

So That We Never Forget...

GEORGE LAWRENCE HUBLER '64



Captain, United States Marine Corps

September 6, 1942 – February 23, 1968



Vietnamese Cross of Gallantry
(Unit Award)



Before Texas A&M...

Like all children of military families, George Hubler called many places "home". His father was an Air Force officer who flew in WWII and Korea, and had roots in deep south Texas.

The Hubler family moved often during George's early childhood until they settled in Dallas when he was a teenager. He was a 1960 graduate of Jesuit High School where he made the honor roll, played a year of football, sported a flattop and a serious frown, ala Kevin Bacon



high school years



Lt Col George Hubler

George and his family often vacationed in Three Rivers, TX – where his father was raised:

"He went by the name Larry while he was in Three Rivers. He never went to school here....just used Three Rivers as a hometown address.... He spent a lot of time here, however, because he had family here and he loved South Texas and the hunting here.

Pat Nance '64

While at Texas A&M...

George Hubler reported to Texas A&M in September 1960, enrolled in Aeronautical Engineering, and was assigned to Squadron 1 - "The Hustlers". From the very beginning, it was clear to his Fish Buddies that A&M was the right choice for George:

"Our backs were against the wall. We were up against both walls, all forty-seven of us straining to get every vertebra - from cervical to lumbar - against the concrete. The backs of our heads were lifted high and we were "encouraged" to produce at least one or two wrinkles under our chin. It was a struggle because most of us were too skinny to have any wrinkles at all.

We were on the fourth floor of Dorm 6, outside the room of Jerry Walla '61, our Squadron Commander. It was a hot and sultry evening early in Fish Orientation Week. Walla had given us a pep talk and retired to his room.

With Walla's departure, the "agenda" for the rest of the evening was now in the hands of First Sergeant Jay Terry '62 and his "serge butt" buddies, including unforgettable personalities like Willie Bednar, Robert Ramsower, Pat Mazzio, and "Grotey" Bob McKean. Across from me and pushing hard against the opposite wall was a tall, skinny guy from Dallas whose name, for the moment, I could not remember. While I focused on the "wisdom" that Jay Terry was imparting, I noticed something alarming: This guy from Dallas standing across the hall from me seemed to have a subtle, almost unnoticeable smile on his face!

Earlier in the evening, I had learned the hard way that it was not a fish privilege to smile or "buzz". I was still looking for a way to warn my buddy on the opposite wall, unfortunately, we were hustled off to some other activity.

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HUSTLING ONE



SECOND TO NONE

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While at Texas A&M (Continued)...

The fish buddy against the opposite wall was George Hubler, and for the next four years I would see that smile often – in the halls of Dorm Six; around campus; at RV drill. It seemed to tell all who saw it that George was happy to be at A&M, happy to be in the Corps, happy to be headed toward the future that he had chosen. George smiled because he was where he wanted to be and was doing what he wanted to do.

John Dickson '64

George's family visited College Station often, especially during his first two years. These visits provided memorable breaks from the intense schedule of Corps life and the demands of the classroom. We can only assume the family gave George much-needed encouragement, but we know they made an impression on some of George's classmates. Fifty years later, one classmate recalls:

I don't remember much about George's family... although I do remember that he had a good-looking little sister.

Anonymous '64

For most students, the Aerospace Engineering curriculum could be daunting. George easily met the challenge.



George and little sister, Holly

George didn't have to work hard for grades... He had a good time without having to worry about grades.

Larry Vetter '64

George was smart enough to excel in the classroom while participating fully in the multi-faceted "second education" – Corps leadership development, campus activities, and, of course, the pursuit of girls. Some people develop the essential skills of a good leader at such an early age that they are considered a "natural" leader. George Hubler was an excellent example.

As an underclassman I vividly remember George Hubler as a strong, consistent, example-driven Cadet. George made you want to march better, wear a sharp uniform and he inspired one to try to be the best you could be.

Frank Muller '65

Here Come the Marines.... Late in his Fish Year or early in his sophomore year, George's career took shape. Squadron 1 may have been an Air Force outfit, but within its ranks were a handful of guys with a different goal – the United States Marine Corps.



