

'A Fine and Decent Gentleman'

Cavalry units historically take on screening and reconnaissance missions due to their relatively greater mobility on the battlefield. Mylon Ray Hopkins of Mauldin was a cavalryman, the commander of an armored reconnaissance vehicle assigned to F Troop, 17th Cavalry where he was better known as "Hoppy." The 17th was assigned to the 196th Infantry Brigade which had been absorbed into the 23rd Infantry Division. Of course nobody called it the 23rd; it was better known by its more popular name, the Americal Division.



The Americal Division's history dated back to World War II when it was the only American division to be formed overseas. In the aftermath of the Pearl Harbor attack, the War Department had hastily dispatched three separate regiments to defend the island of New Caledonia, 750 miles east of Australia. Major General Alexander Patch, the division's commander requested that his new command be named Americal, a contraction of America and New Caledonia. In 1967, history was repeated as the division was reformed, this time in Vietnam. Two separate brigades were combined with the 196th Infantry Brigade to form the nucleus of the reactivated division.



In June 1969 the division and its subordinate commands were operating in Quang Tin Province in northern South Vietnam. The 196th was established in a fortified firebase near Tam Ky, the provincial capital. Viet Cong guerrillas and North Vietnamese regulars were infiltrating the area and harassing the firebase. During four days of fierce fighting beginning on June 8, US forces killed 249 North Vietnamese soldiers and 87 Viet Cong. On June 11, Specialist Fourth Grade Mylon Ray Hopkins was killed in the fighting.



Hopkins was a member of Clemson University's Class of 1970 and had been employed by the Franklin Process Company before his induction into the Army. He must have had an aptitude for military life for his decorations were numerous, including the National Defense Service Medal, Vietnam Service Medal, Republic of Vietnam Military Merit Medal, the Combat Infantry Badge, Purple Heart and, posthumously, the Bronze Star.

His F Troop comrade Jonathan Blanton remembered that "I liked him the minute I met him. Ray saw a copy of my hometown newspaper, and asked whose it was. When I told him it was mine, he smiled and said that he was from the same area of South Carolina." Looking back nearly 40 years, Blanton described Hoppy as "a fine and decent gentleman. Everyone who knew him knew that about him."

Hopkins was a graduate of Hillcrest High School, son of Mauldin mayor Ray W. and Novella Tharp Hopkins. He was msurvived by a sister, Rebecca and two brothers, Sammy and Eddie. He was buried with full military honors in the



Greenville Memorial Gardens by a detachment from Fort Gordon, Georgia.