

# Recollections

of the

*Burleson Family Research Group*

Memorial  
Day  
Edition

May 2023



This special edition of the *Recollections of the Burleson Family Research Group* honors the service and lives of four Burlesons who made the ultimate sacrifice in the Vietnam War.

For more information on the Burleson Family Research Group visit

[www.bfrg.info](http://www.bfrg.info)

For opportunities to meet and share Burleson connections, join and follow Burleson Cousining on Facebook <https://www.facebook.com/BurlesonFRG>

Vol XXVI No 2

A Memorial Day message from Lieutenant General Willard “Bill” McKenzie Burluson III.



Regarding the BFRG Memorial Day article, Gen Burluson stated, “Very nice tribute to those young men who made the ultimate sacrifice. My father served in Vietnam as well. I think our countries efforts in Vietnam made a difference.”

Go to the BFRG Cousining Facebook page to hear Gen Burluson’s message.

General Burluson is the Commanding General, Eighth Army/Chief of Staff, Combined Forces Command, Republic of Korea. General Burluson and his wife both come from military families. His father was the late Major General Willard McKenzie Burluson II and his son, Captain Matthew Burluson is on active duty in the U.S. Army. He is the highest-ranking Burluson to have served in the U. S. military and descends from Burlusons in Michigan and New York.

## Broken Branches: Burlasons and the Vietnam War

They didn't know each other in life, but they had much in common. They were born within six years of each other. They grew up across America—California, Texas, Oklahoma and North Carolina. They were interested in the things young people of the day enjoyed. One loved to talk about his animals, especially his pet alligator. Another could be seen working on his 1954 Mercury and had a job at the local pump and valve shop. They all stayed in their local area after graduating from high school. And they were all single.

Another common thread was they were all drafted to serve their country in Vietnam. Three went into the Army and one into the Marine Corps. A tragic thread was that, in less than one year of their arrival in Vietnam, all were killed in the war, all in their early 20's. A final commonality was that, although their lives ended too soon, remembrances and stories shared demonstrate what a positive, lasting impact they had on the lives of those around them.

A difference among the four is that they descended from four different Burleson family lines (see family tree charts at the end of the article). For Memorial Day 2023, the Burleson Family Research Group honors four Burleson men who served and were killed in the Vietnam War.

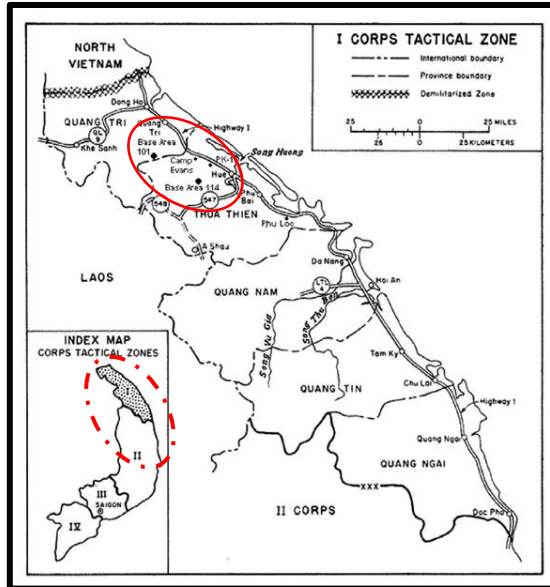


Born in 1944 to Finnie Ernest Burleson and Louis Laurice Eskridge of Waxahachie, Texas, Michael Finnie Burleson was the oldest of the four Burlasons in this article. He attended Duncanville High School where he was a member of the band and Honor Society, graduating in 1963. He grew up with a love of animals, including a pet alligator, and music, sharing his clarinet talents with his friends. Mike attended the University of Texas at Arlington until he entered the military. Mike joined the Marine Corps on 23 September 1965 as a Rifleman and began his Vietnam tour on 10 February 1968. Lance Corporal (LCPL) Burleson (Service Number 2158303) was assigned to Company F, 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Regiment, 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Division, 3<sup>rd</sup> Marine Amphibious Force.<sup>1</sup>



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<sup>1</sup> Ancestry.com. *U.S., Vietnam War Military Casualties, 1956-1998* [database on-line]. Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations, Inc., 2005.



