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Letters From Vietnam



Bill Graves
...from a family portrait



Richard Wilson
...on December leave in Hawaii

Asian War Claims Men From Cherokee

Richard Wilson didn't like the food over there and lost 30 pounds.

Bill Graves suffered from malaria and wrote that most of all he missed the "cool, clean clear water" of home.

They both now lie in fresh graves, duly processed, Cherokee County's latest casualties of the war in Vietnam.

Both young men died violently in March. First there was the heart-stopping appearance of an Army officer at their family homes and the dreaded message. Then the bodies were returned for full military funerals.

And finally, last week, the Army sent a colonel from a school at Dahlonga, Ga. to present a cluster of medals to the families.

Bill Graves, son of Mr. and Mrs. Ralph Graves of Murphy, had gone through Murphy High School as a star athlete and then went on to play football and graduate at Wake Forest University in 1968. He was in the ROTC program at Wake Forest and received his commission as an officer on graduation, a new second lieutenant.

He went through jump school, then Ranger and the tough Pathfinder school. At Ranger School, he graduated tops in a class of 230 men, one of his biggest thrills according to his family. Willing to speak up when he felt something was wrong, Graves was credited with pointing out faults of the rifle training at Ft. Polk, La. and revising some of the procedures used on the rifle ranges.

His letters home carried little indication of the combat action he was in, his mother said, to keep the folks back home from worry. One letter stressed that "you've got a better chance of getting hurt on the highways than I have here of being hurt."

Graves, 23, was looking forward to a career in the Army, his mother added, and wanted to go to Germany. Letters received by his family from his friends in Vietnam after his death said he was very "proud to be an officer."

On Sunday afternoon, March 15, 80 miles north of Saigon near the Cambodian border, First Lieutenant Graves and his platoon ran into heavy enemy fire. The paper that accompanied his posthumous Silver Star award reads in part "With complete disregard for his safety, he moved through the barrage of enemy fire to assess the situation and call in effective artillery and air

strikes... halted the assault and led his men as they routed the enemy." But before the fight was over, Bill Graves had paid the price.

Richard Wilson, two years younger, was the son of Mr. and Mrs. Johnny Wilson of Peachtree. He had completed Murphy High and gone two years to school at Western Carolina University when he was drafted.

Shortly before being drafted, Wilson married Charlotte Wright of the Hiwassee Dam section. Her father was operating a cafe at Peachtree and there they met. They were married in September of 1968 and he went into the Army the next January.

He came home to Peachtree last summer, there was a baby due and he knew he was headed for Vietnam. He said he'd stay until the baby was born. His leave ran out, the baby had not been born and he still stayed. A son, Dewayne, was born on June 7 and the proud father overstayed his leave by a full week. It was a wise decision - it turned out to be the only time he ever saw his son.

"He never told us what they were doing," the 20-year-old widow says. "He never went into detail, he didn't want us to worry." She said he once told her that he was fighting part of the time as a sniper and she didn't like that at all. "I don't really understand the war," she says sadly. "I didn't think we belonged over there. He said we did, said people here didn't understand. He was proud of what he was doing."

Richard Wilson wanted to go back to WCU and be an accountant, his widow says. He planned to serve his time and then get out.

Specialist Four Wilson won a posthumous Bronze Star with the V device for his actions on March 17. His platoon was returning from a night operation, according to official papers, "when an anti-vehicle land mine detonated, fatally injuring him. Specialist Wilson placed himself between the land mine and the other platoon members, thus preventing serious injury to other members of his platoon."

Mrs. Richard Wilson says most people "just don't think about the war much," unless they have a close relative involved. Mrs. Ralph Graves keeps a close watch over her letters and the postcard sent from Vietnam last Christmas - "That's all I've got".

Tomato-Buying Pack House Opens

The Murphy Tomato-Packing House opened for business this week, an event which will mean more than a quarter of a million dollars to the local economy before the tomato season ends at first frost.

Tomatoes sold here from Cherokee, Clay and Graham counties will be shipped as far north as Canada and as far west as Texas, according to Way J. Abel of Canton, owner and operator of the packing house.

"We're at a thriving, growing peak when much of the nation is enduring a dry spell," Abel said. The timing of the Western North Carolina crop is vital to its marketing success.

Mike Angell, Extension Service tomato specialist for Clay, Cherokee, Graham and Swain counties, added that this region's cool nights and relatively abundant rainfall also figure in the firmness and flavor of trellis tomatoes produced here.

Abel said the quality of Western North Carolina tomatoes is also a factor. "We're shipping tomatoes into states which actually produce more tomatoes than we do in this state," he said.

He said the reason for this is that tomatoes grown in this area are produced largely by family labor units, taking great care in the crop and selecting of tomatoes to sell. This shows up in the final product he said, as compared to tomatoes grown and then picked by machines.

