



Reneau remembered as war hero

Received silver star for his bravery in Vietnam War

By Ashley Rhodebeck

Daily News staff writer

A star fell last week, leaving behind a legacy of heroism. In 1967, Thomas A. Reneau received a Silver Star — the third highest American military award — for continuing to fire from his flaming tank during a battle in Vietnam.

He died Nov. 13. He was 62.

The Beloit resident enlisted in the U.S. Army just 60 days after graduating from Beloit Memorial High School in 1963. He was first assigned to Ger-



Reneau

many, then to Vietnam as a tank commander in the 25th Infantry Division from July 1967 until July 1968.

Reneau wrote to his parents, Jesse B. and Frances Reneau, about the fiery incident.

"I've got something to tell you," Reneau wrote to his mother. "The night of the 12th, about 8:15 p.m., my platoon, the 1st Platoon, was hit by a

Viet Cong ambush."

At first, Reneau was hesitant to go into details about the attack. Then fire started coming from both sides of the road we were on. Mom, I don't want you to get all upset and worry so I'm not going to tell you the rest of what happened," he wrote.

But, after reassuring his parents he and his crew were okay, Reneau shared his close call.

"The tank was hit five times, caught fire but we stayed and fought until the last minute," he wrote. "But before we had to leave the tank, we were able to get out 9 to 12, 90 mm main gun rounds at the Viet Cong. In all, the platoon killed 10 Viet Cong. The crew of B-15,

my tank, was given credit for killing 3 of the 10 Viet Cong. Just as we got off the tank, it started to blow up. So, now you know what happened."

The Commanding General of the division personally promoted Reneau to Staff Sergeant E-6 and awarded him the Silver Star. His crew received the Bronze Star.

Despite the awards, the young soldier seemed modest about his achievements.

"So, I guess you may say we were heroes, in a way," Reneau wrote.

Reneau retired from the Army in 1985. By then, he had received more than a dozen awards, including a Purple Heart, Meritorious Service Medal and the Army Commendation Medal.

In 1996, his alma mater inducted Reneau into its Hall of Fame.

"There are safer ways to make a mark in life," Reneau had said. "I feel humbled that I was selected for this honor."

Reneau is survived by sister Peggy Reneau, nieces Lisa Weakley and Monica Rodriguez, great-nieces BreAnna W. and Diana W. and uncle Andrew Reneau.

Visitation will be at the Henderson Avenue United Methodist Church from 11 a.m. to noon Friday, immediately followed by the service. Interment will follow at Eastlawn Cemetery.

September 14, 1967

Dear Mom,

... I've got something to tell you. I feel you should know. The night of the 12th, about 8:15 p.m., my platoon, the 1st Platoon, was hit by a Viet Cong ambush. We had a tank in the lead, APCs and two tanks at the end. The tank I commanded was the very last tank.

The lead tank was fired at with an RPG-7 (an anti-tank weapon) but was missed. Then fire started coming from both sides of the road we were on. Mom, I don't want you to get all upset and worry so I'm not going to tell you the rest of what happened.

I will tell you this, because of what I did. I was promoted to the rank of Staff Sergeant E-6, by the Commanding General of the division, personally. I also received the Silver Star, the nation's second highest military award and my crew received the Bronze Star, the nation's fourth highest award. So, I guess you may say we were heroes, in a way.

The tank commander of the tank in front of me that night, wrote up an eyewitness report of what happened that night. When I get a copy of the report, I will send one to you. Don't worry Mom, my men and myself got off to the tank and to safety okay.

Mom, your prayers and everyone else's prayers, timely were answered that night. I said a little prayer that night before I went out, as I usually do. (SMILE)

Well Mom, I may just as well tell you what happened. The tank was hit five times, caught fire but we stayed and fought until the last minute. But before we had to leave the tank, we were able to get out 9 to 12, 90 mm main gun rounds at the Viet Cong. In all, the platoon killed 10 Viet Cong. The crew of B-15, my tank, was given credit for killing 3 of the 10 Viet Cong. Just as we got off the tank, it started to blow up. So, now you know what happened.

Love always,

Tom

INFORMATION RELEASABLE UNDER THE FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT

| | |
|---|--|
| NAME: | Thomas Anthony Reneau |
| BRANCH OF SERVICE AND SERIAL/SERVICE NUMBER(S): | Army |
| DATES OF SERVICE: | July 17, 1963 to October 31, 1985 |
| DUTY STATUS: | Retired |
| RANK/GRADE: | SFC/E7 |
| SALARY: | NA |
| SOURCE OF COMMISSION: | NA |
| PROMOTION SEQUENCE NUMBER: | NA |
| ASSIGNMENTS AND GEOGRAPHICAL LOCATIONS: | See attached sheet |
| MILITARY EDUCATION: | See attached sheet |
| DECORATIONS AND AWARDS: | Silver Star, Bronze Star Medal, Purple Heart, Meritorious Service Medal, Army Commendation Medal, Army Good Conduct Medal (7 th award), Army Achievement Medal, National Defense Service Medal, Vietnam Service Medal, Vietnam Campaign Medal w/60 Device, Vietnamese Cross of Gallantry w/Palm, NCO Professional Development Ribbon (3), Army Service Ribbon, see attached sheet |
| TRANSCRIPT OF COURT-MARTIAL TRIAL: | Not on file cont |
| PHOTOGRAPH: | NA |
| PLACE OF ENTRY: | NA |
| PLACE OF SEPARATION: | NA |
| FOR DECEASED VETERAN ONLY | |
| PLACE OF BIRTH | |
| DATE OF DEATH | |
| LOCATION OF DEATH | |
| PLACE OF BURIAL | |
| NOTE: | N/A denotes information is not available in the veteran's records |
| NATIONAL ARCHIVES AND RECORDS ADMINISTRATION | NA FORM 13164 (Rev. 02-02) |

SFC/E7 Thomas A. Reneau
United States Army