

## PMM BLOG ARCHIVE

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### Germantown Native's Helmet a Grim Reminder of the Cost of War

(Pennsylvania Military Museum, J. Gleim, Museum Curator)

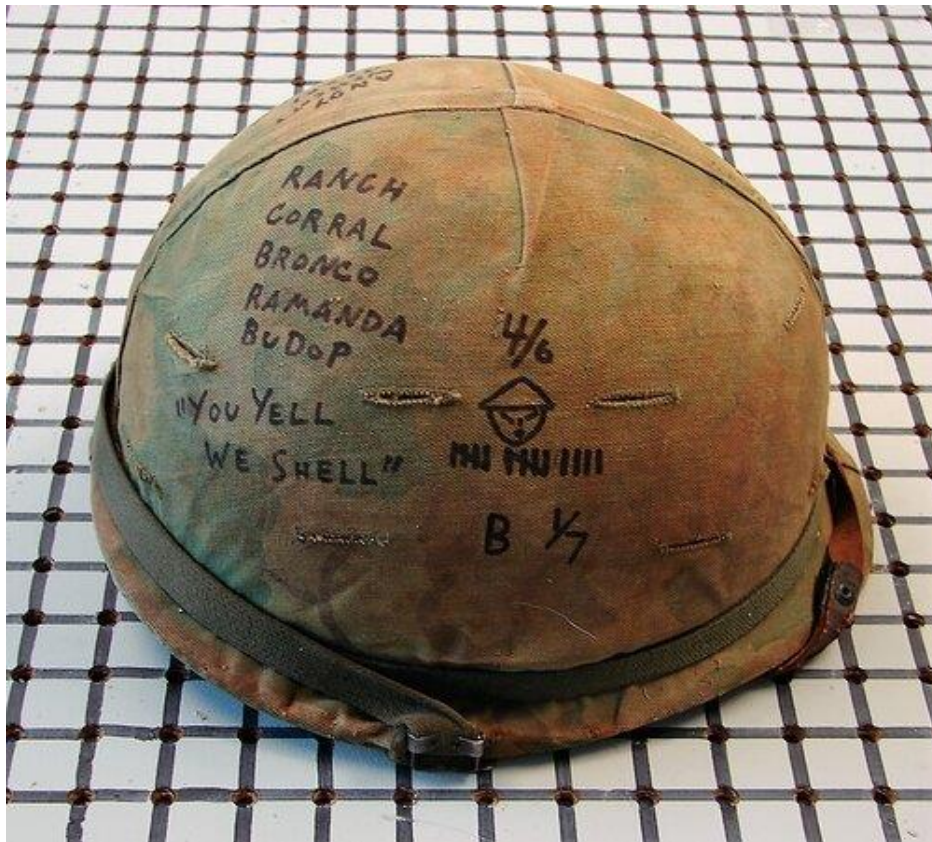
William J. Peberdy (1947-2009) of Germantown, Pennsylvania wore this helmet while serving in the Army during the Vietnam. Peberdy volunteered for service in 1967 and shortly after graduation from bootcamp, he was accepted into Army Officer Candidate School. Following his commission as a Second Lieutenant in May 1969, Peberdy was deployed to Vietnam, where he served for a year.

Peberdy was assigned to the 1st Battalion, 7th Cavalry, 1st Air Division as the 4th Platoon Leader. As a platoon leader, Lt. Peberdy was responsible for controlling and directing the accomplishment of his platoon's mission. To that end, he planned patrol routes, assigned duties, and positioned the soldiers under his command. In addition to ensuring mission success, Lt. Peberdy bore the responsibility for the health, welfare, and morale of the soldiers under his command.



During his time in Vietnam, Lt. Peberdy marked his helmet cover with symbols that commemorated his time in Vietnam, including a list of the men in his platoon, and a “short-timer’s calendar” intended to track how far along his twelve month tour was. As his time in

Vietnam wore on, Peberdy stopped keeping track of his calendar, recalling that the invasion of Cambodia in April 1970 put a stop to such “frivolous activity”.



On the other side of his helmet Lt. Peberdy recorded the firebases that he and his platoon operated from. Firebases were temporary encampments designed to provide artillery fire support to infantry units operating beyond the normal range of support from a larger main base. Because there were no defined battle lines during the Vietnam War, firebase positions were often located in enemy-dominated territory.

Lt. Peberdy also marked his helmet with a series of hash marks that he explained in a letter to the Pennsylvania Military Museum, as “the other grim portrayal was a[n] account of the measure by which ones leadership was evaluated in [a] particular page of Army history. It is by no means an individual accounting. Running a unit in combat is very much a team effort, and no one man could do it all...If the young Lt. felt a grim sense of pride in his unit and its achievements on a dozen bloody contacts, you will have to forgive him.”.

When William Peberdy returned from Vietnam he spoke little of his experience, preferring to remain a silent veteran. His helmet, and his brief recollections of the markings it bears provides visitors to the museum with a powerful testament to the cost of war.