

**is honored on Panel 11W, Row 41 of
the Vietnam Veterans Memorial**

Full Name: GEORGE THOMAS KELLY III
Wall Name: GEORGE T KELLY III
Date of Birth: 6/10/1947
Date of Casualty: 4/23/1970
Date of Death: 4/23/1970
Home of Record: HIGH POINT
County of Record: GUILFORD COUNTY
State: NC
Branch of Service: ARMY
Rank: 1LT
Casualty Country: SOUTH VIETNAM
Casualty Province: KONTUM



1LT Kelly was killed in action while serving with Battery C, 6th Battalion, 14th Artillery as a Forward Observer for the 1st Battalion, 42nd ARVN Infantry Regiment

Distinguished Service Cross Citation:

The Distinguished Service Cross is presented to George Thomas Kelly, III, First Lieutenant (Field Artillery), U.S. Army, for extraordinary heroism in connection with military operations involving an opposing armed force in the Republic of Viet Nam, while serving with Battery C, 6th Battalion, 14th Artillery, I Field Force, Vietnam. First Lieutenant Kelly distinguished himself while serving as forward observer with a Vietnamese battalion near Dak Seang. Lieutenant Kelly's battalion had been engaged with a North Vietnamese Regiment in continuous combat for several days. During the previous night the battalion had been aggressively attacked by the enemy who had moved to within thirty meters of the battalion's perimeter. Only through Lieutenant Kelly's daring and precise artillery adjustment was the enemy attack repulsed. During the early afternoon of 22 April 1970, Lieutenant Kelly led his beleaguered comrades in an attempt to break through the enemy encirclement and reach Camp Dak Seang. After several hours of travel, a bomb crater large enough to be utilized as a landing zone was discovered. A medical evacuation helicopter was immediately summoned by radio. Moments after the helicopter's arrival, the enemy emerged from the tree line and struck Lieutenant Kelly's force again. Because of the intense hostile fire, the heavily laden helicopter experienced great difficulty in taking off. Lieutenant Kelly unhesitatingly left the ship to engage the enemy in an attempt to divert their fire and to allow the helicopter to depart. As Lieutenant Kelly maneuvered to one side of the clearing to provide cover fire, he was mortally wounded by enemy small arms fire. First Lieutenant Kelly's extraordinary heroism and devotion to duty, at the cost of his life, were in keeping with the highest traditions of the military service and reflect great credit upon himself, his unit, and the United States Army.

Tom Kelly: Son, Brother, Uncle, Friend



There it is on The Wall, G. Thomas Kelly III, one of over 58,200+ names carved, subtracted from the stones much as they were subtracted from our lives and their futures. All heroes, all remembered, all loved.

G. Thomas Kelly III was the third in a direct line of G.T. Kelly's and as the previous G.T.'s disliked the name George and chose to go by Tom.

The accompanying photograph, top left, shows Tom with his Father, G. Thomas Kelly Jr., top right, Tom with his proud and adoring Mother Jill T. Kelly; he was their pride, joy, and first born. In the center is his niece Kelly (now married with two wonderful children of her own) bottom right, Tom with me and our sister Jude. Lower left: the two Tom's swore they would not leave the table until they had eaten the entire turkey; they were so proud... and full. The lower pictures are from the last day we saw him... Thanksgiving '69; all so vivid still.

I have since that day met 12 of the men he spent his last days with and through them my days with Tom have grown. Bless you Tommy... bless all of you.

Posted by: Patrick O'Kelly
Relationship: He is my brother
Saturday, November 30, 2002

From A tribute to Tom Kelly from his brother Patrick

He arrived in Vietnam attached to C Battery, 6th Battalion, 14th Artillery. On his last mission he was working with the 1st Battalion, 42d Regiment Army of the Republic of Vietnam they were just southwest of Dak Seang near the tri-border.

The incident of his death was associated with the Siege of Dak Seang - April 1970

Talk to the guys who met/knew/talked on the radio with him. They will tell you he drank too much, he was a problem child, not your spit and polished officer, a hippy, openly against the war... the list goes on, but what is agreed upon is his dedication in the field and duty to the men he served with.

I have heard several accounts of the events that day, April 22, 1970 but they are all related and/or very similar.

