

“A Poem for My Daughter”

[Author's note: Several years ago, I was serving as a host at the Scroll of Honor Memorial before a Clemson football game. My job was to answer questions and help people find the names of family members and loved ones listed on the Memorial. When a young woman approached, I asked if I could help her find someone. “No,” she replied with a smile, “I know right where he is.” I watched from a respectful distance as she knelt before one of the stones and placed a rose on it. After she left, I walked over and noted the name on the stone: Harold M. Renwick, Jr.]



He was an outstanding athlete, quarterbacking Winnsboro's Mount Zion Institute football team to successive state championships in 1957 and '58. So it should come as no surprise that Harold McGill Renwick, Jr. walked on to Coach Frank Howard's football team when he arrived on the Clemson campus in 1959. Howard recognized Mac's talent as an athlete and a leader and eventually awarded him a scholarship. But the football coach wasn't the only one to note Mac's leadership ability. An exemplary ROTC cadet, Mac worked his way up through the Cadet Corps at a time when ROTC was required of all male students. His senior year, cadet major Renwick served as the S-1, or personnel officer, of Clemson's Cadet Brigade. Mac lived in F section of the old “Tin Cans” and was remembered for his laugh and his caring disposition. He was selected for membership in Scabbard and Blade, the honorary military society. An industrial management major, Mac served as treasurer of Phi Kappa Delta, one of the new social fraternities on campus.



Renwick, number 11, third from right on the second row, was a member of the 1962 Tiger football team that finished with a 6-4 record, including a season-ending 20-17 win over South Carolina.

Mac married his high school sweetheart, Perry Anne Cathcart, on June 1, 1963, just before receiving his commission as a second lieutenant in the Army. Assignments at Fort Jackson, Fort Benning, Germany, and Aberdeen, Maryland followed in order—as did the arrival of the couple's daughter, Penny.

The Renwicks' next post was in El Paso, Texas where Mac attended Vietnamese Language School in preparation for his overseas deployment scheduled for November 1967. Before departing for Vietnam, Mac returned home to South Carolina and took Penny to her first Clemson football game.

After Mac's arrival in Vietnam, he was assigned as an advisor to the 64th Regional Forces Battalion, a Vietnamese army unit. American policy at this point, in what was beginning to look like an unwinnable war, was to build up

South Vietnamese forces and gradually shift the burden of the country's defense to its own military. As such, the United States provided advisors to work with Vietnamese units to achieve a higher level of combat proficiency.

With Penny's second birthday approaching, Mac took time from his duties to compose a poem for his daughter. It begins:

*A poem for my daughter,
I send it to you,
on this your birthday,
when you become two.*

Mac used the poem to explain why he would not be present for Penny's celebration.

*Alas, my child, with you I cannot be,
Because there is a need to keep the world free.
A need that was created many years ago,
When a people's thirst for freedom began to grow.*

Before he could mail the poem, Mac was ordered into the field on a search and destroy mission. On February 27, 1968, while operating near Ong Cop Mountain in Quang Ngai province, Mac's battalion came under "intense small arms, automatic weapons and mortar fire." According to the Bronze Star citation, Mac moved up to join the lead element only to discover that it was pinned down and "steadily taking casualties. Fearlessly, Captain Renwick began moving about the fire swept battlefield establishing an effective base of counter fire. This accomplished, Captain Renwick valiantly led the unit forward in an attack on enemy positions." In the course of this counterattack, Mac sustained a mortal wound.

After his death, one of Mac's fellow officers found the poem and included it in a letter to Perry. Mac was awarded the Bronze Star with Valor Device, Purple Heart, Air Medal, 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. Mac's body was returned to the United States and buried at the Bethel A.R.P. Cemetery in Fairfield County. He was survived by his widow and daughter, his parents, and two brothers.

Penny turned two shortly after her father's untimely death. Though she has no memories of him, she recalled in a 2014 interview, "Not a day goes by when I don't think of him. Freedom is not free and we must have people willing to step up and do what most will not. My daddy did exactly that, and I will always be proud of him." It's a pride exemplified by a single rose.

*Don't weep, my child, for this birthday I'll miss,
Go to your mommy and she'll give you a kiss.
From me, to remind you I've not forgot,
You see, my child, I do love you a lot.
So much, in fact, that to you I do pledge,
That a world of freedom shall be your heritage.*



*Sleep, my child, the night is here,
Sleep, my child, and wake without fear.
Grow, my child, be happy and be free,
For these are the dreams I have for thee.*

See also Schuyler Easterling's article, [*A Father's Love*](#).

