

Honoring those who served:

Brown...

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(Editor's Note: The following feature is the first in a series of profiles that will honor the Vietnam War era veterans from Tonkawa. The bulk of the work and research was completed by Mike Schatz and Ginger Hunter.)

Bobby Brown Honoring Those Who Served in the Vietnam Conflict

I graduated from Tonkawa High School in 1965. I went to college at Northern Oklahoma Junior College my first year out of high school. I took 14 hours of college credit that first semester and 16 hours in the spring semester. During that time our nation was engaged in a police action in southeast Asia in a little known country called "Vietnam" and most men 18 years of age and older were eligible (if you didn't have some kind of deferment) to be drafted into armed forces. To be eligible for a college deferment a person had to take at least 15 hours of college credit each semester. During that spring of 1966 I was going to college and having a great time when one day I got a letter from the draft board which stated that my draft status had been changed from 11S (college deferred) to 1A (eligible to be drafted). I went into panic mode. I immediately went to my friend and former coach, Clane Kirtley, who was my councilor at Northern and he shot off a letter to the draft board explaining my situation and asking that my draft status be changed back to 11S. Well, days turned into weeks and then months without hearing from the draft board.

Before I get too far into this, let me give you a little background information. I was raised on a farm north of Tonkawa. My parents were Roy and Irene Brown, and I have one sister Mary Cook (husband Barry). I went to Catholic kindergarten in Tonkawa and then spent my next 8 years of school at Union District 61 which is 5 miles north of Tonkawa on Hubbard road. There were 6 kids in my class at Union and we stayed together practically the entire 8 years. I had a best friend in that class we are still friends to this day, Johnny Hauf. When we

Bobby Brown

graduated from the 8th grade all of my classmates went to Blackwell High School except me, I went to Tonkawa. Johnny and I stayed in touch during our high school years and then after high school I went to college and Johnny went to work and so he got a 1A draft status. After my draft status was changed and I didn't hear back from the draft board after Clane's letter, Johnny and I got to talking and decided to join either the Marines or the Army. Back then you and a friend could join the service and were guaranteed to get to stay together through your first several months of training and so that's what Johnny and I decided to do. Either the Marines or the Army was our big decision. It was a hard decision, but finally, after a lot of deliberation, we decided to join the army airborne. We would be paratroopers and jump out of airplanes. We were off on what two nineteen year old kids thought would be a great adventure.

Our first 8 weeks of training was spent in the desert at Fort Bliss, Texas near El Paso. It was very dusty and hot when we first got there in early September but we needed our field jackets by the time basic training ended in November.

Our next duty assignment was in Fort Gordon, Georgia for Advanced Infantry Training (AIT). We were billeted in old army barracks with linoleum floors which were very cold at 4 in the morning and most of the time. There was some kind of disease going through the Army at that time and the windows had to stay open 6 inches so that we got plenty of fresh air. If you have ever been in Georgia in the winter the air is very moist and 50 degrees can feel like 30 degrees.

After 16 weeks of training, Johnny and I arrived at Jump School in Fort Benning, Georgia. One of the things that I remember was that during our orientation, we were told that the non-commissioned officers who would be instructing us were not only our instructors but we could also think of them as our den mothers. Finally, after 3 weeks of airborne training we graduated and were officially paratroopers, and we never did get any cookies from those instructors.



BOBBY BROWN

After Fort Benning, Johnny and I went in different directions, he to Fort Bragg and I went to Fort Campbell Kentucky. I became a member of 101st Airborne Division. I was assigned to C Company 1st Battalion 501st airborne infantry as a member of the mortar platoon where I trained on 81mm mortars. I had two memorable experiences during my time at Fort Campbell. The first was being deployed to Detroit to help quell the racial riots and we were also put on alert to go to Israel during their 7 day war of 1967. In August we were told that the 2nd and 3rd brigades of the division would be going to Vietnam in December. The 1st brigade had been in Vietnam since 1965.

Most of the members of the 2nd and 3rd Brigades had been to Vietnam and so these men transferred to other stateside units and were replaced by young, fresh recruits or draftees. When I had first transferred into C Company, the First Sergeant had asked me if I could type. I told him that I had typed 60 words per minute in high school and yes I could type. That short exchange probably saved my life (thank you Mrs. Garner) because our company clerk had already been to Vietnam and transferred and the First Sergeant, remembering that conversation, assigned me as the company clerk.

On the 13th of December we flew into Bien Hoa airbase, near Saigon, and from there we were deployed to Cu Chi, the home base of the 25th Infantry Division, where we were in training until the end of January, 1968. We then flew north to Phu Bai which was in the I Corps area, which bordered North Vietnam.

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Our first night in Phu Bai, was spent in an open area between the airport and a large marine base about 1/2 mile from where we were. We set up our tents and Sgt. Daniels who was in charge of our little group instructed us to dig a bunker which ended up being about 2 foot wide and perhaps 25 foot long and 3 foot deep before darkness put a halt to our project. That night the infamous TET offensive of 1968 began. Rockets and mortar shells rained down on us all night and our little trench became a very popular spot as no one else in the other battalion groups had bothered to begin anything for self-defense. That night the enemy blew up our mess tent which was about 40 yards from where we were.

We spent most of February in Phu Bai, and then in March we moved north and established LZ Sally which was several miles north of the old imperial capital of Vietnam, Hue. LZ Sally was established on an old railroad track and about 1/2 mile from highway 1 which ran from one end of South Vietnam to the other along the coast. We had a MASH (Mobile Army Surgical Hospital) unit on LZ Sally and this is how they built their hospital. Bull dozers dug a trench about 20 feet wide by 12 feet deep by 30 yards long. The engineers then laid rails from the old railroad track across the top, then they laid corrugated landing strip material over the rails and then sand bags on top of that. Each end was sloped downwards so you could enter there. There were several operating tables, and it was possible to walk up behind the surgeons and watch them work.

1968 was a very bloody year in Vietnam. In April of that year, in my company alone, we lost 120 men, 99 wounded and 21 killed, which was basically the entire company as we were always quite a few men short of full strength; full strength of an infantry company at that time being 156 men; 6 officers and 150 enlisted men.

As my one year in country approached at the end of 1968, I decided to extend my tour of duty for 6 months as I really wasn't looking forward to spending another 9 months of stateside duty in the Army, with all the spit and polish that it involved.

Toward the end of my 6 month extension, the 101st was assigned to reinforce the American Division which had bases located in the mountains west of Da Nang. So we got on helicopters and flew into a little base about the size of a football field called LZ Professional. It was located on a mountain top with higher mountains to our rear at the end of a long valley. The valley was a major infiltration route into the south for the North Vietnamese. One of the things I remember about being there was sitting on one of the bunkers at night and watching "puff the magic dragon" bringing fire down on the enemy in the valley below. Puff was a C-130 aircraft that had mini-guns in each of its windows which fired simultaneously out of one side or the other as the aircraft banked, with each 5th round from each gun being a tracer round, so it appeared to be a wall of fire coming from the aircraft as you watched it. Believe me it brought terrible fear to the enemy being targeted. Another thing I remember was that we were being actually see the smoke from their mortars coming out of the jungle as the enemy fired. An airstrike was called in and these fighter jets came swooping in and dropped napalm on their location. I remember thinking how pretty it was, the two fighter jets and the orange of the napalm against the green background of the jungle on the mountain side. I spent about a month there before I decided that it was time to see about finding a way to get back home to Oklahoma. At that time the Army had a regulation which said that if a soldier had a month or less left on his tour of duty and he was needed at home that he could get out. Harvest was at hand in Oklahoma and so my dad had Bobby Colombe write a letter stating that I was needed. I got the letter and sent it through Army channels and it came back rejected. I went to the battalion executive officer and finally talked him into letting me hand carry it to Bien Hoa, which was our divisional headquarters. I took a helicopter to Da Nang, hitch hiked on a naval LST from Da Nang to Hue, and then caught a ride on an army truck from Hue to LZ Sally. From there a friend of mine took me to the Phu Bai airport where I caught a ride on a C-130 to Bien Hoa. During that flight, the pilot came on the loud speaker and said that he is having trouble with 2 of the engines and was shutting them down. A little later he came back and said he's shutting down a third engine, "but don't worry" he says, this plane will fly just fine on one engine. Anyway, I finally got to Bien Hoa, and found the captain in the AG office who approves or rejects requests like mine and lo and behold, out of the 500,000 men in Vietnam, he went to school at OU, went to school with someone from Tonkawa (I think it might have been one of the McCarters, but my memory fails me a little on this) and would be glad to sign my request. Praise The Lord!. Four days later I was on a flight from San Francisco to Oklahoma City.

Honoring those who served:

Claudie Cochran

(Editor's Note: The following feature is the second in a series of profiles that will honor the Vietnam War era veterans from Tonkawa. The bulk of the work and research was completed by Mike Schatz and Ginger Hunter.)

Claudie Cochran Honoring Those Who Served in the Vietnam Conflict

Claudie Cochran was a "lif-er". He spent eighteen years as a Combat Engineer and over 10 as a Unit Supply specialist in the Army. Some of those years he served in Vietnam. Cochran went into the Army at Fort Hood, Texas. He received orders for Vietnam while stationed at Ft. Belvoir, Virginia and given 14 days to clear his post and settle his wife and son in Oklahoma. It was December 1965, and he managed an early Christmas before flying to Oakland, California to ship out for Vietnam. He arrived in Saigon on December 24, and spent Christmas Day processing and getting his assignment. Cochran then flew to An Khe, Vietnam and became a member of company C 8th Engineering, 1st Cavalry Division. Following is a letter Cochran wrote to Mike Schatz summarizing his time in Vietnam.

"I was injured on my first operation and sent to a hospital

in the Phu Cat area. I went to Camp Drake in Japan and then to Tonkawa on emergency leave for a death in the family. After leave, I went back to Japan for my return to Vietnam. My next operation was Dak To airfield. We maintained the airfield and swept the dirt road for mines. My squad had to go to an undisclosed location to a chopper crash for body retrieval and aircraft destruction. Happily, both pilots were still alive; but we destroyed the chopper with demolition.

The rest of the time I was in "Nam", we blew away trees, rocks and stumps for landing zones of all kinds and provided direct infantry support during marches. Most locations were unknown to me because we went by chopper, and it was just another jumping off place for us. Everything was our job, and we did it. One time the infantry we were with decided to build a raft to get across the river. We offered to help build it, but they wouldn't listen to us. They built a very nice raft, launched it, and it promptly sank. They lifted it up and carried it out a little further and it sank again. After a few more tries, they gave up. We laughed, but not in front of them because we had to get along; they were our protection while we were in the field. They were nice guys, and we were in it together. We teased them back at camp, but in the field it has to be serious."



CLAUDIE COCHRAN

Cochran mustered out at Lampasas, Texas. He left the military with numerous medals. He earned the National Defense Service Medal, Army Commendation Medal, Republic of Vietnam Campaign Medal, Viet-

namese Cross of Gallantry with Palm (Unit), Purple Heart, Good Conduct Medal, clasp, Bronze, 5 Loops, Air Medal, and the Vietnam Service Medal with 3 Bronze Service Stars.

Honoring those who served:

Jerry Weeks

(Editor's Note: The following feature is the third in a series of profiles that will honor the Korean and Vietnam War era veterans from Tonkawa. The bulk of the work and research was completed by Mike Schatz and Ginger Hunter.)

Jerry Weeks **Honoring Those Who Served in the Korean Conflict**

When I was in school (not Washington, not Lincoln, but the Catholic grade school) and later Tonkawa High school, I remember going with friends to the National Guard Armory to play basketball, dodge ball, watch High school basketball games, and just 'explore'. We all knew the "soldier" who was in charge of the place, and he was always nice to us. We would see him as

he drove an Army jeep to either Mary's or Jack's cafe for coffee in the morning, and on a rare occasion he would give us a ride in a "real" Army jeep. That was so cool! He was 1st Sgt. Jerry Dean Weeks, a Korean War Veteran.

