

Vietnam: Trip to wall honors Green Beret

THE WALL: REMEMBERING VIETNAM

SECOND OF A 7-PART SERIES

Trip to the wall honors Chicopee Green Beret

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What can you say about a 24-year-old man whose name is among 58,256 on the Vietnam War Memorial?

That he was a platoon leader in Bravo Company.

That every day he assigned someone from the squad to watch over "Mouse."

That he and his grunts, carrying M-16s, trailed a jungle maze for weeks and fought for their lives as the young lieutenant tried to pick their battles.

Mark C. Rivest, of Chicopee, was an officer and gentleman.

He was one of the famed "Green Berets" in the Army's Special Forces, and he completed two tours in Vietnam as the leader of a platoon which, for the most part, was composed of draftees, many of whom were high-school dropouts.

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Photos courtesy of JOSH MORIN

Childhood friends from left, Ron Morin, Josh Morin, Peter Rivest and Mark C. Rivest, seen in this 1950s photo as they climbed on a truck owned by Rivest's grandfather. Right, Mark C. Rivest in an undated photo during the Vietnam War.



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A couple of guys in the band of 30 men should probably have never been in the Army, let alone assigned into the deadly terrain around Hue, a battle-scarred city just below the North Vietnam border.

"He is a very hard person to forget," recalled Manhattan businessman Anthony Loiero, who turned 21 in Vietnam and served under Rivest between 1969 and 1970.

"One of the things I remember the most about him was that he tried to keep us out of trouble," Loiero said. And, when they went in for the fight, "he would make sure that we were all protected. He was concerned about the guys he was responsible for. The jobs we were doing, he wanted to make sure we were there to do them the next day."

The year before Rivest and his most of his men arrived in country, the Tet Offensive in 1968 ramped up the carnage and particularly bloody was the battle for Hue.

When Communist forces seized the city, they held the city for 25 days "committing ghastly atrocities during the initial phase of their occupation," wrote Stanley Karnow in his Pulitzer Prize-winning book: "Vietnam. A History."

Back home, America was violent, too. Robert F. Kennedy and Martin Luther King Jr. were assassinated within months of each other. America was at war with itself. That summer, anti-war protesters were beaten by Chicago police as they stormed the Democratic Convention.

By 1969, when Rivest, who left behind his parents, Paul and Catherine, two brothers and a sister in the Aldenville section of Chicopee, and Loiero, an only child, who grew up in the Italian enclave of West New York, N.J., where he still lives, got to Vietnam, the death toll of American soldiers and civilians - both in the North and South - was staggering.

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Before they met, Rivest had completed a six-month tour as platoon leader and, instead of alternating to the rear, "he transferred into the field again at his request," Loiero said.

Rivest earned the confidence of the soldiers in his new platoon almost immediately. Even-tempered, without bluster, he was approachable and ruled by a shot from his dark eyes.

He was college educated. He smoked Chesterfields, played the piano and had something about him that Loiero still associates with Louis Armstrong's song, "What a Wonderful World."

It took Loiero 13 years before he went to "the wall" in Washington, D.C., to take in the full measure of the Vietnam War's toll and tragedy, his delay mostly attributable to seeing the actual engraving of his platoon leader's name.

Now, middle-aged, Rivest's covenant to keep the men in his platoon safe with his good judgment and keen skills is even more precious to Loiero who came home, got a college degree, has a successful graphic

ABOUT THE SERIES

This Memorial Day week series comes as the Vietnam Memorial Wall in Washington, D.C., marks its 25th year and will focus on some of the Western Massachusetts soldiers remembered on its granite.

Yesterday: What has the wall meant to Vietnam veterans and the families of the war's casualties.

TODAY: Mark Rivest, of Chicopee, a member of the Army's famed Green Berets, had completed two tours before he was killed June 4, 1970, in Laos.

Tomorrow: Frank Chadwick Jr., the oldest of six sons from Ashfield, was killed by friendly fire at the beginning of the war in 1966; James E. "Jimmy" Palmeri, of Shelburne Falls, was killed in action Feb. 26, 1969.

arts business and is happily married with two children.

"We were a rag-tag bunch of good guys living every day hoping that every one of us would live to go home that day," Loiero said, adding that he still thinks "about the way he treated us. How he protected us. How his main objective was to watch his gaggle of geese and to make sure we did the right thing."

"If we were in harm's way, he would be the first one out there clearing the path," he added.

