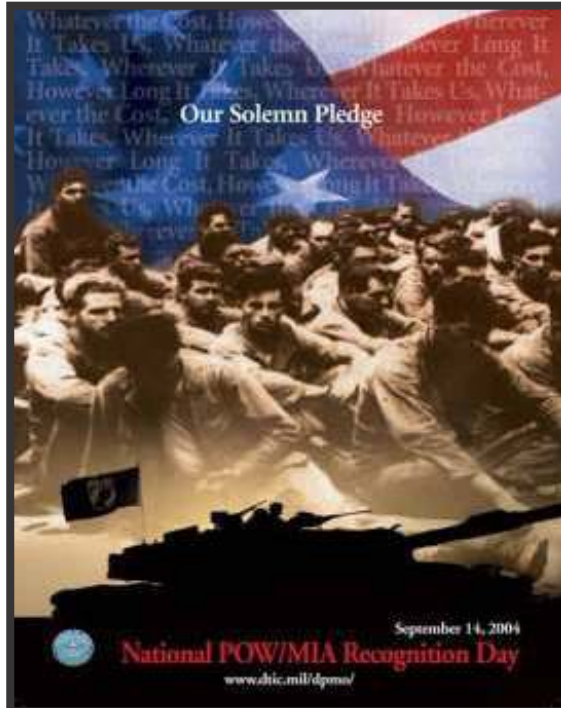




September 14, 2004 has been set aside to honor the commitment and sacrifices made by this nation's Prisoners of War, those who are listed Missing in Action and their families. History of the POW MIA flag

National POW/MIA Recognition Day is one of the six days specified by US Public Law 101-355 for federal facilities, cemeteries, post offices and military installations to fly the black POW/MIA flag.

The now familiar black POW/MIA flag was chosen "as the symbol of our Nation's concern and commitment to resolving as fully as possible the fates of Americans still prisoner, missing and unaccounted for in Southeast Asia, thus ending the uncertainty for their families and the Nation."

The other five days are Armed Forces Day, Memorial Day, Flag Day, Independence Day and Veterans Day.

Please visit the Defense POW/Missing Personnel Office for more information.



David Eugene Lovegren

David Lovegren was lost on March 1, 1969, a very sad day for Delta Company. David, and four other men, were lost in the helicopter crash that claimed the lives of five men of the Third Platoon and the entire chopper crew. There were only two survivors. The crash took place on a hillside, overlooking the Song Ve River.

The other four men were James Craft, Thomas Gaines, Rodney Goode and Jimmy Gross. One of our Third Platoon members has commented that these five men were as fine a group of men as could be found.

Alan Conger



Specialist 4 Clifford Dale Van Artsdalen Company "D", 1st Battalion, 20th Infantry

On 11 May 1968, at 0840 hours, Van Artsdalen, Zapata, and Lockhart, while on patrol, came under heavy machine gun, grenade, and RPG fire in the vicinity of BT068255 near LZ Center. The NVA forces killed all three.

At 1140 hours 11 May, a valiant effort by A 1/6, 198th Infantry recovered two of the soldiers of D1/20 killed vicinity BT067253. Heavy enemy resistance made it impossible for them to retrieve one soldier - Specialist 4 Clifford Van Artsdalen, who was reported MIA and assumed to be KIA.

In 2012 Michael McDonald Low, Van Artsdalen's former Platoon leader, led an American Joint POW/MIA Accounting Command Team to Vietnam to locate Van Artsdalen's loss location. The team was unsuccessful, and to this day, Van Artsdalen remains MIA/BNR (Body Not Recovered).

TO READ THE WHOLE STORY CHECK OUT UNACCOUNTED

Michael McDonald-Low served with Delta Company in Vietnam in 1967 and 1968 as a 1st Lieutenant infantry platoon leader and later as company commander after being promoted to Captain. He has one soldier from his platoon still there, Specialist 4 Clifford Van Artsdalen - MIA #1165. In 2012, he led an American Joint POW/MIA Accounting Command team to search for his location. He is the author of "Unaccounted" which chronicled the battle that led to Van Artsdalen's death and the mission McDonald-Low led in Vietnam in 2012.

