

USD Grad McDermott Saw Vietnam As Soldier, Advisor

BY DOUG SALL
For the Press & Dakotan

Two years ago this month, I reviewed several books by local authors, one of which was “True Faith and Allegiance,” by Michael McDermott, a Highmore native. Mike had served a three-year stint with the 101st Airborne Division as an enlisted man and then returned to USD early in the ‘60s. At that point, McDermott had decided to make the army a career so he enrolled in ROTC and pursued a degree in political science.

I met him about that time and, as a returning vet, we had similar interests and experiences. Both the 1965 and ‘66 *Coyote* (yearbook) lists Mike as a dorm counselor at Brookman Hall. The latter yearbook also featured him as a “C” Company Commander in the ROTC unit. Upon graduating and receiving a commission as a newly minted 2d Lt., he was reassigned to the 101st Airborne Division. Shortly, thereafter he returned to campus and I grabbed a photo of him all decked out in his dress uniform, a picture later dubbed “Poster Boy for the 101st Airborne” and, indeed, he was. With the Vietnam conflict heating up, it wasn’t long before McDermott found himself in the thick of it.

“Even though the American Army, to include the 101st Airborne Division, was pulling out, my fidelity to the mission remained as it had been. The purpose of the fight

I’d embraced years before had not changed. A disinterested observer might have labeled me a romantic with an itch to stay in lock step with the last centurions, or just stubborn and brassbound, and perhaps there’s a bit of truth to be found there ...”

In November 1967, he suffered a serious eye injury during a firefight when he was serving as a platoon leader with the 101st. In all, Mike did three tours and was involved right up until the U.S. started withdrawing its forces in 1971-72, including the 101st Airborne. This is when McDermott made a fateful decision or, as he put it, “So rather than quitting Vietnam and returning home with my unit, I volunteered to stay as an advisor with the Vietnamese Airborne Division.”

During this time, however, things were relatively tranquil in Vietnam; that is until March of 1972 when the North Vietnamese launched a sharp attack during the last week of the month. Known, henceforth, as the Easter Offensive, it “quickly developed into a series of full-blown and bloody slugging matches.” His book, “True Allegiance,” written more than 40 years later, is a gripping account of the action that ensued over a period of some three months and deeply involved Mike and a few others attached to Advisory Team 162. To capture some of the action that took place during that period, the following excerpts from the book will give the reader a feel of just how heavy the action was during the 1972 Battle of An Loc.

Among the multitude of dramat-

ic moments which took place in the subsequent days and weeks was one, in particular. It took place in a concrete basement command post and involved McDermott and a badly wounded Vietnamese soldier. Here’s how he described it:

“Early one morning a badly wounded soldier was helped down the stairs and laid on the floor by several of his buddies. He had been hit in the lower arm days before and had insisted on staying with his squad, but had become so sick his friends decided to get help... I thought the soldier would probably die if the arm didn’t come off, and that’s what I told Colonel Hieu. His response was (he) “wished the surgeon hadn’t been killed,” and I certainly agreed.

My new patient was small and skinny and probably didn’t weigh more than 120 pounds. There was no way to knock him out, but he was drifting in and out of consciousness and I figured he’d probably faint once I went to work, providing his heart didn’t just stop beating. Although streaks of infection ran up to his shoulder, I didn’t want to try to amputate his arm that high because I didn’t have a saw to cut through the bone of his upper arm.

Even though there were several light-weight scalpels in the surgeon’s kit, I decided to use my heavy bladed K-Bar knife. It was sharp and I could get a good grip on the leather handle, plus I could press down on the flat top of the blade if more pressure was needed. I didn’t feel comfortable trying to use the thin scalpels.

There wasn’t any way to sterilize



Michael McDermott

his arm or my hands or my knife, so it didn’t take long to get ready. Colonel Hieu refused to participate, but the radio operators held flashlights. I tied a very tight tourniquet around my patient’s upper arm and when everyone seemed prepared I told his buddies to hold him down. I gripped his wrist tight, took a deep breath, and made a strong cut across the inside of his elbow. He groaned and kicked and tried to get free but his

buddies held tight and I continued to cut. The arm didn’t bleed much but the tendons and ligaments were tough and it took a lot of pressure to cut through and find the joint. At one point it didn’t seem like the elbow was going to separate and I couldn’t see what was holding it together, so I just leaned on the knife and finished the job.

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Family Practice: Two Generations Involved In Two Wars

HARVIN H. BAHN

Submitted by Gerald Bahn

My father, Harvin H. Bahn, was drafted after graduating high school in 1943. He went through Armor School in Ft. Knox, Kentucky, training to be a tank crewman. Prior to being shipped overseas, he fought forest fires near Ft. Lewis, Washington.

My father was assigned to HHC 735th Tank Battalion where he was an assistant gunner on a Sherman tank. He claimed to have had two tanks shot from under him. The first time, he was wounded and sent to

England to recover for six weeks. For this, he received a Purple Heart.

He returned just in time to join his Battalion fight in the Battle of the Bulge and also entered France on D-Day Plus 6. He fought in France, Germany, Belgium and Czechoslovakia until V-E Day.

Like many soldiers, he never talked much about his military experiences. One story he did mention was that after a particularly awful battle, the Allied troops were recovering the bodies of the dead and wounded soldiers. They could



H. Bahn



G. Bahn

see the Germans repositioning their armor and reloading their weapons. Yet the Germans did not fire upon the recovery units when they could have easily done so.

GERALD BAHN

My father, Harvin Bahn, and my uncle, Norman Bahn served during World War II. Following the family tradition, I joined the Army right after high school graduation. I took my basic training at Ft. Lewis, Washington, and my AIT training at Aberdeen Proving Grounds, Maryland.

Many soldiers at that time were being sent to Vietnam but I was sent to Korea, which was and still is a “hostile fire zone.” I was stationed at Camp Stanley which is near Uilongbu, Korea, from June 1969 until July 1970. My MOS (Method of Service) was that of a machinist but since there was no need for a machinist, I was assigned to the 11th Engineering Headquarters driving a 2 ½-ton truck. My job was to make daily runs for supplies from Battalion S-4 Supply. Later, I was assigned to driving a five-ton dump truck.

During my assignment in Korea, I drove, as part of a convoy maneuver, to Camp Red Cloud where we all had to re-qualify with the M-14 rifle.

I was originally assigned to Ft.

Riley, Kansas, after my return to the United States from Korea. But I was sent, with three other guys, to Ft. Carson, Colorado, where I was assigned to HHC 2/11 infantry. I was promoted to Sergeant and put in charge of the company’s Arms Room. I had to have Top Secret Security Clearance due to the presence of a Red Eye Missile.

During my tenure in the Arms Room, I improved the record and filing system, including having file cards on each soldier on base, and the serial number of his weapon. An IG inspection of the base judged my Arms Room to be the best arms room on post. My top sergeant was very pleased and I received an award and a savings bond as a reward.

very, Franklin

My Jeep and crew

Tablet - M-16 - 1943

Paulck? ?
Bemilton, Tablet, Bismar

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