

----- Original Message -----

From: Ramos, Hector

To: Don Poss (E-mail)

Sent: Friday, December 28, 2001 12:03 PM

Subject: Story Submittal

Hi Don,

If you'll recall I wrote to you back in April about a story submittal ([my letter](#) was posted under Binh Thuy) that I thought should be part of a human interest story for the newsletter or added to the base archives on the site. In June I mailed you a 1988 letter [see below] from the fiancée of the A1C M.W. Lehman who was KIA in 1966. My hope was to find Mrs. Erlyce Pekas and introduce her to the VSPA, get her permission to print her letter and further contribute to this story. On Christmas day I was successful in finding a link through a web search and after 13 years found her. She is a remarkable person as you will see, and extremely happy and thankful for my perseverance and has granted permission to use her correspondence and photos. The following is the full text of her E-mail to me. Also under separate mailing are (2) jpeg's [[article-1](#), [article-2](#)] of her participation in the 10th anniversary of "the Wall" in in D.C. in 1992.

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December 27, 2001

Dear Hector,

Thank you so much for finding me, and sending me the website information for VSPA.com. I was so surprised to hear from you, especially since we moved from Sioux Falls, SD nearly four years ago, and we now live in Phoenix, AZ. When I first got email, I had AOL, but have had a prodigy email address now for a few years. It was good of you to persevere....I do so appreciate it. As it happens, David Hoodenpyle is married to a girl from my hometown of Baudette, MN (where Millard, or as we called him, "Lee", was stationed) so David knew how to find me. Actually, I was in Baudette over Christmas. We flew out of here December 20th and arrived by car in Baudette (population about 1,200 souls) on the 21st, just in time to take my mother home from the hospital. She is doing better, but may need surgery on a ruptured disc in the near future. We came back to Phoenix yesterday morning, the 26th, and today I had a chance to glance at my email.

At any rate, when I looked at the VSPA.com website, I was very touched to read both your letter and the one sent by Duke Windsor. Even after all these years, it was and still is important to me to know Lee's life and the loss of it was not in vain. To know that he touched other lives, to read about the somewhat humorous account Duke Windsor had in regards to getting his weaponry, and to see the photo of the memorial was deeply moving to me, and important to an ever-evolving understanding and acceptance of his death. Lee's mother still lives in Tucson, AZ..... as a matter of fact, we spent my birthday together in late September this year and played "tourist" in Tombstone, a place Lee and I had gone with his parents in early 1966, just a few days before he shipped out for Vietnam. She is 80 years old, doing well, and had a chance to visit the "Wall" in Washington, D.C. a year or two ago with some relatives. Lee's father died about 3 years ago.

I'm not sure of the time frame of when you and I had contact (you indicated that it was 12 years ago, making it 1990? Is that a fair assessment? If so, then you probably don't know that I was honored to be a reader at the 10th anniversary of "The Wall" in D.C. in November of 1992. I will send by separate email page one and page two of the newspaper article telling about the event and my part in it. It was actually through my volunteer service at the Vietnam Vet Center in Sioux Falls that I was selected to be a reader. I was so honored to go; it meant so much to me. AcCOing me was my "best friend", Karen (Lynn) Valentine from Baudette, who also knew Lee.

Life has continued to bless us. Our oldest daughter, Stephanie, was married five years ago here in Phoenix and she and her husband now have two little girls, making us grandparents. I provide full time day care for 3-1/2 year old MacKenzie and 1-1/2 year old Madison. My husband works for a carpet and tile CO, and also moonlights for our daughter, who has her own interior design business here in the valley. Our younger daughter, Heather, is in her fourth year (of a five year program) as a resident surgeon in Michigan where she lives with her fiancé. They are planning an April wedding here in Phoenix, so we are busy making plans for that event. Sadly, I lost my Dad nearly one year ago, when he passed away due to complications of diabetes and congestive heart failure. I miss him on a daily basis, but we stay very busy and the year has passed quickly.

Since moving from Sioux Falls, we have been back several times, and still remain in touch with the Vet Center and its personnel. In the years since you and I connected, I have also gotten an email address along the way of another 692nd serviceman who was stationed both in Baudette, MN and at Binh Thuy. His name is Nathan Oxhandler and he, too, knew of the memorial to Lee. His email address is; [nathan@gvvc.com](mailto:nathan@gvvc.com) The 692nd Air Force Squadron (no longer in existence) still have reunions in Baudette, the last one being in 1999, I believe. And I still communicate via occasional email and through xmas cards with several of the guys who were stationed up there in the mid-60's. Hard to believe we're now nearing or at retirement age!

I thank you for writing to me, Hector. It means a lot to me. Please write again if you wish. (I also have another address I use while traveling....it is; [erlyce@yahoo.com](mailto:erlyce@yahoo.com) I don't check it as frequently as my prodigy account, however.) You certainly have my permission to use whatever I sent you in any way that you wish that honors Lee's memory.

Sincerely,

Erlyce Guenin Pekas

P.S.

I know it's a lot to deseminat, but I'm willing to help with your guidance in the story presentation, and there's no hurry since I expect to recieve more material in the future.

If you want to look further into her writings, key in Erlyce Pekas in Google.com and open the document [www.ibiblio.org/pub/academic/history/marshall/military/vietnam/nvet\\_archive/nvet0402.txt](http://www.ibiblio.org/pub/academic/history/marshall/military/vietnam/nvet_archive/nvet0402.txt), her letter is on page 18.