<https://www.amazon.com/Unaccounted-Michael-McDonald-Low/dp/1506900895>

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Judiciary panel debates Trump impeachment; vote approaches

By MARY CLARE JALONICK
AND LISA MASCARO
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The House Judiciary Committee argued through a marathon session Thursday ahead of voting on articles of impeachment against President Donald Trump, the latest big step as the politically split panel prepares to send the charges to the full House.

Speaker Nancy Pelosi sounded confident Democrats will have the votes to impeach the president next week but said it is up to individual lawmakers to weigh the evidence and decide for themselves. Republicans seem unwavering in their opposition to expelling Trump.

"The fact is we take an oath to protect and defend the Constitution of the United States," Pelosi told reporters. "No one is above the law; the president will be held accountable for his abuse of power and his obstruction of Congress."

Trump, apparently watching the live proceedings on television, tweeted his criticism of two Democratic women on the panel, Reps. Veronica Escobar and Sheila Jackson Lee, both of Texas. He called their comments about his actions inaccurate.

SEE JUDICIARY ON PAGE 11



ANDREW HARNIK/AP

Rep. Jim Jordan, R-Ohio, listens during a House Judiciary Committee markup of the articles of impeachment against President Donald Trump on Thursday in Washington.

VETERANS

Michael McDonald-Low poses March 9, 2012, the day he led a Joint POW/MIA Accounting Command mission to the site where Spc. Clifford Van Artsdalen was killed May 11, 1968, in what was then South Vietnam.

Defense Department

UNACCOUNTABLE

A Vietnam veteran's 10-year quest to bring his soldier home

By WYATT OLSON
Stars and Stripes

Pushing through dense foliage toward the site of the bygone ambush, Michael McDonald-Low felt like he was floating through time.

He had longed for this day, planning thoroughly for the time he would return to this hillside in Vietnam's Que Son Valley where many of his infantry company were wounded or killed by a hail of North Vietnamese gunfire on May 11, 1968. The body of one of those soldiers in the platoon he commanded, Spc. Clifford Van Arts-

dalen, had never been recovered.

That fateful trek was etched like a gravestone inscription in his mind as he retraced his steps during this mission on March 9, 2012, to pinpoint the exact location of Van Artsdalen's death so that his remains could be found and returned home.

He pressed on to find the split in the trail where he had sent Van Artsdalen and two other soldiers ahead to secure the route.

Soon after finding it, McDonald-Low was joined by the other 11 members of the mission team from the Joint POW/MIA Accounting Agency, the U.S. Defense Department body tasked at that time with finding

America's lost warfighters.

McDonald-Low was confident that this was the exact location where Van Artsdalen was killed, he told Stars and Stripes during a series of interviews about his search. With the location pinpointed — the government for years had been working with an erroneous place and date of his death — the way was finally clear to find and repatriate the soldier's remains.

Seven years later, nothing has changed. McDonald-Low's quest to bring him home is no further along than it was then.

And there is little time left.

SEE UNACCOUNTABLE ON PAGE 8

VETERANS

Unaccountable: US still pursuing cases of more than 1,100 MIA from Vietnam War

The toughest cases

Clifford Van Artsdalen represents one of the toughest types of cases to resolve in the search for the still-missing 1,600 soldiers, Marines, airmen and sailors from the Vietnam War: ground-loss cases.

The Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency, the body now overseeing the U.S. government's effort to repatriate the country's missing troops, is still actively pursuing the cases of 1,102 service members missing from the Vietnam War.

Van Artsdalen is one of the 257 lost infantrymen and Marines not associated with large metal objects such as helicopters and airplanes. The enemy often stripped the American dead bare of even their metal dog tags before a hasty burial.

Progress in retrieving these ground losses has been achingly slow, with the DPAA identifying only seven such cases since the beginning of 2015. At such a rate, it would take almost two centuries to recover them.

Many of the remains rest in the harsh, acidic jungle soil of Southeast Asia, dissolving over the half-century since the U.S. ended combat operations there in 1973.

"Time is not our ally," Rear Adm. Jon Kreitz, then DPAA deputy director, said in June at the annual conference of the National League of POW/MIA Families. "One of the biggest reasons when it comes to the Vietnam War is because remains are degrading at a very fast rate. It makes identifying individuals from their remains more challenging all the time."

