

“Six Generations”

What Can Happen When Men and Women Commit to Be and Make Disciples for Christ

by Colonel Barry Willey, USA (Ret.)

“And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others.” 2 Timothy 2:2

Part One - Choosing the Harder Right

When I learned back in October of 1970 of the tragic death in battle of my friend and spiritual mentor at West Point, Jon Shine, and thought of the powerful and eternal impact he had on my life, and that of so many others, I committed then to telling his amazing story to others. His selfless lifestyle and his courage--at West Point, in the Army and in combat in Vietnam--have inspired me and many others whom he contacted during his life to live for Christ. As I have shared my Christian testimony over the years with many people in many settings, it has always included Jon Shine’s inspiring life. Jon’s death was a launching point for, and an inspiration to, building in other men’s lives the character, vision, and example of his selfless, sacrificial life.

To the Christian believer, life is all about serving the living Christ and living one’s own life in a sacrificial way--serving others, leading others, helping others, providing for and protecting others...and if called to do so, dying for others. While on earth, believers want to seek first His Kingdom, to be a disciple and to help others become disciples. When those are our priorities, all other necessary and needful things in life are generously provided (see John 16:33). But when other things push God and His priorities aside, then one’s perspective becomes temporal and shallow--well-meaning as it may be. When compared to an eternal perspective on life, all other perspectives simply pale and fade into insignificance.

Jon Shine’s perspective on life was eternal. He surely thought and felt earthly, temporal, and physical thoughts and emotions. But the thrust of his life was eternal--how could he please the Lord and help others see their need for the Lord. This outlook was shaped for sure by many people and experiences. But perhaps most significant of those experiences and people was one man who also had that eternal perspective on life and wanted to share it with Jon.

Paul Stanley was that man, but the story of Jon’s development as a disciple of Jesus

Christ goes farther back than Paul's life. We must look at the "generation" before Paul to a man who had a profound impact on Paul's life while a cadet--Joe Caldwell. From Joe we can count forward and see six "generations" of reliable or faithful men, as Paul talked to Timothy about, who desired to serve Christ and serve others. Jon Shine was touched by and touched many in a ministry of multiplication.

Senior cadet Joe Caldwell's relationship to Plebe cadet Paul Stanley was very similar to Jon's and mine. Joe was an All-American quarterback for the Army football team during its heyday in 1958 and 1959. It was tops in the nation and Joe was tops on the team. He was also at the top of his class academically. He took Paul Stanley under his wing and invested nine months of his life in Paul. As Paul explained it in a letter to me:

"(He) modeled (a life of Christ), we prayed often together, went out on 'basketball evangelism' after the football season was over. We memorized many passages of Scripture together and spent hours and hours in studying the Word and praying over it. We grew so very close. I am the godfather of his only child, a son he never knew. Joe was killed in a car accident four years after his graduation while getting his Masters Degree in Michigan. Joe had a broad testimony, but according to his wife, Gigi, I was the only one he ever invested his life into so intently and intentionally. My life was ignited by his love and investment...and it has never stopped. You know the rest."

The rest is that Paul Stanley has powerfully touched hundreds if not thousands of men's lives through this kind of ministry of multiplication. Paul resigned his Army commission in 1970 and joined the Navigators ministry, for whom he now still works as a senior executive. There is a ministry of discipleship...of faithful men teaching other faithful men the ways of Christ. Gwyn Vaughn, another committed officer, came along and picked up the ball from Paul. With the support of ministries like the Officers' Christian Fellowship--another group, different in scope than the Navigators, but equally dedicated to helping build cadets into disciples for Christ and sharing their faith with others through prayer, fellowship, and Bible Study.

In 1969--Jon's last year and my first--Paul Stanley's focus was on a handful of men he felt would carry on a ministry of multiplying disciples for the Lord. He (a second generation) invested his life in Jon (a third generation) and did many of the same kinds of things that Joe Caldwell did with him--prayer, Bible Study, evangelism experiences, and Scripture memorization. He was investing time in Jon's life that would reap eternal rewards. Paul also took me under his tutelage and spent quality time, over many weekends, sharing and modeling Christ for me and for other first year cadets. He also spent much of his free time with

the more senior cadets who would be leading the ministry at West Point and then beginning their own ministries once they got into the Army. Jon then took me and several others as his charges (a fourth generation of believers), maturing believers who wanted to learn about and grow as Christians. This generational look at Jon's spiritual impact on lives will be addressed more in the final part of this series. Now it is time to look briefly at his West Point days and how God used him and worked in him to do His will.

New Cadet Shine

At West Point, Jon was embarked on the experience of a lifetime, with challenges that would stagger most people his age, but he would quickly rise to the occasion and establish himself as a pillar of moral character and spiritual strength that would powerfully and positively change all those he encountered.

New Cadet Jon Shine experienced the blur of "R" Day or Reception Day, like thousands before him; survived it, and was assigned to a room with two roommates, for their first night of "Beast." To Dave Jamison, his new roommate from Arkansas, Jon was "the first person I talked to 'as an equal' that night." Dave was overwhelmed and confused by the craziness and chaos of that day and could only think about why he had gotten himself into this mess. Ready to quit then and there, Dave wasn't sure about this new guy.

"Jon warmly introduced himself saying something like 'we can make it if we work together,'" Dave remembered. "My first impression was formed when he announced that he prayed every night, hoped we had no difficulty with that, and then proceeded to kneel in prayer by the bed." Dave also found it fascinating that Jon never failed to read his Bible every day during his cadet experience.