LCPL Burleson was stationed in Military Region 1 at Quang Tri., located a mere ten miles south of the Demilitarized Zone, separating North and South Vietnam. “Because Quảng Trị City was an important symbol of South Vietnamese government authority and was arguably the most vulnerable provincial capital in South Vietnam, it was a prime target of the North Vietnamese during the 1968 Tet Offensive.”<sup>2</sup> LCPL Burleson arrived on 10 February 1968 in the immediate aftermath of the January 1968 Tet Offensive and the Battles of Quảng Trị and Hue.<sup>3</sup> “The American military considered the attack on Quảng Trị without a doubt one of the major objectives of the Tet offensive”.<sup>4</sup>

*Tactical Zone 1 circled in red dashes in inset map Quang Tri City and Hue circled in red on main map.*

LCPL Burleson and his comrades faced constant threat from the enemy as “The Communists maintained a higher concentration of units in northern South Vietnam than anywhere else in the country, including some of the best regiments and divisions in their army.”<sup>5</sup> LCPL Burleson was killed in an engagement with enemy forces southeast of Khe Sanh Combat Base on 19 May 1968—at age 23, less than 100 days after arriving in Vietnam. He is buried at Mountain Peak Cemetery, Ellis County, Texas.



LCPL Burleson was awarded The Purple Heart, The Combat Action Ribbon, The Navy Meritorious Unit Commendation, The National Defense Service Medal, The Vietnam Service Medal, The Vietnam Gallantry Cross Unit Citation, The Vietnam Civil Actions Unit Citation, and the Republic of Vietnam Campaign Medal.<sup>6</sup> Mike is honored on Panel 63E, Line 6 of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Rawson, Andrew (2013). *Battle Story Tet Offensive 1968*. The History Press. p. 16. Retrieved on 23 May 2023 from [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle\\_of\\_Quang\\_Tri\\_\(1968\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_Quang_Tri_(1968))

<sup>3</sup> Villard, Erik, *The 1968 Tet Offensive Battles of Quang Tri City and Hue*, U. S. Army Center of Military History, 2008. Retrieved on 24 May 2023 from [https://history.army.mil/html/books/vietnam/tet\\_battles/tet.pdf](https://history.army.mil/html/books/vietnam/tet_battles/tet.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Fold3 by Ancestry retrieved on 25 May 2023 at <https://www.fold3.com/memorial/632415560/burleson-michael-finnie-lcpl>

<sup>7</sup> The Wall of Faces, Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund, retrieved on 22 May 2023 from <https://www.vvmf.org/Wall-of-Faces/6883/MICHAEL-F-BURLESON/>

DOUGLAS A WALKER · THOMAS J WEISS · NATHAN WHITE Jr · GARY N FRY  
RICHARD L AKEL · MELVIN A ALLEN · THOMAS M BAKER · WILLIAM I  
JOSEPH A BODNAR · JOSEPH BONNER · EDWARD A BIES · GEORGE  
GORDON C BROWN · MICHAEL F BURLESON · JOSEPH F BURNHAM  
RICHARD C COLEMAN · JAMES W COOPER · JESSIE F CROW · PAUL  
JOSEPH E DAVIES · RICHARD H DILLON Jr · JOHN D DONOVAN · D  
AMES L FOSTER · GERALD JAMES · CARLTON A FROST · GARY N FRY

Family, friends, and colleagues have left a number of remembrances at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial on-line Wall of Faces to honor Mike's service and sacrifice:

*I was talking to your cousin Una yesterday. She gave me inspiration to reach out. I am leaving this letter as a remembrance that I have carried with me for over half a century now. Loved the long discussions we had about animals, biology, music and things that were of interest to us way back then. I knew I would marry you some day, granted this was coming from a kid at the time. I was 11 you were 23...lol. My first crush. You were a gentle and kind soul.*

*I remember the morning exactly when we were informed of your death, I was devastated. Know that I have carried fond memories of you throughout the years, you were never forgotten by me. I finally got the nerve to say these things.*

*You died and served in the same company fox on the same day in the same place as my brother Roger.*

*I wish we all made it through that day. Semper Fi, buddy.*

*I miss you, Mike. Thanks for teaching me to play clarinet.*

*Hello, Mike. Well, it's another Memorial Day here. No, we haven't forgotten. It's been a long time, but we'll never forget. We can't forget, even if we wanted to.*

*I wish you could have made it home, Marine. There's a bunch of us here who still think about you, especially on days like this. It's been nearly 40 years now, and our numbers will be coming up soon. You missed a lot of good stuff, but generally things have been getting tougher for everybody who loves America as much as you. We have needed men of your character to carry the banner, and we do have a great many, but more are always needed. You are greatly missed and definitely not forgotten.*

*We grew up together through grade school, Jr. high school and high school. He was an outstanding young man in every way, and I hold his memory in the highest respect. I have mourned his loss ever since I heard about it many years ago.*

*I remember a fantastic guy who taught me to play clarinet while I taught him to play saxophone. We spent many hours together in the band and at each other's homes. I will never forget the pet alligator.*



