

# Now & Then in Ripon ... Looking back with the Ripon Historical Society

## Remembering those from Ripon lost in the Vietnam War

By Pat Grahn

Celebrated on the last Monday of May, Memorial Day originally was known as "Decoration Day." This day was set aside after the Civil War to decorate the graves of soldiers who had died in the war. In 1967, Congress formally changed the commemoration's name to "Memorial Day." In 1971, Memorial Day became a federal holiday honoring all those who have died while serving in the United States military.

This Memorial Day, the Ripon Historical Society honors those who died in service to their country during the Vietnam War. The Wisconsin Historical Society states that "The Vietnam War was the longest, most expensive war in American history. More than 58,000 Americans died and more than 300,000 were wounded. The United States entered the war incrementally between 1950 and 1965, when President Lyndon Johnson began bombing North Vietnam and sent U.S. Marines to defend South Vietnam."

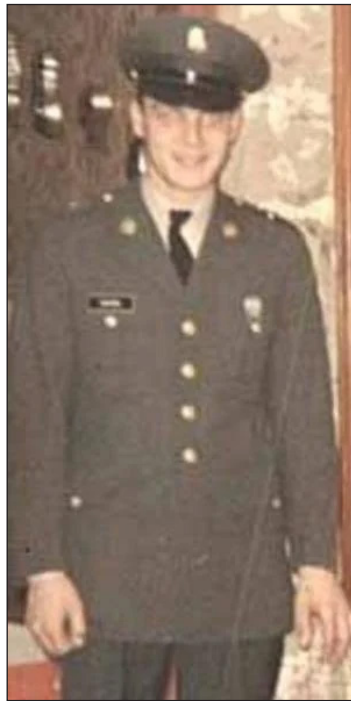
The state historical society also noted that "More than 57,000 Wisconsinites served in Southeast Asia; 1,239 never returned. The average American

soldier in Vietnam was 19 years old. In World War II, the average had been 26. GIs who served in Vietnam also came disproportionately from rural and urban working-class backgrounds. Because the Army had a policy of rotating servicemen into Vietnam for a year at a time, soldiers returned home individually; the comradery of military units in earlier wars was gone."

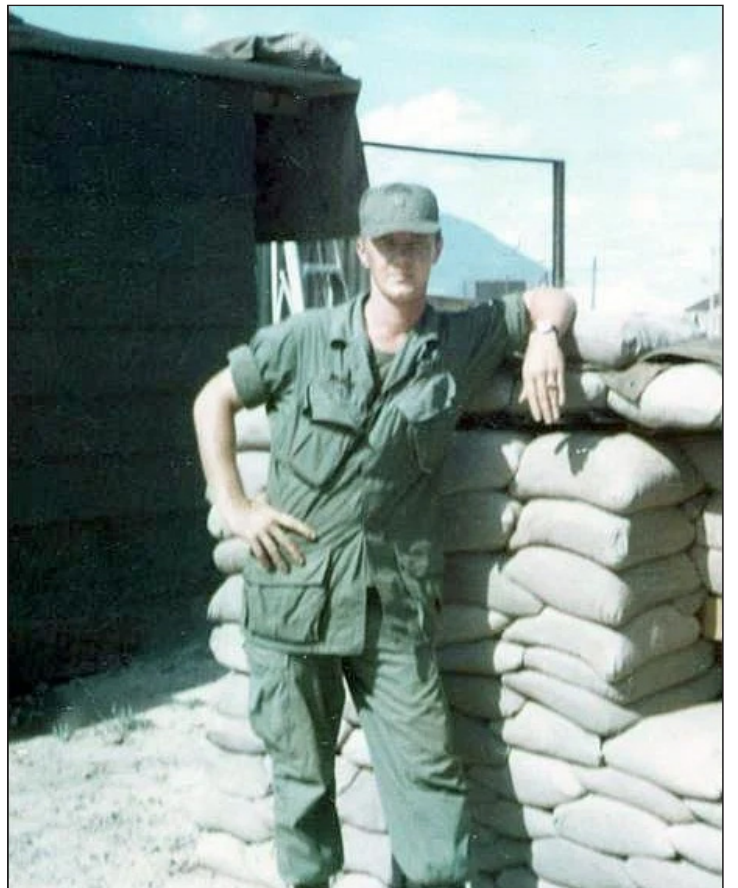
The city of Ripon is credited with two Vietnam deaths. The first was Daniel Kasten (1944-1967). Kasten graduated from Brandon High School, was drafted into the Army in November 1965 and sent to Vietnam in July 1966. Ten months later, on May 7, 1967, he was killed at age 22 when the vehicle in which he was riding struck a land mine. He is buried in St. Patrick's Cemetery in Ripon.