Learning to deal with the pressure was one of the goals of the Fourth Class System and the upperclassmen were very good at dishing it out. Of course they had all lived through it and were intent on making each successive class's experience even harder than theirs.

Dave Jamison's description of Jon's confident, positive attitude and willingness to use his talents and skills to help his buddies is worth recounting:

"Jon's attitude was clearly one of his strongest attributes. He never faced a challenge that dampened his enthusiasm, and his outlook became infectious to all those around him. During the early days of Beast Barracks, memorization was a key to survival--a feat Jon mastered like no other. In anyone else, such a photographic memory would have instilled jealousy, but for Jon it garnered admiration. He memorized passages so easily that he always had time to help

those of us who struggled to remember even a brief phrase. I also recall occasions when he would state something during required recitation to attract the squad leader and save my hide. He knew I was having trouble and it was no coincidence when on a few occasions my turn to recite didn't come up."

Jon's attitude and approach to life at West Point--using his talents to serve others--were unique. Jon's Christian faith added a dimension to his life that further bolstered his self-confidence and gave him an inner peace and spiritual plumb line that kept him focused on service to others, while he unashamedly served his Lord. Jon daily prayed his personal prayers in his room, but would also learn another prayer, which all first-year cadets had to memorize--the Cadet Prayer. The Cadet Prayer is a powerful summation of a cadet's intention to live according to a "higher standard."

One poignant phrase in that prayer is a petition for strength to "choose the harder right instead of the easier, and never to be content with the half-truth when the whole can be won." Jon Shine lived that part of the Cadet Prayer to the fullest. His life as a cadet, and later as an Army officer, epitomized choosing "the harder right" over the easier wrong. Attracting attention to himself to take the "heat" off of his fellow classmate was certainly a choice he made that was risky and much harder than choosing to remain silent--smug in his self-confidence and ability to memorize all required Plebe knowledge--and watch his classmate suffer at the hands of upperclassmen. Time and again, as a new cadet, as an upperclassman, as a new Army lieutenant, and as a combat platoon leader in Vietnam, Jon would choose the harder right--even during the last hours of his life.

Love for God, love for his fellow man, and service to others marked his 23 years on earth...and choosing that "harder right" instead of the easier wrong was becoming routine procedure for Jon and was never done for the praise of others. In fact no one else really knew of Jon's propensity to make that harder but right call, save for those he was helping. Only after many years have passed is his story becoming known. Others now need to hear it.

Faith Grows

Jon's confidence and persistence allowed him to make the gymnastics team his Plebe year and he continued to apply his strong athletic abilities to that endeavor as a Yearling. He was now a high bar specialist and lettered his second year on the team. He also followed suit from his first year by volunteering to teach Sunday School again, this time for eighth graders from families that lived on the installation. Additionally he was a faithful participant in the weekly

cadet chapel Wednesday morning program and was selected as the Cadet-in-Charge of that event. Jon was growing in his Christian faith through these many activities that gave him an opportunity to study God's word, prepare lessons, and share his faith. Perhaps most significant in his spiritual maturing process was an encounter he had with a field house maintenance man sometime during his first or second year at the Academy, the exact time being uncertain.

Exactly when Jon made a specific decision to become a Christian and when he had the encounter with Hank Rhinefield is not what's important. What is certain and what is important, though, is that Jon was greatly touched in his heart and encouraged in his faith by a humble janitor who lived out his faith on a moment-by-moment basis. Hank, a middle-aged man when Jon's brother, Al, met him as a cadet half-a-decade earlier, loved cadets and loved sharing his faith with them. As cadets would come and go to the field house for various athletic events and team practice for track and other sports, Hank would "catch" them individually, either in the locker room or on the field house floor. He would gently but firmly inquire as to the beliefs of each cadet he would meet. Some would be annoyed and ignore Hank. Others were interested and listened to his stories. A few would even want the faith that Hank had and often would commit their lives to Christ then and there. Al Shine, Jon's brother, was one of those who several years earlier was convicted in his heart that he needed to become a Christian after his encounter with Hank, but waited until he got back to his room and could study his Bible and think over the things Hank had told him. He became a Christian in the quiet of his room with a simple prayer whispered to the Lord. Al eventually shared what he had experienced with Jon and encouraged him to seek Hank out when he got to the academy. Jon did just that.

Hank's approach was simple. Over the exit to the field house he placed a large sign with John 3:16, inscribed upon it (something that today's civil libertarians wouldn't stand for). Hank would then use that verse and personalize it for each cadet he would engage.

"For God so loved Jon Shine that He gave His only begotten Son, that if Jon Shine would believe on Him, Jon Shine would not perish but have everlasting life."

Hank's enthusiasm for living as a Christian got Jon fired up and he never lost that fire or desire to serve. One of Jon's extracurricular activities during his senior year would be taking a lead role in the spiritual development of several Plebe cadets within his company, while also providing spiritual leadership and encouragement to his classmates and fellow Christian believers throughout the Corps of Cadets. Jon met Captain Paul Stanley at Fort Benning, Georgia during his senior trip and Paul encouraged him to take such a key spiritual leadership role within the Corps of Cadets. Paul Stanley would soon be stationed by the Army at West

Point as an Admissions Officer and became a spiritual mentor to Jon for his final year. Despite his many other activities and duties, Jon was very desirous of leading in this meaningful way--personal and corporate Christian maturity--a path he had followed faithfully since becoming a cadet and was not about to abandon now.