McDonald-Low's efforts on the Van Artsdalen case illustrate many of the obstacles that have stood — indeed, still stand — in the way of DPAA recovering ground troops still missing in action, or MIA.

For the past decade, the decorated Vietnam War veteran has shepherded Van Artsdalen's case through the government bureaucracy, tracked down and interviewed eyewitness veterans, dug up official after-action reports and pushed back on erroneous assumptions and information held within the official case file.

"The grim reality is that there's no sense of urgency or priority at DPAA to recover the remaining unaccounted-for soldiers of the Vietnam War, although they are keenly aware that the window for their recovery is rapidly closing," said McDonald-Low, who lives in Portland, Ore.

The DPAA said in a written response to Stars and Stripes that the Vietnam War missing are its "primary operational priority" and that it is increasing the pace and scope of operations, spending, for example, more than \$50 million in the last two years in investigative and excavation missions in Southeast Asia.

The boyish-faced grenadier

First Lt. Michael McDonald-Low arrived by ship to Vietnam for his first combat tour in December 1967 after graduating two years earlier from Officer Candidate School in Fort Knox, Ky., and then training in Hawaii.

Within a couple of months, his company was patrolling South Vietnam's countryside on search and destroy missions for 10 to 12 days at a time, he said.

Among the men in his platoon was Clifford Van Artsdalen, an 18-year-old boyish-faced grenadier who stood barely 5 feet tall.

Growing up, "Cliffy" had a passion for baseball, said Garth Garges, a boyhood friend, now 70, who still lives in the tiny town of Perkasi, Pa., where they both grew up. During summers in their early teens, the pair played sandlot baseball almost every day, he said.

"He didn't have a mean bone in his body," Garges said. "He always had some funny little quip."

He lost track of him after Van Artsdalen dropped out of high school during the 11th grade. The two had talked frequently about the Vietnam War, and neither had any desire to go fight it, Garges said.

But Van Artsdalen found himself in the thick of it as an infantryman in Vietnam, where danger and death lurked everywhere, from sprained ankles, jungle rot and diseases to firefights big and small with the enemy.

He was among hundreds of soldiers killed or wounded in Que Son Valley, about 30 miles southwest of Danang, in the early part of May 1968, when the North Vietnamese Army launched attacks marking the start of their second Tet Offensive.

On May 5, McDonald-Low's Delta Company, 1st Battalion, 20th Infantry, 11th Light Infantry Brigade was chopped into a valley below Landing Zone Center, a hilltop U.S. firebase. Together with Bravo Company, 1st Battalion, 6th Infantry, 198th Light Infantry Brigade, the soldiers swept through the nearby hillsides where two U.S. helicopters had been shot down.

McDonald-Low led his men on assaults over five days on the top of Hill 352, a North Vietnamese Army stronghold, each time being driven back, each time dragging the dead and wounded down the slope to



Gary Sanner

Spc. Clifford Van Artsdalen, left, plays cards with his fellow platoon members on May 5, 1968, as they await a helicopter shuttle to Hill 352 on Nui Hoac Ridge, South Vietnam. Van Artsdalen was killed in an ambush six days later, and his body was never recovered.



ANDREA VILLARI/Stars and Stripes

Capt. Michael McDonald-Low poses in December 1968 after completing his combat tours in Vietnam. Spc. Clifford Van Artsdalen was one of the men in McDonald-Low's platoon.

Michael McDonald-Low

where they could be treated or evacuated.

After days of intense battle, Delta Company was badly depleted of men and rest, and on May 11 they were ordered to leave Hill 352 and make haste to Landing Zone Center for refitting and replenishment.

McDonald-Low was tasked with leading the company from Hill 352 across the valley and up the roughly 1,200 feet to LZ Center.

When McDonald-Low reached a split in the trail on a nearby summit, with one path leading up to LZ Center, the other heading down into the next valley, he sent Van Artsdalen and two other men up trail 30 yards and three men down trail the same distance to secure each location.

It was the simple kind of command he'd given countless times in recent months, but the moment was locked in his memory.

"Some guys just stick out in your mind," McDonald-Low said of the many men who died under his command. "I remember looking at Van Artsdalen and sending him up that trail. I'll never forget it."

Van Artsdalen and two other soldiers were ambushed and killed moments later.

