

Sammy McDaniel



Sammy McDaniel, a Corsicana High School Class of 1970 classmate, quiet and not well-known to many, was a fun companion to his group of close friends. He enjoyed riding motorcycles, loved The Beatles, and wrote stories. Shortly after high school, he felt a calling to serve his country and soon enlisted in the US Army. By November 1970 his tour of duty began in Thua Thien, South Vietnam. Sammy became a well-liked and well-respected Staff Sergeant Medical Specialist. His comrades called him “Doc Sam”.

Their six-man recon team worked many missions together, but also enjoyed good times, listening to music, talking of building their own motorcycles, Sammy intending to paint a Texas flag on his gas tank. He was considered one of the best medics around, always helping others and never once putting his own needs first.

Then on 8 July 1971, Sammy McDaniel’s young life ended before his 20th birthday. He was killed instantly in a mortar attack during a torrential rainstorm.

The following pages are an in-depth newspaper story of his short life, a compelling letter to his family from a fellow soldier, and military records – presented with respect from all of his high school classmates.

Letter from Vietnam: Package sheds light on local soldier's journey

• By Sierrah Sowell - Corsicana Daily Sun - Jan 5, 2019

A face from Corsicana's past was resurrected in early December when a box from a man named Ralph Schiltz in Canton, Ohio showed up in the Corsicana Daily Sun's mail. Inside the box was a two-page handwritten letter, a photo, a nine-minute war DVD and printed pages about a man named **Samuel Waymon McDaniel II**. This is what began the Daily Sun's deep dive into the history of this veteran.

After reading the letter, we learned of a brave soldier who was called "Doc Sam" by his comrades, as he was a medic for his station. Schiltz had personally served with Doc Sam and spoke highly of their time together. The photos included in the package were of Doc, and in the video he can be seen spending time on his base with other soldiers. Shots of the Vietnam landscape can also be seen along with the men taking a swim by a waterfall and just spending time on the base itself.

While reading the letter, it became clear that tragedy had struck and led to the death of Doc. On base Bihn Dihn, a mortar exploded by accident, with the men thinking it had already shot off after a rain storm. It hit Doc directly, leaving him dead upon impact.

Feeling heartbroken over the loss of his friend, Schiltz tried to come up with a way to express that emotion. He started a letter, intending to send it.

"I started to write it, then I just couldn't finish so I put it away in a drawer," he said. "Now, years later when I was cleaning out some things I found it and felt like it was time to finish what I started. I knew he was from the Corsicana area so I sent it to the paper hoping it would find its way into the right hands, and lucky for me, it did."

Schiltz requested that he wanted these items to go to the closest living kin as a way to find closure. With many questions left unanswered, The Wall of Faces, a Vietnam Veterans memorial website, was able to provide a starting place.

This allowed for the discovery of McDaniel's birth date, Oct. 1, 1951 to the date of his casualty, July 8, 1971. His home of record is listed as Corsicana and his branch of service as army with his rank being SP5. He is honored on Panel 3W, Line 104 of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial. His casualty province is Thua Thien.

A phone number was found on the photo developing envelope, and after calling, was found to be disconnected. In response, a letter was sent in the mail asking for Schiltz to contact the Daily Sun to explain his story further and to confirm his package had been received.

With a starting point, findagrave.com was a great resource tool for finding the exact location of McDaniel's body. After a quick search, it was revealed that he was laid to rest at Hamilton Beeman Cemetery in Retreat.

After taking a trip to the cemetery, Linda Bennett, the president of the cemetery, was a huge help in finding information on McDaniel and his family members. After finding his burial place in the cemetery's records, it was discovered that his father, Samuel Waymon McDaniel, was buried next to him on a conjoined McDaniel headstone with his father's birth date being July 24, 1932 and his death date as Oct. 25, 1951. When thinking about finding his mother, the thought did occur that her last name may have changed in the time after her husband's death if she had married someone else.

Upon looking at the lot descriptions, next to the McDaniel plot a note stated "See also V. Beamon" which was yet another context clue in this story. After locating the last name Beamon, a woman by the name of Velma Jean Garcia McDaniel Beamon was discovered, but no headstone was present for her at the family plot. While being almost certain she was in fact the mother of Samuel, locating her obituary for confirmation was the next step.

Bennett explained how previous members, Mary Love Sanders, who was the secretary treasurer and Polly Thomas, the former secretary of the Retreat Circle had both played a major part in starting a filing system for obituaries of those buried at Hamilton Beeman Cemetery. After several hours of searching, an obituary was found for Beamon in which it mentioned her son, Samuel McDaniel II preceding her in death.

Now, confirming that Samuel had lost both of his parents, it lead to the next chapter of finding a surviving family member to send the items to as well as someone who knew the cause of death for the parents.