In a very telling letter dated April 1969, to his older brother, Al, then serving in Vietnam, Jon weaves some powerful spiritual insights. Here are a few:

“Spirit still working overtime here. Last weekend Don Moomau preached here and then spoke informally Sunday afternoon. He was All-American LB (linebacker) at UCLA in ‘53 and now is a minister in the LA area. His testimony and real, sincere and honest talk was, I think, one of the best we’ve had this year. He was competing with Gary Puckett and the Union Gap, a singing group, for an audience and didn’t fare too well, but I have found real peace in this matter. I figure that with the speakers we bring up, if we do our work well, we can just leave the rest up to the Lord.

“This week we have started a new (Bible) study over here in (Companies) F-1 and H-1 where I now live. We have 2 firsties, a yearling and 3 plebes...

“This weekend I am CIC (cadet-in-charge) of a Protestant Retreat...up to Deer Hill in Wappinger’s Falls. We have about 60 guys coming, including several on the football team. I think athletes can often have a good ministry here at Woops (slang for West Point) because most guys are so sweaty. However, I am somewhat against the emphasis I see sometimes on guys being effective because of all the neat things they do--we non-champions can be used, too.

“My best wishes for a prosperous and low silhouette. Psalm 27:1, ‘The Lord is my light and my salvation, whom shall I fear; the Lord is the strength of my life, of whom shall I be afraid?’”

Jon’s enthusiasm for Christ and serving Him wholeheartedly as a cadet was beginning to have a marked impact on many around him. His professionalism was evident to all, but even more evident was the joy in Christ he demonstrated. It was infectious.

Committed to Men

For a confused, lonely, and scared Plebe named Barry Willey, from Indianapolis, Indiana, Cadet First Classman Jonathan C. Shine was an unlikely hero. On the last day of the transition period between Beast Barracks and the academic year, when all the upperclassmen return from their summer duties, trips and vacations, Jon confronted me while they stood in formation

ready to march to the dining hall for dinner. His simple question to me as I stood at a stiff position of attention, chin well to the rear, was, "Cadet Willey, would you like to participate in a Bible study in the company after duty hours?" Somewhat taken aback, but pleasantly relieved that there were other Christian believers within the Corps of Cadets, I muttered a quick, "Yes, sir!"

That brief encounter changed my life. A relationship had begun that would last a lifetime and have a profound impact on the way I lived--as a cadet, as an officer, as a husband, and as a father.

Part Two - Barracks Bible Studies

Jon approached several other new cadets in our company and assembled a small group of eager men who desired to grow in their Christian faith, while they progressed in their cadet experiences. The discrete manner of Jon's involvement in these men's lives, however, and Jon's own stellar reputation, created a situation that was easily tolerated by the members of Company G-1, though it could have been viewed by some as fraternization. There was never any pressure to participate and Jon's leading of these Bible study groups was personable yet scholarly and professional...and after duty hours. It would have been hard for anyone to find anything worth criticizing in the arrangement. The group usually met once during the week, in the evening, down in the basement of the cadet barracks where the quiet atmosphere supported a discrete study of the Bible. Participants, including members of the company other than Plebes, had to obviously be willing to sacrifice a portion of their evening that would have otherwise be devoted to studying for the next day's academics.

As it turned out that year, not one of our group suffered adversely in academics. On one occasion, we were unable to meet due to scheduling conflicts. Jon wrote a personal note to the members apologizing. His note to me was brief and to the point, yet spoke volumes. It, in fact, is a microcosm of his life at West Point -- developing relationships, meeting other's needs, excellence and faith:

Willey, 4th CI

Sorry about Thurs nite - I guess we all got a little busy - let's shoot for another meeting
Sun. nite - Daniel 3:17,18

BEAT SPRINGFIELD

Mr. Shine

The verses from the above passage, along with the context, describe the three Jewish lads, taken into captivity by an invading king, who defiantly worshipped their God and refused to bow to the king's idols. They were thrown into the fiery furnace but were kept safe by the "fourth man in the fire...who appeared like the Son of God." Though always a popular Sunday School story with younger ones, the trials, faith and courage of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego inspired Jon in his own daily faith. He wasn't ashamed or hesitant to share that inspiration with his fellow cadets. Again, his firm stance on living unashamedly as a Christian is another example of choosing the harder right over the easier wrong of just going with the flow and not making one's faith a lightning rod for others to criticize.

Special Inspection

Graduation was drawing near and preparing for life as an Army lieutenant became the one thing on most Firsties' minds. While many consider their professional legacies--how people will remember them--when completing a watershed event their lives, the main thing on Jon's mind at the end of his cadet experience was ensuring the spiritual legacy of those who had gone before him was carried on at West Point. He wrote the below words on a green Department of Defense routing slip to young Plebe Barry Willey twelve days before graduation day for the Class of 1969.

WILLEY, 4TH CLASS, CO. G-1

Thru M/C (message center)

Let it be now and henceforth known that you will report to room 3921 at 031525 June for Special Inspection. This order to be superceded only by someone with 6 stripes.

Jonathan C. Shine

Cdt Cpt, 2d Bn, 1st Regt.

Commanding

An order to report for Special Inspection strikes fear and anxiety into any plebe, especially when it comes from the Battalion Commander. I had gotten to know Jon in a more personal way throughout the year in Jon's company and studied the Bible with him during our free time. It still was not clear, though, what Cadet Captain Shine wanted with Plebe Willey. When the day arrived for graduation, Barry Willey pulled out the green routing slip and double-checked the time to report and the room number. It was time. With shoes highly spit-shined, a starch-stiff pair of white cadet trousers under a full dress gray coat--brass buttons shined to perfection--and crossed white parade belt with brass plate in the center of his chest, I was

ready for the worst, most scrutinizing inspection imaginable...a Special Inspection by a First Classman--my company commander!

