

# Everyday Hero

By Katie Meisel

Dwight Montgomery Durham is a name that Monty Durham probably only heard when his mother was mad at him, which for a studious but fun-loving kid like Monty, was probably only occasionally. His friends called him Monty when inviting him to ride bikes on the infamous Channel 8 hill, and the name used when asking to play in the coolest treehouse on the block. The meticulously crafted, insulated, and electrically lit treehouse stands out in the memories of all who knew Monty as a youngster.

Born to a seamstress and to a father who enjoyed building amazing treehouses in his spare time, Monty and his two older siblings, Joe Jr. and Patty, grew up on the west side of Tulsa, Oklahoma. Raised Protestant, young Monty grew up with his beloved dog, a Samoyed named Lady, an Archie collection to be reckoned with, and a Sunday morning paper route. The paper route was not only a source of income for the dozen or so boys employed, but also a time for social gathering before the route began - social time which always resulted in rubber band fights. They always got the job done, though, a habit that would prove to be very useful later in life.

Schools on the west side of Tulsa are not known for their stellar reputation - then or now; therefore, Monty's parents sent him to a different school on the other side of town. Intelligence seemed to run in Monty's family - his older brother Joe received a full scholarship to M.I.T., and Monty himself was no slump. He did not let that go to his head though. Monty, in between making stellar grades, still made many good friends, including one Jerry Sinard, a fellow paper boy who covered Monty's route first when he came down with mononucleosis for six weeks, and when he crashed the brand-new bicycle the day he got it riding down the Channel 8 hill and was out of commission for a month. At the time though, a month's recovery probably seemed worth it.

Monty grew into a caring young man. When his friend Jerry, who had helped him all the times he had needed it, was in a car accident, Monty went to visit although they had rarely seen or talked to each other since Jerry had moved away. After insisting that he wanted to see Jerry's scars, Monty passed out and had to go to the emergency room for the head trauma he sustained during the incident. Not long after that, though, Monty's stomach toughened up as he entered basic training before being sent to Vietnam at 18 years old. "I would say he went from Beaver Cleaver to Rambo in 18 months," Jerry Sinard said of Monty's transformation during his time in the army.

Monty served a regular eight months in the army, but soon got a chance to be something a little more notable. By the age of 19, Monty was deep in the Vietnamese jungle, serving as a Sergeant in the three-year-old Ranger division. During Monty's time in the army, he came to be known as "Bull" Durham by his peers. In the few short months he spend with the Rangers, he made such an impact on the men with whom he served that one wrote a song about him. The lyrics are straightforward poetry such as "With sixteens on their shoulders and Claymores in their packs six men went out that day, but only one came back," the sad ballad succinctly encompasses the Vietnam experience. The song has a special meaning to all of the Rangers and is sung at every reunion to this day.

Joining the 75th Ranger Division was not just a matter of showing up and falling in - one had to be tested and approved by his peers before being allowed to officially wear the black beret of the Rangers. Regular Ranger missions included locating enemy bases and lines of communication. Sometimes they were given special missions, which consisted of wiretapping, prisoner snatching, raid missions and Bomb Damage Assessment missions after B-52 Arc-Light attacks. Rangers were known for conducting long-range intelligence collection missions. While at first the US Army only accepted graduates of Army Ranger School and Special Forces trained men, most of the troops in the Rangers were soldiers who did not have a chance to attend the schools. Monty Durham was one such feisty volunteer who was willing not only to fight for his country, but to work to carry the fight to the enemy. The 75th Ranger Regiment was initially activated about halfway through the war, on February 1, 1969 and remained in action until August 15, 1972.

On Thursday, April 10, 1969, during an operation in the province of Tay Ninh in South Vietnam, Dwight Montgomery "Bull" Durham was killed by way of hostile multiple fragmentation wounds while engaged in combat. He earned two Purple Hearts, a Bronze Star, a Silver Star and the love and respect of his peers. His remains were recovered and he is buried in Fort Gibson National Cemetery in Muskogee County, Texas.

Just shy of one month away from discharge, Monty Durham had his life taken in an instant. He is remembered by friends for his kindness, playfulness, and bravery. Jerry Sinard says that Monty remains one of his personal heroes, and his picture resides next to his computer where Jerry can see it every day. "Monty was a great guy and would have made a difference in what he chose to do? The world would have been a better place had he lived."

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