Here are some of the accounts that have been recalled to me:

"The men who returned on that medevac said that Kelly and another Lieutenant would not get on board as the ship was quite overloaded. Kelly grabbed two M-16 and told them to "get outta here!" As the chopper left it received some small arms fire from the surrounding bush. The two (Kelly and Delong) were seen prone on the ground apparently on the radio when they came under fire from atop the hill. Kelly rolled one way and the other lieutenant rolled the other. Kelly was seen getting up and crossing a clearing to some upturned trees while laying down suppressive cover fire. The chopper cleared the trees and those on board could no longer see through the cover." -----

"The medevac drew machine gun fire before we even got everyone aboard, but the pilot held it at a low hover until he had a full load and then lifted almost straight up, absorbing hits all over his ship. That left me and Tom laying prone at the uphill end of the tiny LZ. Tom, calm as ever, was trying to raise the 6/14th to see if they had a helicopter in the area that could pick us up. He was twisting the PRC-25 knob to change the frequency when a machine gun began firing at us from behind. The rounds were kicking up dirt all around us. We rolled in opposite directions, trying to get out of his target zone. I rolled across the LZ and into a depression caused by an uprooted tree. Then all hell broke loose with small arms fire raking the LZ, coming from uphill of our position. I saw several wounded ARVN killed as they tried to return fire from the middle of the LZ. I never saw Tom again. I believe he was killed by the initial burst of machine gun fire" -----

"When the boys returned from retrieving his remains, they said they found him slumped against a clump of large bamboo or the stump of a large overturned tree, his trade mark red bandanna and gold rimmed glasses. He had been shot many times but clearly and finally at close range. There were two M-16's laying by his side... clips empty." -----

"I was the S-3 of 6/14 at Dak Seang when Tom was killed. Wrote him up for the Medal of Honor for his selfless act of saving his buddies on the medevac. He was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross.



Tom is buried at Guilford Memorial Park, Greensboro, North Carolina.



From The Virtual Wall

Thirty-four years ago today, on the day after Thanksgiving, Tom Kelly left home for Vietnam. I did not meet him until almost five months later on a battlefield in Vietnam near Dak Seang. I was an infantry lieutenant, and he was an artillery forward observer. We were friends for the six longest days of our lives. At the end, he died and I lived.

Tom's life represents the real cost of war. He was not a supporter of the war, nor was he someone who was in Vietnam because he had no choice. He was there because he felt it was his duty to be there. After all these years I have finally found something that explains why he is a true hero. John Stuart Mill wrote

"War is an ugly thing, but it is not the ugliest of things. The person who has nothing for which he is willing to fight, nothing which is more important than his own personal safety, is a miserable creature and has no chance of being free unless made and kept so by the exertions of better men than himself."

Tom Kelly was a "better man," a man of honor, loyalty, and good humor. He also was a friend the likes of which I never expect to see again.

A Friend
Frank DeLong
1Lt Inf, MACV Team 23
November 28, 2003

A Dak Seang Story - by Frank DeLong

One Saturday afternoon last August I was working in the yard when my wife brought the cordless phone out the front door. The fellow on the other end said: "Mr. DeLong, you don't know me, but I was going through some things of my dad's last week, and I came across a letter you sent to our family." I said: "I know who you are. You're Tom Kelly's brother." I sent a letter to his family from Vietnam in 1970. I was the last one to see Tom Kelly alive.

Tom was the FO with our battalion advisory team at the battle of Dak Seang in April 1970. There were four of us with the 1st BN 42nd RGT ARVN. Tom and his RTO made six. Since the beginning of April 1970 the Dak Seang Special Forces Camp had been under siege by elements of the 28th NVA RGT, supported by the 40th NVA Artillery RGT. Our battalion was inserted in a helicopter assault just southeast of the camp on April 12, 1970. After about five days of fighting, the battalion moved to a hilltop a click north of the SF camp and was attempting to push further north with no success. For the next six days, the 1st BN 42d RGT was surrounded on that hill. That's when I met Tom. Up to that point, I had been with the battalion's lead company, while Tom stayed with the battalion commander and my boss, MAJ Noll. But when we were no longer able to move, all units were pulled back into a rough perimeter on the hilltop.

Then we hunkered down and started calling in artillery and air support morning, noon and night.

Tom and I became friends during the six longest days of our lives.

