

Where are they now?

I was born in 1967, and I have early recollections of Walter Cronkite and John Chancellor giving the gruesome totals of the day's toll in the Vietnam War, "37 dead, 414 wounded..." As a 6-year old, I wasn't sure what the difference was.

I don't remember where I first heard the names of Sam Cornelius and Lou Breuer. Both were Texas Tech football letterwinners in the 1960s. What they have in common, unfortunately, is that they both died in the Vietnam War.

You might have read in the trailer at the end of these monthly columns that I am the Director of Special Events for the Double T Association (DTA), the association of former Red Raiders athletes/letterwinners. Last fall, the DTA sponsored a reunion of the "John Conley era" of Tech football. Coach Conley was an assistant coach from the early '60s to mid-'70s, when he left the sidelines for an administrative position in the athletic department. Football players from those years came back in big numbers to take part in honoring Coach Conley, including Danny Hardaway, the first black athlete at Texas Tech.

What struck me was that among all the players, who ranged in age from their late 40s to late 60s, was a distinguished-looking couple much older than the former players in the room. Several players made their way over to swap handshakes, hugs and hellos with the couple. When Coach Conley finally took the microphone he treated the group to several stories and memories of individual players. Among those, he talked about a tight end who annually kept his position despite bigger and faster players vying for his job. He was talking about Lou Breuer, and it was Breuer's parents who drove from Richardson that night to see their son's coach and former teammates from almost 40 years prior. When Coach Conley said Lou Breuer's name, the room stood in applause to honor their fallen teammate.

Lou Breuer played on the varsity at Tech from 1966 to 1968. At the dinner we were told that he had finished his first tour in Vietnam and had re-upped for a second tour shortly before he was killed.

I have read many accounts of his death on Web sites devoted to Vietnam. I'm not enough of a student of military history nor southeast Asia to know much about An Loc, Phnom Pen, a VNAF A-1 or a SAM. However, I do understand the following posting from a fellow platoon member on a Web site about Lou Breuer's death:

"Losing Lt. Brewer (sic) was like losing the quarterback from the football team in the fourth quarter of the Superbowl. He was everybody's hero. He was physically a big man. It was told to me that he played college football for some school in Texas. He was out going and very likable. You have to remember I was a crewchief at the time and not an officer. Us enlisted men looked at officers differently than they saw themselves. I didn't know any soldier who thought Lt Brewer (sic) was the kind of guy to look down his nose at a man just because he

was enlisted. He was well liked and admired throughout the whole unit. (...) we knew he would put it on the line to protect us and on many occasions he did just that. After he was killed all of us felt a little more vulnerable.”

That’s pretty high praise from a guy who risked his life with Lou Breuer daily.

Sam Cornelius played football at Tech before Breuer. He played on the 1962-64 teams, and I’m told he was an end. Being a child of platoon football, I asked “offense or defense” only to be told “both,” although I think eventually he ended up a defensive end as platoon football set in during his college career. Cornelius was from Spearman and grew up playing against the Anderson brothers (Donny and Larry), who played for nearby Stinnett High School. Cornelius was also described to me as a good guy and a good teammate. Like many Tech football players at the time, he did an obligatory ROTC stint but after the required two years were up, he stayed in.

Cornelius was a fighter pilot and was shot down over Cambodia in 1973. He was 30 years old when he died. He is shown on many Web sites to be a POW/MIA, although many of the same Web sites say his plane never gave the sort of distress signal automatically emitted when an ejection seat was employed.

Texas Tech currently houses the Vietnam Center, which includes an archive and research facilities devoted to the study of the Vietnam War. On April 1, the “Moving Wall,” a mobile version of the Vietnam War Memorial, came to Memorial Circle on the Tech campus for a week. A ceremony was held by the Vietnam Center on the day the Moving Wall was unveiled, and a decorated retired general spoke. He was introduced to us as a war hero, and his heroics in a battle were described. Tears filled my eyes as the story was told. Does anybody else do what I do when I hear a story like that? I can’t help but wonder what I would have done with bombs going off around me and friends dying.

My parents are about the age of Cornelius and Breuer and they have classmates and acquaintances from their young adulthood in Illinois on that wall. My dad was at the ceremony that day on Memorial Circle. I didn’t know he was going out there or he and I probably would’ve walked out together, since we work in the same building on campus. We just sort of ended up out there at the same time. He was with a colleague on the faculty about his age. I’m guessing they were probably remembering the people they knew who never came home, and it was a quiet way to pay tribute.

After the ceremony I walked to the wall and looked at all the names. Some stood and gazed at the seemingly endless list of names while others sought a specific name. Some were my age or younger and were too young to have been in Vietnam. Maybe they were looking for an uncle or hometown hero. Others wore jackets with patches indicating that they were perhaps looking for old platoon buddies.

Lou Breuer is immortalized on the same panel as Sam Cornelius. Officially, you will find Louis Karl Breuer IV at 01W-047 and Samuel Blackmar Cornelius at 01W-119. The

01W is the panel number and the final three digits are the panel line on which they are located.

I didn't know Sam Cornelius nor did I know Lou Breuer. I'm sure some of you reading this knew them. One thing I am certain of is that they are heroes. They are American heroes and Texas Tech heroes and should never be forgotten. Red Raiders probably fought in every war and military action in which the United States was involved in the 20th century. More are in Afghanistan and Iraq today. If you get the chance to remember a veteran, please do. I did.

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