

JOSEPH VINCENT WHELAN**Class 19-66**

is honored on Panel 17W, Row 115 of
the Vietnam Veterans Memorial

Full Name: JOSEPH VINCENT WHELAN
Wall Name: JOSEPH V WHELAN
Date of Birth: 2/1/1942
Date of Casualty: 10/25/1969
Home of Record: GARWOOD
County of Record: UNION COUNTY
State: NJ
Branch of Service: ARMY
Rank: CAPT
Casualty Country: LAOS
Casualty Province: LZ



CPT Whelan was with the 5th Special Forces Group and served with the Military Assistance Command Studies and Observation Group (MACVSOG). He was a member of an Exploitation Force from Command and Control Central (CCC) in Kontum and died while missing in Laos. He was posthumously awarded the Silver Star for gallantry in action.



Joseph is buried at Arlington National Cemetery Section 36, Site 2604

Joseph entered the US Army in 1959, and served for three years. Whelan re-enlisted in 1965, and attended Officer Candidate School in Ft. Sill, OK. Upon graduation he was commissioned second lieutenant and attained the rank of Captain (CAPT/03). He was wounded twice during his first tour of duty in Vietnam and awarded the Bronze Star for Gallantry.

Joseph served as the leader with the Fifth Special Forces Group (Green Berets) of a joint Vietnamese and American Platoon. He was killed in action while on a combat mission when the platoon was ambushed in the LZ Providence of Laos on October 25, 1969. He died three weeks after beginning his second tour of duty in Vietnam.

In a letter to Whelan's father shortly after his death, Colonel Michael D. Healy of the US Army states:

“Your son was the leader of a joint Vietnamese and American Platoon on a combat mission operating deep in enemy held territory. A man who was admired and respected by everyone, Joseph was a true professional soldier with an absolute dedication, both to duty, and to the principles for which we fight. He died doing a job in the defense of an oppressed people, so that they, and all of us, might have a better world in which to live.”

This cause was one in which he had a profound faith and duty, as he understood it. Whelan received many awards for service in Vietnam including two Purple Hearts, the Bronze Star, the Silver Star, the Army Commendation Medal, the National Defense Service Medal, the Vietnam Service Medal with Bronze Star, the Vietnam Campaign Ribbon, the Combat Infantry Badge and the Parachutist Badge.

Joseph left behind a wife, Dorothy Gillespie, and a daughter, Charlotte. A memorial service was held at St. Michael's Roman Catholic Church in Cranford, NJ. He was buried at Arlington National Cemetery in Virginia.





Silver Star citation:

Captain Whelan distinguished himself on 24 October 1969 while commanding a platoon of Vietnamese civilian irregulars during an exploitation mission deep in enemy-held territory. Subjected to enemy fire, the platoon was inserted by helicopter into the planned area of operations. After moving some distance from the landing zone, the platoon was attacked from every side by an estimated company of North Vietnamese armed with rockets and automatic weapons. Several Americans and Vietnamese were seriously wounded in the initial exchange of fire. Although rocket-propelled grenades exploded overhead and machine gun fire raked the area, Captain Whelan moved from cover through open terrain to a group of Vietnamese irregulars stunned by the suddenness and ferocity of the enemy's attack. He quickly allayed the irregulars' fear and disorder by forming them into a large squad and rallying others to join them. Shouting commands and encouragement to his men, Captain Whelan then led a bold rush against fortified enemy positions atop a nearby hill. Firing their weapons on the run, Captain Whelan's squad, with him at the fore, broke through rank after rank of enemy soldiers. Although knocked down several times in his advance by the blasts of exploding grenades, Captain Whelan struggled to his feet each time and continued to lead his men on. As the allies neared the crest of the hill, a last barrage of rocket-propelled grenades unleashed by the enemy mortally wounded Captain Whelan. Inspired by his unfailing courage and leadership, Captain Whelan's men fought on and routed the North Vietnamese from their defensive positions. Captain Whelan's gallantry in action, at the cost of his life, was in keeping with the highest traditions of the military service and reflects great credit upon himself, his unit, and the United States Army.

Sources: Dorothy Starrett (widow), Joan Ventura (sister), Geraldine Jones (sister) and NJVVMF.