I will never forget the first time I laid eyes on him. It was the morning of April 13th. He was sitting cross-legged on the ground next to his RTO, studying a folded map. He had a red bandana around his forehead, almost resting on the top of his glasses, and he looked over at me with this look of utter calm and acknowledged me with his open palm. I had not yet met him. I was rushing back to the lead company after running out to a resupply helicopter to hand the door gunner a letter to mail for me. I do not recall seeing him again until dusk on April 18th, when our lead company returned to the battalion hilltop perimeter. The next day, Tom helped me dig in, between mortar attacks, during which we crouched together in his hole counting down the rounds. During a break, we brewed up my last packet of hot cocoa in a canteen cup, but before we could sample it, the NVA began to mortar us again. We scrambled into his hole, and eased the canteen cup back and forth between us, trading sips. Then one round exploded nearby and dislodged an egg-sized chunk of red clay from the edge of the hole. It fell squarely into the middle of the cocoa.

Tom looked straight at me and said, through clenched teeth: "OK. That does it. Now they've made me angry!"

Our lives depended upon artillery and air support. Dak Seang was a difficult environment for an FO. At any one time, there were three to five battalions deployed independently in the area of operations, all requiring artillery and air support. There were frequent check fires to permit the air assets to provide close support. Our hilltop was also a difficult location for an FO. It was moderately wooded, with treetops in the 75 to 90 foot range. The NVA were hugging our position. They never seemed to attack from the same location. Tom and his RTO worked round the clock, juggling the assets he had available from the 6/14th and directing fire from other units, too, but the bottom line was we were exposed on that hilltop. Toward the end, it became impossible for us to be resupplied with food, water or ammo. My boss, MAJ Noll, was wounded by shrapnel in the lower spine when an enemy round exploded in a tree above his hole. Tom's RTO was wounded by shrapnel from an RPG while trying to help repel a ground assault on the battalion. Tom's radio was put out of commission. On 4/23/70, during that same ground assault, the battalion "broke out" and headed back toward the SF camp.

Tom and I were together, sharing one radio and one map between us. Heading down a ravine from the hilltop, the battalion came under fire from one or more automatic weapons covering the mouth of the ravine. My NCO was wounded. Meanwhile, a medevac came on station, and our senior NCO called him in to pick up our wounded, including MAJ Noll, my NCO, the RTO, and several wounded ARVN soldiers. There was a small open area on the side of the hill created by airstrikes. It was amazing that the pilot could find that tiny LZ, much less get the helicopter into it.

The medevac drew machine gun fire before we even got everyone aboard, but the pilot held it at a low hover until he had a full load and then lifted almost straight up, absorbing hits all over his ship. He was forced to make an emergency landing at the SF camp. (One of those machine gun rounds hit our senior NCO in the belly, and he died in the RTO's arms before they landed.)

That left me and Tom laying prone at the uphill end of the tiny LZ. Several ARVN wounded and a few able-bodied soldiers were in the middle of the LZ. I said to Tom that we needed to get off that LZ. Tom, calm as ever, was trying to raise the 6/14th to see if they had a helicopter in the area that could pick us up. He was twisting the PRC-25 knob to change the frequency when a machine gun began firing at us from behind. He had us in his sights. The rounds were kicking up dirt all around us. We rolled in opposite directions, trying to get out of his target zone. I rolled across the LZ and into a depression caused by an uprooted tree. Then all hell broke loose with small arms fire raking the LZ, coming from uphill of our position. I saw several wounded ARVN killed as they tried to return fire from the middle of the LZ. I never saw Tom again. I believe he was killed by the initial burst of machine gun fire.

Three ARVN soldiers (one of them wounded) took care of the machine gun, though among the 4 of us, not one of us had a grenade. (It was an M-60, at the mouth of a deep bunker.) The four of us set off downhill, crossing an open area of trees felled by airstrikes. I was attempting to point them back in the general direction of the SF camp (I did not have the map, just a compass), when we were taken under fire again, from uphill. I got separated from them, too, and was damn near shot at point blank range by a guy in a covered fighting position that I almost stepped on as I turned to follow them. Fortunately, he missed and (17 rounds later), I didn't. I then alternately walked and crawled back to the SF camp by early evening and scampered across an open area to a bunker on the outer perimeter. It was manned by soldiers from my own ARVN battalion who were yelling encouragement to me. Our ARVN A Co. commander (a lieutenant like me) came double-time from around the outside of the concertina, saluted and grabbed and hugged me.

For 31 years I have thought about Tom and what happened to us, going over it again and again, remembering how Tom looked grinning from behind his glasses; remembering how he was calm and funny; remembering how he took care of his RTO; remembering how we all depended on him. Then last August I got that call from his brother. It was a wonderful thing to talk to someone who knew Tom and to talk about what a great guy he was and how much I have missed him. I'll bet it is hard for the average person to believe you can feel like that about somebody you knew for just six days, but those were not six ordinary days and Tom Kelly was not an ordinary man.

