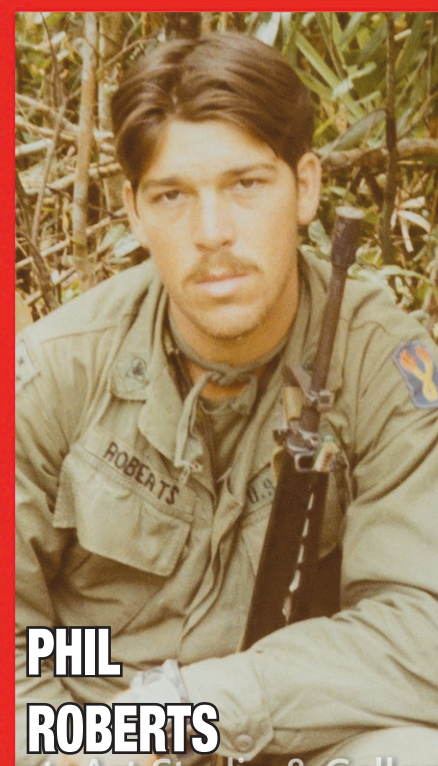




# A Salute to White County Veterans

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# VETERAN SPOTLIGHT: BOB CARLSEN

**RACHEL AUBERGER**

Staff Writer

For Bob Carlsen, a Lieutenant Colonel who served the United States Air Force for 28 years, his service time during the Vietnam War was fulfilling, so much so that he volunteered to serve an extra six months in the war-torn Asian country.



"My assignment was close-air-support and search and rescue," Carlsen said that he was assigned to an A-1 Skyraider and stationed at the Royal Thai Airforce Base, a base in Thailand that was being occupied by U.S. forces. "The mission was the most rewarding assignment a pilot could ever have - to rescue pilots who had been shot down by enemy forces. Of course, I was flying the most phenomenal aircraft too."

Carlsen, who firmly believes that every citizen should find the opportunity to serve their country in some way - whether it be through efforts in their local community or on a higher state or national level, almost missed out on the opportunity to fly those missions and help his fellow airmen.

"I actually entered college in pre-med chemistry," he said that his plans to join the military didn't develop until his junior year. "Before my senior year, I transferred to another college and changed my major to psychology as my career plans had changed. I just wanted to graduate as soon as

possible and enter the United States air force."

Before graduation, Carlsen had decided he wanted to apply for the air force's officer school and subsequent pilot training but was still waiting for the results of his application on graduation day.

"Primarily for me it was a fascination with aviation. I grew up on military bases and living all around the world," Carlsen, whose father worked as a civilian for the military, had grown up watching airplanes fly in and out of bases in France, Germany, Tokyo, and Guam. "I made up my mind by college that that's what I wanted to do but took a few years to develop those plans."

Eventually, he got that acceptance letter he was waiting for, and Carlsen was granted a slot in officer training school in November 1969 followed by a slot in pilot training in February 1970.

"The Pilot Training was a 53-233k course and was extremely difficult," Carlsen, who was sworn into the air force as a 2nd Lieutenant, right before the training began said. "I found it a lot harder than college or anything I had ever encountered."

While flying as a search and rescue pilot was rewarding for Carlsen, it wasn't the only service he gave to the United States Air Force. After spending 17 months overseas, from July 1971 through December 1972, Carlsen became an instructor pilot where he trained pilots for both the US and German air forces at Shepherd Airforce base in Texas for the next four years.

Before he resigned his commission as a captain in the regular air force, Carlsen served as an A10 Wing Safety officer at Mellis Airforce Base in Las Vegas.

"The A10 was a brand new plane that had entered the service to take over the search and rescue and close-support that the A1 had flown in Aisa," he explained that he was commissioned to look into the safety of the new plane and really enjoyed getting to fly the new model. "The A10 is still an active plane in the U.S. military's inventory and is considered the primary plane for search and rescue today. It is really an honor to be a special part of something so

important."

In 1979, Carlsen left the active Air Force and was sworn into the Reserves where he finished his military career as an Air Force Academy Liaison Officer.

