
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This story is compiled from many sources: family furnished information, histories, memoirs, and newspapers; the greater portion, however, is culled from official Navy Department records of Donald Francis Antonacci. It reflects the totality of events Donald participated in or lived through during a life that ended only too soon; from his childhood experiences as a resident of St. Agnes Home and School for Boys (Sparkill, NY), as a budding teenager, to his late teenage years as a young Sailor, culminating in completing a military career of over 21 years in the service of his country, including being awarded the Purple Heart Medal for his wounds from combat service in Vietnam.

While this story is lovingly dedicated to Donald, it also includes his four Brothers because of the love they shared for one another, forever interrupted until the hereafter by the untimely loss of their dear brother Donald.



Donald



Robert



John



Ralph



Joseph

Special thanks are extended especially to John Antonacci who exerted much effort and energy in his endeavor to have this record made of Donald's service to his country. His forceful efforts and resolute determination were also reflected in his following through to ensure this tribute was written about his beloved Brother Donald. He promptly and thoroughly answered my numerous inquiries, sending any and all documents and pictures requested. Thanks also to Joseph Antonacci (my former classmate and fellow Marine) for locating his brother Donald's personal records that contained a treasure trove of important military information and documentation. Without the support of these two men in particular, this story could not have been told.

Wherever possible, all documents have been checked against official sources to verify dates, unit and rate designations, and names of Navy Posts, Ships, and Stations. There may be errors in these narratives, for which I apologize in advance. Memory, especially at an advanced age, is often a fragile thing. In addition to sources and references shown in appropriate places, credit is also given to the following invaluable sources to which I referred:

"Names On Our Land, Hardly a Trace Remains of Orphanage," Peter Krell,

History Editor, Our Town, July 12, 2004.

"Sparkill Dominican's—100 Years of Caring," by James E. Merna,

The Journal-News, Nyack, NY, December 16, 1984.

"An Unabridged Unofficial Dictionary for Marines," compiled by Glenn B. Knight.

A myriad of U.S. Navy and Veteran Web Sites for histories and ships pictures.

"Tappan Zee, Math = F.," Rockland Review, Friday, July 11, 2003.

Memorandums and Letters from John Antonacci.

Memoranda *"Navy Terms and Trivia,"* source unknown.

Finally, this story is not only In Memory of Donald Francisco Vincenzo Antonacci for his service to his country and his deeds of valor, but also In Memory of his Brothers-In-Arms from St. Agnes who also served their country in World War II, Korea, and Vietnam, whose deeds may or may not have been recorded or recognized, but who met the call of duty when duty itself was more than was required.

GFM 8/18/04

DONALD FRANCIS ANTONACCI:
A 'HOUSES KID," A PATRIOT, AND A HERO
1937 – 1990

By Gerald F. Merna
Mustang 1stLt USMC (Ret.)
*Bio last page



Donald Francis Antonacci
OMC U. S. Navy (Retired)
SN 482 77 79
Vietnam, 1970-1971



Background:

Through a mutual friend, John Antonacci, a retired New York City Police Department (NYPD) Detective whom I haven't seen in almost fifty years (though his oldest Brother Joseph was a high school classmate), contacted me about a matter very near and dear to his heart. Aware of some help I gave our mutual friend in putting together a fairly complete record of her late husband's World War II Navy service, he wanted my help to do the same for his late brother, Donald Francisco Vincenzo Antonacci, (Donald for short hereinafter).

John knew to some extent his brother Donald had performed heroic deeds while in the Navy and serving in Vietnam, but he wanted specific details and verification, so that other members of his family and his friends would know it as well. In fact, he wanted a "record" to be left behind to future generations of the Antonacci Family.

To begin this undertaking I helped John obtain Donald's official Navy Records in order that we could research and verify Donald's entire Navy career of some 21 plus years so that a complete and accurate record could be made. We sent letters to the National Personnel Records Center, the national repository for most military records, requesting copies of Donald's records. When they were received, some copies of records were blurred and difficult to read, while others were missing, particularly copies of citations for military decorations earned by Donald (though the awards were clearly listed on his separation documents). Fortunately, enlisting the aid of another brother, Joseph, we learned that almost all of the missing records

were in a small box of Donald's belongings that until now had been almost ignored. These included more detailed records and pictures, including the missing Citations from U. S. and Vietnamese authorities for medals earned by Donald. From this, and John's responses to my questions, I was able to glean a great deal of additional information that is hopefully detailed in this story.

Using the telephone and email I continued to query John for additional information and requested copies of other documents about Donald in the family's possession. So we had very good success in obtaining sufficient information for this story, buttressing it with additional information obtained from the Internet and other sources. The Internet was particularly useful in obtaining information concerning the various Navy posts, stations, and ships Donald served on. The more I researched and learned the more this undertaking literally became a "labor of love."

In order to really know and understand Donald, by necessity, this story requires some deviation and diversion, as well as a discussion of other background information. To know and perhaps understand Donald in his latter years, I felt you also needed to know him in his formative years. His upbringing as a very young man would lay the groundwork for his future perhaps more than someone who enjoyed a "normal" family environment. You also need to know something about his family, friends, Nuns, Priests, Counselors and others, in order to understand the totality of the circumstances and surroundings that affected and influenced his growth, development, and accomplishments, including his several "missteps" at the beginning of his Navy Career as well, leading up to his bravery in combat during the Vietnam War that made him a Hero, and finally his untimely death at the very young age of 53.

What is a Hero?

A Hero can be anything from a person successfully fighting cancer or some other serious disease, to a single Mom or Dad laboring to raise their children morally and properly despite a partner and the lack of worldly goods. (Some people mistakenly consider talented athletes "heroes" for their athletic skills alone, while many others, including many athletes themselves, do not). There are of course many *categories* of "heroes," and everyone may not agree with some or any of them. During and after the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks, we have witnessed more than ever the heroism of Firefighters, Police, Emergency Responders, and so many others who sacrificed their own lives to save innocent victims from that carnage.

In the military, a hero is also someone who performs a wide variety of "heroic acts," from giving his/her own life to save one or more of their buddies, or putting their own life at risk to defeat an enemy about to do harm to their own troops. It can also be an act that doesn't ever require firing a weapon, as was the case on Saipan, Marianas Islands, 7 July 1944 (World War II), when PFC Harold Christ Agerholm, a 19 year old Marine from Wisconsin, commandeered an ambulance and single-handedly loaded and evacuated forty-five wounded men through the heaviest fighting to a field hospital in the rear, out of harms way. Hours later, while aiding the wounded, he was killed by a Japanese sniper. He was awarded a posthumous Medal of Honor.

What people who perform heroic acts have in common however, is having or displaying *courage*. They can be called bold, brave, fearless, gallant, unafraid, valiant or valorous. In a slang vernacular, many of us might call them "gutsy," or even "plucky." The definition I feel comes closest to describing what Donald accomplished is close to a dictionary definition of "Hero:" *"A person noted for feats of courage or nobility of purpose, especially one who has risked or sacrificed his life."*

I feel that anyone who knew (or reads this story about) Donald would agree that *his* "feats of courage and nobility of purpose" gave ample proof that he indeed *is* a hero. They should also be able to see that Donald's significant accomplishments and heroism were sown in the seeds of his upbringing and faith. Thus this is an

account of an extremely talented and courageous young man who, like many of his time, had everything against him and yet rose far above it all.

The Early Years, 1937 – 1955:

Donald was born on November 7, 1937 in the City of New York, to Carmen Mayo Antonacci (also known as “Honey” Kelly) and Joseph William Antonacci. Like anyone else, Donald had no idea what life had in store for him. But he “played the hand he was dealt” by rising far above his modest beginnings and the breakup of his family to become both a very decent human being and one of significant accomplishments.

The early plight of the five Antonacci brothers is similar to that of so many other children who were orphaned or abandoned by one or more of their parents and deprived of what many considered “a normal upbringing in a loving family.” Like many other families, including my own, it was not unusual that a large number of troubled families with as many as five or six siblings (six Merna’s, five each Altomore’s, Vincent’s, Oryghya’s, and Anonacci’s, and three each O’Rourke’s, Feldman’s and Molerio’s) were sent to religious or similar homes as a result of referral cases from the courts and various public social service agencies, including the Catholic Charities organization. Many of these families had literally given up or abandoned their children on the streets of New York until some social, church or other organization found shelter for them. In the case of the Antonacci children, it was because their father abandoned his sons, and their mother, who found herself in dire circumstances, and forced to find another home for her five sons.

In 1941, at the very tender age of 4, Donald, together with his four brothers, Joseph age 9, Robert age 8, John age 5, and Ralph, only 18 months old, were all placed in *St. Agnes Home and School for Boys*, Sparkill,



St. Agnes Home and School for Children.

(Picture from cover of Program of “St. Agnes Home Third Annual Building Fund Dinner Dance, Singer’s Hotel, Spring Valley, N.Y., Saturday, March 1, 1975”)

Rockland County, New York. (The terms *St. Agnes Home and School for Children* and *St. Agnes Convent* are oftentimes used as well. Hereinafter I will refer to it simply as *St. Agnes*). *St. Agnes* was normally used to house and educate young men of *high school* age (though at one time it also cared for young girls),

fortunately for the Antonacci brothers (and others); they were also able to attend *elementary school* there as well.¹

Except for the youngsters who took their training right at St. Agnes, called “shop” (manual or other skilled technical training classes such as printing, carpentry, electrical work, etc.), most of the “House’s Kids,” including Donald and his brothers, attended *Tappan Zee High School (TZHS)* in Piermont, the next town over. (Many St. Agnes “House’s Kids” also spent their elementary school years at two other (Rockland County) Catholic institutions, *St. Dominic’s Convent* in Blauvelt, NY and *St. Agatha’s Home* in Nanuet, NY).

The five Antonacci brothers would remain at St. Agnes until they graduated from TZHS, which was seven long years for Joseph (1948), eight for Robert (1949), 11 for John (1954), and 12 for Donald (1955). Brother Ralph left St. Agnes before graduating, but later received his high school diploma from Flushing High School in Long Island, New York.

Since the Antonacci and Merna brothers were approximately the same ages, they were in one or more of the same high school classes, played together, went “bean picking” together (less than .50 cents a bushel), caddied at the local golf club (less than \$10 for 18 holes), hiked to the “ol 40-foot swimmin’ hole” each summer (free, not counting blisters), and competed on the same ball fields. All this while domiciled in the “attic” (top floor) and dormitories on lower floors in “The House.” (Note: some were also fortunate to live in several detached “cottages” near the Nun’s cemetery).

According to Donald’s Brother John, the Antonacci Brothers “*had to grow up tough after that,*” and the swaggering Donald oftentimes thought he was a fighter. On more than one occasion they found themselves “*jumping to the defense of each other.*”

When John provided the below photograph of the five Antonacci Brothers, he said that the occasion was Easter Sunday in 1941, during a visit by their Mother “Honey” to St. Agnes. Shown in the top row are Robert and Joseph, and in the bottom row are Ralph, Donald and John. Directly behind the brothers in this picture, though not very clear, is the St. Agnes Cemetery, with the grave markers of 330 Dominican Sisters, including 10 Mothers, three children, one woman, and a former Convent chauffeur who died in 1936. The building on the right was the Greenhouse.

¹ I say “fortunately” meaning they were able to avoid the painful necessity of breaking up the brothers’ one at a time each year, as was the case for the six Merna brothers who had to attend elementary school at one institution and high school at another. (In January 1942, the oldest brother George was sent to St. Agnes. His four younger brothers and one sister went to St. Dominic’s, a few miles from St. Agnes, where they would remain until they completed the eighth grade. Each year as one graduated, he was “transferred” to St. Agnes for high school, leaving the others behind. (Their only sister, Vivian, after ten years at St. Dominic’s, was “discharged” to the Catholic Guardian Society in New York City).



**The Five Antonacci Brothers, 1941
(Photo Courtesy of John Antonacci)**

John also said *“this is the only photo of the five Antonacci brothers taken together.”* In addition to the Fedora Hats popular in the 1940’s, note the Easter Bunnies held by the youngest children. John’s note explained: *“My Mom always brought us our clothing, bunnies, coloring books, etc. She never missed a Sunday.”*²

“Never missed a Sunday” is quite a tribute to Mrs. Antonacci, as her frequent and loving visits were beyond the norm for the majority of children placed in either *St. Dominic’s Convent, Blauvelt, New York* (another Dominican Home for boys and girls up through the eighth grade) or *St. Agnes* though Mrs. Antonacci could not care for her family in her own home, for reasons beyond her control, she never “abandoned” her five sons and in fact, to her great credit, kept in extremely close contact with them.

But Donald and his brothers survived their humble beginnings and many years as “House’s Kids.” Donald would graduate from high school, join the Navy for what turned out to be 21-year career, during which he got off to a slow start, but settled down to go on and earn decorations and awards for distinct and heroic feats of courage in combat, representing his country in an exemplary manner.

