

2021

Willie Lee Freeman

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Recommended Citation

Boyd, Eric; Davison, Alex; and Pitts, Carter, "Willie Lee Freeman" (2021). *Native Sons Lost: The Vietnam War Dead of Milledgeville, Georgia*. 12.

<https://kb.gcsu.edu/nativesons/12>

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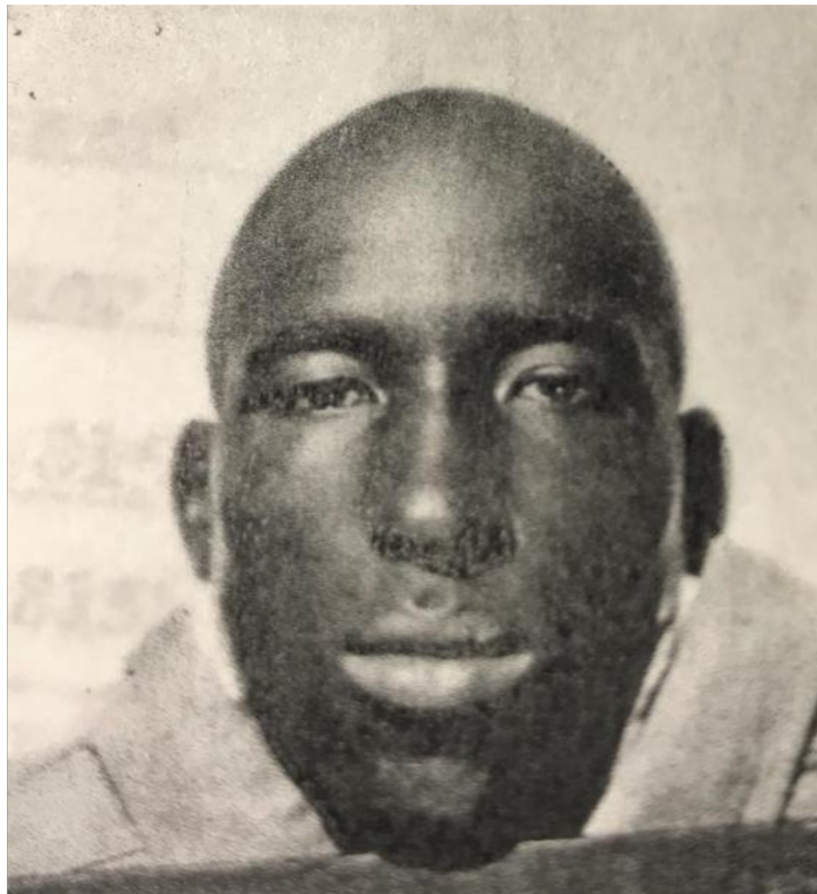
The Willie Freeman story

Eric Boyd, Alex Davidson, Carter Pitts

Professor Schiffman

Vietnam War in the Media

5/7/21



Background

Willie Lee Freeman was born Jan. 3, 1947 in Milledgeville, Georgia. His family circumstances are largely unknown; the only document linking him to a family member is the headstone application card his mother filled out following his death. His mother, Mozelle Sims, was born in Milledgeville on Dec. 3, 1919 and died on July 16, 2008. She and Willie are buried

