

## THE LONG GOODBYE (a Memorial Day Story)

On July 4th, 1994, a funeral was held in Danville, Indiana. The funeral was held in the Danville High School Gymnasium. It was a chance to say goodbye.

On August 19th, 1968, a CH46D helicopter was shot down while flying an extraction mission of Marine infantry units. A direct hit from anti-aircraft fire caused the helicopter to crash and burn. Of the five man crew, three were killed. Killed were Corporal Terry Hoffman, Corporal Patrick Miles, and Corporal John Hutchinson.

The bodies of Corporal Miles and Hutchinson were recovered the next day. It would not be until August 1st, 1993, that Corporal Hoffman's remains were released to a United States Military team. It had been almost twenty-five years since Corporal Hoffman had crawled off into the surrounding jungle and died from his wounds.

Months before the funeral, I had met a young Marine Second Lieutenant Randy Hoffman outside an ATM at a local bank in Danville. We talked quite a few minutes about my time and his...old Corps meets new Corps. Little did we know that our paths were to cross not once but twice in the coming years.

On July 4th, 1994, my six year old son Casey and I attended the service in the high school gym. Attending also was Marine Second Lieutenant Randal S. Hoffman, Corporal Terry Hoffman's nephew. He would be in charge of the Honor Guard for the funeral procession through Danville.

After the ceremony, the caisson transporting the remains of Corporal Hoffman proceeded through the small farming town of Danville to the cemetery where he would be put to rest with other family members. At the head of the procession was Marine First Sergeant Page, a Marine I'd served with years before. We would meet up later. Beside me stood Casey, who I suspect had very little idea of what was going on or how this would intertwine into his life. How could he? How could any any of us?

Years later, Randy Hoffman and I would meet again at the Indiana Marine Reserve Center in Terre Haute, Indiana. It was 2006 and we had not seen each other since that July 4<sup>th</sup>, 1994. He was now a Major and was the Commanding Officer of my son Casey who had just completed all of his Marine infantry training. He would also be the one to see my son off for his first tour in Iraq. His second tour would see him under the leadership of Marine First Sergeant Howard. A Marine I had led as his Platoon Sergeant years earlier.

On that July 4th, 1994, my son Casey and I stood at attention as Corporal Hoffman's procession came by. Life has a way of intertwining our life's with others. Standing there holding my little boy's hand, how would either of us know the road awaiting him.

The road for Corporal Terry Hoffman ended on that July 4th, 1994. On that day, Corporal Terry Hoffman finally came home and it was time to say goodbye.

C.V. Egan

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