzon Island in the Philippines for more intensive care. But his injuries were too great. He died earlier that Sunday. The stunned family sat frozen in grief.

Larry's father didn't eat for several days. He went to work because he needed to do something. Larry's brother Pete cried all day when he heard the news. When *Pacifica Tribune* reporter Berenice Palmer stopped by the family's home on Monday, May 23, the whole family sat with her, but only Larry's mom and his brother Pete spoke.

"Larry liked jet mechanics," Pete told Berenice. "He might have gone into that or electronics."

Mrs. Foster told the reporter that her son had "passed the test and was looking forward to the training he would receive as soon as his duty in Vietnam with the 1st Platoon was finished."

Larry's Aunt Beatrice Wheeler was there as well. She made her way to Pacifica as soon as she heard the news about her beloved nephew.

"Mrs. Wheeler and Larry's mother kept shaking their heads in stunned horror," Berenice wrote in her *Tribune* article which ran on the front page of the Wednesday weekly: "Westview, Oceana Boy Dies of Battle Wounds."

"They were so proud of Larry," Berenice wrote, "and the kind of boy he was. But there was mostly the stunned reality of a death they could not comprehend."

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On October 10, 2007, Marine Gary Lisle wrote about Larry on the Marines "Together We Served" (TWS) website. The purpose of the TWS online community is to "connect and honor every American who has worn the uniform of the United States military."

"Only a short time together, as friends and fellow Marines, but brothers forever," Gary wrote. "Lawrence came to the first platoon, D Company, of the 1st Battalion, 9th Marines, in 1966."

"He was on patrol from Hill 55," Gary continued, "just shortly after we left perimeter duty at Da Nang Airbase, when he was killed. It seems like he was with us for a short time, but is always with us in our thoughts and prayers. To his family and friends, our condolences."

Every Pacifica kid who died serving their country left their community in grief. Larry was the first to fall. Even today, individuals who were at either Oceana or Terra Nova High School during the Vietnam War years know Larry's name, even if they did not know him personally. The Marine with the "beautiful smile," the first Pacifica kid to die in Vietnam, was just 32 days shy of his 19th birthday.

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"His death really brought the Vietnam War home to Pacifica," has been the sad lament shared by a number of Pacificans. Larry's death would also mark the first time Pacifica's City Council adjourned a meeting in memory of a Pacifican killed in Vietnam. (Pacifica's City Council in 1966 was Mayor Harland Minshew and Councilmembers Grace McCarthy, Nick Gust, Jim Fox and Don McMannis.)

When the news of Larry's death broke, the American flag was flown at half-mast at Oceana High School, Terra Nova High School and City Hall. Even today, Oceana class reunions set a table for the two Oceana students, Larry Foster and George A. Cabano, Jr., who died in Vietnam. The table settings include their photos and the rubbings of their names from the Vietnam Memorial Wall. Larry's name is located at Panel 07E, Line 101. Oceana also keeps a memorial board dedicated to Larry and George, near the school's office. The Purple Heart recipient is buried at Golden Gate National Cemetery in San Bruno.

"Larry had so much potential," his friend Pat said, "and he died so young. I will never forget him."



Author's note: If any of Larry's siblings discover this tribute, please contact the Pacifica Veterans Memorial Group so that your comments can be added.



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.