“HOUSE’S KIDS”

The term “House’s Kid” was appropriately given to any boy who was placed in the custody of the Dominican Nuns of *St. Agnes*.³ Since its inception, thousands of children, through no fault of their own, for the reasons mentioned above, were housed, educated and supervised by Catholic Priests, Dominican Sisters, and lay coaches and counselors. Some of the counselors were themselves former “House’s Kids.” The duration of time for those placed at *St. Agnes* ranged from as little as a year to as many as ten or more. Up until the 1950’s, most boys at *St. Agnes* were orphans or those with only one parent, and most were from New York City. In the late 1950’s and 1960’s the population began a steady decline from a high of 600 to about 300.

² The six Merna children *never* saw their Mother during their *entire* placements, and in fact, were told she had died. It wasn’t until many years later they learned she not only left New York to live in California, but remarried and had yet another child. The Merna children’s Father visited them sporadically at *St. Dominic’s* when he was stationed at Ft. Dix, NJ during W.W.II, but never at *St. Agnes*).

At St. Agnes all of us lived in what was referred to as the “attic,” the top floor of the very large building shown in the pictures on page 3 and below. The building itself was both affectionately and irreverently referred to as “The House.” It was thus with great pride and affection therefore that all who found themselves residents of St. Agnes were, are, and to this date continue to be referred to as “House’s Kids.” Indeed, over the years and even today there has been a variety of paraphernalia produced proudly proclaiming, “I’m A House’s Kid.” Many of its former residents, now adults in mid-to-late life, proudly wear or display these proclamations on caps, sweaters, tee shirts, jackets and bumper stickers. There is even an annual reunion picnic in either Sparkill or Piermont that attracts 75 or more former residents each year.

“House’s Kids” never tire of telling (bragging?) how they had to walk almost 4 to 5 miles every day, one way of course, from “The House” at Sparkill to Tappan Zee High School in Piermont. Contrary to what some believe, TZHS in Piermont³ did *not* get its name from the *Tappan Zee Bridge* as TZHS was in existence *long* before that Bridge was built.



St. Agnes Home and School for Boys, Sparkill (Rockland Co., New York)⁴
(Photo from Post Card 7713 by J. Britton, Tappan, NY)

³ Piermont was where my classmate and future wife Dorothy M. (Dot) Sedlack lived with her family. After my brother Jim got out of the Marines he lived with Dot’s family while working as a laborer on the Tappan Zee Bridge, the N.Y. State Thruway and Garden State Parkway, during the four summers he attended college. And it was St. Agnes’ long time Coach Jim Faulk who got him that job! (More to come on Jim Faulk).

⁴ The property for St. Agnes, purchased in 1884 by Mother Mary Dominic of “Johnson’s place,” was a 30-acre farm located in what was then called “Sparkville.” It became known as *St. Agnes Home and School for Boys*, a “residence for dependent and neglected children.”



Piermont High School Building, built 1898 to 1900,
Named Tappan Zee High School in 1901
(Photo courtesy of Rockland Review, Friday, July 11, 2003)

St. Agnes as a “boot camp?”

Having been both a “Blauvelt Kid” (St. Dominic’s) and “Houses Kid” (St. Agnes), I can only liken the shock orphaned or abandoned young boys such as the Antonacci’s, Merna’s and others experienced upon arrival at these Catholic “homes.” It had to be similar to the greeting Marine recruits receive on their first day at the famed Parris Island, SC (PISC) “boot camp.” During my time there (1947) we were “greeted” with the not so friendly admonition: *“There are only two ways off this Island, graduating from boot camp or leaving in a pine box.”* While that may sound a bit harsh, it was in fact quite close to reality; at least we all *believed* it to be true. PISC’s earnest reproof today is more subtle and “politically correct,” as the overhead sign on the Base that greets new recruits see upon their arrival proclaims that PISC is the place *“Where the difference begins.”* This slogan certainly would have been very apropos for “House’s Kid’s” of *any* era; for sure it was “where the difference began” for Donald Francis Antonacci.



Marine Corps Recruit Depot, Parris Island, SC (Photo by Gerald F. Merna)

I used the PISC boot camp example above for another good reason, and that is because so many “House’s Kids” joined the Marines after leaving St. Agnes. These included Brothers Joseph and Robert Antonacci, Frank Boyle, Richard Feldman, Philip Greco, Halprin, Nicholas Huha, William “Sarge” Karris, Brothers

David and Louis Kee, William Lehman, Hugh McAvinue, Brothers Gerald, Jim and Richard Merna, Malachy Murphy, Donald Hennessy and many other “old timers” of World War II vintage.⁵

Most of these “House’s Kids” considered “boot camp” a breeze compared to what they had experienced at St. Dominic’s, St. Agatha’s or St. Agnes (especially if they were in *two or more* of them).

Part of that “experience” began the first few days and weeks at both “Homes,” and it was not what you would call a “friendly” occasion. Unless you were “big” or athletically talented, you were “initiated” on day one, (though the words “bullied” and “intimidated” easily come to mind) by older and/or bigger boys, who no doubt received the same treatment when they arrived, and now it was their turn.

And I don’t remember any “House’s Kids” wanting the option the Marine Recruits had, i.e., to “*depart in a pine box,*” so it was easy to choose the option of leaving by “finishing (high) school. But they did have other choices as well. These included being adopted (few were), reunited with other family members (some were), or attaining the age of age 17 or 18 when they could go out on their own (most did). One option for the truly daring (or those running from other dire consequences) was “running away.” Several “attempted” this, and most were either “caught” or “surrendered,” and a very few never returned.

Since St. Agnes had no gates, guards, fences (except around the playing field), or bridges like those at PISC, (it wasn’t called Parris “Island” by accident); House’s Kids could simply “take off,” any time, committing the *civilian* version of the *military’s* AWOL or Desertion offenses. Except that for the residents of St. Agnes we’re talking about boys in their early teens. This serious option of “running away” was surprisingly selected by quite a few, and at least one of the “penalties” if you got caught was getting a “baldy” haircut. (Heck, we got one of those for *volunteering* to go to Parris Island and had to *pay* for it as well!)⁶

“Role Models”: The Sisters of Sparkill:

Although not every Dominican Nun was equally loved by their charges, the *overwhelming* majority of Sisters were not only held in great esteem, but also served as great “role models” for the mothers most “House’s Kids” did not have, and probably for many who did! Indeed, some of the Nuns became so popular that former “House’s Kids” would return time after time just to visit with them, especially at annual picnics, midnight masses at Christmas, and on other special occasions; many of us kept in contact by phone and mail as well.

⁵ My next story will be about my Navy brother George, killed in WWII. I then hope to write another about “The Military Men of St. Agnes.” The latter will require considerable research of all St. Agnes Alumni who served in the military from WWII to the present. Initially I intended to limit it to “The Marines of St. Agnes,” since my brothers Jim and Rich were also Marines, but decided to expand it since so *many* served in *all* military branches, including George and another Brother Bob (who served in the Navy during the Korean War), as well as John Antonacci and many others who joined the Army. It appears that the Navy attracted more “House’s Kid’s” than any other service, with the Army running a close second.

⁶ Ironically, both my oldest brother George and I became two of those “runaways” who were never “caught” as each of us “disappeared into the bowels of the “Big Apple” [New York City] to begin a world on our own, which was not so easy. George made his “escape” before I arrived at St. Agnes, and like me, got a job in the City until he was old enough to enlist in the Navy in 1943. I ran away at age 16, got a job in NYC and joined the Marines on my 17th birthday in 1947. Two “House’s Kids” who ran away with me “got caught” and completed their time at St. Agnes. (I never did ask if they got “baldies.”) I was also surprised some 40 years later when an old-timer “House’s Kid” said he never knew I was a runaway.



The Dominican Sisters of Sparkill
 (Photo's courtesy of Dominican Sisters of Sparkill)



Joe Wiska, John Antonacci, Sr. James Francis.
 April 16, 2001
 (Photo courtesy of John Antonacci)

The Dominican Sisters of Sparkill (175 Route 340, Sparkill, NY 10976) recently sent out an announcement that they are building a “Motherhouse” and adding a 4-story addition to the Dominican Convent “that will provide both assisted and nursing care for the retired and infirm Sisters. Addressing us, their alumni, they said, “You, as a St. Agnes Boy/”House’s Kid” have your own memories of living here in Sparkill and are part of the history of St. Agnes Home and School founded from the 1880’s.”



**Bill Lehman, Dominican Sister, Rudy Loyola,
 Jerry & Dot Merna, Linda Merna Figura**



**Sr. Ann Catherine (R.) and Nuns
 cut the Cake**

50th Anniversary of the St. Agnes Alumni Association, August 24, 1996.
 (Photos by Gerald F. Merna)

It is safe to say that many “House’s Kids” will be supporting the almost 400 elderly Nun’s in this worthwhile endeavor, many of whom are now in their 70’s, 80’s, and 90’s. There’s also no doubt that Donald Antonacci would not only have *approved* of this, but would have fully *supported* it as well. I say this for many reasons, including this moving account about Donald provided by his brother John:

“When Donald was at St. Agnes he played in the band (under) Sister Marie. He sang in the choir and was an altar boy. He worked in the men’s ref (area occupied by male employees of St. Agnes) and his “boss” was Sister William Vincent.⁷ They (Donald and Sr. William Vincent) built up a friendship. Donald took her

⁷ A favorite of almost every St. Agnes “House’s Kid,” she was affectionately called Sr. “Willy Vin,” and was responsible for all those who lived in the “attic” of the building we called “The House.” A gentle, caring, and loving individual, Sr. William Vincent

name “Vincent” for his confirmation name (thus the *Vincenzo* mentioned on page one). He was also excellent in art and sculpturing; one year while in High School he won first prize for his Halloween window painting in Piermont.

“In 1969, when I was upstate, I visited St. Agnes. And you know how your car “acts as a magnet” (steering you back to St. Agnes); you have to stop to see the Nun’s. We had a great visit; we saw Sister Anne Catherine, Sister James Francis, and Sister William Mary (see pictures above). Before we left we also saw Sister William Vincent. After asking about our Mother was doing, the first words she said were “How is Donald?” I told her he was in Vietnam. As we were about to leave, she took her rosary beads from her belt around her waist, handed them to me, and said, “Please give these to Donald.”

“Sister William Vincent died while Donald was still in Vietnam. I made it to her funeral that was held during one of the worst blizzards to ever hit New York. They couldn’t even dig any graves in the cemetery, so she had to be buried at a later date. Nothing, not even that storm would keep me from that funeral. I did that for my brother Donald. Before Donald died I went to visit him in California and delivered Sister William Vincent’s rosary beads to him. We then spent ten wonderful days together before he died.”

“Role Model”: Coach James J. Faulk



Coach (Col., USMCR Ret.) James J. Faulk, 1908 - 1985
(Picture courtesy Donald Dillon)

St. Agnes also had a dominant male *role model* for the missing fathers of Donald and the other “House’s Kids;” someone almost everyone looked up to, though not all in the same way. This person played *many* roles in their lives; the major ones being athletic director, coach, counselor, and some would say a very strict disciplinarian. This particular man was James J. Faulk, who out of both respect and affection, was called

in many ways not only assumed the role of “mother” that many of us never had growing up during our most impressionable years, but was also a “friend” to many of us, someone you could talk to about anything.

“Coach.” (Unlike today’s culture, where regardless of your age, almost everyone feels free to either call you by your first name, while wait staffs in most restaurants refer to both young and senior citizen customers alike as “You Guys.”) No one dared call Coach Faulk anything but “Coach,” at least not out loud.

Coach’s wife Betty (“Mrs. Faulk” to us), a registered nurse, not only *endured* but also *shared* her husband’s dedication and care of “his kid’s.” While they had no children as a result of their marriage, in reality they had “thousands” represented by the “House’s Kids” they made their own! It also goes without saying the high regard the Faulk’s had for the Nuns and Priests of St. Agnes.

Coach’s roles as model and disciplinarian greatly influenced the adult lives of most of us. Many of us to this day credit him for not only instilling needed discipline at a critical time in our lives, but as a result of his guidance and training, giving us a moral compass as well. Whether we knew it or not at the time, he also gave us, by example more than anything else, the ethical and mental characteristics that would improve not only our lives, but also our love of God and sense of patriotism for the Country we lived in. These characteristics would ultimately affect not only *our* lives and careers, but also those of our children. There is little doubt they affected the character of Donald Francis Antonacci immeasurably.

We “lost” Coach for a few years when he answered another calling, that being to defend our country when it was attacked, by joining the United States Marine Corps during World War II. His frequent letters from the Pacific Islands he fought on, as well as those from the “House’s Kids” fighting in all of the military services, were printed in a “*Newsletter*” that endures to this day. One of his letters in the “*Second Newsletter*,” dated “*April 24, 1944 South Pacific*,” led off with what would become his “trademark greeting”: “*To the Fightingest Boys in the World*” (see extract below). Newsletters⁸ weren’t the same without a message from him, and when duty allowed, he never missed the opportunity. He truly loved his “House’s Kids” and it was no accident he returned to St. Agnes after his war time service in World War II to resume the very same duties he performed before the war, and probably for the same modest remuneration.

