

Carp's War

On Sunday morning, April 23, 1967 LRRP Team 1 came under heavy fire from enemy soldiers. It was the first mission for **William "Bill" Carpenter** and **David Ives**. The four other members of the team on this ill-fated mission were Team Leader, **John Simones**; **Doug Fletcher**; **Art Guerrero**; and **Geoff Koper**. The fierce and grueling battle of this six-man LRRP team is depicted in chapter 18 of Gregg P.J. Jorgenson's book, [The Ghosts of the Highlands](#).

On this mission the LRRP company suffered its first casualties. **David Allen Ives** became the unit's first LRRP killed in action. **Guerrero**, **Koper** and **Carpenter** were all seriously wounded. Heroes are made in times like these and the members of this team on this mission qualify without exception. Courage under fire is a trademark of LRRP/Rangers and it started with Team 1 on April 23, 1967 for the 1st Cav LRRPs and continued throughout the Vietnam War. The following account of the mission is from Bill Carpenter's perspective and the actual documents are his irreplaceable and treasured mementos. Thank you for sharing your story with us, Bill.

Bill Carpenter is a loving family member, a devoted son and all-around good guy--and a liar! Let me explain. It seems that Bill's parents had contacts back home with folks who knew quite a bit about military operations and Bill did not want them to be aware that he had joined the LRRPs. So, to keep them from worrying he fabricated a tale that could be feasible and help explain his return address. The story that he told them was that he had a very safe job interpreting maps and doing a little aerial map work.

That well intentioned fib must have added to the shock that Bill's mother felt when she was on jury duty in Denver, Colorado and was told that she was needed at home right away. No reason was given--just that she must return home. On the bus trip home from the court room she felt that it must be about Bill. Upon her arrival she was given [this telegram from the Adjutant General](#).

The trouble with telling small lies is you have to tell more to cover your tracks. On April 25, just two days after the mission Bill was in the 67th Evacuation Hospital and could not write because he had been shot in the left hand (Bill's a south paw). Wanting to communicate with his folks and not realizing that the army had already sent the telegram describing the seriousness of his wounds, Bill persuaded a Donut Dollie to write [this letter](#) for him. In a crazy sort of way, I imagine that receiving the letter eased the concern that his family must have felt to some degree. At least he was conscious and thinking of them. But before the family could have actually received this letter, the army sent another [telegram on April 27](#), advising them that Bill had been moved to the 249th General Hospital and [another on April 28](#), advising them that he had been taken off of the seriously ill list. Isn't it amazing that they don't even tell you where the hospital is located!

On April 30, one week after the mission, Bill decided to come clean and wrote [this letter](#) using his wounded left hand. It's a little difficult to read so a [typed version](#) of it is available.

Bill and the army weren't the only ones doing the writing. Shortly after the mission Team Leader, John Simones wrote [this letter](#) to Bill. Many times in war, the wounded are gone and never heard from others in their unit. Bill has treasured this letter for years and the comments proclaiming him a "professional soldier" have always meant more to Bill than John could have realized when he wrote the letter. Also, John's wish for Bill to successfully pursue his dreams did in fact come true. After recovering from his wounds Bill returned to college and became a successful veterinarian.

On May 11 Bill wrote [this long letter home](#) from Japan. It says it all.

Bill also received this letter from [Lt. Ron Hall, the XO of the LRRPs](#) and this letter from [Captain James D. James, the company commander](#). The copy didn't come out very clear. So you can read [this type written version of Captain James's letter](#). These written communications from men involved in combat are so highly valued

because of the intense conditions under which they were living. To take time to write to a wounded soldier, who they may never hear from again shows the love and respect that these LRRPs had for one another.

Not only did Bill hear from LRRPs, friends, and family back home, but he also heard from members of his former state side unit, "The Old Guard" in Washington, DC. One friend in particular, Jack Lawn, wrote for the whole company and sent Bill [this very encouraging letter](#) with a card signed by all the members of his old unit.

Bill and Art Guerrero, both from Denver, received medals at ceremonies held at Fitzsimons Army Hospital in Denver and their pictures and a small part of their huge stories were told in the Denver Post. [Bill's ceremony](#) and [Art's ceremony](#). Although the awards are nice they never are enough. That fateful mission affected those involved dramatically. It changed those involved forever. In spite of the damage done, the pain, the hurt and the loss, some very wonderful things came from it. Courage and caring were the bywords that day and long afterwards.