At the time, the Aggie Corps had only Army and Air Force units. Anyone wanting to take a commission in the Marine Corps had to turn down an Army or Air Force contract before their junior year, become a "Drill and Ceremonies" cadet, and enroll in the Marine's Platoon Leader Class (PLC).

Two upperclassmen in Squadron 1, Sheldon Best '63 and Tom Nelson '63, were among a small but growing cadre of Marine Corps PLC cadets whose



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dedication to the PLC program was known throughout the A&M Corps. Sheldon and Tom played big roles in the development of Hustling One freshman so it is easy to see why George Hubler followed their lead and signed-up.

In September 1962, the Trigon formed Company I-3 and cadets who were in the Marine Corps PLC, or hoped to be accepted into PLC, were assigned to I-3. Tom Nelson '63 was the company's first commander and George was First Sergeant.

He was tall, about 6' 2" or so... and wore his Aggie uniform with pride and perfection. George was serious about the right things: his faith, our country, Texas A&M, his friends, our outfit and certainly the U. S. Marine Corps. George's sense of humor was not far below the surface. He made friends easily and was well-liked and was respected for living up to the high standards that he demanded from those cadets junior to him. George's self-confidence, his high intelligence, and his willingness to take the high road and accept the demands that outpost every high road, marked him as a man who was all set to achieve great things in his life.

Ted Hopgood '65

Early in his junior year, George was selected for membership in the Ross Volunteer Company – The Honor Guard to the Governor of Texas. This meant that George was among the top ten percent of all juniors in the Corps of Cadets.

George excelled in the RVs, and during his senior year he was elected Platoon Leader of the RV 1st Platoon – the "Trees".



Cutting Drill.... Unless you attended Texas A&M before 1963, you cannot appreciate how difficult it was to spend a Friday or Saturday night on an all-male campus. It is also difficult to imagine how far an Aggie would go to get a date in those days.

Immediately after Saturday Drill – officially known as Leadership Laboratory - carloads of Aggies would depart for nearby sources of coed companionship such as Huntsville, Houston, Austin, Waco, or San Marcos. A date in Dallas, Fort Worth, or Denton was out of the question on drill weekends, unless you were willing to risk getting a lot of demerits for "cutting" drill.

This was the problem that George had during his junior year. Sheldon Best '63 had introduced George to a cute "Tessie" (TWU student) named Gail Ratliff. The attraction toward Denton was strong and at least once, George found exceptional ways to respond to it. Larry Vetter describes one way:

One Friday night when we were juniors, George, Tom Nelson, and I went out to one of the local drinking establishments. At some point, we got a wild hair and decided to drive to Denton and find girls. We went back to the outfit and got the XO, Vance McNeil to stand in for the company commander, Tom, and either John Rowe or Norman Beard (I think it was John) to cover for George, who was 1st Sergeant. These arrangements were necessary because of one small issue - the next morning was Saturday drill.

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So off we went for Denton. I think we got there about midnight to 1am. We checked into a little motel that charged by the number of people. George hid in the car while Tom and I checked in. The lady signing us in went outside and looked around, not trusting us to be only two. She did not see George and let us have a room. But there was only one double bed. So, we put chairs along one side of the bed and slept (or tried to) with our feet on the chairs sleeping cross ways on the bed. The next morning, we all found the girls we were looking for, including George finding Gail.

Larry Vetter '64

George and Gail developed a relationship that was so strong that, on at least one occasion, Gail made a similar late-night trip to College Station:

At about zero-dark-thirty I hear this loud scratching on the window screen and a female voice quietly calling out "Father Vetter...Father Vetter." I looked up and there was Gail at my window enveloped by the darkness... (For some reason, Gail called me "Father Vetter".)

I jumped out of the top rack and went to the window in my "skivvies". Gail asked if I knew where Hubie was. I said that he was likely studying in the library.... So, she went off and found him, but I don't know when or where.

But George studied hard. George was in a very tough curriculum. He studied all hours... he always was cramming for his courses. And he didn't wait until the last day.

Larry Vetter '64

Trouble for Company I -3.... Some would say it was inevitable. If you gather forty or fifty future Marines in one outfit, you are bound to have trouble. Unfortunately, the trouble in Company I-3 came with consequences that cast a cloud over George's senior year as Commander of Company I-3.