WW I WW II KOREA Vietnam (VPT) DM JUL 29 1968 ORIGINAL		14. NAME AND LOCATION OF CEMETERY (City and State) Randolph Cemetery, Milledgeville, Ga.	
1. NAME OF DECEASED - LAST - FIRST - MIDDLE (Print or Type) FREEMAN, Willie Lee		15. IMPORTANT - Item 15 on reverse side must be completed. See attached instructions and complete and submit both copies. This application is submitted for a stone or marker for the unmarked grave of a deceased member or former member of the Armed Forces of the U. S., soldier of the Union of Confederate Armies of the Civil War or for an unmarked memorial plot for a non-recoverable deceased member. I hereby agree to accept responsibility for proper placement at the grave or memorial plot at no expense to the Government.	
2. SERVICE NUMBER 2208889		3. PENSION OR VA CLAIM NUMBER	
4. ENLISTMENT DATE (Month, Day, Year) Feb 24, 1966		5. DISCHARGE DATE (Month, Day, Year) May 27, 1968	
6. STATE Georgia		7. DECORATIONS Purple Heart (Form)	
8. GRADE OR RANK Co A 1st Bn 3d Mars LCpl 3d Mar Div (Rein) FMF		9. NAME OF APPLICANT (Print or Type) Mrs. Mozelle SIMS ADDRESS OF APPLICANT (Street address, City and State) 1116 Highland Avenue Milledgeville, Georgia 31061	
10. DATE OF BIRTH (Month, Day, Year) Jan 3, 1947		11. DATE OF DEATH (Month, Day, Year) May 27, 1968	
12. RELIGIOUS EMBLEM (Check one) XX LATIN CROSS (Christian) STAR OF DAVID (Jewish) NO EMBLEM		13. CHECK TYPE REQUIRED UPRIGHT MARBLE HEADSTONE XX FLAT MARBLE MARKER FLAT GRANITE MARKER FLAT BRONZE MARKER	
16. SIGNATURE OF APPLICANT Mozelle Sims		17. DATE 20 Jun 68	
17. NAME OF CONSIGNEE WHO WILL TRANSPORT STONE OR MARKER A. Austin, Jr.		18. ADDRESS OF CONSIGNEE (Street address, City and State) 950 N. Clark, Milledgeville, Ga. 31061	
DO NOT WRITE HERE FOR VERIFICATION 26 JUN 1968		ORDERED 5 AUG 1968 CONTRACTOR COLUMBUS MARBLE WORKS COLUMBUS, MISSISSIPPI DIED on a/o Vietnam	
DD FORM 1330, 1 NOV 62		EDITION OF 1 DEC 61 APPLICATION FOR HEADSTONE OR MARKER MAY BE USED.	

in Randolph Cemetery in Harrisburg. Several other Freeman headstones are in the cemetery, so it can be assumed his family was in the area for a while. It is also known that Freeman was a Protestant, as were most Southerners at the time. His marital status is ambiguous. Military documents

A headstone application card Freeman's mother filled out following his death. It is the only documentation linking Freeman to another family member

compiled postmortem state that Freeman was single. However, library resources report that sometime before his death he was married to Rebecca Ann Keesey of Okaloosa, Fla.

Ancestry.com shows no record of her.



Both Freeman and his mother, Mozelle Sims, are buried in Randolph Cemetery in Harrisburg, GA

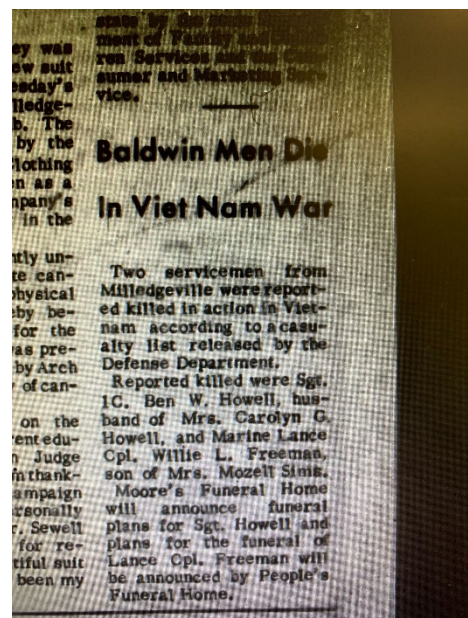
Time in Vietnam

Willie L. Freeman arrived in Vietnam sometime around March 27, 1968 with the 1st Battalion, 3rd Marines, 3rd Marine Division which is also known as the 3/3 Marines. These Marines were stationed in the battle-torn Quang Tri Province near the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) in the Northwest Region of South Vietnam near the Laos border, an area that saw many bloody battles over the year prior to Willie's arrival. The Quang Tri Province would also be the location of Willie's death, exactly two months after his tour start date.