Along with friends, Weeks joined the Tonkawa National Guard 45th Field Artillery Division while still in school at THS. Because of the Korean War, Weeks' guard unit was activated. By September, 1950 they were in Ft. Polk, Louisiana getting ready to ship out to Korea, where they functioned as support personnel. When the men returned, they were given partial high school credit for time served and finished their senior year. Weeks graduated in 1953, and while attending Northern Oklahoma Junior College, he accepted the position of Administrative Supply Technician and was later made 1st Sgt. for the

Oklahoma National Guard Unit in Tonkawa, a position he held until his death in 1969.

The Tonkawa guard unit was a Service Battery and Firing Battery for the 1/189 Field artillery. Under "Sarg's" leadership, the Battery received eight superior ratings from the annual AAIG inspections. Few Batteries can claim that achievement. Weeks was also a recruiter. Clane Kirtley and Weeks recruited over half of the NOC football team into the unit during a summer recruitment drive one year

Active in community affairs, Weeks was a member of the first Christian Church, the American Legion, The Veterans of Foreign Wars, Chamber of Commerce, Tonkawa Fire Department, a past president of the Lions club, and Scoutmaster of local troop 27. He enjoyed his job and certainly had our respect. His career in the



military saw the end of the Korean War and the beginning of the Vietnam Conflict. Although his unit did not get called up a second time, he felt that it was pertinent that they be ready to support the regular military if called upon.

Mike Schatz...

My thanks to Lonnie Bray for his assistance with this article.

Honoring those who served:

John Lucas

(Editor's Note: The following feature is the fourth in a series of profiles that will honor the Vietnam War era veterans from Tonkawa. The bulk of the work and research was completed by Mike Schatz and Ginger Hunter.)

John Lucas Honoring Those Who Served in the Vietnam Conflict

I was born December 20, 1950 in Lawton, Oklahoma where my father was stationed in the Army but shortly thereafter the family moved back to my Dad's hometown of Tonkawa, Oklahoma.

I grew up on the family farm and went to school at Fountain school, three quarters of a mile east of our house. After graduating from the eighth grade I started attending school at Tonkawa High and graduated in 1969.

I had a fascination with flying and started taking lessons from Dewey Mauk at the airport just south of Blackwell across the road from the cemetery when I was fifteen years old. Neither of my parents knew anything about my flying as I would ride my motorcycle to Blackwell after school and take a lesson and then head on home. The day I soloed I couldn't keep it a secret anymore and had to tell my mom and dad about my great adventure and achievement of soloing. My mom thought my flying was the greatest thing she could imagine. My dad? Not so much. He had a fit, and never was supportive of my flying endeavors. He never forbid me though. Back then it cost me \$14.00 an hour for dual instruction and \$12.00 an hour (wet) with fuel) solo. I worked on the farm and made \$1.00 an hour so that is how I was able to

pay for my lessons.

I graduated high school and was somewhat of a rebel and wasn't living the life I should have. One day Pete Linton, who was the chief of police and a good friend of the family, called me into his office at the police station, sat me down and told me that if I didn't join the military that I, more than likely, would wind up in jail. I took him at his word and shortly thereafter went to talk to the Air Force recruiter in Ponca City. I wanted to fly so I thought the ideal thing for me to do would be to join the Air Force. They informed me that you had to have a degree to fly in the Air force but said that if I wanted to fly helicopters I could go down the hallway and speak to the Army recruiter, as you didn't have to have any special schooling to fly for them. So that is what I did. I signed up to become a Warrant Officer Avia-



JOHN LUCAS

tor.

That evening I told my mom and dad what I had done and that I was going to fly helicopters and my dad was just so proud of me. This was the same guy who never supported my flying before. My mom on the other hand cried.

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John Lucas flew helicopters while in Vietnam

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You see my dad was an old Army guy who fought in WW II and Korea and who was at that time back in the National Guards. He eventually retired from the military as a Captain. He loved the military life. A sentiment I never achieved.

I entered the Army in Oklahoma City AFEEES station on 18 July 1969 and was shipped out to Ft. Polk Louisiana the next day on a most memorable (not necessarily in a good way) adventure. My life was never the same again.

I did basic training in Ft. Polk and after a short leave I went to Ft. Wolters, Texas where I entered into primary Warrant Officer and Flight training. The Nam war was on and they were training thousands of pilots so it was very easy to wash out of the program and be busted back to 11 Bravo which was the infantry. This was something that nobody wanted to even think about, much less have happen to them. I graduated Primary training and went to Ft. Rucker Alabama to Advanced Flight training where we were introduced to the UH-1, Huey helicopter. The workhorse of Army Aviation. At Ft. Rucker we learned tactical maneuvers, formation and flying and got instrument training. There are a hundred stories I could tell about training down there but maybe some other time.

I married the love of my life while in flight training at Ft. Rucker. A marriage that due to the war in Nam and our young years did not last. I got divorced while I was stationed in Viet Nam. She just couldn't wait for me. But like I mentioned we were both young and foolish and I have forgiven her for everything.

After graduating and an all too short leave, I flew to California where I joined up with my flight school buddies and we got on a 727 for the flight to Saigon. We went to Anchorage Alaska first, then to Japan and then into Saigon. We left San Francisco about 1 p.m. and arrived in Viet Nam about 12 p.m. on the same date as when we left. We went through that many time zones and the flight was that long.

The first thing that hits you when you arrive in Nam is the smell. The sweet smell of napalm, along with the smell of gunpowder and papa son burning human feces. Everywhere there were American military there were outhouses with fifty five gallon drums that had been cut down to size under each hole. When the drums got full papa son would drag them out from under the outhouses and fill them with diesel and set them on fire. That was the accepted method of sanitation. Some of the outhouses were very impressive with up to twenty holes to accommodate a large number of soldiers. Not to glamorous, but was just an accepted way of life that you didn't give much thought to. You get hard when you are in a war zone.

When I first got to this country I was assigned to the Fourth Army stationed in An Khe where I flew with the "Blackjacks." An assault company. We did troop insertions, resupply, medevac and extractions. My hooch was about a block away from a 175 howitzer battery which fired on the enemy almost continuously. When they were firing over the hooch it would rattle the walls and the noise was tremendous but you got to where you didn't even notice them when you were asleep at night unless they quit firing for some reason. Then you had trouble sleeping. I want to add here that we had a cat in our company area. Something that was just never seen in Nam.

While flying with the Blackjacks things weren't too bad. We did come under fire some but not with any regularity. We would get an occasional rocket or mortar attack but nothing even close.

I was just with the Blackjacks for about four months when they stood down and the Fourth Army was sent back to the states. We anxiously awaited our orders for our new station, hoping and praying that we didn't get sent to I Corp where the fighting was really bad. Quite a few guys were sent down to the Delta and South but as fate

would have it I was sent to I Corp to a place called Camp Evans. It was located between Hue and Quang Tri. It may have been called Camp Evans but it was a far cry from any camp I had ever heard of. We lived in hootches made out of ammo boxes, divided into separate rooms, with tin roofs held down with sandbags because of typhoons, which I did experience while there. Everybody eventually bought a blue bladed fan to help stifle the heat.

Viet Nam is a beautiful country and very wild. It is mostly jungle with monkeys, parrots, ten foot lizards, and I even saw a tiger in the wild one day. It was a breathtakingly beautiful creature as orange as the Buccaneer flag. There were also cobras and other reptiles. Early in the mornings while flying over the jungles, the smell of the orchids was almost overwhelming. Even though we were caught up in a really bad situation, there was still many blessing to behold.

When I was sent to Camp Evans I was assigned to "A" company, 101st Airborne Division, the Ghostriders. I want to digress here and tell you that I had a brother, Chris, who was born a cowboy. I swear he had cowboy boots on the day he was born. Anyway his most favorite song was "Ghostriders in the Sky." Chris was killed in a car wreck when he was a senior in High School. He was two years older than me. And here I was flying with The Ghostriders. I believe there is more to this than coincidence.

The dread that I felt when I found I was assigned to a unit in I Corp was not unfounded. Things were truly tough up there and you felt almost that every day could be your last. I learned how to pray really, really fast that year. Our job was to insert troops into LZ's blown into triple canopy jungle, resupply and troop extractions. We had some other secret missions that took us to places we really didn't want to go. I always say I got the twenty five cent tour because I saw North Vietnam, South Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia. Most insertions drew some enemy fire although some times were way worse than others. It is not something that one can even begin to convey to another what all takes place when you are on short final to an LZ with both 60's in back rattling, Snakes (AHIG gunships) laying down mini gun fire, rockets or twenty mm on either side of you, the smoke, the vibrations, green tracers coming up at you, some the size of basketballs, (fifty mm) the radios cackling with guys reporting taking hits, touching down, picking up to a hover, bending it over and getting the hell out of there. Just to go back and load up again and come right back. War is hell, and something that no person should ever have to endure, but it is also needed sometimes.

Another smell that one can never forget is the sweet smell of death. I can't explain it but it is very real and very distinct.

I could go on and on with life stories of Nam but suffice it to say that it was a horrible thing to experience but I am not ashamed of my service to my country. You've never lived until you have almost died. For those who have fought for it, freedom holds a flavor the protected will never know.

The war in Viet Nam was winding down and we made one last major offensive into Laos called Lam Son 719. Most air units were dispatched to I Corp to participate in this offensive. Hundreds of helicopters, Artillery pieces, men, and tanks. This was a huge endeavor and a blood bath. We literally got our asses kicked during this time and it took a very heavy toll on all who participated.

Thankfully the Ghostriders never lost one pilot or crewmember to death all the time I was with them but I did have some friends really messed up. One being a pilot we call Ity Bitty who got his spine shot in two during Lam Son 719. The last time I saw Ity Bitty was



Huey lifting off



Ghostrider lineup, Haunted House

in the hospital in Quang Tri, laying on his belly, looking into a mirror angled on the floor so he could look you in the eye while talking to you. Making jokes about looking up the nurses dresses. I'll go on to tell you that Ity eventually was fitted with a back brace and went on to live a fulfilling life as an insurance salesman and a proud owner of his own aircraft. A Piper Cherokee 180. Now there was a true hero to me. We had others who sustained life threatening wounds but all survived.

The war was winding down and they decided they only wanted regular officers as pilots, so they offered an "early out" to the Warrant Officers. I was in Nam when they offered it to me so I had no trouble at all making up my mind to get out.

I caught that freedom bird and left Nam in September of '71 and flew to Ft. Lewis, Washington where I was honorably discharged.

I GRADUATED High School, went through basic training, went to officer flight school, went to Viet Nam and came home and still could not legally buy a beer or vote. Go figure.

Proud to have served.

Honoring those who served:

Melvin Osburn

(Editor's Note: The following feature is the fifth in a series of profiles that will honor the Vietnam War era veterans from Tonkawa. The bulk of the work and research was completed by Mike Schatz and Ginger Hunter.)

Melvin Osburn Honoring Those Who Served in the Vietnam Conflict

I was born in Enid, Oklahoma on November 2, 1949 to Charley and Eva Osburn, I was the second of five children: from oldest is June, Melvin, Yvonne, Sue and Jerry.

We moved to Tonkawa when I was five years old and I attended Washington Grade School and Tonkawa High School. I was in the graduating class of 1969 and married Sharla Armstrong of Blackwell on June 27, 1969. I got my draft notice in December of that year and was drafted in February of the following year. I went to Fort Polk, LA for basic training and had four weeks of advanced training; which included pole climbing, switchboard operations, and stringing

telephone wires.

After Fort Polk, I went to Ft. Gordon, GA for eight more weeks of advanced training at Southeast Signal School. I was trained on highly sophisticated communications systems. Before I left for Vietnam I had thirty days of leave then left from Tulsa in August of 1970. We landed in Oakland, CA and we were processed there for overseas duty. As we landed in Ben Wall the air base was hit by enemy fire, so we were diverted to Vongtou and was bused to Long Ben at the 40th Signal Battalion with the First Signal Brigade. When I arrived at the 40th Signal Battalion my job was originally going to be climbing telephone poles, but I don't like heights, and a supervisor told me about a position driving supplies trucks, so I volunteered for that instead. While driving I learned about the supply sergeant (E6). Word got out around Long Ben that sergeant Okie was able to get things done in supply and the General of the First Signal Brigade came to me on several occasions to get things done in a timely manner.