From the I-3 perspective, the trouble started when an Air Force outfit painted something on the Marine bulletin boards. Some of the I-3 sophomores decided that the appropriate response was to set off explosions in the Air Force unit's crappers (toilet/shower).

They filled them (old tires) with gasoline, put fuses to them, lit the fuses, and ran like hell. The two explosions (one in each crapper) were truly fireballs and melted the window screens and pretty much destroyed the crappers. It was lucky no one was up and walking past the crapper doors when they went off, as a ball of flame billowed out ... into the hallway... Well, all that may have sent a message to the air crappers, but one was also sent to the Trigon... Hubie was reduced in rank from a Cadet Captain to a Cadet Lieutenant.

Larry Vetter '64

It was truly amazing that no one was hurt by this prank. George was given an unimportant job on a battalion staff, but he did not lose command of his RV platoon. Although the consequences of the "Exploding Tire" prank were severe, in the long term, George probably benefitted from demotion and job change. Now he could focus on grades, RV's and Gail – not necessarily in that order.

A 5th Year Engineer Gets Married... George Hubler's time at A&M did not end with Final Review in May 1964. Like most engineering majors, George still had two semesters of coursework to complete before graduation. George and Gail thought seriously about getting married before the Fall 1964 semester.



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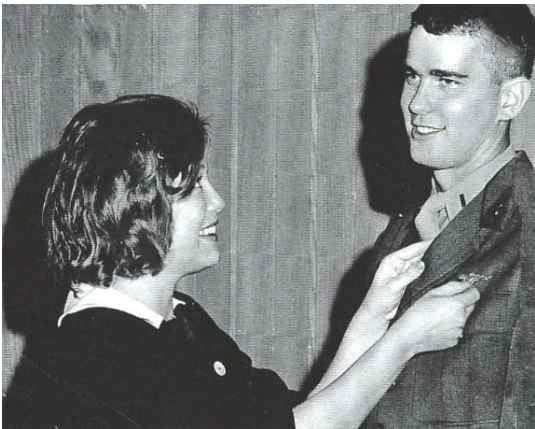
For several reasons that did not happen. However, the Aggie engineer and his Tessie sweetheart soon remembered how lonesome it can be in College Station and Denton, so they decided to elope.

The dictionary says to **elope** is “to run off secretly to be married, usually without the consent or knowledge of one's parents.” Gail and George modified the concept a bit. Gail tells the story best:

“... on October 16, 1964 George came to Denton to get me so we could get married at the courthouse in Denton. My parents were told of the plans and drove to Denton to see if it was true. So instead of a courthouse wedding, we got married at the church I went to in Denton with all of my girlfriends, me in a loaned wedding dress and the only three men, George and my father, and the priest, of course. Dallas is where we honeymooned for the weekend and then it was back to A&M and TWU until December...”

Gail Hubler Gravenhorst TWU '64

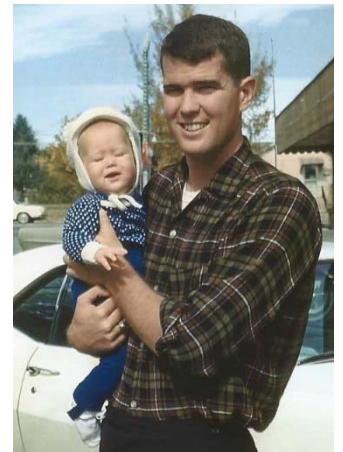
The Lieutenant Learns to Fly...and be a Father.... Gail finished at TWU in December and moved to College Station where the newlyweds took an apartment in Hensel Apartments. In May, George finished the curriculum in aeronautical engineering, took his commission, pinned on the gold bars of a Second Lieutenant, and proceeded to Pensacola for flight school.



George Gets His Aviator Wings

Pensacola was only the first stop for a Marine Corps pilot. The pilot training scheme then took George to Meridian, MS, and back to Pensacola before jet training in Beeville, TX. To say that George did well in pilot training is an understatement. For example, he was the Student of the Month in Beeville.

After Beeville, George and Gail received orders to report to their first unit assignment at Marine Corps Air Station, Beaufort, South Carolina. As



George and Leslie

is often the case, the orders came at a bad time - Gail was too pregnant to make another move. Instead, she returned to her parent's home in Tyler, TX, where their daughter, Leslie was born on April 10, 1967.

