

On August 7, 1782, General George Washington - then the commander-in-chief of the Continental Army - established the Purple Heart award, originally designated as the Badge of Military Merit.

In 1783, three Revolutionary War volunteers were awarded the badge, which was the "figure of a heart in purple cloth or silk edged with narrow lace or binding."

The award was mostly forgotten after the revolution. It was reinstated in 1932, the bicentennial of George Washington's birth, when War Department Secretary Douglas MacArthur announced its new name - the Purple Heart - as well as a new purpose and design.

The design became a purple enameled heart with a bronze border with a profile of George Washington in his Continental Army uniform. The reverse is inscribed with "For Military Merit" and there is space for the recipient's name to be engraved. The medal is suspended by a vertical purple band with white borders.



The Purple Heart in its current form is awarded to service members "wounded or killed in any action against an enemy of the United States or as a result of an act of any such enemy or opposing armed forces".

With the advent of the Vietnam War, again Purple Heart medals were awarded to American service members who died or were wounded in battle. Over **200,000 Purple Hearts** were given to military members or their next of kin (47,000 combat deaths, 153,000 wounded in action).

In 1985, the Purple Heart's order of precedence was changed from just above the Good Conduct Medal to just below the Bronze Star.

On 1 August 1963, around 1269 new admissions to the Naval Academy Class of 1967 stood at attention in Tecumseh Court to listen to remarks from our Commander in Chief, John F. Kennedy. His words were short and inspiring, and even when he requested us to stand at ease we remained ramrod straight. No mention was made of a war raging in Southeast Asia, and we were probably more pleased to have him grant the class amnesty (for those who needed it) than to warn us about the perils of military service.

On 7 June 1967, some 890 of the Class of 1967 filled the Navy Marine Corps Stadium for our graduation. Our speaker was Vice President Hubert Humphrey, and he also offered inspiring words about service and the rights of man. Again, no mention was made of a war that had only become more unpopular in the nearly four years since Kennedy had spoken to us. On that graduation day, some 500,000 men and women of our armed services were "in-country" under the overall leadership of General William Westmoreland. In the next five years in Southeast Asia, 39 members of the Class of 1967 would be killed or wounded, receiving a total of 44 Purple Hearts.

For a few of the thirty-nine, I only have the year their Purple Heart was received. For others I have the month and year, and for most I have the exact date. The breakdown of the 39 recipients includes 18 Marines, 11 Surface Warriors, 3 SEALs, 3 Pilots, 3 Naval Flight Officers, and 1 Army artillery officer.

On graduation day, 86 classmates were commissioned in the Marine Corps. Their follow on training placed many of them in Vietnam shortly after the Tet Offensive which had begun on 31 January 1968. Henry Wright (22nd co.), was born in Oakland, California in June of 1946 and must have been one of our youngest classmates. As a second lieutenant, he arrived in Vietnam on 5 January 1968 and was killed in action on 6 February 1968 and was our first classmate to receive the Purple Heart. Al Kettner and Thomas Weiss, both Ground Combat Marines from the 28th company also were killed in early 1968. 28th company graduated 24 classmates and four total (3 Marines) would receive the Purple Heart, the most from any company. Richard Hudson is the third Marine from 28th company to earn the medal. Henry, Al, and Tom can be found in Memorial Hall along with Marine 2Lt Robert Tuttle of the 25th company. Other Ground Combat Marines to receive the Purple Heart were Russell Johnson (3rd co.), John Williamson (4th co.), James Buchli (8th co.), Norm Hapke (9th co.), Paul McConnell (9th co.), William Isbell (11th co.), Ike Eisenbach II (13th co.), William Goodwin (18th co.), Tom Trompeter (27th co.), and Dennis Lister (33rd co.). Marines JJ O'Brien (30th co.) and Bob O'Rourke (24th co.) each were double recipients of the award while William "Rick" Donnelly heads the list with three Purple Hearts. One of several career Marines, Rick Donnelly passed away in April 1994 while serving as the Director, Marine Corps War College in Quantico. A number of these ground combat marines moved to the aviation side via Air Force training, another became a Naval Flight Officer and astronaut. Follow on occupations for others include speech therapist, Episcopal priest, airline pilot, police pilot, ski instructor, logistics analyst, information systems director, aerospace executive, banker, and lawyer.

