



A Hometown Hero

It was a Tuesday, but for most people March 11, 1969, has faded from their memory, that is unless you are a member of the Frain family. Why, because it was on that day that Topeka's own Kenneth Michael Frain made the ultimate sacrifice in the service of his country. Kenny, "Tank" as he was known growing up, was only 20 years old when his unit was ambushed in a place called Tay Ninh, in South Vietnam. His death made front page news in the March 20th edition of the LaGrange Standard. He was the only Topeka serviceman killed in Vietnam. A military funeral was held in his honor at the United Methodist Church in Topeka.

Kenny was born October 17th, 1948, in Topeka to Russell A. and Francis (Miller) Frain. There were five other children in the Frain family: two girls (Carolyn and Jeanette) and three boys (David, Richard, and Robert). Growing up he attended Topeka School, playing baseball and basketball while in high school for the THS Bears. He dropped out of high school before graduation.



Kenneth M. Frain

October 19, 1948 - March 11, 1969



I'm not sure where the nickname "Tank" came from. Most people who remember him say it had to do with basketball. Kenny wasn't the most gifted athlete. But, what he lacked in coordination and skill he made up for with effort. It is said that on the basketball court his play was akin to that of a Sherman Tank going through the enemy lines. Wherever the nickname came from, Kenny Frain with his ready smile was known and accepted as one of the guys.

Dave Sprunger tells a great story about when he was a little kid and went with his dad, Orland, into Jonas & Pat's Dine In. Kenny was working in the café that day for the Bontragers when a young Amish boy came in and started putting change in the cigarette vending machine. Dave says Kenny waited until the kid had put all his money in. About the time he was ready to pull the lever for his pack of smokes, Kenny put his hand on the machine and said, "Hey, are you 18?" To which the kid responded, "No, but I already put my money in." "Too bad", Kenny said, "you shouldn't have tried to break the law.....get out of here!" Dave said, "I looked at my dad and said "Who is that?" Orland's response was, "Oh, that's Tank Frain.....he's a cousin to Alan and Pat Frain."

Kenny worked for Starcraft in Topeka before joining the Army on June 28th, of 1968. He was assigned to Company B, Second Battalion, 22nd Infantry Division with the rank of Private First Class. Tank's unit shipped out on Sunday, January 12th and arrived in Vietnam on January 14, 1969. His tour of duty would last a mere 58 days. Kenny's name can be found on the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, D.C. (Panel 29W, Row 6).

Numerous members of his unit have posted tributes to Kenny on a Vietnam War Memorial website. They can be seen at: <http://www.vvmf.org/Wall-of-Faces/16953/KENNETH-M-FRAIN#sthash.2JBH0s98.dpuf>.

Continued on page 2

In this Issue

- **Kenny Frain: Hometown Hero**
- **Track Notes**
- **The Mile 146 Quiz**
- **Hawpatch History Detective**

Several of the tributes on websites are reprinted here in their unedited form.

Posted 3/11/14 - the 45th anniversary of Kenny's death

*Dear PFC Kenneth Michael Frain, sir
As an American, I would like to thank
you for your service and for your sacrifice
made on behalf of our wonderful
country.*

*The youth of today could gain much by
learning of heroes such as yourself,
men and women whose courage and
heart can never be questioned.*

With respect, Sir

Curt Carter

Posted 2/3/05 - by Keith, a squad mate

*Kenny was in my squad. Our unit
was the "Triple Deuce" 2/22 Inf. 25th
Inf. Div. We were providing security
for the daily convoy to Dau Tieng
when we were attacked. Kenny was
atop our APC bravely manning the
50 caliber machine gun when he was hit. He served
bravely and made the ultimate sacrifice for his country.*

From a squadmate, Bill Noyes

Kenny Frain was one of our newest squad members



This photo, taken within a week of Kenny's death, was posted online by squad mate Bill Noyes.

but a brave and determined soldier. He fought tenaciously as our 50 cal gunner the day he was killed and was as responsible for our isolated platoon's survival of the ambush into which we had entered as anyone that day. His gun spoke long after the others had quit, and as such a prime target he drew the heaviest fire. He was an uncommon soldier, a brave and decent man.

America's involvement in Vietnam actually began as early as 1955, under the administration

of President Dwight Eisenhower after the defeat of the French. But it was President Lyndon Johnson who dramatically raised the level of American involvement.

The Vietnam War (1964-1972) was different from any other American war. The widespread use of

chemical weapons such as Agent Orange left many American soldiers with both physical and emotional problems. Added to the horrors of war was the fact that frequently women and children were wired with explosives. The psychological toll on American soldiers, when you combine this with drug abuse, is hard to measure.

It was a very unpopular war, marked with demonstrations, protests, and draft dodgers fleeing to Canada. There were no parades for soldiers returning from the war. They were not welcomed home as heroes. Many were ridiculed as baby killers and spit upon. The only ones to welcome them home were family and close friends. Most of the nation simply wanted to block that "crazy Asian war" from their memory.

Only in recent years have these brave men and women begun to be acknowledged for their dedication, their service and their sacrifice.

Tragically, there is no record of any citation or metal being awarded to Pfc. Kenneth Michael Frain for his bravery.



