

THE REMEMBRANCE

By John F. Hall

Ralph Waldo Emerson said, “To leave the world a bit better, whether by a healthy child, a garden patch, or a redeemed social condition, to know that even one life has breathed easier because you have lived - that is to have succeeded.”



waited. Raindrops covered my windshield.

The day started out in the cold Kentucky rain. The temperature was 49 degrees. This is the second year of the Pandemic that has disrupted the lives of nearly everyone. The drive to Fort Campbell was uneventful and the traffic on Interstate 24 was beginning to get heavy for a Friday. I parked in the parking lot at the Town Center Pharmacy. I was making the monthly run to pick up a controlled medicine for my wife, Paula. I was given a pager and told to wait until it goes off before returning to the pharmacy. So I went back to my car and patiently

I like to use song lyrics to enhance the theme of my story. Dick Heard and Eddy Rabbit wrote the song “Kentucky Rain.” These are some of their lyrics: “Seven lonely days and a dozen towns ago, I reached out and you were gone. Don’t know why you’d run, what you’re running to or from. All I know is that I want to bring you home. So I’m walking in the rain, thumbing for a ride on this lonely Kentucky back road. I’ve loved you much too long, my love’s too strong, to let you go, never knowing what went wrong. Kentucky rain keeps falling down and up a head’s another town that I’ll go walking through, with the rain in my shoes. Searching for you in the cold Kentucky rain. Showed your photograph to some old gray-bearded men sitting on a bench outside a general store. They said, ‘Yes, she’s been here.’ But their memory wasn’t clear. Was it yesterday or the day before? No, wait, the day before. Finally got a ride with a preacher man who asked, ‘Where you bound on such a cold dark afternoon?’ As we drove on through the rain, as he listened, I explained. And he left me with a prayer that I find you...”.

I was an M-60 machine gunner, assigned to the 3rd Platoon, B Company, 327th Infantry, 101st Airborne Division. I was the “Rambo” with the linked ammo belts on both shoulders, before Sylvester Stallone played the role of John Rambo. When I came in from the field, I would walk into the shower with boots and uniform on, with my machine gun. I would turn on the water to wash the dirt off my gun, first. After the shower, I would put on a blind fold, and take my gun apart blindfolded. I oiled my gun, and she passed every inspection. I was a fearless 101st paratrooper in the world’s greatest Airborne Division.

This story goes back to one day in 1963. Our platoon was on a forced, four miles per hour road march. My Platoon Sergeant gave us a ten-minute rest break. I spotted a small cemetery that had a tall cedar tree. I climbed over a barbed wire fence that surrounded the small cemetery. I pulled off my steel helmet and sat on it. I rested against that cedar tree. The tree was next to a girl’s headstone. I began to read the inscription. I wondered why she died at the age of 16. At that time, I was 17. I had trespassed the solitude of her

forgotten grave. I felt as forgotten as she was. The small cemetery was all grown up in sage grass. I kept looking at that headstone and wondered about that girl.

The ten-minute rest break and the cool shade under that tree really helped. My 23-pound machine gun was wearing me down. I put my helmet back on and looked at her headstone one last time. I don't recall my exact words, but I made a self-promise to come back and visit her grave. At that time in history, the road by the cemetery had not been paved. All I remembered is that the cemetery was in the middle of nowhere.

In my stories, I will put a brief scripture. In Ecclesiastes, Chapter 1, Verse 11 are these words: "No one remembers the men of long ago. Even those who haven't been born yet won't be remembered by those who will be born after them." I was born 183 years after my mystery girl, Catharine was born. All I remembered, before I started this quest, is her first name and her age. I would later discover that her Headstone is located in a clump of trees, in plain sight, behind a security fence, just off the highway, by an electric gate (5), inside the Sabre Heliport on Fort Campbell.



The lesson that I learned is found in Ecclesiastes, Chapter 5, Verse 5: "Better not to promise at all than to make a promise and not keep it."

When the Pandemic began in 2020, it seemed like nearly everyone had gone into quarantine mode. I decided to write one story a week and mail it to my three surrogate granddaughters: Jade, Lexie, and Skyler. I did this, to quote Emerson, "to know that even one life has breathed easier because you have lived...". I also mail a copy to four extended family members: Trish, Audrey, Mike and Daniel. I stay connected with them by doing this. . It also helps to keep my mind active.

(Pictured: Nicole Sorensen-Mutchie the Fort Campbell Archaeologist and John F. Hall by the grave of Catharine B. Collins (1838-1854), Fort Campbell , KY).

For the Remembrance, I wanted to do more than to just put a traditional small stone on Catharine's Headstone. So I purchased a tiny artificial pink dogwood stem. I decided to set it in front Catharine's Headstone in remembrance of a mystery girl who died two years before the start of the American Civil War. She was spared that war that tore this nation apart. The dogwood tree is a reminder-of Christ's love for us: "Its blossom is in the form of a cross. At the tip of each petal are nail marks, rusty brown and red stained, and in the center of the bloom will be seen a crown of thorns, that all who behold the tree and its flowers will remember the sacrifice that Christ made for all of us."