While in the Air Force Reserves, Carlsen didn't give up his love for flying. Instead he took to the skies as a civilian, first flying scenic routes over the Grand Canyon and transporting skiers to Idaho and then as one of

"Ideally, I think it would be good if everyone in the country donates some of their life to something that helps the country," Carlsen said that there are a lot of options in the military for young people who want to serve, including a pilot shortage that would provide what he claims is a fascinating career for anyone with an aptitude for flying, but he also said that service doesn't have to come in the form of military. "Government



the first pilots hired by United Parcel Services (UPS) when the company started their own freight airline.

Carlsen, who now lives in Tennessee along with his wife, still believes that serving their country is the duty of every citizen.

Embassies, Wildlife Preserve, Parks and Recreation, Local governments and organizations - whether it is military or civilian doesn't matter, everyone should contribute some part of their life to making their country better."

# SUTCLIFFE RECEIVES POW MEDAL

**RACHEL AUBERGER**

Staff Writer

On Oct. 23, approximately 76 years after his release, Jim Sutcliffe was awarded his POW Medal of Honor during a small ceremony as he was surrounded by family members and friends.

Sutcliffe, who was born in Michigan and moved to his wife's native Tennessee after he retired, was drafted into the U.S. Army, in 1943, during World War II. He was one of several of the 105 students from his high school class that would serve during the war and one of three of that same class to be taken as Prisoners of War by the German Army.

In July 1944, six weeks after D-Day, Sutcliffe landed in the middle of the war. He missed being part of D-Day because of a severe cold he had developed during infantry training, which resulted in a stay at the hospital. Because of this health issue, Sutcliffe had to restart his 17-week training

Over the next two and a half months, Sutcliffe fought for his life and the lives of his fellow soldiers and the lives and freedoms of all Americans. He saw death all around him on a daily basis and has stories of being under fire and of long days and longer nights. He has stories of narrow misses that, had the smallest details been changed, could have cost him his life.

"War is hell," Sutcliffe said about the things he saw and experienced in those months he spent in battle.

September 1944, Sutcliffe's unit was under siege and eventually taken captive. Loaded into box cars on a train, with about 40 soldiers to a car, Sutcliffe and his fellow soldiers were transported to Bavaria where they would be held until the end of the war, 12 months later.

Sutcliffe's wife, whom he had married after being drafted but before leaving for infantry

training, and his parents were informed that he was missing in action via a telegram. It wasn't until he had been missing for 63 days that they were updated and learned he was alive and an official Prisoner of War.

During the next 12 months, Sutcliffe endured harsh conditions that included overcrowded barracks, little food, work details, and air raids.

"One technique I used to keep from getting depressed was to constantly dream of and make plans for the house I was going to build for my wife, Ola, once I returned home," Sutcliffe said. "This helped me to keep the mindset that I was going to return home and see my family again."

And eventually build that house he did. Sutcliffe was rescued and returned home at the end of the war, having spent all but those first two months of his deployment as a Prisoner of War. He recalled the trip home was much longer than the trip over, taking three weeks versus three days.

"As we sailed into New York harbor and back into a land free of war, I saw the Statue of Liberty looking out towards the ocean and told my comrades, 'If She ever wants to see me again, She'll have to turn around,'" Sutcliffe said.

Sutcliffe's story, one filled with fear and hope alike, was overlooked in the issuance of Prisoner of War Medals, until recently when a friend of his family contacted U.S. Senator Marsha Blackburn.

Blackburn said her office was informed that when Sutcliffe's family found out he would be eligible for the POW Medal, they attempted to have him awarded, but met a dead end.

Blackburn, who attended the ceremony, said her staff immediately went to work to research Sutcliffe's service and status.



**SUTCLIFFE 4**



Jim Sutcliffe is pictured with his family and friends during a recently ceremony in which he was presented with his Prisoner of War Medal by U.S. Senator Marsha Blackburn.

