

How FSB PACE Was Named

By Tom Colaiezzi

I was a Fire Direction Officer in C Battery, 2nd Battalion/32nd Artillery from October, 1970 to April, 1971. Early in 1971, C Battery occupied Fire Support Base Lanyard on the Cambodian border in Tay Ninh Province. Conditions at Lanyard were not very good, especially during the rainy season when most of the fire base was under a layer of mud. In late February a company from the 31st Engineers came out to build us a new “state of the art” fire base. The Engineers stayed at Lanyard while they built the new fire base just across the road.

One of the Engineer’s platoon leaders was 1st Lieutenant Gary L. Pace. I got to know Gary fairly well in a short period of time. Gary was from South Carolina and his wife Pat was from Lancaster PA, just a short distance from my home town of Philadelphia. After dinner Gary would come over to our side of the fire base and join in our nightly pinochle game. On the night of March 29th our pinochle game was interrupted when the east side of the fire base opened fire in response to a trip flare going off near the tree line. We found out later that night that the trip flare was set off by part of an NVA sapper squad. Six of the sappers survived our fire and in the early morning hours of March 30th they hit Lanyard under the cover of a mortar attack.



A captured member of the sapper squad later told us their plan was to enter Lanyard from the side of the fire base occupied by an ARVN Infantry company that was supposed to be our defense. However, when the NVA mortar fire started falling in their path they moved up the perimeter of the fire base and entered in the area occupied by the engineers. Almost immediately they were caught in a maze of cyclone fencing (RPG screen) and they started throwing satchel charges and firing at the engineers.

About nine engineers were wounded and three of them were laying helpless out in the open. Fearing that his men were open targets, Gary Pace put his dedication to his men above his own safety and went to their aid. In the process, Gary was hit with small arms fire from the sappers and was killed instantly. By firing at Gary, the sappers gave away their position and the engineers quickly eliminated them before they could do further damage. Gary was the only American soldier killed in that attack on Lanyard. If not for his efforts, the three wounded engineers and many others would surely have died.

Gary was not part of the 32nd Artillery, but his name became a part of our history. After his death it was decided that the new fire base would be named FSB Pace in Gary’s honor. Gary made the ultimate sacrifice and gave honor to his oath as an Officer by putting the well-being of his men above all else. First Lieutenant Gary L. Pace was awarded the Silver Star, posthumously.

I never saw the completed Fire Base Pace. Two weeks after Gary was killed, I was wounded and left Vietnam. In April 2003, 32 years after Gary was killed I had the privilege to meet Pat Pace, Gary’s widow. This article is dedicated to Pat for the pain she endured. Gary and his wife Pat epitomize the motto of the 32nd Artillery - “Proud Americans.”

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