

# Silver Star Presentation Slated

Metter's VFW Post Commander Lt. Col. Mark Cauley and Candler County Probate Judge Tony Thompson solemnly announce that on Monday October 25 at 2:00 at the front lawn of the Candler County Courthouse, Specialist Oscar Barker Jr. of 2nd Platoon, A Co., 2nd Battalion, 7th Cavalry Regiment will be posthumously presented with the Silver Star for gallantry under fire. The Silver Star is the third highest military decoration that can be awarded to a member of any branch of the United States Armed Forces for valor in the face of the enemy. In the event of inclement weather the alternate site will be the VFW building on the Claxton Highway.

Judge Thompson explains the story of Specialist Barker's long delayed recognition.

"Over four decades ago, the 1st Cavalry Division (including the 7<sup>th</sup> Cavalry Regiment) deployed from Fort Benning, Georgia for Vietnam. On 14 - 16 November 1965 in the Ia Drang valley they fought the first major battle between the American Army and the People's Army of Vietnam. The battle was immortalized in the book "We were Soldiers Once and Young", by Lt Gen Hal Moore, the commander of US forces in the engagement, and Joe Galloway, a journalist present during the fighting. The book was later made into the movie "We Were Soldiers" starring Mel Gibson."

"On November 6<sup>th</sup>, 2009 I received a letter from Congressman Stephen Lynch of the 9<sup>th</sup> Congressional District of Massachusetts. He wrote, 'Dear Judge Thompson, I am searching for the family of Specialist Oscar Barker Jr. (Oct. 30-1938-Nov. 17, 1965). A resident of Metter, Candler County, Georgia, Specialist Barker was married before serving in the Vietnam Conflict. While serving in Vietnam he was killed by enemy fire while protecting his fellow soldiers. Recently, Specialist Barker has been awarded the Silver Star. I am in the process of trying to

locate Specialist Barker's family. I would appreciate the release of all records related to the case and any other information that may be pertinent. '

"After receiving the letter I looked through the available court records and inquired with members of the community's various military honor societies including the VFW, American Legion, Sons of American Revolution and Sons of Confederate Veterans about Specialist Barker. Past SCV Commander Randy Crooms noted that he was aware of Barker's service and that Specialist Barker was indeed part of the U.S. Cavalry Division which was portrayed in the movie "We Were Soldiers" with Mel Gibson. Crooms made the discovery during his studies at Georgia Southern where he is working on his doctorate in military history. Specialist Barker's widow, Mrs. Donnie Barker was the focus of an interview in 2002 by Metter Advertiser's Jerri Goodman. VFW Adjutant Ernest Kite noted that he understood Specialist Barker to be the first Vietnam casualty from Candler County. Further inquiries revealed that Specialist Barker's widow Mrs. Donnie B. Barker passed away on Dec. 15, 2003 having never remarried. She and Specialist Barker are buried together at St. Matthews Missionary Baptist Church. However, other surviving relatives (including sister-in-law Mrs. Emma D. Ross) were identified who still reside in Candler County, and that information was conveyed to Congressman Lynch's office in Massachusetts."

"After hearing nothing further for several months, I made a follow up call in September to Congressman Lynch's office where it was explained that the process had been slowed by a change in staffers in the office. Coincidentally, the presentation had recently been handed off to Georgia's 12th District Congressman John Barrow for completion."

"Congressman Barrow's Veteran's Affairs constituent services representative Matthew Kleinsorge was now heading up the process. As luck would have it, we had met recently when he spoke to the VFW/American Legion in Metter. With his direction the presentation details were soon finalized."

Thompson added, "During each communication with Congressman Lynch's and Congressman Barrow's office, the name of Barker's fellow soldier Sgt. John Eade of Massachusetts came up as the person who was the driving force behind seeing that this long overdue recognition for Specialist Barker was completed. It was clear that he had made this a personal mission."

