

# Local & State

Monday, May 6, 2001

## Photo's 1,000 words are tale of local boy

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**D**ANBY — A neatly framed photograph stands out from the clutter on the walls of the Danby town clerk's office.

The photograph hangs as a quiet reminder of the price this small Vermont community paid in a war that ended nearly three decades ago.



Howard

The picture is of a U.S. military port on a beach along the South China Sea near the village of Sa Huynh in Vietnam. In the foreground is a sign that reads "Howard-Thompson Port."

The name Howard refers to a young Danby man, Harvey Howard, 20, who enlisted in the U.S. Army, served six months in Vietnam, and died as the result of a land mine explosion while helping to build the vital military port.

The second name, Thompson, refers to Howard's good friend, 18-year-old Wayland Kent Thompson of Texas, whose tour in Vietnam had lasted only



Photo by Sandy Switzer

**This view of a U.S. military port in Vietnam during the war hangs in the Danby town offices in honor of Harvey Howard of Danby, who was killed by a land mine.**

two months before he was killed.

According to John Boyle, an Army medic who served with the 19th Engineer Battalion, Howard had been assigned to the 137th Engineer Company, which was attached to the 19th Battalion.

The battalion was in charge of maintaining a major coastal highway, and the 137th supplied motorized equipment like bulldozers, cranes and front-end loaders for the work.

The port and highway were considered high-priority projects, essential to the supply effort for combat units in the area.

"Without supplies, no war — or, at the very least, troops suffered needless deprivation or increased risk," Boyle

said recently.

Howard, a heavy equipment operator, worked on the port project and helped repair the coastal highway. The road was enemy-controlled at night and subject to land mine explosions, snipers and ambushes both day and night, according to Boyle.

At about 7:30 p.m. on Oct. 16, 1967, Howard decided to join Thompson on a front-end loader for a 5-mile return trip to D Company, where some members of the 137th were staying while working on the project.

"It was a decision based on friendship that cost Harvey Howard his life," Boyle said.

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The seven vehicles in the convoy were approximately 2,000 yards from their destination when an anti-tank land mine exploded. The badly damaged single-seat loader provided little protection for the operator, Thompson, and outrider, Howard.

"I can say with certainty that they both died instantly without ever knowing what happened to them," Boyle said. "I arrived on the scene within 10 minutes of the event, organized the recovery of the bodies and stayed with them throughout the night, until a helicopter arrived the next morning to take them home."

The six other vehicles made it safely back to base camp. The 19th Battalion lost about 90 men in the two years the unit was in the area; Howard and Thompson were among the first killed.

Dedication of such sites to "killed-in-action" soldiers was common, according to Boyle, and the sign honoring the two young men has since been removed by the Vietnamese government.

The photograph on display in the Danby municipal building was taken by Larry Bose of Headquarters Company of the 19th Engineer Battalion, who sent a framed copy to town officials after Howard's death.

"I hope family and friends

of Harvey are proud that halfway around the world, a military port was dedicated to a brave soldier from the town of Danby, Vermont. May this picture serve as a reminder to his ultimate sacrifice to our country," Bose wrote in an accompanying letter.

As with any such casualty, there are survivors who may not be familiar with the names of villages in far-away lands or the importance of a military port during wartime.

They only know about a young man, in this case a brother who grew up on a farm in Danby and died while fighting in a war almost 35 years ago, two months shy of his 21st birthday.

Sisters Henrietta Walsh of Brandon and Connie Chamberlin of Randolph are the only surviving members of Howard's immediate family.

Their parents, Henry and Laurel Rickert Howard, died several years ago, as did another brother, Harland. Harvey Howard, his parents and brother all are buried in the Scottsville Cemetery in Danby.

"He was a fun kid to be around, and he liked to hunt and fish, and got a big deer on the last day of hunting when he was 17 years old," Chamberlin said.

She recalled that her brother, a Wallingford High School graduate, was eager to enlist in the military and took his Army physical on his 18th birthday.

"On the day he was to leave on the bus, our grandmother died," Chamberlin said. "It was a very upsetting time for him."

She said she remembered working as an aide at the Rutland hospital when a call came from the pastor of the Danby Congregational Church, relaying the news of her brother's death.

"I began to cry and my legs started shaking," she said.

Chamberlin said she eventually took a three-month leave from her job to tend to her distraught mother.

"He was killed in '67, and she died nine years later, but she was never the same again," she said.

Howard's father traveled to Texas to meet with the Thompson family a couple of years after his son's death.

"My father was kind of a reserved man, and he never expressed his feelings too much," Walsh said.

She said she believed the trip was part of the healing process for her father.

Chamberlin is now searching for an organization or museum that would like Howard's numerous medals, including his Bronze Star, a Gold Star and several letters written during his tour of duty. Boyle has offered his assistance.

"When I think of him, I remember his big brown eyes and black hair. He was such a cute baby, and I took care of him, almost like he was my own," Chamberlin said.



Harvey R. Howard  
Vermont  
1966