While serving 13 months in

Vietnam, I was awarded the Silver Star, Soldiers Medal, Bronze Star, Meritorious Service Medal, Army Accommodation Medal, Overseas Service Medal, Army Achievement Medal, Good Conduct Medal, National Defense Service Medal, Armed Forces Expeditionary Medal, U.S. Vietnam Service Medal, Armed Forces Reserve Medal and USAR Retired Service Medal.

When I came back from Vietnam in 1971 I started my family with Sharla. Our first son was born in 1973, we had a daughter in 1975 and another son in 1978. I reenlisted in the Army Reserves in 1973 and spent seven years in the personnel administrative battalion. In 1975 I went to Ft. Benjamin Harrison, IN to attend recruiting school and become a recruiter for the 381st. In 1980 I divorced Sharla and transferred into the 95th Infantry Division and was a recruiter there also.

I married Brenda Willis in 1981 and had two children, Michael and Sarah.

In 1988 I went back to Ft. Pike, LA to become a Senior Drill Ser-



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-geant for the 95th Infantry Division. I was discharged due to injuries sustained in 1996. After serving 26 years in the United States Army Reserves I retired as a Sergeant First Class. My education consisted of two semesters at the University of Maryland with a major in history. I graduated from NOC with an associate's degree in Industrial Arts.

I used my education to work for Smith International for 31 years as a machinist. I am now a life member of the Disabled American Veterans (DAV) Chapter 29 out of Oklahoma City and I am the Chaplin for both The Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) Post 1201 and The Vietnam Veterans of America (VVA) Chapter 750. The Men's Ministries Leader and a Trustee for the Tonkawa Assembly of God Church.

Honoring those who served:

Bill Burns

(Editor's Note: The following feature is the sixth in a series of profiles that will honor the Vietnam War era veterans from Tonkawa. The bulk of the work and research was completed by Mike Schatz and Ginger Hunter.)

Bill Burns

Honoring Those Who Served in the Vietnam Conflict

When asked what war he served in, Robert William Burns laughs and says, "I didn't fight in a war. I was never in combat," but he left the Army a Captain after serving as a butterfly catcher in South East Asia. "I was there, but I wasn't," he says. His team was not allowed American clothes, American supplies, or American anything. He couldn't write home; they had no way to contact family, no paper, pen, or pencil. For over a year, he wore Bermuda shorts and carried a butterfly net along with a knife and a pistol. He was a part of the Special Forces the government sent to Vietnam before the conflict was officially recognized in 1964. His team was "trained

to live off the land", so they ate roots and berries, carried some with them, and drank from the streams. For entertainment, they watched cobras slither, sometimes in a branch over a man's head while he rested unaware against a tree. His first real meal after a year in the jungle was in Bangkok on a three day leave at Christmas in 1962. He received mail from home for the first time since being sent to Vietnam while on that leave. Ninety percent of it was the Tonkawa News and letters from his high school drama teacher, Ruth Hamburg. It was addressed to him in Germany, his address of duty, since he was "not in Vietnam." His company had split up and teams sent on different assignments, but at the end of his leave, his company was reassembled for further training before resuming duty in the jungle.

Burns was still in high school in Tonkawa when he joined the National Guards. "I wasn't exactly drafted," he says, "all the guys my age were deciding what to do about our duty tour country. It was a thing we all had to face, and I was recruited into the Guards by Jerry Weeks." In

March of 1959, Burns started his six months active duty Guard training and when the 1960 school year started, Burns returned to studies at THS and graduated with his class. After graduation, he traveled to Minnesota to visit family and then to Ohio to art school. In the spring of 1961 Burns entered the Army to complete his military obligation. He was sent to California for Advanced Infantry Training and from there to Fort Benning, Georgia for jump school. He applied for and was accepted into the Special Forces and spent over year training at Fort Bragg, North Carolina, where he volunteered for advanced training in HALO (high altitude low opening) Special Forces Parachute Operations, a new training the Army was testing. While at Fort Bragg, he spent time locked in a Quonset hut in order to gain experience for his Vietnam assignment. Of the 344 men who entered the program with Burns, only twelve completed it and were assigned to the "A- Team," of which Burns was a member. They were trained in education, weapons, demolitions, and communica-



BILL BURNS

tion. Burns' Military Occupation was Radio and High Speed Teletype Operator. At the end of training, they were deployed to South East Asia. Only four of his team returned. The rest were listed as missing in action. At the end of his year of assignment, his team walked out, one at a time, and flew to Saigon for transfer to the United States. Burns was debriefed at Fort Campbell, Kentucky and sent home.

Burns doesn't tell much about what he really did, since he

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wasn't officially there, but he is troubled by "something we did that wasn't right, in my mind, anyway, and I have to live with that." Burns credits the army for teaching him respect and discipline. "They also taught us how to handle stress by thinking of other things. I thought about being at Tonkawa High School. It was the best time of my life." When asked if he did anything special for luck, Burns says, "I was just thankful when the sun rose on a new day."

Burns has all the regular ribbons of rank and outfit, good behavior, marksmanship, but not a Vietnam combat medal, since he wasn't there. In the field, they were not allowed to have or take pictures, but Burns has one, taken by someone from another company. It took him over a year to make contact and ask for the picture, but for a man who wasn't there, it is evidence that he was.

Honoring those who served:

Lt. Comdr. William (Bill) H. Byers, USNR (Ret.)

(Editor's Note: The following feature is the sixth in a series of profiles that will honor the Vietnam War era veterans from Tonkawa. The bulk of the work and research was completed by Mike Schatz and Gin-giner Hunter.)

Lt. Comdr. William (Bill) H. Byers, USNR (Ret.)
Honoring Those Who Served in the Vietnam Conflict

Sent in a letter to Lee Jones

After graduation from Tonkawa High School in 1960, I attended Northern Oklahoma Junior College. I always wanted to be a pilot, so after my first year at NOJC, I went to Vance Air Force Base in Enid for the testing required to apply for the Air Force Academy. I was selected as an alternate. In my second year at NOJC, I learned of the Naval Aviation Cadet program. To be a cadet required two years of college, and of course more tests. So, early in 1962, I went to NAS Dallas, for the NAVCAD screening. This time I made it.

In June 1962, 19 years old

with an Associate Degree of Engineering in hand, I boarded a Central Airlines DC-3 in Ponca City, Dallas bound. After more tests, and the swearing in, I was off to Pensacola, Florida to commence Naval flight training. The first 16 weeks were under the care and handling of the Marine Corps' finest - Drill Instructors. Navy, Coast Guard, and Marines all went through flight training together (the Coasties and Naval Academy types skipped the DI's). In November 1963, after a year and a half of flight training, I was commissioned an Ensign and designated a Naval Aviator.

After more training in the A-1H Skyraider in 1964, I was assigned to Attack Squadron 15 for a cruise to the Mediterranean aboard the aircraft carrier, U.S.S. Franklin D. Roosevelt. The Skyraider was a large single engine, single pilot, propeller aircraft, capable of any attack mission, including transporting a nuclear bomb from an aircraft carrier in the Mediterranean Sea to Russia. We stood nuclear alert. A cruise on an aircraft carrier typically lasted 8 months, and a pilot would make about 105 carrier



Lt. Comdr. William (Bill) H. Byers, USNR (Ret.)

landings, a third of them at night. A night catapult launch is no cup of tea, either.

When we returned from the Mediterranean, our squadron was disestablished (Navy term for disbanded), since Skyraider aircraft were being replaced by jets

on the east coast and jet fuel on a carrier was a lot less volatile than high octane avgas used for prop planes. In 1965, I was sent back to NAS Lemoore, CA, to transition to the A-4 Skyhawk, a single engine, single pilot, jet attack aircraft. (Please see VET Page 10)

two of them. Later that evening, an F-4 Phantom found another PT boat, but only carried air to air missiles. A call went back to the ship, and I launched with three other A-4's. The plane I grabbed only had bombs, which is a poor choice for attacking a PT boat, but I had to outrun another pilot to get it. My first bombing pass, I dropped two 500 pound bombs, but missed. The other guys missed, also. On the second attack, I dropped my last two bombs, and one hit on the bow, the other on the stern. Since it was now officially after sunset, I scored the first night kill on a PT boat (first DFC that day). We lost a lot of guys again on this cruise. Two friends in the squadron flew into the ground on dark nights over there. We did return in time for me to once again be home for Christmas in Tonkawa.

In May 1967, my active duty commitment ended, so the Commanding Officer asked if I would extend active duty to make the upcoming cruise on the U.S.S. Coral Sea. I said, sure. This time before we left, I was one of two guys to checkout with the Shrike missile. The Shrike is used to attack surface to air missile sites (SAM). So, as an Iron Hand, I would be dog fighting SAM's for the strike group. I also qualified to drop the Walleye, a TV guided missile (early smart bomb).

The 1967 cruise was the toughest of all. During the day, we were flying large strikes (called Alpha Strikes) on major targets in Hanoi, Haiphong, etc. At night, we were out in the dark trying to stem the flow of trucks headed south. I was even loaned to the U.S.S. Oriskany for a few missions. There, I flew with John McCain a couple of times.

Later, I was able to knock out a steam driven locomotive with a Walleye. The Walleye required a shallow dive. A wingman would call out flak, missiles, or Mig fighters. It was very touchy, but precise. You could put one through a window. Mine hit the engine while it was at full speed and sent it cart wheeling end over end, through a rice paddy, splashing water and throwing out steam..

On 24 October, 1967, we were given the go-ahead to hit Phuc Yen. It was their main Mig base near Hanoi and had been off limits until then. The Air Force would hit it first, then us, then the Otiskany. The Air Force did not lose any planes, but surely woke them up. They could see us on radar and now knew where we going. I was the Air Wing Commander's left wingman and the other Lieutenant with the most combat experience was his right wingman. As we approached Hanoi, they filled the sky with SAMS and flak. An SA-2 surface to air, radar guided missile is 35 feet long with a 400 pound warhead, going Mach 3.5. It looks like a flying telephone pole with fire on the back end. Immediately, two F-4s were hit and going down. Then, A-4's behind us were being hit, including my Commanding Officer. A missile put a bunch of holes in his tail, but he kept coming. Ahead of us, I saw the dust clouds of three more missiles from three sites lifting off. We dodged the first two, but I don't think our leader saw the third one. It was headed straight for me, but we were at the roll in point, and I couldn't leave my leader. Then Gary, on the other side yelled, "Billy, Break". That's all I needed. I jerked the plane as hard as I could, and the SAM went off a half second later, right where I had been. The shock of the explosion was terrific and knocked my airplane straight up. I was enveloped in the orange cloud they produce and could see nothing but fire in my rear view mirrors. I headed for an ejection area, but the flames went out when all the fuel in the wings burned off.

The other wingman, Gary, stayed with me, and we headed for the coast. I was down to about 2 minutes of fuel when I joined the Navy air refueling tanker over the Gulf. Fuel was streaming through my airplane, so I had to stay plugged into the tanker all the way back to the boat. At one point, the tanker pilot thought he was too low on fuel and threatened to cut me off. Gary said, "You do, and I will shoot you down". I got my gas, but my hydraulics quit, and I caught on fire again, but I made it aboard. That was my eighteenth Air Medal. I had blood on my collar, but I changed my fatigue shirt and kept my mouth shut. There was a follow up strike the next day, and I wanted to be on it. I was back to my old job as Iron Hand. I took out those three SAM sites during a very busy morning. That was my last DFC.

The monsoon season later that fall and winter was really bad, and although we were able to fly a few large strikes against bridges, we mainly flew smaller elements trying to get in, through, or around the storms. Night missions were tough, due to low visibility, storms, and it was just black around a boat in the rain. Lightning strikes over the beach really get your attention. You have to decide if it was flak, a missile, or just lightning. Ducking your head in the cockpit, with the

tracers and flak zipping by, won't save you, but you can't help it.

