



FACT SHEET

Fort Worth & Vietnam

In August 1967, a group of U.S. soldiers hunkers down deep in the steaming jungles of the Central Highlands of Vietnam, 9,000 miles from home. War-weary minds, clouded from months of sleep deprivation and constant enemy fire, search for threads of hope in the dismal situation.

In the darkness, one lone young soldier scrawls a selfless letter, seeking some sort of encouragement, some token of acknowledgement to raise the morale of his comrades.

The letter finds its way to Fort Worth Mayor DeWitt McKinley. Touched by the humility of a hometown soldier in the throes of war, asking for nothing but a glimmer of hope, the mayor and the people of Fort Worth respond to the heart-felt plea with compassion.

In September, Fort Worth's reply to the letter arrives in Vietnam. Duffel bags stuffed with cookies, cakes, and letters of support arrive weekly. Churches, schools, lodges, and Scout troops all confirm their support of the soldiers.

Some people offered prayers for the soldiers' safe return; others just wanted the troops to know that someone really cares about them. Tucked among the letters and desserts were proclamations declaring that the City of Fort Worth has officially adopted the soldiers, formally known as Charlie Company, 1st Battalion, 503rd Infantry, 173rd Airborne Brigade (Separate).

For the soldiers, the flood of reassurance came at a time when morale is particularly low. One soldier later commented, "You have no idea how that compassion turned us around."

A memorial plaque was subsequently placed in the Fort Worth Botanic Gardens for Charlie Company containing the story.

Thirty-four years later, on July 6, 2001, twenty-nine surviving members of Charlie Company convene at the Garden to again say “Thank You” to the people of Fort Worth who lifted them up in their time of need. Sadly, among the missing was James David “Shorty” Haas, the soldier who, at 18 years of age, wrote the letter that touched so many lives.

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