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Charles Albert Fraley

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Charles Albert Fraley
1948-1970

Joel White, Kevin Duer, Madison Miles



Figure 1: Charles Albert Fraley (vvmf.org)

Charles Albert Fraley was born in Baldwin County on October 29, 1948. Unlike most, Charles has his mother's maiden name. His mother, Gladys Fraley was a local of Baldwin County being from the countryside of Milledgeville. It is likely that she did not graduate from high school and worked on the farm. Gladys was around 17 years old when her son Charles was born.

Charles was the son of Joseph Mullins, also a rural resident of Baldwin County. Mullins was a veteran of WWII. Mullins was born in 1929 and served when he was around 16. Right before his son Charles turned 2, Mullins was sentenced to life for murder. There are no records of the case. Mullins died in 1967, two years before his son passed away in Vietnam.

Entering the service via the regular military path, Fraley enlisted in the United States Marine Corps, and began his tour of duty in Vietnam on August 18, 1969. Fraley held the rank of Private First Class, and his military occupation/specialty was that of a Rifleman. He was attached to the 1st Marine Division, 2nd Battalion, 1st Marines, E Company, during which he partook in the Vietnam War/Counteroffensive Phase VII Campaign (1970-71). It was during his service in the war where Farley would ultimately lose his life on April 8th, 1970, from a hidden explosive device, in the Quang Nam province of South Vietnam. Charles is honored on

the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington DC, inscribed on Panel 12w, Line 107, and is buried in Bone Cemetery in Milledgeville, Georgia.

When Fraley passed, this clip was posted in the Union Recorder of Baldwin County. Fraley was not listed with the other dead, in fact this short article was stuck between the classifieds in the edition of April 16, 1970. There was no picture or further information. There is no record of finishing high school. At the time, Baldwin County was still deeply racist and there were no focuses on Black veterans at the time.

Stories - Wall of Faces

“Charlie walked point for 2nd Platoon, Echo Co.,2/1. I was the stand-in platoon commander for a week while the regular platoon commander, Lt. Kyle took R&R. That's how I came to know Charlie Fraley. He was a black Marine who had the biggest smile plastered across his face at some of the most unusual times...his nickname put on him at Camp Pendleton was 'Smiley' according to his buddies. I had some adventures with Echo 2 thanks to Charlie the week I stood in for Kyle. He managed to scare the bejesus out of me twice and be philosophical about it all at the same time. I had 1st Platoon, Echo in the Old Cemetery near Tra Khe on April 7, 1970 when Charlie, walking point as usual, was seriously injured by a boobytrap in the darkness. I heard later he had both his legs amputated at 1st Medical Battalion Hospital in Da Nang. We could hear his pain tearing into our hearts in the night. He died the next day, April 8. I cried from my gut that night for Charlie Fraley and the future he'd never have. I visited his gravesite in Milledgeville, GA. in 1993 and spoke with one of his many uncles about that night. I told him what a good Marine he was and how he saved lives by the competent and professional way he walked and was able to pick up on boobytraps before they could injure his fellow Marines. His paternal uncle and a good friend of his told me all he wanted to do was to better himself by being a Marine and seeing the world outside of Georgia. I worried the day Charlie died that he had given up on life when he saw that he'd lost both his legs. I wish he could've lived to see how much the world has changed since the 1970s. His mother's brother had lost a leg in a jeep accident in Okinawa in

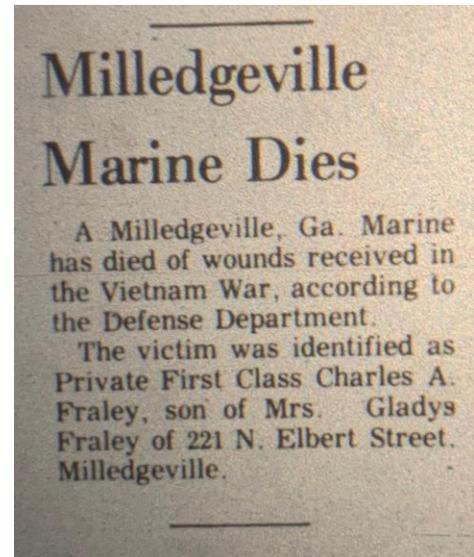


Figure 2: Union Recorder article of Fraley's death in Vietnam. (Union Recorder, April 16, 1970)

WW II and had managed to live a full life...I wish it'd been the same for Charlie. I will miss Charlie Fraley. He was one d--n good Marine."

- Dan Kellum, former 1stLt. 2/1, 2/26, Jan.1970-Jan.1971, Da Nang Vietnam.

An interview with Mr. Kellum helped bring even more insight into the personal life of



Figure 3: Fraley (far right) in Vietnam (vvmf.org)

PFC Charlie Fraley as he shared some personal experiences and interactions he had with the man during the brief time he was around him. The first interaction Kellum had with Fraley was his first night with Fraley's platoon. According to him, "Some black marines came over and asked him what he was doing with the people here when you could be with us, and he [Fraley] just said 'these are my people; my platoon-mates.'" Although his time in

close proximity with Fraley was short, Kellum has a lot of distinct memories with the Private, including one story where Fraley was supposed to professionally defuse what looked like a booby-trapped can on the ground, but instead, "He yanked the can up! And I'm going 'oh s--t Charlie what are you doing? You could have killed everybody including yourself!', and he [Fraley] said 'Well when it's your time to go you can't do anything about it.' and he laughed and thought it was funny. That was Charlie." When Mr. Kellum arrived in Baldwin to talk to the family after Charlie's death, he said his mother was too upset to talk, and while he was there he looked at the obituary for Fraley and was incensed when he realized there were only a couple sentences saying he had died in the paper. "I got all over the

