

Commanders Corner, July 2020

There were no July 2020 Executive Board and Post meetings due to restrictions on social gatherings related to the COVID-19 outbreak; Post and Executive Committee meetings are suspended until further notice. The South Montgomery County Community Center has advised that they will remain closed until August, 31, 2020. We will advise if there are any updates.

The COVID-19 pandemic has curtailed our activities so there isn't much to report. I encourage you to continue to use good judgment in your upcoming activities. Please follow the guidelines for mask use and social distancing.

The latest unrest in communities across our nation reminded me of a period in my active duty in the U.S. Army. This was in 1967 and 1968 during the Vietnam conflict. At this time I was an instructor in the United States Army Engineer School (USAES) in Fort Belvoir, VA. Fort Belvoir was the home of the Army Corp of Engineers then; it is now located in Ft. Leonard Wood, MO. The U.S. Army Engineer School provides training that develops a wide variety of engineering skills including: combat engineer, bridging, construction, geospatial, topography, diving, and firefighting.

Although I would like to describe more about the history and role of the USAES that is not the focus of my musings today. Perhaps I will do that another time.

My memory has faded somewhat over the years and may not be completely accurate, perhaps it's a way of the human mind to discard bad memories given enough time, but there were some things that happened then that have stayed with me. As I recall there were minimum National Guard units functioning in the Washington, DC area then so active duty soldiers were required to be available to support in roles that the National Guard would normally provide as they do now. One of these roles is crowd control to protect federal properties. Soldiers at Fort Belvoir were required to train and be prepared for this. We were issued protective gear and weapons (M-14 and bayonet) for this purpose.

Although there were many instances when we were activated which were generally benign, two things happened that engendered violent confrontation between soldiers and civilian protesters. One was the protest at the Pentagon on October 21, 1967 and the other was ongoing violent protests throughout Washington, DC triggered by the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King on April 4, 1968.

As I'm writing this, visions of my experiences during these events are bubbling up and I'm not going to describe them in any detail as I've tried very hard to forget them. I encourage you to research information available on these events in order to learn how they have been captured in history.

The pentagon protest was focused on anti-Vietnam war sentiment which was very prominent, pro and con, in public opinion but particularly troubling for us soldiers. Some of us were drafted but most had volunteered for active military service. In both cases, although we had diverse opinions on U.S. involvement in the war, that was no different than opinions about U.S. involvement in

military interventions since the Korean War. We believed that in any case we were performing our duty and serving our country as we had sworn to do.

It started as a rally at the Lincoln Memorial attended by approximately 70,000-100,000 people. This led to approximately 35,000-50,000 people marching to the Pentagon. What was offensive was that many of the protesters were very aggressive in their actions and attacked us as we stood guard. We had orders not to instigate any physical action but were reminded that if confronted we were to defend ourselves and the property and people we were there for. I don't need to tell you that this degenerated into brawls between soldiers and protesters that resulted in many injuries to both soldiers and protesters. Many of us, some Vietnam combat veterans, were dismayed that this was something that we had to do. At the end approximately 650-700 people were arrested. Forty-seven people, demonstrators, soldiers, and U.S. Marshals, were injured.

The riots that occurred in Washington, DC were much worse. Similar to today, the riots were racially motivated and had been going on throughout the country in various cities since the summer of 1967. The assassination of Dr. King sparked violent protest and destruction of property that devastated Washington, DC. President Johnson dispatched 11,850 federal troops and 1,750 D.C. Army National Guardsmen to assist the overwhelmed D.C. police force. There were 13 reported deaths, 1,097 injured and 7,600 arrests. It took years for the city to recover.

We were soldiers, black and white, many of whom were brothers in arms from Vietnam, taking armed fire from crowds and rooftops the like of which many hadn't even experienced in Vietnam. We were tasked with not only protecting federal property but protecting community property and people from what was an inner city war. This was an experience that weighs heavily on our minds to this day.

Here we are today, more than 50 years later, still suffering from the same unrest. Military personnel are again being called out to quell domestic violence. I'm sure these soldiers are experiencing the same quandary that I and my soldier brothers did.

I'm hopeful that although there has been terribly violent protest, it hasn't been as adversarial as events of the 1960's. Military personnel are regarded with much more respect than Vietnam era veterans were then and the Black Lives Matter movement has been embraced by Americans of all races and may ultimately lead to greater racial acceptance which this country needs.

