

**2022 – Remembering a hero named Bill Crusie – 53 years later
(May 6, 1948 – June 6, 1969)**

***VIRTUAL VIETNAM VETERANS WALL OF FACES
POSTED ON 8/15/03 - BY NORM BERGSMAN***

I would like to hear from you if you knew William Crusie. Served with him, or family, or friend?
I served with Bill and was with him the night he died. Drop me a note...Norm

<https://www.vvmf.org/Wall-of-Faces/11338/WILLIAM-M-CRUSIE-JR/>



By KEN CERINO, Wappingers Historical Society

June 6, 2022 marks the 78th Anniversary of one of the biggest events in world history, the Allied invasion of Normandy during World War II (better known as D-Day).

There was another significant event that took place that day, which I will never forget.

Fifty-three years ago, on June 6, 1969 my cousin **Bill Crusie** of Wappingers Falls, NY was killed on a remote battlefield 8,772 miles from home in Vietnam. He was 21 years old.

Bill and two other soldiers were on patrol and only 50 meters from returning safely back to their unit at Fire Support Base (FSB) Crook in Tay Ninh Province when mortars fell around them.

Bill didn't make it!

I was a senior in high school when our family received the awful news. We heard that Bill died in a mortar attack, but over the years I wondered about the exact circumstances surrounding his death.

Nine years ago, I noticed a post that Norm Bergsma wrote (see top of page one) on Bill's Virtual Veterans Wall of Faces page. Norm was with Bill the night he was killed and was interested in hearing from anyone who knew him.

I found Norm's telephone number and contacted him at his home in Burlington, WA. After some initial hesitation, he agreed to talk about Bill, the battle at FSB Crook, and the impact Bill had on his life. Norm sent three lengthy emails describing how he met Bill during the processing period in Vietnam and how they made their way to FSB Crook. He requested that the focus of any story remain on Bill.

A little more than a year later Norm's own journey came to an end when he died of a heart attack on July 27, 2014 at the age of 65.

Star Athlete

William Michael Crusie Jr. was born on May 6, 1948, the middle child of **William** and **Mary DiRocco Crusie**. Bill had an older sister **Mary Ann** and younger brother **Ken**.

Our mothers were second cousins who were more like sisters. They lived near one another in the Village of Wappingers Falls and did a lot of things together. I knew Bill, but never hung out with him because of the three-year difference in our ages.

Bill was a tall, good-looking guy with a beautiful girlfriend named Pam who was a cheerleader. He was an All-Dutchess County Scholastic League (DCSL) basketball and football selection at Roy C. Ketcham High School who was later inducted into the Wappingers Central School District (WCSD) Thomas Macrini Sports Hall of Fame.

As a senior in 1965, Bill helped Wappingers compile a 7-0-1 record and the school's first Dutchess County Scholastic League (DCSL) football title in 14 years.



Bill Crusie is in the front row, wearing number 65

The big game that season was a stunning 20-19 victory over previously unbeaten Arlington. Trailing 19-13 in the fourth quarter, Karl Lalonde of Wappingers caught a pass from Jim Ruf and scampered 69 yards for a touchdown with four minutes left. Randy Scott ran in for what proved to be the deciding point. Bill played a guard position on both those plays.

In the final minute Lalonde, now playing defensive back, saved an Arlington touchdown with a tackle on the two-yard line. Bill, now on the defensive line, and his teammates came up with a clutch goal-line stand for the win. The following week Wappingers defeated Our Lady of Lourdes of Poughkeepsie 27-0 under the lights for the DCSL crown.

Bill graduated from Wappingers in 1966 and Dutchess Community College in nearby Poughkeepsie, NY in 1968. He wanted to serve his country, so he enlisted in the Army in October of 1968. Bill and Pam decided to get married when he returned home.

The Battle at FSB Crook

After completing his basic training at Fort Dix in New Jersey, Private First-Class Bill Crusie Jr. was sent to Vietnam and became a member of the 3rd Battalion, 25th Infantry Division. It was during the processing period that he met Norm Bergsma. The two quickly became friends.

The situation in Vietnam was changing quickly when Bill arrived in the county on March 26, 1969.

Richard M. Nixon was the President of the United States succeeding **Lyndon Johnson**. By April there were over a half million U.S. military personnel stationed in the country. A controversial battle at Hamburger Hill near the Laotian border in May resulted in more negative feelings towards the war.

Just outside Tay Ninh City, not far from the Cambodian border, the U.S. Army established Fire Support Base Crook in the jungle. Heavily armed, its purpose was to provide artillery support throughout the area.

“Fire Support Base Crook was built to disrupt the North Vietnamese Army’s supply route between Cambodia and the South Vietnam capital city of Saigon,” wrote Norm in one of his emails. “It was not long before the base came under enemy attack. Detection devices placed in the surrounding jungle signaled movement of the NVA.”