Frank DeLong
MACV Team 23 - 1969-70

Sill dedicates Forward Operating Base
Facility named for Vietnam forward observer
May 11, 2007 (Lawton Constitution)

Flooded low-water crossings kept the ceremony from being held at the FOB itself on Fort Sill's East Range, but members of Kelly's family gathered in the Reimer Conference Center of Snow Hall for the unveiling of a sign and the reading of a citation.

Kelly was posthumously awarded the Distinguished Service Cross for his actions on April 22, 1970, when, as a forward observer with a Vietnamese battalion near Dak Seang, he saved other soldiers' lives at the cost of his own.

"I was there. I am here to bear witness to the character and courage of my friend, Tom Kelly. We met on a battlefield in Vietnam. We were friends for six days. The lives of my combat adviser team, the lives of our Vietnamese soldiers — those lives were (saved by) Tom and the Field Artillery. We owe our lives to the artillery," said Frank DeLong, a lieutenant on the battlefield with Kelly who is attending an Officer Candidate School (OCS) reunion on Fort Sill this week.

"I'm so proud to have known Tom. I'm so grateful to be here with you, and so happy that you are honoring him this way," the Vietnam veteran said.



Attending Thursday's dedication of a Forward Operating Base on Fort Sill to the memory of 1st Lt. George Thomas Kelly III are, from left, his mother, Jill Kelly; his sister, Jude Kelly; and Frank DeLong, who was a lieutenant on the battlefield with Kelly the day he died on April 22, 1970.

Another lieutenant who served with Kelly, Randy Dunham of Lawton, said, "There were three young lieutenants who found their way to Vietnam in 1970, and all of those participated in a battle that we'll never forget. Two of us came home, and one of them didn't. We're here today honoring the one who did not come home."

“Our family sent over a son, a brother, and he sent back to us another brother, and another, and another, and thousands more, and we thank you all for coming home. We thank you for this day,” said Kelly’s brother, Patrick.

He added that “President George Washington once said that the willingness of our young people to serve is directly proportional to how those veterans of past wars are appreciated and are treated. ... This is one of those days when that appreciation is clear to our young people in service now, and we come here to honor them as well as my brother.”

Col. Kevin M. Batule, commander of 428th Field Artillery Brigade, said Kelly’s example represents selfless service, one of the Army values.