John Allan Burleson was born in Tulsa Oklahoma, to James Edgar Burleson Jr. and Bobbie June Morgan on 27 October 1947. He attended Central High School in Tulsa, Oklahoma. Following graduation, he enlisted in the U. S. Army on 24 October 1967. He was trained as an Infantryman, eventually attaining the rank of Specialist 4 (SP4) (Service Number 54667934), the highest rank for junior enlisted recruits. Following stateside training, Paul began his tour in South Vietnam on 20 April 1968. He was assigned to Alpha Company, 16<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment, 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, Tay Ninh, near the Cambodian southern border (see red circle on map at right).<sup>8</sup> Upon his arrival, his unit was heavily engaged in the Tet Counteroffensive Campaign and then *Operations Quyet Thang* and *Toan Thang I* (8 April 1968) and *II* (1 June 1968-16 February 1969).<sup>9</sup>



It was during Operation *Toan Thang II* that SP4 Burleson's unit fatally engaged the enemy. A fellow soldier stated that "When the NVA (North Vietnamese Army) caught us in an open field and their machine gun fire pinned us down, "J. B." advanced to within meters of their position before he fell."<sup>10</sup> SP4 Burleson was killed in this fire fight on 22 October 1968—6 months after arriving in Vietnam and five days before his 21<sup>st</sup> birthday.



*Besides an infectious smile and friendly personality, "J.B." showed the courage that to this day 47 years later, ignites a sense of pride to have known and served with him. (Tribute posted by G. Page Brown on 22 October 2015)*

<sup>8</sup>Ancestry.com. *U.S., Vietnam War Military Casualties, 1956-1998* [database on-line]. Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations, Inc., 2005.

<sup>9</sup> Headquarters U.S. Military Assistance Command, Vietnam Monthly Summary October 1968. Retrieved on May 23, 2023

<sup>10</sup> The Wall of Faces, Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund, retrieved on 22 May 2023 from <https://www.vvmf.org/Wall-of-Faces/6882/JOHN-A-BURLESON/page/2/>

SP4 Burleson was awarded The Purple Heart for his combat-related wounds, The Bronze Star Medal (1<sup>st</sup> Oak Leaf Cluster), The National Defense Service Medal, The Vietnam Service Medal, The Vietnam Gallantry Cross Unit Citation, The Republic of Vietnam Campaign Medal, and The Good Conduct Service Medal.<sup>11</sup> He is buried at Memorial Park Cemetery in Tulsa, Oklahoma, and is honored on panel 40W, Line 17 of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial.<sup>12</sup>



The following are excerpts of remembrances posted in John Burleson's honor:<sup>13</sup>

*Thank you for your service as an Infantryman. It hurts to know that you died 5 days before your birthday. sigh. It is important for us all to acknowledge the sacrifices of those like you who answered our nation's call. Please watch over America, it stills needs your courage and faithfulness. Rest in peace with the angels.*

*Hard to believe it's almost 49 years ! I often think about you and all the fun we had at Cleveland Jr hi and Central hi . Working on your 54 merc and working at Wheatley pump and valve.*

*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.*

*Thank you for all the things you did for our country. Everything you did for us is appreciated. You made the ultimate sacrifice. You will be remembered by many and honored by all.*

*We Nam Brothers pause to give a backward glance, and post this remembrance to you, one of the gentle heroes lost to the War in Vietnam: Slip off that pack. Set it down by the crooked trail. Drop your steel pot alongside. Shed those magazine-laden bandoliers away from your sweat-soaked shirt. Lay that silent weapon down and step out of the heat. Feel the soothing cool breeze right down*

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<sup>11</sup> Fold3 at Ancestry retrieved on 25 May from <https://www.fold3.com/memorial/631987702/burleson-john-allan-sp-4/sources>

<sup>12</sup> Ibid

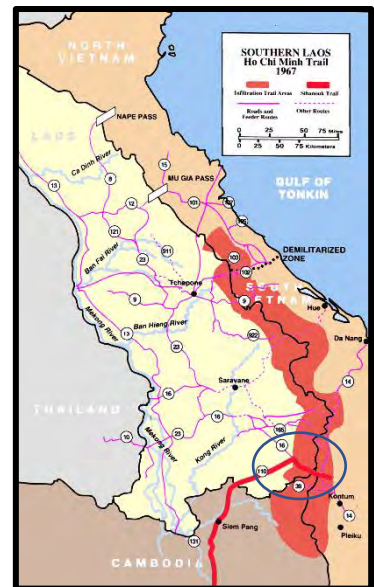
<sup>13</sup> The Wall of Faces, Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund, retrieved on 26 May 2023 from <https://www.vvmf.org/Wall-of-Faces/6882/JOHN-A-BURLESON/page/2/>

*to your soul ... and rest forever in the shade of our love, brother. From your Nam - Band-Of-Brothers*

