

9/30/18

**Tom McCracken
RVN Memorial Committee**

I really wish I could have attended this ceremony as I have never been back to Gettysburg, and what an important time to do it. My body is too beat up from 27 years in the Army Infantry (bad back/neuropathy), and age. I wanted to return because three of these KIA are friends of mine.

Ron Thompson, a fellow TKE was maybe two years ahead of me and sort of looked out for me in my historically long pledgeship--5 semesters—grades. He was a kind, smooth, understanding brother—just the friendly kind of guy with the focused, cool, attitude necessary to become a fighter pilot. As I understand it, he was a Blue Angel, training for a flight demonstration in the greatest high performance jet fighter demonstration team in the world. I can remember his arm on my shoulder counseling me to hang in as a TKE pledge, hit the books, and make it. I'll bet he was that way as a military officer, taking care of his junior officers and enlisted troops.

Joe Murphy, among a number of SAE friends, was a physically tough, but compassionate, friendly college kid when I knew him. I didn't know he had joined the Marine Corps, as I had graduated (miracle) before him, until I heard of his F-4 missing in RVN combat. I later learned Joe's wife, Carol, and my wife, Connie Suttles, were roommates in some G-Burg dorm (can't ask Connie as she in mid-dementia now.) So, Joe and Ron did exactly what I wanted to do--fly fighters. Ron & Joe, up there in the big, blue sky—see you soon.

Rick, was a Phi Psi, with the rest of my collection of bright, studious, intermural classmates. I didn't see him very much but I know he was a dedicated patriot. (Knew him thru John Perry, and Rick Bainbridge, later both USMC Lieutenants, and Bruce Elton, one of the few guys who had prior military service.) I congratulate the college, Tom McCracken, Chairman of this committee, and the entire committee for the wonderful effort to memorialize our students who gave it all for this country.

Gettysburg went a long way to my maturation process, I loved the college so much, I stayed an extra semester! (Just ask Dean Jones and Dean Shaneline), and went quickly into the Army. I came into G-Burg with the class of 1962, and graduated in Jan '63. The Army finished the job and made me a responsible citizen. So, my word to parents, and current students, if you aren't ready for a job that you may not like, or might not find you will perhaps like, consider the military. Like me, you will find so much pleasure in growing up to help defend our country and you will learn leadership skills in three years that might take you ten years or never.

I think I can speak for Ron, Joe, and Rick, the better part of their military service was important to them. I grieve at their losses. (I spent 31 months of ground combat time in Vietnam and was fortunate to come home.) I'm sure there have been many G-Burg grads/students who have served in combat (Vietnam, Iraq, Afghanistan, Bosnia, Africa, and where else we've been) who did come home, and my hat's off to all.

**Bob McKeen
Colonel, US Army, Ret'd
Ranger**