The date of Van Artsdalen's death remains seared into McDonald-Low's memory because that same day, May 11, 1968, he was wounded in the head, right shoulder and arm and evacuated for weeks of hospital recovery.

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VETERANS

FROM PAGE 8

Two months later he returned to the battlefield as a newly minted captain in command of Delta Company.

Leaving Vietnam behind

McDonald-Low left the Army when his four-year stint was up in July 1969, taking with him a Combat Infantryman's Badge, Bronze Star with "V" device for valor, Bronze Star for Meritorious Service and Purple Heart with two Oak Leaf Clusters.

"I left Vietnam behind me," he said. "I put it in the back of my mind for many, many years. Never admitted I was a Vietnam vet."

He said he never forgot the bedlam, uncertainty and loss he experienced in infantry combat; it flooded upward through nightmares and mood swings.

An extreme-sports enthusiast, he made a career out of writing and publishing magazines on windsurfing, snowboarding and wakeboarding as he raised a family.

When he retired in early 2009, he began for the first time reflecting in depth about the Vietnam War experiences he had pushed into a dark corner. He found the website for his old unit, the 11th Light Infantry Brigade, which listed those in the unit who died in action.

He was stunned when he reached the entry about Van Artsdalen: He was listed as missing in action, body never recovered.

He had no idea that one of his soldiers remained unfound in Vietnam.

The website listed Van Artsdalen's death on the wrong date — two days before McDonald-Low had looked the soldier in the eye and sent him up the trail — and in the wrong location.

He said he was aghast to learn that the Hawaii-based Joint POW/MIA Accounting Command, or JPAC, was using the same flawed data — even sending search teams several times to the wrong location in Vietnam.

The information JPAC and its sister agency, the Defense Prisoner of War/Missing Personnel Office on the East Coast, had on Van Artsdalen's death was largely based on statements made by Capt. Charles Seketa, Delta's company commander, during a board of inquiry May 20, 1968 — nine days after the deadly battle near Landing Zone Center.

After discovering Van Artsdalen was still missing, McDonald-Low tracked down Seketa and met with him in the summer of 2009, about six months before he died.

"He was very cordial, and we sat down with a map," McDonald-Low said. "But Chuck couldn't read a map if his life depended on it. He admitted to me, 'You know, you couldn't really rely on me for those kinds of things.'"

"In the board of inquiry, all he was trying to do was put names to dates, nine days after he'd lost some 45 men," McDonald-Low said. "For a company commander to do that even with as few men as we had left would be very difficult to do under the best of circumstances."

In June 2010, McDonald-Low



Above: A member of a Joint POW/MIA Accounting Command field mission searches on March 9, 2012, for evidence of the remains of Army Spc. Clifford Van Artsdalen, who was killed on the spot in Vietnam on May 11, 1968. Right: On the same date decades later, Michael McDonald-Low leads a JPAC team up the same trail in Vietnam that he had led soldiers up 44 years earlier.

Defense Department photos

provided JPAC with a map showing the exact location where Van Artsdalen died.

Three months later he received an email from a JPAC analyst telling him that Seketa's information "is obviously incorrect," and invited McDonald-Low to head the next investigative field team to the location just below LZ Center.

Under JPAC protocol, no excavation was done during that investigatory field mission in March 2012.

McDonald-Low said the mission's forensic anthropologist, Elliot Moore, indicated that the most likely spot the North Vietnamese would have buried Van Artsdalen was in a nearby small gully covered with dense overbrush and

that there was a 10-year window to retrieve bones before the acidic soil dissolved them.

"Research has shown that remains can be lost within 10 years in very acidic soils," Moore, who retired from JPAC in 2015, told Stars and Stripes in an email. In less acidic soils they may last "up to 40 years plus," he said.

'Fog of war'

Two years after standing on that Vietnamese trail with Moore, McDonald-Low had grown frustrated that no excavation mission had gone to the site.

In May 2014, he was contacted by Alisa Stack, a senior Defense Department civilian heading the Personnel Accounting Consolidation Task Force, or PACT, which had been formed by Defense Department Secretary Chuck Hagel to oversee the overhaul of the department's accounting after a series of scandals. She invited McDonald-Low's feedback on the agency's performance.

In an email, he complained about the slow progress in finding his soldier, whom JPAC had officially designated MIA 1165.