*It has been 31 years now but it seems like yesterday to me. We grew up together in Tulsa but joined the Army at different times. Still miss him and wish he had listened when I told him to take an extra year when he got drafted. Strange, I spent 2 1/2 years in Nam and 1 1/2 years in Laos and not a scratch. See you someday and we'll have a Coors buddy.*



Clarence Paul Burlleson, who was called Paul, was born in 1948 in Utah to Clarence C. Burlleson and Vera Ethel Williamson. Following high school at Armijo High School in Fairfield, California, he enlisted in the U.S. Army on 11 May 1967 as a Light Weapons Infantryman, attaining the rank of Sergeant (SGT).<sup>14</sup> SGT Burlleson (Service Number 56829304) began his Vietnam tour on 29 March 1968, serving with Company B, 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, 12<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment, 4<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division in Military Region 2 at Kontum.<sup>15</sup> In 1967, North Vietnam General Giap had repositioned forces towards Kontum, one of the more important highland towns.<sup>16</sup> U.S. forces were positioned in and around Kontum to counter the influx of troops and materials from the Ho Chi Minh Trail on the South Vietnam-Cambodia border (see map at right—blue circled area in lower right corner).



According to the unit logs for 9 March 1969, "Staff Sergeant Charles Avery of Bravo Company, 4<sup>th</sup> Engineers; Sergeants Robert Protto Jr., Clarence Burlleson, and Jerry McDonald; and Specialist Fourth Class Raymond Betha, Edward Millison III, Clarence Nofford and Thomas Turner of Bravo Company are killed by enemy small arms fire."<sup>17</sup><sup>18</sup> SGT Burlleson at age 21 died less than a year after his arrival in Vietnam.

<sup>14</sup> "United States Casualties of the Vietnam War, 1956-1998," database, *FamilySearch* (<https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:KXZH-SYZ> : 12 December 2014), Clarence Paul Burlleson, NARA NAID 306742, National Archives at College Park, Maryland.

<sup>15</sup> Ancestry.com. *U.S., Vietnam War Military Casualties, 1956-1998* [database on-line]. Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations, Inc., 2005.

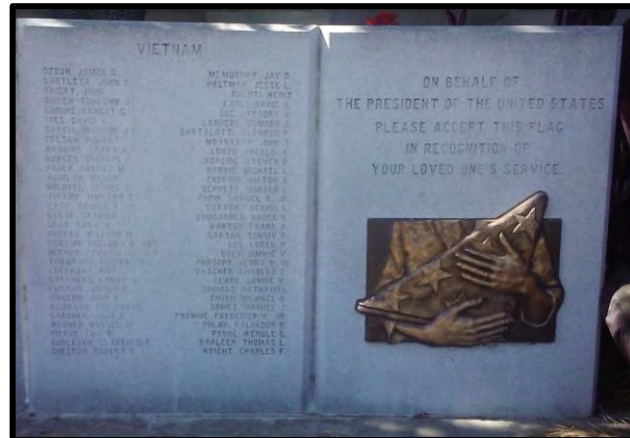
<sup>16</sup> O'Neil, Robert J., *The Strategy of General Giap Since 1964*, Canberra Papers on Strategy and Defence, No. 6, Australian National University, 1965-1991 retrieved on 24 May 2003 from <https://openresearch-repository.anu.edu.au/bitstream/1885/115099/2/b10685741.pdf>

<sup>17</sup> 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion 12<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment, Red Warriors web page retrieved on 24 May 2023 from <https://redwarriors.us/History1969.htm>

<sup>18</sup> The following information was posted on Paul's page on the Wall of Faces website retrieved on 24 May 2023 at <https://www.vvmf.org/Wall-of-Faces/6880/CLARENCE-P-BURLESON/>. Additional information regarding the field conditions experienced by Clarence Burlleson, Dean Johnson, Raymond Betha, and other members of their team can be read in the nonfiction book "Time Heals No Wounds" by Jack Leninger, published in 1993 by Ivy Books/Ballantine Books.



SGT Burleson was awarded The Purple Heart for his combat-related wounds, The Army Commendation Medal for Heroism (1<sup>st</sup> Oak Leaf Cluster), The Vietnam Service Medal, The Vietnam Gallantry Cross Unit Citation, The Republic of Vietnam Campaign Service Medal, The National Defense Service Medal, and The Good Conduct Service Medal.<sup>19</sup> He is honored on panel 30W, Line 85 of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial.<sup>20</sup> SGT Burleson is buried at the Fairfield-Suisun Cemetery.<sup>21</sup> He is also honored on the Solano County, California, Vietnam Memorial.



Vietnam Memorial for Solano County. Clarence P. Burleson listed second from bottom left.