Knocking on the door, I could almost hear my knees knocking at the same time. I was nervous and sweating profusely against the high, stiff collar of my parade jacket. What was about to happen? He guessed it couldn't be any worse than what he had just finished going through the past eleven months.

The door opened and there stood Cadet First Classman Jonathan Cameron Shine, five gold stripes on his full dress coat, his red officer's sash neatly tied around his waist and his gleaming saber ready at his left side. "Come in Cadet Willey. I'm sure you are wondering why I called you here. Well, you are surely aware of the tradition of upperclassmen recognizing plebes on graduation day. It symbolizes the break from the tough plebe year to the ranks of the upperclass. It involves shaking the plebe's hand and calling him by his first name." Jon then thrust his calloused gymnast's hand toward mine and said, "Hi Barry, I'm Jon." Hesitating but happy and relieved, I raised his right hand and firmly grasped Jon's and our eyes met and a bond was formed that day that only the few who have experienced it can comprehend. But that wasn't the end of the Special Inspection. Jon then opened and held out his left hand, which had been grasping a dulled-silver dollar, a rather old vintage coin that held some significance to Jon. He explained its significance to me.

Jon had received the silver dollar from a graduating cadet when he was a Plebe, at a similar recognition. The tradition behind the coin transfer was this. The coin was to be given to a cadet who exemplified Christian character and leadership during his first year at West Point. It symbolized the faithfulness of a generation of men who were willing to risk ridicule and perhaps spiritual persecution while living a godly life as a cadet. Being recognized not only as an upperclassman, but as a spiritual leader with responsibilities to the Lord and to his fellow cadets was a distinct honor...and an awesome charge. I felt a deep awe at this nod to my potential as a spiritual leader and a little bit of trepidation, hoping and praying that I could live up to the expectations inherent in this tradition. One more handshake and a heartfelt, manly hug sealed our friendship and bond as brothers in arms and brothers in faith.

Jon left that evening for his home in Pleasantville, N.Y. and a well-earned respite before the requisite military schools and training that would prepare him for a combat tour in Vietnam. 2nd Lieutenant Jon Shine, who had taken the oath of allegiance to support and defend the Constitution as a commissioned officer early that day, was now ready for the toughest challenges of his life. They would soon be upon him.

Marriage and Preparation for Combat

Jon married Gail while a student at the Infantry Officer's Basic Course and they headed to Colorado for a short stint before he deployed to Vietnam. A good friend of Gail and Jon and former Executive Secretary of the Officer's Christian Fellowship (OCF), Paul Pettijohn remembers some quality time with the two of them while they vacationed at the OCF's Colorado retreat center, Spring Canyon, located a couple of hours from Fort Carson. "I vividly remember going to their chalet to talk with them about getting ready to be apart and to prepare for his going into harm's way. Jon was very calm (author's note: this calmness will manifest itself again in an amazing way later in Jon's story) and he was spiritually ready. He was at peace with the task that was before him. The three of us talked about the role of the Word of God in our lives and ended up having a very meaningful prayer time together."

Paul also remembered a Scripture verse that Jon sent him in a letter from Vietnam in which Jon shared what became Jon and Gail's favorite verse--Romans chapter 8, verse 28: And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to those who are called according to His purpose (the verse on the plaque at Fort Shine).

"I remember as if it were yesterday," Paul recalled. "I felt the power and significance of what Jon was writing me. 2LT Jonathan Shine, U.S. Army, was saying in what proved to be his last letter to me, 'no matter what happens in Vietnam, I know it is going to work together for good.' What a powerful and profound application of God's Word by a young officer who was going into his first round of combat!"

While difficult decisions for young lieutenants at Fort Carson and elsewhere were few, Jon, nevertheless, experienced some kind of serious dilemma during that time at Carson. While we do not know exactly what Jon faced, it tore at him and he shared it with Gail. Gail swore to Jon then that she would never reveal the dilemma's details to anyone. "It was very painful for him," Gail shared many years later. "He told me not to tell anyone. And it would be wrong for me to share (the details) now. It involves other people and somebody who was involved might read this and be hurt by it." Thirty-two years later, she kept her promise.

We only know that it was extremely serious and caused Jon no small amount of anguish. It could have been an attempt by a superior officer to test Jon's personal and professional honor code. Perhaps pressure to "fudge" the monthly Unit Status Report that reflected the readiness status of the unit and could get a commander fired if it weren't up to par. It could have been a valued subordinate caught breaking a regulation or committing a serious breach of ethics and forcing his platoon leader to make a tough disciplinary call. It

could have been a peer, committing an indiscretion and forcing Jon to either turn him in or turn the other way. Gail classified it as an “ethical dilemma that he had to confront.”

Jon had been through some tough times before and knew it would not be an easy choice to make. When he finally made up his mind and chose a course of action, it evoked the following comment from Gail:

“Despite his rank, he stood his ground and said he would not compromise his principles. He simply couldn’t do that. There was no question (about it)...he would not be compromising. A higher ranked officer said, ‘I hope you keep your high principles, Lieutenant Shine. I doubt it, but I hope so.’”

The Shines’ time at Fort Carson was over before they felt they were settled as a new Army couple. Time was now nearer their point of separation than they would like to admit. Orders were in hand for the Jungle Operations Training Center in the Panama Canal Zone. While not Vietnam, it was the next best thing for replicating the rigors of maneuvering and fighting in the complex terrain such as they would likely find in Vietnam.

Jon left for Panama on August 15, 1970 and completed the two-week training scenario at the Army’s Jungle Operations Course on the 29th. Next stop--South Vietnam.