Strawberry Fields Forever

PFC William D. Carpenter
RA 16887249
Ward I-B
US Army Hospital
Camp Zama, Japan
APO San Francisco, Calif 96343

To
Mrs. Ova M. Carpenter
4416 Xavier St.
Denver, Colo 80212

30 Apr 67

Dear Momma,

Try writing with a cast on your arm, it's a little slow.

First of all, I'm really doing great and my moral is really very high and except for my broken jaw, having no problems except for ear aches the jaw causes. I can get shots that kill the pain right off. I usually only have them give them to me if I need them to sleep. So the pain is not really all that bad.

Now it looks like that in about 2 months the kid is either going to have one of the best "cool it" jobs in V.N. or be home with a discharge. The only way I will go back to V.N. is on my terms and I can call them. There can be some money to be made in V.N.

Your little boy fibbed to you. Next, have Tom H. and Ronnie tell you what I've really been doing, LRRP and all. On the the eve of the 19th me and one other new man went out on our first mission. We were with Team 1. Things went well and we picked up some important info for Division. Until about 6:15 am on the morning of the 23rd (about) 15 VC hit us. Some of them were women but all had automatic weapons. Some had BAR's like Kirby carries on Combat. I was on guard and the first I knew they were in the area was when a gernade (sic) went off beside my head. This is what did the damage. I am permanently blind in my left eye.. It also broke my jaw, knocked our 4 or 5 teeth and put a couple of cuts in the kid, none that would mar my features tho. The concussion also temporarily deafened me. Two doctors have examined my ears and say that there is no permanent damage. If there is any, it will be only minor to my left ear.

Well after that we had a little firefight. I passed out three times during it, so I don't know all that happened. I did get shot 3 times, but no major damage. Once through the left hand, no broken bones but the nerve to my pinky, once through the left fore arm, missing both bones and Ronnie you said in one of your letters, "Don't get your you-know-what shot off", well the third one went in my left hip, came out my left thigh about 1/2 way down. My hip is not even sore, I can sit on it. Only limp a little when I walk. Art, the kid from Denver, was shot in the stomach area, but not hurt seriously. Our medic took a round in the spleen, it had to be removed. Art was everywhere in that fight. Using the grenade launcher, calling in choppers, shooting. Really a good man. Now for a big

reason for me wanting to go back to Nam. The other new man was on the same poncho sleeping that I was—less than 2 feet away—he took seven rounds through the trunk. Died instantly. I feel I owe Dave something. I don't know if the army will even let a 1-eyed man stay in uniform, much less in V.N. and I know I'll never see combat again. Actually the odds are real good that I will be home for Daddy's birthday.

Again Momma, don't worry about me. I'm really doing fine. I thot it was about time I told the truth. By the way I have been recommended for the Bronze Star, the major that eats where you work can tell you about it.

Would you let the people around the area know why they aren't hearing from me. Appreciate it.

Well, I am going to quit for now. Take care, tell all hello.

Love always,
Your son,
Bill

Original Letter below:

CLASS OF SERVICE
This is a fast message unless its delivery character is indicated by the proper symbol.

WESTERN UNION TELEGRAM

W. P. MARSHALL
CHAIRMAN OF THE BOARD

M. W. MCPALL
PRESIDENT

SYMBOLS
DL=Day Letter
NL=Night Letter
LT=International Letter Telegram

The time shown in the date line on domestic telegrams is LOCAL TIME at point of origin. Time of arrival is LOCAL TIME at point of destination.

333A CST APR 25 67 KA053

SYAO39 SY WA110 GOVT PD 6 EXTRA FAX WASHINGTON DC 25 320A EST

MR AND MRS OVA M CARPENTER, DONT PHONE, REPORT DELIVERY

4416 XAVIER ST DVR

THE SECRETARY OF THE NAVY HAS ASKED ME TO EXPRESS HIS DEEP REGRET THAT YOUR SON, PFC WILLIAM D. CARPENTER WAS PLACED ON THE SERIOUSLY ILL LIST IN VIETNAM ON 23 APRIL 67 AS THE RESULT OF GUNSHOT WOUNDS TO LEFT ARM, LEFT THIGH, BUTTOCKS, FACIAL FRACTURE AND LOSS OF LEFT EYE. HE WAS ON RECONNAISSANCE PATROL WHEN HIT BY HOSTILE SMALL ARMS FIRE.

