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**QUANTICO MARINES FOOTBALL
{ 1964 - 1965 }**



(L-R) Moses Denson, Steve Szabo, LtGen. Edwin L. Wiesman, CG of MCB Quantico, Tommy Holden, Coach Joe Caprara and Gene Carrington

somewhere for a Marine Corps Base team. This tradition goes back at least to Brigadier General Smedley Butler—the namesake of Butler Field in Quantico.

At season's end, Conti and many of his teammates shipped out to South Vietnam, where Conti served first as a platoon commander and then as the company executive officer of Lima 3/5. None of his friends were in Third Battalion, Fifth Marines with him.

Conti did his duty and then came back home, but not all of his old teammates made it. Several of them were killed in action and a few of them, including the good friend he'd made while on Quantico, Tommy Holden, were posthumously cited for valor.

Before playing for the Quantico Marines in the 1964 and 1965 seasons, Holden already had a solid football career behind him. He had been a four-letter man at St. Mary's High School in Rutherford, NJ, Class of '59. Then, after prep school, he was an offensive lineman for the U.S. Naval Academy's 1963 team at the Cotton Bowl.

At Quantico he was, according to the Quantico Marines 1965 football brochure, "An excellent blocker and pulling guard" and was expected to be a "linebacker where his tenacious hitting ability" could be put to good use.

That "tenacious hitting ability" would earn Holden a Purple Heart and a Silver Star in Operation Alleghany, and then another Purple Heart and a Silver Star, awarded posthumously, for "conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity" while fighting in Operation Kern with Company G, Second Battalion, Third Marines, in Vietnam in October 1966.

After the war, Conti went back to Allentown, started his civilian career and raised a family. Soon his Marine friends and his combat service were a distant memory. The years piled on as Conti grew his printing business and raised his children. But in the back of his mind, Conti was nurturing a mission: to visit his old friend's gravesite and pay his respects.

Once a Team, Always a Team

By Douglas Graves

Like a lot of combat Marines, Ed Conti did his hitch, came home from Vietnam, started a family and founded a successful business. He never thought he would lead his wartime comrades in commissioning a war memorial to fallen Marine athletes on the campus of The Basic School, the Quantico, VA, home of the Marine Corps' officer infantry school.



Ed Conti

Conti was a standout football player in Allentown, PA's, Central Catholic High School and later at Syracuse. Then in 1965, he got the chance to play football for the Marine Corps at Quantico. Conti said that after graduating from The Basic School (TBS) in June 1965, "The base commander said, 'You're going to stay here and play football.'"

That was his job when he wasn't commanding a platoon in the Schools

Demonstration Unit, assigned to teach infantry tactics to Marine lieutenants.

The Marine Corps, like the other services, had active intra-service athletic programs in those days. The programs have since been terminated, but there were basketball, baseball, track and field and even lacrosse teams in addition to football. Marines who had been outstanding athletes in college or high school had a good chance of playing

QUANTICO MARINES FOOTBALL { 1964 - 1965 }

Another Quantico football player and coach, Gene “Bear” Carrington, also counted Tom Holden as a friend. Carrington recalled, “I had been invited to try out for the team and was standing in front of my locker. I looked to my left and saw a rugged guy, about 6 feet and 200 pounds. He gave me a big toothless grin and said, ‘Tom Holden.’”

Later, in Vietnam, Carrington’s artillery outfit was in direct support of Holden’s company. In September 1966, Carrington got a chance to visit Holden in Golf Company.

“We were going to do some traveling together when we got back to the states. But first we had our little war to think about.” But on 22 October 1966 Holden was killed in action, Carrington said.

“There are very few role models in society today,” he added. “Tommy Holden is a true American hero. Tommy gave his life trying to help the men under him—he was a leader of Marines.”

Carrington, like Conti, did his hitch in the Marines and got out. He thought about his friend often and kept a picture of the two of them on his desk, but his career with Exxon and his new family kept him busy. However, in 2000 he

Tom Holden during his time as Navy offensive lineman



“He was some guy ... he was one of those real hard-nosed guys, all guts.”

— Roger Staubach

started his quest to visit Holden’s grave. It wasn’t easy. He met roadblock after roadblock. “I wrote letters and made numerous phone calls,” Carrington said. “I came up empty-handed.”

Church records were faded. “They [the church] promised to help me, but they never came through. The funeral home’s records were useless.” The new owners couldn’t find the 34-year-old information.