The Battle

Jon Shine arrived in South Vietnam in August of 1970. He had been in combat operations for only a few weeks when he wrote Al, his older brother, about a desire he felt to simply look out for the men in his platoon and keep them from becoming casualties as the politicians back home sorted out the U.S. policy toward Vietnam, the President prepared to start bringing troops home and many back home protested the war in America’s streets. He knew that wasn’t how things were supposed to be but was being honest with Al.

When Al received Jon’s letter he immediately penned a reply that mildly scolded Jon and lovingly but directly charged him with the firm responsibility of taking the fight aggressively to the enemy. Jon never received Al’s letter. But he really didn’t need it. He knew in his heart what he had to do...

...Sergeant Joe Christopher left his four-man reconnaissance element at a concealed location, only yards from eight North Vietnamese Army regulars, their radio blaring, and the soldiers oblivious to the U.S. infantrymen nearby. M-60 machinegunner Carl Nichols got specific instructions from Christopher not to fire unless it was absolutely necessary. Christopher then rejoined his main element, led by Sergeant Greg Yahn, about 30 to 40

meters away. At the same time, Lieutenant Jon Shine, leading the Third Platoon, in Charlie Company, 4th Battalion, 9th Infantry Regiment (The Manchus), operating in two groups on this mission, also linked up with Sgt. Yahn when he heard about the enemy sighting. The men quickly discussed in low voices how they should handle the enemy force.

A typical tactic for this kind of contact was to pull back a safe distance and call in artillery, helicopter gunships, and jets to unload their ordnance on the unsuspecting enemy. Jon Shine's small force could certainly count on the help of their higher headquarters' arsenal to cover their actions. Another possibility was a frontal assault, achieving shock action and hopefully a quick, decisive victory, but a very risky venture with high probability of casualties. A third course of action involved an aggressive attack on their flank, thereby gaining some measure of surprise and less likely to result in serious casualties.

RAT-TAT-TAT-TAT-TAT-TAT...the unmistakable sound of the infantry grunt's best friend in battle-the M60 machinegun! Something must have happened to cause Nichols to fire off a burst of thirty rounds. No more discussions of options. It was now time for action. Jon called out to his men as he literally lurched toward the enemy's flank, leading the rest of the platoon in this gutsy move. In pursuing the smaller enemy unit, however, they soon discovered they had run into that unit's larger force, a huge enemy bunker complex with what was later determined was about 100 NVA Regulars and two 30-caliber machineguns trained on them. The action quickly turned into a larger fire-fight in which the 3rd squadron of the 11th ACR eventually became decisively engaged.

The ground trembled and opened in wide gaping holes as North Vietnamese Army mortar rounds landed nearby the men of Jon's platoon. The deadly projectiles, lobbed with precision accuracy from perhaps one terrain feature away, were joined by rocket-propelled grenades, arcing into their oblong piece of ground, exploding into hundreds of molten-hot fragments. Man-sized chunks of mud rose from the earth like geysers each time a round landed. NVA 30 mm machine guns and AK-47 assault rifles joined the cacophony that became a roar in the ears of Jon and his soldiers. Sgt. Greg Yahn shared with me his memories of that battle:

"We had just decided on a compromise of Lt. Shine taking a flanking position, when the firing started. The Lt. ran forward, with Sgt. Roberts following, towards his platoon, and leading them on a flanking position from where our main group was set. The jungle was thick, from anywhere just off the path, and made visibility of the enemy past 10 meters impossible to detect without observing muzzle flash. As he rallied his troops to move to our right, they

maybe made about fifty yards progress, when he was cut down by machine gun fire.”

Rob “Doc” Jackson, Jon’s platoon medic--and now a pastor in Maine--unhesitatingly moved to the front of the column when word came to him that casualties had been sustained. He began intently working on Sgt. Joe Roberts, one of Jon’s squad leaders, as Jon lay five feet away. Both men were seriously wounded from the initial enemy fire. Roberts had taken two bullets in the chest and Doc feverishly tried to stop the flow of blood, deal with the “sucking chest wound” that comes from penetrations of the lungs and treat for shock. Oblivious to the enemy fire all around him, Doc knew his lieutenant was either wounded or dead nearby. At this point, Rob “Doc” Jackson’s remembrances are powerful:

“As I was trying to bandage his wounds and assess what was appropriate to do next, I heard a voice just a few feet to Robert’s left. Realize all this was happening in intermittent hails of fire like torrents, but somehow I could hear Jon very clearly. It was for me a very special moment, it was holy, and I realized it even then.

I had just been saying the name of Jesus out loud, over and over as I worked on Roberts, and I hear Jon say, ‘Doc, I’ve been hit in the head but I’m OK. Just throw me some bandages and I’ll stop the bleeding until you finish with Roberts and get back.’ That’s very close to verbatim. Over the years I’ve told the story many time and I always include how remarkably composed he was... It wasn’t until I met you, Barry, that I understood how he could be so calm, so secure, it was of course Christ in him the hope of glory. What a privilege to be there with him even for those few moments. I threw him the bandages and while I was dragging Roberts back he was killed and I never saw him again. Lewis Lesnikowski and Gene Hess both got up to him or close but he was gone home and in the Savior’s presence, as we labored on.”

From Jon’s life story, we now know of his propensity to sacrificial living and action when others are involved. He constantly chose the harder, more risky, more dangerous “right” rather than the much easier “wrong” when confronted with such dilemmas. We have seen that he moved--yes, bolted--into action, without any hesitation, toward the enemy that was engaging and threatening his small band of soldiers, 75 yards from his platoon position. He could have tried to call in artillery and jets to bomb the enemy force but his troops were too close and that would take too long and even now they were engaged in a life-or-death struggle at close quarters.

