

**THOMAS ERIC SHANNON****CLASS 18-66**

is honored on Panel 17E, Row 24 of  
the Vietnam Veterans Memorial

**Full Name:** THOMAS ERIC SHANNON  
**Wall Name:** THOMAS E SHANNON  
**Date of Birth:** 5/7/1944  
**Date of Casualty:** 3/22/1967  
**Home of Record:** ST PAUL  
**State:** MN  
**Branch of Service:** ARMY  
**Rank:** 2LT  
**Casualty Country:** SOUTH VIETNAM  
**Casualty Province:** PLEIKU



On 22 March 1967, near the village of Polei Duc the 85 men of Company A, 1st Battalion, 8th Infantry, 4th Infantry Division, were ambushed by a battalion or more of North Vietnamese regulars - well trained troops familiar with the terrain.

The Company Commander Captain William D. Sands and the Artillery Forward Observer, 2LT Thomas Eric Shannon from A Battery, 6<sup>th</sup> Battalion, 29<sup>th</sup> Field Artillery were killed and two of the platoon leaders were severely wounded in the initial assault. During the fight the unit suffered 22 men killed in action and an additional 42 wounded. 2LT Shannon was posthumously awarded the Silver Star for his heroic action during this engagement.

**Always Young**

We were in the same platoon/squad in OCS. I have many fond memories from our "Glory Days."

Tom will always remain "young" and full of life in our memories.

Posted by: Donald E. Zlotnik  
February 3, 2007

**Thomas is buried at Fort Snelling National Cemetery**

## A Great Man and a Wonderful Cube Mate

Thomas E Shannon was my final "cube mate" in OCS. Charlie Battery was originally known as "Charlie Battalion" as it was the largest starting OCS class ever. Being fortunate (?) enough to be in the first barracks building, I never had to move from my cube as the scores of candidates of our original 144 washed out or were re-cycled. When it came time for Thomas Shannon to move to our barracks, everyone said "Don't move in with Leonard, he is a jinx". Thomas Shannon said he did not believe in jinxes and moved in with me. That was a lucky day for me, because Shannon was one of the best men I have ever known. His loss was devastating for me, and I have felt it every day for over forty years.

Posted by: Thomas B Leonard  
June 2, 2008

### *From the Virtual Wall*

Most of the men in Alpha Company, 1st Battalion, 8th Infantry, had been together since Basic Training at Fort Lewis, Washington; all were friends. They were the best friends and soldiers I ever knew.

2LT Thomas E Shannon was our Artillery Forward Observer - he and PFC Jerry L Pickworth, both of the 29th Field Artillery.

On 22 March 1967, Alpha 1/8 was ambushed by a North Vietnamese Battalion near Polei Duc in the Valley of Tears (the Plei Trap Valley). No-one shirked his duty or lost his nerve, and the bravery they showed was beyond belief - a Medal of Honor, two DSC's, seven Silver Stars, and many Bronze Stars were earned that day, but we lost friends and brothers.

The men who died that day in the Battle at Polei Duc will be remembered by those who didn't until we eventually rejoin them.

From his comrade-in-arms,  
John Nelson  
28 Jul 2001  
(now deceased)

***The Battle of Polei Duc  
Into the Valley of Tears  
22 March 1967***



**The Plei Trap Valley is**

located in Vietnam's Central Highlands, west of the Nam Sathay River and close to the Cambodian border. During the war, the Plei Trap was heavily used as an infiltration route and base area, connecting at its northwestern end with the infamous Ho Chi Minh Trail. The area is a torturous place with some of the most difficult terrain imaginable - steep mountains, mist-

shrouded valleys, and dense jungle coverage. The low-lying areas are overshadowed by rugged mountains, and daylight temperatures soar above 105 degrees. In 1967, potable water was scarce, but insects and other pests - including the enemy - were plentiful.

The Plei Trap had a nickname - the Valley of Tears. And into the Valley of Tears came the men of the 4th Infantry Division.

The 4th's Second Brigade had arrived in Vietnam in August 1966, and the entire Division had closed by mid-September 1966. Between September and the end of the year, 4th ID engaged in heavy jungle training and operations in the coastal plain area of I Corps.

In early January 1967 the 4th Infantry Division moved into the western area of the Central Highlands, determined to engage the North Vietnamese Army's 1st and 10th Divisions. Operation Sam Houston began immediately, with US units clearing the highland plains of Pleiku and Kontum Provinces, preparatory to more substantial campaigns west of the Nam Sathay River.

