

May 6, 2020

## Two Sacrifices, One Family, 51 Years Apart

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

Lance Corporal William (“Bill”) Franklin Merrill was born in 1948 in Muncy, PA to Joseph and Sheila (Wolfe) Merrill. He graduated from Muncy High School in 1966. That year, he and his family moved to State College and William began working for HRB Singer Inc., a defense contractor that provided imagery support as well as signal analysis and processing.



In 1968, Merrill enlisted in the Marine Corps. He trained as a radioman (RTO)/demolitions expert with India Company, Third Battalion, First Marine Division. He arrived in Vietnam on February 2, 1969. In May, Merrill’s unit came under heavy fire while on a search and destroy operation. Merrill observed a wounded comrade fall in an open area. He ran to the man, administered lifesaving first aid and carried him to safety. In August, Bill was wounded but returned to duty.

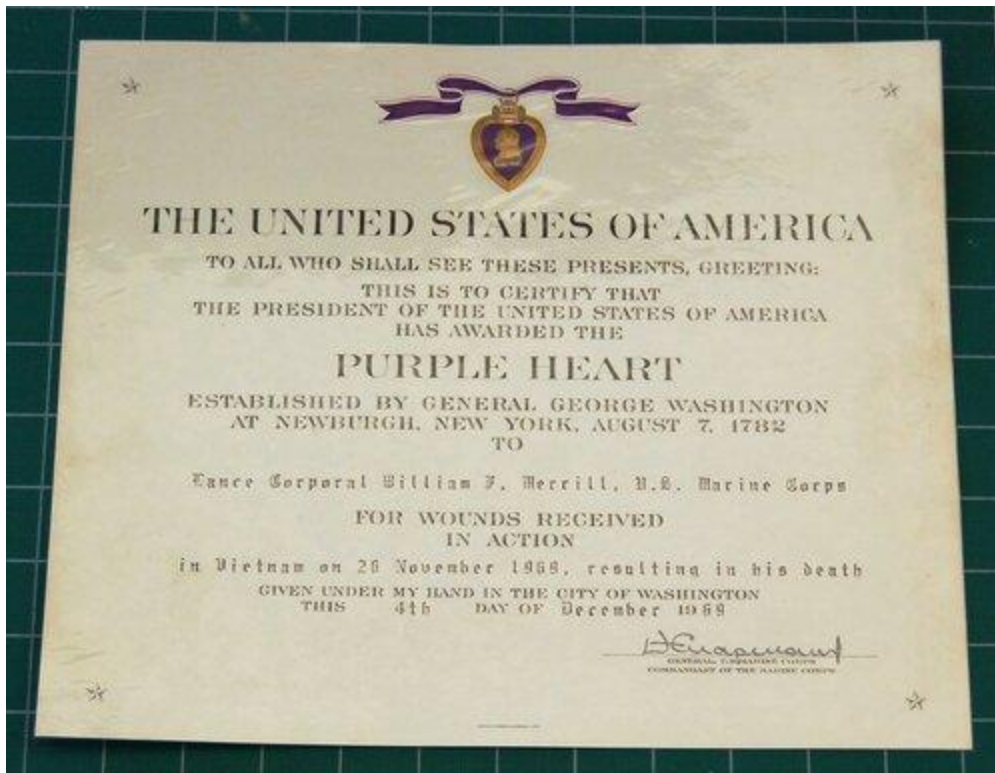
On November 26, 1969 Merrill’s unit was on patrol in Quang Nam Province, approximately 8.5 miles south of Danang, Vietnam when they discovered a command-detonated booby trap. After discovering the device, Merrill

guided his comrades around the danger and instructed them to take protective cover. Once the area was cleared, Merrill and Sergeant Clive Garcia, Jr. attempted to locate the connecting wires when the booby trap detonated, killing both Merrill and Garcia.



Merrill's remains were returned to Centre County, and he is buried in the Boalsburg cemetery. His great grandfather, Captain Franklin Wolfe, was killed in action with the 1st Battalion, 109th Infantry Regiment during the Meuse Argonne Offensive and is listed on the WWI Officers Memory Wall at the 28th Infantry Division Shrine. William F. Merrill received the Navy Achievement Medal with Combat V, the Purple Heart, The Grit Award for Meritorious Community Service, and the Daughters of the American Revolution Memorial.

In 1970, William Merrill's parents discovered an article in Grit Magazine recounting a small Arizona town's loss of six Marines in Vietnam who had all enlisted together. The Merrills recognized Sergeant Clive Garcia's name among those lost. Curious about the man who had been killed alongside their son, the Merrills contacted Garcia's family. The two families connected and shared stories about their sons.



In a Grit Magazine follow-up article, the Merrills stated: “It was through the article in the Grit that we two families who have suffered identical great loss of our sons have been able to talk with each other. We have both lost sons, brothers, and loved ones on the same mission, at the same hour, in the same country, Vietnam – to preserve our peace and freedom here in the U.S.”.