



John I. Higgins Jr. (1947 – 1967)

Eric Stevens

John Higgins Jr. was a well-rounded young man. He had so much to offer to this world and was shortchanged by a war called Vietnam. Let me tell you about this great individual whom I would have loved to meet.

John Jr. was born in Bayonne, New Jersey, on April 4, 1947, the only son and the middle child of a Navy family. The Higgins family settled in Chula Vista in 1962 in a house off Helix Ave. John graduated from Castle Park High School in 1965 and was a popular and outgoing Trojan. At High School, he was active as a photographer for the yearbook, a member of the Pep Club, the Castle Park Marching Band, the Dance Band and acted in a school play. He had lots of friends and was extremely loyal to them and to his family. He always lent a helping hand to anyone who needed it; he could never turn anyone down. John, like most students, knew what he wanted to do after high school. Like his father before him, he would join the Navy. John wanted to someday study to become a doctor. That fits---he always wanted to help the people around him. In August 1965, he enlisted in the military and joined the Fleet Marine Force in which he became an E-3 Hospital Corpsman. As soon as John completed his training, his unit was immediately sent to Vietnam.

John Higgins went home for his last leave before his departure. Once there he spent time talking to his parents and to his two sisters. John had a strange feeling in his heart that he wouldn't make it through the war. Therefore, he arranged for the disposition of his belongings and discussed his will with his family. John Higgins was only 20 years old when he said good-bye to his father, mother, and two sisters at March Air Force Base. On September 28, 1967 he boarded a plane never to see his loved ones again.

Once in Vietnam John Higgins' more noble traits were demonstrated in the depth of combat. On the morning of October 13, 1967, John's base-camp, located near the DMZ (Demilitarized Zone) was attacked by a Viet Cong mortar team. John, while treating one of his wounded military brothers, saw a mortar round about to hit nearby. He jumped on top of his fallen comrade, saving the life of another while losing his own. John was fatally wounded by his selfless act of kindness--- a character trait which was this great man's trademark. The Higgins' family later received a letter from the Department of the Navy describing John's last heroic moments. The letter arrived just 28 days after they saw him board a plane bound for Vietnam.

His sacrifice earned him the Purple Heart medal from the Navy.

After speaking with his sisters, I asked them how they would like to see their brother remembered. "Remember John as a terrific individual who, if given the chance, would have gone far in the field of medicine. He was a normal kid, good to his family, loyal to his friends, whose life was shortchanged by the conflict in Vietnam."

He will not be forgotten in the hearts of his family or in mine. Thanks to the commitment of the Sunbow Development; the Chula Vista community will not forget Hospital Corpsman John Higgins Jr. A street has been named in his honor.

E-3 John Higgins

John Higgins was a boy, who died as a man.
His parents wept and his sisters cried
when they heard that John had died.
They couldn't believe what they were told;
they had just seen him a month ago.
How could this happen to a boy so great,
someone who had his whole life to make?
He was helping a fellow man who had
fallen and was hurt so bad.
He couldn't deny a helping hand
to his comrade lying in the sand.
All of a sudden he turned; saw a piece of falling death
He jumps on top of his fallen friend
And John saved him in the end.
John Higgins died a boy in the eyes of many in town
But John Higgins' noble memory will certainly abound.

His name appears on the Vietnam Wall in Washington DC at location Panel 28 East, Row 2. He was buried at the Ft. Rosecrans National Cemetery with full military honors at location plot PS-46-B. His name also appears on the San Diego Peace Memorial in Balboa Park. His name was also added to the Stardust Spacecraft in a NASA microchip as an outreach program. Further information can be found at:
<http://stardust.jpl.nasa.gov/overview/microchip/faq.html>