⁸ A distinction should be made between two versions of the St. Agnes Newsletter. The first began during the World War II era, and was called “*The Newsletter*” and sometimes included the number of the issue, such as “*Sixth Newsletter*.” Though it discussed what was going on with the “boys” at St. Agnes during the war years, its primary purpose was to report on the “comings and goings” of St. Agnes alumni serving in the various military services. The highlight of each issue would hopefully have a letter from “Coach Faulk” wherever he was serving in the Pacific. In 1946, the first issue of the “*ST. AGNES ALUMNI NEWS BULLETIN*” appeared. (Later the word “Association” replaced the word “Bulletin.”) It announced both the newly formed “St. Agnes Alumni Association”, and its first “Acting President,” Joe Rosen, who would serve in that capacity for over 50 years. Though the word “Newsletter” does not appear on its masthead, it has always been informally added to the end of the title and is popularly known today as “The St. Agnes Alumni Association” Newsletter.

To the fightingest boys in the world,
Wherever you may be

My Dear Boys,

This has really been a happy day for me. The News Letter reached me early this afternoon and completely broke up whatever I had planned doing. I just walked to the top of the hill where I know for certain I would be able to devour every word of the Letter without any military interruptions. You will all admit that this second News Letter is tops. The Sisters, Fr. Nash, Mr. Sullivan, Sr. Ann Catherine did a marvelous job and in passing out thanks let's not forget the Editors John O'Sullivan and Henry Foldman. I'm sure you all must feel as I do. There aren't words or phrases at our humble disposal to justify our sentiments or our appreciation. As I sat on the hillside and read the different sentiments and expressions from Sisters and you boys, I was glad I was alone, as for some reason or other I got a bit moist around the eyes. I think the Sisters expressed themselves nobly when they said your loyalty has been far beyond anything they expected. And I know all of you who were quoted meant every word you uttered. I only wish I could forward some of the letters I receive from you boys back to the Editors of the News Letter. Thanks again for the beautiful letters that keep coming my way. All of you speak from the heart and I have the deepest faith in your abilities to accomplish any task that might confront you. I know as I write this letter there are a number of you battling for your very existence against an enemy that seemingly won't give up until his last man is dead. And yet with all your tribulations and inconveniences, you take time out to drop your Coach a few lines. What a thrill it is to me when I receive letters, cards and even presents from "the finest guys"; from all over the world filled with greetings and best wishes - may I with bowed head say thanks to you all. Of course you will agree and I believe you all do understand that all I can do is answer in a blanket letter which I send back to the Good Sisters, who in turn print and send back again to you in all parts of the world. I'm sure you will all vouch for the joy and comfort that is provided us by the News Letter - not only does it keep us in touch with home and our friends, but they revived the spirit that makes men great; that enables you all to do deeds beyond all human courage and power; the spirit of freedom, fostered by the school where once you sat as youngsters and where you studied and played. Now you are carrying on for your school, your country and your loved ones in order that right may triumph and peace be with us all for generations to come. Let each and every one of us in receipt of the News Letter dedicate again our hearts, our minds and our bodies to the great task that still lies ahead. Since each News Letter will bring additional names of boys who are casualties, it is only fitting

I only wish space would allow printing this letter from "Coach" in full, because even this brief excerpt depicts the mutual love that existed between this man and his "boys;" his spirit, determination, dedication, and enthusiasm jumps off the page as one reads it. His remarks also give a good sense of just how *important* these *Newsletters* were to him and all of us. (I still feel the same "emotion" re-reading this excerpt).

During W.W. II, almost every one who joined the military would be sure to visit St. Agnes after their recruit training, while on leave between assignments, or upon their discharge. The following excerpt from page 16 of an early 1945 *Newsletter* written by a former "House's Kid" then a "GI" fighting in Germany, both complements and corroborates the Coach's excerpted letter above in many ways:

Somewhere in Germany
1900 hrs., 5 Dec., 1944

To all St. Agnes men everywhere; to you especially with the fighting forces, be it front line or services of supply; to you in the Army, Navy, Marine Corps and Coast Guard and to you in the Merchant Marine, let us pause momentarily and let our minds wander back to those wonderful Christmas Eve services at St. Agnes. Nostalgial. That which we had once enjoyed physically we can now enjoy again mentally. I firmly believe that these sentiments expressed herein are those of all St. Agnes fighting men all over the world. It is my contention that on Christmas Eve every fighting man of St. Agnes will have in their hearts and on their minds the vivid memory of the Midnight Service.

In your church this Christmas Eve you will have not only the present St. Agnes men, but also those that have been there before; yes, they too will be there in spirit.

During World War II this legendary Coach of St. Agnes, now *Major James J. Faulk*, had a chance encounter on the pacific island of Guadalcanal with one of his former St. Agnes boys, then Master Sergeant Carl Trezini. They conceived the idea of building a gymnasium to serve as a memorial to honor the St. Agnes boys who had given their lives for their country.



(Cover Page by Dom Yozzo from W.W.II St. Agnes Newsletter)

Shortly after the war the *St. Agnes Alumni Association Newsletter* (shown above) announced the idea for the gymnasium. Donations poured in, much of it from the paychecks of current and former “House’s Kids,” many of them still on active duty or returning from the fighting on Pacific beaches and islands, serving aboard ships and submarines, and in the air, in all of the military services during WWII. The fund was also the beneficiary of one alumni’s \$10,000 GI Insurance. The gym was successfully built in 1954 and boasted having one of the finest basketball courts in Rockland County at that time.



(Photo courtesy of Gerald F. Merna)

The Plaque pictured above, was dedicated in honor of those “House’s Kids” who made the supreme sacrifice in World War II and Korea, and was proudly hung in the new St. Agnes gym. At the time of the dedication it had 39 names. Unfortunately, the list of those making the supreme sacrifice would swell to 55, including our brother George.

Serving as St. Agnes’ athletic director and counselor both before and after World War II, Coach Faulk is credited with shaping “his kids” into productive citizens. One former resident (1940 to 1948) said, “*this man (Faulk) was an inspiration to us kids...and...the “major reason why most of the St. Agnes kids lived decent lives.”*” Many “House’s Kids” would go on to become Priests, lawyers, doctors, dentists, business and government executives, career military NCOs and Officers, and a variety of other successful careers. Donald Francis Antonacci *and* his four brothers were among the *many* to do so, with careers second to none.

Following are several pertinent excerpts from four post-W.W. II Newsletters that are striking in their similarity to those published by the World War II generation:

Dear Member and Benefactor,

July, 1990

Rec'd a nice note from Michael [redacted], he said he remembers a [redacted] alumnus by the name of Lemont [redacted] instead of [redacted] as requested by Victor [redacted] who was trying to locate him, if anyone knows his whereabouts please let us know. Whanks Mike and we do hope you will feel better, and even make the annual picnic in Aug, so glad to hear you enjoy the letter so much. Had a nice note from Janet [redacted], widow of George, she tells us her sister-in-law (widow of Gus) comes from England and spends the holidays with her each year, it helps them get through the holidays after losing their husbands. Glad to hear from new member, Peter [redacted] (42-51) & add him to our mailing list, thanks for the note, Peter. Thanks to Joe [redacted], we were able to add the [redacted] brothers to our mailing list. Also Joe rec'd a nice letter from Louis [redacted] & forwarded it to us. Louis informs us he is now 67 yrs.

Extract from July 1990 Newsletter

⁹ Indeed, my brother Jim even named his first son *James Faulk* Merna. In all, over 555 St. Agnes kids literally went “from the ball fields of St. Agnes to the battlefields of W.W.II, Korea and Vietnam.” Today, their children and grandchildren are fighting in Afghanistan, Iraq, and elsewhere in our nation’s war on terror.

THE COMMITTEE
JOE ALFANO
FRANK ASCIOLLA
JOHN BOHANNAN
FRANK BRADYCH
TOM FITZGERALD
MAE MALTESE
JOHN MANGANO
OSCAR MOLERO
JOHN O'ROURKE
JOE ROSEN
FRANK VIOLETTA

St. Agnes Alumni Association

P.O. BOX 143
SPARKILL, NEW YORK 10976

DECEMBER, 1977

HOLIDAY GREETINGS

Dear Member:

It is that time of the year again, when we spend so much time and money shopping for presents for those far and near. We decorate our homes and offices, we sing holiday songs, and introduce our youngsters to Santa Claus. But we are really celebrating the birthday of God become man. Therefore, we wish to extend to all our alumni and their families a joyful Christmas and a healthy, happy, and prosperous New Year.

And why this Christmas greeting each year? Would you believe this is the *only* greeting a few of our members receive!

Extract from December 1977 Newsletter

ST. AGNES ALUMNI
9 GLEN ROAD
HIGHLAND FALLS, N.Y.
10928

Dear Alumnus/Friend,

July '03

Dropping by to say "Hello" and say we hope ^{you} is going well for you and your family.

"HERE 'N NOW: Rec'd a surprise phone call from "Iggy [redacted]" out of CA. had a great chat & lots of laughs reminiscing of old times at St. Agnes. Iggy also sent us a check along with his dues to be sent to Father [redacted], thanks so much Iggy. Rec'd a nice note from Aida [redacted], sister of Father [redacted] thanking us for the prayers for Father & informing us she was flying to Brazil 6/3/03 to spend time with him & returning 8/21/03 hopefully with her brother thanks Aida for your nice note & also sending your new address, we hope your trip is a good one. Heard from Greg [redacted] recently, he informed he was going to St. Agnes 5/18/03 to a Mass for some of the Dominican Sisters who were celebrating their jubilee, he wanted to attend to show [redacted]

Extract from July 2003 Newsletter

Dear Alumnus/Friend:

SPRING: '04

Joe Rosen's burial Mass while he was here stateside. Nice hearing from Bernice [redacted] again, he is on the internet & tries to contact Alumni. nice hearing from Jim [redacted], Jim sent us the obit. of Ed [redacted] who passed away May 9th. Ed attended St Agnes & graduated from TZ High school in 1953, he was unanimously voted "All County" in football. Jim also informed his wife, Sue, who was a nurse for many years recently had both knee replacements & doing real good glad to hear all went well for you, Sue. Thanks to Phil [redacted] from FL, for his nice note about the newsletter. Congratulations to Nick [redacted] & wife on their Golden Wedding Anniv. may you have many more happy, healthy years together. Thanks to the Joseph [redacted] family from MA, for their donation in memory of Sr. M. Daley. Rec'd a beautiful autographed picture from member, Elvin [redacted] out of Grand Prairir, TX. Elvin's picture is going to be on the front of a book written by author, Ken [redacted], who has written at least 5 other books. the name of this book is True Crime Novel, the author has followed Elvin around for a year while doing his job private investigating cases. Congratulations, Elvin, What an honor we are all very proud of you & know what a dangerous job you have.

Extract from Spring 2004 Newsletter

Contrast these four postwar newsletter excerpts with the one from the war years and you will note their "style" and "content" is the same. While a variety of individuals, including Nuns, Counselors, and Teachers (and a few alumni) published the wartime newsletters, since its postwar inception almost 50 years ago, the St. Agnes Alumni Newsletter was published by *one* individual, Joe Rosen. With a little help from his friend Art Kingsley in his declining years, Rosen lovingly, painstakingly and devotedly composed, typed and mailed the newsletter two, three, and sometimes four times a year, while maintaining the constantly changing address base doing a great job answering all the letters or calls he received from alumni, including penning a short note in response to most of the letters he received.

Even the advent of the computer with its word processing program, Page Publisher or other contemporary newsletter tools hasn't changed the Newsletters' hunt n' peck appearance or its content. It still contains tidbits of news from any and all alumni who drop even a brief note, and also includes death notices and illnesses of both Nuns and alumni. Oftentimes it has enough "typo's" to make any English teacher blush, but not its readers. Our "Editor" literally follows the "KISS" rule ("Keep It Simple Stupid"). Everyone loves receiving it, and no one "complains" about anything, except perhaps that it's not long enough. (If they complain too loudly, they may become the next "Editor").

And there were always a couple of Rosen's "corny little jokes" in most issues. They were *always* clean and good-natured, and gave us all a chuckle.¹⁰ When Rosen died, after being the "Temporary President" for over 50 years, another "old-timer" and World War II Veteran, Art Kingsley, "with a little help from his friend" (wife Gloria), both of whom had assisted Rosen when his health was failing, "picked up the flag" as the new Editor, and the *St. AAA NL* hasn't missed a beat since. Only the destinations have changed; instead of sending it to "House's Kids" on Pacific Islands, to ships at sea, or to troops in other war-torn areas of the globe such as Korea, Vietnam, and later the Persian Gulf. This served to "link" the newer generation to the "greatest generation." Today it goes to many of the children and grandchildren of former "House's Kids" serving in Iraq, Afghanistan, and other dangerous places around the world. I can't emphasize enough how critical the Newsletter was and still is a "link to our roots." Always of great interest to everyone concerned, it was (and is) unique in the love and remembrances it provides. Again, this criticality is aptly demonstrated in Coach Faulk's above excerpted letter in the W.W.II newsletter.

For many years the cost of mailing the Newsletter was paid by donations. Only in recent years were alumni asked to "voluntarily send \$3.00 a year for membership and (Newsletter) mailing costs." Today it's only \$10.00, though many of us send more in annual donations for the postage *and* the charitable causes our association supports, including several alumni now priests serving foreign missionaries. If someone doesn't have \$10.00 or "forgets" to mail their "dues," that's not a problem; no one "bills" you and all alumni get it whether they send in their "dues" or not.¹¹

There's little doubt Donald Antonacci received *his* Newsletters during his 21+ years in the Navy, especially while he served aboard ship and in Vietnam Waters. He probably also enjoyed sharing them with his Vietnamese counterparts that he worked so closely with, just as many of us did in prior wars.

