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A BROTHER IN ARMS

Sisters will accept honor for Tim McHugh, who was killed in action in Vietnam in 1968

The family of Vietnam veteran Pfc. Timothy McHugh stands for a photo at a burial plot at SS. Peter and Paul Cemetery in Springfield for Memorial Day Friday. From left: Sister Susie McHugh, sister-in-law Suellen McHugh, sister Maureen McHugh and brother Edward McHugh.

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Times staff JULIA WILKINSON

Remembering a real hero

■ A Springfield Marine, Tim McHugh lost his life fighting in Vietnam in 1967. He will be honored this Memorial Day by his hometown.

By JEFF WOLFE
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Like most other young men in the mid-1960s Tim McHugh didn't have second thoughts about joining the military. It's what many men in their late teens and early 20s raised by World War II generation parents did then.

Since the United States was at war in Vietnam, joining one of the branches of the military to serve your country was something many did without a second thought. McHugh originally joined the Navy Reserves before deciding to transfer into the Marines. Pfc. McHugh arrived in Vietnam on Nov. 19, 1967, and was killed in action on Feb. 7, 1968, two days before his 21st birthday.

McHugh and his surviving family members will be honored at the Springfield Memorial Day Celebration with a parade starting at Veterans Park on Springfield Road at 10 a.m. and ending with a ceremony at the Springfield Municipal Building, when McHugh will be honored.

"They had told me a year ago that they would like to honor our brother next year," said Susie McHugh, who along with her sister Maureen, has been active for years in Vietnam veteran causes. "We attended it last year and it was very gratifying to know that Tim was going to be honored this year."

While Susie and Maureen McHugh were never officially in the military, they appear to carry those military-type qualities such as loyalty and honor when it comes to remembering Tim McHugh. They have assembled various memorabilia over the years including a scrapbook that through photos and words tells Tim's story.

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From left are photos of twin brothers Michael McHugh, who served in the Army, and Timothy McHugh, who served in the Marines. Michael passed away from cancer and Timothy was killed in action while serving in Vietnam.

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Sisters Susie and Maureen McHugh look through a scrapbook of the military careers of their twin brothers Michael and Timothy, at Susie's home in Folsom, Ridley Township.

They first started the scrapbook about five years ago when Tim was honored at a reunion in South Carolina for the 3rd Battalion/5th Marines 1st Division.

"When we were contacted about Tim being honored at the 3rd/5th reunion, I felt like I needed people to know Tim as a person," Susie McHugh said of making the scrapbook. "It's come in handy so many times."

That sense of duty and honor in the McHugh family has continued through other generations. Susie's son, Gene Redding, had always looked up to Tim. He retired from the Marines 10 years ago as a major after two different stints totaling 18 years. It was Gene Redding, who graduated from St. James High School in 1982, who did extensive research on his uncle that prompted Tim McHugh to be honored at the reunion in South Carolina.

"Gene learned all the details about his uncle," Susie McHugh said. "As a result of his investigation, that's why he was honored at that reunion."

While the McHugh sisters are deeply appreciative at all the ways and places their brother has been remembered, it's not always easy to think about the past.

"This is very emotional," Susie McHugh said. "It's both sad and emotional as we find out more things. It's bittersweet in some ways."

And there are some times, even though Tim McHugh died more than 46 years ago, that finding out about his death seems just like yesterday. John McHugh, an Army Lt. from East Lansdowne, had died in Vietnam just a few days before Tim McHugh. He was not a relative of this McHugh family, but Susie McHugh still remembers reading about his death.

"I remember I was baby sitting and picked up the newspaper and saw that," she said. "I thought that's what our name would look like in the newspaper. Then 10 minutes later there was a knock on the door and it was my family to tell me about Tim."

Over the years, there have been plenty of people who have told the McHugh sisters about Tim. One of those people is Bob Bagosy, who like McHugh, is a 1966 graduate of Monsignor Bonner High School. Bagosy and McHugh were friends throughout high school and had written several letters while McHugh was away in Vietnam. But Bagosy, who was served in the Marine Reserves, never replied back to one of those letters ... at least not until 2004. Bagosy left the

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A portrait of Pfc. Timothy McHugh sits on a shelf in the home of sister Susie McHugh in Folsom, Ridley Township. McHugh was killed in action while serving as a Marine in Vietnam. To the far right on the wall is a portrait of their father, Navy Cmdr. Edward A. McHugh USNR.

