

Kenneth Beryl Berry—everyone called him K.B.—quarterbacked the Nowata Ironmen from the 1961 football season through 1963 season and did the same as point guard for his basketball teams. He started as a sophomore (freshmen were not eligible in those days). K.B. wasn't tall yet he stood taller than anyone. "He was," as best-friend Bucky Buck liked put it, "our little leader." On a sophomore-laden '61 team, that learned to play against larger, more-experienced teams, everyone followed him, even the juniors and few seniors.

As in storybooks, teammates voted him captain and classmates looked up to him. He began college at Northeastern State University, receiving a Harmon Grant, but was lost without football and volunteered for the war-time draft. His mother, Jewel marched down the draft board to ask that it not take K.B. since the family had lost brother Warren in an auto accident.

Though he had a foreboding premonition of Vietnam, K.B. told his mother that he couldn't seek conscientious-objector status that led someone else fighting in his place. It surprised no one that he led a squad in Troop B, 3rd Squadron, 17th Air Cavalry. When he and his squad in a helicopter flew into a battle zone on January 6, 1968, when K.B. was struck by enemy fire as he sat in an open chopper doorway opposite the gunner to lay down gunfire. The dark sky opened as if crying the day of K.B.'s memorial service in the Nowata High School gymnasium. The crowd of mourners was described as the largest (1,100) in Nowata history.

Douglas Merle Buck—everyone called him Bucky—also captained the Ironman football team as a senior and his mother, Bonnie Lee, made a habit of preparing a pre-game meal for him and K.B. on Friday nights. That was one reason, but hardly the only one, that in their senior yearbook the answer to one of those common personalizing questions "Usually Seen?" was "At Bucky's." They had considered continuing their football careers together at Fort Scott Community College where each had received a scholarship offer, but K.B. followed his parents' advice and accepted a more substantial four-year Harmon Grant. That changed so much.

"K.B. had wanted to follow me to Fort Scott . . .," said older brother Chuck, star running back. "I had the impression that he was not ready emotionally for college, and without sports for an identity, he was not doing well." Thus, the army. Bucky and, Charles Dugger, another teammate, attempted to convince K.B. to volunteer, as they had, for the Navy and Air Force, respectively. North Vietnam had a navy but the Vietnamese prevailed on land, not at sea, and Bucky returned safely home. K.B. refused the longer but safer Navy or Air Force enlistments. "I'm only going to give them two years, not four." Instead, he gave everything.

After playing linebacker at Fort Scott, Bucky passed on a football scholarship to the University of Miami and chose Northeastern State University in Tahlequah. Bucky knew himself. "Too far away for a poor boy." He graduated with a degree in business administration. Drawn to the outdoors, his can-do attitude blossomed into a pipeline welder throughout the country. He was good, fast, and strong, as he had been on the football field, but his health deteriorated following the celebration of the fiftieth anniversary of the Class of 64's graduation. Bucky helped fill in gaps for author Steve Love's missing 2 ½ Nowata years, for *Football, Fast Friends, and Small Towns: A Memoir Straight from a Broken Oklahoma Heart*. Bucky said not to worry about him not being around for the 2020 publication (he died May 8, 2018). He would finally be with K.B. again.