

## **In Memory**

by Rick Henderson

Every Memorial day I am taken back to the time I was 4 years old and we lived in Porterdale. From my birth until I was 4, my parents worked on different shifts so that one of them was with me at all times. Then both were able to go on the first shift and it was decided since my Grandparents were both on the 2<sup>nd</sup> shift, I could stay with them while my parents worked. I remember being bundled up in a blanket on cold mornings and taken to my Grandparent's house that set next to the Porterdale Baptist Church. Many times I would simply go back to sleep. Some times I would remain up with my Grandparents, even though they worked 2<sup>nd</sup> shift, they were still early risers. My grandmother would fix me breakfast and lunch and my grandfather was always working on or building something in his make shift work shop on the back porch and I would hang around with him after being given a block of wood or some tool to play with. Sometimes I would go on errands with him or stay with my grandmother in the kitchen where it seemed she always was. The problem with this arrangement came at shift change, that time between when my grandparents went to work and the time my parents got off from work. Sometimes that could be 30 to 45 minutes with no where for me to go. That is where Danny Jo came in. Danny Jo and his family lived next door to my grandparents. He was 4 years older than I was and an arrangement was made between his parents, my grandparents and Danny Jo, that he would stay with me at my Grandparents house when he got off from school that was located right behind their house and when they left for work and until my parents arrived. Of course I was given complete instructions by my parents and grandparents on what I could and could not do and Danny Jo was given a list of do's and don'ts and so the arrangement started. I am not sure if there were ever any financial arrangements made or not, but I am sure it included some pocket change as I saw my Grandfather give Danny Jo some change on occasion. Things went well as I really enjoyed Danny Jo, he was like an older brother to me and I would come to see him that way and really looked up to him. Most of the time we spent was on my grandparents big front porch as back then most kids stayed outside during the day. We would play games or he would push me around in a wooden cart my dad had made me that was kept

at my Grandparents house. Time went by quick from when my grandparents left for work and my parents arrived. Danny Jo would come straight from school and greet my grandparents and I was told to mind Danny Jo as they left for work and then he would always greet my parents when they arrived and tell them if I had behaved, which I always did..haha...then he would tell me bye and jump of the porch and run next door to his house. The first summer when there was no school after the arrangement, sometimes I would see Danny Jo and many of the other kids on the block in the backyards and back alley playing and I would wave to him, sometimes he would come and sit on the back steps and talk to my grandfather and me, but always just like clock work he reported right on time to my grandparents front door and take charge of me until my parents came. Porterdale and the era I grew up was a fascinating place and time. It was a world within itself and of course to a 4 year old it was a huge world. As the summer passed, Danny Jo and I would spend more time together, he would come over early and ask permission from my grandfather to take me to his backyard which was next to my grandfathers back porch and he would show me his toys or bike as we sit under the shade of a big oak tree. Danny Jo was a avid collector of toy soldiers, not just the plastic kind you bought in a bag, but actual action figure soldiers and soldiers from different eras, Revolutionary, Civil War and World War soldiers as well as the horses, wagons, tanks and cannons. He even had cowboy and Indian figures with horses, stage coaches, teepee's and canoes. Not only did he have these collections, he would set up reenactments of the great battles. I would watch and be mesmerized as he meticulously set up each figurine and he would start telling me about the battle or the scene he was setting up as I squatted and watched. Soon he would let me set this figurine or that figurine up according to his instruction. Now the thing about imagination and Porterdale, every big oak tree roots could be make believe mountains, every clear sandy spot in the sun could be the desert, any of the dirt could be scooped to form rivers, battle embankments and even when it rained, under the edge of that big old front porch would be an ideal place to stay dry and set up a civil war battle, or a circle of wagons with the Cowboys inside the circle and the Indians riding around the outside or setting up sticks as a wooden fort. Sometimes older boys would come over and there would be much talk about this battle or that war which I didn't even know about, however Danny Jo always included me. This went on until at the age of five

it was decided I would go to school. I would be allowed to stay with other children my age at the school until our parents picked us up. I would have one more summer with Danny Jo between my 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> grade year and we would reenact many more great battles with his toy soldier collection or we would play games with other kids that last summer. Then my brother was born between my 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> grade and when he was six weeks old, my parents hired a nanny to take care of my brother and me. I would still see Danny Jo at school and over the years as we each grew up and I would continue to see him when I visited my grandparents until my grandparents moved to a house across the street from where we lived.

So now I guess you are wondering what this has to do with Memorial Day, my memories of Danny Jo and me.

Danny Joe Richardson U.S. Army Specialist 4<sup>th</sup> class was killed in action (KIA) by a grenade explosion on April 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1968 at Binh Dinh, South Vietnam. He is listed on the Vietnam Memorial Wall on Panel 47E and Row 053 as well as being listed on the Veterans Memorial on the Covington, Ga. town square. Danny Jo had just turned 20 years old the week before his death. Every Memorial Day since 1968 I take a few minutes and I think about the boy next door to my grandparent's house. Let us all remember those that made the ultimate sacrifice for our country and our freedoms and never forget them, always to carry them in our heart and in our mind.