

John R. Ludwig – Corpsman

John Robert Ludwig enlisted into the Navy September 27, 1966, at the heart of the Vietnam War. During his high school years in Hamilton, New Jersey, John began his passion for helping people in the medical field. This carried over to his Military service as a Corpsman. He began his military medical training, at the Hospital Corps School at Montford Point, North Carolina soon after basic training on December 29, 1966. In April of 1967 he transferred to the Field Medical Service School to complete his training and on May 12, 1967, PVC Ludwig became a Corpsman. That same year he trained to serve in combat with the Marines.



In late 1967 Corpsman Ludwig was deployed to Vietnam, city of Hue where he joined up with the 1st Battalion, 5th Marines, 1st Marine Division as their Corpsman.

On January 30, 1968, Communist-affiliated troops from North Vietnam and the Viet Cong launched what became known as the Tet Offensive against South Vietnam and its American allies. The Tet Offensive was one of the largest military operations of the Vietnam War.

The Tet Offensive was a surprise of attacks launched during Tet, the Vietnamese New Year festival. Many South Vietnamese troops were on holiday when the attacks began, and the military was caught off guard. The campaign initially targeted more than 100 cities and towns, including the strategic southern capital of Saigon.

In January of 1968 the city of Hue was under attack and Corpsman Ludwig was in the heart of battle. The men he trained with took heavy casualties and he made every effort to administer to as many Marines as he could. Each time, under heavy fire, as

he ran to the wounded Marines, there would always be a Marine kneeling alongside him trying to shield him from fire. His fellow Marines would say to him, "Hurry, Doc!" while using themselves as human shields.

The Battle of Hue began on January 31, 1968, by the North Vietnamese Army and Viet Cong after months of reconnaissance, pre-positioning of supplies, and clandestine infiltration of fighters in civilian clothes for what would become known as the Tet Offensive assault.



Corpsman Ludwig administering to a Fallen Marine



Corpsman Ludwig on left running to help a fallen Marine.

Within hours the 4th North Vietnamese Army (NVA) Regiment had taken New Hue, the 6th NVA Regiment had taken the Citadel, and the 5th NVA Regiment was firmly entrenched in several villages, northwest of the city. The Viet Cong (VC) began a systematic and thorough program of murdering South Vietnamese government officials, their families and friends, and anyone in the city who had the slightest relationship with or had

supported South Vietnam's government or the United States.

The battle continued for weeks in different parts of the city. The US Marines engaged the NVAs 4th Regiment in New Hue; the South Vietnamese forces, and US Marines engaged the NVAs 6th Regiment in Old Hue's Citadel; and the US Army engaged the NVAs 5th Regiment northwest of Hue. The Marines were reinforced with the M-48 tank division.



Marines help other Marines under fire clearing New Hue's City

US Marines used urban warfare tactics, techniques to clear New Hue's city blocks and destroyed the North Vietnamese Army 4th Regiment. The South Vietnamese Forces Inside Old Hue's Citadel were reinforced by US and South Vietnamese airborne troops. After

several days, the American and South Vietnamese forces reached the border walls and cleared any pockets of remaining resistance in the Citadel and Imperial Palace. The US Army units continued advancing toward the Citadel to clear out the final pockets within Old Hue's city walls. Small pockets of resistance in and around Hue were continually found for the next several weeks.

Like most urban operations the casualty numbers on all sides were very high. Over 200 US Marines were killed and over 1,500 wounded. South Vietnamese forces had 333 killed, and over 2,000 wounded. An Estimated 7,000 North Vietnamese and Viet Cong were killed. Roughly 116,000 civilians were made homeless, and some 5,800 were reported killed or missing. Approximately 3,000 bodies were found in shallow graves blatantly murdered by the Viet Cong assassination program that had begun shortly after Communist forces had seized the city.

On March 23, 1968, during a patrol along the mountainside of Hill 1192 near the city of Hue, the marines were attacked by a remaining pocket of North Vietnamese forces. During the exchange of fire and tending to a worried Marine, Corpsman Ludwig was hit and wounded. The Marines he mended carried him down the mountain in a makeshift poncho-stretcher, and he was medevac'd by Helicopter to the Hospital ship.

After being treated, Corpsman Ludwig was transported to Da Nang airbase where he boarded a C-141 Medical Transport to the Guam Island Naval Hospital to be further treated for his injuries.

The plane was full of wounded South Korean Marines. One side of the plane had three tiers of cots with South Korean Marines

suffering from burns and gunshot wounds. Airforce Nurses administered to them throughout the trip, assisted by Medics. Their dedication will always be remembered. He was eventually transported to the Philadelphia Naval Hospital for further treatment and recovered from his wounds.

Once mended Corpsman Ludwig was transferred to St. Albans Hospital in Queens, New York where he completed his enlistment training in new procedures for cardiac heart catheterization and the study of heart disease in children. After completing his 4-year enlistment, he was honorably discharged on June 15, 1970.

For Hospital Corpsman Ludwig (HM3) service he received the National Defense Service Medal, Navy Commendation Medal with Combat V, Vietnam Service Medal with Bronze Star, Vietnam Campaign Medal and the Purple Heart for his wounds received in Vietnam.

John Robert Ludwig served his country for 4 years and continued his service to his community at Deborah Heart and Lung Center where he worked for 18 years as the Director of the Children's Heart Program; and then to Siemens Medical Corporation to develop Heart Systems, to eventually retired.



Marines carrying ***their*** wounded to be medevac'd.

John's final tribute is thanking the Navy for giving a young man from a poor family the tools to succeed in life. He is proud of the Marines he served with and the many of whom risked their lives for "Doc Ludwig" and their fellow Marines.

We thank Corpsman (Doc) John Robert Ludwig for his service and dedication to the medical profession.

Written by Vincent Scatuccio

Reference from John R. Ludwig, photos from the Ludwig personal archives.

Navy records, Wikipedia and Ancestry.com