

A family mystery solved, and a veteran remembered

By Lisa Britton
For the Baker City Herald

Karen Cloudt can rest easy now that she knows the name of the man who used to own her record player.

She inherited the turntable, along with a stack of records, when she was in high school.

Cloudt knew her relative — a third cousin — died in the war, but her family didn't really talk about him.

"The story in our family was he went missing in the Bermuda Triangle. But all the records were destroyed by fire," she said. "He was lost to the family memory. I had forgotten his name — isn't that terrible? I felt so bad."

So she turned to the vast internet and started searching.

She knew that he had lived with her great-aunt Hannah Huffman after his mother died in 1924. And she knew his last name was Edwards.

"It's amazing what you can find out when you know nothing," she said.

In the intricate web of online searches she started hitting on information.

She also discovered a yellowed newspaper clipping in a box of family photo-



Submitted photo

Glen Edwards' grave marker at the Union Cemetery.

graphs.

She finally had a name and a picture.

"I was so pleased when I found this

stuck in a box with a bunch of pictures," she said.

Staff Sgt. Glen A. Edwards was stationed at Columbia, South Carolina, in 1944. He was a radio operator-gunner training to go overseas with the U.S. Army Air Forces.

He went missing on a flight on April 17, 1944. His body was never recovered. He was 19 years old.

She found his name engraved on the East Coast Memorial in New York City that listed his military unit. But without a body, Edwards didn't have a grave.

"They don't get a flag, they don't get memorialized," Cloudt said. "It seemed wrong."

She and her husband, Steve, met with Rick Gloria, the veterans service officer for Baker County. Cloudt found out that the Veterans Administration would pay for a marker.

The plaque was placed this fall next to his aunt's grave in the Union Cemetery.

Cloudt can now fill in a missing spot in her family tree. She said she's not the only one who had relatives go missing in war, and encourages everyone to take up the search so these veterans aren't forgotten.



Lisa Britton / For the Baker City Herald

A certificate honors Staff Sgt. Glen A. Edwards, who went missing in 1944.

"There are resources through the VA and genealogy sites," Cloudt said.

HOLCOMB

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Robbins was among those casualties, although he downplays both the shrapnel wound in his leg, and the Purple Heart and Bronze Star he was awarded.

Robbins, who grew up in Florida and was drafted into the Army in 1968, said he will never forget Dec. 3, 1968.

It was hot, but of course most days were hot in Vietnam.

"It was over 100 degrees," Robbins said.

He and Holcomb were in the same company — D Company — of the 2nd battalion, 7th Cavalry, 1st Cavalry Division.

Although they were in different platoons — a platoon usually consists of 16 to 44 soldiers, and a company comprises three to five platoons — Robbins said both his and Holcomb's platoons were among the units delivered by helicopter to a clearing.

"The whole company was involved," Robbins said.

The helicopters landed without incident, he said, but once the last chopper had flown away the soldiers realized they were almost surrounded by Viet Cong soldiers.

"They had us on three sides," Robbins said. "They opened up on us. There was no cover, only knee-high grass. They had us pinned down all day.

The soldiers ran out of water and were low on ammunition.

Helicopters that tried to drop supplies were driven off by intense ground fire.

"They couldn't get anything to us," Robbins said. "I thought it was all over. I thought we would either be killed or captured. I made my peace with God and I was prepared."

Because he suffered his shrapnel wound relatively early in the battle, Robbins didn't see much of what took place where Holcomb was stationed.

"Some of us were waiting to be evacuated, and they took our weapons from us because

"I thought it was all over. I thought we would either be killed or captured. I made my peace with God and I was prepared."

— Jimmy Robbins, talking about Dec. 3, 1968, in Vietnam

Holcomb honored in Baker County

Holcomb Park, on the north shore of Brownlee Reservoir's Powder River arm about 3 miles east of Richland, John Noble Holcomb's hometown, was dedicated in his name on July 4, 1993.

After improvements to the park, it was rededicated to Holcomb in May 2012. His mother, Wadean Holcomb, attended the ceremony. Wadean died on Jan. 12, 2017. John Holcomb's father, George, died in 1995.