Successful First Assignment... At Beaufort, George was assigned to Fighter Attack Squadron 333 (VMFA 333). From all appearances, Beaufort was a perfect first assignment for George. He spent a lot of time in the air and while on the ground he had some interesting “collateral duties”, including Squadron Information Officer. When the “Seven Days War” happened in 1967 George became the resident expert on all things related to the Middle East, the Israeli and Egyptian armed forces, and the geography of the region where the war occurred.



Most importantly, at Beaufort George logged a lot of hours in what was then the Marine's pre-eminent air superiority fighter, the Chance Vought F8 Crusader.

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The F8 Crusader... Those who fly, and especially those who fly military aircraft, always see a special kind of beauty in the machine they fly. Like the women they love, the pilots of an aesthetically pleasing aircraft like an F-18 or a P-51 will, without hesitation, tell the world of its beauty.

Unless you flew one, the F8 Crusader was not an aesthetically pleasing aircraft, at least while it is on the ground. Sitting on a parking ramp or a carrier deck, or taxiing for takeoff, the F8 sat on short, stubby landing gear and had drooping wings that looked as much like a broken-winged sea gull as a jet fighter. The “drooping wing” impression was real – the F8 had what was called a *variable incidence wing* that increased lift during take-off and landing.



An F8 Crusader from VMFA-235 on the Ramp at Danang



Crusader with Wings in Airborne Configuration

After takeoff, the pilot could lift the wings to a more streamlined configuration. This made the F8 a fast and sleek airplane that could catapult launch from an aircraft carrier with a heavy load of missiles and bullets, intercept enemy and deliver its load with exceptional accuracy, return to the carrier, and survive the impact of the carrier landing that was often referred to as an “arrival” rather than a “landing”.

Orders to the Combat Zone... The Autumn of 1967 saw the United States war effort in Vietnam grow significantly. Every day brought reports of more decisive battles in all parts of the country, from the DMZ in the north, to the Mekong Delta in the south. In response, more American troops received orders to deploy.

George was no exception. After only a few months at Beaufort, he received orders for Vietnam, and the Hubler family packed their belongings for another move. Gail and little Leslie moved to Tyler TX to be near her parents, while George set out for Southeast Asia. On October 28, 1967, George reported to Danang and the Marine All-Weather Fighter Squadron 235 (VMFA 235). At that time, the squadron was flying F8E's configured for ground attack missions.



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We know very little about what transpired during the early months of George's tour with VMF 235. We do know that George (a.k.a. Larry) was back in the United States in January 1968 because he visited his Huslin' 1 buddy, Mike Dodge:

In January '68 I was working as a new lawyer in D.C. at DOD. Had a high-rise apartment and a girlfriend working on the Hill. A good life at 25. Larry Hubler was on leave and routed through D.C. on his way back to Viet Nam. He called me and we drank some beer(s) in my apartment and talked for maybe 3-4 hours...he was heading out somewhere the next day, as I recall. Anyway, I can accurately report that he was happy and doing exactly what he wanted to do, and flying the exact plane he wanted very much to fly. He was a committed, very good guy...

Mike Dodge '64

A Mid-Air Collision... Air Space Management was a significant issue in the Vietnam War, and the area around Danang was one of the most congested air spaces in the country. Airplanes and helicopters from all services, along with aircraft from the Vietnamese forces filled the sky. Artillery and naval gunfire filled any empty spaces that developed. Even when the weather was perfect, this was a very dangerous area for flying. Tropical rain storms during the wet monsoon could easily create an instant "white-out", reducing pilot visibility to near zero.

On the morning of February 23, 1968, George turned his F8 Crusader on to the active runway at Danang, did a few last-minute checks, pulled the throttle back, and rumbled down the runway, out over the East Vietnam Sea. The record shows George was on a "un-armed" training mission. We do not know what kind of training or how long the mission was supposed to last. We do know that at about 5-6 miles southeast of the airfield, over open water, George's F8 collided with another unknown aircraft and crashed into the sea. Neither the aircraft nor George's remains were recovered.

Double Tragedy ... Gail and Leslie were in Tyler, near her parents, when word came that George was missing. The Department of Defense carried George as MIA for two months after his crash. On April 3, 1968, the DOD announced the death of 67 Americans in Vietnam. George was one of them.