"The reason I have been given [for the delay] is that JPAC needs confirmation by a Vietnamese villager or a former soldier who remembers the date and location of 1165's loss," he wrote. "This is in my opinion an unreasonable burden of proof being demanded.



lost in that same area is virtually zero."

DPAA spokesman Lt. Col. Kenneth Hoffman, in a written response to a query by Stars and Stripes, said the agency routinely takes U.S. and foreign veterans and civilians back to battlefields to help locate burial sites.

"Many of these individuals, to include Mr. McDonald-Low, were not able to confirm precise locations based on their recollection of events that occurred decades ago in the fog of war," Hoffman said. "Mr. McDonald-Low was able to point out the general area where he last saw SP4 Van Artsdalen but could provide no information on where he was killed or buried."

McDonald-Low dismisses that characterization.

"I wasn't in a fog of war," he said. "I knew the exact map coordinates. I provided precise information on where he was killed."

Illogical conclusions

Stack invited McDonald-Low to become a member of the PACT task force, and he was sent to Hawaii for a week to assess JPAC's operations and procedures.

It was during these interviews that the chasm between JPAC in Hawaii and DPMO on the East Coast became clear: "There was not just miscommunication, but also a self-serving willingness to guard information — an unwillingness to share, which was affecting their ability to work as a team and accomplish the mission," he said.

SEE UNACCOUNTABLE, PAGE 10



VETERANS

Unaccountable: Vietnam vet feels frustration, sense of urgency

FROM PAGE 9

In his final report, McDonald-Low wrote that burden-of-proof protocols for infantry ground-loss cases, like Van Artsdalen's, should be changed to improve the chances for success in these "toughest remaining cases."

A few months later, in August 2014, McDonald-Low was appointed as the first-ever Southeast Asia veteran liaison for JPAC/DPMO. He underwent a background security check, was issued an official Defense Department ID card and worked as an unpaid contractor reviewing unresolved ground-loss cases.

As he worked the cases, it became clear to him that too many JPAC investigators were unfamiliar with basic Vietnam War-era infantry combat tactics and weapons, as well as the types of wounds and damage they could inflict, he said.

"In one case, an investigator said a soldier had an 81-mm mortar land at his feet, and his body was vaporized," he said. "Hence, there was no further remains we could identify and recover, as had been reported by the soldiers on the ground."

"It's impossible for a human being to be disintegrated by that mortar size," he said.

He saw that ignorance surface in Van Artsdalen's case, which he reviewed in early 2015. In it, a JPAC analyst speculated on the possibility Van Artsdalen "was wounded and perhaps left the immediate vicinity of the battle."

That notion entirely ignored after-action reports McDonald-Low had delivered to JPAC.

Those reports detail a search for the bodies up the trail about three hours after the initial fire-fight. They recovered the bodies of two but could not recover the third body they saw, Van Artsdalen, because of subsequent heavy enemy fire.

"For the JPAC case analyst to imply that 1165 lay at that location for three hours until [Alpha Company] arrived and then [he] departed after their firefight is illogical," he wrote.

Waning casework

By the end of 2016, he said the flow of cases from the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency had dried to a trickle.

His numerous inquiries about cases he had worked on and requests for new cases went unanswered.

As someone who speaks his mind, he is cognizant he may have rubbed somebody the wrong way.

"Certainly I'm an abrasive personality," he said. If he judged something in an analyst's report to be "ridiculous," he did not hesitate to point it out, he said.

But he also suspects he might have ruffled feathers with a book he self-published in 2016, titled "Unaccounted," which chronicled the battle that led to Van Artsdalen's death and the mission McDonald-Low led in Vietnam in 2012.

"I wrote it for 1165 and myself,"



Gary Sanner

First Lt. Michael McDonald-Low awaits the arrival of a helicopter on May 5, 1968, to take him and other soldiers to Hill 352, Nui Hoac Ridge, South Vietnam. More than 50 years after one of his soldiers was killed in the Que Son Valley, McDonald-Low is still fighting frustration and Father Time in an effort to locate that soldier's remains.

he said of the book, which depicted the government accounting effort in a generally positive light. "I wanted to memorialize his service, his loss and my experience going through it."

To this day, he does not know why the casework ended.

"I only had one goal, which was to be honest and give them my opinion based on my knowledge and experience," he said. "I had no ax to grind. I just wanted to see the mission fulfilled, streamlined and improved."