The End of St. Agnes Home and School for Boys:

For 72 years from 1905, St. Agnes cared for thousands of boys (and surprising to me I learned a small number of girls of all ages long before my time). In 1977, mounting costs and a freeze in public assistance forced St. Agnes to close its doors after 93 years of service. Former "House's Kids" have complained that when the former school building (erected in 1919) was torn down, not even the class pictures on the hall walls were taken down. However, the Nun's housing and St. Agnes' Chapel survived the shutdown. A Senior Citizen housing complex (Thorpe Village) has been located for over 30 years on the former St. Agnes ball fields.

¹⁰ Here are two examples: "Old photographers never die, they just stop developing" (1989); "Son: What does it mean when a man goes to a convention as a delegate-at-large? Papa: It means his wife doesn't go with him" (1944). Not as bad as "why does a chicken cross the road," but they came from Joe, and we all laughed!

¹¹ And thanks to the ambitious ingenuity of a few 'House's Kids,' there is now a St. Agnes Alumni web site, House's Kids@Home: <http://www.stagnesalumni.org/>. It also links to a web site for TZHS alumni.

St. Agnes' beautiful altar and choir loft (below), serves as a reminder to its former residents not only of the many Masses and services they attended, but also as a remembrance to those who would return each Christmas Eve for Midnight Mass. This was also a good time to "show off" your fancy duds, latest girl friend, and perhaps do a little "bragging" about your successes, real or imagined, since you left "the House." But in truth the former "House's Kids" really came to meditate on their time at St. Agnes, and to see the counselors and current "House's Kids" which could have included brothers, cousins, and other family members. It was also an opportunity to say hello to the Nuns most knew so personally. It was an extra bonus if they could also meet former friends and classmates who were there for the same reasons.¹²



Altar of St. Agnes Chapel



Choir Loft at St. Agnes Chapel
(Photos courtesy of Gerald F. Merna)

¹² There was a unique restaurant and bar less than a mile away called "The Mountain House," where, both before and after Midnight Mass you could find at least one "House's Kid" you knew from years gone by. (It's also been said that sometimes a few "House's Kids" "forgot" to go to Midnight Mass, preferring to "wait" for you there when you came after Mass).

THE UNITED STATES NAVY:



Off on the wrong foot:

Donald being Donald, nothing ever really came easy for him. He was something of a renegade, sometimes quick to ignore rules and do things his own way. But he had so many other great qualities about him, especially a heart that was burning with a patriotic fervor. So at age 18 he left St. Agnes, found the nearest recruiting station, and on November 25, 1955, quietly became Seaman Donald Francis Antonacci, United States Navy.

During his first enlistment, sure enough, he started off on the wrong foot by going AWOL (absent without leave), not once, but several times! Not for unusually long periods, but enough to cause him some disciplinary problems. But he returned each time to face the consequences of both non-judicial punishment and two of the three lesser courts-martial before he finally "got his act together." Normally a start like this would be enough to end almost any military career; but "someone up there" was obviously looking after Donald, and the Navy also perceived something in him worth giving him that "second chance." That decision turned out not only to be a "lucky break" for Donald, but a *wise* one for the Navy and our country as well. Perhaps we'll never know why Donald started out the way he did.¹³ Like many of his fellow alumni, he undoubtedly asked himself many times what life really had in store for him. If he asked that out loud, the priests and nuns at St. Agnes probably dismissed most of the questions he asked of them as the typical fanciful flights and thoughts of a young man reaching for manhood.

As was the case at St. Agnes, as a young sailor Donald again had to learn to "live by his wits." With his intellect he was able to complete a variety of difficult and technical training courses. In 1970 he was then assigned to his first of two tours of duty in Vietnam. This experience so affected him that between tours he volunteered for and was selected to attend the very formidable 35-week Vietnamese language course, which he successfully completed. On this second tour in 1971, the lone American on a Vietnamese riverboat, Donald successfully ingratiated himself with his counterparts, not only winning their respect and admiration, but also distinguishing himself in combat. After his Navy career, he checked off another of his life's goals by not only earning his college degree, but doing it *with honors*. There are many who had the benefit of "a normal upbringing in a loving family" who cannot claim *half* of Donald's accomplishments. So this is the story about what Donald accomplished notwithstanding false starts and other obstacles, some unavoidable, some of his own making..¹⁴

¹³ Having gone AWOL from St. Agnes to also join the military at age 17, I can sympathize with Donald's initial behavior; this was also his first taste of real "freedom" after *many* years in the disciplined environment of St. Agnes.

¹⁴ In the interest of "full disclosure," I am both a "House's Kid" and a military careerist, so I cannot help but be influenced by that background in some of my writing.

Donald’s official Navy records were requested and obtained from the National Personnel Records Center; members of Donald’s family provided other original documents. Copies of original documents, where possible, have been “scanned” to speak for themselves, without any editorializing, thus avoiding errors and/or misinterpretations. Where possible and known, credit is given for the photos or other documents provided.

VIETNAM WAR SERVICE



Designed by American architect and sculptor Maya Lin, the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, D.C., was dedicated in 1982. It features a V-shaped black Granite wall with the names of more than 58,000 Americans who were lost during The Vietnam War (1959 – 1975) (Leo de Wys, Inc./Everett C. Johnson)

When Donald learned there was a war brewing in Vietnam, he wanted to be a part of it. As shown from Table 1 below, he served a total of two years, three months and 13 days in or around the Vietnam area of operations:

<u>FROM</u>	<u>TO</u>	<u>DUTY STATION</u>	<u>YRS/MOS/DAS</u>	<u>RATE</u>	<u>CUMUL SVC</u>
11-12-70	11-06-71	Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (Chief, Naval Advisory Group)	00-11-24	SF1	00-11-24
06-25-72	02-20-73	Arrive/Report/Serve, Saigon, Vietnam, (CMNAV)	00-07-25	HT1	01-09-19
03-30-73	09-24-73	Fleet Training Group, WESTPAC, Yokuska, Japan	00-05-24	HT1	02-03-13

(Table 1)

These maps will help identify some of the areas where Donald served in the Vietnam War as reflected in several of his citations and other documents that follow:



Prior to and between his two tours Donald successfully completed several very technical courses, not the least of which was the successful completion of an intensive 35-week foreign language curriculum where he mastered the Vietnamese language. Here's a small sample of what Donald grappled with in learning this most difficult language:

miền Nam the South (the Mekong River Delta) miền Bắc the North (the Red River Delta).

*A friend wants to know why you want to learn Vietnamese. You answer:
 Tại vì sang năm tôi định đi thăm Việt Nam.*

While accomplishing this, Donald advanced from Seaman Apprentice to Chief Petty Officer. Along the way he became both an “American Patriot” and a Hero in the service of his country. He accomplished this by supporting and defending his country during twenty-one years of service in the United States Navy, including two tours of combat service in the Vietnam War where he earned a variety of personal heroism awards.

There is no better place to start than by the following excerpts from a few of the more interesting and pertinent family comments John Antonacci made in his various email responses to me. These not only provide *personal insight* about Donald, but also show John's deep *religious convictions* and his *unconditional* love for his *entire* family. This, and his unrelenting search for all he can learn about Donald, leaves little doubt how much he loved and misses him.



12 May 2004

“Jerry, there was five of us, Joseph, Robert, John, Donald and Ralph. Sometime in 1941, after our father did a disappearing act, my mother, God Bless Her soul may she rest in peace, had to sell every stick of furniture in our house, and we all wound up at St. Agnes. Donald, Ralph and I wound up in the “Babies” section and Joe and Bob in the Little Side. The early stages of growing up at St. Agnes were easy, but as you progressed up through the higher grades it became brutal.

We all carry our scars, but some really never forgave or have never really dealt with the anger. We were very fortunate my mother always came to visit; she never missed a day in the 11 years I spent at St. Agnes.

She always had a home for us when we were allowed to go home during the Easter and Christmas Holiday. Joe graduated from college with the help of the GI Bill. While working, going to school and raising a family, he received a Teaching Degree and taught in the Ridgewood School District.

Bob, upon leaving the Marines went to France where he married his wife. He then came back to New York (City), Nyack, New Jersey and California, working hard doing very well for himself and his family. That’s what it’s all about, Family.

I was in the Army and after that I joined another great family, the New York Police Department (NYPD). I worked in patrol for eight years until I was promoted to Detective, where I worked for 16 years before retiring. I then went to work for the New York State Insurance Frauds Bureau as one of only five investigators covering the five boroughs of New York. After being promoted to senior investigator I had a massive heart attack with five bypasses. God was good to me, I’m a miracle. I had to retire on disability after 29 years in law enforcement.

Brother Ralph also served in the U. S. Army, following which he had a very successful career in Sales.

Donald, what a tough guy! He would never back down from anyone and as a result he sometime took some awful beatings. As his “bigger brother” sometimes I had to “take up his call to battle.” If I were losing he would always jump in and help me, or visa versa. He went into the Navy and I really didn’t see him that much. . I was very close to Joe and his family.

When Donald and I did get together it was always an “adventure.” He was my hero, and upon leaving the Navy, he graduated from college with honors and worked for the State of California getting jobs for servicemen as they were being discharged.”

When I sent John a copy of a newspaper interview about a former Marine who became an NYPD Police Officer at the age of 40, John replied as follows:

19 May 2004

“Nice article. A person going to the Police academy at age 40 is quite a feat. The average age in the Academy is 21. My oldest son John followed in my footsteps and is also a NYC Police Officer with about 13 years service. Today I sent you information my brother Joseph sent me about Donald. When you receive it, it will keep you very busy.”



“6 June 2004”

“It was nice to talk to both you and Dot via phone. I received more material from my brother Joe including photos of Donald I will send you during the week.

When I was in (Police) uniform I was a training officer for the new recruits when they graduated from the Police Academy. We trained them in the field to prepare them how to handle all types of emergency situations, how to fill out forms properly, how to make arrests, and also took them through court procedures. We also taught them to respect the people they have to protect.

I trained hundreds of young Police Officers and every once in awhile I read of some heroic deed they accomplished in the newspapers and feel good that I played a small part in their career. God Bless, John A.”

“24 June 2004

“We had no sisters, just the five boys. We all did all our time at St. Agnes. My father did a disappearing act leaving my mother with 5 children, and he would show up every 10 years, cause problems, and then disappear. This happened for about 40 years and I refused to speak to him for 60 years. He passed away at age 92.¹⁵

Joe graduated TZ in 1948, Bob in 1949, I graduated TZ 1954 (your brother Richard was in my class but I believe he graduated early.^{15a} Donald graduated TZ in 1955 and Ralph graduated from Flushing HS.

I know my brothers Joe and Bob were in Korea, but they don’t talk about it. When Bob left the Marines he went to France where he lived for a while and married the girl he met before going to Korea. They have been married for over 50 years”.

My brother Jim and I met Donald’s Brother Bob in Korea in the winter of 1953. (We also have a brother Bob who served in the Navy in Korea, so these names can become confusing).



**TSgt Jerry Merna, SSgt Bob Antonacci, Sgt Jim Merna
Three “House’s Kids” (Korea, January 1953)**

¹⁵ Mr. Joseph William Antonacci died in Queens, New York on March 6, 1999. Mrs. Antonacci had predeceased him on September 15, 1992 in Plattsburg, New York. She was 82).

^{15a} Brother Richard graduated from high school in *three* years, so he was the “smartest” Merna.



SSgt Robert Antonacci, Korea, January 1953
(Photos by Gerald F. Merna)

DONALD F. ANTONACCI’S SERVICE SCHOOLS, TRAINING & RATINGS:

Donald joined the Navy on November 25, 1955 at 346 Broadway in New York City.¹⁶ For various reasons, adjustment to Navy life didn’t come quickly or easily to Donald and he got off to somewhat of a "rocky start." While a few more specifics will necessarily be given further on in this story, at this point it is safe to say he went through an “attitude adjustment period,” serious enough to warrant disciplinary action by the Navy, but fortunately not substantial enough to damage his career.

The enlisted rating badge for Petty Officer Third Class and above consists of two parts. The chevrons indicate the pay grade (rate). Between the chevrons and the eagle is an insignia indicating the Sailor's job specialty (rating). Because Donald excelled in both academic training (language skills) and specialized technical training, during his career he earned and wore a variety of specialty ratings. His major ratings were Hull Technician, Optical Repairman, and Storekeeper, shown here:

Metalsmith Hull Technician Optical Repairman Storekeeper Damage Controlman
ME HT OM SK DC

Table 2 chronicles the formal training Donald received during his career, which qualified him for some of the ratings shown.