My extension on active duty was up the beginning of January 1968. My Commanding Officer requested the Bureau of Naval Personnel detach me early in December so I could be home for Christmas, but the Bureau sent orders for me to detach on or after 25 Dec. I continued to fly until December 23rd. One of my good friends was shot down the 22nd. Christmas morning, I took my last catapult shot in the back of the ship's transport plane while headed for NAS Cubi Point, Philippines. The Air Wing Commander instructed the crew to declare an emergency and divert to Clark AFB, where I had a good chance to catch an early ride to the States on an Air Force cargo aircraft. They did, and I did.

Medals are a funny thing. Many get few, but are in great danger, such as the flight deck crew on an aircraft carrier. They get little sleep and are always exhausted. They are surrounded by screaming jets and whirling props; any misstep will get them sucked into an engine, chopped by a prop or blown over the side. As I mention what I was awarded, remember, it took hundreds of people, many risking life and limb, for me to fly.

I was awarded three Distinguished Flying Crosses, eighteen Air Medals (the aircrew Bronze Star), two Navy Commendation Medals with Combat V, three Navy Unit Commendations, National Defense Service Medal, four Vietnam Service Medals, Vietnamese Gallantry Cross with Bronze Star, Vietnamese Gallantry Cross Unit Citation with palm, and the Vietnam Campaign Medal.

Would I do it again? Of course I would.

Did we lose? I didn't.

Vet...

(Continued from Page 1)

craft, the aircraft flown by the instructors in the movie Top Gun. After checkout in the Skyhawk, I was sent to Attack Squadron 153, called the "Blue Tail Flies," aboard the U.S.S. Coral Sea, operating off the coast of North Vietnam on "Yankee Station".

The Vietnam War was just heating up, with the aircraft carriers in the Tonkin Gulf launching their first air strikes into North Vietnam. We were the opening phase of what was called "Rolling Thunder", the heaviest bombing campaign of North Vietnam, conducted from 1965 into 1968. Our Air Wing lost a lot of guys, including two of our squadron's Commanding Officers. We returned from that cruise in time for me to make it to Tonkawa for Christmas.

In 1966, I was back on Yankee Station on the U.S.S. Constellation. We flew large (maybe 40 aircraft) or small (just two guys) day and night. The flak is not as accurate at night, but it is tough flying below the hills in a pitch black sky at 500 feet and 500 mph. Plus, you always have to return and land on the aircraft carrier. It is no fun on a dark night in a thunderstorm with the deck pitching all over the place. Testing, conducted in 1966, revealed a night carrier landing was more stressful than combat. During a carrier landing, you are in charge, and your skill will determine the outcome (your fault if you die). In combat, just do your best, but you are not in charge.

A high point of my 1966 cruise was finding three North Vietnamese patrol boats (PT boats) under camouflage netting in the islands southeast of the Port of Cam Pha. I initiated the attack using 2.75 inch rockets. I fired too soon on my first attack, and the rockets hit short. I pulled around and made another diving (45 degree) attack. Now, they were fully alert and firing back with everything they had. I dove as low as I could stand it and fired the rest of my rockets. They landed in the boats and smoke billowed out. My flight leader and I damaged

Honoring those who served:

Allen Teten

(Editor's Note: The following feature is the seventh in a series of profiles that will honor the Vietnam War era veterans from Tonkawa. The bulk of the work and research was completed by Mike Schatz.)

Allen Teten
Honoring Those Who Served in the Vietnam Conflict
By Allen Teten as told to Scott Cloud

It's amazing how such a short period of time in a man's life can change him forever.

That definitely is the case for Allen Teten, a man who served his country in Vietnam and was among many who were ridiculed for their service.

Teten, however, has found positives in his service to the country, now assisting Kay County and area veterans receive their due benefits.

It's my passion to help fellow veterans and I am dedicated to it until I die," Teten said. "I feel so fortunate to be able to help veterans in a small way. So many have suffered and are still suffering every day. The effects

of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder are terrible, these vets need help."

Teten works with the Oklahoma Department of Veterans Affairs (ODVA) to help area vets.

They meet at the Ponca City American Legion every Thursday.

"When we first started, we had four or five per day, now we have 10-15," he said. "They are of all ages, from 30 to 80, doesn't matter. We're there to help."

That's the present, but what about the past.

All Teten wanted was to be a baseball player, but injuries stopped Teten's dream after high school.

He attended NOC at Tonkawa but left school in November 1968.

In two months, having lost his school deferment, he was drafted into the United States Army. In January 1969, he was on his way to Oklahoma City for a physical and then on to Ft. Polk in Louisiana.

"We went there for eight weeks basic training. After the fourth week, we were told that we were going to Vietnam," he said.

Teten trained as an infantryman or grunt, as he called it.

In May 1969, his training was completed and after a two week leave, he was a half a world away at Due Pho in Vietnam. He was then assigned to an infantry unit, 46th Infantry Division, Charlie Company. Teten experienced the real war in a hurry.

On his fifth day in country, he was involved in the real shooting war. "Total shock," he said. "We weren't even settled yet and we were in the real, fighting war. Such a shock to us. Our heads were spinning." Working out of LZ Professional, a landing zone where missions were assigned, Teten spent the next several months on various missions, hiking three to six miles per day.

"We took a hill, and then gave it back," he said. "It made no sense, but we followed orders and that's what we did." Then, on Sept. 9, 1969, Teten was involved in an intense firefight and was wounded, shot in the left calf. He received the Purple Heart for his wounds, but he thought about his comrades. "We lost about 14 soldiers that day," he said. "Man, that was tough. Men you trained



ALLEN TETEN

with and lived with, then they were gone." Teten's tour was to be 12 months, "after six months you count the days."

"You just wanted to get out of there," he said. "It was one day at a time, you just wanted to go home and you hoped you could make it home."

Six days before Teten was supposed to go home, he and some other soldiers received orders.

"We just knew they were our orders to go home," he said. "Little did we know."

The United States was scaling

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Vet...

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back operations in Vietnam, according to Teten. "They didn't want to train and send some other men over there when they were de-escalating the war," he said. "We were then extended 60 days," he said. "Talk about the highs of thinking we were going home to the lows of knowing our tour was extended." "I had written home to tell my family I was coming home and then had to write again and tell them I was staying," he said. "That was tough on my family back home."

Teten said the duty wasn't as bad as in combat, working in the rear echelon, taking care of officers. "Some of us had it pretty easy, but eight of the fifty whose tours were extended did not make it home," Teten said. "That's always a tough deal to think about, the lives that were lost." "The enemy would send human waves of soldiers," he said. "It was pretty easy to defend but there is always a cost."

After his tour ended, Teten was sent to Washington state and then home to Kay County.

It was August 1970. His first impression of home was not what he hoped.

"We were so proud to wear our uniforms, and within two hours, we found a department store and took them off," he said. "We were in shock, total shock." Teten said the soldiers had tomatoes thrown at them and were verbally abused. "Very sad," he said.

Teten was trying to fly to Oklahoma City to return home but couldn't get a flight, but he could get a flight to Dallas. "I called my parents and told them I could get a flight to Dallas and then to Oklahoma City," he said. "Before I could get it out, Mom said they were driving to Dallas." He met his parents, Frank and Ellen Teten, and brother Mark at the airport along with eight people who had been following his journey overseas through his family, shared by his mother. "That was the homecoming I was looking for," Teten said fighting back tears. "What a great moment for all of us." When Teten returned to Tonkawa, he was walking at the corner of Main and Grand and saw his Grandmother, Emma Myers. He accidentally on purpose bumped into her in front of the First National Bank. "She was the type that

if you bumped into her, she would say, "look out where you're going,"

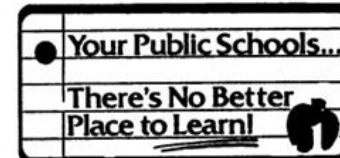
Teten laughed. "But it was worth it to see the look on her face, and the celebration started.

Teten qualified as expert with the M-14 rifle, Marksman with the M-16 rifle. His medals include Vietnam service and Vietnam campaign medals, ARCOM medal, good conduct with 2nd clasp. He is currently retired and living in Ponca City. He married the former Brenda Veach from Tonkawa. They have 2 daughters, Chelsa Ulrich, a Psychologist in Oklahoma City, and Hilary Teton, a teacher.

Teten contributes to a journal on Facebook that records his service in Vietnam and to area Veterans.

I dedicate this story to my father, Frank Teten, and to all the other veterans who have served.

Attend Church Sunday



Honoring those who served:

Louis 'Louie' McCarter

(Editor's Note: The following feature is the eighth in a series of profiles that will honor the Vietnam War era veterans from Tonkawa. The bulk of the work and research was completed by Mike Schatz.)

Louis 'Louie' McCarter Honoring Those Who Served in the Vietnam Conflict

I graduated from Tonkawa High School in 1958, the University of Oklahoma in 1962, the University of Texas Law School in 1965 and entered the Army Judge Advocate General's Corp (army legal branch) as a First Lieutenant in October 1965. At that time, all new army JAG officers were First Lieutenants, although I was already a commissioned officer through ROTC. While at Fort Rucker, Alabama, I was promoted to Captain and received orders to report in January 1967 to the 196th Light Infantry Brigade Headquarters in Tay Ninh, Vietnam, near the Cambodian border.

I arrived in Saigon on January 16, 1967 and, although I later learned there was a nearby heli-

copter to take me to the 196th, I climbed onto the back of an army transport truck packed with GIs bound for Tay Ninh. A young private suggested I conceal my Captain's insignia on my fatigues shirt collar because snipers preferred to shoot officers. My hands grew numb covering my collar the duration of the three hour trip.

I was subsequently transferred from the 196th to the U.S. Army Engineer Command in Bien Hoa, about twenty miles east of Saigon. Constant artillery could still be heard, but it seemed farther away. Living conditions were much better: hot showers, flush toilets, beds in enclosed sleeping quarters instead of a cot in a small tent, higher quality mosquito nets, better selection of beverages, and also more peer collegiality. I had been the only JAG officer with the 196th, and there were four JAG officers with the Engineer Command where I represented GIs in several general courts-martial.

One of my more interesting cases was the defense of a young Hispanic private charged with aggravated assault. The private



LOUIS "LOUIE" McCARTER

had been arguing with two GIs at a payday crap game at four in the morning when he fired at them with his M-16 from the hip at a distance of about fifteen feet. But he was drunk and fortunately missed. The private told me that he had fraudulently enlisted in the army. He had concealed the fact that he had been in a hospital for the criminally insane. With his consent, I obtained the hospital records which indicated he was there for two years and six days,

started using pot at age twelve, contacted VD at age fourteen, his father died from a drug overdose, and his mother committed suicide by jumping out of a fourteen story window. The kid, however, was very likable, made a great trial witness, and was only convicted of the careless discharge of a firearm and sentenced to one month confinement and forfeiture of two-thirds of his pay for one month.