During the early morning hours of Friday, June 6, the NVA started the attack.

An Associated Press story that appeared on June 8, 1969, reported that “the attacks on the base have been by far the largest in last year’s series of enemy offensive operations in South Vietnam.” Several of the soldiers in the Viet Cong’s 9th Division were 14 and 15-year-olds.

Norm described how Bill was among three soldiers who “were assigned to the listening post that night. The listening post was just a three-man foxhole about 50 meters outside the base berm line. When you are out there, it feels like 50 miles. The idea I suppose is that you will be able to hear better at night outside the base.

“When the mortar barrage began, the people in the listening post kept their heads down. When there was a break in the barrage, they made a run for the berm line. Somewhere between the listening post and the berm, they were hit.

“By the time they got to the berm, they were dragging Bill. They pulled him to safety and started returning fire. Another soldier and I grabbed Bill and dragged him through the mud toward the center of the base where the Medics bunker was located,” Norm recalled.

As the NVA tried to penetrate the wire, Fire Base soldiers utilized machine guns, artillery guns, their own mortars, and soon thereafter, air support from helicopters and fighter jets to thwart the attack.

After two nights of fighting, enemy casualties numbered approximately 400.

Bill was the only U.S. soldier to die in the attack.

Norm mentioned that Bill’s actions and those of his fellow soldiers saved a lot of American lives.

For his bravery, Bill received several medals, including the Silver (the third highest military decoration for valor) and Bronze Stars, and the Purple Heart.

Major Joseph Hacia of Wethersfield, CT was the Battalion's Commanding Officer. He died in 2004 at the age of 66.

FSB Crook is now farmland just outside Tay Ninh – the coordinates are 11.39N, 105.971E on Google Earth.

A Special Brother

Ken Crusie was only eight years old when his brother died. As he stated, Bill's death devastated his entire family.

"I was in fourth grade at St. Mary's School in the Village of Wappingers Falls when **Msgr. (Charles) Brennan** knocked on the door and asked to see me outside the class. He told me my brother was killed in action in Vietnam. I started to cry and he took me home to be with my parents.

"Despite the 13-year difference in our ages, I have fond memories of my brother. I watched him play basketball and football in high school. He was my hero. He bought me boxing gloves and we would fight in our living room. I played basketball with him and his friends in our driveway. When he went to Fort Dix, my family went to visit him and he would give me Army clothing to wear," said Crusie whose son **Gregory** is a U.S. Navy veteran.

After Bill's death, his parents dedicated the remainder of their lives doing volunteer work for several Veterans organizations. Both Mary and Bill, Sr. spent considerable time at the local Castle Point Veterans Administration Medical Center in Wappingers Falls.

Mary became a Gold Star Mother for her work with the organization that supports mothers who lost children in service to our country. For over 25 years, she also packaged and delivered Meals on Wheels. Mary was my mother's Matron of Honor at her wedding in 1946.

Mary met **General William Westmoreland** at a Gold Star event at West Point, NY and had the honor of placing a wreath at Arlington National Cemetery at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier in Washington, DC.

The Crusie's were married for 53 years with Bill Sr. passing away in 2003 and Mary on June 8, 2012 at the age of 92. Ironically, it was on June 8, 1969 (two days after Bill was killed) that President Nixon announced the withdrawal of 25,000 troops from Vietnam.



Bill Crusie is buried with his parents in St. Mary's Cemetery in Wappingers Falls, NY.

Two other Village of Wappingers Falls natives, Marine pilot Capt. **Joseph MacDonald** and Marine Lance Corporal **Wayne A. Whiteley**, were also killed in Vietnam. Town of Wappinger resident Army **Major Daniel Martz** was the first Dutchess County resident to die in Vietnam in 1966.

In 1985, Village officials dedicated a memorial Gazebo in Bill's honor, just a short distance from where he grew up on Park Street. The 43rd Annual MacDonald & Crusie Memorial Road Races will take in in the Village on Saturday, June 4, 2022.

Several years ago, my wife Kelly and I visited the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Wall in Washington, DC.

We found Bill's name on Panel 23W, Row 84, and wiped away tears as we stared at the black granite wall.

More than 58,000 soldiers died in the Vietnam conflict.