Part Three - Final Act of Courage

The citation to Jon's posthumous Silver Star for gallantry in action described his actions: "During the initial contact, Lieutenant Shine was seriously wounded. Despite his wounds, Lt. Shine immediately began placing suppressive fire on the enemy positions, thus allowing his men to move to cover." His words to "Doc" Jackson seem clearly intended to keep "Doc" and the other platoon members focused on Joe Roberts for the few moments that he engaged the enemy. Jon, thinking only about his men and acting on their behalf, perished when the enemy returned his fire.

When word of the fight reached back to Cu Chi base camp, an incredible thing happened. The battalion scout platoon was just back from an operation for rest and recuperation. Their leader was a close friend of Jon and a West Point classmate and his soldiers knew of that strong bond and Jon's reputation in the battalion. Without orders, they put on their combat gear, drew ammo and stood by to go in and retrieve Jon's body. The battalion commander himself had to order them to stand down.

A Special Reunion

In May of 2002, I had the privilege and honor to join the first gathering of members of Jon's platoon since that fateful battle in 1970. Greg Yahn, Gene Hess, Joe Christopher, Jesse 'Sal' Salcedo, Rob Jackson, Steve Harlan and Ted Hooker were plain-talking heroes who gave their all and after Vietnam went about their lives as solid citizens, not asking anything from their country that asked so much of them. Several were severely wounded in ways that profoundly affected the rest of their lives. Joe Christopher suffered from a fragmentation wound to his back during the firefight and then serious injuries to much of his body when the rescue litter he was in dropped from 60 feet up when the evacuation helicopter carrying it was hit by enemy fire; Gene Hess lost a finger and part of his upper arm from AK-47 fire when he attempted to rescue a wounded Jon Shine. Greg Yahn went in after Gene and was eyeball-to-eyeball with enemy soldiers only yards away as he pulled Greg back to safer ground. Ted, Sal, and Steve moved, fired, and bravely defended their ground despite the horrific firestorm, while Rob courageously attended to Jon and Country Joe Roberts. All of these men have dealt with the emotional and physical scars from that awful day in South Vietnam's Hobo Woods.

Greg Yahn sent me several notes and emails and his words are poignant: "Lt. Shine was absolutely courageous in his assault on that day, as was Sgt. Roberts...I wish this book could be written from the first person, because we have all lost a comrade soul...God bless you and your family. God has directed your hand in all of this, pulled all of us veterans

together, helped to give us rest in heart and mind, and given us all a reason to remember each other. For this I am forever grateful.”

Jon Shine and Joe Roberts’ names are on the Vietnam Memorial Wall, panel 6 West, line 2...together...just as they fell in battle.

The Investment Pays Off

The time Jon Shine invested in me--studying God’s Word, praying together, meeting in fellowship with others at the Academy and going to spiritual conferences on weekends--made profound inroads in my life and the lives of several other cadets, and set me on a course of personal spiritual discipline and training.

During my senior (Firstie) year at West Point, I asked two younger men in my battalion--Greg Schumacher and Jim Blackwell--if they wanted to join me in a year of intensive spiritual growth together. They both eagerly agreed. My desire was to share the disciplines of the Christian faith that I was taught from my parents, and then had learned from and seen so clearly in Jon Shine and the Christian faculty officers who had “adopted” me. I would now pass them on to Greg and Jim, so they in turn could pass them on to other reliable men. I was convicted and convinced of the truth in Scripture that the Apostle Paul taught to his young friend, Timothy. (2 Timothy 2:2)

Following graduation I sensed there would be other opportunities to work with men eager to grow as believers. The first opportunity came during my first assignment in the Army. As a young lieutenant of infantry and a member of the storied 82d Airborne Division, the quick reaction force for the United States, I was humbled yet proud.

Following an alert to possibly deploy to the Middle East in 1973, we all felt what it was like to be physically and emotionally prepared for combat. We also became sensitized to the spiritual side of our makeup. I felt a strong obligation to share my own faith and ensure my men knew that if they ever needed encouragement in that area of life, they could call on me without hesitation. I was also still very cognizant of Jon Shine’s life and death and impact on my life. He was killed in action only three years earlier in combat in Vietnam. My memory of his brief but inspired life and my own changed outlook on life--feeling a strong need to work with men as a spiritual mentor, as God led me to those men--convinced me that I needed to share my Christian testimony with my platoon of about 40 soldiers.

I called them together one day, shortly after the alert, and sat them on the steps to our barracks. I spent about ten minutes sharing my personal philosophy of life as a Christian and

was compelled to talk to them about my relationship with Jon Shine, his powerful touch on my life and his heroic death in action during the Vietnam conflict. Some squirmed, others looked away...but all listened. Most seemed appreciative of my willingness to share something many of them had never heard before--nor expected to hear. I wasn't quite sure what to expect following this session but hoped a few of them were sensitized to the Christian lifestyle and the hope and assurance it provided.

I did, however, remember Jon and others in my early days as a believer at West Point, telling me a great truth. They asked the question, "How best should we be spending our time in this life?" Their answer was, "By focusing on the only two things that really last...that really have eternal value...the Word of God and the souls of men." If you think through that statement, it makes a lot of sense. Everything else is all eventually meaningless when life is over. You can't take any of it with you! What does last are the words of our Heavenly Father, found in the Holy Scriptures, and the souls of men...that which passes on into an eternal state after death on this earth. My priorities were set.

