

Veterans' Corner *-Still serving*



News on MIA came 40 years later

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Two flags hang in front of her house. First, the American flag, which represents the unconditional love she has for her country. Second, the Prisoner of War/Missing in Action flag which epitomizes her commitment as an advocate for POW/MIA Families.

She is Susan Stephens, State and Region I coordinator for the National League of Families for POW/MIA and state president for the Ga. Committee POW/MIA. Most of all, she is one of many MIA Family members with a story to tell.

Stephens' brother, Stephen Jonathan Geist, joined the U.S. Army in the 1960s during the Vietnam War. He chose to enlist rather than wait to be drafted, starting with the Rangers and going on to Special Forces.

"Sis, before I leave I want you to know if something happens to me, you cry for yourself," Geist said. "Don't cry for me because I'm doing something I believe in and love."

After training, Geist volunteered for Vietnam. As a staff sergeant, he was assigned as a heavy weapon specialist to Detachment A-332, 5th Special Forces Group

(Airborne), III Corps, War Zone C, Republic of Vietnam.

Stephen was responsible for the training of indigenous South Vietnamese troops in the operation of heavy weapons, machine guns, mortars, recoilless rifles, infantry tactics and training, and camp defenses.

According to Susan, his letters home to Family did not brag on 100 ways to kill, but rather the thousands of ways he learned to preserve life and aid others from his training.

"He spoke of the privilege to be associated with men who shared his dedication and belief that freedom cannot merely be wished for; it must be earned from work," she said.

On Sept. 26, 1967, Stephen had been pulled back for "R and R" but a mission came up asking for volunteers. Of course, he stepped up and volunteered for it. He was the observer aboard an O1D aircraft of the 74th Aviation Company piloted by Lt. Lynn R. Huddleston from Fort Stewart.

Their mission was near the Cambodian border. The plane never reached its destination. Although a search and rescue was initiated, it was terminated three days later without any sightings of either aircraft or its two man crew.

"My parents had requested being told any bad news in person instead of receiving a letter or a phone call," said Stephens. "My mom saw the Army car come up with the chaplain, and she knew instantly."

Stephens was away in Pennsylvania at West Chester Teachers' College, now West Chester University.

A lot of anti-war demonstrations during the '60s occurred, especially on college campuses. "That was like a point of the sword to see an Army chaplain on

a campus, coming to the dorm," she explained.

By the time, the chaplain finished informing Stephens, an anti-war protests had begun.

"From then on, I couldn't go anywhere on campus without being singled out."

She was spit on and told that she needed to go to Vietnam, to take her parents with her and die because they were all "baby killers."

Susan never gave up hope. After 40 plus years, she received breaking news regarding her brother's MIA status. An unknown Viet Cong village had been discovered along the Cambodian border. It had an underground hospital that kept daily medical logs.

Stephen had been shot down. He survived the crash, but Lt. Huddleston was killed instantly. Stephen was able to make it out of the plane and even had a rescue beeper. In addition, he had a rifle with him.

Unfortunately, the VC caught him and executed him. They took his body back to the crash site and burned him and the



Stephen J. Geist



Lance Davis

MIA Family member, Susan Stephens admires her POW/MIA flag that hangs in front of her yard.

plane.

"It brought peace to my heart and gave me more closure to understand what happened," said Stephens. "Without the body or final story, there is no closure."

Stephens says that she wants her brother home, "even if it's just a jar of dirt."

"This hero deserves the right to have what's left of him brought to America, so that the future generations will know this young hero who gave his life for them," she said. "Until I get that closure, I won't give up."

"What if this was your child? Would you just walk away and get on with your life, or would you fight the fight?"

She chose to fight the fight.

"By keeping as much public awareness of the POW/MIA plight as I can is my way of honoring Stephen and keeping his memory alive."

Stephens wants her brother, Stephen Geist, to be remembered as a Soldier, a warrior, a hero, but most of all, as an American who loved his country.

"Dying for freedom isn't the worst that could happen -- being forgotten is," said Stephens. "He would do it all over again, I know, knowing he'd have the same result."