Then Carrington got a call in response to a letter he sent to Jay Robertson, another Quantico athlete. Robertson’s call yielded a key name: Ed “Squally” Conti. Carrington called Conti, who got a break when he read an article in the *New York Times*.

Right after the 9/11 terror attacks Tom Holden’s cousin, Arlene Stewart, the publisher of a com-

memorative book about the longstanding Army-Navy rivalry, “managed to sneak in a photo of her cousin, Tom Holden (No. 67), a Navy offensive lineman, who as [a] USMC First Lt., was killed in Vietnam,” according to the *Times* article.

Conti read the article and called

**QUANTICO MARINE ATHLETES
MEMORIAL**

TO HONOR THE ATHLETES
WHO GAVE THEIR LIVES,
IN VIETNAM,
IN SERVICE TO THEIR COUNTRY

Ron Brown

Bruce Capel

Fred Cobb

Tom Holden

W. Dale Marshall

Paul McGrath

Gene McMillen

Tyrone Pannell

John Pritchard

Robert Smith

Will Spanhour

DEDICATION CEREMONY
JUNE 15, 2007
THE BASIC SCHOOL
QUANTICO, VIRGINIA

Arlene Stewart; it was the first time he’d had direct contact with one of Holden’s relatives. She invited Conti to come up for a visit. She also started contacting some of Holden’s Naval Academy classmates and some of the guys who had played ball with her cousin in high school. When she realized that Conti was in contact with other Marines who had wanted to visit Holden’s grave, she invited all of them to come up to New York.

After gathering at Conti’s home in Pennsylvania, six men made the trip up to the memorial service. Conti, Carrington and four other Marines, including John Kopka, who had been Holden’s company commander, and about 20 others made the trip to Holden’s grave in Bangall, NY. There they were joined by 20 of his old school mates, some men from Holden’s Naval Academy days and others from his high school in Rutherford, NJ. Together they honored a fallen classmate and comrade.

In his biography, *Roger Staubach: Captain America*, Staubach said of Tommy Holden, “He was some guy ... he was one of those real hard-nosed guys, all guts.”

After an emotional ceremony in the spring of 2001 that included a Marine Corps honor guard, Conti and others met Kevin Jones who had played football with Holden at St. Mary’s High School in Rutherford. For several years, Jones had been participating in an annual scholarship award commemorating Holden, who had long been celebrated as a hometown hero.

They give the annual Thomas J. Holden Memorial Award to the “Most Valuable Player of the Homecoming Game.” Jones invited the Marines to come back in the fall and present the award at St. Mary’s High School. Thirteen of them came back in October to give out the MVP trophy.

“We’ve been going up every year since to give out the trophy,” Conti said.

“After going to the ceremony,” said Carrington, “another of Tommy’s cousins, Ursula Corr, invited us to her home where we told stories about Tommy. Then we went back to Ed Conti’s home

QUANTICO MARINES FOOTBALL { 1964 - 1965 }

in Allentown. We put a lot of demons to sleep.”

From this original group of brother Marines, united to honor a friend, the Quantico Marine Athletes of the Sixties was formed. “We knew that four of the guys had been KIA,” Conti said. “But we didn’t know how many others had been killed.”

“We decided to keep trying to find more guys and started having reunions,” said “Bear” Carrington. “By the third reunion we were up to 120 guys. By the fourth reunion we decided to incorporate. And we knew by then the names of seven or eight guys who got killed.”

“We had gone out to visit The Basic School while having our fourth reunion at Quantico,” Conti said. “We saw some monuments on the quadrangle of the campus.”

They decided to commission a monument to honor the Marines who played with them in Quantico and, after giving their lives for their county in Vietnam, had been buried in family cemeteries across the nation. Then another old teammate stepped up to help. Granville “Granny” Amos, a retired Brigadier General, volunteered to coordinate the effort because he lived in Fredericksburg, VA, not far from Quantico.

“We were teammates in 1965,” Amos recalled. “But I was a 2nd Lieutenant and he was a 1st Lieutenant. I knew who he was, but we weren’t close. In fact, I played against him when I was at Virginia Military Academy and Tommy was at Navy.”

While Amos played fullback for VMI, at Quantico he was tapped to be a half-back. Amos, like Holden, was missing his front teeth and “didn’t mind hitting big guys.”

