



Photo added by Tom Reece



Added by Michelle Littrell Williams



Added by Tom Reece

## Sgt Charles Martin “Chuck” Penley, Jr

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| <b>BIRTH</b>       | 1 Aug 1942<br>Asheville, Buncombe County, North Carolina, USA                       |
| <b>DEATH</b>       | 11 May 1969 (aged 26)<br>Yên Bái, Vietnam   |
| <b>BURIAL</b>      | Newfound Baptist Church Cemetery<br>Leicester, Buncombe County, North Carolina, USA |
| <b>MEMORIAL ID</b> | 17728959 ·  |

SFC/PSG Charles Martin Penley Jr, Vietnam Veteran, Native of Asheville, NC.

Platoon Sergeant/Sergeant First Class Charles Martin Penley Jr was a casualty of the Vietnam War. As a member of the Army, SFC Penley served our country until May 11th, 1969 in Quang Ngai, South Vietnam. He was 26 years old and was not married. It was reported that Charles died from multiple fragmentation wounds from a mine. His body was recovered. Charles was born on August 1st, 1942 in Asheville, North Carolina. SFC Penley is on panel 25W, line 053 of the Vietnam Memorial Wall in Washington D.C. He served our country for 8 years.

SARGE, WE WERE TOGETHER FOR SUCH A SHORT TIME.  
BUT YOU WILL ALWAYS BE WITH ME AS LONG AS I LIVE. AND  
MAYBE WE WILL MEET AGAIN AND TALK OF THOSE TIMES.  
SO REST IN PEACE AND SAVE A PLACE FOR ME ON THE  
OTHER SIDE. YOU LIVE ON IN ME FOREVER. DAN ALLEN.

I was a member of his 2-1 Cav Rifle Platoon. MOTHER'S DAY.  
Below is my TRIBUTE to SFC Charles Penley to summarize his courage and let others know of his true heroics. It was "Mother's Day" and started out like many others for "D"

Troop 2nd Squadron 1st Cavalry Regiment in the spring of 1969. We left An Khe in the central highlands of South Vietnam at daybreak, 4 scouts, 4 Cobras & I believe about 6 Hueys<sup>1</sup> loaded with three squads from the Aero-Rifle Platoon. It's one I won't forget, although many of the details I never learned nor cared to at the time. For example, I'm sure there was an "OPERATION" name, but I don't remember it or never knew it. We flew west following highway QL-19 towards the Mang Yang Pass. The OH-6's (LOH's) flew low and the Cobra's flew high with the Hueys sandwiched in the middle. We knew the route well, as we passed over LZ Action and LZ Schuller near the foot of the Pass.

On our right was the hastily built cemetery full of French soldiers buried high on the Mountain. They were killed in June 1954 in a massive Viet Minh ambush. Opposite the burial grounds, on the south side of the present highway was the former battleground. Dozens of rusted hulks of trucks and armor vehicles provided mute testimony to the savagery of the June battle fifteen years prior. As we flew overhead these fallen soldiers, the helicopters gently banked North... towards Kontum. Needless to say, we never liked that turn North. Kontum was located East of the Cambodian and Laotian border area, in the West part of the Vietnam land mass. This area was known as the Central Highlands. Just west of Kontum, across the border was the Ho Chi Minh trail. The Central Highlands was the perfect place for the North Vietnamese to try to cut South Vietnam in half. Kontum stood in the way and was like a bone in the throat of the North Vietnamese Army. It was a clear day and the view from our Huey was full of green vegetation and fantastic mountains.

We always knew, however, that the view of the lush vegetation that we were enjoying was the sanctuary of thousands of NVA soldiers. We arrived in Kontum and began our mission. The Scouts and Cobra gunships went searching for Charlie and our "Blue" Platoon sat on the tarmac with the Huey's and their pilots ready to insert us if a Scout (OH-6 Observation Helicopter) or Snake (AH-1G

Gunship Helicopter) got knocked down. The day passed slowly as each pair of Scouts and Cobra's played tag team recon while the others fueled and checked out their ships for their next run. Sometime late in the day (3-4 PM), our PRC-25's (radios) picked up a firefight by an Infantry platoon from the 4th Infantry Division (I think) that needed help. We were probably airborne within a minute. We knew the drill; we knew our role and were always thankful that the scouts and snakes were with us. SFC Charles Penley was our Platoon Leader, a pro at the age of 26 and second oldest to PFC Gethers at 27. PFC Reasor was the youngest at 18 with most of the guys being 19 to 22. The LZ they dropped us into was a cleared area compliments of a 500 pounder dropped some days or weeks earlier by a B-52. The crater at the center was near 20 ft across and 6-8 ft. deep. We hooked up with the guys from the 4th who had several wounded and some killed in action (KIA). Our "Doc" Tippet was the only medic; I'm not sure what happened to theirs.

He moved the wounded into the crater while SFC Penley spread us out in a defensive perimeter. We were on high ground that was rocky as hell. No digging here. But who needed to, we were sure we'd be out of there within an hour, you know - before dark. The area in front fell off quickly to a field maybe 40 yards wide before another tree line. Left and right of us was thick vegetation, behind us the ground sloped up, but not real steep. Another platoon from the 4th Infantry Division was dropped or walked in for additional support and closed the defensive perimeter to our right and behind us. It was good to see them and I'm sure they were glad to see us. Doc was doing all he could and called for a Medivac. Captain Poe & Captain Stanley Hudson (the Troop's Executive Officer & our commander that day) were flying C&C (Command & Control). Courageously, they responded for providing the urgent Medivac Services with their D Troop Huey helicopter. Coincidentally, the crew chief on board was SFC Penley's younger brother. The door gunner was Dan Kavanaugh from North Carolina.

