

You might ask, “Why do we do reunions?” Here is a wondrous story told by Rick Rowe last year in a Linden, Tx News Story that might help you understand our reasons....we can’t tell this better — Tia McConnell was given up at birth, and last year she discovered her father was an East Texas soldier. Rick tells the story, as related to him by Tia and Mae, her newly-found Grandmother:

It sits on top of a hill just outside Linden Texas....a grave marked with flags....it tells you this was a soldier buried here....but cemeteries all over America are filled with graves just like it....nothing special until you look at the date....January 27th 1973....we'd heard that date before....the ceasefire will take affect on 2400 Greenwich time....January 27th 1973....the Vietnam war would be over....no one wanted that any more that John “O’Neal” Rucker....he loved to hunt and fish and he loved nature....he was a typical small town boy from east Texas....when he graduated from Linden high he joined the Air Force....went to Vietnam....came home for R and R in December 1972....went hunting with his daddy....that was their big thing hunting and fishing....

Then it was that last trip to the airport in Shreveport....Mae said ” *I just had this feeling that I would never see him again....that's hard*”26 days laterjust a few hours before the cease fire was to take place....North Vietnam had to make one more strike....there was a rocket attack on O’Neal’s base....in DaNang....he never knew what hit him....

But the story doesn't end there....you see there had been a big party a few nights before....a baby had been conceived....that baby was adopted by a couple in Denver....she grew up....and a few months ago started looking for her daddy....found the name John O’Neal Rucker, and Tia says ”*I had a glitch in my heart and started to cry*” ... DNA and genology research....Tia now a 39 year old nurse with loving parents, husband, and 2 boys....thought she had found her birth father, “*I just knew like a parent knows, a child knows too.*”

Mae, her birth grandmother knew it too, “*You know I have always had a feeling that someday someone was going to knock on my door and say you’re my grandmother*”Tia came to Linden....visited her birth father's grave, “*that was real hard*”then the memorial to her dad...in the courthouse square....where we see that date again.... January 27 1973John O’Neal Rucker the last American soldier to die during the Vietnam war....

Tia says ”*It’s been overwhelming emotional because this is someone I never met....but he is such a big part of who I am. People don't know how can you mourn someone you never knew....but that was my dad....I will never get to know him now....or hear his voice....or be hugged by him....but I will someday.*”

Woman reconnects with her father 40 years after his death in war in Vietnam. Posted on: 10:15 pm, March 29, 2013, by [Web Staff](#), updated on: 10:18pm, March 29, 2013 Hendrik Sybrandy (KDVR) — It was 40 years ago Friday that the last U.S. combat troops left Vietnam. The war in Vietnam was a hugely divisive conflict in this country but one Commerce City woman owes her life to it, literally.

Tia McConnell was born in Danang, Vietnam and although she was adopted by a loving American couple she always assumed her biological father was a U.S. soldier. “*I never did meet him but he’s half of who I am and it’s still very emotional,*” McConnell said. Last year, after much detective work, she finally learned that man’s identity: Air Force Sergeant John “O’Neal” Rucker. Rucker was just 21 when he became the very last enlisted serviceman to die in Vietnam before the ceasefire took effect there.

After reconnecting with O’Neal’s mother by phone in January, 2012, McConnell traveled to Texas last summer to meet her in person and visit his grave site. McConnell and her new family have become close. She said it’s proof that the war was not an entirely negative experience. “*I know Vietnam was very unpopular... but there can be happy endings from it, too,*” she said. “*Maybe what I’ve gone through can help other people go through it because how wonderful is it to find out that you have more family.*”

This story does not end here though. Tia and Jack Whittier, her adoptive father, will be at our San Antonio Reunion along with four of O’Neal’s (and now Tia’s) family; Mae (O’Neal’s mom), Billy (his brother), and his two sisters Marsha and Marjorie. The last pictures the family has from O’Neal were those still on his camera when he died, but they include several unknown people. If you know any of the people in these pictures, please contact me or Wayne Laessig at Qadvocate@sbcglobal.net or 707-592-4492.