

FINDING AID

SGT Paul William Malec

*D Company, 2nd Battalion, 8th Cavalry (Airmobile)
1st Cavalry Division — Republic of Vietnam, 1965–1966*



Paul Malec in Airborne jump gear — courtesy of David Malec (great-grandson)

A starting point for your own research — what the archive holds about Paul Malec, the path his unit took during his service, and concrete leads for where to look next.

Prepared by the d281staircav archive (D/2-8 Cav) • June 2026
Compiled for David Malec from photographs and his family's account

How to read this

This finding aid is **not a finished biography**. It gathers everything the archive holds or can reasonably infer about your great-grandfather and turns it into leads you can keep pulling on. Throughout, we separate two very different kinds of statements:

Confirmed — named in a record, a photograph, or a document.

Probable / circumstantial — his unit was documented in a place or operation within his service dates, but he is not individually named. Treat these as *context and leads*, never as established fact.

*A note on his service window: because Paul was **wounded on 21 March 1966** and died of those wounds weeks later, the operational and location sections below cover **20 September 1965 – 21 March 1966** — the period he was actually with the unit in the field.*

1 Identity & service

Name	Paul William Malec
Rank	Sergeant (SGT)
Born	24 January 1937 — Summerdale, Baldwin County, Alabama
Service number	RA14547599 (Regular Army — a career-NCO service number, not an SSN)
MOS	11H40 — Infantry Direct Fire Crewman
Unit	D Company, 2nd Battalion, 8th Cavalry (Airmobile), 1st Cavalry Division
Role	Squad leader (per family account)
Arrived RVN	20 September 1965
Wounded	21 March 1966 — Operation Jim Bowie, Binh Dinh Province
Died of wounds	14 May 1966 — Fort Campbell, Christian County, Kentucky (age 29)
Buried	Fort Donelson National Cemetery, Dover, Stewart County, Tennessee
Vietnam Memorial	The Wall — Panel 7E, Line 59

Before Vietnam. By his family's account, Paul trained as an Airborne paratrooper with the 101st Airborne Division, then joined the 11th Air Assault Division — the test unit that became the 1st Cavalry Division (Airmobile) — and deployed with it in 1965. The cover photograph, in jump gear with the Screaming Eagle patch, is from that earlier Airborne service.

2 His wounding — reconciling the accounts

This is the part of Paul's story families most want squared away, and the records can be reconciled.

The official record codes his 21 March 1966 wounding as *hostile*, with multiple fragmentation wounds.

The account passed down (from a soldier who served under him, relayed by the family in 2025) describes an *accidental detonation while he was setting a trap*, which also set off the smoke grenades he was carrying.

Primary sources support the family's account and reconcile the two. Operation Jim Bowie was a trap-and-booby-trap fight, not a firefight:

- The official **MACV daily communiqué of 21 March 1966** — the very day he was wounded — reports the operation had had “no significant contact in the nine days of searching,” with friendly casualties “the majority of them sustained from punji sticks.”
- The operation’s overall casualties were **3 killed but 377 wounded**, the majority from punji-stake booby traps.

In other words, on the day Paul was hit there was no battle underway, and the wounds the operation was producing were overwhelmingly from traps and explosive devices — exactly the kind of event the family describes. He was evacuated to Japan and then to Fort Campbell, Kentucky, where he died of infection from his wounds on 14 May 1966.

3 Operational arc — what his unit did during his tour

These are the named operations 2/8 Cavalry conducted while Paul was with the unit. This is unit-level context — it shows where the battalion was and what it was doing, not a claim about his personal movements on a given day.

Deployment to Vietnam — Jul–Sep 1965

The 1st Cavalry Division stood up and shipped to An Khe (Camp Radcliff). Paul arrived 20 Sep 1965.

Pleiku Campaign / Operation All the Way — 27 Oct – 9 Nov 1965

1st Brigade pursuit of PAVN regiments after the Plei Me siege. D Company lost three men at Hill 732 on 4 Nov 1965 (see ‘the men around him’).