Rivest made his platoon a band of brothers. And, he did it in many ways, Loiero said.

There were, for instance, specific orders that someone in the squad watch over a guy nick-

Wednesday: Marc J. Kuzma, a Marine from South Hadley, was killed April 26, 1968, as he tried to reach fellow Marines who were wounded. He would receive the Navy Cross, its second highest honor, for saving his squad before his death.

Thursday: James D. Zebert, of Westfield, was killed on his 18th day in Vietnam in June, 1969, serving just one week with a squad of the Army's 25th Division.

Friday: Carl Rattee, of Monson, a Screaming Eagle with the Army's 101st Airborne, was killed Feb. 19, 1968, during the Tet Offensive.

Saturday: Army Spc. Ronald C. Hurst, of Springfield, was killed April 12, 1967, when the Jeep he was driving struck a landmine.

named "Mouse," and a couple of other grunts, who Loiero said, "should never have been in the Army. Should never had been sent to Vietnam. And never should have been in the infantry with the rest of us."

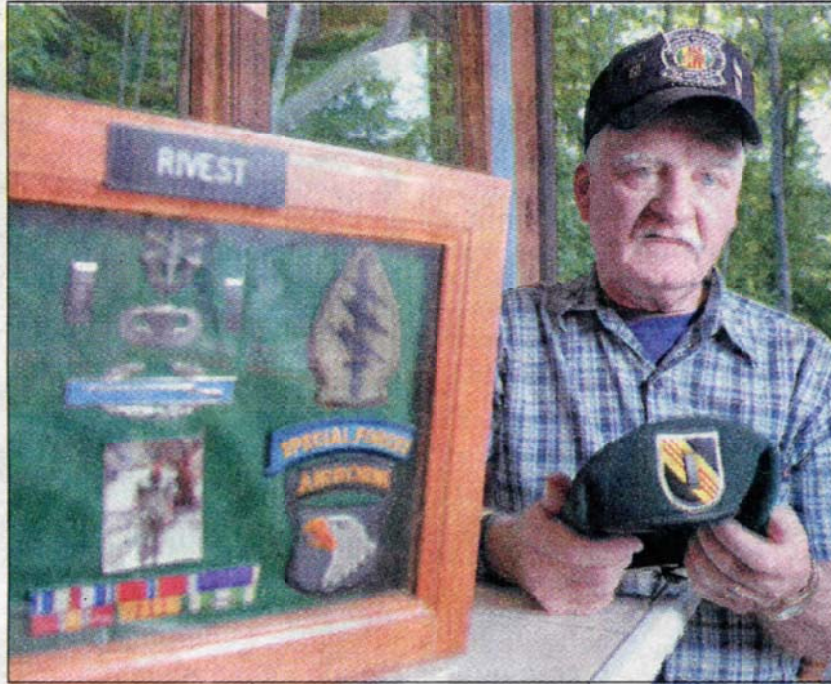
Rivest instilled a discipline for constant movement.

The checklist was drilled into his men: Rifles cleaned. Gear together. Who's got the gun flares. Teeth brushed. Boots tied up. Who's watching "Mouse" today? Who's sleeping first.

"Then you'd start all over," Loiero said. "You make a commitment to the guys next to you and they make it to you. It is a brotherhood."

After their tour ended, Loiero

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Staff photo by **CHRISTOPHER EVANS**

Josh R. Morin of Palmer holds the green beret of his friend Mark C. Rivest of Chicopee, who was killed during the Vietnam War.

went home. And Rivest, from what Loiero has been able to piece together, returned to Special Forces duty. The next assignment he accepted took him into Laos where he was killed in

ground combat on June 4, 1970.

These days, Palmer resident Josh R. Morin, who once lived across from the Rivest home on McKinstry Avenue in Chicopee, carries the green beret of his

boyhood friend to schools in Western Massachusetts as he talks to students about U.S. history and the Vietnam War.

As boys, they played Army together with their younger brothers.

Morin had been to Vietnam and back before Rivest went, and he warned his buddy against going because the terrain had gotten so dangerous. Morin's combat buddy had been shot dead inches from him.

When Rivest was killed, Morin, married at the time but living on the same street, said he couldn't go to the funeral.

"I couldn't go to his funeral and face his mother and father, the idea that I made it and he hadn't. I couldn't deal with it and now I regret that," Morin said. "I never saw them again."

Someone in the family later entrusted Morin with Rivest's green beret and his medals.