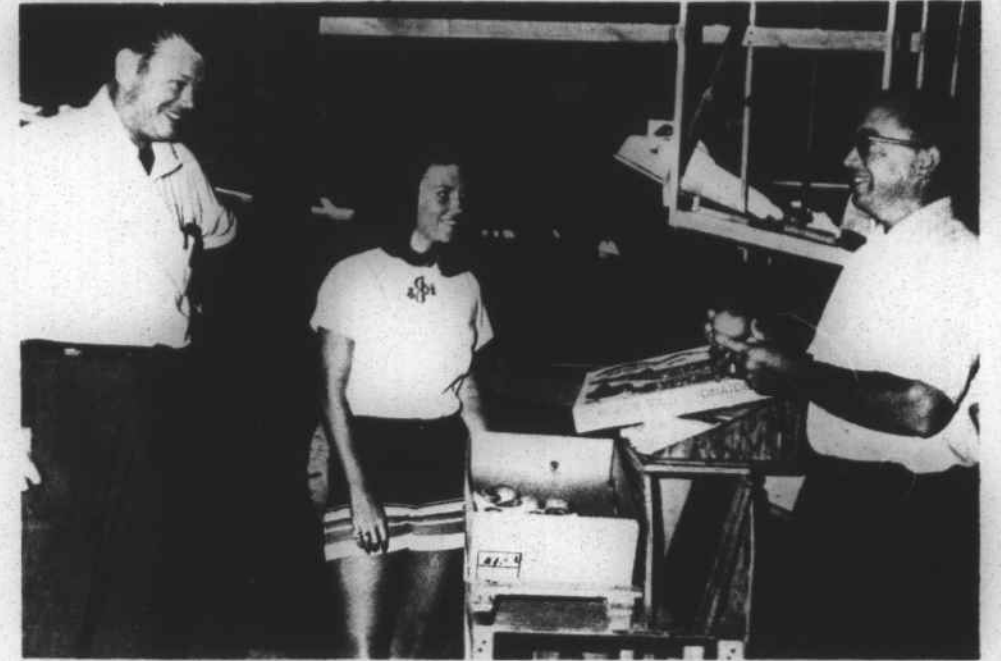
Angell and other Extension personnel have emphasized to farmers in the past several years the greater cash value of a crop of tomatoes as compared to the traditional burley tobacco. An acre of burley they point out, will bring its owner from \$1,500 to \$1,800 where an acre of tomatoes in this area last year had an average value of well over \$4,000.

Abel said the Extension workers, and especially Angell, were to be commended for their work in promoting and teaching the growing of trellis tomatoes in this area.

He said the packing house will pay out here more than \$250,000 to growers before the first frost ends the tomato season. And this, Angell pointed out, doesn't include the salaries paid to workers at the packing house. Abel said he expected to work about 55 people at the height of the season.

Sold under the brand Pigeon Valley Tomatoes, the tomatoes are picked green when the first blush of color is showing. They are then sorted and graded, packed individually in paper and then placed in cases, 20 pounds to the case. They are shipped out in refrigerated trucks, to ripen en route to their final destination.

Abel also operates a packing house at Canton and says the two houses make for a smooth, constant supply of tomatoes. The plants mature here earlier than in Haywood County and by the time the crop is lagging here, tomatoes are at full harvest around Canton, he said.



Tomato Time... Way Abel, Shirley Jones and Mike Angell examine early crop.

Eric Townson Returning To Open Office Here

Eric Townson, a native of Murphy, announced this week that he will return to open an office here as an architect.

For the past three years Townson has been associated with Foy and Lee Associates of Waynesville and fulfilled the state requirements for architectural registration in August of last year.

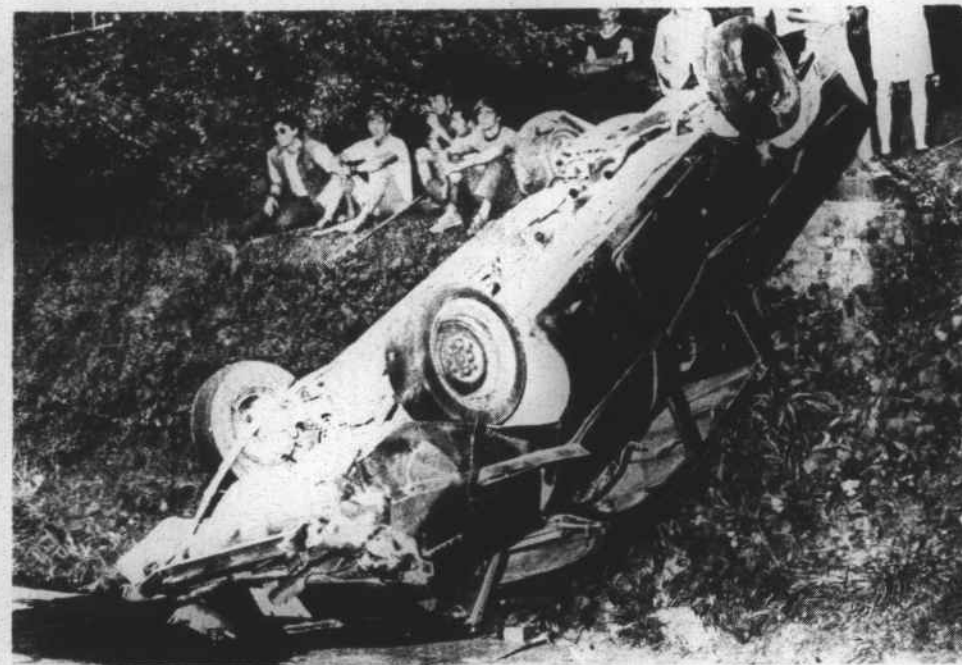
He graduated in 1963 from Auburn University in Alabama and was employed for four years as an architect-in-training with Six Associates, Inc. of Asheville.