The second largest group of Purple Heart recipients were our eleven Brown Water Navy Surface Warriors. Patrolling coastal waters and the Mekong River and its tributaries they manned a variety of water craft including PBRs, Swift Boats, Alpha Boats and others. Ken "Norts" Norton (9th co.) was killed in action on 7 October 1969. Tim Cohane, Jr., the last of the 28th company classmates to receive the Purple Heart, may have been the first Surface Warrior to receive one on 30 March 1969. Rock Harmon (2nd co.), Charles "Trout" Armentrout (4th co.) John Goldschmidt (6th co.), Dwight Hughes (25th co.), Bob Natter (33rd co.), James Cook II (34th co.), and Mike Frey (34th co.) were awarded the Purple Heart between 1969 and 1971. Bob Kelly, Jr. (17th co.) is a second generation recipient, his dad was awarded the Purple Heart as one of the "Expendables" in the Philippines during World War II. Tom Southworth (21st co.) is a double awardee, with two received in December of 1970. Several classmates made the Navy a career, including one four star admiral while others went on to leadership positions as an NJROTC instructor, basketball coach, physics teacher, public works officer, teacher, banker, lawyer, software engineer, and oil industry engineer.

A small number of our classmates went to Southeast Asia as SEALs or UDT and about four did tours as SEALs. Three of the four were wounded. Chris Ward (16th co.) was wounded twice, in May 1970 and again a year later in May 1971. The other SEAL recipients are Sandy Prouty (34th co.), and Evan Dill (32nd co.) Following Navy duties, their occupations have included medical doctor, FBI agent, and sailor on the seas of the Pacific Ocean.

If you were a brown water Navy sailor or a SEAL, and needed air support you wanted one of the detachments of the HAL-3 Seawolves, flying Huey gunships, on speed dial. Two of the three Navy pilots receiving the Purple Heart flew with the Seawolves. Son of a Navy captain and second generation midshipman, Hal Castle, Jr. (35th co.) lost his life when his helicopter was shot down in Cambodia on 28 April 1969. Military operations outside of Vietnam had been going on for years in Cambodia and Laos but were only announced to the American public by President Nixon in April of 1970. Rudy DeAtley (5th co.) received the Purple Heart while supporting SEALs in February 1971. Rudy is the only pilot of our classmates who survived to wear the award. Bart Creed (26th co.) was shot down and killed flying his A-7 Corsair II aircraft over Laos in March of 1971. Bart's two children, 2 and 1 years old when he went missing, are both Naval Academy graduates.

Two of our classmates chose the Army for their commissions, William Nelson, Jr. (35th co.) received his Purple Heart with an Army artillery unit in Vietnam. After his time in service, Bill had a career in the information technology business.

Some thirty or so classmates chose Naval Flight Officer upon graduation and headed off to Pensacola for initial training. Three would become Purple Heart recipients. Four NFOs wound up in Attack Squadron 196 as bombardier/navigation for a cruise aboard USS RANGER in 1969-1970. Two of these four received the Purple Heart when their A6 Intruder airplanes were shot down over the Ho Chi Minh trail in Laos. Dick Deuter (12th co.) was killed when his airplane

was lost on 22 November 1969. Don Fraser's (32nd co.) plane went down on 6 February 1970 and he was rescued by Air Force Search and Rescue operations from Thailand the next day. The third naval flight officer, Frederick "Bat" Masterson (8th co.), an F-4 Phantom Radar Intercept Officer with VF-103, was our last classmate to receive a Purple Heart. His aircraft was shot down over North Vietnam on 11 July 1972. He was captured and interned as a Prisoner of War until March of 1973. His injuries led to military retirement in 1977 and his follow on work was with an engineering firm. He was killed in a car crash in 2001.

The Purple Hearts awarded to our classmates were often received in conjunction with the Silver Star, the Bronze Star, or the Distinguished Flying Cross for their courageous acts of valor and bravery. Some injuries incurred were severe enough to demand a medical retirement. Individual stories and detailed descriptions were purposefully not described, but several classmates use and relate their experiences to keep alive the memory of friends and classmates who paid the ultimate price in the service of the United States. Of the thirty-nine classmates mentioned, ten are deceased, eight in the Vietnam era.

An Air Force pilot detailed to Search and Rescue missions from Thailand in the late 1960's was once mentored, "In combat you will have bad days, but you will have one really bad day." Thirty-nine members of the USNA Class of 1967 each experienced one of those really bad days.