

Kenneth Wayne Worthley

March 7, 1947 to August 26, 1969

Ken grew up on a farm southwest of Sherburn, MN. He attended a small country school before attending Sherburn High School. He graduated from high school on June 1, 1965. He attended North Dakota State School of Science at Wahpeton, ND on 8/24/1965 and studied Diesel Mechanics. As with most kids growing up on the farm, hard work was the name of the game.



**SSG Kenneth Worthley
Memorial Flagpole at
Sherburn Elementary School**

Ken was not involved in sports in high school, but was involved in FFA, band, and choir. He loved hunting and trapping, and ran a trap-line that he would check in the morning before hurrying home to change clothes and still get to school on time. They had horses growing up, and Ken loved to ride and spend time with the horses. According to Ken's brother Keith, Ken also liked being involved in politics, and was active in school as well as in the community and government.

Ken joined the Army on January 10, 1967. He attended basic training at Fort Lewis, Washington; MP School at Fort Gordon, GA; Jump School at Fort Benning, GA. From Fort Benning he took the bus to Ft. Bragg, NC (Co B, SF Tng. Grp) with Bob Garcia and they graduated together in December 1967 as Special Forces Radio Operators. Ken was assigned to the 7th SFG and Trained Ranger trainees in the Florida everglades before going to Vietnam in Early 1968. Bob Garcia was sent RTT School at Ft. Gordon, Ga and met up with Ken at MACVSOG FOB #2 in Kontum Vietnam in April 1968.

Ken was assigned as a radio operator and after numerous attempts to volunteer for recon company was finally assigned to RT Florida in December 1968. Ken was assigned to the recon team as the 1-1 (Team

Sergeant) under Ralph Rodd the 1-0 (Team Leader). In the spring of 1969, Ken extended his tour with SOG and took a leave home. When he returned to FOB #2 he told Bob Garcia that he had a wonderful time with his dad and family at home. His dad had purchased a new tractor and was quite proud of it and Ken was very happy for his dad.

After his return from leave Ken took over as 1-0 (Team Leader) of RT Florida on July 1, 1969. Bob described Ken as one of the nicest human beings he had ever met. All of the men that I spoke with that knew Ken said he was a great guy to know and have on your team. Not all of the SOG men were known that way, but Ken was described as having a very soft spirit, yet able to lead the men of RT



**Kneeling: Indig troops, standing: Ralph Rodd, Dan Harvey
Joe Pamar, Ken Worthley, and Cra. ..?**

Florida with high proficiency. Ken asked his friend Bob to come with on his final mission as 1-1 (Team Sergeant) because he was training in a new man, Dale Hanson who would carry the radio.

Ken's final mission on August 26, 1969, proved to be one of the most productive intelligence gathering operations in the annals of SOG. One of the highest intelligence agents, a Chinese Political Officer, was killed by Ken and his point man. That individual carried dead U.S. serviceman's I.D. cards, a roster of double agents operating in South Vietnam and strategic observation notes on the morale of North Vietnamese soldiers during recent attacks on U.S. Military outposts such as Ben Het, within a leather satchel. The information was further responsible for clearing the murder charges against Colonel Robert Reault, Commander of the Fifth Special Force in Vietnam who was still imprisoned.

In the book *SOG, The Secret Wars Of America's Commandos in Vietnam*, John Plaster described the mission, "A few months later, on 25 August, RT Florida, led by Staff Sergeant Ken Worthley, inserted in northeast Cambodia to recon an area thought to be inhabited by the 66th NVA Regiment. Sergeant Bob Garcia came along as the acting One-One to help break in a new recon man, Dale Hanson, who carried the team radio; with four Vietnamese, that made a total of seven men."

"Landing uneventfully at noon, they left the LZ and began climbing a steep hillside; by 2 p.m. they were sitting on the slope, taking a break, when Garcia detected two NVA trackers approaching on their back trail. The Oakland, California native held his CAR-15 sight on one NVA and would have let him come closer but an indig. got nervous and fired. Garcia shot his tracker but the other fled, then AK bursts rattled all around them, and they heard brush breaking on a wide front—apparently a company had been following the trackers and now fanned out to encircle RT Florida. Garcia spotted one NVA on their left, but his CAR-15 malfunctioned so he snatched an M-79 grenade launcher from an indig., knelt to see beneath the thick brush and fired at the enemy soldier's legs. The bursting grenade knocked the soldier down—then it was time to run, with One-Zero Worthley taking the lead.

As they trotted, Hanson clumsily wrapped a bandage around his hand where an AK slug had clipped off his middle finger. Garcia relieved him of the team radio and tried to raise a FAC, but no one responded.