Eric Townson

Townson said his firm in Murphy will maintain working relationships with several engineering firms in order to offer complete architectural services. He also says he believes Murphy and the surrounding area is currently experiencing an economic growth essential to the success of an architectural practice.

Townson is married to the former Ida Brumby of Murphy and they have two children. They expect to move to Murphy from Waynesville this summer and will be living on Mooreland Heights Drive.



Wreck Near Fairgrounds

Harry Little, 18, of Route 4, Murphy, escaped injury when his 1956 Chevrolet wrecked Tuesday night on US-19-129 near the Fairgrounds. Little

received minor cuts and abrasions; town police officers have filed no charges pending completion of the accident investigation.

Preacher Billy On Second Lap Of Cherokee Trail Of Tears

Rev. Billy Richardson of Crawford, Neb. last week began a 320-mile second lap of the "Trail of Tears" His trek began from Murphy July 4th last year from the site of Fort Butler and he walked to Cape Girardeau, Missouri.

His historic route follows the trail taken by members of the Cherokee Indian Tribe when they were forced to march from their native lands in the vicinity of Murphy to a new reservation at Talequah, Okla. more than 700 miles from Murphy in 1838.

The Cherokee County Historical Society and the Daughters of the American Revolution have proposed plans to rebuild Fort Butler and make a park and museum on the Fort Butler site just off Cherokee Street in Murphy. They hope to secure federal

funds to acquire some additional land at the site of the fort so that the location itself can be protected from permanent alienation. Dr. H.G. Jones, Department of Archives and History in Raleigh, suggests that the site of Fort Butler might be included in the National Park Service System as a national historic site.

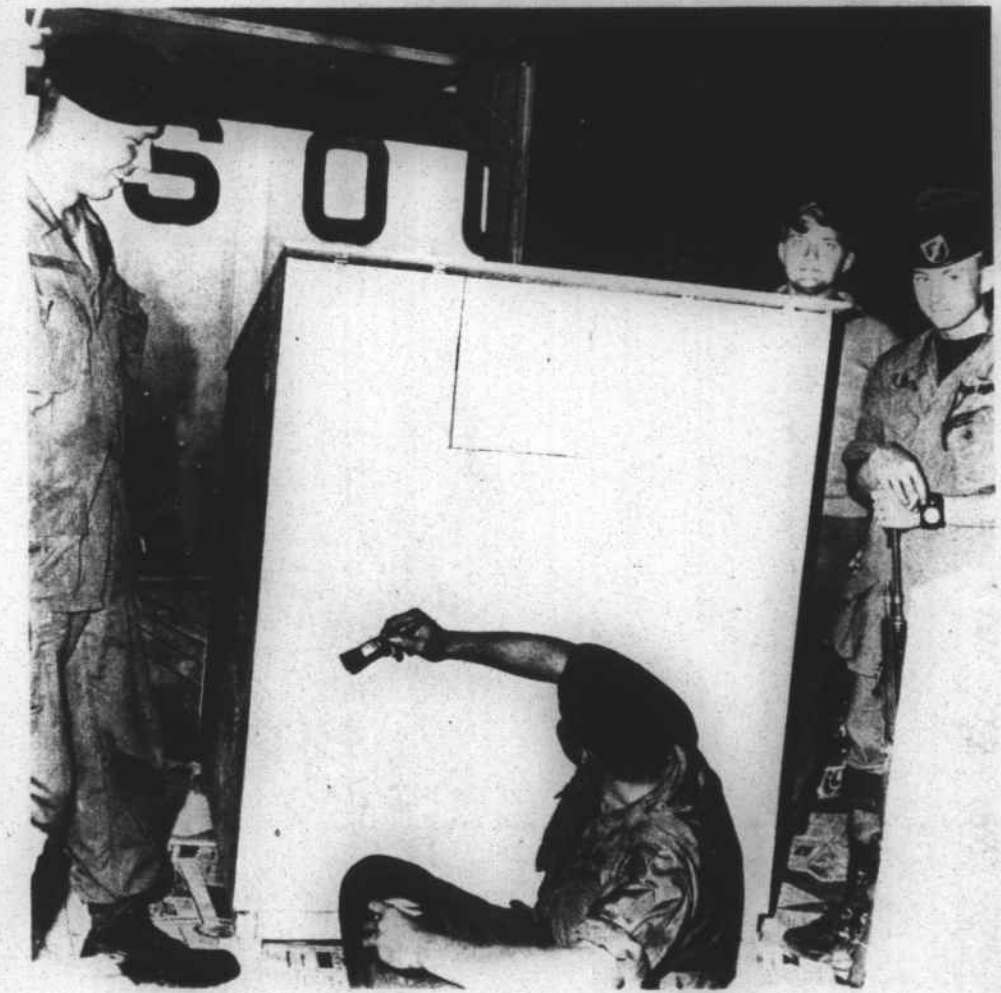
The Rev. Mr. Richardson, pastor of the United Methodist Church of Crawford, Neb., says he is making the trip by foot as a form of penance for the treatment handed the American Indians in their dealings with the white man.