Looking for some help in connecting the dots, a post was made to the Navarro County History Facebook page reaching out to anyone who had information on this soldier to aid in finding a home for the items received. Ironically enough, Polly Thomas gave the biggest tip of all: the phone number of Velma's sister, Viva Garcia Gray, with whom she is friends. Along with the information that Samuel, his father, mother and maternal grandmother were all buried at the same plot at the cemetery, with his grandmother also without a headstone.

Gray was contacted, and became emotional about the news of the items the Daily Sun had received.

"Sammy is what we always used to call him," she said. "He was the shy and quiet type, but he was always so caring and sweet to everyone he knew."

She went on to explain that his father had died in a car accident when he was only three weeks old, having a trailer he was pulling jack-knife him on a rainy night, killing him on impact.

“This left my sister, Velma Jean, heartbroken,” Gray said. “Sammy grew up knowing his father had passed away when he was a baby, but never really saw photos of him until one day when he was snooping around in a chest of drawers and found the photos of his father in his casket. He had tears in his eyes and always missed his daddy even more after that.”

Growing up with his family out in Retreat including his mother, Gray and Callie Garcia, his maternal grandmother, Sammy had plenty of love in his life.

“Around the time he started high school in Corsicana is when his mom married Mr. Beamon and he moved in with his grandma Callie,” she said. “He was real into motor bikes and he always rode one with his group of guy friends from school. He also really loved The Beatles and writing.”

After asking about the relationship between his mother and biological father, Gray told of a love story the two had.

“The love between them was so true and real,” she said. “They had a whirlwind romance and married at the courthouse, finding out about my sister’s pregnancy shortly after. She loved his father more than anyone and chose to be buried with him and her son as they were both the loves of her life.”

Upon asking about Sammy’s death and what that did to the family, Gray began to feel emotional, crying through the phone as she went back to that moment in time.

“We all had a ‘party line’ as we used to call it back in the day, where we all hopped on the house phone and talked to Sammy before he left for Vietnam,” she said through tears. “When we found out about his passing, Velma was never the same. When we went to see the body, I told them to open the casket and let her see her son one last time. She laid over his body and wept, realizing she had lost the other half of her heart.”

At Sammy’s funeral, his fellow bike-riding friends followed behind the procession and “Let It Be” by The Beatles was played as a way to remember him at his service.

“On his tombstone, it says ‘When the Power of Love Overcomes the Love of Power, Then There Will be Peace’ and he wrote that in one of his journals we found,” she said. “I always remember him as someone who had a love for his country. While most men his age were hoping not to get drafted, he went and enlisted because he felt led to do so. He was one in a million and the love we all had for him was unmeasurable.”

After his mother’s passing due to Alzheimer’s several years later, Gray is one of the last living relatives remaining who knew Sammy.

“I am just overwhelmed with emotion to find all of this out,” she said. “I look forward to receiving all of these items and having another piece of comfort after his death.”

After exchanging information, it was arranged for the items to be sent back to Gray for her and her children to keep. While being thrilled to have found a home for the treasures, the newsroom was still hoping for a call from Schiltz.

Almost a week after sending the letter, finally the phone rang with a number from Ohio. Now, the final chapter of the story was added, as Schiltz was ready to tell his side of the story.

“We all called him Doc Sam,” he said. “He was one of the best medics we had. All he ever wanted to do was help others and he never once put his own needs first, it was always about all of us.”

After telling of the good times they had listening to the band “Bread” and talking about how they wanted to build their own motorcycles, with Sammy wanting a Texas flag painted on his gas tank, Schiltz explained some of the things they went through together.

“We had a huge typhoon one day,” he said. “Massive amounts of flooding and even more mud. Instead of just covering in the bunker, Sammy was out helping people find shelter and dragging people into our shelter. This is just a small example of who he was, always looking out for his troops.”

On the day of Sammy’s accident, not only Schiltz, but other comrades too, felt as though they had lost a member of their brotherhood.

“He had one ear pierced and always thought that was real cool,” he said. “The day he died me and four other guys who were his close buddies all went up on the top of a hill and pierced our ears in memory of him.”

Upon learning about Sammy’s aunt being found and receiving the items, Schiltz was overwhelmed with happiness.

“I just feel like a weight has been lifted from me,” he said. “I think about him every single day and am proud to share these memories with someone who loves him as much as all of us did.”

With both Schiltz and Gray receiving a copy of this newspaper and the peace of mind and heart they both needed, we all truly hope Samuel is smiling down with the rest of his loved ones on the memories finally finding their way home.