There was a reunion for the survivors of the Ia Drang Valley campaign held on May of 2008. An article detailing that reunion explains why Sgt. John Eade was so committed to seeing that his fellow soldier Specialist Barker was finally recognized. The article appeared in the May 24<sup>th</sup> 2008 edition of [www.mudvillegazette.com](http://www.mudvillegazette.com) written by editor Jules Crittenden. The following is excerpted from that article:

"In 1965, Sgt. Eade, 21, was a fire-team leader in 2nd Platoon, A Co., 2nd Battalion, 7th Cavalry Regt., 1st Cav Div. 1st Lt. Larry Gwin was Alpha Co.'s XO. The battalion was sent in to reinforce 1/7 Cav at LZ X-ray on Nov. 16, 1965, and with NVA forces at X-ray destroyed, 1/7 was choppered out, and 2/7 was marched 10 km to LZ Albany. They encountered and captured a couple of NVA soldiers, and had established a defensive perimeter at Albany when the two NVA regiments encamped nearby attacked. Gwin was at the A Co. command post among some trees and anthills in the center of the LZ. Eade and 2nd platoon had been sent into the trees to the left while 1st Platoon went right. Before it was over, more than two-thirds of the Americans were dead or wounded.

Eade recalls that his platoon was immediately pinned down in ferocious fighting as the NVA swarmed on them through the trees. "For the first hour and a half, it was intense hand-to-hand," Eade said. "It was like a gang fight. It was small groups of us versus small groups of them. It got down to knives. It got down to choking people."

Eade said he and three others, Wilbert Johnson, Barry Burnite and Oscar Barker Jr., had some freedom of movement along a line of brush and tried to flank the NVA.

"We wanted to hunt them down and give the platoon a chance," Eade said. "We bit off more than we could chew." Eade said. Burnite, a white trooper, was a machine gunner and Johnson, a black trooper, was his crewman. When the machine gun was disabled by shrapnel and Burnite was hit in the chest, Johnson dragged Burnite 30 meters in an effort to save him.

"It was the greatest feat of human strength I have ever witnessed," Eade said. "I don't know if Burnite was still alive." Eade, a native of Toledo, Ohio, is white and said that **growing up, he** had played sports with a lot of black kids and was not subject to racism. But he said that what he witnessed that day cured him of any possible vestiges and has left him with no tolerance for it.

Johnson, Barker and Eade holed up among some trees and continued to fight. Johnson was killed, and Eade was shot in the gut and the right shoulder, forcing him to fire his M-16 left-handed. His legs and boots had been sprayed with shrapnel, with a large piece stuck into his foot, so Eade couldn't walk. By about 3 p.m., much of the fighting had subsided around Barker and Eade. Barker tended to Eade's wounds when they weren't fighting, stuffing one of Eade's dirty socks into his shoulder wound to stop the bleeding because they were out of bandages.

"I knew and he knew that everyone else was dead," Eade said. He urged Barker, a black trooper, to try to save himself and run for the command post, where Gwin and others held a perimeter.

"He refused to go," Eade said. Shortly after that, Barker was shot in the chest, and Eade had to watch him die. Barker had a sucking chest wound, and it took him a long time to die, Eade said.

After the battle, Sgt. John Eade was found alive and conscious, though shot in the head, the sole survivor of those who had remained in Second Platoon's position at LZ Albany.

Crittenden adds, "Eade has recently done research and is preparing paperwork in an effort to have Barker posthumously awarded a Silver Star for gallantry under fire."

Metter's VFW/American Legion and Women's Auxiliary will serve as hosts for the ceremony with Metter High School's ROTC providing an honor guard. Thompson added, " Our community takes special pride in its servicemen and women and I'm sure Metter and Candler County will want to take the opportunity to pay tribute to Specialist Oscar Barker and his family for his heroism and their shared sacrifice. Additionally, Sgt. John Eade plans to be present at the ceremony, flying in from Massachusetts and I trust that many will want to thank him for seeing that Specialist Barker's heroism is properly recognized. "