

## **Sgt. Wayne M. Kidwell, U.S. Army**

By Barbara Glakas

On this Memorial Day weekend we remember Wayne M. Kidwell, for whom the Town's American Legion post is named.

Herndon's American Legion Post #184 was chartered in 1989. The first Sergeant at Arms, John Kirk, suggested naming the Post after Wayne M. Kidwell, a Herndon native who was killed in action in Vietnam. At a meeting on August 21, 1989, the members approved the name.

Wayne Minor Kidwell was born in 1948 to Kenneth and Emily Kidwell. As a child he lived in the Fox Mill area of Reston and attended Navy Elementary School. His family moved to Ballou Street in Herndon when he was middle school age.

Wayne liked working on his grandparent's farm; he enjoyed plowing and planting corn, potatoes, and other vegetables. He also liked hunting, fishing, go-karts, and fast cars as he got older. He was described as someone who was strong, who had nerves of steel, and who would always stick up for or help anyone in need.

He was very passionate about serving his country. When he decided to enlist in the Army he was under age and had to have his parents sign for him. He always wanted to become a paratrooper.

He became a member of the U.S. Army and attained the rank of Sergeant (E4). He started his tour in Vietnam in December of 1967. He served in the first platoon of Company A, the First Battalion, 502<sup>nd</sup> Infantry of the 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne Division.

Sgt. Kidwell was a recipient of the Combat Infantry Badge, the Parachutist Badge, the Vietnam Gallantry Cross Unit Citation, the Vietnam Service Medal, the National Defense Service Medal, the Republic of Vietnam Campaign Medal and the Purple Heart. He died on March 8, 1968 of hostile small arms fire in the Battle of Ap Dong Lam in the Thua Thien Province of South Vietnam. He was 19 years old.

Excerpts from the writings of a fellow unit member, Charles "Country" Cole, describe the battle:

The Battle of Ap Dong Lam was fought on March 7<sup>th</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> of 1968 by A Co. 1/502/2nd Bde, 101st Airborne Division. We had artillery support, but I don't remember any air support other than the medivacs taking out our dead and wounded.

The first thing I remember about it is when Sgt. Otero, Sgt. Tetrick, and SP4 Laird went on a scouting mission into the village next to Ap Dong Lam. They made contact with the enemy and Sgt. Tetrick (my squad leader) was killed by automatic weapons fire. He was a tough fearless soldier and it really got to me to see him shot up the way he was. Laird brought his body back. I put his gear on the chopper when they carried him out.

After we got resupplied and our wounded and dead were taken out, we moved to a graveyard next to the village of Ap Dong Lam. Third platoon sent out an ambush to the left of Ap Dong Lam that night. They said the NVA walked into their kill zone with their AKs slung over their shoulders not suspecting they were fixing to die. They sprang the ambush and pulled back to the NDP.

I can't remember everything that happened the next morning, but I do remember we were being fired on from the village. There was also some artillery fire called in on the village.

My squad was sent in to take out an enemy machine gun that was firing at us. Our squad went in alone on this machine gun across this paddy. How we all made it to the edge of the village with this gun firing at us every time we jumped up to run toward the village, I don't know, but we made it. They pulled the machine gun back when we got close. We took out some more enemy positions along the edge of the village and then stayed trapped there for 4 or 5 hours. One of our guys had to throw 3 grenades into one bunker to silence it. He then stood up and said "I got him" and promptly got his helmet shot off his head. Didn't hurt him.

We had four or five rockets or RPGs fired at our position. Most of them went over our heads and blew up in the rice paddy about 20 yards behind us, but one hit a banana tree right where we were and blew up. I don't know to this day how we survived that one.

I carried 6 grenades with me on this assault and many clips of ammo for the M-16. We fired up most of our ammo and threw most of our grenades during this 4 or 5 hours we were there. I had 1 clip left and 1 grenade when the word came at dark for us to pull back. We made a hasty retreat back to where the rest of the company was.

The next day was when the whole company assaulted the village and the enemy let the company get in the village and started popping up out of holes shooting people. We had come in bringing up the rear after we had such a bad day the day before and already lost two men from our squad. The enemy just flat ran us out of that village that day and inflicted many casualties on us. I remember walking away from the village helping carry some of the dead and the enemy shooting at us. We were just walking in the open.

When I got back to the graveyard, I laid on top of a grave and was shooting back in the village. I heard a bullet go over my head and then a few seconds later, one hit the tombstone beside me. I decided someone in the village was shooting at me and decided not to give him a third clear shot at me. I got down behind the grave and finished this day from there.

The last day, we went through the village and the enemy had slipped away. I believe we were credited with 57 enemy KIA. We had lost 10 KIA and many WIA. We also recovered our 3 MIAs. They estimated we were fighting two NVA companies or more. This battle is not well known by many, but some men from A Co. remember it well.

Sgt. Kidwell is buried in Herndon's Chestnut Grove Cemetery. His name is on the Vietnam Memorial Wall in Washington, D.C., Panel 43E, Row 56.

Others from Herndon who died in the Vietnam War include PFC Ernest Richard Franks, U.S. Marines; PFC Theodore S. Heriot Jr., U.S. Army; PFC Guy Holdaway, U.S. Army; and PFC Daniel Wesley White, U.S. Army.