After TBS, these teammates scattered to posts and stations all over the world. “I didn’t see most of these guys after Basic School,” Amos said. “It wasn’t until we got together in Jacksonville, NC, that I started getting involved with the monument idea.”

Amos got permission for the memorial from the Marine Corps and “very supportive” cooperation from TBS. He contacted a memorial company for the design and engraving, and the newly formed association quickly raised the money to pay for it. They dedicated it 15 June 2007 at The Basic School in Quantico.

The memorial now on the campus quadrangle at TBS has 11 names:

Ronald Howard Brown, John Bruce Capel, Paul Frederick Cobb, Thomas James Holden, Willard Dale Marshall, Paul Martin McGrath, Gene Smedley McMullen, Tyrone Sidney Pannell, John Lee Prichard, Robert Norman Smith and Walter Judson Spainhour Jr. “We left room to add names,” said Ed Conti.

These men made their last play in Vietnam but, due to some uncommon devotion and loyalty of friends and others who couldn’t forget their courage and spirit, their names are engraved where new generations of Marines can stop and take measure of themselves and contemplate what it means to be a Marine. **SIF**



Top: The Memorial at TBS aboard Quantico.
Below: John Kopka (Tommy Holden’s CO in Vietnam), Gene Carrington, Ursula Corr (Holden’s cousin), Ed Conti, Jay Robertson (former Quantico player and coach at Quantico and former Giant’s coach), John Snider (played with Conti as Syracuse and later at Quantico), and Hank Hatch (former Yale University football player.)



The memorial at The Basic School was erected by Ed Conti, Gene Carrington, Granville Amos, Fred Jones and other Marines who contributed. In addition to 1stLt. Thomas James Holden, the following Quantico athletes are memorialized.

Capt. Ronald Harold Brown had been playing and coaching football in the Marine Corps since 1960 and coached at Quantico in 1965. He was commanding Bravo Battery, 11th Marines (artillery) when his convoy was attacked. Brown was killed in the initial attack.

2ndLt. John Bruce Capel was killed while leading a patrol southwest of Danang in 1966. At Quantico, he had received *Leatherneck* magazine’s All-Marine Linebacker award.

After playing Quantico football in the 1967 season and getting orders to Vietnam, **2ndLt. Paul Frederick Cobb** was posthumously awarded the Navy Cross after falling in action during Operation Allen Brook.

Captain Willard Dale Marshall, like Holden, a Naval Academy graduate, had been on the 1962 Quantico track team. Marshall was posthumously awarded the Bronze Star for his courageous leadership after his unit was ambushed in 1968.

2ndLt. Paul Martin McGrath was in Basic School when he was recruited for the Quantico football team. McGrath, after his death in Vietnam, was buried in Valhalla, NY. McGrath had written a letter home shortly before his death and his parents had it read in the U.S. House of Representatives in 1968, just three months after his death.

2ndLt. Gene Smedley McMullen played Quantico football in 1965 and the following year was a forward observer for 12th Marines. He was killed by counter battery fire.

2ndLt. Tyrone Sydney Pannell was on the Quantico track team in 1965 Pannell and his wife, Marlene, had just had a baby. 2ndLt. Pannell died later that year while leading his rifle platoon in 7th Marines.



Don Stuber's Hue City pictures 1968



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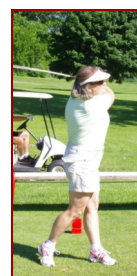
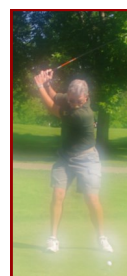
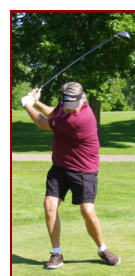
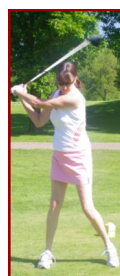
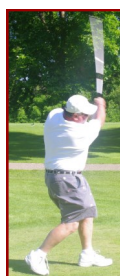
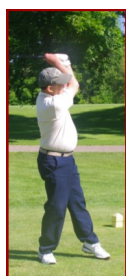
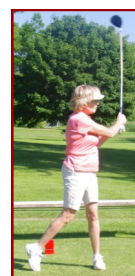
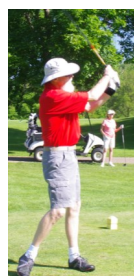
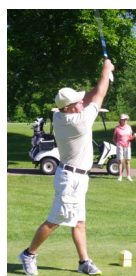
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