¹⁶ Ironically, this was the very same building where I joined the Corps on April 2, 1947, and later my center of operations (headquarters) for my Marine Corps Recruiting activities in New York and New Jersey. Before I left for Korea I served a two-year tour of recruiting duty (50-52) in the Times Square booth, Paterson and Hackensack, NJ, and most of it in Rockland County with an office I opened in the Nyack Village Hall. Coach Faulk would occasionally “deliver” a few “House’s Kids” in urgent need of “direction” to me in Nyack for “proper dispatch”. In February 1951 I married my TZHS classmate (Dot Sedlack) in a military wedding at St. John’s Church in Piermont; the ushers were fellow recruiters in Dress Blues with ceremonial swords. (Coach and Mrs. Faulk were also in attendance at the wedding and reception in Nyack).

<u>School Attended</u>	<u>Rating</u>	<u>Length</u>	<u>Date</u>
Damage Control, Practical Procedures	SFM2	5 days	Dec 1966
Vietnamese Language Course	HT1	35 weeks	Jan 1972
Shipfitter First and Chief	HT1		Apr 1976
Military Requirements for First and Chief	HT1		Apr 1976
Engineering Administration	HT1		Apr 1976
Foam Generating Systems Maintenance	HT1	2 weeks	Jan 1978
Opticalman Class "A" School	HT1	17 weeks	Jan 1978
Opticalman Class "C" School	OM1	12 weeks	Apr 1979
Optical (Sub-Marine Periscopes) Repairman	OHC		Sep 1984

(Table 2)

Here are some short definitions of what was required of Donald in order to perform in each of these rates:

Damage Controlman (DC). Donald's training in this area was for a damage control preventative maintenance program on a ship. It included ship wide damage control and firefighting practical knowledge and training other crewmembers.

Vietnamese Language Course: There is no "rating" badge for a language skill, but as indicated, Donald completed the extremely difficult 35-week Vietnamese language course at the Navy Postgraduate School in Monterey, CA on January 6, 1972. This skill would prove to be beneficial to him both in getting the combat duty he wanted, serving "up front and personal" with his Vietnamese Navy counterparts, and in eliminating the "language barrier" as well. He quickly made friends with these fellow warriors, as will be shown in the narrative and pictures further on in this story.

Hull Maintenance Technician (HT). In the early 1970s the navy combined the ratings of shipfitter (SF) and damage controlman (DC) into a new rating "HT" (hull maintenance technician). HT's were responsible for maintaining ships' hulls, fittings, piping systems and machinery. They also installed and maintained shipboard and shore based plumbing and piping systems, looked after a vessel's safety and survival equipment and performed many tasks related to damage control.

Opticalman (OMs) perform organizational and intermediate level maintenance on small navigational instruments, binoculars, night-vision sights, range finders, turret and submarine periscopes and other optical instruments. OMs must be able to perform close, exact and painstaking work and possess high mechanical aptitude.

Storekeeper (SK). Storekeepers are the Navy's Supply clerks. They see that needed supplies are available including everything from clothing and machine parts to forms and food. SKs have duties as civilian warehousemen, purchasing agents, stock clerks and supervisors, retail sales clerks, store managers, inventory clerks, buyers, parts clerks, bookkeepers and even fork lift operators

UP FROM THE RANKS TO CHIEF PETTY OFFICER



Chief Petty Officer CPO E-7¹⁷

Not including his basic training (boot camp) following his enlistment, or other courses designed to qualify him for advancement to the next higher enlisted grade; Table 2 also reflects the *major* Navy training completed by Donald. During this time he held a variety of Navy ratings, similar to Military Occupational Specialties (MOS) in the other services. His many ratings included:

<u>Rate Abbrev.</u>	<u>Defined Rate</u>	<u>Pay Grade</u>
(SR)	Seaman Recruit	(E-1)
(SA)	Seaman Apprentice	(E-2)
(FA)	Fireman Apprentice	(E-2)
(SN)	Seaman	(E-3)
(FN)	Fireman	(E-3)
(SK3)	Storekeeper	(E-4)
(ME2)	Metalsmith	(E-5)
(HT1)	Hull Technician	(E-6)
(OMC)	Optical Repairman	(E-7)

Navy rates are more than just who salutes whom. Navy rate, just as in the other services, is a badge of leadership. Responsibility for personnel, equipment, and mission grows with each increase in rank. Do not confuse rank with pay grades, such as E-1, W-2 and O-5. Pay grades are administrative classifications used primarily to standardize compensation across the military services.

The "E" in E-1 stands for "enlisted" while the "1" indicates the pay grade for that position the higher the number, the higher the pay). The other pay categories are "W" for warrant officers and "O" for commissioned officers. Some enlisted pay grades have two rates. When Donald was promoted to Chief Optical (Submarine Periscopes) Repairman (OMC), his enlisted pay grade was (E-7),^{17a} which was the rate and grade he retired with on November 15, 1982 with over 21 years¹⁸ of not only *honorable* service, but extremely *heroic* service as well. (The term "rank" for Navy enlisted personnel is incorrect. The term is "rate." The rating badge is a combination of *rate* (pay grade, as indicated by the chevrons), and *rating* (occupational specialty, as indicated by the symbol just above the chevrons.)

¹⁷ For illustration only. While the CPO rate is correct, the insignia shown here represents a Chief Petty Officer who is a Chief Quartermaster. Donald retired as a Chief Optical Repairman (OMC). That rating symbol is shown on page 24.

^{17a} The pay grades of E-8 and E-9, Senior Chief and Master Chief, (MCPO and SCPO), were created effective June 1, 1958. Eligibility for promotion to E-8, the Senior Chief level, was restricted to Chiefs with a minimum of four years in grade and a total of ten years of service. For elevation from E-7 to Master Chief, E-9, a minimum of six years service as a Chief Petty Officer with a total of 13 years service was required. The E-5 through E-9 levels included all ratings except Teleman and Printer, being phased out (people holding those ratings were absorbed or converted to Yeoman or Radioman from Teleman and primarily to Lithographer from Printer). (Source: Navy Terms and Trivia).

Service members in pay grades E-1 through E-3 are usually either in some kind of training status or on their initial assignment. The training includes the basic training phase where recruits are immersed in military culture and values and are taught the core skills required by their service component. Basic training is followed by a specialized or advanced training phase that provides recruits with a specific area of expertise or concentration. In the Navy this area is known as a Rate.

Leadership responsibility significantly increases in the mid-level enlisted ranks. This responsibility is given formal recognition by use of the term petty officer. The Navy NCO, petty officer, is achieved at the rank of petty officer third class.¹⁸

SHIPS SERVED ON



Donald served a total of 21 years, 4 months and 26 days of *active* service in the U. S. Navy. He also had a total of 3 years, 4 months and 25 days of *inactive* duty, not included in this total. His 21 plus years of service included an astonishing 4 years, 6 months and 1 day of sea service on *nine* U. S. Ships, in addition to serving on several Vietnamese Riverine crafts for varying amounts of time.

The names and pictures of these ships and his rank and ratings at the time, where ascertainable, are included below, as well as the time he served on each ship.



¹⁸ Part of the narrative information in this section was obtained from the official U. S. Navy web site.

	From	To	Ship	Yr/Mo/Day	Cumul.	Rate/Rating
1	02-22-57	10-28-57	USS KIRKPATRICK DER-316	00-08-06	00-08-06	FA
2	07-21-58	02-25-59	FORREST G. SHERMAN DD-931	00-07-04	01-03-10	FA
3	10-21-62	11-04-62	USS REMEY DD-688	00-00-14	01-03-24	SFMFA
4	12-21-65	11-15-68	USS THOR ARC-4	02-10-24	04-02-18	SFM2
5	06-20-69	06-14-70	USS ASKARI ARL-3-	00-11-24	05-02-12	SFM2
6	01-04-77	04-29-78	USS JOHN S. MCCAIN DDG-36	01-02-25	06-05-07	HT1
7	05-30-78	08-16-78	USS SPERRY AS-12	00-02-16	06-08-03	HT1
8	11-30-80	04-10-81	USS PROTEUS AS-19	00-04-10	07-00-13	OM1
9	06-02-81	10-01-82	USS FULTON AS-11	01-04-00	08-04-13	OM1

(Table 3)

On several of the above ships Donald served very relatively short periods, mostly for training. Some of it was active duty for training for periods of about 14 days while he was in the Inactive Reserve for several years after he was discharged from his first enlistment and before he reenlisted to stay in for a career.

The variety of these ships and the experiences he obtained on each of them were invaluable to him and the Navy during his career. The ships are shown below, in the order in which he served aboard them, even though he may have had other shore assignments, including his Vietnam service, in between some of his sea duty.

The USS KIRKPATRICK - DER 318



This is the first Navy ship that Donald served on, and it was for just a little over eight months (February 22 through October 28, 1957.) He was “received for duty” on the USS KIRKPATRICK with the rating of Fireman Apprentice (FA), and was transferred with the *same* rating because on May 17, 1957, only about 90 days after he reported on board, he was 12 hours *late* returning from “Liberty,” (an *authorized* absence from duty granted by the local commander that does not count as leave).¹⁹

The Navy officially calls being late from Liberty or official leave, “Absence Over Leave (AOL),” and though 12 hours *seems* minor, it is deemed to be of great consequence in the military services, and any AOL or AWOL (Absence Without Leave) violation is considered a serious problem. (In civilian life if someone was 12 hours late coming to work, they may only suffer the loss of 12 hours pay for doing so). Since it was his first offense, Donald was fortunate and received only a “Warning” under “Captain’s Mast,” which is “non-

¹⁹ There is another type of leave called “Cinderella Liberty,” which is liberty that expires at midnight. It is used mostly in foreign ports where the Captain is concerned for the safety of his crew.

judicial punishment” (does not require courts-martial and is used for minor infractions). On October 28, 1957 he was transferred to the U. S. Navy Schools Command, Naval Base, Newport, RI.

This is a brief background on The USS Kirkpatrick - DER 318:



The USS KIRKPATRICK was a Radar Picket Ship, defined by the Department of Defense (DOD) and North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) as “a ship stationed at a distance from the force protected, for the purpose of increasing the radar detection range.”

It was laid down by Consolidated Steel, Orange, Texas on March 15, 1943 and Launched June 5, 1943. It was then commissioned October 23, 1943 In Honor of Chaplain Thomas Leroy Kirkpatrick who died on the USS Arizona. Decommissioned May 1, 1946, it was reclassified As Radar Picket Ship USS Kirkpatrick DER 318 on October 1, 1951. It was recommissioned again on February 23, 1952. Finally Decommissioned in Philadelphia June 24, 1960 and entered the Atlantic Reserve Fleet. It was stricken from the United States Navy Register on August 1, 1974 and sold by DRMS (Defense Reutilization and Marketing Service) March 12, 1975 for scrap. (Photo courtesy of Ed Dube SF3)

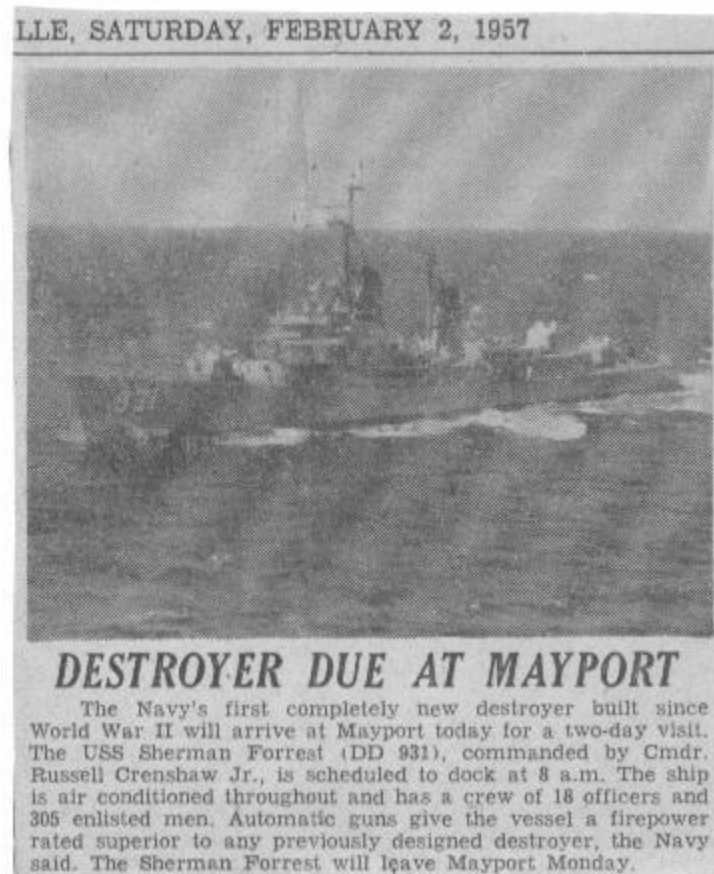
USS FORREST G SHERMAN DD-931
AND DONALD’S “BRUSH WITH NAVY LAWS”



(Photo courtesy of USS Forrest Sherman DD-931 Foundation, Inc.)

