

A LONG OVERDUE APOLOGY

To family, friends, and lost brother Marines,

I cannot explain why I have chosen to pen this apology on this particular Christmas Day in 2024. Perhaps it's the weight of approaching my 78th birthday, or the growing difficulty in recalling my childhood memories, or finally accepting that I have spent decades viewing my past through a distant, clouded lens. Since returning from Vietnam, my only way of partitioning the dark memories of war was through a desperate struggle to forget them. But I could not simply forget Vietnam, I had to also forget my life before it.

The cost of this struggle has become painfully clear. In my relentless effort to suppress the harrowing memories of war, I inadvertently locked away the precious memories of my childhood, my family, my friends, and my brother Marines who fought and died in a jungle thousands of miles from their homes and loved ones over five decades ago.

These were brothers who strengthened me through the intimidation and challenges of boot camp, whose minds aligned with mine as we trained to fight and survive as one unit through advanced guerrilla warfare in Okinawa and the Philippines, preparing for what awaited us in Vietnam. The unshakeable bond we shared, the absolute trust that another Marine would always have 'your back' - its absence has left an aching void in my heart that grows deeper with each passing year.

I see now that building this wall between my past and present was a misguided attempt at self-preservation. But the price of this protection has been devastating: the family and friends I once held dear have become like shadows in an ebbing dream. Those who remain must believe I abandoned them for reasons they'll never understand. With all my heart, I apologize for the profound pain my absence may have caused.

To my brothers who gave their lives in combat, I will no longer remain hidden in the shadows, failing to honor your heroism and sacrifice. To those cherished childhood friends who left us too soon—whether by overdose or natural causes before my return from Vietnam—and to those who survived, I vow to confront my demons rather than continue avoiding the bonds we shared. The wound of our lost brotherhood has not healed with time; instead, it has carved an ever-deeper chasm in my soul.

To my family, I did not forget you by design. I am deeply saddened by the lost contact and decades of separation. The price of walling off my past was losing the warmth of your love, and that burden grows heavier with each passing year.

On this Christmas Day 2024, I must finally remember and honor my closest Marine brothers, whose memories I have too long tried to suppress. They gave their lives one day on Hill 362 in Vietnam during Operation Hastings in 1966:

PFC James R. Nash 7-24-66 Brick Township, NJ

PFC Paul J. Strausser 7-24-66 Millington, NJ

PFC Bruce A. Baker 7-24-66 Essex Junction, VT

PFC Pruitt H. Cheaney 7-24-66 Sarasota, FL

SSGT Norman L. Koos 7-24-66 Olivet, MI [A WWII veteran who saw more in me than I saw in myself]

To all those I've lost touch with - family, friends, and fellow Marines alike - please understand that my silence was never about a lack of love or respect. It was a misguided attempt to shield myself from pain, a defense mechanism that ultimately robbed me of the irreplaceable warmth of your companionship. I hope this long-overdue apology might begin to mend what my silence has broken. With deepest remorse and honor, Sgt AW Schade 12/25/2024

AW Schade; a Marine, Vietnam 1966/67, retired corporate executive and author of the award-winning book, Looking for God within the Kingdom of Religious Confusion. A captivating, comparative, and enlightening tale that seeks to comprehend the doctrines and discord between and within Judaism, Christianity, Islam, and Secularism. What the seeker discovers, transforms his life forever! <https://www.amazon.com/author/awschade>]