IN THE JUDGEMENT OF THE ATTENDING PHYSICIAN, HIS CONDITION IS OF

WU100102-00

THE COMPANY WILL APPRECIATE SUGGESTIONS FROM ITS PATRONS CONCERNING ITS SERVICE

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SUCH SEVERITY THAT THERE IS CAUSE FOR CONCERN, BUT NO IMMINENT DANGER TO LIFE. PLEASE BE ASSURED THAT THE BEST MEDICAL FACILITIES AND DOCTORS HAVE BEEN MADE AVAILABLE AND EVERY MEASURE IS BEING TAKEN TO AID HIM. A REPORT ON HIS PROGRESS WILL BE FURNISHED YOU IN ABOUT FIVE DAYS. IF THERE IS A CHANGE IN HIS CONDITION YOU WILL BE ADVISED IMMEDIATELY. ADDRESS MAIL TO HIM AT 67TH EVACUATION HOSPITAL, APO SAN FRANCISCO 96238

KENNETH G WICKHAM MAJOR GENERAL USA C1701 THE ADJUTANT GENERAL
1017A

WU100102-00

THE COMPANY WILL APPRECIATE SUGGESTIONS FROM ITS PATRONS CONCERNING ITS SERVICE

Class of Service

This is a fast message
service. It is delivered direct
and is indicated by the
proper symbol.

WESTERN UNION

TELEGRAM

W. P. MARSHALL
Chairman of the Board

R. W. McFALL
President

Symbols

DL = Day Letter
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Letter Telegram

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141A CST APR 27 67 K0397

SYA592 SY WA008 GOVT XV PD FAX WASHINGTON DC 26 1139P EST

MR & MRS OVA M CARPENTER, DONT PHONE

4416 XAVIER ST DWR

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION RECEIVED STATES THAT YOUR SON, PFC WILLIAM
D. CARPENTER HAS BEEN EVACUATED TO THE 249TH GENERAL HOSPITAL,
APO SAN FRANCISCO 96202 ON 26 APRIL 1967. ADDRESS MAIL TO HIM
AT ABOVE NAMED MEDICAL FACILITY.

YOU WILL BE PROMPTLY ADVISED AS ADDITIONAL INFORMATION IS RECEIVED

KENNETH G WICKHAM MAJOR GENERAL USA THE ADJUTANT GENERAL

249 96202 26 1967

(53).

30 Apr

DEAR Pimma,

Try writing with a cast on your arm, its a little slow.

First of all, I'm really doing great and my moral is really very high, and except for my broken jaw, having no problems except for ear aches. The jaw causes I can get shots that kill the pain right off. I usually only have them give ~~me~~ to me if I need them to sleep. So the pain is not really all that bad.

Now it looks like that is about 2mo. The kid is either going to haul one of the best Cool it jobs in V.C. or be home with a discharge. The only way I'll go to V.C. is on my terms & I can call them. There can be some money to be made in V.C.

Next, have Tom H & Rennie till you see what I've really been doing. you're little boy fibbes to you
and all. On the eve of the 19th we and one other new man went out on our first mission. This go went well & we picked up some important info for Division. Until about 6:15 A.M. on the morning of the 23rd 15 V.C. hit us, some of them women but all with automatic weapons. Some had BAR's like Kirby Carries on Combat. I was on guard & the first I knew they were in the area was when a

we were with Team 5



THE AMERICAN NATIONAL RED CROSS

25 April, 1967

Dear Momma,

You probably know your little boy got hurt the other day. I was fooling around with another guy in a Huey and fell out and broke my left hand and smashed my jaw up. I will be going to Gonzo or the Philippines for about three weeks R+R. I'm getting along ok - it's not really that bad. My mail will probably be messed up pretty good now. This will probably definitely knock me out of the school in Nha Trang. I will be going back to An Khê from the hospital. I don't know how

11 May

Hi All,

Finally got some stationary - or is it ery. I didn't have any money until yesterday & most of the other guys are in similar shape & I didn't want to borrow what little they had.

I got Daddy's Letter, A Card From Aunt Blanche, and a Card from Leon & Wilma so far. They have my mail fouled up here. For some reason They are sending it over to stand 9. One of the work Sgts. just happened to be over there & get them for me. The Address you have is right tho.

