



"The News You Miss On Earth" ELI

samn edwards, editor

Greely, Doubleday, Watson...Generals and Colonels were the ranks preceding the names on most of the stones we read as we let our eyes drift from marker to marker searching for a famous name we would all recognize. The chill of October was absent on that clear, warm day a few weeks ago as Vann Greeson, Robert Richardson and I walked along the neatly manicured pathways of Arlington National Cemetery. We stopped for a moment and watched the robotic, spit and polish members of the Old Guard ceremoniously exchange posts at the tomb of the Unknown Soldier and then we talked of past days when the three of us wore olive drab; Robert, walking point in the infantry, Vann strapped to an M-60 machine gun in the doorway of a Huey helicopter and me doing intelligence re-con. It had been twenty years or so for all of us. And it had been twenty years for Eli.

We had made the trip to say good-bye to a friend. A guy we knew and loved and missed. As we settled into our seats in the Chapel at Fort Meyer, Virginia we joined other veterans whose lives Eli had touched. Harry Harwell, Jimmy Goble, David Diprima, Ronald Ingle, Lanett Fox and friends Mona Smith-Brady and Butch Layson and a coterie from Eli's old unit.

His mother Elsie and brothers Harry and Larry sat solemnly in front of us, each having held Eli's face in their memories for two decades, never knowing for certain whether they would ever touch that face again, or hear his voice or his laugh, a laugh so distinctive and yet never more than a half breath away.

As the service concluded we moved outside with the families and friends of the remainder of Eli's crew, the pilot, co-pilot and crew chief who had also died that March 5th, when their helicopter gunship exploded fifteen hundred feet over Laos while on a treacherous mission known as Lamson 719. The horse drawn wagon, the military band and the riderless horse all awaited us at the front of the chapel and we made the sober walk together to section 52 of the Cemetery of

Heroes.

We stood by the casket and watched a young girl place her MIA bracelet gently on the coffin; a former pilot lay his highly polished boots near the grave and then we wrestled with our emotions as Eli's mom was presented with the flag that had covered her son. She sat straight, proud and I watched her as she felt the fabric and caressed it lightly with her fingers maybe remembering the last tape he had sent home and how many times he had said on that tape that he loved his country.

We met at the Wall later. Vann and Robert and I arrived first and researched the directory for the names of others we had known and cared for, scratched out their locations on a scrap of paper and then held our breath for the last few steps before we turned and saw for the first time those huge, angular

slabs of glistening black marble stretching hundreds of feet in front of us; the thousands of names ground into the stone representing a decade when serving your country meant that you could pay the ultimate price.

Robert's friend we found first. He had been killed on one of those nights when a one way ticket to hell would have seemed like a reprieve. Robert stood and looked at his name and smiled a little, thinking of other

times they had had together I suppose and said, "that guy...he was like a brother to me." Vann and I commiserated with him silently as he reread the name, but Robert kept the remainder of his thoughts private. After a time we moved on to find Eli.

We found his name near the top of the fifteen foot wall, far out of our reach, which meant we would be denied a pencil impression. It seemed as if we would return home without it. But Eli would have expected more of us, we thought. Vann and I took the paper from Robert and walked around to the top of the monument where I lay down on the grass, leaned over the wall and as the eyes of hundreds of spectators bore into me, I stretched out my hand and touched the name. At that instant I felt a fourth person had joined us, that if he had



not been with us before, the connection had suddenly been made, as if he had been summoned by the touch of my hand on his name; I saw his face in my mind and heard his curly lipped, unmistakable laugh and then his voice, "Edwards what in the hell do you think you're doing," and then more of his laughter. And at that moment the long drive, the rigid discomfort of a chapel pew, the inordinate proselytizing by the chaplain, the second hand pain from what his family had been feeling and the almost alien tears that had crept into my eyes a dozen times that day, suddenly all of that had been rendered insignificant. For a fleeting second Eli was here.

I placed the paper over his letters and quickly made four impressions, one for each of us and another for his mom and finished just as a grizzled old park attendant yelled to "get off the wall."

On our way out we met mother King and brother Harry who had served in the Marines, the brother who had eyed the war from it's middle and been wounded before Eli had volunteered, and brother Larry and his family. We chatted for a few moments, passed around Eli's high school class ring which his niece had worn and then gave them the pencil impression. They were a proud bunch, the Kings, a pride strengthened by two decades of pain and two decades of memories of what might have been, and the undeniable truth of what a success Eli would have been. He was a boy of humor, intelligence, honor and courage and he would have been a man in whom those traits would have multiplied a hundredfold.

The earth is a lessor place without him. But, I can hear his laughter, still.

MICHAEL ELI KING, KIA, LAOS, 1971



Eli's friends and fellow veterans assembled at the gravesite in Arlington National Cemetery. (L-R) Robert Richardson, Harry Harwell, Butch Layson, Jimmy Goble, Ronald Ingle, David Diprima, Samn Edwards and Vann Greeson.



Vann Greeson remembers a comrade-in-arms at the Vietnam Memorial in Washington DC.

VALUES AS CURRICULA

edwards/Stephens

It's come to this. We're approaching the twenty first century and suddenly we discover that our children no longer know the difference between right and wrong, good and bad or even the practical application of the ten commandments.

So the state Board of Education has plans to institute a new and deeper emphasis on values in our children's education. Courage, tolerance, honesty and regard for human life will now join the 3 R's. "We're seeing a generation go through school without learning values," said board chairman Hollis Q. Lathem, "We're teaching values now, to some extent, but apparently it's not working."

No wonder. Children are often more influenced by an inanity spouting cathode ray tube than by their parents. Most of whom-even the ones conveying intelligent attitudes-are probably falling far short in leading by example. And television, "the great dispenser of all that is real," says one cynic, depicts life with a large dose of empiricism, as sad a concept as they may be, but as such it is not generally illustrative of the types of goals or ideals that would most benefit societies impressionable minds.

The Board is considering a litany of course ideas that might possibly reverse the current trend. Including: a respect for nature, with an emphasis on the conservation of land, air and water; components of civic responsibility such as global awareness, justice, respect for authority, patriotism and rights of personal property.

Pope John Paul II has said that the state of the environment, "lays bare the depth of man's moral crisis." If we are ever to have a kinder, gentler nation, (one of President Bush's more sensitive and sensible ideas) then the proper management of our earth seems a logical starting point.

Environmentally, Georgia ranks 44th according to a recent study. If left to the whims and inaction of the state legislature we are sure to remain ensconced in the environmental cellar, where neither light nor air nor common reason can exist. At number 44, there are but six states more irresponsible than us. Bad company, one would think. Like mom and dad always told us, "you are who you hang out with."