

# Twenty-Seven

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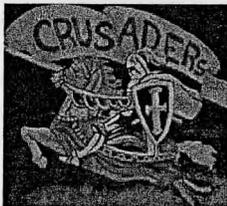
### Recommended Citation

Konieczny, Jaime () "Twenty-Seven," *The Histories*: Vol. 6 : Iss. 2 , Article 3.  
Available at: [https://digitalcommons.lasalle.edu/the\\_histories/vol6/iss2/3](https://digitalcommons.lasalle.edu/the_histories/vol6/iss2/3)

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I

Twenty-Seven  
By Jaime Konieczny '07



The conflict between the United States and Vietnam spanned twenty-five years; 58,219 Americans died, but it was never declared an official war.<sup>1</sup> The majority of the public opposed the war by its end and often shunned those who served. Not until the late 1980s did the nation begin to recognize those who fought, were maimed or died. As the numbers were tallied, small yet important connections became apparent. Such was the case with the twenty-seven former students of Father Judge High School, who are known to the current students, faculty and alumni as the Father Judge 27. These men were from different classes and different areas of Philadelphia, yet they have two commonalities: they were students at Father Judge, and they all died because of Vietnam. The Father Judge 27 left everything they knew in order to serve their country and it cost them their lives. These twenty-seven men answered a call to arms to serve their country, doing so with great dedication and honor. They entered the war as enlisted men and as draftees to fulfill their duty to their country. They did so by signing up and responding to the summons to serve in some of the most grueling, dangerous, and needed positions in the military. Most of the men never lived to see beyond their twenty-second birthdays, but they understood the simple phrase that “freedom is not free,” and they fought for it.

These men may not individually have radically different stories than the other 58,219 Americans who died in the war; however, together they represent a great gift from one small Catholic school to the rest of the country. The Father Judge 27 were all students of the same high school where they were taught to be men, and to live their lives to the standard of the school motto “non excident,” meaning “will not falter or fail.”<sup>2</sup> Each man lived up to the standards instilled in them by Father Judge through their actions as part of the Vietnam War. They did not fail, for they served their country to the best of their abilities even when doing so meant sacrificing their lives. They were not in the same units, and they did not die side by side, but when counted together they are the highest casualty rate of any parochial school in the nation. To serve was their duty; their sacrifice was their lives.

Vietnam was a war of misconception and constant escalation. The first U.S. ground troops landed on March 8, 1965; by 1967 the U.S. was drafting thirty thousand troops per month. With this began the long process of the disillusioned society of the

<sup>1</sup> Waring, Tom. “Great Wall Visits Father Judge High School,” Philadelphia: *Northeast Times*, 2001.

<sup>2</sup> Father Judge High School. <http://www.fatherjudge.com/fatherjudge.aspx?pageID=883>

U.S.<sup>3</sup> No longer were people enthusiastic about defending U.S. pride or sense of world power, not as they had been when the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution was signed in August of 1964.<sup>4</sup> Instead people now began protests and rallies arguing against the war. The anti-war movement gained full momentum in 1968 after the large number of casualties was revealed to the public. However, the men of the Father Judge 27 did not waver in their commitment to the country's increasing need for additional military—if they were drafted, they went to serve to the best of their abilities in the army. However, the majority of the twenty-seven men willingly enlisted in the various military branches of the armed forces. Fourteen of the twenty-seven enlisted and served in the Marine Corps; they enlisted knowing they would be sent to Vietnam and would more than likely serve as a member of an infantry division. Surviving Marines from the Vietnam era have said that men enlisted wanting to be the best.

Those who enlisted in the army did so also knowing they would be sent to Vietnam, but not necessarily in the infantry units. No matter in which branch they served they were husbands, brothers, fathers and sons during a time when the country was awakening from the illusion that the war would be quick and the U.S. victorious. They had the opportunity to see the lack of support. Yet, they choose to enlist, to be the best, to know the horrors and the pain, and if necessary give their own lives. They were students of Father Judge High School; they had been taught to be men, to stand their ground, to be dedicated, loyal, and to maintain their crusader pride.