Regards,

Hector Ramos

hector.ramos@pseg.com

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"In-Touch" -- Helping Vets of Then and Now

Input by Ray "Frenchy" Moreau Herndon Byte eXchange - Herndon, VA (703) 471-8010

Following received from the office of the Friends of the Vietnam Veterans:

January 20, 1990

IN TOUCH

1350 Connecticut Ave. N.W.

Suite 300

Washington, D.C. 20036

Sirs:

I am a volunteer at the Vietnam Veterans Center in Sioux Falls, South Dakota, where I recently saw an issue in (missing text) newsletter. I was very interested to see the information published therein concerning your organization, IN TOUCH. For many years, I have sought ways to make contact with anyone who may have known my fiancé,



**Airman 1st Class Millard Lehman  
Killed in 1966 in Mekong Delta**

**Millard W.["Lee"] Lehman**, who was killed in a mortar attack at Binh Thuy AB, Vietnam on July 8, 1966.

Millard (or "Lee", as he was known to his friends) and I were engaged in the Fall of 1965 in a little town in Northern Minnesota called Baudette. I was very young -- 18 years old, to his 22. The following April, he went to Vietnam, and was killed after just a few months "in country.". During the period of time he was there, however, I have 32 letters from him. He described many things, but made no mention of friends he may have made, etc....

When he was killed I have little knowledge or memory of the event. It is entirely possible that some of my memories have died along with him, as it was very traumatic for me. Since I began doing Volunteer work at the Vet Center in the Fall of 1988, and through the efforts of the office manager there along with some correspondence to Lee's parents, I have since discovered some things I was unaware of previously. For instance, I did not know that he was the first GI to be killed at that Base. I knew a memorial made of granite of stone had been erected in his honor (he sounded the alarm, alerting the base to the danger and was awarded the Bronze Star, posthumously), I had never seen pictures of it and was really unaware as to its size and place of honor. I have since learned that the plaque on the memorial bearing his name was sent to his parents when our government pulled out and the memorial was dismantled. As a strange coincidence, the man who is the office manager at our Vet Center was also stationed at Binh Thuy, although it was 2 years after Lee's death. He recalled that the memorial had the Birn of Arizona (the state which Lee was from) on top, and was surrounded by a garden with well maintained flowers.

On a recent visit to Tucson, Arizona to see Lee's parents, I was able to obtain some photographs of the memorial; I have enclosed one as well as other correspondence, newspaper [[article-1](#), [article-2](#)] or magazine clippings, etc... Although I married someone else in 1967, and after 23 years with my husband and 2 children, I have maintained close ties with Lee's family. For many years however, I did everything I could to avoid anything to do with Vietnam. I read no books, went to no movies, and studiously avoided any television coverage. Finally in the summer of 1986, I visited Washington, D.C. and went to the Wall. It was difficult. I went again with my husband in January of 1987. Painful wounds were opened, and in the summer of 1988, I found myself in the middle of what I now realize was a depression. It seemed I had successfully avoided the loss of Lee for many years, but the visit to the Wall opened the floodgates to my emotions. After a few months of behavior very unlike my norm, I decided to look for volunteer work as a way of erasing my own depression and helping someone else. I had no plans to go to the Vietnam Vet Center, and yet one day as I was driving to the library, I noticed the storefront office and was really drawn to go in. I did so immediately, before I could change my mind. Instead of the few moments I expected to be inside, I ended up speaking to a counselor for several hours. A few days later, I was introduced to the Team Leader and permission for my volunteer help was granted. In the year and a half since I have been there, I have found peace. In helping others, I have healed my own wounds. (Just this past summer, the Sioux Falls Vet Center celebrated its 10th Anniversary and I was chairperson for a picnic held in September. 1,500 Veterans and their families attended from a 3 state area, and the entire day was very rewarding.) Bit by bit, I wrote some letters, found a few more items of information, made a few visits and finally went

to Lee's grave in Tucson to really say good-bye. I still, however, have some strong feelings about getting in touch with anyone who might have known him in Vietnam....anyone who might remember him. I might add that my husband and children have been extremely supportive and understanding and have encouraged me to do whatever I feel I must do in this regard.

I "have" had some correspondence with (name withheld), a man who was stationed at Binh Thuy (after Lee died) and whose letters to his wife, Yolanda, were published in the book, "Dear America - letters home from Vietnam". He was kind enough to respond to my inquiry, but could not shed any additional information about the memorial or about Lee.

After reading this lengthy letter, I do hope there is some way you can help me located anyone who was stationed with Lee. He was there from April 1966 to July 8, 1966. In one of his last letters, he told me that he was beginning to work with training dogs. I think he was an AP, and his Rank was Airman 1st class (AF19669028). He was with the 632nd Combat Support Group. Many times in the past year or so I have wondered how many women like me are out there - women who were "just engaged" but not married - and how their loss affected their lives. I feel that your project will be a healing device for many, many people, and I applaud your efforts.

Yours Truly

Erlyce Pekas

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If YOU can help: Replies can be sent to Herndon Byte eXchange - Herndon, VA (703) 471-8010 this node and we will ensure that the Friends get the copy of the message to Erlyce.

Thanking you all in advance. God bless and keep the faith.

Ray "Frenchy" Moreau USN (RET) but not from life....

*We Take Care of Our Own*

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