Cliff Thompson 1971

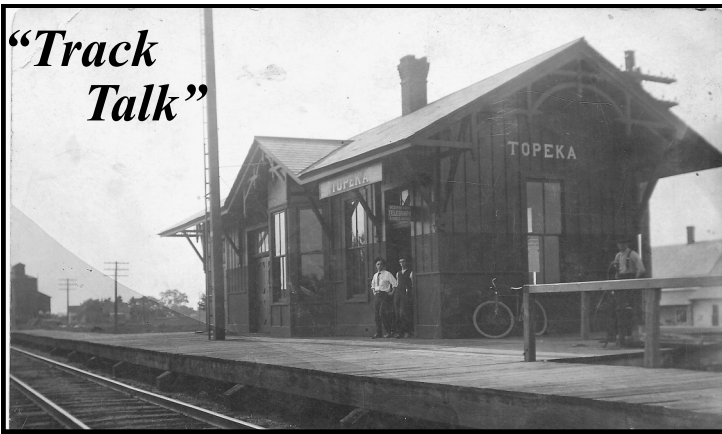
Answers:
1) Tank
2) Panel 29W, Row 6
3) Eisenhower, 1955
4) 24 cents
5) 1962



Dennis Thompson

HG

“Track Talk”



Coming Events:

Topeka Area Historical Society Meetings
at the Topeka Branch Library - 6:30 PM
Everyone is welcome:

March 17, 2015 *“Topeka’s 1927 Air Mail Crash”*

May 19, 2015 *(program to be announced)*

June 20, 2015 *THS Alumni Banquet*
Topeka Elementary School

We would love to have photos of **Robert Carpenter** and **Ferman Christner**. If you have any photos of them from their military service days, please share them with us.

Visit us online at: www.topekahistoricalsociety.com

The Mile 146 Quiz:

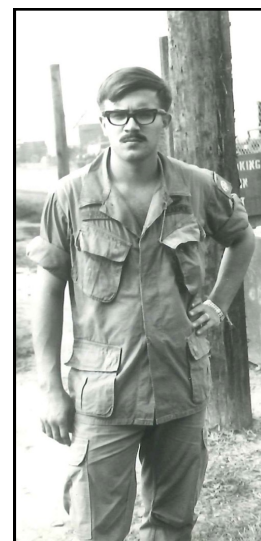
1. What was Kenny Frain’s nickname?
2. Where can Kenny Frain’s name be found on the Vietnam Veterans Memorial?
3. Who was the president that first involved the USA in Vietnam and in what year?
4. How much did an airmail stamp cost in 1918?
5. What year did Karen Bobeck Oesch graduate?



Gary L. Miller



Kenny Christner



Pat Frain

Dennis Thompson



Dennis Thompson on Honor Guard duty for Gen. William Westmoreland in Saigon, South Vietnam

Topeka Area Historical Society

P.O. Box 33
Topeka, Indiana 46571

www.topekahistoricalsociety.com

2015 Board of Directors

Harold D. Gingerich, President
Doris Haggard, Vice President
Cathy Strawser, Secretary
Janice Gingerich, Treasurer
Keith Bobeck, Director
Ezra Miller, Director
Michael Zehr, Director

Museum Curator

Susie Parker



The Hawpatch History Detectives

Karen's Window on Main Street

Karen Bobeck Oesch has had a unique window on life in Topeka for almost 50 years. Monday thru Friday she unlocks the door at 105 South Main to her *Silhouette*



Cutting Janice Gingerich's hair. Karen also styled Janice's hair for her wedding on April 13, 1968.

Beauty Salon in what is now the Topeka Pizza building. With an eye on the town square, along with listening to her patrons, not much goes on in Topeka that she doesn't hear about.

Karen says that she started doing hair as a child. "I had a doll with really nice blond hair and I use to braid it."

Shortly after graduation with the THS Class of 1962, Karen worked for a year before heading off to study cosmetol-

ogy in Ft. Wayne. In January of 1964, she earned her degree and license from Warner Beauty College and went to work for Lois Weaver in Ligonier at the Magic Mirror.

Karen didn't open her shop in Topeka until 1967. Herman Yeager had built a laundromat with two small office spaces facing Main Street several years earlier. One

became home to Bert Smith's barber shop, the other was a beauty salon operated by Kathy Frick. Frick gave up the shop when she gave birth to twins. That was the perfect opportunity for Karen to launch out on her own. The salon's name was simply a random choice.

When asked about memorable moments, Karen's amused reaction was, "Well, probably too numerous to mention - and some I can't mention!"

But there have been memorable moments and more than a few changes, not the least of which are hair styles. "When I started out it was all razor cuts, then it went to scissor cuts and you had to learn all of that."



The advent of blow-drying brought another major change. In old days women had their hair put up in rollers before sitting under a hood mounted on a large chair or a floor model dryer. Karen says that today she only has 5 to 7 customers who still sit under a dryer. "I don't know if they (beauty colleges) even teach 'roller sets' anymore."

During her college days Karen remembers that they used metal rollers "just in case someone had a bad disease." The rollers could then be sterilized for re-use. Today she says, "They either have it blow dried or they go home and do it themselves."

Hair care products have also changed. "We would use things like Dippty-Do (a setting gel applied before the hair was put up in rollers and dried), then it went to moose, to gel and spritz ...to whatever. You just have to keep going; but the haircuts are the same, just different names."

It doesn't appear that Karen, who has three children and 12 grandchildren, has any plans to retire anytime soon. *HG*

www.topekahistoricalociety.com

1918 Airmail Stamp



Topeka Area Historical Society, Inc.
P.O. Box 33
Topeka, Indiana 46571