

# Hansen honored with Purple Heart

*Wilkin County resident recognized nearly four decades after being wounded*

BY MARY NELSON - DAILY NEWS

Wade Hansen was only 19 years old when he was assigned to the 101st Airborne Division near Phan Rang, Vietnam in June of 1967.

The son of Frederick and Cecilia Hansen of Foxhome, Minn. Private First Class Hansen was a light weapons infantryman in Company B and entered the army in January 1966.

Hansen said he got in the country as a replacement from the 82nd Airborne at Ft. Bragg. At the time it seemed to Hansen that 19 was the magic age for Viet Nam.

It was only four months later that Hansen was wounded in action with a gunshot wound to the head.

He was wounded on October 5, 1967, and considered himself to be one lucky soldier.

"I still have my helmet, in all its splendor, thanks to my XO (executive officer) Larry Boecklen. He made sure I had it in my possession on Medevac," Hansen said.

Since 1967 there have been several efforts to have the Purple Heart awarded to Hansen. "It's been like trying to part the Red Sea," Wilkin County Veteran's Service Officer Ron Verhaagen said.

Hansen is a resident of Wilkin County and recently retired from trucking and marketing. He and his wife Vonnie live on a farm at Foxhome.



MARY NELSON - DAILY NEWS

From left, Wilkin County Veteran's Service Officer Ron Verhaagen, Wade Hansen and North Dakota Senator Kent Conrad during the state democratic convention recently. Conrad's involvement in the process helped expedite Hansen's Purple Heart honor.

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# HANSEN: Awarded Purple Heart for 1967 injury in Viet Nam

At one point, the Hansens were told all his records were destroyed in a fire in St. Louis, Mo., where the national personnel records are kept. They later discovered his records weren't really destroyed because they were somewhere else.

The Purple Heart is an American decoration and the oldest military decoration in the world in present use. It was initially created as the badge of Military Merit by one of the world's most famed and best loved heroes, General George Washington. Today the Purple Heart is awarded to members of the U.S. armed forces who are wounded by an instrument of war in the hands of the enemy.

Hansen was recently informed that the medal is in fact, on its way. His wife Vonnie has had the certificate stating he is awarded the purple heart framed and the decoration is on its way.

The family will soon see copies of these letters written by fellow officers detailing events from that day.

One document already in their possession was written in December of 1967.

"Specialist Hansen's platoon was suddenly brought under vicious attack by an estimated enemy squad. When the hostile force started withdrawing, Specialist Hansen immediately began leading an assault across an open rice field. He continued pursuing the enemy even though he was later wounded and the target of accurate enemy fire. His heroic actions prevented the enemy force from stopping and placing effective fire on his platoon. Specialist Hansen's devotion to duty and personal courage were in keeping with the highest traditions of the military service and reflect great credit upon himself, his unit and the United States Army," signed by S.A. Roundtree, 1st Lt. Assistant Adjutant General.

In December 1967 Hansen was awarded the army commendation medal for heroism by direction of the Secretary of the Army.

Yet for years the Purple Heart eluded him.

There was a lot of frustration after years and years of bureaucracy, Ron Verhaagen, Wilkin County Veteran's Service Officer said.

Two years ago Hansen started looking for his company commander. "He'd had no contact after the accident and was medevaced to a hospital," Vonnie Hansen said.

When released he wasn't returned to his unit, but was sent elsewhere in Viet Nam.

Hansen developed a fever in the hospital and almost died. He was packed in ice and his recuperation took a long time. When he was well enough, Hansen was sent to an air base and never saw the men he fought with again, until recently.

Vonnie Hansen said they contacted Minnesota legislative officials numerous times for assistance, but got nowhere.

She said it was the Web master for the 101st Screaming Eagles that was the push that finally opened a door. Dale Hansen contacted Wade's commanding officers that put together letters stating they were there in October 1967 and were witnesses to his injury. Hansen's executive officer, Larry Boecklen, and his commander, Ray Millard, both wrote letters stating they were there in October 1967 when he was injured and although they've never seen them, Wade and Vonnie Hansen have been told the letters are very powerful. "I can't wait to read them," Vonnie Hansen said.

Tom Willard was also contacted. Willard was also a member of the 101st and he hand delivered the information to staff members of North Dakota Senator Kent Conrad. Tom Willard was a paratrooper and combat medic with the 101st Airborne Division and is now self-employed and a political advisor.



This photo was taken of Wade Hansen after he was injured in 1967.

Wade Hansen said he's not interested in the public recognition, he just wants his records to reflect things correctly.

Verhaagen said the important thing is that Hansen's discharge papers will reflect he's been awarded the Purple Heart.

Vonnie Hansen said they also wanted it for their children and grandchildren. This is also a lesson for them, that when you are deserving of something, you may have to work hard to get it, she said. "You just can't give up."

She also pointed out that her husband and the others were only kids themselves when all of this happened.

While the Viet Nam War is considered America's most unpopular war, returning soldiers were met with the full weight of American anti-war sentiments. Returning soldiers were taunted with jeers and were spit at in airports and on public streets, which kept many soldiers like Hansen from talking about their experiences.

During the last two years the Hansens have attended reunions which have helped him open up and allowed for some healing to begin. It also fired the family's fervor to get this medal and recognition which has been long overdue.