I guess a situation Report would be in order. First, I didn't know I was even on any "danger list". I'll admit I was asleep most of the 24 - 30 hours after I was asleep but when other teams came in off missions

July 1967
Bong Son, V.P.

Dear Phil,

I have read several of your letters to the men of the Company. You sound like you are doing well. As I am sure you know we all wish you the best.

With only 16 days left in Vietnam I am a bit anxious to see the U.S. again. My assignment instruction read H. Head, Japan. I must admit I have tried to get them changed, but no luck! It looks like I'll be spending my last nine months in Japan. I hope to be able to stop and see you on my way to Japan. That should be the last part of July or the first of Aug. I do hope you will be in the area (of Denver) at that time.

We haven't had much going on since you left. A couple of teams have made light contact but no injuries. I had my CC shot up the other day and was hit in the hand with a frag but am back in action doing well. Sgt Campbell was scratched on one cheek and another Lt. was hit in the leg with an M16 round. Other than that everyone is doing well.

Yours
H. Head
XO LRP



Denver Post Photo by Cloyd Tater

THESE FOUR MEN WERE AMONG THOSE DECORATED AT FITZSIMONS GENERAL HOSPITAL

From left, they are Spec. 4 Steven D. Case, Colorado Springs, and Spec. 4 Lawrence L. Lander, Wyo.; Pfc. William B. Carpenter, Stephens, Glenrock, Wyo. They received medals in Friday ceremony at the hospital.

12 Wounded Veterans Receive Decorations

Twelve wounded veterans of the Vietnam war were decorated Friday in a ceremony at Fitzsimons General Hospital.

Their combat decorations included seven Purple Hearts and the Republic of Vietnam's Cross of Gallantry.

The Cross of Gallantry winner is Spec. 4 Steven D. Case, 19, Lander, Wyo.

CARRIED AMMUNITION

Despite wounds received on a search and destroy mission, Case continued to carry ammunition to his machine gun and fellow soldiers until he was evacuated.

Among other soldiers decorated were Pfc. William B. Carpenter, 25, of 4416 Xavier St.; Spec. 4 Lawrence L. Stephens, 21, Glenrock, Wyo., and Spec. 4 Louis J. Swayne, 20, Colorado Springs.

Carpenter received the Bronze Star with V device for valor for his heroism on a long-range reconnaissance patrol.

When his unit made contact

with a numerically superior enemy force, he was critically wounded early in the fighting.

Despite this, he continued to engage the enemy and was instrumental in preventing his patrol from being overrun.

Carpenter received the Purple Heart earlier, for multiple gunshot wounds and the loss of his left eye.

Others receiving the Purple Heart Friday were Spec. 4 Steven W. Ducklow, Spring Valley, Wis.; Spec. 4 Norlyn A. Huseby, Yuma, Ariz., and Pfc. Alexander V. Sokoloski, Buhl Minn.

HEROISM AWARDS

Men who received other heroism awards were:

—1st Lt. David U. McCool, Payette, Idaho, the Bronze Star and third Oak Leaf Cluster with V device to the Bronze Star for his actions as a platoon leader with the 1st Cavalry Division. He previously was awarded the Purple Heart.