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Vet... (Continued from Page 1)

Much of my time was also spent on C-130 airplanes and helicopters flying to engineer brigades to represent GIs in Article 32 hearings, the military equivalent to a civilian grand jury. A senior officer reviews the evidence, listens to witnesses, and then makes a recommendation as to whether the case will proceed to a general court-martial, or a lesser court, or even dismissed. I also gave legal assistance to GIs and was the Post Solatium Payment Officer. Solatium was a program instituted by the U.S. Department of Defense to reimburse the Vietnamese for property damage or personal injuries caused by a GI, regardless of fault. So if a GI ran over a Vietnamese's bicycle left in the middle of the road, it was my job to be driven in a jeep throughout the village to find the Vietnamese owner and pay him in Vietnamese currency for the damage to his bicycle. The purpose of the program was to promote good will with the South Vietnamese, but it was often difficult to locate the Vietnamese to pay. On December 7, 1967, with only thirty-six days left in Vietnam, I left the hot showers and

flush toilets of Bien Hoa and headed 240 miles north to Pleiku, headquarters of the 4th Infantry Division, where I lived alone in a small tent with a huge white rat. Located in the central highlands of South Vietnam, Pleiku was cold at night, as was the water dribbling from the shower about fifty feet from my tent. The 4th Infantry Division commanding general had instituted a program where its JAG officers traveled by helicopter to Fire Support Bases (FSB) to provide legal assistance to the troops. It was much more dangerous than giving legal assistance at Division Headquarters, although I never spent the night at a FSB as did the hundreds of GIs manning the howitzers and living in bunkers. A typical day for me at a FSB was standing around waiting for a GI to ask for legal assistance. Business was never very good. Most of the GIs were more concerned with staying alive. An interesting aspect of Pleiku was the Montagnards, French for mountain people, usually pronounced "mountain yards". There were several different tribes, all indigenous to the Central Highlands. They were darker skinned and completely different in their culture and language from the mainstream Vietnamese. Historically, they were persecuted

and repressed by the Vietnamese and, thus, supportive of the U.S. troops. Their above-ground graves were colorful and elaborate, and the women and children were often seen walking along the side of the road. While assigned to the 4th Infantry Division, I also visited a military sanctioned brothel – to interview a witness. I was unaware of the brothel's existence, and it was apparently not widely known, presumably because the army did not want it publicized in the states. Only enlisted men, with the consent of their company commanders, were allowed to go there for liaisons with the Vietnamese ladies, who, I was told, were frequently checked by army doctors for sexually transmitted diseases. On January 8, 1968, in a five minute ceremony at the 4th Infantry Division JAG office, I was awarded the Bronze Star for Meritorious Achievement in Ground Operations Against Hostile Forces in the Republic of Vietnam during the period January 1967-December 1967. Four days later, I was home. As a staff officer, my combat experience had been limited to hunkering down in an underground bunker during two mortar attacks. Many faced combat daily, and 58,148 GIs never made it home.

Honoring those who served:

Fred Etzel

(Editor's Note: The following feature is the ninth in a series of profiles that will honor the Vietnam War era veterans from Tonkawa. The bulk of the work and research was completed by Mike Schatz.)

Fred Etzel

Honoring Those Who Served in the Vietnam Conflict

Fred Etzel was raised in Tonkawa. He joined the army "to see what it was like" as soon as he was old enough to enlist. Etzel chose the Army because it was "easy" [to sign up], and he wanted

to get started on his world tour as soon as possible. In all, his tour lasted 12 years. He was assigned to the 363rd Infantry, and he left service as an E5. Etzel served in Korea, Germany, and Vietnam. He signed up for Vietnam in Bangkok at the end of his first tour and served as a truck driver hauling gas and ammunition to the troops in Vietnam. When on leave, he did what most military do, went sightseeing, drank hot beer, (there was no ice in Vietnam), wrote home, took pictures, and prayed. On the road, the men in his unit slept on top of their trucks and kept praying. In one

incident, Etzel remembers well that "a little kid, just this tall", he indicates, threw a hand grenade at his truck. It bounced off the windshield, saving him but not the trucks in front of him. Most of the pictures he took of his company were taken from him when he mustered out, and he has lost track of the friends he made. But he has no regrets, even though he suffers from Diabetes and Agent Orange. After leaving the military, Etzel kept driving trucks. He also worked for a time in a radiator shop. Now retired and living in his hometown, he says, "I have some memories I don't



FRED ETZEL

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Honoring those who served:

Mike Schatz

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Mike Schatz Honoring Those Who Served in the Vietnam Conflict

Take a good look the next time you see Mike Schatz. He will probably be wearing a Marine Corps tee, but it is his demeanor, his stance, his entire bearing that says "military". Schatz joined the Marines one day after his 18th birthday and has made it his life style since. He still believes in the values of honor and loyalty he was taught in the Marines. He served in Vietnam, Desert Storm, and Enduring Freedom; his Vietnam tour included a 12 month tour and 2 six month extensions.

(He was sent home one month into his 2nd six month extension.) He shrugs, grins a little, and says, "I came out a Corporal. Should have been Sargent, but I got busted once." Schatz knew he was going to be drafted. He also knew that if he was going to Vietnam, he wanted to go as a Marine. He felt the Marines would have "the best training for the intensity of war". Sure enough, his draft number came up two weeks after he joined. Schatz' uncle had been a Marine in WWII, and his close friend Lee Dirickson was a Marine, and although they both told him "don't do it," he talked his friend Butch Clemens into signing up with him. The military had an incentive program called the buddy system at the time, wherein one could go through basic training with a friend, so they entered the Marines together. Because of the lag time of military mail, Schatz

did not receive Dirickson's advice until after his death. But it wouldn't have changed Schatz' mind. He respected Dirickson, and his death made Schatz more determined to be a Marine.

Schatz and Clemens signed up on September 13, 1967 and were in San Diego, California, the next day. His Drill Instructor was hard on them. "He was in your face," he says, "but I understood why. We would need to be tough when we got there. They were training us for war and didn't have time for screw-ups. It made me a better person." After the first few weeks, he began to enjoy himself. He liked the discipline, teamwork, and spirit of the Corps. He learned that individual characteristics rather than education are what make good leaders. He was in good physical condition when he started basic, and at the end of his training, Schatz passed his physical fit-



MIKE SCHATZ

ness test easily. To make the high score of 500 was nearly impossible, and a score over 400 was achieved by few. Most scored 300 or less. Schatz scored 426. And he had survival skills. He grew up farming with his dad and uncles, and his dad taught him to fish and hunt and clean his catch. His mother taught him to cook

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Vet...

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and sew, and he laughs as he tells about watching a 'college grad' squad leader try to figure out how to thread a needle and sew on a button. He also had an advantage. He was small, 5'5", and the DI chose smaller guys for housekeeping duties. They were called "mice," and Schatz was the "Chief Rat," in charge of the others. As "Chief Rat," he had access to the daily plans, and he occasionally heard comments he could pass on to the men. He had power of knowledge, and no one bullied him.

During his advanced training, Schatz noticed a group of men running here and there, and he asked what was going on. "They're Recon," he was told, "and you don't want to go over there." Of course, he did. His assigned MOS was 0311 Rifleman, but he volunteered for Reconnaissance, passed the criteria, and took an additional six weeks training and MOS 0311/8651. He was now Rifleman/Recon qualified. He flew into Da Nang and barracked at the airstrip. "The F4's came in about every two minutes," he says, "and would just shake you out of the cot all night long." The next day, he was assigned to 3rd Recon Ban up north and helicopters took them to Dung Ha, in the I core area, about ten miles south of the DMZ. "The airstrip was under mortar fire, and the helicopters would land, roll by the terminal, and you threw your duffel in and jumped off while the helicopter was still moving," Schatz relates. "They took us to the trenches till the shelling stopped and from there we got on a truck. It drove 16 miles south to Quang Tri, as fast as they could go, and that was my welcome to Vietnam."

The team Schatz was assigned was called Dallas Girl, and they had already gone on patrol by the time he got there. He missed them by one day, and they were "shot up," he says, "so I was assigned another team until mine could regroup." The new team took him on a night patrol outside the perimeter and at the last minute switched his rifle for one of theirs. Walking along a rice paddy terrace, Schatz saw feet on the trail above him. They were supposed to keep silence, so he tried to communicate what he saw by signaling the others, but no one paid attention. Suddenly he saw green tracer bullets. The enemy used green tracers, and "we used red," Schatz says, "I thought we'd been ambushed." Then he heard, "Where are you, where are you? Let's go." He later learned the man at the head of the team shot the tracers, and he had been given a rifle with no firing pin. He had been

set up. What hadn't been planned were the feet Schatz saw. They belonged to a team coming off patrol. They did it to all the new guys," he chuckles, "It was routine, to see what they would do." I was never so scared in my life, but I passed the test!

Schatz was on the ground as part of a four to six man team whose job was to observe the enemy. They were told, "Sneak in, sneak out, and don't get caught." They were sent beyond military support and were not to fire their weapons. They were so far out, communication with base camp had to be relayed several times. They lay on the ground and watched trails or bunker complexes four or five days at a time, sometimes as long as fifteen. Their job was reconnaissance. Before leaving they would call in air strikes or if in range, artillery. They had to travel light, so they didn't take many supplies. They did, however, always take a little rice. They could put some in a bamboo shoot, add a snail, fish or snake, some heat from the C4 out of a claymore mine, and make a meal. Schatz also volunteered for search and recovery missions. "A message would come in that a team was in trouble. We'd get the coordinates." He pauses, takes a breath, and continues, "Sometimes we found them, sometimes we didn't. Sometimes it was bodies. I didn't know it until twenty years later, but the casualty rate was 40 to 60%."

They weren't restricted to the jungle. Something that distresses Schatz is a patrol he had been on for four or five nights. His team was on the Cua Viet River trying to catch North Vietnamese who were disrupting shipping with floating mines. A troop ship transporting Marines from Dang Ha to the coast, Oscar relay, for some R&R time, hit one of the mines. Since they weren't going very far, the men hadn't donned life jackets. Schatz' team swam out to bring them to shore. It was a wide river. On his third trip, Schatz cramped, and the man with him had broken legs. They were about to go under. "I lost my momentum and could barely tread water. I got another cramp and panicked for the first time, and had to let the Marine go. I really thought I was going to drown when a teammate threw me a rubber sleeping mattress. "I don't know why I didn't think of that," Schatz wonders. "I'd been a life guard all through high school. Its basic lifesaving: reach, throw, row, and go. If you can't reach or throw, take something that floats. Later, when I was a life guard instructor, I was very hard on the kids about it doing it "right"

When asked about life in the jungle, Schatz relates that the rats were huge. One time elephants crashed through the jungle, and they thought it was an attack and called in mortars from a nearby infantry unit. There were rock apes about the size of a small chimpanzee that tripped their flares and lots of snakes. Then there was the tiger... on a sting ray op, there were three teams about fifty yards apart. The center team started yelling, screaming and shooting. "We thought they had been attacked." A tiger had one of the men by the neck and was dragging him off. Schatz' team and the other team cornered the tiger, still holding the man by the neck, shot the it and threw it on the medevac with the injured man. The skin was later made into a rug and sent to the victim. "I went to a reunion last year," he says, "and the tiger guy was there and okay. He still has the rug."

Reflecting on life at base camp, Schatz says: "At first, we didn't have electricity, so we sat around and played mind games, sort of 'one-upmanship', like mental chess. After electricity, we had tapes for music. There were about ten guys to a tent. We had basic supplies but had to scrounge for the good stuff. I had a plastic bowl to wash up in and a knife my uncle sent me. The best thing I had was a hot plate my mother sent, so I could cook my own meals. We had powdered milk and dehydrated eggs in the mess hall. Perishables weren't any good by the time they got to us. When we got a box from home we took out a few personal things and set the rest in the middle of the floor to share with the team. We put our money together and bought a strobe light. It fit down the barrel of an M-79 grenade launcher, and we could point it at helicopters at night to let them know where we were. It was better than a flash that would let everyone in the area - the enemy - know. We didn't get the good entertainers. They went to safe places like Da Nang. We had a Philippine rock band one time. I was selected to go see Bob Hope in Da Nang once. He had the Gold-diggers and Ann Margaret. He put on a great show. The Army had clubs, but not the Marines, so we would confiscate a dump truck and go over there. Mail was two to three weeks out and two to three weeks in. I can't imagine what it's like today with computers and Skype. There wasn't any censoring until you left. Then they would go through your stuff and throw most of it away. I sent my maps home or they would have been confiscated. I wrote a summary

of what I had on the maps, so I have those. I had a movie camera, and I sent the film home, too. I have several patrols on film, the first prisoner we caught, film of the guys training with rubber boats and repelling from choppers, stuff like that. But they got my diary. We had lucky hats; mine was a camo boony hat. We all had our hats."