BACKGROUND: The USS FORREST G SHERMAN DD-931 was the Navy’s first completely built Destroyer since W.W.II. Its automatic guns gave this vessel firepower rated superior to any previously designed Destroyer. It was launched 5 February 1955 by Bath Iron Works Corp., Bath, Maine, and commissioned 9 November 1955. After a year of initial training and fitting out, *Forrest Sherman* arrived at her homeport, Newport RI, 15 January 1957. In preparation for her first deployment to the Mediterranean the destroyer took part in amphibious exercises off Puerto Rico in July 1958, and arrived at Gibraltar 10 August. She patrolled the eastern Mediterranean through the rest of the month, and then sailed to join the

7th Fleet in its operations off Taiwan in support of the threatened islands of Quemoy and Matsu. Sailing eastward to complete a cruise around the world, *Forrest Sherman* returned to Newport 11 November 1957



This news clipping of Feb 2, 1957 was only 20 days before Donald joined the crew on Feb. 22, 1957

Less than a year after The USS Forrest Sherman returned to Newport on November 11, 1957, Donald reported aboard on July 21, 1958 as a Seaman (SN E-3). He had been recommended for promotion to Metalsmith Third Class (ME3) but that promotion would have to wait, because unfortunately, this would be the second time he found himself facing disciplinary action. He was obviously still having difficulties adjusting to whatever it was that caused him to be absent over or without official leave. He was tried by the least severe of three military tribunals (Summary Court Martial), and though the records we were furnished are somewhat incomplete it appears he was given a reduction in rate for this offense.

After he transferred from the USS Kirkpatrick on October 28, 1957 to the U. S. Navy Schools Command, U. S. Naval Base, Newport, RI, Donald unfortunately had a third detour in his career. Still on his first enlistment and with less than three years of service, he had unauthorized absence problems once again. Entries in his records indicate that on November 2, 1957 he was "on unauthorized absence since 2400 (midnight) that date, *intentions unknown*." On November 6 he was "Declared an unauthorized absentee from the U. S. Naval Schools Command, U. S. Naval Base, Newport, Rhode Island since 2400, 2 November 1957."

When a military member's unauthorized absence exceeds 30 days, it is normal to administratively declare him a "Deserter," and the Navy did this in Donald's case on December 3, 1957. The next item in his record is an entry made by the U. S. Naval Receiving Station, Boston, MA, as follows:

“31 December 1957: Surrendered to the Armed Services Police Patrolmen at 0015, 24 December 1957 ... Boston, MA. Delivered on board this command at 1000, 24 December 1957. Absent without proper authority...since 2400, 2 November 1957, a period of about fifty-three (53) days.”

Then a Storekeeper Third Class, pay grade (E-4), he was tried by a Special Court Martial, and again it appears the only “punishment” he was awarded (according to the records we have) is that he was reduced in grade to Seaman Apprentice, pay grade (E-2), a reduction of *two* pay grades. If this is all he received, he got one heck of a break, considering it was his *third* offense, and for an absence of a much *longer* period.

After this Donald’s service became even uncannier. Only 18 months later, on July 21, 1958 he was recommended for promotion to Metalsmith Third Class, pay grade (E-4), his former pay grade. But before this could be done, he got into even *more* trouble, *twice*!

On September 18, 1958 Donald was tried by a Summary Court Martial, ostensibly for additional unauthorized absences, and on November 4, 1958 he received yet another Captain’s Mast for the same offense. Now at the rate and grade of Fireman Apprentice (E-2), he somehow “hung on” until the end of his enlistment when he was discharged on February 25, 1959. He had completed two years, nine months, and 18 days service out of a four-year enlistment. And half of his time, one year, two months and 13 days was served aboard ship on foreign sea service!

What a first enlistment! What was going on with him? I don’t know if *anyone* knows, and it would have been interesting to hear Donald’s explanation for this rockiest of starts. Even more surprising, with this record and receiving an “Under Honorable Conditions” discharge, it would be very difficult to be allowed to reenlist.

Thereafter his career made a 180 degree turn for the better, for both Donald and the Navy, as he literally got his act together, and *more* than atoned for his transgressions. Apparently Donald figured he needed time to “regroup.” His records indicate that after his first term discharge, he remained in the private sector for almost *three and one-half years*, until July 17, 1962, when the Navy allowed him to reenlist at the Naval Research Surface Division 3-63(L), Freeport, NY.

In addition to having all his time to make the decision to reenlist, Donald was no longer 18 years old, but was now 25. So older and wiser, he decided to “go for it,” and raised his hand yet one more time. This proved to be a 180-degree turn around as Donald put his earlier transgressions behind him, settled down, and for next 18 years plus was not only a model sailor, but one who would serve his nation well and make it proud of him.



USS REMEY -688
(FLETCHER CLASS)



USS REMEY DD-688
(© Courtesy of Navsource)

This Destroyer was laid down by Bath Iron Works, Bath ME on March 22, 1943 and launched July 25, 1943. It was initially commissioned on September 30, 1943 and would be decommissioned and recommissioned several times until finally being decommissioned on December 30, 1963 and stricken from the rolls of the Navy on December 1, 1974 and sold for scrap on June 10, 1976.

Donald was transferred to this ship for fourteen days of active duty training on October 21, 1962, as an Shipfitter Fireman Apprentice (SFMFA) for active duty training.



USS Thor (ARC 4)



(Picture contributed by Ramon Jacks)

BACKGROUND: The USS THOR (ARC-4), A Cable Repair Ship, was originally an Artemis Class Attack Cargo Ship. It was laid down on April 18, 1945, as a Maritime Commission type hull under a Maritime Commission contract at Welsh-Kaiser Co. Providence, R.I. Launched on June 8, 1945, it was acquired by the US Navy from the Maritime Commission on loan-charter and Commissioned the USS Vanadis (AKA-49) on July 9, 1945. Decommissioned on March 27, 1946 at Boston MA, it was struck from the Naval Register on June 5, 1946. It was then returned to the Maritime Commission for lay up in the National Defense Reserve Fleet, James River, Fort Eustis, VA. and reacquired on April 14, 1955 by the US Navy for conversion to a Cable Repair Ship.

It was recommissioned the USS Thor (ARC-4), on January 3, 1956, until it was decommissioned on July 2, 1973, at Portsmouth, VA. and simultaneously placed in service with the *Military Sealift Command* (MSC) as USNS Thor (T-ARC-4). It was placed out of service and returned to the Maritime Administration in April 1974, for lay up in the National Defense Reserve Fleet, Suisun Bay, Benecia, CA. It was sold September 22, 1977, and its fate is unknown today.

Shipfitter Metalsmith Fireman (SFMFN) Donald F. Antonacci reported aboard the USS Thor at Portsmouth, NH on Dec. 21, 1965. While serving aboard the USS Thor, Donald was promoted to Shipfitter Metalsmith Second Class (SFM2) and was also recommended for advancement to Shipfitter First Class (SF 1). On Nov. 15, 1968 he was transferred to the U. S. Naval Station in Long Beach, CA for the few remaining months of his then current enlistment, and then reenlisted. With two senior level petty officer promotions achieved, this represents a complete turnaround for Donald during his almost three year's service aboard this ship.

USS ASKARI (ARL-30)

BACKGROUND: What is an “ARL,” or perhaps more appropriately, what “was” an ARL, for there are currently no ARL's listed in the active roster of U.S. Navy ships. Apparently during WWII when the Navy was having landing craft built by the thousands, the need was recognized to repair and maintain them near the action. Even though the Navy had many regular repair ships, they were ill designed and equipped to be able to be at the sight they were needed, or have the facilities to work on these small wooden landing craft. The LCVP (Landing Craft Vehicle/Personnel), for example, had become the mainstay of the Navy's small boat fleet, not just for landings, but were used for everything, everywhere. What was needed was a ship that was not too large, had a shallow draft to get into small harbors, inlets or rivers, and be produced quickly. By mid WWII, the LST (Landing Ship Tank) was being produced by the hundreds.²⁰ So, why not use that hull, with its huge empty tank and main decks and fill it up with repair shops and machinery. Hence the ARL “Auxiliary Repair Light or Landing Craft”. They were used in WWII, Korea and were particularly suitable for the rivers in Vietnam.

There were 37 LST's converted to ARL's from January 1943 to May 1945. The Askari was one of the later ones. All the ARL's are now either scrapped or were given to foreign navies. The USS Askari (ARL-30) was transferred to Indonesia and serves that navy as Ri Djaja Widjaja.



(Photo credited to Albert Moore, Mobile Riverine Force Association)

Reporting aboard as an SFM2 (Shipfitter Second Class), Donald was recommended for and promoted to SF1 (Shipfitter First Class). He served almost two years to the day on the USS ASKARI (ARL-30) with its homeport in San Diego, joining it on June 15, 1969 from the Naval Station in Long Beach, and transferred to Vallejo, California on June 14, 1970. During most of 1969 it was at sea.

²⁰ Our oldest brother George was killed in action on Feb. 11, 1945 when his LST-577 was sunk by a Japanese submarine).

USS JOHN S. MC CAIN (DDG 36)

BACKGROUND: Laid down as DD 928, the JOHN S. MCCAIN was redesignated DL 3 in 1951. Again redesignated DDG 36 on April 15, 1965, the JOHN S. MCCAIN entered the Philadelphia Naval Shipyard for conversion to a guided missile destroyer in June 1966. The ship rejoined the fleet on June 21, 1969. Both decommissioned and stricken from the Navy list on April 29, 1978, the JOHN S. MCCAIN was sold for scrap on December 13, 1979. It has a crew of 28 officers and 345 enlisted.

Its armament includes two Mk-42 5-inch/54 caliber guns, Mk-32 torpedo tubes (two triple mounts), one Mk-16 ASROC missile launcher, and one Mk-13 guided missile launcher



USS JOHN S. MCCAIN (DDG-36)

(U. S. Navy Photo. Ships information courtesy of www.navysite.de, an unofficial navy site.)

About the Ship's Name: John Sidney McCain, Sr., was born in Teoc, Miss., 9 August 1884 and graduated from the Naval Academy in 1906. His first assignments were ships of the Asiatic Squadron. In the years between the World Wars, McCain served in many ships, including MARYLAND, NEW MEXICO, and NITRO. His first command was SIRIUS. In 1936, at the age of 51, he was designated a Naval Aviator, and from 1937 to 1939 he commanded carrier RANGER, contributing much to the development of carrier tactics for the war to come. For the first year of World War II he served as Commander of Air Forces for Western Sea Frontier and the South Pacific Force. In October 1942 McCain became Chief of the Bureau of Aeronautics and in August 1943 rose to the rank of Vice Admiral as Deputy Chief of Naval Operations (Air).

In 1944, he returned to the Pacific Theatre to command a fast carrier task force that for over a year operated almost continuously in support of the great amphibious operations. His exceedingly skillful tactics protecting CANBERRA (CA 70) and HOUSTON (CA 81) in October 1944 earned him the Navy Cross, and the daring forays of his mobile force had much to do with the eventual victory. Vice Admiral McCain died 6 September 1945, just after arriving back in the United States, and was later appointed Admiral effective that date. For his outstanding performance as an air planner and carrier task force commander he was awarded the Distinguished Service Medal with two Gold Stars, Secretary Forrestal commented: "He was a fighting man all the way through."

Donald served on the USS JOHN S. MCCAIN from January 4, 1977 until April 29, 1978 when he returned to the Pacific Fleet in San Diego, CA, the same command from which he joined the USS MCCAIN. It appears from his records that for a portion of this assignment he was classified as a "student under instruction" (SUU).

USS SPERRY (AS 12)
Submarine Tender



*Sperry (AS-12) underway, date and place unknown. Photo courtesy of Joe Radigan MACM USN Ret.
(Ship information courtesy of "Tender Tale, United States Navy, Submarine Tenders.")*

BACKGROUND: Sperry earned the distinction of being the first Navy ship to be launched after "Pearl Harbor" on December 17, 1941 at the beginning of World War II, and achieved many successes in a career spanning some forty years. In June of 1979 the Secretary of the Navy awarded Sperry the Meritorious Unit Commendation for meritorious service in support of the units of Submarine Group Five, Submarine Development Group One and Submarine Squadron Three from 1 April 1978 to 1 December 1978. Once again in 1980 Sperry was awarded the coveted Battle Efficiency "E" for fiscal year 1980.

On 1 May 1982 Sperry celebrated her fortieth anniversary of service to the fleet. Sperry's long history can be summed up in her motto "service is our business". Sperry's many conspicuous achievements are a testimonial of a proud ship and many proud crews who steadfastly adhered to this motto.

During those years she earned a reputation of excellence that is a standard by which other submarine tenders and even war ships of the line would aspire to. Her gallant career came to an end on September 30, 1982 when she was decommissioned

Within one month of leaving the USS JOHN S. MCCAIN Donald was transferred to the USS SPERRY AS-12, where he served for less than 90 days (May 30 - August 16, 1978). His rating during this assignment was HT1 (Hull Technician First Class). It appears his short assignments on various ships included repairs to the ships structures.



USS PROTEUS AS -19
Submarine Tender



USS Proteus AS 19 underway in the late 70's

(Picture courtesy Dave Gibson. Ship information courtesy of "Tender Tale, United States Navy, Submarine Tenders.")