I went to lunch at the Burger King on Post. As I was about to go inside, two Military Police soldiers came out of the restaurant. I said, "Gentlemen! Thank you for your service!" They replied, "Thank you, Sir!" After I came out of the restaurant, I called Nichole Sorensen-Mutchie, the Fort Campbell Archaeologist. She gave me the directions to her field office that is located near the former Clarksville Navy Base. We met outside her office. She told me to park my car and said that we would take the white government pick-up. Claire Woerner, the archaeological technician, followed us in another white government pick-up truck.

Nichole drove to the main Sabre Heliport gate. The two Military Police soldiers at the gate scanned our military identification. We went through the gate.

Nichole parked the truck and called Bill Zientek, the Sabre Heliport Director. He came down from the top of the tall Heliport observation tower. He got into a white government pick-up truck and drove over to where Nichole was parked. He rolled down the truck window and told Nichole to follow him. He escorted us to the small historic family cemetery. Claire, the technician followed us. When we arrived, she got out of her truck. She had, what looked like a laptop, and she began to conduct a required inspection of the cemetery. Once she was finished, Nicole and I entered the cemetery.

Several things surprised me when we first arrived. The barbwire fence that I climbed over, 58 years ago, was gone. It was replaced with metal posts and a log chain that surrounded the entire cemetery. The purpose of the chain is to help protect the cemetery. The sage grass was smothered out by the cedar tree needles. Lichen fungus had covered part of the front of the Headstone. I got down on my knees and used a cotton glove to brush off the fungus. My memory had not failed me and I confirmed that I correctly remembered the spelling of Catharine's first name. She was born on June 21st, I was born on June 29th. I pushed the artificial dogwood stem into the ground in front of the Headstone. I asked Claire to take a picture of me and Nichole by Catharine Collins' Headstone. We took our face masks off for the picture. I thanked Bill Zientek for his assistance. He let us exit the Heliport at the nearest electric gate, that he opened by remote and he closed it when we got back on the main road to Post.

Nichole pulled into the main gate and I gave her my military ID. Two Military Police



soldiers were manning this gate. When one of the soldiers scanned my ID, he came to attention, gave me a hand salute and said, "Thank you for your service, Sir! Air Assault!" I returned his salute and said, "Air Assault!" On the way back to Nichole's office, she drove over to the German P.O.W. cemetery. It was immaculately cared for and quite impressive. I thanked Nicole for helping

me. All I had when I started this quest was a first name and the age of a girl that walked this land before it became Fort Campbell.

Kathy Wakefield, Jeffery Bowen, and Donald Baldwin wrote the song “Memories.” These are some of their lyrics: “Memories, pressed between the pages of my mind. Memories, sweeten through the ages just like wine Quiet thoughts come floating down and settle softly to the ground. Like golden autumn leaves around my feet, I touch them and they burst apart with sweet memories...”. My oldest memory, when I first arrived on Fort Campbell in 1962, was seeing a small, dimly lit billboard. It had three words: “Rendezvous With Destiny.” My three-year enlistment was completed in 1965. In 1968, I was given an honorable discharge. In 1977, I enlisted in the Army Reserve. In 1979, I was given a Direct Commission in the Kentucky National Guard. I transferred back to the Army Reserve in 1984. I served until one day before my 60th birthday. I retired in 2005. My favorite memory is being that “Rambo” paratrooper in the 101st Airborne Division. It is past time to end this story, and for this old soldier to fade away.

John F. Hall

*Read other stories by John F. Hall and others at: <http://www.ajlambert.com>

<https://home.army.mil/campbell/index.php/cultural-resources/cemeteries>

Fort Campbell has 131 known historic period cemeteries with over 1200 individuals buried here. The earliest marked grave dates to 1821. Interments continued up until 1941 when Fort Campbell acquired the land. The map below shows where those cemeteries are generally located. Cemeteries located in the Cantonment and Impact Areas were relocated off post. Ancestral cemeteries located on Fort Campbell are not available for new interments according to [Army Regulation 201-190](#).

German POW Cemetery

Fort Campbell was one of 142 German Prisoner of War Internment Camp locations in the United States during WWII. Three separate POW camps were located on the installation, built to house 1,000 prisoners each. Many of these prisoners were contracted out to the local farming community to help fill the labor shortfall. All POWs held here were returned by April 1946.

Five prisoners died during their confinement. Josef Reidinger, Eugen Ulrich, Guenter Cassens, Kurt Franke and Herbert Lindner are buried in the only official Army cemetery on post. A civilian named William Dennis, a local farmer who died in 1899, is buried in the back of the cemetery. His remains were found during the construction of Sabre Heliport in 1974 and was reinterred in the German POW Cemetery. It is located on Rail Unloading Road and is the only cemetery Fort Campbell manages and maintains. This cemetery is closed for future interments.

The German POW Cemetery is one of only 22 Army cemeteries in 13 states overseen by the [Office of Army Cemeteries](#).

<https://home.army.mil/campbell/application/files/9615/5752/0951/Graves.pdf>