They did not all die heroic deaths; not all were remembered in newspaper articles, nor were all given more than the customary medals. Yet, these twenty-seven men are heroes to those who remember: their families, friends, fellow service men and the schools that taught them. They inspire a sense of pride in those who know their stories. They are the Father Judge 27. "Greater love than this no one has, that one lays down his life his friend."<sup>5</sup> This statement as inscribed on the monument to the Father Judge 27, erected in 1968 to commemorate their service to their country, truly strikes a chord when considering the circumstances of the deaths of the men of the Father Judge 27.<sup>6</sup>

In 1961, Joseph Pellegrino graduated from Father Judge High School. In September of the same year he enlisted in the Army, by 1963 he was sent to Vietnam to serve as a private. He had been promoted to the status of sergeant by the time he returned home. By 1965, sergeant Pellegrino had served his term—he was eligible for discharge—yet he was inspired to reenlist. His sense of adventure compelled him towards the Special Forces units, particularly the Green Berets.<sup>7</sup> In March of 1966, Joseph Pellegrino returned to Vietnam for the last time, as a second Lieutenant and senior advisor to a Civilian Irregular Defense Group. On May 18, 1966 he successfully saved captured enemy documents that had been swept down the Song Con River, but in his retrieval of the documents he drowned. Joseph Pellegrino was twenty-two years old when he died.<sup>8</sup> What is unusual about him is not that he enlisted in the army or the fact that he was twenty-two years old when he passed away, it is rather that he was willing to re-enlist in the military

<sup>3</sup> Herring, George. *America's Longest War*. Boston: McGraw-Hill Higher Education, 2002. (155-156).

<sup>4</sup> Herring, George. *America's Longest War*. Boston: McGraw-Hill Higher Education, 2002. (144-145).

<sup>5</sup> John. 15:13

<sup>6</sup> Father Judge High School <http://www.fatherjudge.com/fatherjudge.aspx?pgID=1258>

<sup>7</sup> "The Wall-USA" <http://thewall-usa.com/cgi-bin/search5.cgi>

<sup>8</sup> "The Wall-USA" <http://thewall-usa.com/cgi-bin/search5.cgi>

to join a more elite and tougher unit, all the while knowing what he was signing up for. He knew the conditions of Vietnam—the horrible monsoon season, the unrelenting heat—and yet he re-enlisted to serve among the elite for his country. His death at a glance appears to be more accidental than heroic, but he gave his life in order to secure important captured enemy paperwork. He did not falter in his mission to protect the paperwork; he lived up to the Judge motto “will not falter or fail.” He did not fail in his mission; he did what he had to do, giving it his all, including his own life.

John F. Bense, better known as “Jack,” was a six-foot-two, two hundred pound all-star football player who for a brief time played college football (on scholarship) at the University of Tulsa. He was drafted into the Army in November 1965 and was sent to Vietnam as a sergeant on July 23, 1966. Sergeant Bense was assigned to Company C of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, 8<sup>th</sup> Infantry, 4<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division. He died on April 17, 1967 after throwing a body block on his platoon leader to save him from a live grenade. After his death his platoon continued on, yet they still remembered Sergeant Bense. Joe Woods, Judge Class of 1965, one day struck up a conversation with a few GI’s. When Woods mentioned he was from Philadelphia the men from Bense’s unit mentioned that they had just lost a Philadelphian, Jack Bense. Mr. Woods recalls them as saying “He was one of our good guys.”<sup>9</sup> He did not fight the draft or do a lesser job because he had been drafted. He performed up to the standards Father Judge had set; he did not volunteer but he also did not falter when called. He performed the ultimate act of sacrifice, of love; he died trying to protect another. Father Judge not only holds as its motto “non excident,” it also states as a goal of its students “to be the best possible person [they] can be.”<sup>10</sup> Jack Bense exhibited these virtues of Father Judge the day he died; one could not ask him to be a better person than one willing to give his life for another. Jack Bense in his selfless actions displayed the many qualities Father Judge strives to instill in all its students.