There only is one known photograph of Kasten in his military uniform, which is not very clear. The Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund Wall of Faces, as well as other Vietnam Veterans groups are looking for a better-quality photo of Kasten. If you have a photograph of Kasten in uniform, contact the Ripon Historical Society.

The second Vietnam-related death listed from Ripon was



**THE FIRST PERSON** from Ripon to die in the Vietnam War was Daniel Kasten (1944-1967). Kasten was drafted into the Army in November 1965, sent to Vietnam in July 1966 and died 10 months later. The Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund Wall of Faces, as well as other Vietnam Veterans groups are looking for a better quality of photo of Kasten. *Find A Grave photo*



**RONALD REILLY (1937-1970)** grew up in Brandon and lived in Ripon for a short time. He enlisted and served more than a decade in the Army, doing two tours of duty in Vietnam. Reilly died of issues unrelated to combat and there is a book written about his time and death in Vietnam by his brother, Thomas Reilly, titled "Next of Kin, A Brother's Journey to Wartime Vietnam." *submitted photo*



**RIPON COLLEGE'S WAR** memorial, found on Seward Street, commemorates the alumni who gave their lives in service to their country from World War I onward. It lists 10 alumni who died in the Vietnam War and their class year. *Ripon College photo*

Ronald Reilly (1937-1970). Reilly grew up in Brandon, graduated from Brandon High School in 1956 and lived in Ripon for a short time. He enlisted and served more than a decade in the Army, was stationed in Germany for two years, the Philippines for two years and had two tours of duty in Vietnam.

Reilly was the recipient of the Bronze Star for meritorious achievement in ground operations against hostile forces, two Purple Hearts and several battle ribbons issued by the government of South Vietnam.

Reilly died of issues unrelated to combat and there is a book written about his time and death in Vietnam by his brother, Thomas Reilly, titled "Next of Kin, A Brother's Journey to Wartime Vietnam." The Ripon Historical Society houses one of Reilly's Vietnam fatigue uniforms.

There was no coverage in

the *Ripon Commonwealth Press* about these two Vietnam deaths except for their obituaries found on back pages of the paper.

Ripon College has a war memorial on the campus found on Seward Street, which commemorates Ripon College alumni who gave their lives in service to their country from World War I onward. This memorial lists 10 alumni who died in the Vietnam War and their class year: Robert W. Brownlee, 1951 (MIA); William M. Church, 1949; Peter C. Ferguson, 1967; Kent Hayward, 1963; Karl F. Lange, 1952; Rodney J. Lawson, 1953; William J. Lyons, 1952; Clifford O. Mignerey, 1966; Thomas W. Newman, 1967; and Rick L. Scott, 1971.

The Vietnam War was not a popular war and there were many war protests, especially on college campuses. Antiwar sentiment was high across American and Vietnam War veterans

were not always treated with respect or kindness when they returned to America.

America withdrew forces from Vietnam in January 1973. The *Commonwealth Press* stated in an article published Jan. 31, 1973: "This Vietnam War was just too puzzling and tiring for anyone to want to shout about it being finished. America just wanted to rest this week."

The Vietnam War officially ended April 30, 1975 with the fall of Saigon and the surrender of South Vietnam to North Vietnamese forces.

*The Ripon Historical Society is the oldest continually operating historical society in Wisconsin. It is open Fridays and Saturdays 10 a.m. to 1 p.m.*

*For more information, visit [www.riponhistory.org](http://www.riponhistory.org), [facebook.com/riponhistoricalsociety](https://www.facebook.com/riponhistoricalsociety) or [instagram.com/riponhistoricalsociety/](https://www.instagram.com/riponhistoricalsociety/).*

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