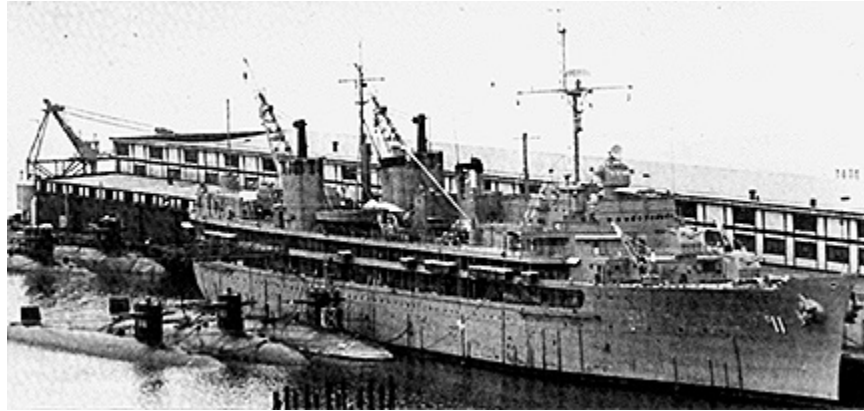
BACKGROUND: The third Proteus (AS 19) was laid down by the Moore Shipbuilding and Dry Dock Co., Oakland, Calif., 15 September 1941; launched 12 November 1942; sponsored by Mrs. Charles M. Cooke, Jr.; and commissioned 31 January 1944, Capt. Robert W. Berry in command.

Picking up the history of the USS PROTEUS from 1978, that year the Proteus received her third consecutive Engineering "E" and the Battle Efficiency "E." In 1978 it was sent to overhaul at Long Beach Naval Shipyard rather than the expected retirement and decommissioning.

Donald joined the crew of the Proteus, again as a "student," on November 30, 1980 after it had returned to Guam in May 1980, and after a visit to Mazatlan, Mexico. He would remain aboard until April 10, 1981 when the Proteus resumed refit duties for the remaining *Ship, Submersible, Ballistic, Nuclear (submarine) (SSBNs)* in the western Pacific.



USS FULTON AS-11
Submarine Tender



USS Fulton AS 11 at New London in 1969
(Photo courtesy U. S. Navy. "Tender Tale, United States Navy, Submarine Tenders.)"

The fourth Fulton (AS-11) was launched 27 December 1940 by Mare Island Navy Yard; sponsored by Mrs. A. T. Sutcliff, great granddaughter of Robert Fulton; and commissioned 12 September 1941. Underway on her shakedown cruise out of San Diego when the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor 7 December 1941, Fulton was ordered at once to Panama, arriving 9 December 1941.

Fast forwarding ahead to 1972, the Fulton made a 5 month deployment to the Mediterranean, at LaMaddalena, Sardinia. The Fulton's mission was to prepare for full time use an advance refit site for nuclear fast attack submarines. This was the first deployment of a WWII vintage submarine tender to the Med since WWII.

After a shipyard overhaul in 1976, Fulton returned to New London to continue support of Atlantic Fleet submarines. It was during this period, June 2, 1981 that Donald came aboard the Fulton, whose homeport at that time was New London, CT. His records indicate he was also a student at this time, until he was transferred on October 1, 1982.

Fulton was again modernized in 1983-1984 with an extensive overhaul at both the Electric Boat, Groton, CT, and General Dynamics, Quincy, MA. In her return trip to New London from the yard at Quincy, MA, Fulton suffered a main space fire due to oily rags left there by yard workers. Fulton is the only tender ever to survive such a fire. Damage was not major, and was repaired at Electric Boat, Groton, CT. upon her arrival.



MILITARY AWARDS AND DECORATIONS OF DONALD FRANCIS ANTONACCI



Medals, awards and citations earned by
Donald Francis Antonacci
November 25, 1955 to September 30, 1984 ²¹

Now we can present unequivocally the heroic Naval service of Donald by presenting the over 20 individual and unit awards he earned from both the United States and the Republic of Vietnam (RVN). These attest to and validate the confidence placed in him by the United States Navy, and his commitment to them and his Country during his Navy career of over 21 years.

Four of Donald's U. S. awards were for *personal* heroism and one for being wounded in action. All but one of these awards is represented in the five rows of ribbons shown above, described as follows: ²¹

- First Row:** **Bronze Star Medal w/Combat "V"**
 Purple Heart Medal (For injuries at Thie Binh 21 May 1974)
 Navy and Marine Corps Commendation Medal w/Combat "V"
- Second Row:** **Navy and Marine Corps Achievement Medal**
 Combat Action Ribbon
 Navy Unit Commendation
- Third Row:** **Navy Good Conduct Medal, 1st & 2nd, 3rd & 4th Award**
 National Defense Service Medal
 Armed Forces Expeditionary Medal (Lebanon)
- Fourth Row:** **Vietnam Service Medal with two stars**
 RVN Cross of Gallantry w/Palm (Unit Award)
 Vietnamese Cross of Gallantry w/ Bronze Star (Personal Award)
- Fifth Row:** **Republic of Vietnam Civil Action Medal**
 Republic of Vietnam Campaign Medal w/device
 Expert Rifleman, 1st Award

²¹ Not included above is the Republic of Vietnam Armed Forces Honor Medal – Second Class also awarded to Donald. This is because a ribbon for that award was not available on the "ribbon rack builder" I used to create the mounted ribbons (courtesy of "Medals of America"). However, a picture of that medal is shown in the Vietnam section of this story on page 50. Though not a "medal" or a "ribbon," Donald also earned the "Small Craft Insignia" for serving aboard Navy and Vietnamese craft. (This insignia is shown on both page 1 and in the Vietnam section of this story on page 46.

Actual copies available of the original award documents presented to Donald are shown on the pages that follow.

The Bronze Star Medal with Combat “V”²²



²² The “Combat Distinguishing Device” that is authorized in this citation is the Combat “V” for Valor. It distinguishes “heroic” versus “meritorious” achievement. (Note: It is worn *on* the ribbon, not separately as shown in the above “illustration.”)



COMMANDER
UNITED STATES NAVAL FORCES
VIETNAM

The President of the United States takes pleasure in presenting
the Bronze Star Medal to

DONALD F. V. ANTONACCI
SHIPFITTER FIRST CLASS
UNITED STATES NAVY

for service as set forth in the following

CITATION

"For heroic achievement while serving with Vietnamese Navy River Assault Interdiction Division Seven Four engaged in armed conflict against the North Vietnamese and Viet Cong communist aggressors in the Republic of Vietnam. On 18 May 1971, Petty Officer ANTONACCI was the advisor on a craft which was towing another boat alongside when the boat directly astern of his struck a very large watermine. Seeing that the craft was badly damaged and in danger of sinking, he rapidly advised and aided his counterparts in casting off the towed boat and in turning his boat around to render assistance to the mined boat. He then personally dove into the water and rescued four seriously wounded men. Later, he went aboard the mined boat and assisted in the rescue of several seriously wounded men who were trapped by materials and debris. After gathering ten wounded personnel on his boat, he assisted in carrying the men to the landing zone for medical evacuation. Petty Officer ANTONACCI's exemplary professionalism, devotion to duty, and courage were in keeping with the highest traditions of the United States Naval Service."

The Combat Distinguishing Device is authorized.

For the President

R. S. SALZER
Rear Admiral, U. S. Navy
Commander U. S. Naval Forces, Vietnam

The Navy and Marine Corps Commendation Medal with Combat "V":²³



²³ The "Combat Distinguishing Device" that is authorized in this citation is the Combat "V" for Valor. It distinguishes "heroic" versus "meritorious" achievement. (Note: It is worn *on* the ribbon, not separately as shown in the above "illustration.")



COMMANDER
UNITED STATES NAVAL FORCES
VIETNAM

The Secretary of the Navy takes pleasure in presenting the Navy
Commendation Medal to

DONALD FRANCISCO VINCENZO ANTONACCI
SHIPFITTER FIRST CLASS
UNITED STATES NAVY

for service as set forth in the following

CITATION

"For meritorious service while serving with friendly foreign forces engaged in armed conflict against the North Vietnamese and Viet Cong communist aggressors in the Republic of Vietnam from November 1970 to November 1971. While serving as an advisor to River Assault and Interdiction Division Seven Four, Petty Officer ANTONACCI participated in numerous combat patrols and engaged the enemy on eight occasions. During those patrols, he boarded and searched numerous junks and sampans, interdicted cross river traffic, enforced curfew, inserted and extracted friendly forces in hostile territory, and provided fire support for besieged units and outposts. He also advised his counterparts on all phases of riverine warfare. On one occasion, Petty Officer ANTONACCI's boat came under intense rocket and small arms attack. Ignoring his wounds, he repeatedly exposed himself to enemy fire while assisting his wounded comrades, returning fire, and coordinating air strikes. His exemplary professionalism, devotion to duty, and courage under fire reflected great credit upon himself and were in keeping with the highest traditions of the United States Naval Service."

The Combat Distinguishing Device is authorized.

For the Secretary of the Navy

R. S. SALZER
Rear Admiral, U. S. Navy
Commander U. S. Naval Forces, Vietnam

The Navy and Marine Corps Achievement Medal





COMMANDER IN CHIEF
UNITED STATES PACIFIC FLEET

The Secretary of the Navy takes pleasure in presenting the NAVY ACHIEVEMENT MEDAL
to

DONALD F. V. ANTONACCI
HULL MAINTENANCE TECHNICIAN FIRST CLASS
UNITED STATES NAVY

for service as set forth in the following:

CITATION

"For professional achievement in the superior performance of his duties while serving in the Republic of Vietnam from 22 July 1972 to 27 February 1973. As a Contract Administrator for the Master Ship Repair Contract Office, Saigon, Petty Officer ANTONACCI was required to master the skills of an electrician, machinist and hull maintenance technician. He accomplished this challenge through long hours of study and work under the most trying conditions. Undaunted by poor working conditions and the lack of facilities, equipment, and skilled labor, Petty Officer ANTONACCI overcame all obstacles to successfully complete, on schedule, the overhaul of six LCM-8 craft and three AMMI fuel barges. His alertness, technical competence, and aggressive attitude enabled him to detect and eliminate potential trouble areas, which could have significantly delayed delivery of the craft and resulted in additional cost to the U. S. Government. Petty Officer ANTONACCI's outstanding leadership, planning, and Vietnamese language abilities were contributing factors to achieving contract requirements from the non-U. S. owned and operated repair facilities in the Saigon area. Petty Officer ANTONACCI's professional skill, sense of responsibility, and devotion to duty were in keeping with the highest traditions of the United States Naval Service."

For the Secretary of the Navy

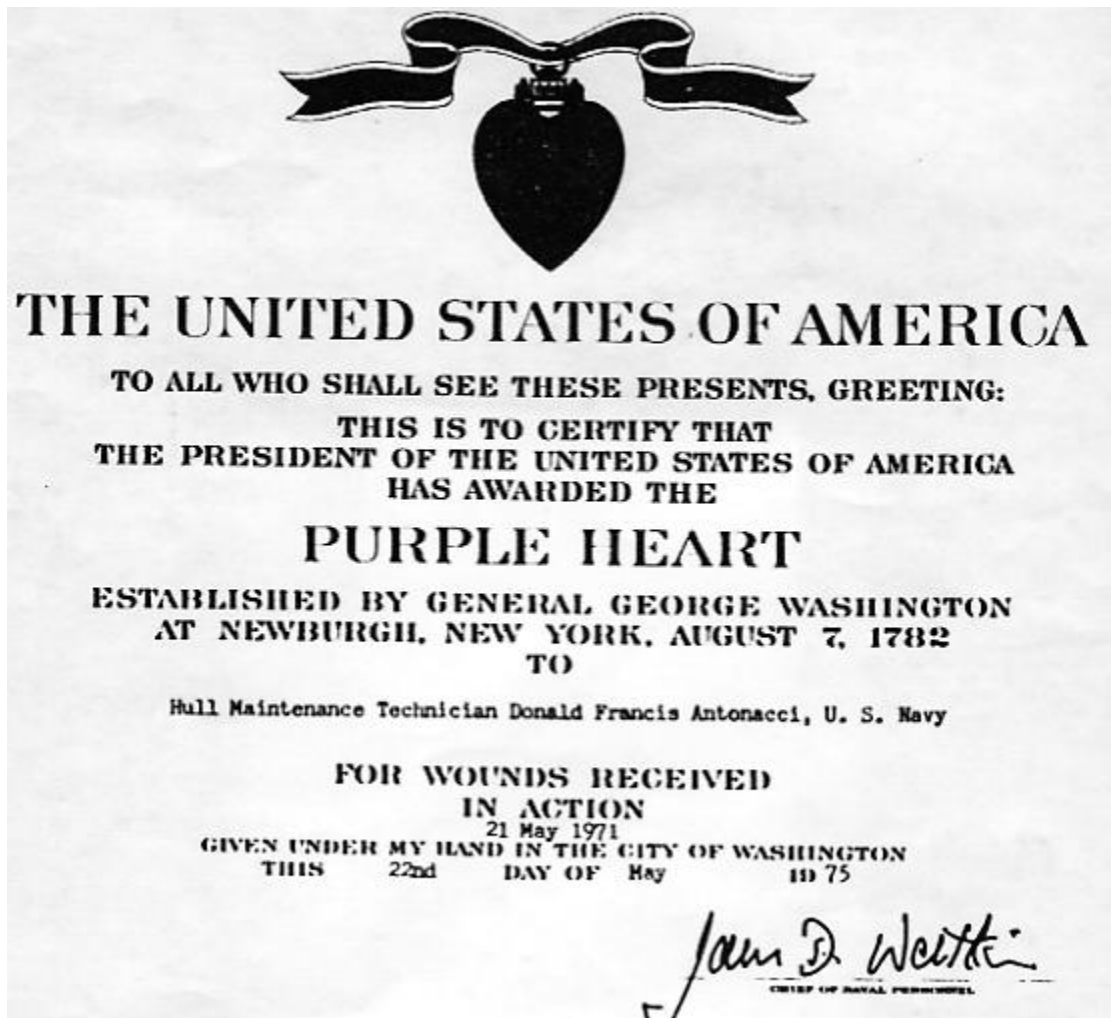
B. A. CLAREY
Admiral, U. S. Navy
Commander in Chief U. S. Pacific Fleet

Purple Heart Medal



The Purple Heart Medal is awarded to a member of the U.S. Armed Forces who was either killed in action

or wounded in an armed conflict. This Medal was awarded to Donald for wounds he received on May 21, 1971, for the actions described in his Bronze Star Medal shown above. His wounds must have been fairly severe, as his records show he was a long-term patient in the Oakland, California U. S. Navy Hospital.



