

crust in the creases of our football gear on a miserable field in the center of St. Louis.

Joni Mitchell called Woodstock "a spark of beauty," where 500,000 kids "saw that they were part of a greater organism."

Many of us in the SLUH Class of 1971 desperately longed to be part of that greater organism, too. We just weren't sure how to do it. So we went to football practice, and then to class.

I played sparingly, mostly on special teams, that autumn of 1969, as the SLUH varsity won eight of our 10 games. For Del Bannister, Mike Wiese and me, and the rest of our classmates, our time would come the following August, in the summer and fall of 1970. For the time being, we were pretty content to ride out the relatively carefree winter and spring of our junior year.

9// *"He Was My Hero"*

February 1970

AS WE IN THE JUNIOR CLASS REACHED our second semester, U.S. troops had been deployed in the War in Vietnam for longer than they had been in World War I or World War II. Certainly, it was on our minds, especially as we contemplated the idea of being called to serve in it before long, if—as had been debated and eventually would be enacted—the "college exemption" were to be eliminated. Many of our older brothers were temporarily excused from involuntary induction because they were in college, through a provision that allowed draft-eligible young men to defer their military service while enjoying the privilege of attending college.

Mike Wiese was one of the few guys in our class who had a brother in the Armed Services. Despite his magnificent debut at Notre Dame in the

fall of 1966, Bob Wiese had decided college was not for him, and he had dropped out to enlist in the U. S. Marine Corps in January of 1968. As always a leader, Robert James Wiese came out of boot camp as a corporal.

"He was home in mid-December of 1969," Mike Wiese remembers. "He left just before Christmas. We weren't too worried, though, and thought he was far away from the fighting. We thought he was safe and sound."

What Corporal Bob Wiese had told Claude Wiese, and had asked his father not to tell the rest of the family, was that he had volunteered to be a machine gunner on a combat helicopter. Four years before, Bob Wiese had sat in the same classrooms we occupied now. Classrooms far away from the fighting in Vietnam.

On a chilly February morning in the winter of 1970, St. Louis U. High assistant principal Charlie Conway opened the door to the class Mike Wiese was in, interrupted the teacher, and asked Mike to step outside. "Mike," said Charlie Conway somberly, "Do you have a brother Bob who is in Vietnam?"

Charlie Conway did not have to say anything else. Mike Wiese's heart accelerated, his legs weakened, his stomach cramped, and he started to weep.

En route to the USS *Repose* on the night of February 16, on an emergency mission to retrieve a supply of transfusion blood that would preserve life for wounded soldiers, Corporal Bob Wiese and four mates from Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron 161 navigated through a dark, foggy sky in their Boeing-Vertol CH-46 twin engine, tandem-rotor helicopter. In this ill-fated "20 seconds of history," the helicopter clipped a hilltop and crashed hard into the earth, in the Thua Thien Province in South Vietnam. No one survived.

Thoughtfully, Charlie Conway asked Mike if he wanted to take a friend home with him. Accompanied by classmate and good friend Steve Walsh, and driven by assistant varsity football coach Ebbie Dunn, Mike Wiese headed home.

"I'll never forget going into that house, and seeing my Mom on the couch bawling," said Mike Wiese, many years later. "She was there with Dad. I was devastated."

Many years later, Mike had often wondered what his life would have been like, had his brother Bob not died in Vietnam. It would never be the same.

"He was my hero," Mike said.

10// *Thoughts of the War*

1968-70

THE DEATH OF BOB WIESE in Vietnam made the war more personal for us, as the deaths of more than 58,000 Americans lost in that war affected the lives of millions of family and friends. For one thing, it affected us because we saw our friend Mike Wiese carry the heavy burden of his most personal loss with him every day. For another, we knew this war was being fought by young Americans just a year or two older than we were. The average age of the American soldier in Vietnam was 19, well below the average age of 26 for the GIs in World War II. In World War II, American combat troops faced combat, on average, an estimated 40 days per year. In Vietnam, on patrols in search of a hidden enemy or in sustaining frequent ambushes, and facilitated by the mobility of the helicopter, the troops saw combat an average of 240 days per year.

This war, this world, had suddenly become a bit more real.

In the summer of 1968, people of our generation created chaos in the streets of Chicago as the Democratic Party convened to nominate Hubert Humphrey as its candidate to succeed Lyndon Johnson as President of the United States. The Chicago police tried to keep order, but people of