The Wall of Faces web page features a number of remembrances of Paul:

*My brother Paul.. my friend.. brave as he was strong.. as he was my brother Paul whom I miss every day of every month and every year the worst time of my life was losing my brother Paul whom I loved so much*

*Thank you for your service to our country so long-ago sir. The remembrance from your sister June is especially poignant. As long as you are remembered you will always be with us....*

*Thank you for your service as an Infantryman. It is important for us all to acknowledge the sacrifices of those like you who answered our nation's call. Please watch over America, it stills needs your courage and faithfulness. Rest in peace with the angels.*

*I think of you often. We were not close after we got to Armijo, not for any particular reason. But at Fairview we were friends. I think of you every time I see a rabbit. Because you were the only one, I knew that could out run a rabbit. Be well my kind friend in your eternal peace.*

<sup>19</sup> Fold2 by Ancestry retrieved on 25 May 2023 from <https://www.fold3.com/memorial/631975531/burleson-clarence-paul-sgt/source>

<sup>20</sup> The Wall of Faces, Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund, retrieved on 24 May 2023 from <https://www.vvmf.org/Wall-of-Faces/6880/CLARENCE-P-BURLESON/>

<sup>21</sup> "California, Solano County Genealogical Society, Burial Records", database, *FamilySearch* (<https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:CSSB-Z1ZM> : 14 February 2020), Paul Burleson, .

*Paul was my uncle, and I was named after him. I never got to meet him, but from what I heard he was a great man. My Mother is his sister.*



Garney Adford “Jay” Burleson, Jr. was the youngest of these four featured Burlesons, born on 31 May 1950—the day after Memorial Day—to Garney Adford Burleson, Sr. and Prutina Moore. Jay attended Reynolds High School in Asheville, North Carolina, where he was a member of the Future Farmers of America.<sup>22</sup> After graduating in 1969, Jay (US244849785) enlisted in the U. S. Army. Following completion of training as a Light Weapons Infantryman he arrived in Binh Tuy, South Vietnam, on 17 October 1970 (see map at right) . Corporal (CPL) Burleson was assigned to B Troop, 1<sup>st</sup> Squadron, 9<sup>th</sup> Cavalry Regiment (Air Mobile).<sup>23</sup> His unit was one of the reconnaissance units of the 1<sup>st</sup> Cavalry Division.



CPL Burleson’s arrival followed the unit’s Cambodian Campaign (1 May 1970-31 July 1970). His unit provided air mobile support to U.S. and South Vietnamese troops as they interdicted enemy supply lines and blunted enemy offensive maneuvers. Enemy actions intensified in 1971 with the “Vietnamization” program and the planned withdrawal of the 1<sup>st</sup> Cavalry Division. CPL Burleson was killed in Bin Thuan on 28 January 1971, a little more than 100 days in South Vietnam—he was 20 years old.



*Photo of Bravo Troop, 1st Squadron, 9th Regiment soldiers in Vietnam.*

He was awarded The Purple Heart Medal for his combat-related wounds, The National Defense Service Medal, The Vietnam Service Medal, The Vietnam Gallantry Cross Unit Citation, The Republic of Vietnam Campaign Medal, and The Good Conduct Service Medal.<sup>24</sup>

CPL Burleson is buried at Fairview Cemetery, Buncombe County, North Carolina.<sup>25</sup> He is honored on Panel 5W, Line 66 of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>22</sup> "U.S., School Yearbooks, 1880-2012"; School Name: *Reynolds High School*; Year: 1966

<sup>23</sup> Ancestry.com. *U.S., Vietnam War Military Casualties, 1956-1998* [database on-line]. Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations, Inc., 2005.

<sup>24</sup> Fold3 by Ancestry retrieved on 25 May 2023 from <https://www.fold3.com/memorial/631172498/burleson-garney-jr-cpl>

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> The Wall of Faces, Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund, retrieved on 25 May 2023 from <https://www.vvmf.org/Wall-of-Faces/6881/GARNEY-BURLESON-JR/>.



The following remembrances were posted in Jay's memory:<sup>27</sup>

*You will forever remain in our hearts and prayers.*

*You bravely honored your country and gave up your life in doing so. For this today and forever, you will not be forgotten.*

*On the remembrance of your 70th Birthday, your sacrifice is not forgotten.*

*Garney, you are not forgotten.*

*You were born about 50 years before I was born. If only I had the chance to meet you. Your smiling photo brings tears to my eyes. It is hard to imagine that you were once here, possibly where I am sitting right now. Your bravery is unexplainable, your price of freedom is unbelievable, and your life is irreplaceable. While it is not even close to the appreciation you deserve, I wish you great things, with all my heart, with all my soul. Your loved ones still love you and are proud of you. Thank you for your service, Mr. Burleson. Thank you.*

*As a fellow North Carolinian, 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.*



The Burleson Family Research Group extends our deepest gratitude to these heroes for their selfless sacrifice and our sympathies to their families for their losses.

