



Thomas Wilson Pusser Co B-2

Tom came to the Academy from the deep South, and it took most of us until Plebe Christmas before we could understand him. T.W.'s the man who put Chesterfield on the map. The transition from squirrel gun to M-1 was made when he earned the E.I.B. Cow year. His devotion to duty assures him success as an officer.

Born – 22 Apr 1939, Wadesboro, NC.

To USMA – Came from Chesterfield, SC.

Appointed by South Carolina 5th. Nickname – “T.W.”

Died – 22 Oct 1965 (age 26) killed-in-action (KIA) in Vietnam. Buried at Chesterfield Cemetery, Chesterfield, SC.

Military Awards – Silver Star Medal (awarded posthumously), Purple Heart, Army Commendation Medal, Combat Infantryman’s Badge.

Schooling – Inducted into the Ranger Hall of Fame, Ft. Benning, GA.

Family – Tom was not married.

Contact – Randy Pusser (brother), Gerald Pusser (brother), Betsy Pusser Middleton (sister).

Tom served on active duty in the Army (Infantry) for 4 years, until his untimely death in 1965, with the rank of Captain. His first assignment was with the 1st Cavalry Division in Korea. He then served in Vietnam (first tour – Advisor, 5th Special Forces Group), Vietnam (second tour – Advisor to Vietnamese Rangers).

In October 1965, the Special Forces camp at Plei Me, in the II Corps area, was surrounded and under heavy attack. On 21 October, relief units landed by helicopter and began moving toward the Plei Me camp. Documents found on a dead enemy body identified the opposing units as North Vietnamese. This was the first proof of NVA troops in South Viet Nam. Project Delta and Ranger companies were able to enter the camp at Plei Me on the morning of 22 October. On the same day, Colonel Beckwith (U.S. Commander of the relief units) received an order to send units outside the camp to locate and eliminate the enemy. In Beckwith’s words (from his Book “Delta Force”) – “In the afternoon we mounted up both Ranger companies. Captain Thomas Pusser, a West Pointer I thought a lot of, was the adviser to the Vietnamese Rangers.” Beckwith knew it was a dangerous mission and suggested Captain Pusser go with the stronger of the two companies. “He (Tom) felt because he could kick ass and get it moving he should go with the weaker one....I shouldn’t have let him do that....The plan was to begin to clear the northern slope area from which most of the heaviest fire was coming. The NVA waited for both companies to get outside the gate. Then they came out of their holes and hit us with everything they had. About fourteen men were killed, including Tom Pusser. Many more were wounded.” From the intensity of the siege that followed, Colonel Beckwith estimated there were two or three NVA Regiments involved.

Footnote from Tom when asked why he had volunteered to go back to Vietnam for a second tour – “It was hard over there before, and this time it will be harder. But I might as well do it as anybody else. I have no wife or children, and there are wonderful people over there. They don’t trust you at first, but once you’ve won their trust, they will give their lives for you.”