

Kelly Eugene Whitaker, T-66

25 June 1947 – 8 November 1965

(aged 18)



An 18-year-old Memphis paratrooper who had been the only man in his stateside company to be assigned to Vietnam, lost his life Monday in some of the fiercest fighting of the war.

The Defense Department said Private First Class Kelly E. Whitaker, son of Mrs. Dorothy I. Hoard of 2665 Ketchum, was among a group of Americans killed in close-quarters combat in a Communist stronghold 30 miles northeast of Saigon.

In a telegram to Mrs. Hoard yesterday, the Defense Department said Private Whitaker, a member of the 173rd Airborne Brigade, was struck by small arms fire in War Zone (Hill 65 War Zone D North of Dong Nai River, South Vietnam, Bien Hoa province).

Less than 24-hours before the wire was sent, Mrs. Hoard had received a letter from her son which spoke of the operation in which he was killed.

"I won't be writing for a while," Pfc. Whitaker had written, "as we're going on a five or six-day operation. I knew they wouldn't let us sit around here much longer."



With the young soldier's death came an end to his plans to learn to play the guitar, save his money for a new car, and continue his career as a jump specialist.



"He loved to jump. He had said that if he didn't remain in the paratroopers, he wanted to be a jump artist in a civilian job," said his stepfather, Vernon Hoard, a driver for East Motor Transport Company.

Born in Chattanooga, Pfc. Whitaker had moved to Memphis with his family when he was eight. He attended Charjean Elementary, Fairview Junior High, and Tech High Schools.

After enlisting for a three-year tour of duty in July 1964, he received the equivalent to a high school diploma through the armed services educational program. He was a member of Fairlawn Baptist Church. He also leaves a brother, David L. Hoard and a sister Debra F. Hoard.

Private Whitaker was the sixth Shelby Countian to be killed in Vietnam.