Author's Notes:

The four Burleson soldiers and marine were selected as records indicate these were the only four Burlesons killed in action in the Vietnam War. This was confirmed in researching archival databases from The National Archives, including:

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

- Defense Casualty Analysis System (DCAS) Extract Files, created, ca. 2001 - 4/29/2008, documenting the period 6/28/1950 - 5/28/2006.
- Records of Deceased, Wounded, Ill, or Injured Army Personnel, Including Dependents and Civilian Employees, created 1/1/1961 - 12/1981, documenting the period 1/1/1961 - 12/1981 - *Record Group 407*.
- Records on Military Personnel Who Died, Were Missing in Action or Prisoners of War as a Result of the Vietnam War, created 1/20/1967 - 12/1998, documenting the period 6/8/1956 - 1/21/1998 - *Record Group 330*.
- Records with Unit Information on Military Personnel Who Died During the Vietnam War, created ca. 1983 - 12/18/2005, documenting the period 6/8/1956 - 10/10/2003 - *Collection COFF*.

Other Burlesons may have died from their wounds after removal from the Vietnam War theater, but Mike, John, Paul, and Jay are the only documented Burleson servicemembers killed in action. If readers feel a mistake has been made, please respond with any available information to support the record.

Similarly, if readers have additional vignettes concerning the lives of these Burlesons, please forward those to BFRG. If you have additional or differing information concerning the family lineages, again, please forward those with any corroborating information.

It has been reported on several civilian-based web sites that CPL Jay Burleson was also awarded The Bronze Star Medal. Any information to corroborate the award of the medal is appreciated as we want to provide full honors for his service.

The BFRG urges its readers to post remembrances on available forums. This article was supported by The Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund, Wall of Faces which can be accessed at <https://www.vvmf.org/Wall-of-Faces/>. The page states, "The Wall of Faces allows family and friends to share memories, post pictures and connect with each other."