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State Representative Paul Sherrell thanks Jim Sutcliffe for his service and congratulates him on receiving his long-overdue Prisoner of War Medal.

## SUTCLIFFE

CONTINUED FROM 3

"We are delighted to be here today," Blackburn said. "Our staff has worked with Mr. Sutcliffe's family to make this happen. We are just thrilled to have done our part."

Caroline Diaz-Barriga, a member of Blackburn's staff confirmed she had worked quickly to ensure that Sutcliffe would be awarded the medal he most certainly deserved.

"We sent the inquiry to awards and decorations and asked for rapid response, and we got it right away," Diaz-Barriga said. "Hon-

estly it was really quick."

So, 76 years after he had been released by the defeated German Army; after having built his dream home and raising his children and retiring and relocating to his wife's home state; after having written a memoir detailing his time in war; just a few months before his 100th birthday, Jim Sutcliffe, a corporal in the United States Army, proudly stood in the American Legion Post 99 building, on Liberty Square, in downtown Sparta, Tennessee, and received his Prisoner of War Medal.

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# HONAKER'S HOME FOR OUR TROOPS KICKOFF

**RACHEL AUBERGER**

Staff Writer

Lance Cpl. Kevin Honaker came home a wounded hero over seven years ago, but now he is coming home to stay. On Oct. 23, 2021, the community gathered on Liberty Square to welcome a man who lost both of his legs while defending his country.

"It's awesome. From the day I was injured, this community has always shown a ton of support, and they still do," Honaker said about the crowd who gathered on Liberty Square and chanted his name as his vehicle arrived, which was led by the Run for the Wall motorcycle riders and emergency vehicle. "I really appreciate it."

Honaker, who was wounded when he stepped on an IED (Improvised Explosive Device) during a routine patrol in Afghanistan, has been living in Atlanta where he operates a lighting company. His home in Atlanta, however, keeps him on his prosthetics, and the hallways aren't wide enough to give him a chance to use his wheelchair at home.

Homes For Our Troops specializes in finding builders who will construct homes that meets the needs of wounded post-9/11 veterans so they can live their lives fully and comfortably. The program will be providing Honaker with a home that has wider hallways, lowered appliances, a roll-in shower, and other amenities to make his home a place where he can be comfortable.

"They reached out to me while I was in the hospital and have called me every four months for about seven years now," Honaker said;

Homes For Our Troops, which provides homes at no cost to the veterans they are serving, wanted him to know they were there for him when the time came that he was ready for his forever home.

"They were just waiting until I knew where I wanted to build and stay," Honaker said.

For Honaker, the "where" was never a question, just the timing. Honaker has been running a lighting rental company, in Atlanta, with a friend who he says will stay in Georgia while he [Honaker] makes his home in Sparta and offers wired electrical services to White County and the surrounding area.

"I've always loved this community," Honaker said of his hometown of Sparta. "I was born and raised here, and this is where I want to stay forever."

And from the outpouring of support and the crowd that gathered to celebrate his Home For Our Troops kickoff, it would



appear the community would like Honaker to stay here forever, too. In addition to cheering and waving as he approached the square and entered Christpoint Church, where the celebration was being hosted, the crowd signed lumber that would be used in the building of Honaker's home. They gathered and listened to all of the great things that are being provided for veterans by the Homes For Our Troops organization. Senator Marsha Blackburn presented Honaker with a flag that has flown over the U.S. Capitol, listened to the way the home changed the life of a previous recipient, and listened to Honaker's story itself.

Once the building process gets underway, there will be a Volunteer Day for the community to help with Honaker's home. After the home is completed, there will be a Key Ceremony in which Lance Cpl. Kevin Honaker and his fiancée, Rachel Payne, are given the keys to their new home.

"It's going to be awesome. It's set up for everything I need in life," Honaker said of both his new home. "This is it. I don't need anything else."





  
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# VETERAN SPOTLIGHT: PHIL ROBERTS

RACHEL AUBERGER

Staff Writer

While service in the U.S. Military is often thought to mature a person quickly, and the young men who were sent to serve the country during the Vietnam War are often said to have had to grow up fast with some hard lessons as their teachers, Phil Roberts says he has no regrets about going to war for his country.