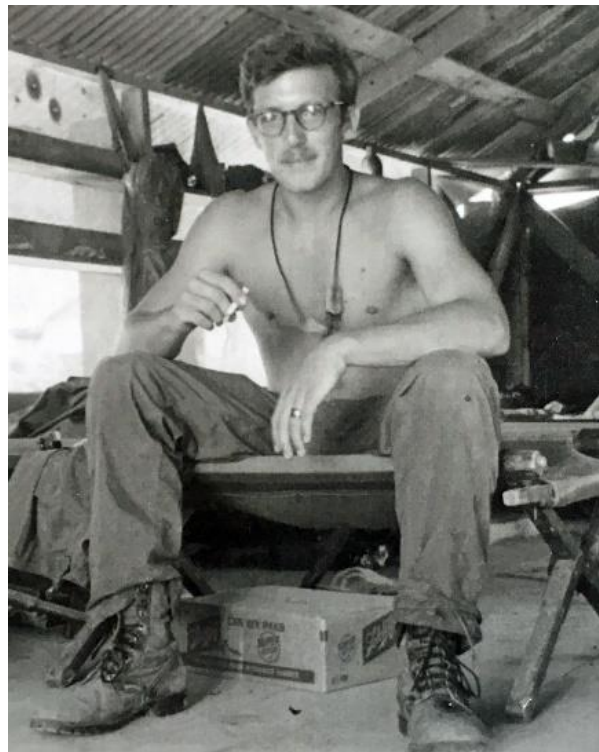
Never forgotten and thank you

Life was never the same for **Norman "Monty" Bergsma** after the battle at FSB Crook! He spent nine more months in the Vietnam before heading back stateside.

"There were a lot of close calls, but finally my tour was up and I went home in one piece," he said.

Norm finished his final six months of duty in Fort Hood, Texas.

Like many survivors Norm suffered from post-traumatic stress disorder and survivor's guilt.



“The whole time a soldier is at war he dreams about the day he will return home,” he stated.

“When I finally got home, I wasn’t prepared for the bad reception at the airport. The war protest movement had become open season (on returnees). There was no work at home and I had a new family to support. I stayed in school because of the GI Bill and we struggled along for several years.”

Norm and his wife **Kathy** (whom he met in the ninth grade) persevered raising four children. They used their strong Christian faith to help other veterans cope with their problems.

Returning home one night from a Vietnam Veterans group meeting, Norm heard a voice.

“The voice said, ‘I want you to paint!’ What am I going to paint?” asked Norm “The voice said, ‘I will show you what to paint.’ Well, not being in the habit of hearing voices I began to wonder if maybe I was going crazy after all.

“During the following week I sort of laughed it off and life went on. It had me thinking though. I had studied art in college and had painted for several years after. I was technically pretty good but had nothing of consequences to show for it, so it kind of got lost among raising kids and running a business. But now I was thinking about it ever since that evening on the road and the voice.

“I decided to buy some paints and stretched some canvas and set up an area in the basement as a studio. After all the preparations were completed, I sat back and waited to hear the voice. It never came.”

Norm’s first painting was a picture of his buddies together (see below) again in the jungles of Vietnam. He began to paint in earnest and showed several of his art pieces to members of his support group.



Norm became an accomplished painter and presented his artwork at the Vietnam Veterans of America Convention. What followed were invitations to high schools and colleges to talk about his war experience.

Painting helped free Norm from his bad memories.

Norm and Kathy also teamed together to start a ministry that provided assistance and support to veterans at conferences, seminars, and at campouts. They became friends with **Chuck** and **Athena Dean** and connected with a similar organization named Point Man Ministry.

Norm and Kathy also were co-owners of the American Veterans Traveling Tribute, visiting over 150 cities in the country. At every stop they would display Norm’s artwork and talk to hundreds of veterans and their families.

Norm would find Bill’s name on the Wall, tell him where they were, and what was going on.



In his final years Norm did volunteer work for the Forest Service in Washington maintaining trails.

Being in the fresh mountain air made him feel good.

Norm and Bill knew each another for only a short time, but developed a special bond that remained with Norm his entire life.

“Bill was an inspiration to me. His death was one of those defining moments in my life that is hard to explain. Bill just stood out among the people over there. Bill was a great guy and it seemed so unfair that he would be the one to die that night.”

Remembering Bill and Norm

It was an honor to speak with Norm about Bill and that fateful night over a half century ago.

It put closure to something I had wondered about for a long time.

It also helped Norm as well, according to his wife Kathy.

“I watched all the suffering and turmoil he went through all those years,” she said recently. “Speaking with you and Bill’s brother Ken put a lot of things to rest for Norm. The struggle was over. He was free.”

I think of Bill and Norm every day and I hope you will as well.

The war is long over for these two heroes, but we must never forget them and all the others who died after making the ultimate sacrifice so we can enjoy our freedom.

We also thank past and present members of our military for their service to our nation.

It took a long time, but it is gratifying to finally see the appreciation and support we now give our veterans.

That’s why telling the stories of **Bill Crusie** and **Norm Bergsma** are so important!

They deserve it!!!