

GARY DOUGLAS JACKSON

NO. 26264 CLASS OF '66

Died 16 Jul 1972, aged 29 years

Interment: Unknown

GARY JACKSON was one of the finest men I have ever known. In an age when it was not always popular, he was a true gentleman and scholar, possessed of quiet yet great intellectual and moral strength and a spectacular smile. And he was an accomplished athlete and adventurer.

Gary came to West Point from the rural Ohio town of Piqua, where he had been a football and tennis star, an expert outdoorsman, and a karate specialist. By age 18 his physics genius was already a matter of record, as he had invented, patented, and sold to the government plans for an electronic timing mechanism for satellites. At West Point, where he and I roomed together as plebes "for disciplinary reasons," he played Corps Squad squash and intercollegiate rugby and made the Academy debate team. Gary was so advanced in physics that the Physics Department set up a special laser course just for him and Jon Steel, but nonetheless he was later unsuccessful in persuading Academy officials to allow him to compete for a National Science Foundation Scholarship in physics.

After spending graduation leave on a harebrained, gun-toting expedition prospecting for gold with me in the Peruvian Andes, his life suddenly became that of a modern-day Job. He was shot 3 times by a hitchhiker in Ohio the next Christmas, and then he was wounded twice while defending a Montagnard village in Vietnam. The second time he was hit by rocket shrapnel and thrown through the air to land on his head. Shortly thereafter, Gary began suffering intermittent bouts of unconsciousness and partial paralysis. After Army doc-

tors were unable to diagnose the problem, he underwent exploratory brain surgery at Walter Reed, and it was determined he had a malignant brain tumor. He was given only 4 months to live, but was not informed of this. After his immediate release from the Army, he entered graduate school at Purdue to study nuclear physics. Several months later, tragedy struck again, and Gary was severely

beaten and left for dead in

Central Park in New York while attending an outdoor concert. The

beating destroyed his facial nerves and reshaped his handsome features but did not affect his remarkable spirit. He

told me during the long months of recovery that the worst part was not being able to smile. Six

months after the original brain tumor diagnosis, he again began experiencing attacks of

unconsciousness and paralysis,

this time brought on by the chemotherapy prescribed for what was considered a terminal illness. The doctors had not expected him to live that long and had neglected to reduce the dosage.

At this point Gary had been so close to death so many times that he felt his faith had been a deciding factor, and he began studying to become an evangelist. He married a fellow fundamentalist and died unexpectedly in his sleep a year later—after supposedly refusing to take his medicine.

To know Gary Jackson has been a great privilege. His courage, integrity, and indomitable spirit in both good times and bad have set an example that will inspire many of us for the rest of our lives. If we will be thought of as highly when we depart this world, we should count ourselves as lucky men.

T. P. Hill

Note—Several attempts to locate the place of death and interment for Gary Douglas Jackson have proven unsuccessful.