"The people my age - and most of them were - we didn't know a lot about the world yet, but military service matures you pretty quick," Roberts said. "But I've always told people - I never regret going to Vietnam. I had some good times. I had some good experiences, saw some strange animals, and had stories to tell when I came home."

While he focuses on the positives, Roberts doesn't have any disillusionment about why he was there and the job he was there to do.

"We were in the bush a lot. Most of the time we were out for 30 days and then we would come back for three and then go right back out," he recalled, but added that his previous outdoor experiences, growing up in a family that spent a lot of time hunting, hiking, and fishing, helped him adjust easier than some. "Most of it was really grueling,"

Roberts's ability to come home with no regrets about having served in Vietnam is something to be commended since he earned his Combat Infantryman's Badge the moment he stepped foot on the ground in eastern Asia.

"As we were landing, we were taking rocket fire and had to rush for cover the minute we landed," he explained that the Combat Infantryman's Badge is awarded to those servicemen who have been fired on by the enemy. "The plane behind us - I could see it as we were landing - had to divert out of there and go back to Thailand."

That wasn't the only award Roberts would earn while he was in Vietnam, however. Just a month later, he earned a Purple Heart having been shot twice by opposing forces.

"We were light infantry with no mortar, no machine guns, no backup. Just small platoons of three to five



men," he explained. "We were on a patrol, and I was right at the very edge of the village. They were on the side of the hill, and they opened rounds. They opened up on me with automatic weapons."

That patrol earned Roberts two weeks in the hospital, but not a trip back home. Roberts stayed in Vietnam for close to a year, and halfway through that year, at just 20 years old, Roberts was put in charge of his own squad.

"About six months after I first landed on the ground in Vietnam, they field promoted me to an Acting Jack," Roberts said that he promoted to an E-5 Sergeant grade in the field, but my paperwork still showed him at an E-4 level for some time. "I enlisted in the army at eighteen and a half years old, was nineteen when I hit the ground, and now I was in charge of a squad at just 20 years old. Military sure matures you quick."

Roberts thinks he was target early as having potential for leadership.

"I joined the army in February 1971. The draft was going on, and my number was low, and so was my best friend's. But they had a buddy system where you could enlist together

and would be guaranteed to go to Basic Training with your friend, so we volunteered for that. We figured we would probably be drafted anyway," he said.

"I guess they saw something in me," Roberts said about his time in Fort Polk, Louisiana. "Not sure how I got chosen for Advanced Infantry Training, but then while I was in that, I guess they saw something in me again and they sent me to an advanced leadership preparation course."

Roberts had one more training session, Jungle Warfare, when he landed in the Vietnamese jungle in July 1971.

When Roberts's time in the military was winding down, he left active duty the same way he started: by volunteering.

"I got out of the military active duty about three months early. They were anxious to reduce the size of the military, so they gave a 'work out,'" he explained. "If you had a paper signed by an employer with a legitimate job and description and official signature, they would let you out so you could go to work."

Roberts had committed to being

a member of the United States Army for a designated length of time, however, so he continued as a serviceman in a reserve unit.

"I remember that I had to go to Wisconsin and 'train' for two weeks," Roberts, who is originally from Illinois and had returned to his hometown to find work, said. "It was the stupidest thing I had ever heard of. I had just left combat. What were they going to 'train' me for that I hadn't already experienced."

For Roberts, who came home from war and got a job and married the girlfriend he left behind and created a life that includes two children and three grandchildren and a slower retirement having moved to Sparta, Tennessee, Vietnam was just a year of experiences - a year in which he took many pictures to document.

"I really wasn't depressed about it. I don't regret one minute being over there," he said, but acknowledged that many soldiers who spent their time in Vietnam don't get to be in the position he is in today. "I can say that because I came home. I know that I am one of the lucky ones. I am very thankful for that."





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Phil Roberts

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