John M. O’Farrell, a Judge graduate and a class behind Jack Bense, was a celebrated science student, having won many awards for physics in high school. He graduated in 1964 and went on to continue his education in Physics at La Salle College. However in 1966 after his sophomore year he left La Salle because he wanted to enlist in the Army and serve his country. He had intended to continue his education after he returned from his tour of duty. He was sent through officer candidate school and made a Second Lieutenant because of his advanced education. In May of 1968 he was assigned to the 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne and sent to Vietnam. When Lieutenant O’Farrell arrived in Vietnam there was a shortage of officers to fill positions in the regular infantry units. Upon hearing about this dilemma, he volunteered to serve with the regular infantry. He was assigned to the 2<sup>nd</sup> battalion, 25<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division. In his many letters home Lieutenant O’Farrell assessed the war, stating that the Vietnamese rangers were “crack troops” and expressing his belief that “If we don’t stop them over here, we’ll have to stop them on our own coasts.”<sup>11</sup> However, he gave greatest praise and confidence to his own unit. In a letter home he describe them as “...the greatest. They had proved themselves repeatedly in

<sup>9</sup> Waring, Tom. “Great Wall Visits Father Judge High School” Philadelphia: *Northeast Times*, 2001.

<sup>10</sup> Father Judge High School <http://www.fatherjudge.com/fatherjudge.aspx?pgID=883>

<sup>11</sup> “Phila. Officer Killed In Vietnam Fire Fight.” *The Philadelphia Inquire*, January 18, 1969. (reproduced under 17 USC107). <http://www.virtualwall.org/do/OFarrellJM01a.htm>

numerous fire fights.”<sup>12</sup> This sentiment was not one-sided, for the men of his unit shared a mutual respect and admiration for him, which was exhibited by the actions of the platoon-sized patrol led by Lieutenant O’Farrell on January 14, 1969. While on patrol the platoon came under sniper fire. In order to protect his men Lieutenant O’Farrell and two others went ahead to scout out and eliminate the sniper, only to be shot dead in their attempt. Having witnessed the shooting of Lieutenant O’Farrell and the other two men, “several soldiers advanced to protect and recover them, as the sniper was still firing which resulted in the fatal wounds of at least one PFC.”<sup>13</sup>

The actions taken by all the men of the patrol led by Lieutenant O’Farrell makes each a hero in his own right. Yet, what distinguishes Second Lieutenant O’Farrell is the fact that he did volunteer to be placed with the regular infantry. He did so at a time when statistically the most dangerous rank was that of second lieutenant—they were a target not only for the enemy but often for their own troops who did not want to be there. Therefore, not only did he voluntarily put himself at risk by simply enlisting in the army, he extended his sense of duty even further by taking a more dangerous and hostile assignment. He was willing to sacrifice himself in order to protect his men. He understood his mission and he did it, by his own free will. This sense of loyalty, respect and admiration transcended even his death, as seen when one of his wounded men, Frank Kearny, wrote to his father asking him to attend Lieutenant O’Farrell’s funeral in Philadelphia and to tell the lieutenant’s parents “that it was a pleasure to have served under their son.” This view was expressed by most of the men who later sent letters to Lieutenant O’Farrell’s parents.<sup>14</sup> Lieutenant John O’Farrell was a student who believed in duty to his country. He infused all he had been taught at Father Judge about physical and social values, and what it would be mean to be his best. He took this knowledge and voluntarily commanded a group of men in war. He was twenty-two years old when he died. After his death he was awarded two Silver Stars for his brave actions during his time in Vietnam.

Not all those who served in Vietnam died heroic deaths. Not all were infantry; some were drafted, yet they were men willing and able to do their duty. They performed necessary (though sometimes forgotten) roles such as chefs, mechanics, and drivers during the war. Although they were not always infantry, these men were also casualties of the war. Ronald M. Iller was among these “non-hostile ground casualties.” He graduated from Father Judge High School in 1964, and for two years he worked peacefully as a florist in Northeast Philadelphia. In June of 1966 he was drafted into the Army. He began his tour of duty on April 12, 1967, where he was assigned to the 525<sup>th</sup> Quartermaster Company as a Specialist Four.<sup>15</sup> He was a light vehicle driver. As he saw more of the war he wrote several letters expressing his desire to return home to the family and job he had left behind. He also discouraged his younger brother from enlisting in the Army in an attempt to protect him from the war. On September 22, 1967, at the age of twenty-one the fuel truck he was driving collided with another vehicle causing fatal

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<sup>12</sup> “Phila. Officer Killed In Vietnam Fire Fight.” *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, January 18, 1969. (reproduced under 17 USC107). <http://www.virtualwall.org/do/OFarrellIJM01a.htm>

<sup>13</sup> “Notes from The Virtual Wall” <http://www.virtualwall.org/do/OFarrellIJM01a.htm>