The session with my platoon was a Friday afternoon and Sunday night I was at my apartment in Fayetteville, N.C., getting my equipment ready for a field exercise starting the next day. It was probably about 9 or 10 p.m. The phone rang and I thought it a bit unusual to be getting a call at that hour. I answered it and the voice on the other end said, "Lieutenant Willey, sir, this is Specialist Fred Staples"...Staples was a machine-gunner in my rifle platoon and not one of the stellar performers. In fact, there were rumors going around the platoon that Staples was into drugs, both using and pushing, and we were simply waiting for an opportunity to catch him in the act and remove him as a bad influence on the other young troops. Now, I figured, was our chance. I suspected he was calling from the jail downtown and needed me to bail him out.

"Sir," the young soldier continued, "I went to South Carolina this weekend with a friend from our platoon and met someone while I was there. I met Jesus Christ and gave my life to Him. I was wondering if you would help me learn more about him."

Needless to say, God had worked a miracle in young Fred Staple's life through the power of His Spirit and a Billy Graham film. And he knew about my faith because of my taking the time to share my testimony. I assured Specialist Staples that I would gladly help him learn more about the Lord. I recalled the early days of my first year at the Military Academy and Jon Shine--my senior by three years--taking some risk and taking me on, teaching me about faithfully walking with the Lord and being a disciple. I wanted to follow that example and be a

spiritual big brother and mentor to this soldier. Because he was a member of my platoon and, therefore, presented me with a potential challenge--possible charges of favoritism--I very discretely met with him after normal duty hours for several weeks before I changed jobs within the battalion and helped him learn a few spiritual ropes. Jon Shine's influence was taking hold, motivating and inspiring me to follow in his footsteps...and as Jon would have observed, more importantly, follow in the Lord's footsteps.

More Generations of Reliable Men

The next or fifth "generation" of believers will pick up with Timothy Mallard, a young man I met and worked with when stationed in Panama. Timothy is now a Chaplain in the United States Army and on fire for the Lord and His work. He recently shared his written testimony with me and here is how it started: "My story as a Christian goes back to several formative experiences, not the least of which was a Bible study and discipleship program I experienced in Panama when I was a teenager. Many years after that...I dedicated myself to full-time Christian service, followed a call to the ministry and another call to the Army Chaplaincy."

While a Chaplain at Fort Benning, Georgia, for a mechanized infantry battalion, Timothy also led a ministry at a small chapel on the base. He was soon reassigned to Europe and found himself in a Germany-based artillery unit bound for Bosnia with another Army unit. He soon was encouraged by some of his soldiers to start a Promise Keepers Bible study and found himself ministering to a diverse group of men from all races, religious affiliations, and backgrounds, all desirous of learning about and walking close to Christ. They started calling themselves the "Men of Integrity." Timothy eventually led this group of men on a spiritual journey to Washington, D.C., during the Promise Keepers' "Stand in the Gap" rally in October of 1997. It was a logistically challenging time to fund, transport, feed, and house a group of thirteen soldiers, but through some amazing answers to their prayers, it all worked out and they experienced a life-changing time together. Timothy concluded his testimony this way: "We made it back to Germany and, returning to our community, began to share with others our adventure in Christ, including those brothers of ours who had remained behind to accomplish other missions. I knew then, however, that our fellowship--not just those who made the journey--but all fifty of our men, had achieved that which God had purposed for us to accomplish. I knew that it was time for us to begin going out from that place to carry our faith to others. Not eight months later over half our group would be gone to other parts of the world...we have eight men preparing for or serving in full-time ministry, two who have gone to

college to return to the Army as officers, and many who are in new places of service in the local church as musicians, deacons, lay leaders, or teachers. As well, there is no telling what impact on the world the sons and daughters of these men will have in the future.”

One of those “Men of Integrity” I was able to locate was Sergeant First Class John Kurzyniec, now stationed at Fort Hood, Texas. When I contacted John--the sixth generation of reliable men in this story--in September of 2001, he wrote me the following:

“I first met Chaplain Mallard in Bosnia in a Tactical Operations Center (TOC) in 1996...We had a nightly briefing at 1900 hours and it was his first night there...I remember him standing in front of everybody in the TOC and giving us the Scripture of John 15:5, ‘I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing.’ Now I remember this because at that time I was searching the Gospel to find out who this God was. I gave my life to Christ and recognized Jesus as my Lord and Savior 20 July 1996...that Scripture has stayed with me until this day.

“There was something different about this man, different from other chaplains I had met previously in the battalion. At the time I didn’t know what it was, but later realized that he had a light that shined. There was something in this man’s life that I wanted, too. He was compassionate and very friendly, always had time for others and what was best is that he brought people together. We had services in Bosnia and people came to hear what this man of God had to say. Church was never that full before, but now they were coming. They must have seen what I saw and that was the realness for Jesus Christ.”

I knew at the time I contacted John that he was heading up a group of men at Fort Hood who were preparing to host a Central Texas-wide Christian Men’s Conference. They had planned it for 11 months and briefed the concept to the Garrison Commander, receiving his approval to proceed. When I re-established contact in April of 2002, John and his group had just completed the conference, whose guest speakers included author Stu Weber and pro-football great, Hershel Walker. His note to me:

“...we just had a wonderful, blessed time in the Lord...What I found really great about the whole conference was the prayer leading up to the conference. We asked the Lord if just one came and gave his life, all would be worth it. Well on Friday night the altar was open and we had about 25, including a nine-year-old who was moved and came by himself. On Saturday before the conference started, we had a soldier who was running the track at 0530 and the praise team had just finished setting up and started playing. This individual started asking the conference staff that was around what was going on. We explained to him what we were doing

and one thing led to another and BAM!!...out of the clear blue he wanted Jesus in his life. We called all the men around that were there and prayed with him. I thank God every day that He can use men all around us for His glory.”

