

The “little Tommy” Dineen I never knew (13)

The Bethlehem Gadfly Memorial Day May 27, 2019

(13th in a series of posts on Memorial Day)

Do you remember my suggestion back in [post #6 to visit — virtually — the Vietnam Wall?](#)

It was an exercise to foster connection with the dead there among my students.

I thought it was a good exercise because of what I found.

I searched my hometown — Lansdowne, Pa.

And found the names of four residents killed in the war. And two I knew.

I was utterly shocked at one: Thomas Gerard Dineen.

“Little Tommy.”

He was “little Tommy” not because his father was named Tommy (which he was) or because he had a big brother.

He was little.

And cute.

Funny. Freckle-faced. Huggable. As Irish-looking as good be.

And angelic: a Sistine chapel cherub.



There's a picture somewhere in the St. Philomena archives just like this one that I can see in mind's eye but can't find. That's me carrying the cross, and "Little Tommy" — two grades behind me — would be the acolyte on my right. Looks warm, might have been the May procession. I wish I could find the picture with "little Tommy." He would have been not much above my belt. I remember looking down on him as we walked. But maybe this picture will at least give you an idea of the context in which I remember him. The dastardly, jeering Highland Avenue "public school" kids were hanging out the windows to our left. It was no role for second-stringers. Mother Bonaventure

picked picture-perfect "Little Tommy" to be out-front as we processed!

"Little Tommy" played no sports — which, of course, made you part of the gang — because he was . . . "little."

I never saw him make a tackle. I never saw him slide into second. I never saw him lead a fast-break.

And yet there he was a 2nd Lt. in the Marines, leading men in battle, and killed August 10, 1967, less than 10 months into his tour of duty, the first of his group to die.

Hill 25 — sporting an “awesome” sign — was named Dineen Hill in his honor.

His valor and the respect of his men must have been “awesome.”

While “Little Tommy” was dying in August 1967, I was reading obscure Puritan sermons in the air-conditioned University of Notre Dame library on the other side of the wall from Touchdown Jesus.

A comrade remembers how Little Tommy “stood tall when Lt., Rowe told you that he didn’t think you had what it took to be a Marine Lieutenant when the board sent you back to be commissioned. You proved him, wrong!! “

Another comrade remembers, “I saved his life, his first night in country. After that we got pretty close, I walked into an ambush, Lt. came to my rescue this time. I have lived with that day for a long time. He was a good officer and I would of followed him any where.”

I remember “Little Tommy” next to me in a procession like the one pictured above. I wish I could find the damn picture and you could see his innocent face. The face I can still see. Looking up at me.

You never know what’s inside a person, never know what a person can do.

“Little Tommy’s” upturned face has, in a sense, become the face of the Vietnam War for me on Memorial Days.

Semper Fi.