<sup>14</sup> Kearny, Tom. “The Virtual Wall.” <http://www.virtualwall.org/do/OFarrellIJM01a.htm>

<sup>15</sup> Editor’s Note: A Specialist Four is a rank above Private First Class and below Corporal but is not considered a non-commissioned officer.

injuries to Ronald Iller.<sup>16</sup> His death was not glamorous. It was an accident. Yet, he also demonstrated the qualities that Father Judge instills in those it educates—he did his best while in Vietnam, and he kept to his word of disagreement with the war by discouraging his younger brother from enlisting. He was a draftee who went to war, but he did his best with what he had, and did not fail.

The same sentiment holds true in the accidental death of Bernard Francis Kissell. Bernard Kissell graduated from Father Judge High School in 1964. He is remembered as being aggressive and hard working. After high school he attended Temple University where he was enrolled in the ROTC program. In 1967 Bernard decided to enter the Air Force. He was sent to Vietnam on November 19, 1967; he worked as an aircraft mechanic and was assigned to Tan Son Nhut Air Base near Saigon. Staff sergeant Kissell died on Oct. 21, 1968, at the age of twenty-two, when his plane crashed nineteen miles southwest of Ban Me Thout, Darlac Province.<sup>17</sup> The plane crashed due to a mechanical problem with a wing. It was simply an accident. Both Staff Sergeant Kissell and Specialist Iller leave no legacy of heroics. They are not largely remembered for individual actions except by their families. They are, however, eternally linked in a legacy along with the other twenty-five Father Judge since in performing their duty to their country they were killed in Vietnam.

Yet another draftee was Raymond Ahern; he graduated in 1965. He lived and worked in Philadelphia, and was engaged to be married when he was drafted into the Army two weeks before Christmas in 1967. His tour of duty as a Specialist Four in Vietnam began on May 21, 1968. He was assigned to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, 19<sup>th</sup> Artillery, 1<sup>st</sup> Calvary. He was twenty years old when he was killed by mortar fire on November 26, 1968.<sup>18</sup> He was greatly loved and missed by the men he served with; for fifteen years after his death his commanding officer sent flowers to his parents to be placed on his grave.<sup>19</sup> This outpouring of emotion for Specialist Four Ahern further confirms that the Father Judge 27 were an ordinary group of men who performed above and beyond what was necessarily expected of them. Perhaps this overwhelming desire to perform their duty was instilled by some of the other Judge values taught to them including, “do whatever [they] do with vigorous enthusiasm and be the best person they can be.” Whatever the cause of their actions, they were loved and admired by those who knew and served with them.

Beyond the tragic fact that all of the 27 died is the fact that many soldiers in Vietnam did not survive the first two weeks once they arrived in that country. Such was the case with William Carpenter. He was a graduate of the Father Judge Class of 1966 and good friends with two other men of the 27, Donald Hertrich and Edward F. Zackowski. William Carpenter joined the Marine Corps straight out of high school, in the summer of 1966. His tour of duty began on December 19, 1967. He was a radio-telephone operator for the Headquarters and Service Company, 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion, 1<sup>st</sup> Marines,

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<sup>16</sup> “Six Hundred and Thirty.” *The Philadelphia Daily News*, October 26, 1987. <http://thewall-usa.com/cgi-bin/search5.cgi>

<sup>17</sup> “Six Hundred and Thirty.” *The Philadelphia Daily News*, October 26, 1987. <http://thewall-usa.com/cgi-bin/search4.cgi>

<sup>18</sup> “3 Area Men Die in Vietnam” *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, November 30, 1968. <http://thewall-usa.com/cgi-bin/search5.cgi>

<sup>19</sup> “Six Hundred and Thirty.” *The Philadelphia Daily News*, October 26, 1987. <http://thewall-usa.com/cgi-bin/search5.cgi>

1<sup>st</sup> Marine Division. He died nine days later on December 27, 1967. He was 19 years old.<sup>20</sup>

The majority of the Father Judge 27 were enlisted men; primarily they were enlisted in the Marine Corps. This in and of itself is an act of pure nerve—the Marines were the first to troops to land in Vietnam and the last to leave. The men who joined the Marine Corps knew one very simple fact: they would be sent to Vietnam. The desire to be part of the best and most elite in training, and the unexplainable loyalty that is bred within the Marine Corps often appealed to many of the Father Judge 27.