The 2nd Brigade, 4th ID, crossed the river in mid-February, entering the Valley of Tears. Artillery and air support was difficult due to the terrain and weather conditions. Joined by the 1st Brigade, the 4th Division pushed slowly westwards, hoping to trap the NVA close to the Cambodian border. Instead, they suffered constant ambush in ideal defensive terrain. By mid-March, both brigades began pulling back to the eastern side of the Se Sanh River.

In the last major engagement of Operation Sam Houston, elements of the 1st Bn, 8th Infantry, were employed as blocking forces intended to hamper the movement of NVA forces. On 22 March 1967, near the village of Polei Duc the 85 men of Alpha Company, First of the 8th Infantry, were ambushed by a battalion or more of North Vietnamese regulars - well trained troops familiar with the terrain.

"We were supposed to be a blocking force against a small unit of NVA that had been spotted by a Recon Team and spotter plane. We choppered out to an LZ on the 21st and proceeded to march towards the NVA force. When we set up our perimeter that night I as well as others were on LP's.

Next morning we set out for the final position and were ambushed by a Battalion sized NVA outfit. The battle started around 7:30 AM and the heaviest fighting ended around 4:30 PM. Lighter fighting continued after 4:30 PM while the choppers were getting the wounded out."

**John Nelson, SP4, A/1/8**

Company commander Captain William D Sands and Artillery FO 2LT Thomas Shannon were killed and two of the platoon leaders were severely wounded in the initial assault. Command devolved on First Sergeant David H. McNerny (MoH). During the fight, Alpha 1/8 suffered 22 men killed in action and an additional 42 wounded - a 75 percent casualty rate. But the greatly outnumbered GIs were not routed by the NVA - they held their ground until relieved and they brought their dead and wounded out with them. Immediately after the battle 139 NVA dead were counted around the A/1/8 position. A subsequent sweep of the area identified approximately 400 NVA graves.



The day's action brought the men of Alpha 1/8 one Medal of Honor, two Distinguished Service Crosses, seven Silver Stars, a number of Bronze Stars, too many Purple Hearts - and the pride of brotherhood and heroism that Alfred Lord Tennyson captured in the *Charge of the Light Brigade*.

Bravo Company, 1st of the 8th, simultaneously was engaged by a smaller NVA force several hundred meters distant from the A/1/8 position. Although pinned and unable to assist A/1/8, Bravo Company withstood the attacks on their position, sustaining much lighter casualties.

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**These soldiers of the Ivy Division died that day at Polei Duc**

**Alpha Company, 1st of the 8th Infantry**

<b>PFC Floyd Barker</b>	<b>PFC James A Cunningham</b>
<b>PFC Blair E Dennis</b>	<b>PFC Ralph Gray</b>
<b>PFC Charles F Harrison</b>	<b>PFC Jacob A Horn</b>
<b>PFC Richard D Kaminski</b>	<b>PFC Gary M Ladd</b>
<b>SP4 Raul Montes</b>	<b>SP4 John A Mott</b>
<b>SGT Timothy X Murphy</b>	<b>SP4 Dennis A Prentice</b>
<b>CPT William D Sands</b>	<b>SP4 Richard S Sedies</b>
<b>SP4 David Vasquez</b>	<b>PFC Ralph M Wentzel</b>
<b>PFC Junior Wilkerson</b>	<b>PFC Billy J Witzkoski</b>
<b>PFC John Zupan</b>	<b>ARVN Scout (Name unknown)</b>

**A Bty, 6th Bn, 29th Fld Arty, FO Team**

<b>PFC Jerry L Pickworth</b>	<b>2LT Thomas E Shannon</b>
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**Bravo Company, 1st of the 8th Infantry**

<b>SP4 William T Kauffer</b>	<b>PFC William J O'Brien</b>
<b>PFC Joseph R Piambino</b>	<b>PFC Daniel M Taylor</b>
<b>PFC Robert D Jenkins</b>	<b>SP4 Calvin E Schwartz</b>

*When can their glory fade? All the world wonder'd.  
Honor the charge they made!  
Noble six hundred!*

*Remembrance*

I remember Vietnam like it was yesterday  
And all the soldiers I knew and miss today.

It was March 22nd 1967

when 22 brave men went to heaven.

We were ambushed by a Battalion of NVA

I'll never forget what I saw that day.

We fought for our lives, these men were great

85 Men from A Co First of the Eight

4th Infantry Division. Alpha Company

Ambushed in the Plei Trap Valley,

Forty-two wounded, twenty-two KIA

I know I will never forget that day.

One Medal of Honor, two DSC'S, seven Silver Stars - we made history.

Numerous Bronze Stars, 55 Purple Hearts

These brave men from Alpha company, Never apart

Those 22 killed - they all gave their all

Forever remembered by us and the Wall.

Johnathan Lee Nelson

A 1/8 4ID Vietnam 1966 1967

Deceased 2002