During his nineteen months in Vietnam, Schatz took two RR trips, first to Japan and then Australia. The trip to Japan gave him the calm he needed, and the Australia trip was exciting. He went diving and deep sea fishing on the Great Barrier Reef. His Vietnam tour ended October 31, 1969, and he says, "Joining the Marines, being in Recon, those are the best things I ever did." Schatz went home in dress uniform, his ribbons on his chest and a registered trophy rifle slung over his shoulder. When he came into LAX, a group of protesters surrounded him and tried to take his ribbons. After a very brief altercation, security took Schatz into custody and put him in lock-down until they could get him on an airplane "for his protection." He missed his connecting flight because of the altercation. He chose two days on a train, since he could get a train ticket sooner than a flight, and came to Ponca City, where his family and friends met him. It was a very warm welcome.

After Vietnam, he had nightmares and "got tense with people," so he spent a year in a monastery in Conception, Missouri, and "got his center again. After Conception, Schatz went to nursing school, a career he followed for thirty-three years, fifteen of those as an ER nurse. He also worked for the Tonkawa Fire Department as Assistant Chief, Training and Safety Officer. With FEMA's Oklahoma Disaster Medical Assistance Team 1, he made 9 two week deployments to some of our countries worst disasters. For over 30 years he has worked with the AHA and Red Cross as First Aid and CPR instructor, Water Safety Instructor Trainer and Lifeguard Instructor Trainer, all jobs that save lives. He also stayed in the military, retiring as a captain with 35 years' service in the Army, Navy, and Marines. His last duty assignment was with the OANG as the senior instructor for training medics in the 45th Oklahoma Army National Guard as well as coordinating returning soldiers with support groups for them and their families. "I don't hunt anymore," he says, "life is too precious." He has "a bunch of ribbons," he says, but only names his Bronze Star with Combat 'V', received on his first tour, and the Vietnam Cross of Gallantry. He went on fifty-five patrols, (average for a 12 month tour was 35) took a Vietnamese officer prisoner and 3 sappers prisoner, was a Team Leader and Operations Chief and the NCOIC of the SCUBA locker for 3rd Force Company. As team leader, he never lost a man. About the Vietnam War, Schatz says, "We should take what we learned and use it. Also, anybody who signed that contract deserves a pat on the back and should be recognized for it no matter what their MOS."

Honoring those who served:

Dale Schatz

(Editor's Note: The following feature is the eleventh in a series of profiles that will honor the Vietnam War era veterans from Tonkawa. The bulk of the work and research was completed by Mike Schatz.)

Dale Schatz Honoring Those Who Served in the Vietnam Conflict

Like all eighteen-year-olds, Dale Schatz was required to register for the Selective Service. But in 1970, when Schatz went to Oklahoma City to register, he also enlisted in the United States Marine Corps. It was the era of the Draft, which ended in 1973, so Schatz might not have been called-up, but like a lot of young men at the time, he chose the certainty of serving over not knowing if or when he would be called.

On September 16, 1970, Schatz left home for boot camp at the Marine Corps Recruit Depot in

San Diego, California. All marines are first trained as riflemen, or grunts, so Schatz and his platoon were sent to Infantry Training at Camp Pendleton, California to learn basic weaponry and other skills. He went to Schools Battalion and began training for his Military Occupational Status (MOS). At the end of his schooling, Schatz was trained as MOS 3516, vehicle mechanic, and MOS 3531, truck driver. His next assignment took place at Cherry Point, North Carolina, attached to the 2nd Marine Air Wing Group 14. In June 1971, Schatz received West Pacific orders to proceed to Futenma Air Base in Okinawa. After a short leave, he departed the U. S. from Travis Air Force Base in California and switched planes in Hawaii, where he experienced his first of many days of hot, humid weather.

Schatz was in Futenma only a short time before transferring to Camp Butler, Okinawa, and the 3rd Force Service Regiment,

which supplied transportation and maintenance for the 3rd Marine Division. At Camp Butler, he received word that he would be involved in the supply build-up for the South Vietnamese Army. Schatz says: "We worked for months getting things ready; we had huge lots full of jeeps, trailers, you name it. We were given this duty because we could drive and repair the vehicles. I was proud to be a part of it."

In September of 1971, the vehicles were loaded onto four ships. Schatz traveled through the South China Sea to Vietnam on the USS New Orleans, escorted by the submarine, USS Scamp. His unit was assigned temporary duty with the 3rd Marine Division at Da Nang, unloading the vehicles and transporting them to designated areas. He says, "Before this, the biggest boat I had ever seen was a ski boat. About a day out, we started getting sea sick. The Navy guys were very enter-



DALE SCHATZ

guard rails. They said we looked like we were feeding fish."

At Da Nang, the ships unloaded one at a time and distributed to different areas. They had simple orders: Stay close and stay in the tracks of the one in front of you. Schatz didn't know what to expect, "It started to sink in; we were at war. We did what the

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commander said. Getting out of line could get you blown up. We traveled on their highways, which were dirt roads. Our lead truck looked like something from a Mad Max movie. It had steel plates welded all over and sand bags over it. It was weighed down to trip land mines. It took about five weeks to relocate all the vehicles, but we didn't have any issues. The country was beautiful, but we could see the pain of war. Back in Okinawa, the lots we had emptied were full again."

Schatz didn't escort another load of vehicles to Vietnam. In late July, 1972 he, was called home on emergency leave. His mother had cancer. He was able to stay home a couple of weeks then went back to Camp Pendleton to be discharged. He left the Marine Corps a Lance Corporal. He has good memories and enjoyed his time in the military. "I loved serving my country," he says, "but there were low spots. The anti-war protesters at the Los Angeles airport let anyone in uniform know that we were a disgrace to our country as we walked by. At home, I didn't think many people even knew where I had been for two years.

Schatz used his V.A. benefits to finish the schooling he put on hold when he enlisted. He went to the Wichita Automotive Institute in Wichita, Kansas, and became a collision repair and refinish technician. His first job was at Tracey Henry Ford in Blackwell. From there, he went to Ray Hamlin Chevrolet and then Fair Auto Body. He joined Steve's Auto Body in Ponca City and then Gary Fruits in Tonkawa before leaving Oklahoma in 1993. In Rogers, Arkansas, Schatz went to work at Old Town Body, later buying into the company. Although he subsequently sold his share of Old Town, he still works there. Schatz has one daughter, Madison DeeAnn. He enjoys custom car painting and likes to build hot rods. He plans to keep traveling to car shows after his retirement sometime in 2014.

Honoring those who served:

Lewis Linton, Robert Cisneros, Phillip Stokesberry & John Knight

(Editor's Note: The following feature is the eleventh in a series of profiles that will honor the Vietnam War era veterans from Tonkawa. The bulk of the work and research was completed by Mike Schatz.)

Lewis Linton, Robert Cisneros, Phillip Stokesberry & John Knight **Honoring Those Who Served in the Vietnam Conflict**

Lewis Linton AZC (Ret) served twenty years in the Navy, from 1955 to 1975. He spent ten months on the USS Midway in the Tonkin Gulf in 1965. In 1966, he was on the USS Ranger, and from 1967 to 1969, he served in the Philippines evaluating and repairing aircraft damaged in Vietnam. After his Vietnam related assignment, Linton rigged parachutes for ten years and was then assigned to Aircraft Maintenance Administration before retiring in 1975. He was awarded the Viet-

nam Service Medal with Bronze Star, The Navy Unit Commendation Ribbon (2nd award), and the National Defense Service Medal.

After graduation from Tonkawa High School in 1960, **Robert Cisneros** enlisted in the Air Force and was sent to San Antonio, Texas for basic training and then to Base Supply Training in Amarillo, Texas. He served at Davis Monthan Air Force Base in Tucson, Arizona, from 1961 to 1966. His next assignment was special Services in Tehran, Iran, assisting training of Iranian troops. From 1968 until 1972, Cisneros was stationed in St. Louis, Missouri at the Aeronautical Information Center. In 1972, he was sent to Thailand as supply to Air Force bombers flying in Vietnam. He was assigned to McConnell Air Force Base in Wichita, Kansas, until 1976. From Wichita, Cisneros went to Howard Air Force Base in the Panama Canal Zone, where he served until 1980. From 1980 until 1984, Cisneros



LEWIS LINTON (left)

was stationed at Aviano Air Base in Italy. He retired in 1984 and lives in Tucson, Arizona.

Phillip Stokesberry went into the Army in August of 1967 and was discharged in 1970 as a Sp5. His MOS was 76P20 Stock Clerk and Account Specialist. After serving three years as a Quartermaster in the regular army, Stokesberry finished his military career with the Reserves. His regular army service included a year in Vietnam from March 1968 to March 1969. His citations and decorations include the



JOHN KNIGHT

Good Conduct Medal, National Defense Service Medal, Rifle: SS, Vietnam Service Medal, TET 69 Counteroffense, TET Counteroffense, VN Counteroffense, PH IV, V, VI and Vietnam Campaign Medal. Stokesberry resides in Ponca City and works at Lowes, primarily in the same position he trained for in the Army.

John Knight, THS class of 1962, entered the Air Force in

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1967 and separated as a Major in 1987. Knight flew bombing missions during his Vietnam tour. His specialty numbers include Plt-Ftr, Squadron Air Liaison Officer, and Flight Commander. Knight was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross with devices, Air Medal with 12 devices, Army Commendation Medal, Distinguished Presidential Unit Citation, AF Outstanding Unit Award with Valor Device, Combat Readiness Medal, Armed Forces Expeditionary Medal with device, Vietnam Service Medal with 5 devices, AF overseas Short Tour Ribbon with Device (3 devices), AF Overseas Long Tour Ribbon, AF Longevity Service Award Ribbon with 4 devices, Small Arms Expert Marksmanship Ribbon, AF Training Ribbon, Republic of Vietnam Gallantry Cross with Device (3 devices), and Republic of Vietnam Campaign Medal.

Honoring those who served:

Marion Lee Dirickson

(Editor's Note: The following feature is the thirteenth in a series of profiles that will honor the Vietnam War era veterans from Tonkawa. The bulk of the work and research was completed by Mike Schatz.)

Marion Lee Dirickson Honoring Those Who Served in the Vietnam Conflict

Saturday, June 3rd, 1967 was just like any other Saturday for Mr. and Mrs. Arnie Dirickson. Their only son was in Vietnam on his second tour, and they trusted he was okay, and they would soon be getting a letter from him. But a platoon mate of Dirickson's had already written to a former platoon member that Dirickson had been "killed around two or three this morning in the slaughter of Fox Company. The North Vietnamese Army caught them in a rice paddy, and no one knows how much of Fox is left." The writer asked his friend to send

flowers from the platoon. On June 7th, the friend called in the order for flowers and also called the Diricksons to offer his condolences. It was the first they knew of their son's death. Frantically, the Diricksons contacted both the Red Cross and Marine Corps officials seeking information about their son. On June 8th, they were finally able to contact Washington D.C. and were given confirmation that their son had died from wounds received while directing his squad in counter fire tactics. He had been promoted to Corporal only two days earlier, June 1st.

Dirickson was the first Tonkawa soldier killed in Vietnam. He volunteered for the draft after high school and was assigned to the 1st Marine Division, 2nd Bn/5th Marines as a Field Radio Operator. After a thirty day leave in December of 1966, he returned to Vietnam to serve a second tour of duty. When Dirickson volunteered for the second tour, he

requested a new military occupation, Specialty/Infantryman, and was assigned as Squad Leader in the 3rd Platoon, Fox Company, 2/5 Marines. He had two months left on his first tour when he "re-upped," but if you knew Lee, you know he couldn't resist going back. Just before he re-enlisted, he survived an operation in which only he and two others came back. And that was Lee. He wanted the challenge. His friends recall him as small but scrappy, tough, and always up for an adventure. He had a sparkle in his eye and a spunky grin that broadcast what was on his mind. A childhood friend says, "He was always independent, never afraid of anything. I think that is what made him such a good Marine." Before he left for his second tour, Dirickson told his mother, "there were times [he] didn't have enough food or hardly any water, but would be alright one way or another." Both of his parents have passed, but in her memoirs



MARION LEE DIRICKSON

of Lee, his mother wrote, "He would have been home the first of September, 1967, but his remains came home in June."