They were compelled to hold themselves to these rigorous standards, as they had in high school been infused with the creed to “not falter or fail.” The Marine Corps had attracted Michael Vitale from any early age; “he admired the uniform, but more than that he admired what it stood for.” He graduated Father Judge in 1966, and then worked for a few years, following his ambition and joining the Marine Corps in August of 1968. He was assigned to Company F of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, 7<sup>th</sup> Marines, 1<sup>st</sup> Division. His tour of duty began on January 22, 1969; he was killed on April 14, 1969 at twenty years old.<sup>21</sup> The desire to be a Marine also drove William Joseph Brown who not only enlisted in the Marines once, but twice. He re-enlisted because he strongly believed that the U.S. should be in Vietnam and that the Marines had a duty to be there.<sup>22</sup> He served from 1962, shortly after his graduation from Father Judge, until his death on May 20<sup>th</sup> 1967. He was the chief clerk of Company K, 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion. He was twenty-two years old.<sup>23</sup>

Francis Kane and William Schussler had been friends in high school, and although they did not enlist in the same year or serve in the same units, both had great love of the Marine Corps. Francis X. Kane’s single goal was to become a Marine; he graduated from Father Judge in 1967 and then enlisted in the Marine Corps. He was an active youth who spent most of his energies working and swimming at the local swim club.<sup>24</sup> He was assigned to Vietnam on November 7, 1968 and served in Company M of Battalion Landing Team 3, 1<sup>st</sup> Marines, 9<sup>th</sup> Marine Amphibious Brigade. He was killed on April 21, 1968 during a search and destroy mission at the age of eighteen.<sup>25</sup> Kane’s friend Schussler later followed in his footsteps, enlisting in the Marine Corps in January 1969. One of Schussler’s relatives said “He would have followed the Marines into hell.” Schussler did follow the Marines into Vietnam on July 19, 1969, where he was assigned as private first class to Headquarters and Service Company of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Marine Amphibious Force. He was killed at the age of nineteen during a patrol around the jungle near the air base at Da Nang, on October 24, 1969. He was remembered as a great friend.<sup>26</sup>

Unfortunately William Schussler was not the only member of the Class of 1967 to be killed in action. Thomas Killion, Jr. was killed in action on November 17, 1968. He

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<sup>20</sup> “Six Hundred and Thirty.” *The Philadelphia Daily News*, October 26, 1987. <http://thewall-usa.com/cgi-bin/search5.cgi>. <http://thewall-usa.com/cgi-bin/search4.cgi>

<sup>21</sup> “Six Hundred and Thirty.” *The Philadelphia Daily News*, October 26, 1987. <http://thewall-usa.com/cgi-bin/search5.cgi>, <http://thewall-usa.com/cgi-bin/search4.cgi>

<sup>22</sup> “Six Hundred and Thirty.” *The Philadelphia Daily News*, October 26, 1987.

<sup>23</sup> “Six Hundred and Thirty.” *The Philadelphia Daily News*, October 26, 1987.

<sup>24</sup> “Six Hundred and Thirty” *The Philadelphia Daily News*, October 26, 1987. <http://thewall-usa.com/cgi-bin/search5.cgi>.

<sup>25</sup> <http://thewall-usa.com/cgi-bin/search4.cgi>

<sup>26</sup> “Six hundred and Thirty” *The Philadelphia Daily News*, Oct. 26, 1987. <http://thewall-usa.com/cgi-bin/search5.cgi>, <http://thewall-usa.com/cgi-bin/search4.cgi>

had been president of his class in his sophomore year and was the oldest of nine children. He was engaged when he enlisted in the Marine Corps in February 1968 and was sent to Vietnam on August 2, 1968. He was assigned to the 26<sup>th</sup> Marine Division. He was killed by gunfire while setting up an ambush. In his letters home he never complained about the conditions or the war because he did not want his mother to worry about him.<sup>27</sup> He was nineteen years old and had intended to become a firefighter when he returned home.<sup>28</sup>