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Maureen McHugh places a wreath at the family burial site for her twin brothers, both veterans, who have passed away in honor of Memorial Day at SS. Peter and Paul Cemetery in Springfield Friday.

letter at McHugh's gravesite at the SS. Peter and Paul Cemetery in Springfield, where the McHugh sisters found the letter and another connection to their brother.

"Tim was the kind of guy you just remembered," said Bagosy. "He was the first person from my high school class that we knew that died in Vietnam. I remember thinking this is tragic. He just wanted to serve his country and do the right thing."

That "do the right thing" mentality was something the McHugh family knew, and still knows, all about. Their dad, Edward McHugh, was a career Navy man and retired as a commander from the Philadelphia Navy Yard in 1967. The McHugh family, which also included Edward's wife Anne, older brother Edward Jr. and Tim's twin brother Michael, moved all around the country, including having stays in Honolulu and Pearl Harbor in Hawaii.

Michael McHugh also served in the military, joining the Army in 1968 and was stationed in Okinawa. He lived in Collingdale with his family until he died of cancer in 2006.

"He took it very hard," Susie McHugh said of the effect of Tim's death on Michael. "He felt like he lost half of himself. He had a nickname, Poncie, after the character in Hawaii 5-0, because of he and Tim being born in Honolulu. After Tim died, he didn't want to be called Poncie anymore. He fought a battle, too. He fought cancer for 20 years."

At first, it appeared that Tim McHugh would follow in his father's footsteps and join the Navy. He enlisted in the Navy Reserves while still a senior at Bonner and

worked at Habbersetts Scrapple Co. while taking night classes at St Joseph's University. But that apparently wasn't satisfying enough for Tim, as he was discharged from the Navy and enrolled in the Marines.

"He just couldn't wait around," said Susie McHugh. "He wanted to be where the action was."

The McHugh sisters later learned that their brother had visited veterans in the Philadelphia Naval Hospital several times, talking with the wounded there. The McHugh sisters believe that only strengthened Tim McHugh's resolve to join the Marines.

So, after being sworn into the Marines reluctantly by his father, Tim McHugh did his basic training at Parris Island in South Carolina in June of 1967.

He arrived in Vietnam in the Quang Nam Province on Nov. 19, 1967, in the midst of the Tet Offensive, the major push by communist forces. Tim McHugh's squad was returning to a compound after a multi-day patrol when it unexpectedly interrupted a North Vietnamese element preparing to attack the DaNang Airfield. While the discovery thwarted an attack, it was also the battle where Tim McHugh perished.

According to *Daily Times* archives, it was the third straight day that a Delaware County military man had died in action in Vietnam. Marine Pfc. Joseph Convery, of Aston, and Army Spec. 4 Richard Harner, of Nether Providence, had been killed on the previous two days.

As it turned out, 1968 was the deadliest year for Delaware County military personnel in Vietnam with 62 perishing. Also, according to the *Daily Times* archives, 163 military personnel died in Vietnam up until January of 1973, when what is officially known as the Vietnam Conflict, but was a

This photo from a family scrapbook from the *Philadelphia Daily News* shows a procession with the remains of Pfc. Timothy McHugh being brought back to Philadelphia International Airport on Feb. 27, 1968. McHugh was killed in action while serving as a Marine in Vietnam on Feb. 7, 1968.

war in every sense of the word, ended.

According to the McHugh sisters, it took about three weeks for their brother's remains to arrive at Philadelphia International Airport. Their scrapbook shows a photo of Tim McHugh's casket being unloaded at the airport on Feb. 27, which happens to be Susie's birthday. McHugh's burial took place on March 1, 1968.

The McHugh sisters admit their lives were different without their brother, and that Tim McHugh's death deeply affected their father.

"We felt Tim's death was the beginning of our father's demise," Susie McHugh said. "He was never the same after that. He had just retired from the Navy and Tim's service was the first

TIMOTHY MCHUGH
Killed in action

time he didn't wear his uniform to a service. He never said he felt guilty, but he would sit in the living room, very quietly, and alone and he mourned."

The McHugh sisters have mourned over the years as well. And as many will go to their barbecues, family outings and shore trips this weekend, they hope others remember why they can do those things.

"We have been on a mission to remind people why we have this three-day holiday weekend," Susie McHugh said. "It's OK to have a good time and all, but let's remember why we can enjoy ourselves."