Four Texans Die In Viet

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Defense Department Tuesday gave the names of 67 U. S. servicemen killed in action in Vietnam.

Included were:

Marine Corps

Capt. George L. Hubler, husband of Mrs. George L. Hubler, 2211 Ridgewood Drive, Tyler.

Mexia Daily News (April 3, 1968)

A month later George's father, retired Lieutenant Colonel George O. Hubler, was flying a light airplane and failed to appear at his destination. Colonel Hubler was missing for three days until his remains and the wreckage were found in rugged terrain near the Montana/Idaho Border.

Former Utahn Missing On Flight of Light Aircraft

POCATELLO, Idaho (UPI)—A search was launched today for a former Utah airport manager whose light plane was believed down in rugged mountain country north of Idaho and Montana.

The Federal Aviation Agency said George Hubler, about 53, Grand Junction, Colo., was missing on a flight from Pocatello to Thompson Falls, Mont.

Provo, Utah Daily Herald
(May 16, 1968)

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The Long Wait for Closure... The Department of Defense and the Marine Corps closed the books for George two months after his crash. Gail Hubler did not.

For a long time... the Marines carried him as missing in action. They sent back his belongings but I didn't get them until sometime in the summer. Because I didn't accept that, without evidence, you could just decide that they were dead, we never had a service... I didn't believe it until the war was over and the prisoners were returned.

Gail Hubler Gravenhorst TWU '64

Because he never returned, and because Gail would not give up hope, there was no ceremony with “full military honors” for Captain George Hubler. Instead, while they waited Gail and his mother had small monuments for George and his father placed in the cemetery at Three Rivers, the “hometown” in south Texas they loved so much.

An Afterthought

The years since George Hubler's death have weathered his small monument in Three Rivers. They have also taken from us many of the details about what happened that day off the coast of Vietnam. There are no records to help us understand how the crash occurred or identify the other aircraft. We can recreate those details only through the deceptive lens of our imagination.

In my mind, there is one detail that I am certain happened that day – although I will never be able to prove it. I firmly believe if you had a camera in the cockpit that morning - just as his F8 left the bumpy Danang runway and became the fast and sleek bird it was before – at that very moment the cockpit camera would detect that small, subtle smile I had seen before. On February 23, 1968, George Hubler was where he wanted to be... doing exactly what he wanted to do!

Post Script... Larry Vetter, George's classmate and Marine buddy from Company I-3, has returned to Vietnam. Larry spends his time in Danang and surrounding Quang Nam province where he served 2-1/2 tours of duty during the war. Larry has dedicated his life and energy to help thousands of Vietnamese children who suffer from the effects of exposure to Agent Orange - the defoliant used to clear the jungle and expose the enemy during the war. The defoliant worked very well, denying sanctuary to the Viet Cong and North Vietnamese Army. Unfortunately, Agent Orange also caused many painful and disfiguring side effects that persist today, fifty years after exposure to the chemical. Larry is on a lifetime campaign to publicize the plight of these children and raise money for their care. In 2015, the Hill Country Community Journal ran an interesting article describing Larry's work that you can find at: http://www.hccommunityjournal.com/article_e8173452-50ba-11e5-91a6-fbec9d354db.html

Larry's work in and around Danang reminds him almost daily of George.

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The beach south of Danang, looking toward Cham Island and the area where George Hubler's plane went down.

Sometimes I walk along the beach here at Da Nang, and I watch the sands slowly, relentlessly advancing and retreating with the waves. But I watch, ridiculously naive, that maybe, just maybe, I will see a glint gold metal shinning in the morning sun just out of the sea half buried on the beach.

Yes, I would know before I picked it up, that it would be an Aggie ring and his name would be etched inside.

So I walk and I watch.

Larry Vetter '64

The Remains of

Captain George Lawrence Hubler

were never recovered

*George is remembered on the **Vietnam Memorial** at
Panel 40E - Line 75*

*George is also remembered at the
National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific
Honolulu Memorial Courts of the Missing: Court A*

*George and his father are remembered with small markers at
The Three Rivers Cemetery, Three Rivers, Texas*

WELCOME HOME, GEORGE HUBLER!