The rest of the Father Judge 27 followed a similar pattern: wanting to be a Marine and joining directly after high school or waiting a year while they worked. One of the first Father Judge graduates to pass away was Stephen P. Miller. He graduated in 1963 and a few days later followed his dream and enlisted in the Marines Corps. He is remembered as a "rambunctious blond" who was "an amateur boxer." Corporal Miller was a machine gunner that belonged to Company D of the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion of the 26<sup>th</sup> Marines. He died due to fatal small arms fire during Operation Deckhouse on September 16, 1966.<sup>29</sup>

In 1967 Corporal Joseph Gradel, Lieutenant Corporal James Snock and Private First Class George Townsend were all killed in action in Vietnam. Cpl. Joseph Gradel graduated from Father Judge in 1964; he was engaged when he entered the Marine Corps in January 1966. He was a squad leader and assigned to Company M of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion, 1<sup>st</sup> Marines, 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Division in Vietnam. He was killed in action while on patrol at Trun Phan on April 29, 1967. A teacher remembered him as "exuberant and effervescent,"<sup>30</sup> attributes that may have served him well in Vietnam. Lieutenant James Snock finally knew some peace when he died on September 3, 1967, from wounds sustained in April. He and his twin brother graduated from Father Judge in 1965. He enlisted in the Marine Corps in September 1966. Those who remember James recall him as being active, fun-loving and containing a large amount of school spirit.<sup>31</sup> In similar form PFC George Townsend, a 1966 graduate, was wounded and evacuated to Japan, where he later died on October 17, 1967. He had begun his tour of duty in August of 1967. He was in Vietnam less than three months. He died at the age of nineteen.<sup>32</sup>

In 1968 Father Judge lost three more alumni who were enlisted in the Marine Corps. They were Fergus Joseph Carroll, Clement J. Grassi, and Michael J. Kilderry. Fergus Carroll was remembered by his teachers as constantly seeing the humor in every situation and never being bothered by anything. He enlisted in the Marine Corps prior to graduating in 1966; he was killed on June 18, 1968. He was nineteen years old.<sup>33</sup> Three days prior to Carroll's death a fellow member of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Division, Clement J. Grassi, died. He enlisted in the Marines in 1966. Small arms wounds killed him on June 15, 1968. He

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<sup>27</sup> Waring, Tom. "Great Wall Visits Father Judge High School," Philadelphia: *Northeast Times*, 2001.

<sup>28</sup> "Six hundred and Thirty" *The Philadelphia Daily News*, Oct. 26, 1987 <http://thewall-usa.com/cgi-bin/search5.cgi>

<sup>29</sup> *The Philadelphia Daily News*, Oct. 26, 1987 <http://thewall-usa.com/cgi-bin/search4.cgi>

<sup>30</sup> "Six hundred and Thirty" *The Philadelphia Daily News*, Oct. 26, 1987, <http://thewall-usa.com/cgi-bin/search4.cgi>

<sup>31</sup> "Six hundred and Thirty" *The Philadelphia Daily News*, Oct. 26, 1987, Oct. 26, 1987 <http://thewall-usa.com>

<sup>32</sup> "Six hundred and Thirty" *The Philadelphia Daily News*, Oct. 26, 1987 <http://thewall-usa.com>

<sup>33</sup> "Six hundred and Thirty" *The Philadelphia Daily News*, Oct. 26, 1987. <http://thewall-usa.com/cgi-bin/search5.cgi>

was twenty-one years old.<sup>34</sup> Former classmates remember him as "...funny. He had a great sense of humor. He was the kind of guy who would give you the shirt off his back."<sup>35</sup> The last of the Father Judge Marines to die in 1968 was Michael J. Kilderry. He enlisted in the Marine Corps in 1967 and was assigned to Company C of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Marine Division in Vietnam. He was fatally wounded in late June 1968 during Operation Scotland II; he died on the hospital ship USS Sanctuary on July 6, 1968. He was one week away from his twenty-first birthday.<sup>36</sup>

It could be argued that there is no guarantee that Father Judge and the virtues it sought to instill had any actual lasting impact on these men—perhaps it was their own will and no outside influence that inspired them to demand excellence of themselves. However the fact that fourteen out of twenty-seven men decided to join the one of the most demanding branches in the military suggests that the one aspect that links them together—the high school they attended—influenced them to demand more of themselves and give more of themselves. In the case of the fourteen Marines, they went on to learn intense loyalty and gave their lives having demanded all they had from themselves. It is impossible to state that Father Judge was the strongest component in their decision to enlist, yet it is not reasonable to rule out Father Judge's influence on the men as an important aspect of their mentality and spirit, resonating with the thought of "being the best person [they] can be."