Not much is known about the specifics of what Willie did during his short tenure in Vietnam. As a rifleman in a province that had seen intensified fighting over the year before his arrival with constant battles with Viet Cong soldiers who continuously launched offensive attacks, it's likely that Willie saw plenty of combat action during his time.

The fighting in Quang Tri Province had begun to noticeably increase as far back as July of 1967, as U.S. Marine General Charles C. Krulak was outspoken about the issues and loss with the U.S. waging war with the North in the DMZ, as he said this regarding the enemies purpose for fighting the US in the area:

To get us as near to his weapons and to his forces as possible, drench us with high angle fire weapons, engage us in close and violent combat, accept willingly a substantial loss of



An excerpt from the Union Recorder reporting Freeman's death on June 6, 1967

life for the opportunity to kill a lesser number of our men, and to withdraw into his North Vietnam sanctuary to refurbish (Shulimson, 19).

Despite General Krulak's growing frustration with fighting the North Vietnamese Army in the DMZ, in September 1967, he rejected the notion of pulling troops out of the area to locations where they would be out of range from the constant artillery coming from the North. Instead of retreating and giving the enemy a major propaganda boost, or creating a political mess by invading North Vietnam and neighboring Laos, Krulak believed that on top of intensifying American airstrikes on the enemy just north of the DMZ, the best choice for the U.S. was to reinforce the 3rd Marine Division located in Quang Tri. While attacks from the North slowed during the Fall months of 1967, sometime in December they began to pick up again, and on January 31, Viet Cong forces launched what would become famously known as the Tet Offensive, with one of the major battles being the Battle of Quang Tri.

This battle would end in one of the most decisive military victories achieved by the allied forces during the Vietnam War, and would be over in only a matter of days. A month later, , Freeman would make it to the region as a Marine. While it is not certain what Freeman did during his time in Vietnam, Quang Tri Province, which hosted the strategically important Quang Tri City, was a constant target for Viet Cong forces. On May 27, 1968, Willie Lee Freeman would succumb to an explosion injury during battle and lose his life. He was awarded the Purple Heart for his service.



(Refugee Camp, Quang Tri Province, Spring 1968, From the William C. Reed Collection (COLL/5634) at the Archives Branch, Marine Corps History Division)

Post Vietnam

Just under a year after Willie's death, Private First Class Ronald L. Coker of the 1st Battalion, 3rd Marines received the Medal of Honor for his service in Vietnam. He received this Medal of Honor for conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty while serving as a Rifleman with Company M in action against enemy forces in the Republic of Vietnam. Ronald L. Coker was killed in combat on March 24, 1969.

Following the Tet Offensive, in the year 1969, the United States slowly started to withdraw troops from Vietnam and the surrounding Southeast Asia. Among the first to be notified of their standdown operations and eventual departure was 1st Battalion, 3rd Marines. This unit departed for the United States on Oct. 5, 1969. They arrived at Camp Pendleton in California later that month. On Nov. 18, 1969, it was reduced to zero strength and reestablished at Kaneohe Bay, Hawaii on Nov. 27, 1969. There they would join the 1st Marine Brigade. This

would bring the 1st Battalion, 3rd Marines' time in Vietnam to a close. Willie Lee Freeman died on May 27, 1968. Just a year following his death, his battalion departed Vietnam, bringing their conflict in Southeast Asia to an end.



Resources

Shulimson, J. (1997). *U.S. Marines in Vietnam: The defining year, 1968*. Washington, D.C.: History and Museums Division, Headquarters, U.S. Marine Corps.

“U.S. Marine Corps Records Search & Veteran Locator: TWS.” *U.S. Marine Corps Records Search & Veteran Locator | TWS, Together We Served*, marines.togetherweserved.com/usmc/servlet/tws.webapp.WebApp?cmd=UnitHistoryDetail&type=UnitHistory&ID=1407.