

is honored on Panel 30E, Row 50 of
the Vietnam Veterans Memorial

Full Name: JEROME CHARLES SHOMAKER
Wall Name: JEROME C SHOMAKER
Date of Birth: 8/13/1942
Date of Casualty: 11/20/1967
Home of Record: NEWPORT BEACH
State: CA
Branch of Service: ARMY
Rank: 1LT
Casualty Country: SOUTH VIETNAM
Casualty Province: KONTUM



1LT Shomaker was killed in action while serving with Battery A, 3rd Battalion, 319th Artillery, 173rd Airborne Brigade. His death occurred during the fight for Hill 875 during the Battle of Dak To while serving as a Forward Observer for the 2nd Battalion, 503rd Infantry, 173rd Airborne Brigade.

Jerry Shomaker

Jerry and I went through Jump School together, the Special Forces Officers Course, and then got separated. He went to the 6th SFG and I went to the 3d SFG but we kept in touch and often went sky diving together at the Center SPC.

Jerry went off to Vietnam before me and, sadly, got killed. I lucked out and ended up as an Infantry Company Commander several months later, which is what probably kept me alive. I still have the Airborne School "Yearbook" with a black border around Jerry's picture. He was my friend.

Posted by: John J. Murphy Class 15-66
Relationship: We served together
April 29, 2006

When We Speak Of War...

When we speak of war in the jungle of Vietnam's II CORPS we speak of days of exhausting humping through triple canopies of vegetation and negotiating bamboo thickets so dense one has to crawl under the masses. Just the physical part of getting from one point to another on a map drains one both physically and mentally. There are no pretty little "battle formations" that were practiced at Fort Benning. It is every man moves himself, his weapons and rucksack from point "A" to Point "B."

As the above occurs—the Artillery Forward Observer must know at all times exactly where the company of infantry with him is in the jungle. This was before GPS—ask any FO from Vietnam, if they had a GPS system, would it have made a difference and every one of them will tell you they could have won the war by themselves IF they knew where they were at in the jungle!

I write the above because how Lt. Jerry Shoemaker and more than 40 other paratroopers died was no one's fault. A lot of extreme guilt has been carried by some for many years but as one grows old the; "wouldda, shouldda and couldas" tend to dissipate.

The Battle for Hill 875 was exactly that—a battle. The paratroopers from 2/503 were attacking—up hill, in a jungle and against fortified positions that had taken direct hits from 500 pound bombs and still functioned.

Some would like to think a leader during times like that calmly looks over his terrain and maps and casually makes decisions. In reality—it doesn't work that way—each infantryman owns a few feet of jungle surround him. He rarely actually sees the enemy in the jungle, each leader is forced to make decisions based on best guesses; where his lines are, where the enemy is and where the enemy might be.

Lt. Jerry Shoemaker was an FO with 2/503 and died with Lt. Richie Busenlehner when his battalion was surrounded by a huge mass of NVA soldiers on November 20, 1967. Both FOs were part of the 3/319th Field Artillery battalion. I was the battalion intelligence officer—also a lieutenant. I did not know Shoemaker as well as Busenlehner. Shoemaker graduated ahead of us in OCS (Class 15-66) and was with the 6th Special Forces Group at Fort Bragg when I was with the 7th SFG at Fort Bragg—Busenlehner and I were in OCS Class 18-66. All three of us were at Dak-To during the "battle" that lasted from June 1967 until the end of November 1967.

The above are only words, they do not reflect the terror, hope, suffering and camaraderie that took place there—but rest assured; Shoemaker and Busenlehner set the standard for all forward observers to follow.

Posted by: Donald E. Zlotnik, Maj. (Ret.) Special Forces
Relationship: We Shared a Battle
March 6, 2008