Combat Action Ribbon



Awarded to Donald for actively participating in ground or surface combat in the Republic of Vietnam from November 1970 to November 1971. The principal eligibility criterion for this ribbon is that the individual must have participated in a bona fide ground or surface combat firefight or action during which he was under enemy fire and his performance while under fire was satisfactory. Service in a combat area does not automatically entitle a service member to this award. The specific area for which Donald qualified for this award was as one who participated “in riverine and coastal operations, assaults, patrols, sweeps, and similar activities (and has) participated in fire fights.”

**Navy Unit
Commendation Ribbon**



Awarded by the Secretary of the Navy to any unit of the Navy or Marine Corps which has distinguished itself by outstanding heroism in action against the enemy, but not sufficient to justify the award of the Presidential Unit Citation. To justify this award, the unit must have performed service of a character comparable to that which would merit the award of a Silver Star Medal for heroism or a Legion of Merit for meritorious service to an individual.

**Navy Good Conduct Medal
With 3 Bronze Stars**



The evidence is quite clear that Donald *more* than atoned for his slow starting Navy career by being awarded *four* Navy Good Conduct Medals, each denoting outstanding performance and conduct during 4 years of continuous active enlisted service, representing 16 years of exemplary service.

**National Defense
Service Medal**



Following the precedent of the pre-World War II American Defense Service Medal, the National Defense Service Medal has been worn by three "generations" of sailors and Marines for three distinct periods of our military history. The current criterion requires Honorable active service as a member of the Armed Forces for any period after 26 June 1950 to 28 July 1954, after 31 December 1960 and before 15 August 1974 (later extended for actions in Desert Storm). A bronze star shall be worn on the suspension ribbon and ribbon bar by personnel who earned the medal for honorable active duty after 26 June 1950 and before 28 July 1954, after 31 December 1960 and before 15 August 1974, and again after 1 August 1990 and before 1 December 1995.

This Medal was re-instituted in 1966 for service in Vietnam and Southwest Asia (Gulf War) actions respectively. Donald was awarded this Medal for his service in Vietnam from 1970 to 1971.

**Armed Forces Expeditionary
Medal (Lebanon)**



This medal was authorized on December 4, 1961 to any member of the United States Armed Forces for U.S. military operations in direct support to friendly foreign nations after July 1, 1958. Participating personnel must have served at least 30 consecutive days (60 nonconsecutive days) in the qualifying operation. Donald was authorized this Medal for his service in Lebanon.

**Vietnam (RVN) Service Medal
With 2 Bronze Stars**



The Vietnam Service Medal is awarded to all members of the Armed Forces of the United States serving at anytime between 04 July 1965 and 28 March 1973 for direct support of U. S. military operations in Vietnam, or in Thailand, Laos or Cambodia in direct support of operations in Vietnam. Donald was awarded this medal for his service in the Republic of Vietnam from November 1970 to November 1971. The two bronze stars earned by Donald for Vietnam Service Medal are for two separate operational periods: Vietnam

Counter-offensive VII (01 July 1970 to 30 June 1971) and Consolidation I (01 July 1971 to 30 November 1971).

Navy Expert
Rifle Badge



This Medal was established in 1920 to replace the Navy Sharpshooters Medal created in 1910. The Chief of Naval personnel award it to those members of the U. S. Navy who qualify as “Expert” with either the rifle or carbine on a prescribed military rifle course. It was awarded due to Donald’s attainment of the qualifying score for the expert level during prescribed shooting exercises.

Small Craft Insignia



Donald earned this distinctive insignia device as a result of his lengthy service aboard both small Navy and Vietnamese craft during riverine operations in the Republic of Vietnam. These were military operations conducted by forces organized to cope with and exploit the unique characteristics of a riverine area, to locate and destroy hostile forces, and/or to achieve or maintain control of the riverine area. Joint riverine operations combine land, naval, and air operations, as appropriate, and are suited to the nature of the specific Riverine area in which operations are to be conducted.

VIETNAMESE AWARDS AND DECORATIONS

*“Donald really loved the people in Vietnam and was devastated when the South (Vietnam) became enslaved by the North.”**

* (Email from John Antonacci to Jerry Merna, June 24, 2004)

Donald’s Vietnamese Awards were primarily for working with and serving intimately with Vietnamese forces on small watercraft, where he was usually the only American. These awards included several

personal awards, the Republic of Vietnam Gallantry Cross with Bronze Star, the Republic of Vietnam Civil Actions Honor Medal, and the Republic of Vietnam Armed Forces Honor Medal - Second Class. He also earned the unit award of the Republic of Vietnam Gallantry Cross with Palm and the Republic of Vietnam Campaign Medal with Date.



**PO 1/C Donald F. Antonacci with RVN
Engineman Fireman Tran Nhu – Vietnam, 1970**

Donald served on the Vietnamese Navy Alpha-boat 5122, a support and patrol boat operating in the southern part of the Mekong Delta. His RVN counterparts called him “Nootch.” Donald was regarded as an excellent cook, telling his Vietnamese friends: “My Mother sends me spaghetti from home so I often cook dinner aboard the boat.”



**Petty Officer First Class Donald F. Antonacci and Petty Officer Second Class
Nguyen Van Bo on Republic of Vietnam Tango Boat, 1970**



Nguyen Van Sen and Donald F. Antonacci with .50 Caliber Machine Gun, 1970

Republic of Vietnam (RVN) Gallantry Cross Medal with Bronze Star



The 21st Infantry Division, AGC, of the Republic of Vietnam's Armed Forces Military Corps IV awarded Donald this Medal for his bravery on March 16, 1971, the same date he was wounded. A copy of the official citation is depicted below:

OFFICIAL ORDER	REPUBLIC OF VIET NAM RVN ARMED FORCES MILITARY CORPS IV 21st INF DIVISION A G C TEXT: #422a/SD21BB/CL/C
GENERAL CAO VAN VIEN CHAIRMAN OF THE JOINT GENERAL STAFF REPUBLIC OF VIET NAM ARMED FORCES	
References:	
- Edict # 10-b dated 15 August 1950 creating the "GALLANTRY CROSS".	
- Decree # 74-b/AT dated August 15 1950 and consecutive documents prescribing circumstances for award of the "GALLANTRY CROSS".	
- Memo # 1472/TTL/CP/PCP/3 dated May 21 1965 prescribing authorities for award of the "GALLANTRY CROSS".	
- Instruction # 655-402 dated February 23 1971 prescribing authorities to award the Republic of Vietnam Armed Forces Medals.	
<u>C I T A T I O N</u>	
<u>Division Level</u>	
.....	
<u>Regimental Level</u>	
.....	
<u>DONALD P. ANTONACCI, PO3, SN.4827779, USN</u>	
"... For bravery, combat experience, eagerness to fight ..."	
Particularly, on March 16 1971 while an infantry unit was engaging in combat with the VC on the Trem Trem river (An Xuyen) PO3 ANTONACCI defying danger, calmly fired at the enemy and helped the combating force to assault and inflict heavy losses to them.	
<u>THIS CITATION IS ACCOMPANIED WITH THE AWARD OF THE</u> <u>"GALLANTRY CROSS", BRONZE STAR</u>	
EPO 3044, July 15 1971	
<u>DISTRIBUTION:</u> - COMUS MACV ATTN: MACAG.DD APO US FORCES 96222	General CAO VAN VIEN Chairman of JGS/RVNAF Major General NGUYEN VINH NGHI Commander, 21st Inf Div Seal and Signature

Republic of Vietnam (RVN)
Gallantry Cross Medal with Palm



This Republic of Vietnam Medal was awarded as a Unit Award to personnel serving in designated units at the time of the award. It is awarded for a unit's (as distinguished from an individual's) valor and heroic conduct while fighting the enemy.

Republic of Vietnam Armed Forces
Honor Medal - Second Class



This Medal was instituted in 1953 by the Government of Vietnam and is awarded for contributions to the formation and organization of the Vietnamese Armed Forces and the training of troops and technical cadres of the various branches. It is intended for non-combat achievements. The 2nd Class Medal is for enlisted personnel. Donald received this in recognition of the training he provided on a close and daily basis with his Vietnamese counterparts.

Republic of Vietnam Civil Actions Medal
Second Class (2/C Enlisted Man)



The Republic of Vietnam Civil Actions Medal was awarded to Donald as an individual foreign award for meritorious service during the period November 1970 to November 1971. Individuals such as Donald Francis Antonacci who received the RVN Civil Actions Medal as an individual award are authorized to wear the medal, whereas other personnel assigned to a unit, which was awarded the medal, are authorized to wear the unit award emblem. The Republic of Vietnam Civil Action unit citation is authorized for permanent wear only. The Republic of Vietnam Civil Action Medal was awarded as an individual foreign decoration in certain instances, and is then worn without the gold frame.

Republic of Vietnam (RVN) Campaign
Medal with Date Bar



Donald met the criteria for this award by virtue of having a minimum of 6 months service in the Republic of Vietnam between 1970 and 1971. He also qualified for this Medal as a result of being wounded on May 21, 1971. The only authorized version of this medal comes with the Bar inscribed 1960-.

COLLEGE DEGREE:



Upon completing his 21 plus years of service in the United States Navy, Donald set out to conquer yet another of his ambitions: obtaining a college degree. On the 5th day of June, 1988, “having demonstrated to the Faculty the High Level of Competence,” the Board of Trustees of *National University*, San Diego, California, conferred on Donald the *Degree of Bachelor of Arts in Behavioral Science, Summa Cum Laude!* For those “House’s Kids” who may not remember their Latin from the days they served as Altar Boys at St. Agnes Chapel, the phrase “Summa Cum Laude” means “with the greatest honor,” and is used to express the highest academic distinction. Again, Donald had to “get it right,” by excelling to be the very best he could be. Two of the below pictures show Donald celebrating receiving his degree with his Sister-in-law Carol and Brother Joseph; the other two show him at different times with his Mother and his brother John.



Donald, Sister-in-Law Carol and Brother Joseph



Donald and Brother Joseph



Donald and John Antonacci



Donald and his very proud Mom

(Pictures Courtesy of John Antonacci)



Donald Francis Antonacci

In his June 24th email to me, John Antonacci said this about the last days of his beloved Brother:

“Donald died in California in 1987 from a form of cancer. I spent 10 days with him before he died, and my brother Ralph spent ten days with him also. Donald died about three months after I left him in California. His request was to be cremated and his ashes spread in a peaceful forest, which my brothers Bob and Joe took care of. The cancer was eating away at his body and he was down to ninety pounds.”

*The LORD bless you and keep you;
the LORD make his face shine upon you
and be gracious to you; the LORD turn
his face toward you and give you peace.*

Numbers 6:24-26 NIV



*O beautiful for heroes prov'd
In liberating strife,
Who more than self their country loved,
And mercy more than life.
America! America!*

*May God thy gold refine
Till all success be nobleness,
And ev'ry gain divine.*



May God bless all those persons who served in our military forces who risked their lives in order to preserve and defend the God-given rights of all "that among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness" which we may exercise freely as citizens of a truly great nation:



The United States of America



Donald Francis Antonacci: "Beloved Brother," "House's Kid," "Patriot," and "Hero," your friends and family can only say this:



We keep a candle burning bright in memory of those whose fight has ended. You are in our thoughts and prayers. We will see you again soon.

May God Bless America



*Jerry Merna, 74, was at St. Dominic's from 1942-1944, and St. Agnes from 1944-1946. He served 22 years as both an enlisted man (Master Gunnery Sgt.E9) and officer in the Marine Corps, including service in Korea and Vietnam. He then had a second 18-year career with the U. S. Postal Service, retiring as one of the 34 Officers of the 850,000 employees of that Service, followed by an additional 12-year career as a Director and Vice President of two defense Associations. He and his wife of 53 years, former TZHS classmate (Class of 1948) Dot Sedlack Merna, reside in Potomac Falls, VA. They have two children and two grandchildren.