Operation Masher / White Wing — 25 Jan – 6 Mar 1966

The Bong Son campaign in Binh Dinh. 2/8 Cav swept the Kim Son and Suoi Ca valleys; on 3 Mar the battalion found a hut used to manufacture booby traps — one sign of how trap-heavy this ground was.

Operation Jim Bowie — 7–28 Mar 1966

Search-and-destroy in the Kim Son valley complex. **Paul was wounded on 21 March 1966 during this operation.**

(Operation Lincoln followed in late March near Pleiku, but Paul had already been wounded and evacuated, so it is not part of his personal arc.)

4 Where he likely was — firebases & landing zones

These are positions 2/8 Cavalry occupied within Paul's service window, drawn from a firebase gazetteer keyed to unit and date. They are grouped into **three confidence tiers**, strongest first; within each tier they run in date order. **If you have a photograph of Paul on a firebase, start at the top.**

TIER 1 — Confirmed: D Company is named here

Records place **D Company specifically** at these positions during his service:

Position	Date	Operation	Grid	Unit noted
LZ Sue	11 Jan 1966	Op Matador	YA648481	HHT, B, and D/2-8 Cav
LZ Rene	4 Mar 1966	Op Black Horse	BR938958	D/2-8 Cav air assault
FB Phoenix City	13 Mar 1966	Op Jim Bowie	BR629820	B and D/2-8 Cav

*Anchor: **FB Phoenix City** is the place to look first — D Company held it on 13 March, just eight days before Paul was wounded, in the very operation in which he was hit.*

TIER 2 — Probable: his battalion operated here (other companies named)

D Company was in the same area and operation, but these specific rows name A, B, or C Company rather than D. Likely places he passed through:

Position	Date	Operation	Grid	Unit noted
LZ Barb / LZ Mary	11 Jan 1966	Op Matador	—	A, C/2-8 Cav
FB Pam / LZ Con	13 Jan 1966	Op Matador	—	HHT, C, Recon/2-8 Cav
LZ Meg	14 Jan 1966	Op Matador	YA559543	C/2-8 Cav
LZ Joan	15 Jan 1966	Op Matador	YA583571	B, C/2-8 Cav
LZ Jane	16 Jan 1966	Op Matador	YA583590	C/2-8 Cav
LZ Bull's Eye / John N&S	1 Mar 1966	Op Black Horse	—	A, B, C/2-8 Cav
Ps Amy / Ps Kim	1 Mar 1966	Op Black Horse	—	A, C/2-8 Cav
LZ Ann / LZ Pat	4 Mar 1966	Op Black Horse	—	A, C/2-8 Cav
LZ Nail, Ps Drill/Saw/Pliers	13 Mar 1966	Op Jim Bowie	—	A, B, C/2-8 Cav
LZ Pick	15–17 Mar 1966	Op Jim Bowie	BR640828	A, C/2-8 Cav
FB Robin, LZ Peacock/Sparrow	18 Mar 1966	Op Jim Bowie	—	A, B/2-8 Cav
LZ Penguin/Quail/Finch /Wren	19 Mar 1966	Op Jim Bowie	—	A, Recon/2-8 Cav
LZ Eagle	20 Mar 1966	Op Jim Bowie	BR455973	C/2-8 Cav

TIER 3 — Possible: campaign context (battalion level only)

During the autumn-1965 Pleiku Campaign, 2/8 Cav held many positions in the Plei Me / Chu Pong area. These rows are battalion-level (no company breakdown), so they are context for the campaign Paul fought in rather than pinned locations. A representative set:

Position	Date	Operation	Grid	Unit noted
FB South	24 Oct 1965	Pleiku Campaign	ZA209123	A, C/2-8 Cav
FB Homecoming	25 Oct 1965	Siege of Plei Me	ZA217109	2-8 Cav
Ps Cherry	27 Oct 1965	Pleiku Campaign	ZA155038	2-8 Cav
LZ Cavalair	1 Nov 1965	Pleiku Campaign	YA975035	2-8 Cav CP

FB Falcon	5 Nov 1965	Pleiku Campaign	ZA021031	2-8 Cav CP
LZ Wing	6 Nov 1965	Pleiku Campaign	ZA032058	B, C/2-8 Cav (heavy fighting nearby)

5 The men around him

Soldiers documented in D Company, 2/8 Cav during Paul's tour — people he served alongside and who may connect you to others:

SGT Richard A. Coffey — D Co — killed in action at Hill 732, 4 Nov 1965 (Pleiku Campaign).