It was about ½ hour before dusk as he maneuvered his slick (Huey) above the treetops to the left and in front of us. SFC Penley was standing to make sure all of us were down (we were) and yelling to keep looking for Charlie. It was surrealistic as the approaching Huey started whining and I caught a glimpse as it started to tilt and spin. NVA automatic weapons were firing from the tree line in front of us raking the Huey with fire. We had six M-60 machine guns with us with three facing the tree line. I know Schmid and Tatum were on two of the machine guns as we all returned fire. Suddenly, an NVA RPG (Rocket propelled grenade) airburst caught SFC Penley and set off his White Phosphorus Grenade. Reasor took some shrapnel in the back of the head, Schmid and Stuecklin and a couple of others took shrapnel in the legs and back. Captain Poe did not have his most graceful landing as his slick crashed through the trees to our left about 10 yards out in front. I think the dink that hit him was right near where the ship hit and probably just outside our perimeter. I was down on the right with Petruska who was firing 79's quicker than I ever saw him move. It was over that fast. Sgt. Gruber took over the Platoon and coordinated with Captain Hudson and the other platoon leader(s) our night defensive position. Nobody was going anywhere that night. Capt. Poe was moved to the crater along with the other wounded. Doc had taken some light shrapnel on his arms and in the face, but never stopped moving around the crater dealing with wounded in the dark. Gruber took what was left of 3rd squad (3 guys) and put them out on an LP (Listening Post). Penley's brother, the Crew Chief, was running around looking for him. He was carrying his M-60 with the butterfly triggers and no barrel guards and with 2 or 3 belts of 7.62mm ammo over his shoulder. John Wayne would have been proud.

Gruber had me take him and position ourselves uphill behind the LP. I think it was Stevens, Stroud and West. I could be wrong, but I know the skinny, entertaining and always talking Stevens from West Virginia was one of them. Gruber told me to keep Crew Chief Penley quiet and not let him know that his brother had been killed. I think he knew

something was wrong but was satisfied with my explanation that Sarge was down the other end doing his job. We set up his M-60 resting between 2 rocks and on a log facing left of the LP. It was the beginning of a long night. I know the Cobra helicopters stayed on station till after dark (not a good move for them) and then Spooky or Shadow showed up later for a little mini-gun demonstration. Fortunately, it was a quiet night and the LOH'S broke the morning silence at daybreak. I can't remember, but I think another company of the 4th arrived shortly later and we began the medivacs. I don't know how many guys were hurt, I don't know what Platoon we went to support or what their casualties were, nor do I know the other platoon involved or where this all happened, except it was near Kontum. I do know, "D" Troop pulled together and did their job with the Blackhawk spirit. Captains Poe & Hudson and their crew risked everything to help the wounded. "Doc" Tippet never flinched given his awesome responsibilities of caring for a crater full of wounded, Sgt. Gruber stepped up at a crucial moment, and Tatum, Thompson, Stevens, West and many others looked to their buddies as family with the determination to protect that family.

I've been to "The Wall" in Washington many times and pause to remember SFC Charles Penley and many of my high school buddies. Like all of us, it's not "The Wall" that makes us remember – that's there for others to understand the sacrifice. Our memories are chiseled deep and triggered by a simple breeze or a view of some mountains in the distance. For me, I often think of and remember SFC Charles Penley who was looking after us that day. I think of my buddies and the many others that gave the ultimate sacrifice, especially on "Mother's Day". Thank You again, Sarge! Joe McManus, 5 Cypress Place Lafayette Hill PA 19444, nomadlh@hotmail.com.

CHUCK WAS MY FRIENDS FATHER. I WISH HE COULD HAVE MET HIS BABY GIRL LEE ANN. CHARLES MARTIN PENLEY JR (CHUCK) WAS WHAT DIANE HOLIFIEL REFERRED TO HIM AS, WAS LEE ANN'S FATHER. HE NEVER GOT THE CHANCE TO

MEET HER FOR HE WAS KILLED ON MAY 11,1969. HE WOULD HAVE BEEN PROUD FOR SHE IS NOW A NURSE AND A MOTHER OF TWO. MY FATHER CARL COLBURN WAS A GOOD FRIEND OF CHUCK'S AND SPEAKS OF HIM IN THE HIGHEST REGARDS. HE SERVED HIS COUNTRY WELL AND DIED A HERO.MAY GOD BLESS HIS FAMILY AND FRIENDS. ANNESIA COLBURN MILLER, PO BOX 190652, MOBILE, AL 36619.

He was the Father to Lee Ann and Son to Mr Charles M Penley Sr, 11 Oakcrest Drive, Asheville, NC. He was a 1960 graduate of Erwin High School.

He served with Delta Troop, 2nd Squadron, 1st Cavalry Regiment, 4th Infantry Division, USARV.

He was awarded The Bronze Star Medal, The Army Commendation Medal, The Combat Infantryman's Badge(CIB), The Purple Heart Medal for his combat related wounds, the Vietnam Service Medal, The Republic of Vietnam Campaign Service Medal, The National Defense Service Medal and the Good Conduct Medal(s).

## Family Members

### Parents



Charles Martin  
Penley  
1923–2006



Ernestine  
Elizabeth *Creech*  
Penley  
1923–1961

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**Created by:** Tom Reece

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