His official credentials giving him access to certain DPAA databases ended in November 2017. The lapse left him ever more removed from the Van Artsdalen case.

Frustrated, he wrote a lengthy letter in early 2018 to President Donald Trump, which he copied and distributed to veterans' groups and members of the media. In it, he highlighted the shortcomings in the DPAA's procedures for locating and excavating remains for ground-loss cases such as Van Artsdalen.

Months later, in September 2018, he finally received a letter from DPAA Director Kelly McKeague, who wrote that he was responding on behalf of the president.

McDonald-Low was familiar with the director because McKeague's professional involvement with the MIA accounting effort mirrored his own.

As an Air Force major general, McKeague took command of JPAC at Joint Base Pearl Harbor-Hickam, Hawaii, in 2012, the same year McDonald-Low led the

mission to Vietnam. McKeague became DPAA's first deputy director when it was created in 2015. He became its director in 2017 after retiring from active duty.

'With rigor and urgency'

McKeague touted DPAA's new review and evaluation processes — which now includes writing an overall case narrative — as a means of speeding approvals of investigation and excavation field missions.

He concluded, "The pledge that I make to families of the missing and veterans whose comrades-in-arms are unaccounted-for is that DPAA will diligently and dutifully pursue this noble humanitarian effort, and sacred obligation, with rigor and urgency, employing best practices as well as embracing new methodologies."

While the letter addressed some of McDonald-Low's general concerns about DPAA, it did nothing to advance Van Artsdalen's case.

Although sidelined from official access to DPAA databases, McDonald-Low continued to work the case on his own.

In October 2018, he tracked down and interviewed a radio operator who was among a group of soldiers from Alpha Company, 1-6 Infantry, sent out on May 16, 1968, to recover the body of a different soldier left on the trail leading to Landing Zone Center. That was five days after Van Artsdalen was killed.

His recollections provided clarification over reports by searchers that had confused sightings of the body of another soldier as

being that of Van Artsdalen.

Confident that the new statement would move the case forward, McDonald-Low submitted an updated report to the DPAA in November 2018. In the following months he queried the agency about the status of the updated report with the radio operator's information but received no reply.

The radio operator died Feb. 2, 2019. No DPAA interview was ever done.

"So the man who gave me this new information dies before DPAA even bothers to interview him and verify what I put in that report," he said. "They dragged their feet."

Still lost

With a heightened sense of urgency in the wake of the death, McDonald-Low wrote to the DPAA a few days later requesting to review Van Artsdalen's case narrative, if one had been written.

About two weeks later, he received a reply from Navy Cmdr. Jason Menarchik, chief of a sub-regional team at the DPAA's Hawaii lab, which said the agency was conducting an "in-depth review of your report."

"To clarify," concluded the short email sent Feb. 27, "since you are not the Primary Next of Kin for SP4 Van Artsdalen, nor have on-record any authorization, we cannot provide sensitive details on this particular case, such as the Case Narrative, that you requested at this time."

McDonald-Low said he still seethes over the denial.

He had spent the last decade

collecting official after-action reports and tracking down veterans with eyewitness accounts. He led an accounting agency mission to Vietnam in 2012 to verify the exact location where Van Artsdalen had died — after JPAC had sent missions to Vietnam numerous times to the wrong place, costing hundreds of thousands of dollars.

To be so casually dismissed from the case he'd built and shepherded — in the death of a soldier he led and fought beside — epitomizes all he finds self-defeating within the Defense Department's MIA accounting effort.

"The bottom line is that Van Artsdalen represents every other poor, forgotten soul — particularly infantrymen and Marines — still lost from the war," he said.

McDonald-Low's entreaties to DPAA officials, including McKeague, have gone unanswered.

A request by Stars and Stripes to interview McKeague was not granted.

McDonald-Low talks often about the letter McKeague sent him a year ago — and the vow he made in it to pursue cases with "rigor and urgency."

"I am still waiting to see Director McKeague's promises fulfilled for the many MIAs remaining unaccounted," McDonald-Low said. "I am deeply worried about when the last Vietnam veteran dies — the last man to see a fellow soldier alive, a man like me who gave him an order to go up that trail — who will be left to carry on the mission?"

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