In an account of the battle in which Dirickson lost his life, a fellow Marine says, "On May 26th, 1967, Lt. Colonel Hilgartner's 1st Battalion, 5th, Marines went into battle. When the first wave of helicopters came back for the rest of the company, the

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helicopter crews unloaded what looked like body bags, but inconceivably, it was flak jackets. Lt. Col Hilgartner thought it was too hot to wear them. By June 3rd, after a week in the bush south of their An Hoa base camp, Foxtrot's objective was the village of Vinh Huy. The company advanced towards a saddle leading to a field 450 meters wide by 350 meters deep where Delta Company was engaged with a company of NVA. Captain Graham radioed the colonel for air and artillery prep but was denied and ordered to move out. The first and second platoons entered the rice paddy, and the battle raged for the next several hours. Corporal Dirickson was badly wounded in the middle of the battle. The men of Foxtrot fought valiantly engaging an NVA regiment. Captain Graham, after being wounded twice, chose to stay with the badly wounded Dirickson. His last radio contact was to 3rd platoon commander indicating that he was out of ammunition and that '25 NVA are firing and maneuvering against me, and they are looking pretty good....' Foxtrot Company lost 30 men killed and another 61 wounded on June 3, 1967."

Dirickson's commendations include the Purple Heart (2nd award), National Defense Ribbon, Vietnamese Cross of Gallantry, Vietnam Service with 3 Stars, Vietnam Presidential Unit Citation, and Vietnam Campaign Device. In a letter to his platoon, Dirickson's mother says, "I was so afraid for my son; my prayers were for his safety night and day. I know God was with him his last day on earth. May God keep you all safe."

Honoring those who served:

Lynn Watson

(Editor's Note: The following feature is the fourteenth in a series of profiles that will honor the Vietnam War era veterans from Tonkawa. The bulk of the work and research was completed by Mike Schatz.)

Lynn Watson Honoring Those Who Served in the Vietnam Conflict

Right after graduation from Tonkawa High School in 1965, I rode along with a friend to Ponca City when he visited the Recruiting Center to take the Armed Forces Qualification Tests. A recruiter struck up a conversation with me, and I took the same test, mostly out of boredom while I waited for my friend. But I didn't sign up for anything at that time because I wanted to go to college. I spent a year floundering around Northern Oklahoma Junior College trying to figure out what I wanted to study before settling on house drafting

and design. After another year of study, I talked to a recruiter and described my studies, but who knew the Navy had no need for anyone to design houses? After joining the Navy on the Delayed Entry program in March of 1968, I spent 4 months waiting until the Navy had an opening in a series of electronics schools. I reported for boot camp in July of 1968. After boot camp, I spent the next year and half in schools studying such things as Secure Voice Communication (crypto) and the operation and maintenance of electronic equipment. I was then sent to Long Beach, California, where I was assigned to the USS Implicit (MSO 455), a wooden hulled ocean going minesweeper that was part of a four ship group called a division. Three months later the four ships of Minediv 73 deployed to sea. It took ten days of sailing to get to Pearl Harbor, where we took on supplies and left as quickly as we could to continue our mission. We contin-

ued to Guam and then Subic Bay in the Philippines. At Subic Bay, the minesweeper division split up, leaving two ships in Subic Bay for repairs. One ship went north and my ship went south to Vung Tau near the Mekong Delta. After two months of doing board and search for contraband such as weapons, explosives and ordinance in the south, we sped north because the ship up there couldn't repair their broken mine hunting sonar and was unable to operate in those waters without being able to locate mines. The move to the Cua Viet River, just a few miles south of the DMZ, changed our alert status to a higher level than it had been in the south. Our supply point was Da Nang, about eight hours from our patrol area. The main objective in our new patrol area was the same board and search of any vessels that we did in the south with the added duties of searching for mines. The big drawback to that mission was the civilian fishermen, who



LYNN WATSON

were not in North Vietnamese Army uniforms but often doing the dirty work for the NVA. This duty was in response to the loss of a Navy Mike boat (transport of supplies and/or troops) and a civilian fishing vessel to a pressure mine. Pressure mines are not the floating contact mines you see in movies. Pressure mines lie on the seafloor and explode when a ship cruises over them causing a

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difference in water pressure, which detonates the mine. The upward blast crushes the hull of any vessel going over it. Our ship had a contingent of Seals aboard who would dive on any of these mines we found and blow them up. We rightfully earned our motto of "Wooden ships and iron men, where the fleet goes we have been." We took a break from our minesweeping duties one day when an MSC (mine sweeper coastal) that was working closer to shore ran aground and started taking fire from the nearby jungle. We went to their rescue and spent about six hours rescuing the crew, all the while still under fire from the jungle. Our ship's guns returned fire during the operation to keep the attackers at bay, and we managed to rescue the entire crew with no loss of life. The grounded ship was an MSC that the US had given the South Vietnamese Navy, so all crew members of the Implicit were awarded the Viet Nam Gallantry Cross with Palm from the government of South Viet Nam. When the minesweeper division got stateside, the Navy decided to just swap crews rather than spend so much time in transit sending ships back and forth. A few minesweepers were mothballed, some were sold to other navies and some were sent to the Reserves. Ships that were sent to the Reserves were downsized in crew numbers. Mine was one of these. My ship went from 5 ETs (Electronics Technician) to just me. It was my responsibility to keep all of our electronics in operating order. When I was relieved to report to my next duty station, I was replaced by two ETs. After two years shore duty in the ET shop at the Radioman's "A" school at Naval Training Center San Diego, I was transferred to the USS Juneau (LPD-10) at Naval Station San Diego, doing one Westpac deployment and going to the shipyards in Oregon for a multi-year overhaul in Portland, Oregon. Two years later I left the Navy on March 13 1978, just short of 10 years of service.

Honoring those who served:

Donald Olmstead

(Editor's Note: The following feature is the fifteenth in a series of profiles that will honor the Vietnam War era veterans from Tonkawa. The bulk of the work and research was completed by Mike Schatz.)

Donald Olmstead Honoring Those Who Served in the Vietnam Conflict

Donald Olmstead as told to Mike Schatz:

I joined the Oklahoma National Guard service battery, the 189th Field Artillery when I was 15 years old. When they were activated in August 1950, they discharged me for being under age. I waited 3 months until November of 1950 and went to Enid, Oklahoma, where I got into the active Army, still under age. From Enid, Oklahoma, I was sent to Fort Carson, Colorado, for basic training and from Fort Carson to Fort Riley, Kansas and then to Korea. After Korea, I got out of the military for 19 days, and then

I went to Fort Sill to go back into the service. In 1965, I got orders to go to John F. Kennedy Warfare Center in Fort Bragg for language school and customs of the Vietnamese. I was Sergeant 1st Class at that time. After finishing Vietnamese language school, I was deployed to Vietnam. I was on Ranger Team 23, a 5-man team. We were further assigned to the Vietnamese 23rd Ranger Battalion, a battalion of around 140 to 180 Vietnamese and 5 Americans. Our main responsibility was the Cambodian border, where we patrolled in small teams trying to locate roads, trails, and base camps. In August, we were given a mission to clear a large area for the arrival of the Korean White Horse Division base camp. My unit began to receive nightly fire from Lac Ninh village. On August 8th, about midnight, our unit moved out and swung left of the village for a couple of miles to come in from the rear. A short distance later, we came under

automatic rifle fire. We were attacked by two Viet Cong platoons. (Olmstead led a squad of Vietnamese rangers around one flank and fired into three enemy positions, enabling his unit to overrun the enemy. He also exposed himself to fire while carrying a wounded Ranger to cover, for which he received the Bronze Star with a "V" Device.) While helping the 101st Airborne clear the base camp for the Korean White Horse Division, I had the leading platoon leader bring up a machine gun team for cover. In the night, something or someone ran into me, so I had the huts searched. We found 2 young girls and 3 men. Further searching turned up colorful costumes, musical instruments and radios, all tuned to a Viet Cong station. We had captured a Viet Cong USO.

Our next mission was to guard a hamlet during election. We were staying in tobacco barns about 3 miles from the battalion. I dis-



DONALD OLMSTEAD

agreed with the Company Commander about the location for the machine guns, and he would not talk to me the rest of the day. That night, we were in the barn talking and playing cards when we heard a grenade explode. A Viet Cong soldier came through the door where my radio and rifle were. We escaped through the

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other door. Since the commander had stopped speaking to me, I had had no warning to withdraw. When we found the rest of the company, they were setting up a perimeter. Two offshore barges offered assistance. Air support located two valleys the enemy could have used to withdraw. A small plane, called a bird dog, offered to fly over the valleys, using his spotlight to detect movement. On the first pass, he drew fire, and the air strikes and artillery were directed on the valley. After dawn, we were directed to recover weapons and obtain a body count, but the Vietnamese commander only went a short way and then offered to pay the civilians for weapons they could recover. They received quite a haul.

I was in Vietnam from '65 to '66, and after my tour with the rangers, I returned to the states where I was promoted to 1st Sergeant. In 1969 I got orders for Vietnam again. (On May, 25th, 1969, Olmstead was involved in a battle at Lang Sau. Under heavy fire, Olmstead searched for a secure location for a landing zone. He directed his platoon in securing the location. He then drove his truck through the battle zone collecting casualties and transporting them to the secured location. He received the Bronze Star First Oak Leaf Cluster with "V" for his actions that day.) After that was the battle of An Loc. On the 6th of June, my unit was at Thunder 4 and I was sitting in my truck. I was in charge of getting the auto trucks fueled up, checking where the platoons were, making sure that they had everything they wanted. Mortar rounds started coming in. We were given coordinates and location for counter fire. The lead platoon was only a few yards from the NVA command group when they began to receive heavy fire. The battle lasted until late afternoon. The NVA group was all killed. (Olmstead organized the ground forces and led the assault, placing his men in strategic positions. Learning that the lead platoon was under fire, he led the 2nd platoon through hostile fire to provide support. He also used the tracks to clear an evacuation zone for the wounded and assisted five helicopters into the landing zone. He was awarded the Second Oak Leaf Cluster.) On June 9, 1969, we made contact with a large NVA group in the rubber fields at Quan Loi. The battle lasted about 4 hours. We were then pulled out of the An Loc area and sent to Dau Tang, where we continued to make contact with the enemy.

I spent 2 years and 2 months in Vietnam. My first tour was in the rangers, and I was Sergeant First Class. My second tour was with the 2nd of 2nd Mech, and I was First Sergeant of Bravo Company, 2nd of the 2nd. I earned 32 awards in the military, among them the Legion of Merit, 2nd Award of the Combat Infantry Badge, Valorous Unit Award, Vietnamese Gallantry Cross with Palm, Vietnamese Honor Medal 1st class for Gallantry, The Vietnamese Ranger Badge, 8 Campaign Stars for Major Battles, Army Commendation Medal 2 Oak Leaf Cluster, Purple Heart, Bronze Star with 5 Oak Leaf Clusters; 3 with V Device for Gallantry.

I had heard stories about service men returning from Vietnam. When I came back from Vietnam after my second tour I got to the airport in Los Angeles and, of course, in uniform. There were a lot of protesters living in the airport. They had their backpacks and all that. I asked one of the security guards, "What are they doing in here?" He said, "Well, if we don't bother them, they don't vandalize the place. They don't start any trouble, so we just leave them alone." I went from one end to the other, kicking their backpacks, just daring them to get up because I had heard these stories about them spitting on people. But they didn't get up.

I stayed in the military after Vietnam. I taught at Kansas State University for 7 years in the military history department. I taught topography, which was actually map reading. I taught MS-101 and 2.

After the military, I moved to Las Vegas and took a job at Clark County Social Services. I worked there 24 years, and when I retired, I opened up a tow truck company in Las Vegas, which my son now operates. I make the 1st Infantry Division reunion every year. I'm still active as far as military. I am the Honorary Command Sergeant Major of the 2nd of the 2nd Infantry. My duties are to assist the rear detachment at Fort Knox any way I can. I visit hospitals, the wounded, and attend funerals.