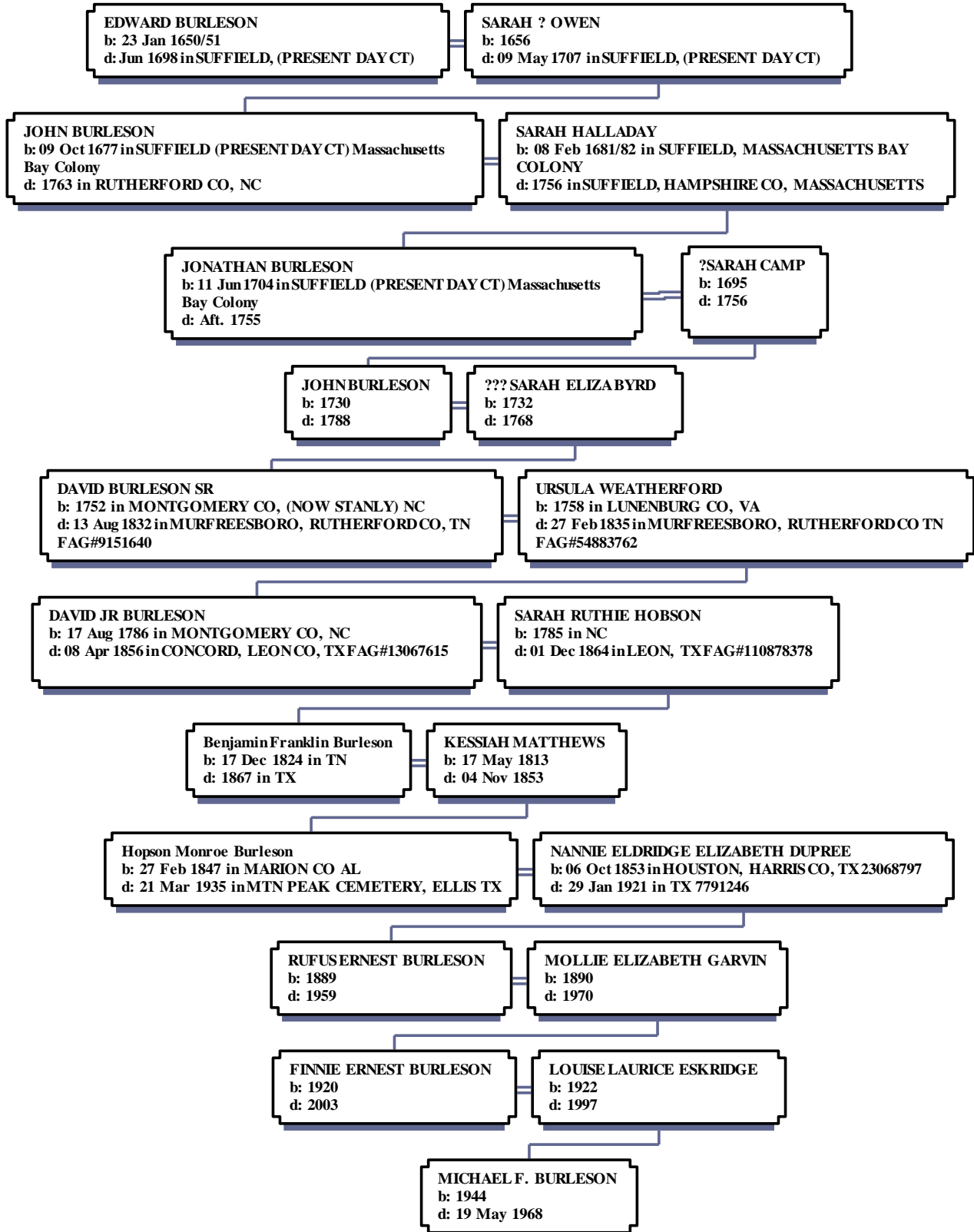


#### About the Author

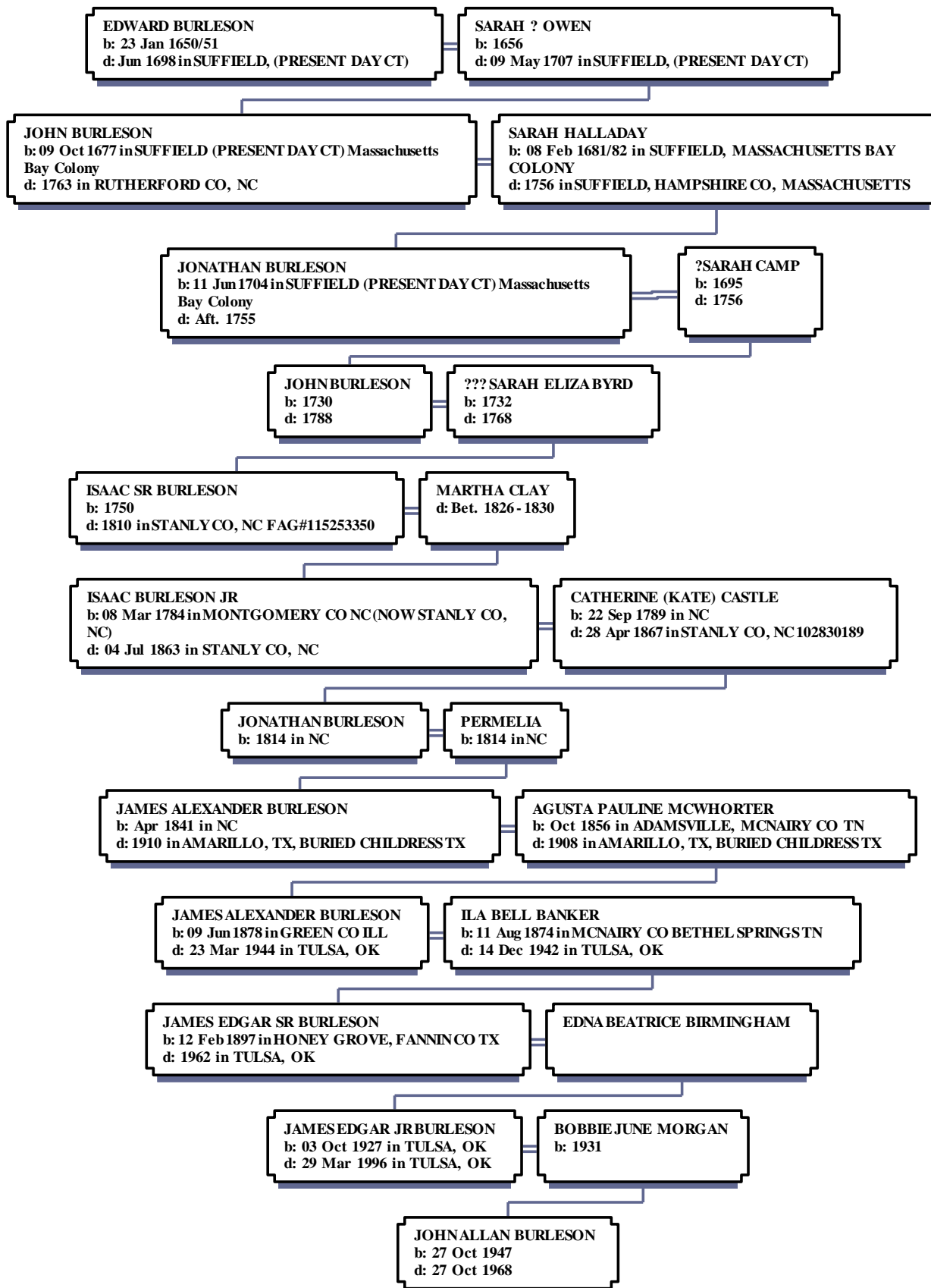
David Burleson is a retired USAF Lieutenant Colonel, son of the late USAF Chief Master Sergeant Ned Garner Burleson, and father of the late USA Staff Sergeant Geoffrey Lance Burleson, USAF Major Jeremiah Burleson currently stationed in Anchorage, Alaska, and USAF Staff Sergeant Micah Burleson currently stationed in Tacoma, Washington.

