

IMAGES

...THEN AND NOW

From the Indian Hill Historical Society



**Buckingham Lodge
1861**

The 25th Anniversary of the Weaver Memorial

In May 1996, the Richard Michael Weaver Memorial was dedicated at Indian Hill High School. It commemorated the only graduate of the school who died in the Vietnam War.

A member of the Class of 1967, Richard moved with his elderly parents to Camp Dennison at age five. A freckle faced redhead who loved the outdoors, he became friendly with the neighboring Buechner family, and was mentored by their father, World War II Marine Hank Buechner. In high school, at 6'3" 200 pounds, Richard was on the football, track, and wrestling teams. One classmate described him as "easily liked, funny, determined, and a friend to everyone". After graduation, he enlisted in the Marines.

PFC Weaver trained as an infantryman in California as the Vietnam War escalated. He was sent there and was "in country" from January through May 20, 1968. The TET offensive (the heaviest and one of the largest military campaigns of the war) began and his Company A, 1st Battalion, 5th Marines fought on a daily basis. During the Battle of Hue (a month-long engagement), he was wounded, and then wounded again three days later. This was later described as the bloodiest battle of the Vietnam War. Richard received a Purple Heart and Gold Star for his meritorious service and wounds in February, only a month after his tour of duty started.



Weaver, known to fellow Marines as "Big Red" volunteered to be an M60 machine gunner in March, when it was common knowledge that the life expectancy of an M60 gunner was 7 ½ seconds after a firefight began, because the enemy aimed at the muzzle flash of the gun. Weaver and his assistant gunner outlasted these odds on many occasions. His unit encountered the Viet Cong foe in more than fifty firefights during the time Weaver was in Vietnam. Richard was said to always lead the way – first to start and last to stop firing.

Big Red helped rookie Marines. He advised them to blacken their dog tags and put them in their bootlaces, so the metal didn't glint; he cautioned them never to smoke cigarettes at night; he showed them how to bend hand grenade pins down to prevent snags and accidental detonation. A fellow Marine stated, "Richard Weaver was only nineteen when he guided me through the jaws of death... which he was not able to escape."

At the Battle of Truoi River in March 1968, Weaver held his ground and performed gallantly. Throughout April and May he was in constant contact with the opposing forces as his battalion swept the countryside uprooting pockets of insurgents. In the early morning of May 20, the enemy ambushed the Marines near Phu Loc, and Weaver was fatally wounded while firing his M60. His devotion to duty earned him numerous medals and awards. The young Marine was buried at Camp Dennison's Waldschmidt Cemetery. His name appears on the Vietnam Memorial wall in Washington, D.C.

Years later, at an IHHS reunion, a group of alumni decided to create a local memorial for their schoolmate, who had died just 11 months after his high school graduation. Nick Bagnoli, Lon Deckard, and Bill Weidemann spearheaded efforts to fund the structure which recognized Richard's service to his country. Many of Weaver's Marine friends contributed and wrote "Semper Paratus" on their donated checks. Those who had been in Vietnam with him provided insight into his character, valor, and courage. The book *Guns Up* featured Big Red in a central role. One Marine said, "He was tough, competent, showed great courage, and wanted to help others." Another declared, "It took a lot of guts – or craziness- to do it (become a gunner). Red never hesitated to pull the trigger."

The impressive dedication ceremony of the Weaver Memorial took place exactly 28 years after he died. A four-foot-tall permanent brick monument was installed in front of Indian Hill High School. It has a square bronze plaque, lists his medals, and has a replica of Weaver's name as carved on the national Vietnam Memorial. It honors a brave young man who made the ultimate sacrifice for his country. It still stands there and is a tribute to a local hero and patriot.



Richard with an M60