

“They Just Don’t Come Much Better”

Family lore has it that Mrs. Wyman McCrary’s sons lobbied their mother to name the new baby after their World War II hero. She did. Douglas MacArthur McCrary, Doug, to his family and friends, would become a hero in his own right.



Doug grew up in Berea. Even as a boy, he seemed destined for the military, wearing combat boots, camping out, and hunting squirrels and birds with his pellet rifle. He also developed the reputation of a prankster. “To say that Doug McCrary was a character is to make a classic understatement,” remembered his friend Jim Smith. “He lived [life] to the fullest.” James Thomas Jones, Jr. agreed, describing Doug as “a risk taker beyond imagination,” but noting that his classmate’s personality was based on a “strong moral character and sound judgment and intellect.” Bill Gallman played basketball with Doug whom he described as “graceful” on the court. Gallman’s memories of Doug “are dominated by his happiness, his sense of humor and his joy of life.” But, Gallman noted, “In spite of his propensity to joke and kid around, he was markedly serious about the way of life we enjoyed in our country and concerned with the importance of committing to serve to protect our freedom.”

Doug took his fun-loving nature onto the “fields of friendly strife,” as his namesake, General MacArthur, called them. Playing basketball, baseball, and running track for the fun of the game, Doug honed his self-discipline and teamwork during formative years at Berea High School. After graduation, Doug enrolled in Clemson College.

At Clemson, Doug studied agricultural economics and was a member of the American Farm Economics Association which he served as vice president. He was also an Army ROTC cadet. Doug graduated from Clemson University on December 18, 1965, and was commissioned as a second lieutenant in the Army.

John Long met Second Lieutenant McCrary when they were both assigned to Charlie Company, 5th Battalion of the 7th Cavalry Regiment at Fort Carson, Colorado in 1966. Long, at the time the company’s executive officer, lived in the same apartment building with McCrary, his wife Vivian, and their young daughter Allison. “Doug had a kind of ‘aw shucks’ attitude of a barefoot guy from the sticks, full of life, always smiling and making jokes... Our company commander, CPT Budge, a West Pointer and Rhodes Scholar, didn’t know quite what to make of Doug...”

“Doug had been commissioned in the Army for less than a year and like all Second Lieutenants he was still learning the trade,” recalled Larry Budge, who would retire from the Army as a major general. “From the beginning, though, the one thing about Doug that stood out was his love and concern for his soldiers. He pushed them as hard in training as he pushed himself, but he was always ready to come to their assistance when they needed help or when they had personal problems as all soldiers do. He never

hesitated to stand up for them to me or the First Sergeant when any of them were in trouble.” McCrary’s dedication to his soldiers is a common theme among the reminiscences of those who served with him. “Lt Mac, as he was called by his men, was a very good leader and became one of the best officers of Company C,” remembered platoon sergeant Willoughby Mercer, Jr.

In August 1966, the 5/7 Cav deployed to Vietnam to join the 1st Cavalry Division. The 1st Cav was one of the Army’s airmobile organizations, relying heavily upon helicopters to provide mobility, firepower, and support during combat operations in Vietnam’s rice paddies and jungles.

“In combat,” John Long wrote, “Doug displayed a knack for leadership, demonstrating to CPT Budge and the other officers that he could be depended upon in tough situations.” Budge recalled, “Doug and his platoon never faltered and never failed to accomplish successfully every mission that they were given.” In December, Budge turned over command of Charlie Company to Captain Bernard Grady.

In his Vietnam memoir, *On The Tiger’s Back*, Grady wrote that McCrary:

...was particularly devoted to his men and his platoon sergeant, a quiet, friendly and competent fellow named Flores... He looked after [his men] constantly when we were in the field, urging them to spread out and not bunch up when we were on the march, checking their weapons to see if they were clean, making certain they were properly positioned for the night. He was a good leader. First Sergeant Westmoreland, a man who had seen more than his share of junior officers, uncharacteristically lauded the lieutenant one day with, “They just don’t come much better.”



McCrary’s devotion to his men, and to Sergeant Flores in particular, was about to experience its ultimate expression.

On February 16, 1967, the 5/7 Cav was acting as a blocking unit and ambush force with its platoons stretched out over thousands of meters. At 1610, McCrary reported that his platoon was in heavy contact with the enemy. By the time his company commander organized reinforcements and arrived on the scene, Grady wrote, “Doug McCrary’s situation had deteriorated significantly.” Two of McCrary’s squads had been caught in the open and were pinned down by the enemy. Sergeant Flores left his covered position

to help his men escape from “an untenable position.” Flores was hit and fell in an open area absent of cover. As the Viet Cong tried to finish Flores off, Grady wrote:

Doug left his secure location and ran into the open after him. Troopers who participated in the fighting recalled that when Lieutenant McCrary rushed into the open, the entire battle seemed to take a quantum leap in intensity. Each of the men with him ignored incoming rounds and were up blasting away at the enemy positions. The men who were pinned down realized the enemy had lifted their fire to shoot at someone else and took the opportunity to engage the enemy. Doug managed to reach his sergeant and, with an unbelievable display of courage, strength, and determination, dragged him toward safety. “Bullets flew all around him,” recalled one man. “It was like every VC for miles around was sighting on his back.”

At 1656, Doug McCrary was killed. Sergeant Flores was already dead.

Richard Belt was a fellow platoon leader in Charlie Company. “I was struck at the time that he died doing what he thought was right. He was fully committed to his men.”

First Lieutenant Douglas MacArthur McCrary was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross, the nation’s second highest award for valor, Purple Heart, National Defense Service Medal, Vietnam Service Medal, Republic of Vietnam Gallantry Cross Unit Citation with Palm, Republic of Vietnam Campaign Medal, and the Combat Infantry Badge. He was survived by his wife, Vivian, their four-year-old daughter Allison, and two brothers.

He is buried in Grand View Memorial Gardens in Travelers Rest.

“We knew he was living a life of significance even back when we were kids,” friend Bill Gallman wrote years after Doug’s death. They just don’t come much better.



See also *On the Tiger’s Back*, Bernard E. Grady, Biddle Publishing Company, 1994.