He is pictured with his granddaughter Irene, daughter of Major Burleson.

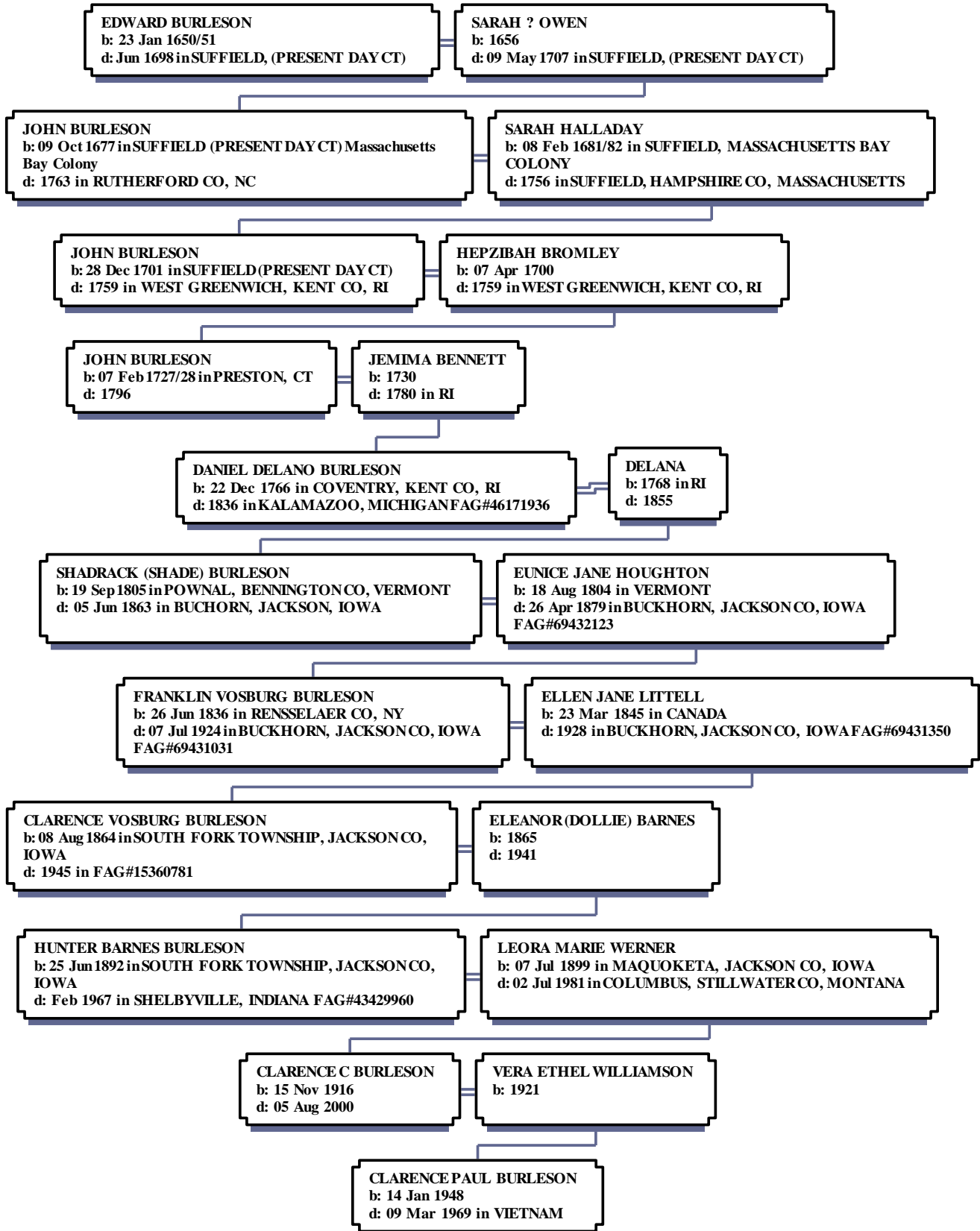
# Direct Descendants of EDWARD BURLESON



# Direct Descendants of EDWARD BURLESON



# Direct Descendants of EDWARD BURLESON



# Direct Descendants of NANCY BURLESON

