

# Estill County's Fallen: The 50th Anniversary of a Vietnam casualty



W/O Harrell Samuel Mefford

The Kentucky Vietnam Veterans Memorial overlooks the Capitol in Frankfort and honors 1105 Kentuckians who were killed while serving in the Vietnam Conflict, including Estill Countians Harold Samuel Mefford and Farris Richardson. Each of their names is inscribed on the blue-gray memorial, and the pointer of a huge sundial touches each veteran's name on the anniversary of his death. The sundial pointed at Mefford's name this past Saturday, June 29, 2019, the 50th anniversary of his death.

Saturday, June 29, 2019 was a beautiful day in Kentucky and the sunlight lit up nearly everything in the state. So, it's likely it was shining on the hill overlooking the Capitol at the Kentucky Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Frankfort, Kentucky for the huge sundial to cast its shadow on the name of Warrant Officer Harrell Samuel Mefford, one of two Estill County soldiers who died in the Vietnam Conflict.

The Memorial honors the 125,000 Kentuckians who served this nation so courageously and unselfishly during the Vietnam era (1962-1975). More than 58,000 Americans gave their lives during the conflict and among that number are 1105 Kentuckians including the two from Estill County that are listed on the Memorial.

The blue-gray granite plaza of the Memorial contains the names of each Kentucky veteran who died in Vietnam with the date of their death. Each name is precisely located so the shadow of the sundial's pointer touches on the veteran's name on the anniversary of his death. Mefford's name was placed on the Memorial when it was completed in fall 1988 so the sundial's shadow fell over his name on Saturday for the 30th time since its construction, commemorating the 50th anniversary of his death on June 29th, 1969.



Sgt. Farris L. Richardson

The other Estill Countian, Sgt. Farris L. Richardson's name was originally omitted from the memo-

rial. He served with the 101st ABN Division and was killed on March 21, 1968. Farris was born and lived in Estill County through his junior year of high school before moving to Cincinnati, Ohio, where he graduated. He joined the Army there and was listed as an Ohio casualty although he was buried in Irvine. A classmate, Harold Hall, pointed out the omission from among Kentucky casualties and Richardson was added as the 1105th casualty at the Memorial on Veterans Day in 2016.

Harrell Samuel Mefford was born December 5, 1949 in Irvine, Kentucky, the son of Anna Kaze Mefford. She later re-married, to Gordon Stone who was from the Hargett community, and Mefford grew up on the Winchester Road near Hargett and at Cressy. Despite his name at birth, most people knew him as "Sammy Stone" from his middle name and the last name of his stepfather. Many of his friends and neighbors never knew his true name until after his death. A close friend from high school, Harold Wayne Warner, said he was even called Sammy Stone at school.

The Stone family originally lived just north of the Hargett School on the Winchester Road (KY-89) until some time in the mid-60s when their home and a nearby gas station and outbuildings burned to the ground.

They may have stayed with others temporarily as they spent at least one night with the Tracy and Irene Patrick family on Cressy Road. Gordon and Anne Stone had at least two more sons younger than Sammy by then, and although the Patricks had a fairly large frame house, they had six kids of their own. Delores Patrick Rowland remembered children sleeping on the the floor and on couches of the living room that night. But before bedtime, each member of the families took a bath in the same "wash tub" in the smoke house, since there was no indoor plumbing. One by one the big tub was used, first by the younger children; then by the women and finally by the older boys and men.

The Stones eventually moved into the second floor of the historic store building at Cressy where they slept above one or more classic cars parked in the garage area under-

neath. They stayed there for several years. Gordon hauled water for people and often used his truck in winter while pulling a massive railroad bridge timber to clear the roads of deep snow.

They eventually built a block house at their former home's location and used part of it as a store for awhile. A block garage building was built later where Sunoco gas was sold by Gordon into the 70's.

Sammy attended Hargett Elementary for all eight years; then went on to Estill County High School where he became friends with Warner. Although Sammie and Harold Wayne attended school together for all 8 years at Hargett, Harold Wayne said they didn't become friends until they got to high school. They were put in Algebra class together where Harold Wayne said the Algebra teacher, Jessie Floyd Abney, had a "unique way of teaching." He put the smarter students and the slow-achieving students together so the smarter ones could help the others. He said Sammie was really smart while he struggled with Algebra. Harold and Sammy were teamed together and eventually became great friends. He said Sammy was small and seemed frail and was very smart but was always picked on. Harold Wayne was one of the larger students, and he said "after we got to be buddies, Sammy didn't get picked on anymore." He recalls staying overnight with the Stones. He said Gordon and Anne were really nice people.

Labon Richardson said "while in high school, I remember Harrell telling me he wanted to have a farm and raise cattle." Sammy's stepfather, Gordon Stone farmed on what is now the Hargett-Parvin Road. Warner recalled that Sammie designed a barn built there so that it was easy to feed cattle that were on the ground level from a second floor where hay and feed were stored.

Sammy attended Berea College where he was pictured as a member of the Speech Club in 1967. He was not considered by many to be most suited for military since he was small and thin, but after entering the Army, he achieved the rank of Warrant Officer with a specialty of Helicopter Pilot. Warner said Sammy was so smart, "I'm not surprised that

he became a pilot." He began his tour on April 6, 1969, and died in a crash on June 29, 1969.

A lot of conflicting reports have been known of the actual incident, but a summary of the crash tells it this way.

Aircraft 641 was readied and armed for a scout mission with Mefford as the pilot along with a crew chief, door gunner and observer/door gunner. They were armed with three side arms and an M-60 machine gun along with other armaments. The aircraft carried 120 pounds of fuel. They were given clearance at 0754 hours and "within one to two minutes after departure, a loud noise was heard in the aircraft." The pilot called the tower and declared an emergency, and a loud noise was heard in the transmission area during the approach. The pilot performed what seemed like a normal approach and instructed the crew to "hang on tight." The aircraft impacted the ground and began to turn to the left. After the crew exited the craft to the left, Mefford shut down the battery and closed the throttle. He exited to the right "in great haste" and was struck by the main rotor blade and thrown about 15 feet where he died of injuries received. Mefford was credited with having gotten all of his crew out of the aircraft safely. Cause of the crash was listed as tail rotor failure. He was buried on a hill overlooking his stepfather's farm on Hargett-Parvin Road.

Among the medals that Mefford was eligible for included the Combat Infantryman Badge, United States Aviator Badge, National Defense Service Medal, Vietnam Campaign Medal, Vietnam Service Medal, Distinguished Unit Citation, Vietnam Gallantry Cross Unit Citation, and the Good Conduct Medal

All of his high school classmates had good things to say about Mefford. Jeanne Crowe said, "Went to school with Sammie! Such a super young man!" Brenda Neal remarked "Thank you for your service, got to know you in school." Bob Peterson said, "Yes, we lost people we grew up with and I am fortunate that my name is not on the wall." Jeanette Rogers Combs says, "I remember you well from school Harrell, and I honor you for your service."



Harrell Samuel Mefford with the Berea College Speech Club. He is second from the left in the back row.

## 50th Anniversary on June 29, 2019



HARRELL SAMUEL MEFFORD is honored on Panel 21W, Line 34 of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial

Wall Name	HARRELL S MEFFORD
Date of Birth	12/5/1949
Date of Casualty	6/29/1969
Home of Record	IRVINE
County of Record	ESTILL COUNTY
State	KY
Branch of Service	ARMY
Rank	WO
Panel/Line	21W, 34
Casualty Province	TAY NINH