The Marine Corps demands excellence; it draws those who knowingly and willingly volunteer or are drafted to be put into combative, dangerous situations. The high number of the 27 who were Marines is a testament to the character of the men as well as the school they represented. However, it is not a Marine who possesses the most compelling story of the 27, it is instead an Army draftee, Edward Zackowski. Better known as "Ed" or "Zeek," he graduated from Father Judge in 1965. In October 1966 he was drafted into the Army. He is remembered by many for his quiet manner, quick wit, and deep affection for family and friends which was most often seen in his conversations with the men in his unit and in his letters home to his family. He belonged to different Companies during his tour in Vietnam, beginning with A Company and then transferring to D Company where he saw extensive combat.<sup>37</sup> He was wounded twice before he was killed during a search and destroy mission on November 28, 1967. He died trying to save other men, about whom he cared deeply.

Three months before his death he explained in a poem his reason for fighting. He wrote, "I came to this place because / because there was a job to be done/ It didn't take long to find out it wouldn't be fun/ I'm here for a year and a year I'll stay/ I'll fight like hell and pray each day/ That my being here will keep my/ brother away."<sup>38</sup> His reasoning is selfless. He fought because it was his duty, but on a deeper, more basic level of compassion and protection he fought to keep his brother from having to fight in the war.

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<sup>34</sup> "Six hundred and Thirty" *The Philadelphia Daily News*, Oct. 26, 1987. <http://thewall-usa.com/cgi-bin/search5.cgi>

<sup>35</sup> Waring, Tom. "Great Wall Visits Father Judge High School" *Philadelphia: Northeast Times*, 2001.

<sup>36</sup> "Six hundred and Thirty" *The Philadelphia Daily News*, Oct. 26, 1987. <http://thewall-usa.com/cgi-bin/search5.cgi>

<sup>37</sup> Chamberlain, Neil. "Comments on thewall-usa" March 20, 2006. <http://thewall-usa.com/cgi-bin/search5.cgi>

<sup>38</sup> "Six Hundred and Thirty," *The Philadelphia Daily News*, Oct. 26, 1987.

<http://www.virtualwall.org/dz/ZackowskiEF01a.htm>

Sergeant Zackowski was a man who did not have to go out of his way: he could simply have served his time and found no reason or belief for fighting. He did not have to give his life for the other men in his unit, but he did. He was known for making many friends and for his ability to make people smile. Sergeant Zackowski died at the age of twenty; he never even met his youngest sister. He acted as a hero, and he was given the honor of that title. After his death "Zeek" was awarded the Silver Star, the Bronze Star for Valor, and three Purple Hearts. He embodied the essence of the heroic American soldier.

Today Father Judge takes great pride in the legacy of the twenty-seven men who died in Vietnam. They recognize the sacrifice of their twenty-seven alumni in many ways. They have retired the number 27 from all sports teams as a sign of respect. The alumni president in 2001 stated that that the Father Judge 27 "were the backbone of the our alumni association." Also, the school now brings in a guest speaker every spring to speak about Vietnam. The students are then informed of the history of the 27 Father Judge alumni who died during the war.<sup>39</sup> In May 2001, as a sign of total recognition of the sacrifice and commitment of its alumni during Vietnam, the Father Judge Alumni Association lobbied and were successful in bringing the Moving Wall (the moving Vietnam Memorial) to Father Judge. A recent Father Judge graduate, Joseph Mullin, when asked about his feelings on the Father Judge 27 stated that, "their lives and their actions during the war are a matter of great pride to Judge, so much so that no students are allowed even to smoke on the sidewalk next to the monument."<sup>40</sup> Father Judge High School alumni, faculty and current students regard the 27 men who died as "their boys" since they were a part of something greater than themselves. They were in a sense members of a brotherhood, a family encompassed by those who knew them and those who taught them. They were and forever will be part of Father Judge High School, and Judge is proud to call them their own.

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<sup>39</sup>Kilkenny, Ryan. Telephone Interview April 14, 2006.

<sup>40</sup>Mullin, Joseph. Personal Interview April 11, 2006.

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