—Sgt. 1 C. Richard T. Norris, Fayetteville, N.C., second Oak

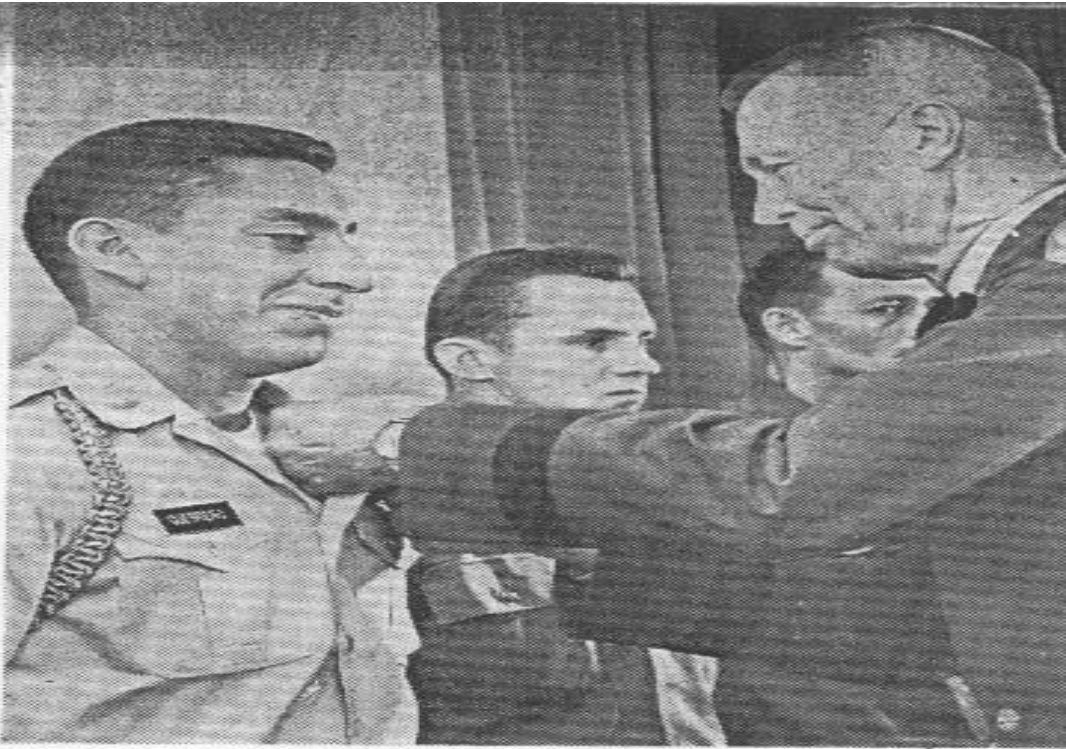
Leaf Cluster with V device to the Bronze Star and second Oak Leaf Cluster to the Army Commendation Medal for heroism during a river crossing. He received the Purple Heart earlier.

—1st Lt. Millard F. Allen, Brookhaven, Miss., Bronze Star with V device for his actions during a battle deep in Viet Cong territory. He also received the Purple Heart previously.

—Pfc. William J. Brady, Whitestone, N.Y., for 25 missions over enemy territory. He has received the Purple Heart for gunshot wounds in his leg.

—WO Fred A. Leistiko, Sun River, Mo., Purple Heart and two awards of the Air Medal for his actions as an assault helicopter pilot.

A noncombat award, the Army Commendation Medal, was presented to Col. Arthur J. Kropp, St. Cloud, Minn., for meritorious service as chief of the Supply and Service Division, U.S. Army General Hospital, Frankfurt, Germany.



SGT. ARTHUR L. GUERRERO RECEIVES SILVER STAR
Medal is pinned on by Maj. Gen. Robert E. Blount.
Denver Post Photo by Orin A. Sealy

SIX OTHER AWARDS

9 Viet Vets Given Medals

Nine veterans of the Vietnam fighting were awarded a total of 14 medals Friday in ceremonies at Fitzsimons General Hospital. Six others received Purple Hearts for wounds received in combat.

S/Sgt. Vital Lajoie Jr. of Sugar Creek, Wyo., Sgt. Arthur L. Guerrero, 729 Elati St. and Spec. 4 Kerry W. Nelson, Long Providence, Minn., received Silver Stars, the Army's third-highest award.

Guerrero received the Silver Star, the Army Commendation Medal with V-device (for valor) and the Purple Heart. He has been discharged from the hospital, although he still suffers discomfort from bullet wounds in one leg and one shoulder.

Guerrero is a part-time district adviser in the circulation department of The Denver Post. After his discharge in about five months he will return to The Post full-time.

The award was witnessed by

Guerrero's mother, Mrs. Elvira Guerrero, 729 Elati St., and two sisters, Betty Jean Guerrero of the same address and Mrs. Anna Louise Trujillo, 674 Elati St.

Lajoie, who still uses a wheelchair to get around, received the Silver Star, the Bronze Star with V-device and the Purple Heart.

OTHERS HONORED

Others receiving awards for battlefield action were Sgt. Gerald Madden Jr. of Sandy, Utah, Bronze Star with V-device; Sgt. Floyd L. Cota, Whittier, Calif., Bronze Star with V-device; Spec. 4 Charles Swanson, Fairbault, Minn., Air Medal and Army Commendation Medal; Spec. 4 Robert A. Andrews, Lincoln, Neb., Air Medal with First Oak Leaf Cluster with V-device and Purple Heart; S/Sgt. Jerry W. Beavers, Muskogee, Okla., Army Commendation Medal; Airman 4/c George A. Zeiler, Brighton