PFC Wright B. Hamill — D Co — killed in action at Hill 732, 4 Nov 1965.

CPL Eddie Hill, Jr. — D Co — killed in action at Hill 732, 4 Nov 1965.

SP4 David 'Doc' Wilson — D Co medic — in-country with the company through the Pleiku Campaign and the Hill 732 action; left a first-person account of that fight.

His commanding officer. The name of the 2/8 Cavalry battalion commander during Paul's window (Sep 1965 – Mar 1966) is not yet established — it is not in the operational reports gathered so far. (The known names bracket his tour: LTC Thomas Tackaberry in early 1967, LTC John Stannard by Dec 1967.) See the leads section for how to recover it.

6 What the archive holds on Paul

Photographs (3) — all courtesy of David Malec: the 101st Airborne jump-gear portrait, a field portrait, and a jeep photograph with fellow troopers (the man believed to be Paul is, by the family's best guess, the trooper at far left — not certain).

His profile page — identity, a service timeline, decorations, and external links (VVMF Wall of Faces, Honor States, the Virtual Wall, Find A Grave).

Event pages covering his tour — the Deployment, the Pleiku Campaign / Operation All the Way (and the Hill 732 losses), Operation Masher/White Wing, and Operation Jim Bowie.

Primary-source documents filed with those events — the MACV communiqué of 21 March 1966; the Masher/White Wing after-action reports; the Bong Son Campaign lessons-learned study; a 2/8 Cav battalion after-action report (Nov 1965); and the Vietnam Helicopter Pilots Association record for Jim Bowie.

7 Leads for your own research

Honest gaps — and exactly where to look to close them:

His Individual Deceased Personnel File (IDPF). Request from the National Archives (NARA). For a died-of-wounds case this file usually contains the casualty circumstances — it is the document most likely to settle, in official terms, how he was wounded on 21 March.

The 2/8 Cavalry daily staff journal & battalion after-action reports. NARA, Record Group 472. This would pin his specific company and the 21 March action, and the report signature blocks would finally name the battalion commander.

The Operation Jim Bowie Combat After Action Report. Formerly DTIC AD0829472 (now offline); held at NARA RG 472 and the Donovan Research Library, Fort Benning.

The 2/8 Cav battalion commander's name. Try the B Company, 2/8 Cav Valorous Unit Award General Order (1966) — unit-award orders name the commander — and valor citations for 2/8 recipients, Oct 1965 – Mar 1966.

His company & platoon within D Company. Currently unknown; the battalion journal or fellow veterans would establish it.

Connect with the units' veterans. The 1st Cavalry Division Association and the 2nd Battalion, 8th Cavalry ('Stallions'/'Mustangs') association — the best route to anyone who knew him.

Add to his public memorials. His photographs and your family's account can be added to the VVMF 'Wall of Faces' page and Find A Grave, so others researching him find them.

Sources behind this aid

MACV Communiqué #080-66, 21 Mar 1966 (Texas Tech Virtual Vietnam Archive, item 2130619006) • 1st Cav Division Combat Operations After Action Reports for Masher/White Wing (25 Jan & 28 Apr 1966) • The Battle of Annihilation & The Bong Son Campaign, Lessons Learned (1 Apr 1966) • 2nd Bn, 8th Cav After Action Report, 9–10 Nov 1965 • VHPA battle record for Operation Jim Bowie • 2/8 Cav firebase-by-year gazetteer • the family's account via David Malec (1st Cavalry Division Veterans, 27 Jul 2025). Confirmed-vs-circumstantial labeling follows the archive's coverage conventions.

Prepared by the d281staircav archive — a research project on the men of D Company, 2nd Battalion, 8th Cavalry. This document is a research aid, not an official military record. June 2026.