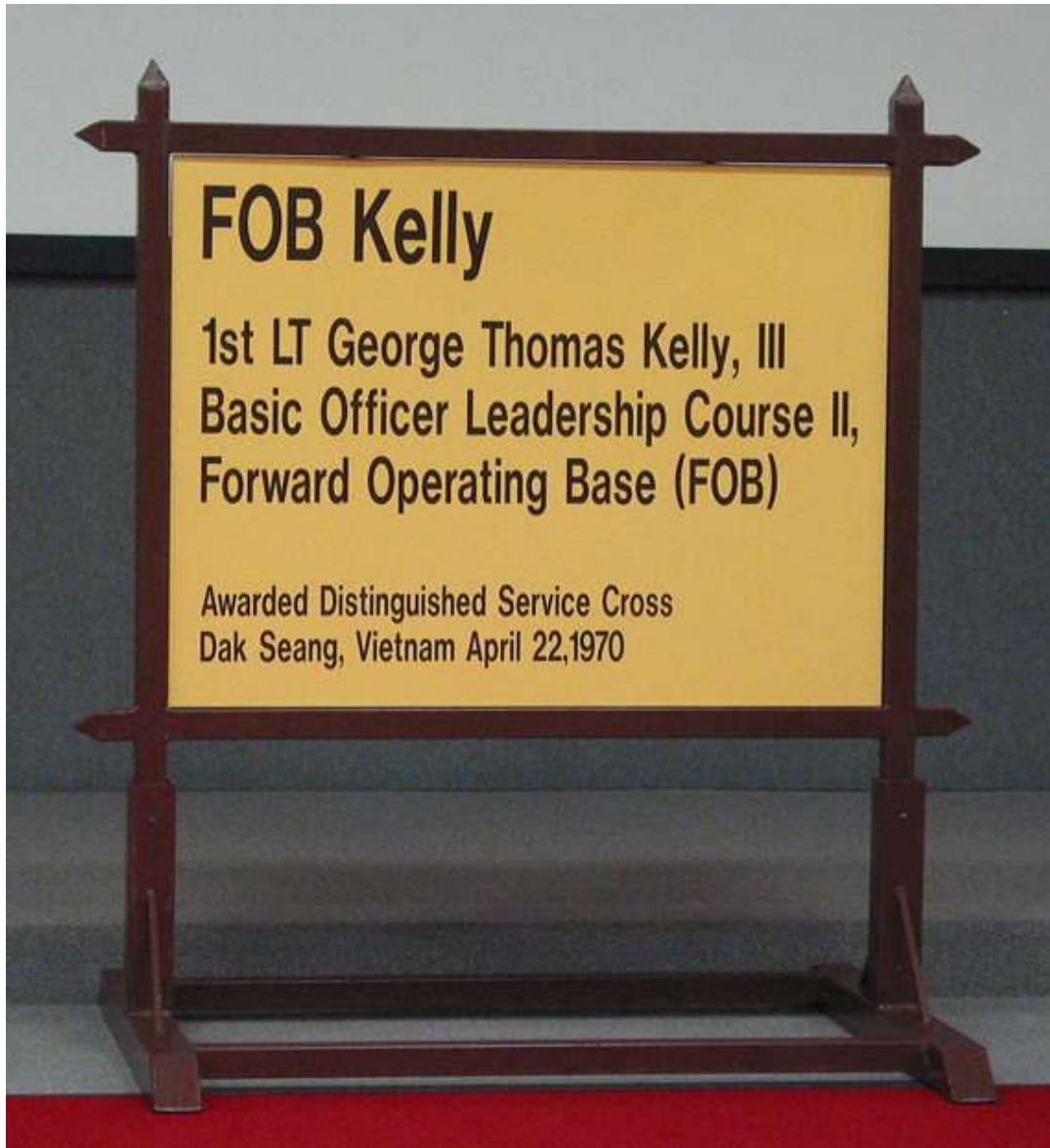
“The official U.S. Army definition of selfless service is placing your duty before your personal value, being able to endure hardships and insurmountable odds,” Batule said.

A graduate of OCS Class 512-68, Kelly was originally assigned as forward observer with 6th Battalion, 14th Field Artillery, he noted.

“Though the Oklahoma weather did not cooperate today and we are inside, it is not altogether a great misfortune that we have chosen the Reimer Conference Center as an inclement weather location. It is named in honor of Gen. Dennis J. Reimer, who a lot of people remember for his famous motto, ‘Soldiers are our credentials.’ Tom Kelly was a soldier who carried those credentials. And those credentials have their roots in a love of God, family and country, and his fellow soldiers,” Batule said.



Together with Kelly’s mother, Jill Kelly; sister, Jude Kelly; brother and sister-in-law, Patrick and Jennifer O’Kelly; and DeLong, Batule unveiled a new sign for the FOB.



“The FOB is important for training BOLC-II lieutenants because in Iraq and in Afghanistan, we use FOBs as our safe and secure area in the combat zones,” explained Maj. Jim Looney, operations officer for 428th Field Artillery Brigade. “The FOB is where they’re going to go and do their reset after going out on patrols. They’re going to rearm, refuel, pull maintenance on their equipment. That’s their time to relax a little bit and then do rehearsals later on and then prep up for next missions.

“And it’s a system that works great. There are FOBs all over Iraq and Afghanistan where we conduct business. And so as we train here in the (Training and Doctrine Command) we want to give our students the sense of exactly what they’re going to see when they get to a combat zone.”

The OCS reunion continues today with a “Jark Walk,” weather permitting, and an induction ceremony with Charles Ray, deputy assistant secretary of defense for POW/Missing Personnel Affairs, as the speaker. Dunham said the Jark Walk was named for the first OCS commandant, Lt. Col. Carl Jark, who eventually retired as a lieutenant general.

“It’s a disciplinary run or march. If you got too many demerits — which was hard to avoid — then it generally took place on Saturday and Sunday,” he recalled.

It was 4.2 miles, round trip, from Robinson Barracks where the cadets stayed to the top of Medicine Bluff-4.

“It’s pretty rugged going up there,” Dunham said. “What we do this time is take buses up there and walk up. We call it a stroll. It’s become a tradition at the reunion.”

Buses carrying “Jark Walk” participants will leave the hotel where they’re staying at 4:30 a.m.



14th Artillery Crest at Fort Sill