One of the topics I am interested in is news about our MIAs. Below is a link to a website (Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency) that documents recovery of MIAs:

<https://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/Recent-News-Stories/>

This is an impressive website that showcases the diligence this agency pursues in accounting for our MIAs.

Some interesting military news:

31 Jul 2020

Task & Purpose | By Jeff Schogol

A "small number" of sailors assigned to the aircraft carrier USS George H.W. Bush have tested positive for the novel coronavirus (COVID-19), Naval Air Force Atlantic spokeswoman Cmdr. Jennifer Cragg confirmed on Thursday.

Cragg said she was unable to say exactly how many sailors were sickened with the coronavirus or when they tested positive for the disease due to limits imposed by the Pentagon on what information can be made public.

"The Department of Defense does not release the number of infected individuals at the unit, facility or geographic area level due to operational security," Cragg said in a statement.

Navy Times reporter Geoff Ziezulewicz first revealed that an unspecified number of the aircraft carrier's crew had been diagnosed with the coronavirus and are currently in isolation at home while the ship is undergoing maintenance at Norfolk Naval Shipyard, Virginia.

The sailors tested positive for the coronavirus "this summer," said Cragg, who declined to be more specific. Those sailors are receiving daily medical care and support.

"Additionally, USS George H.W. Bush is actively enforcing physical distancing, minimizing group gatherings, wearing PPE [personal protective equipment], and cleaning extensively," Cragg said. "Norfolk Naval Shipyard is conducting temperature checks and screening all personnel with a medical symptoms questionnaire, and if required, referring Sailors with symptoms for medical evaluation."

The coronavirus has shown how shockingly vulnerable Navy ships are to disease outbreaks. On the aircraft carrier USS Theodore Roosevelt, 1,273 sailors became infected with the virus, one of whom died: Chief Petty Officer Charles Robert Thacker Jr.

Separately, more than 70 sailors aboard the destroyer USS Kidd tested positive for the coronavirus this spring.

As of July 29, a total of 9,078 Navy sailors, civilians, contractors, and dependents had tested positive for the coronavirus, according to the Navy's latest figures. Of those cases, 18 people have died: One sailor, four contractors, and 13 civilians.

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31 Jul 2020

Military.com | By Hope Hodge Seck

A lawyer for the man accused of fatally shooting Black Lives Matter protester Garrett Foster in Texas has identified his client as an active-duty sergeant in the Army, and released a statement saying the shooting was an act of self-defense.

Sgt. Daniel Perry shot 28-year-old Foster in downtown Austin July 25 at a late-evening protest, according to Perry's attorney, Clint Broden of the Dallas-based firm Broden Mickelson. In a statement, Broden said Perry had been working for a ride-share service when he turned right onto Congress Avenue and encountered the protesters. Foster, who was seen carrying an "AK-47-style" assault rifle, motioned to Perry to roll down his driver's-side window, then raised his rifle at him, according to Broden's statement.

The Washington Post first published the statement in full. The law firm did not immediately respond to Military.com's request for additional comment. Law enforcement officials have not publicly identified the shooter in the case.

Read Next: Marines Suspend All AAV Water Ops As Search for 8 Missing Troops Continues

"It was only then that Sgt. Perry, who carried a handgun in his car for his own protection while driving strangers in the ride share program, fired on the person to protect his own life," the statement continues.

Army Lt. Col. Chris Brautigam, a spokesman for 1st Cavalry Division, out of Fort Hood, Texas, confirmed to Military.com that Perry was an active-duty sergeant assigned to 1st Cav.

"Any questions or information requests related to the ongoing Austin Police investigation should be addressed to the Austin Police public information officer," he said. "The unit continues to cooperate with the Austin Police Department in their ongoing investigation."

Brautigam did not confirm any additional career specifics for Perry, but Broden's statement said he had served honorably for eight years, deployed once to Afghanistan and "has been the recipient of numerous [A]rmy awards and commendations."

Foster also had a history of service; he was a former Air Force flight mechanic who received an early discharge to provide full-time care to his fiancée, Whitney Mitchell, a quadruple amputee.

There is some disagreement among witnesses regarding what took place in the confrontation. Witnesses told the Austin American-Statesman that Perry's car had appeared to accelerate into the crowd, and also that Foster had his weapon pointed down.

"In a Facebook Live video of the hours-long march, a car honking is heard before two volleys of gunshots, a total of eight rounds, were unleashed. Several screaming protesters immediately took cover," according to the American-Statesman report.

The statement from Perry's attorney offers a different view.