Indeed He can! God began this ministry of multiplication through generations of faithful men years ago, using Jon Shine as a powerful influence on many others along the way. We don't always know how and why He works the way He does, but we can be assured that He is in control. He took Jon Shine from this earth, at age 23, to be with Him. Jon's tragic death was certainly a horrible loss to his family and friends and to the Army and his country, for which he held so much potential. We may never know what Jon could have accomplished in an earthly sense. But we do know what he has accomplished in a spiritual sense. Jonathan Cameron Shine serves as a life-altering inspiration and motivation to live for Jesus Christ and serve others selflessly and sacrificially. Jon, I'm sure, would not want us to focus on him. He would much rather we focus on the Lord, giving Him all the glory.

True believers, however, know that faithful disciples of Christ who have gone on from this life, have always left behind them powerfully vivid signs--trail markers--that point the way toward Him. One of those trail markers Jon left us was an example of total reliance on the Holy Spirit, our Comforter and a true Friend we all can have as Christians. Robert “Doc” Jackson, the brave Army medic who heard Jon Shine's last words, now understands why--coming from his platoon leader lying five feet from him with a serious wound to his head, and enemy fire all around--they were so amazingly calm and full of assurance and peace. In F.B Meyer's *David*, the author traces this young warrior's life through the steps by which he became king...those steps in which his character was formed. In one of his poignant passages, he describes David, who, without hesitation, bolts toward the enemy with great valor and skill when that enemy threatened his men. Meyer describes David and all those with a similar warrior spirit, as men and women “in whose breasts the dove-like Spirit has found an abiding place, and whose hearts are ‘sentined’ by the peace of God...these are they who bear themselves as heroes in the fight.” (F.B Meyer, *David*, London, 1953, Preface and p. 34)

The path we tread as we move toward that prize of God's high calling--our reigning with Him eternally--is well lit by the courage and character of a young Army lieutenant, whose calm, peaceful voice...bright, engaging smile...and rock-solid faith in Jesus Christ remain fixed in our memories and encourage us on...each step of the way.

Robert M. Kimmitt, classmate and friend of Jon, former Under Secretary of State for

Political Affairs, former U.S. Ambassador to Germany and Major General, U.S. Army Reserves in an email to Barry Willey:

“Thanks for this opportunity to remember a friend and first-class human being...we got to know each other working on various Corps-wide activities and via mutual friends. One such friend was Guy Hester...who was also killed in Vietnam [authors’ note - seven days before Jon]. Jon and Guy were devout Christians, but Christians who were not judgmental about others. They influenced others by example, not sermonizing. I believe Jon’s and Guy’s widows were burying one of them...when word of the other’s death arrived. [author’s note - in fact, Gail Shine rushed to be with Guy’s wife--a total stranger--when she heard that Guy had been killed in action. While Gail was at the funeral, incredibly, Guy’s wife found out about Jon’s death and informed Gail. They comforted one another.] When I think of what a West Point cadet should be, I think of Jon Shine. When I think of what a young officer should be, I think of Jon Shine. When I think of what a human being should be, I think of Jon Shine. When I think of Jon Shine, I cry and smile; cry because I miss him; smile because he is now and has been precisely where he was always destined to be.”

Colonel (Ret.) Mike Tesdahl, USMA Class of 1969, classmate of Jon Shine and former head of the Officer’s Christian Fellowship ministry at West Point, in a correspondence to Barry Willey:

“The Jonathan C. Shine Memorial Award, traditionally a leather-bound study Bible engraved with the recipient’s name, is still presented annually during the Protestant Baccalaureate service. The award is presented to the Cadet-in-Charge of OCF at West Point. This cadet is chosen on the basis of his/her demonstrated capacity for Christian leadership and service within OCF and the Corps...Jon’s contributions to the spiritual development of his contemporaries is reiterated annually in preparation for this award ceremony. Recent recipients of the award include Bryan Groves, an infantryman serving at Fort Bragg, NC; Mike Stone, a tanker serving in Germany; Marie (Roush) Hatch, an AG officer currently serving at Fort Campbell, KY; and most recently, Riley Post, an infantryman who just graduated from Ranger School and is enroute to graduate studies at Oxford [as a Rhodes Scholar]. Jon is also a recurring topic of discussion during the annual West Point-specific Rocky Mountain High rotation at Spring Canyon, Colorado, where Fort Shine is named after him. In particular, we recount the anecdote that Jon was led to the Lord through the witness of a ‘barracks police’--a

custodian--at the Gillis Field House, and make the point that none of us knows the impact of our daily witness on those around us.”

About the Author

A 1972 graduate of the U.S. Military Academy, Barry Willey is a retired Army Colonel who retired in June of 2001 after 29 years on active duty as an infantry officer. He deployed to Granada in 1983 with the 82d Airborne Division, to Desert Shield/Storm in 1990/91 with the 24th Infantry Division, and to Haiti in 1994 with the 18th Airborne Corps. Barry is married to the former Barbara Fishback and they have two adult children, Rachael, and Jonathan--who is married to the former Jamie Warrick. Barry and Barb have been the OCF staff couple at West Point since January, 2005. Barry has been a member of OCF since his days as a West Point cadet and participated in a European “Summer Safari” with the late Cleo Buxton in 1972. He has published articles in Command magazine and in the book, “Deployed But Not Disconnected”.

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