

Among the First 100

“He was probably the ‘nutsiest’ (sharpest) guy in the cadet corps,” recalled Sanford Smith of his classmate Lloyd Adrian Payne. “He looked sharp whenever and wherever you saw him.” No doubt Smith’s recollection, though more than 50 years old, was accurate, for in addition to serving as a member of Iota Lambda, Adrian Payne was also selected to the Senior Platoon. The Senior Platoon was Clemson College’s competitive drill team and was composed of the best-drilled cadets—and apparently the “nutsiest.”



Payne, an honors student from Sandersville, Georgia, was an industrial education major in Clemson’s Class of 1955. He attended summer ROTC training at Fort Meade, Maryland and by the time he reached Vietnam, had already completed Army assignments at Fort Benning, Georgia; Fort Polk, Louisiana; Berlin, Germany; and Fort Bragg, North Carolina where he completed the Military Assistance Training Course at the Special Warfare School.

American military advisors had been serving in French Indochina since 1950, though in limited numbers. President Kennedy identified South Vietnam as a venue for displaying the credibility of American power following the failure of the Bay of Pigs invasion in Cuba and dramatically increased the American military presence there. By November 1963, 16,000 American military personnel were in the country, including Captain Adrian Payne, now assigned to the Military Assistance Advisory Group Vietnam. Payne served as an advisor to South Vietnam’s 2nd Infantry Division.

According to the book *Vietnam Military Lore—Legends, Shadows, and Heroes*, Payne took time out from his duties to write a letter to his year-old son Carl on the Wednesday before Thanksgiving in 1963.

You are indeed a fortunate child, not because you are ours in particular, but because you were born in the United States and can't possibly conceive of the poverty and untold hardships that the children your age go through in other countries. It will be years to come before you fully realize the impact of what I have just said; but once you have had the opportunity to see it and work among the more underprivileged, then you too will more fully appreciate your wonderful heritage. I only wish that I could be with you and your mother tomorrow to give thanks for what we have to be proud of and what our forefathers fought and died for to give us.

On December 14, Captain Payne was in the field advising a South Vietnamese battalion. The battalion was targeted throughout the day by sporadic sniper fire. Payne advised the battalion commander to send out patrols to locate the snipers. These efforts, reported Payne’s Silver Star citation, helped reduce, but not eliminate the frequency of fire. The sniping resumed once the battalion had dug in for the night. According to the citation, “Captain Payne was at the side of his counterpart advising him in weapons placement, necessary patrol action, and personally checking perimeter security. As the Battalion elements were preparing to move out of their position on the following morning, they sustained heavy sniper fire from the north side of a ridge and, before they could take cover, heavy automatic weapons fire was received from both the north and south ridges. Despite the precarious position, Captain Payne continued to leave his protective cover and bravely moved from position to position offering assurance and advice to the Battalion Commander in coping with the situation. Although he was exposed to this automatic weapons fire, he completely disregarded his own personal safety and continued his advisory efforts until mortally wounded.”

Adrian Payne was killed about the same time his letter arrived half-a-world away. He was among the first 100 American servicemen to die in Vietnam. In addition to the Silver Star, he was awarded the Purple Heart, Army Commendation Medal, National Defense Service Medal, Vietnam Service Medal, Republic

of Vietnam Gallantry Cross Unit Citation with Palm, Republic of Vietnam Campaign Medal, and Combat Infantry Badge.

In October 1964, Payne's widow Jane told the *Ladies Home Journal*, "There should be a better way, a more personal way, of breaking the news to families instead of in a coldly worded telegram delivered by a Western Union boy. A chaplain or some representative of the government should bring the news. I was lucky, my mother-in-law thought of me. She had enough presence of mind. But when I think of those other women, alone in a house when that telegram comes..."

The policy of sending telegrams from Department of the Army notifying family members of deaths of servicemen in Vietnam was changed shortly after Mrs. Payne's comments appeared and both a military representative and a chaplain delivered the tragic news in person.

Lloyd Adrian Payne was buried three days after Christmas 1963 in Brownwood Cemetery, Sandersville, Georgia. He was survived by his widow Jane and their son Carl. Their second son, Wesley, was born the following month.