"Immediately after Sgt. Perry fired on the individual who raised the assault rifle toward him, a member of the crowd began firing on Sgt. Perry's vehicle," it says. "Sgt. Perry drove to safety and immediately called the police. He waited for the police to arrive and fully cooperated with the police following the shooting and he continues to do so."

Austin Police Chief Brian Manley confirmed to reporters on Monday that the driver of the car had called 911 and turned himself in.

Perry was initially taken into police custody but later released. Another individual identified as shooting at Perry's vehicle was also questioned and released, Manley said at the time, according to a Washington Post report. Both, he noted, had a license to carry.

"Sgt. Perry and his family deeply sympathize with the loss and grief being experienced by Mr. Foster's family. Sgt. Perry is devastated by what happened. Nevertheless, that does not change facts," according to the statement. "The simple fact is that Sgt. Perry reasonably perceived a threat to his life when ... We simply ask that anybody who might want to criticize Sgt. Perry's actions, picture themselves trapped in a car as a masked stranger raises an assault rifle in their direction and reflect upon what they might have done if faced with the split second decision faced by Sgt. Perry that evening."

Austin police officials have said the investigation into Foster's killing remains active.

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1 Aug 2020  
Military.com | By Richard Sisk

Army Chief of Staff Gen. James McConville said Friday that he has sought to ease allies' concerns about the U.S. military becoming involved in law enforcement actions in response to nationwide protests.

"As we talk to other countries and other militaries, we have that discussion to make sure they understand that the purpose of the U.S. Army is to protect the nation, not police the nation," he said. "We should leave policing the nation to law enforcement."

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1 Aug 2020  
The Capital, Annapolis, Md. | By Bill Wagner

Former Navy football standout Malcolm Perry is doing his part to combat coronavirus.

Perry, who is now a member of the Miami Dolphins, acknowledged this week that he contracted and recovered from COVID-19. The Tennessee native, who reported to the Dolphins team

facility on Monday, participated in a team initiative aimed at helping others recover from the virus.

Perry was among several Miami players that donated blood plasma as part of a partnership with Baptist Health South Florida.

"I was surprised initially but was happy because I was presented with the opportunity to give back and donate plasma and help people in need," Perry said during a video posted to the team website. "Being able to give back to people who weren't fortunate enough to react the same way you did to the virus and give back to the community was important."

Perry spoke from a stretcher bed while having his blood drawn from inside a OneBlood "Big Red Bus." The rookie running back was wearing a Navy football t-shirt in the video.

Dr. Michael Swartzon, who is with Baptist Health South Florida and serves as team physician for the Dolphins, said he and Miami athletic trainer Kyle Johnston brainstormed with coach Brian Flores about ways the organization could respond to the pandemic.

Linebacker Andrew Van Ginkel, entering his second season with the Dolphins, also donated blood plasma as part of the drive.

Dr. Richard Levine, an infectious disease physician with Doctors Hospital, said medical professionals are using convalescent plasma earlier in coronavirus treatment in an effort to prevent progression of the infection.

People who have recovered from the coronavirus have developed antibodies to the virus that remain in the plasma portion of their blood. By transfusing plasma from a person who has recovered from COVID-19 into a patient still fighting the virus, it can boost their immune system and potentially help them recover.

"That's why it's crucial that people who have recovered from the virus become convalescent plasma donors," Levine said. "We are grateful to the Miami Dolphins and OneBlood organizations for their dedication in helping the communities we serve."

Perry enjoyed a record-setting senior season as the starting quarterback for Navy, earning American Athletic Conference Offensive Player of the Year honors while setting a Football Championship Subdivision record for rushing yards by a quarterback. The 5-foot-9, 190-pound speedster rushed for 2,017 yards and scored 21 touchdowns in leading the Midshipmen to an 11-2 record, Commander-in-Chief's Trophy championship and Liberty Bowl victory.

Perry, who also played slotback in Navy's triple-option offense, concluded his career ranked second in Navy football history with 4,359 rushing yards and 5,320 all-purpose yards. He amassed 40 career touchdowns, which ranks fourth all-time at Navy.

Miami selected Perry in the seventh round (246th overall) of the NFL Draft and list him as a running back on the roster. Perry is expected to be used in a variety of ways, including as a slot receiver and perhaps as a quarterback in the Wildcat formation.

Perry signed a four-year deal worth \$3,392,324 and reportedly received a signing bonus just shy of \$100,000 from the Dolphins. He will have a salary cap value of \$628,873 for the 2020 season if on the active roster and \$75,000 of the contract is guaranteed.