Thousands of Cherokees died en route. Victims included an Indian princess Otaohki, who is buried at the "Trail of Tears" State Park north of Cape Girardeau. The pastor flew to Cape

Girardeau July 6 from his home in Crawford, Mo. He is an ordained minister, a graduate of a State College in Louisiana, Ashbury Seminary and Northwestern University. During the second World War He served on a carrier as a Navy flier. At one time after World War II he was a professional football player.

During the Bi-Centennial of American Methodism he was one of those who rode on horseback to Baltimore as an old Circuit Rider. Out of this experience he felt led to undertake other rides across the country.

Richardson has been active in the past few years with Indian tribes in North Carolina, Georgia and Montana. His next goal is to establish a home for Indian youngsters in Alliance, Neb.



Civic Action Project

The Green Berets, here on maneuvers, last week constructed two boxes which will be placed on the streets in Murphy as drop stations for the Jaycees' Clothes Closet project, which provides used clothing and shoes

for needy families. Sgt. Walt Depp, center, designed and painted the boxes. Looking on at left is Sp/5 Jim Sinker and at right are Jaycee President Dick Davis and Lt. Bruce Lander. (Staff Photo)

Danny Forrister Doing Well After Kidney Transplant Operation

Danny Forrister got his kidney transplant operation last week and is doing well.

That was the word this week from his family, happy that the year of waiting has ended. Forrister, 23, received a kidney from the body of a 12-year-old girl killed in a traffic accident.

"He's delighted," said Charles Forrister, Danny's brother and principal of Murphy High School. "The surgery was a complete success... we just have

our fingers crossed now on the rejection. That's the problem right now."

Danny is the son of Mr. and Mrs. C.C. Forrister of Culberson. His kidney trouble was discovered in an armed forces physical examination and his kidneys were removed in July of last year. Since that time he has lived with the aid of a machine, an artificial kidney which cleanses his blood of waste material.

His blood and tissue type were on file at the Vanderbilt University Medical

Center in Nashville and he waited patiently for a donor, the Vanderbilt surgeons specializing in the transplanting of organs into a live body from a dead one.

The long-awaited telephone call came late Thursday and Forrister was rushed to the airport at Copperhill, Tenn. where his physician, Dr. W.R. Lee of Ducktown, had arranged a flight. Kim Campbell of Ducktown flew the young man to Nashville where the transplant

team, about 12 doctors, was ready and waiting.

He entered the operating room about 11:30 Eastern Daylight Time, his brother said, and the complex operation was finished at 4:30 the next morning.

One of the dead girl's kidneys was transplanted to Forrister's body, his brother noted and the other was placed in the body of a Veterans Administration Hospital patient in Nashville. The girl's family had approved the transplants.

"Danny was conscious and alert the next day," Charles Forrister said. "He actually helped the nurse get rigged up for the kidney machine treatment."

The new kidney is starting to function, he said, but it will be about two weeks before Danny can stop the machine treatments. He is expected to return home in about four weeks and may actually be able to return to his studies at Western Carolina University this Fall. Majoring in social studies, he has completed his junior year at WCU.

The big problem now is the rejection process, his body reacting to an organ from another body. Doctors say this can be controlled in most cases by medicine.

"Danny appreciates the interest people have taken in his case," the Murphy principal said Monday, and is very grateful for the contributions which have been made toward his medical bills. The Scout carried a story about him in the May 27 issue and since that time he has received about \$1,500.