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Handwritten letter from **Ralph Schiltz** to the parents of **Samuel McDaniel II**

I believe by now I might be too late. But for the past 27 years I've been wanting to write to you. You see, I served in South Vietnam with your son in the 2nd of 327th Infantry Company E in the 101st Airborne Division. Your son, 'Doc Sam' by nickname, was our medic of a six-man recon team. We were stationed way up north in South Vietnam. Our job was to go deep inside enemy lines to spot the enemy for the infantry and air strikes. I'm telling you this because I didn't let my parents know what I did and Doc might have done the same. I want you to know that your son was very brave. We made it through a lot together. He is greatly missed by me and I'm sure the others who served with him felt the same. Being a medic and treating every scratch, sickness and so forth, he was like a mother to us. I was a sniper and moved around a lot from one team to another but was on a lot of missions with him. We were in the Asha Valley (Vietnam for "Valley of Death"). We were in the last U.S. major offense against the enemy at the rock pile and so forth. The last few days we spent together were on a firebase on top of a mountain. Usually we were tromping through the jungles, mountains and rice pattys. We were being hit by a typhoon (called hurricane over here). The top of the mountain was washing away from the rain and 120 mile per hour winds. Bunkers were collapsing on top of soldiers. Your son went around pulling them out and treating them. Somehow through the winds and rain the two of us managed to put a small shelter just big enough for the two of us. While others watched from collapsed bunkers afraid to come out in the storm. We shared it with one other soldier who came out after we were done. A few days later during the evening, me and another guy spotted the enemy and I called in a mortar strike. Doc normally would have been on the bunker line with us but this time he was up with the mortar team. I don't know if you want to know how he died. But the age I am now and having an 18-year-old daughter, I know if anything happened to her I'd want to know. It rained so much that to keep the water out of the mortar tubes the mortar crew cut cardboard and covered it with tape. They fired two mortar tubes at the same time which made them believe both mortar tubes fired, but in one tube the cardboard slipped down the tube over the firing pin. Then they dropped another mortar in on top of another round which exploded. Doc took shrapnel through the heart and it killed him instantly. Although he died 50 to 100 feet away from me I couldn't face going over to him. I miss not being able to talk to him, I know he loved you very much. It was a time when a friend meant everything and your son was every bit of that and more. I've had to live with the thought that if only I wouldn't have called the strike in all these years...

[Thirty years later, annotated to the same handwritten letter]

I never got to mail this.

Now my daughter is 48 years old.



Sgt. 5 Samuel W. McDaniel II, 19, died July 8, in Vietnam.

He was a native of Corsicana.

Funeral services are to be Saturday at 4 p.m. in Corley Funeral Chapel with burial in [Hamilton cemetery](#).

A U. S. Army chaplin will officiate at the military services.

He is survived by his parents, Mr. and Mrs. Sam Beamon of Wharton; one brother, Jerry Beamon of U. S. Army; and a grandmother, Mrs. Callie Garcia of Corsicana.

An Honor guard from Fort Hood is to serve as pallbearers.

- [The Corsicana Daily Sun](#) - Fri., Jul 16, 1971
- Submitted by [Diane Richards](#)
- [Viet Nam 327 Inf. 101 ABN Div.](#)
- s/o Samuel Waymon McDaniel, Sr.
& Velma Jean (Garcia) McDaniel-Beamon

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McDaniel

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Sammy's Dad also died at age 19, when Sammy was three weeks old.

Samuel Waymon McDaniel, Sr.
Jul 23, 1932 - Oct 25, 1951

S. W. McDaniel Services Sunday

Funeral services for Samuel Waymon McDaniel, 19, fatally injured late Thursday in a an auto-trailer mishap near Athens, will be held from the Corley Chapel Sunday at 4 p.m.

Burial will be in the Hamilton cemetery. The rites will be conducted by Rev. Jack Goff, pastor of North Side Baptist church.

George York, Jr., 23, and Alvis Elmer Miles, 25, both of Corsicana, companions of McDaniel, were slightly hurt.

Surviving are his wife, a son, Samuel Waymon McDaniel, Jr.; mother, Mrs. D. L. Henderson; two brothers, Doyle Henderson and LeRoy Henderson, all of Corsicana; and two sisters, Mrs. Loraine Lucas, Beaumont, and Miss Patricia Ann Henderson, Corsicana.

Pallbearers will be A. L. Douglas, W. C. Read, Gordo Bland, John Dawson, Daniel parson and O. D. Bamburg.

Archives®

5 possible records found for Samuel Waymon McDaniel II



Samuel Waymon McDaniel II

Military Record

Name

Samuel Waymon McDaniel II

Birth Date

1 Oct 1951

Processed Date

Jul 1971

Gender

Male

Casualty Country

Republic of Vietnam (South Vietnam)

Death Date

8 Jul 1971

Casualty Type

Non-Hostile

Age

19

Casualty Reason

Other Accident

Race

Caucasian

Casualty Air

Ground Casualty

Home City

Corsicana

Body Status

Body Recovered

Home State

Texas

Service Branch

Department of the Army

Religion

Baptist

Military Grade

Specialist Fifth Class

Marital Status

Single

Service Occupation

Medical Specialist

Citizen Status

United States

Province

Military Region 1 – Thua Thien

SSN/Service #

460909690

Data Source

Combat Area Casualties Current File



Samuel Waymon McDaniel II
1951 - 1971 (19)



"Doc Sam"



Sammy
with pal
Rob Crespo

outside Collins Jr High