Then it was almost dark, and Worthley decided to hide out for the night in a gully so narrow the NVA wouldn't



think of searching in it; just in case the NVA brought in dogs, they generously laced their back trail with tear-gas powder.

About 3 A.M., yelps awoke the recon men; then all of a sudden the tracker dogs reached the powder, cried a few minutes and went away. The rest of the night passed peacefully.

At dawn the team slipped through the jungle, quiet, cautious and alert. By 9:30 A.M. they were cresting a hill when suddenly the point man signed to freeze. Worthley crept forward and just as he reached the point he saw a trail and two NVA, who spun to shoot. Instantly Worthley and the point man fired, cutting them down. Garcia arrived to find the two dead NVA and the point man

bandaging his hand where a bullet had skipped across his fingers.

While others provided security, Worthley and Garcia stripped the bodies. By the fine cut of his uniform, they realized one was an important officer, probably a colonel, who looked Chinese and carried a new pistol. The other man was young, armed with an AK, apparently the officer's bodyguard. But most impressive was a big

leather satchel the officer had. Perusing its contents, the interpreter said this was an intelligence officer, and SOG later determined RT Florida had bagged the highest-ranking intelligence officer ever killed by a recon man.

The entire incident took thirty seconds, and as they turned out the dead man's last pocket, they heard NVA running down the trail. Scooping up the satchel, One-Zero Worthley led the way, and off RT Florida dashed. They were barely out of sight when the NVA found the bodies. Excited voices called out and brush crashed as enemy troops ran in cautiously into the jungle, attempting to intercept the SOG men. 'They were super pissed,' Bob Garcia said. Garcia was able to raise a FAC, and soon choppers were on their way.



RT Florida managed to evade the NVA, then they found a bamboo grove with an opening wide enough for them to be extracted by STABO rig. They hid there a half hour and kept hearing NVA voices or signal shots; then it got real quiet and Garcia grew uneasy.

When the first Huey passed low overhead dozens of nearby NVA opened fire. Garcia called in a pair of A-1's, but fire went on unabated, then F-4 Phantoms dropped 500-pound bombs, and the concussion bounced the recon men as if on a trampoline. Then mini-guns strafed danger close, and the NVA pulled back.

Unmolested by fire, a Huey hovered at the treetops and dropped four ropes; three indigs snapped in, and Worthley should have put the wounded point man on that fourth string. Garcia turned to ask Worthley why he hadn't, and Hanson told him the One-Zero was dead. A lone bullet had hit Worthley in the neck, killing him instantly; they attached his harnessed body to the rope, and the Huey lifted away just as the NVA resumed firing.

The second chopper came in despite the fire, dropped four ropes, but a bullet cut one line and a second became snared in the trees. Garcia, Hanson and the wounded point man would have to come out on two ropes. Immediately they snapped in and the Huey began lifting. Just as Garcia reached the treetops, he could see a hundred muzzles flickering from a facing hillside but he could do nothing; he was entirely out of ammunition. He felt the rope stretch, to the point of almost snapping or dragging down the Huey. Garcia looked down and saw Hanson and the point man hacking away where their rope had snagged the bamboo. Garcia shouted into his radio, 'Hold it! We're stuck! We're stuck! Your stretching the rope, we can't make it!' The crew chief probably should have cut the lines and let them fall to their fate but he didn't.

Suspended in the air, Garcia could do nothing but hope not to be shot and hope Hanson could chop the bamboo before the Huey crashed on all of them. 'A warmth went over me and I just waited,' Garcia recalled. 'I just looked around to see where I was going to die.'

A bullet creased Hanson's head, but he kept chopping; then the rope jerked free and Hanson's bloodied hand gave a thumb's up and they rose smoothly, lifted above the jungle and floated away.



As quickly as they landed at Kontum, a SOG C-130 Blackbird was there to rush the captured documents to Saigon. Analysts could not believe the windfall: The bag contained a partial roster of enemy double agents and spies operating inside South Vietnam.

The mission on which Ken was killed was considered as one of the great intelligence finding missions of 1969. Ken's team was responsible for killing the highest ranking intelligence officer ever taken by a SOG team. The satchel being carried by the intelligence officer contained a list of the names of

double agents and spies operating in South Vietnam, and was used by the CIA and South Vietnamese Intelligence to apprehend a number of important enemy agents.

"It has been awhile since I have been there - yet in a moment - I arrive again - I was there - among men, some of whom are mentioned only by their names carved in stone on a black wall. I had the privilege of serving with them and calling them my friend and brother. For that I am grateful and will always be thankful. I will never forget and I will always remember - those who never tired of unselfishness and bravery beyond anything I have witnessed anywhere else."

Respectfully, Ronald E. Owens CCN

1968-69 & NKP