In 2014 John Holcomb's brother, Bill, donated John's Medal of Honor and other items, which are on display at the Baker County Courthouse in Baker City.

they had to conserve ammunition," Robbins said.

But the rescue helicopters were no more successful than the resupply aircraft.

Late in the day soldiers from Company B were able to reach the clearing and keep the enemy soldiers at bay long enough for helicopters to land, Robbins said.

Although he remembers learning that day that Holcomb had taken over a machine gun that was a key part of Company D's defenses, Robbins said he didn't find out until a few days later, when he was recuperating at a base camp, both the extent of Holcomb's heroism and that his friend had been killed on what Robbins describes as the worst day of his year of service in Vietnam.

"It still bothers me," he said. "We'd had some other fire-

fighters before, but nothing like that. It was a bad day."

Robbins said he's convinced that Holcomb's actions saved many lives, possibly including his own. Holcomb's Medal of Honor citation states that by reporting the third enemy attack on the clearing, he "brought friendly supporting fires on the charging enemy and broke the enemy attack."

"I'm sure he helped tremendously," Robbins said. Robbins, who lives in Guin, Alabama, population about 2,300, said he hadn't realized that Holcomb's hometown of Richland, population 175, was so small.

In Vietnam, where he met

STORY

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Randall, whose father was in the Army for 17 years and served during Vietnam, was prompted by Robbins' recollections about Holcomb to also look up Holcomb online. Randall found several stories published the Baker City Herald and sent an email to the paper suggesting Robbins would be a possible story subject.

Holcomb, he only knew that his fellow soldier was from Oregon; he didn't know what part of the state.

Robbins said he enjoyed Holcomb's company.

"You could tell how he cared about people," Robbins said.

He remembers in particular that Holcomb once shared with him and other soldiers the homemade jerky and elderberry wine that his grandfather had sent from Baker County.

Robbins served in Vietnam from July 1968 until July 1969. He returned to the U.S. and was stationed at Fort Riley, Kansas, until his service ended in December 1969.

He worked in retail management, first in Florida and, after 1994, in Alabama. He retired at 62.

John Noble Holcomb's Medal of Honor citation

For conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity in action at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty. Sgt. Holcomb distinguished himself while serving as a squad leader in Company D during a combat assault mission.

Sgt. Holcomb's company assault had landed by helicopter and deployed into a hasty defensive position to organize for a reconnaissance-in-force mission when it was attacked from three sides by an estimated battalion-size enemy force. Sgt. Holcomb's squad was directly in the path of the main enemy attack. With complete disregard for the heavy fire, Sgt. Holcomb moved among his men giving encouragement and directing fire on the assaulting enemy.

When his machine gunner was knocked out, Sgt. Holcomb seized the weapon, ran to a forward edge of the position, and placed withering fire on the enemy. His gallant actions caused the enemy to withdraw. Sgt. Holcomb treated and carried his wounded to a position of safety and reorganized his defensive sector despite a raging grass fire ignited by the incoming enemy mortar and rocket rounds.

When the enemy assaulted the position a second time, Sgt. Holcomb again manned the forward machine gun, devastating the enemy attack and forcing the enemy to again break contact and withdraw. During the enemy withdrawal an enemy rocket hit Sgt. Holcomb's position, destroying his machine gun and severely wounding him. Despite his painful wounds, Sgt. Holcomb crawled through the grass fire and exploding mortar and rocket rounds to move the members of his squad, every one of whom had been wounded, to more secure positions.

Although grievously wounded and sustained solely by his indomitable will and courage, Sgt. Holcomb as the last surviving leader of his platoon organized his men to repel the enemy, crawled to the platoon radio, and reported the third enemy assault on his position. His report brought friendly supporting fires on the charging enemy and broke the enemy attack. Sgt. Holcomb's inspiring leadership, fighting spirit, in action at the cost of his life, were in keeping with the highest traditions of the military service and reflect great credit on himself, his unit, and the U.S. Army.



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