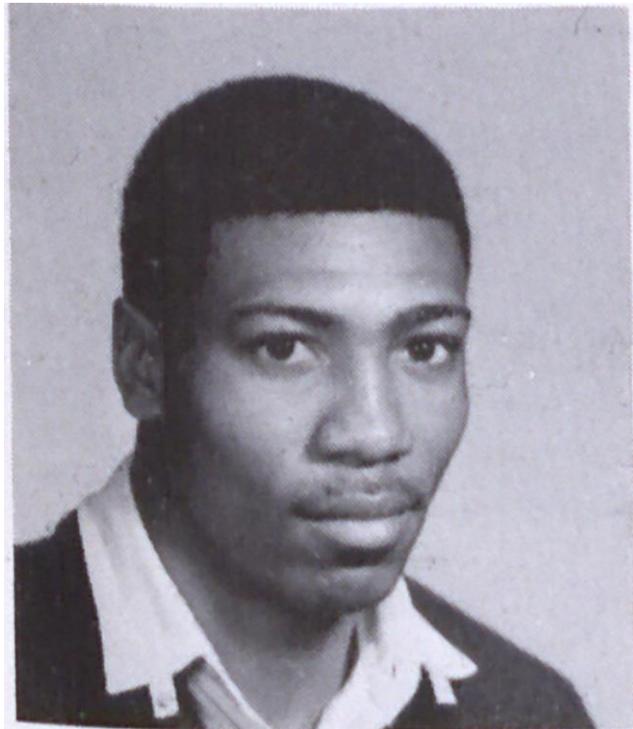


Figure 4: High School Photo of Fraley (vvmf.org)

librarian and that poor lady, I was sitting there just browbeating her about how this boy served over the season. He served this country. It doesn't matter if he's black, if he's white, or if he's Hispanic, he was one of our guys."

"Charley was my guardian angel from the time I first arrived to take over the platoon to the day he gave his life for his fellow Marines. Without his knowledge and courage as the Point Marine I would have walked into many untenable situations. He led our platoon into the most heavily laden mine area in all of Vietnam. It was the same area



Figure 5: Fraley's platoon in Vietnam (vvmf.org)

that the most famous Marine, Chesty Puller had his son cut down by a hidden explosive device. William Puller survived, but the ghosts of his traumatic experience eventually took his life. This was the type of warfare Charley had to carry on his shoulders everyday. Walking on eggshells waiting to hear that snap of trip wire or released pressure device ready to tear you apart; let alone facing direct enemy fire. How many of us did you save Charley Fraley--more than we will ever know. We are all grateful that we

served with the best Especially me Charley. After all these years you remain in my heart and fabric of my life. I will come see you soon someday to lead me again my brother Marine..... "

Your lieutenant, Jim Kyle. ..

Commendations:

- Purple Heart (Posthumously)
- National Defense Service Medal
- Vietnam Gallantry Cross Unit Citation
- Republic of Vietnam Campaign Medal
- Navy Presidential Unit Citation
- Combat Action Ribbon
- Vietnam Civil Actions Unit Citation
- Vietnam Service Meal
- Navy Meritorious Unit Commendation
- Navy Unit Commendation

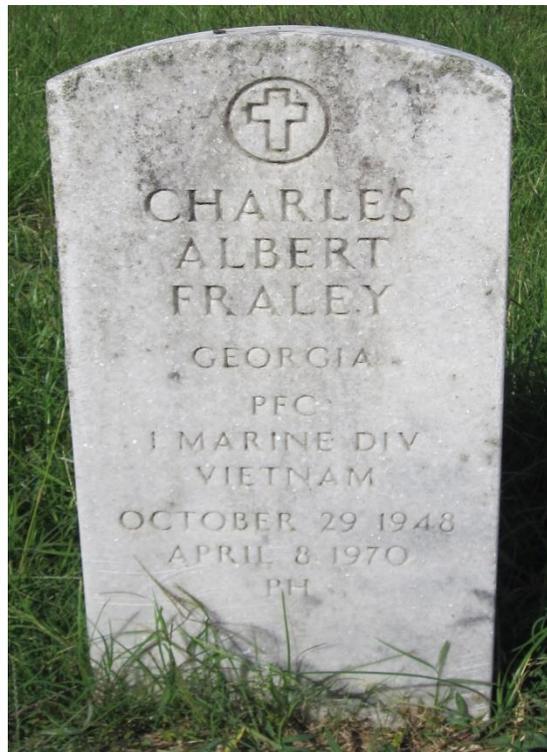


Figure 6: Fraley's grave, Milledgeville GA (ancestry.com)

<https://search.ancestrylibrary.com/cgi-bin/sse.dll?indiv=1&dbid=3056&h=577210&tid=&pid=&queryId=2bb4fbf50cebe8819b576b31cb25c4b1&usePUB=true& phsrc=FM45& phstart=successSource>

<https://www.ancestrylibrary.com/discoveryui-content/view/31565813:60525?tid=&pid=&queryId=ea94f2464645b2bd27b9a8efe47a4a4e& phsrc=FM50& phstart=successSource>

<https://www.vvmf.org/Wall-of-Faces/16960/CHARLES-A-FRALEY/>

<https://search.ancestrylibrary.com/cgi-bin/sse.dll?indiv=1&dbid=3095&h=110562&tid=&pid=&queryId=ea94f2464645b2bd27b9a8efe47a4a4e&usePUB=true& phsrc=FM52& phstart=successSource>

<https://www.fold3.com/page/631182394/charles-albert-fraley/photos>