Honoring those who served:

Hank Coates and Wayne Solomon

(Editor's Note: The following feature is the sixteenth in a series of profiles that will honor the Vietnam War era veterans from Tonkawa. The bulk of the work and research was completed by Mike Schatz.)

Hank Coates and Wayne Solomon Honoring Those Who Served in the Vietnam Conflict

Hank Coates by Ken Coats

Hank graduated from THS in 1968. He entered the Navy at the same time as Ron Mourer, Pat Morgan, and me. All four of us were in the same boot camp in San Diego. Hank was rated a seaman and sent to aviation squadron in the San Francisco area. By Christmas, his unit was assigned to the USS Enterprise and on its way to Yankee Station off the coast of Vietnam. Four days west of Pearl Harbor, the Enterprise experienced a terrible accident costing the lives of

twenty-five sailors. Planes fully fueled and armed with heat seeking missiles filled the flight deck in preparation for launch when the exhaust from one of them set off the missile on another, creating a chain reaction of fire and explosions. Hank was at his bunk and not on deck, but all the hatches were dogged down (sealed) to prevent the possibility of sinking. Burning fuel flowed down into the ship, so Hank and shipmates had to resort to using a fire hose to wet the steel bulkhead to keep from being cooked. The Enterprise returned to Pearl for three months of repair then proceeded to Vietnam. After his tour in Vietnam, Hank wanted to be a parachute rigger and attended Rigger school in Lakehurst, New Jersey. After making the required jump, Hank got into sport jumping until a jump resulted in tangled lines. His next assignment was a squadron in Florida and a Mediterranean cruise on the USS Kennedy. Upon his return for the



HANK COATES

Mediterranean, Hank and I made a joint application that was granted for Hank to come to Beeville, Texas, for brother duty his final year in the Navy. Hank died of cancer in 1999.

Wayne Solomon

Wayne Solomon enlisted in the Navy and served in a Security



WAYNE SOLOMON

Naval unit until 1985. His rank was Chief Petty Officer CTMC (Cryptographic Systems Maintenance). He joined at Copperas Cove, Texas, because he wanted the technical training. Solomon says that his basic training was "eight weeks of hell: marching, drilling, shipboard indoctrination, one day at a time." Once in Vietnam, his duty included signals, communications intelligence, computer cryptosystems maintenance, and classified ma-

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-terial officer. His last day in the Navy was marked with a Command Retirement Ceremony, and he was piped ashore in Guam. After leaving the Navy, Solomon worked for the Department of the Air Force and then the State of California as State Property controller for Folsom Prison. His decorations include two Meritorious Unit Commendations, four Navy Achievement Medals, Recruiting Gold Wreath with six stars, and National Security Agency Commendation. He is retired and lives in Roseville, California.

Honoring those who served:

Pat Mills and Charles Wood Jr.

(Editor's Note: The following feature is the sixteenth in a series of profiles that will honor the Vietnam War era veterans from Tonkawa. The bulk of the work and research was completed by Mike Schatz.)

Pat Mills and Charles Wood Jr. Honoring Those Who Served in the Vietnam Conflict

Pat Mills

Pat Mills graduated from Tonkawa High School and received his Army draft notice in 1966. He immediately went to Ponca City and joined the Navy. He was sent to Kingsville, Texas, where he spent the next two and a half years before being sent to South Vietnam. He was stationed at Da Nang with a fleet support unit. Mills was a ground crew captain whose chief job was to load bombs, refuel, and ready aircraft for missions. He also spent time in the control tower watch-

ing for Navy and Marine Corps planes in order to send ground guides to bring the planes in for service. Although he sometimes boarded aircraft carriers for training, he stayed on land in Da Nang while performing his duties. The airstrip often came under mortar attack, and the injuries were numerous. However, Mills was never wounded. He agrees with other vets that while in Vietnam the mail was slow, two or three weeks between deliveries. He received the Tonkawa News along with letters from home. He also ate a steak dinner at the officer's mess about once a month and walked to the "old" air force side for Chinese food. He was able to use the sauna, which he enjoyed, but mostly played cards. He had a pet monkey, and it kept him entertained although it repeatedly stole his lunch. Mills recalls with a chuckle the time the tire on an aircraft he was pulling to the hanger blew out. The pressure is 350-400 psi while a car tire is



LCpl. Charles Wood Jr.

30-35 psi. The pressure from the aircraft tire tore up everything around it and scared everyone, thinking they had been hit by enemy fire. Mills flew to Corpus Christi, Texas, and then home when his tour was over. He had \$900.00 from his pay, mainly because there was nowhere to spend it. He bought a 1971 Ford half ton pickup and went to work at Wetmore's, did some farming,



Pat Mills

some roughnecking, and in 1994, went to work at Kay Electric. He retired in 2006 and lives on his farm southeast of Tonkawa.

LCpl. Charles Wood Jr.

Charles Wood Jr. Volunteered for the Marine Corps in 1970 and trained at Camp Pendleton before being sent to Vietnam in July, 1970, nearly his birthday. He told his brother-in-law, Kirk Nesbit, that being a Marine was a

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"dream come true" for him. Wood was a machine gunner in Vietnam and "wished he could have brought his machine gun home with him." But just two months into his tour, he was shot by sniper fire while helping someone else. Wood was evacuated by helicopter and spent the rest of his tour in California recuperating. He lost his spleen and a kidney and suffered nerve damage to both legs, one of which was partially paralyzed. Doctors told Wood he would never walk again, but he was determined and managed to walk with a severe limp the rest of his life. He was Honorably Discharged in December, 1970. Wood married Peggy Wheeler in 1971, and she says, "If he ever talked about the war, it was to his best friend, Danny Ailey. He came home but was not the same." When he came home, he hunted with his dad and fished with his friends. He did farm work and became a pumper for Tenaco Oil Company. He spent "special" time with each of his children, coyote hunting with Krystal and taking Paul with him to check the wells. Wood died at home at the age of twenty-nine. His death was ruled service connected. His dress blues were not sent home with him when he left the military in 1970, so he was buried in blues borrowed from his friend, Danny Ailey. "He would have gone back to Nam if he could," Peggy says. He was awarded the Bronze Star, Purple Heart, Vietnam Service Medal with one star, Vietnam Campaign Medal, National Defense Service Medal, and Combat Action Ribbon.

Honoring those who served:

James Mayfield, Woody Berry and Dennis Miller

(Editor's Note: The following feature is the eighteenth in a series of profiles that will honor the Vietnam War era veterans from Tonkawa. The bulk of the work and research was completed by Mike Schatz.)

James Mayfield, Woody Berry and Dennis Miller Honoring Those Who Served in the Vietnam Conflict

James Mayfield

James Mayfield graduated from Tonkawa High School in 1948. He joined the Navy in 1949 and trained for aircraft maintenance and parachute rigging. At the end of his enlistment, he became a policeman in Florida, but after a year, Mayfield returned to the Navy. Eventually, he was sent to Vietnam. Since he had extensive experience on the maintenance of sea planes, he was assigned to Camron Bay as maintenance chief on the USS Pine Island, a sea plane tender. He was in



JAMES MAYFIELD

charge of twelve planes, four in the air twenty-four hours a day seven days a week. At times, Mayfield was allowed to fly with a patrol along the South coast of Vietnam. Usually it was calm, but on one flight, the crew saw what looked like a grounded Viet Cong boat on the beach. Mayfield was stationed on the right side door of his plane, manning an M60 machine gun when the VC aimed rifle tracers at his plane. After a short period of exchanging fire, the roof on the VC boat opened and started to elevate



WOODY BERRY

a large cannon. Mayfield's pilot turned out to sea about ten miles and lowered to 100 feet off the water, heading straight back to the VC. They were low enough that the cannon could not aim at them. They fired two high velocity rockets, leaving a large hole where the boat had been.

After six months in Camron Bay, Mayfield was sent back to California, where he loaded supplies onto the USS Ticonderoga for another trip to Vietnam. For a month, Mayfield's crew flew night hours in the Tonkin Gulf.



DENNIS MILLER

They logged 12 hours in that month, and the pilot's received Air Medals. Mayfield received a Navy Commendation Medal for his part. He retired from the Navy in 1974 as an Anti-Submarine Warfare Senior Petty Officer.

Woody Berry

Just out of school in 1962, Woody Berry joined the Army.

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He received his draft notice two weeks later. He felt that joining was the right thing to do and it was the right time to do it. Berry signed up with the first recruiter he saw and was sent to Basic Training at Fort Polk, Louisiana. Because he tested well, Berry had choices. He was assigned E5 Small Unit Leader and went to Officers Training, becoming a 2nd Lieutenant. He was sent to one of the first officer intelligence classes, completed the Special Forces Qualification Course, Jump School, and Ranger training. He was a "Green Beret" assigned to an "A" Team. The team was out five to ten days at a time working with local tribesmen and running patrols. They had numerous skirmishes with the enemy. The Vietcong attacked his compound in the wire three times, and except for himself, all on his team sustained wounds. As part of stealth and concealment, Berry and his team endeavored to smell like the Vietnamese, living among them, eating what they ate. At times, they traded enemy gear for food. He carried a K-Bar knife, a forty-five pistol, and an M15 (a version of the M16). With his team, Berry patrolled the South Vietnam border area, Laos, Cambodia, and other classified areas. His good luck charm was a South African "kid" he calls his body guard. After four years in the service, Berry returned to the US and attended college in Dallas. He worked for two irrigation companies, one in Dallas and one in Houston. He eventually took over the Houston company. He is now retired and lives in Edmund.

Dennis Miller

Dennis Miller, From the Base Newspaper at Minot AFB and the Minot Daily News in Minot, North Dakota by Senior Airman Stephanie Morris

Three days before Christmas, in 1966, a 17-year-old boy began a journey that would last 22 years and take him around the world. Dennis Miller was joining the United States Air Force and heading to basic training at Lackland Air Force Base, Texas. "Basic lasted six months," Miller said. "After that I went to tech school for nine months to learn weather equipment maintenance and become a 302X0."

Fresh from technical training, Miller was sent to Korat Air Base, Thailand where he began installing electrical equipment to aid with the war in Vietnam. Miller spent a year working on everything from telephones to navigation equipment as a member of the 483rd General Electronics Engineering Installation Agency. He also assisted with the installation of a CPS9 long pause weather radar in Nakhon Phanom, Thailand, to monitor the weather over Hanoi, Vietnam. "If there was cloud cover, the aircraft couldn't drop their ordnance," Miller said. "That meant that they would have to turn back and try to land a plane with armed weapons." Miller explained this made the radar project in Nakhon Phanom a top priority for the military at the time. During the installation process, he had free reign at the site and a Jolly Green Giant HH-53 helicopter at his disposal, even though he was only an Airman 1st Class.

A year after he began his work in Thailand, Miller was once again on the move. During his career Miller worked at Air Force Communications Command, Scott AFB, Illinois, as a program manager charged with finding new technology for weather equipment, training Airmen on its use, organizing logistics and field testing. The final stop of his 22 years in the Air Force was McClellan AFB, California. As a member of the Sacramento Air Logistics Center he worked as a liaison for AFCC, overseeing \$40 billion worth of communications equipment utilized by the Air Force.

"After retiring, I went to work for a company called Fujitsu," Miller said. "I started as a tech writer and became the first product manager for high-speed fiber-optic transmission equipment in the United States."

Honoring those who served:

Donald Mock, Larry Massie, John Strome

(Editor's Note: The following feature is the nineteenth in a series of profiles that will honor the Vietnam War era veterans from Tonkawa. The bulk of the work and research was completed by Mike Schatz.)

Donald Mock, Larry Massie & John Strome Honoring Those Who Served in the Vietnam Conflict

October 13, 1967 was the last time Shelly Mock saw her husband. He walked up the steps to the plane, turned, saluted, and deployed to Vietnam. He was nineteen; she was seventeen. They had been married a year. He wrote to her every two days and told her to keep dancing no matter what. Six months later, he was dead. Mock graduated from THS in May of 1967. He entered the Marine Corps, spent six months in basic and advanced training, and went to Vietnam as a field radio operator in H&S



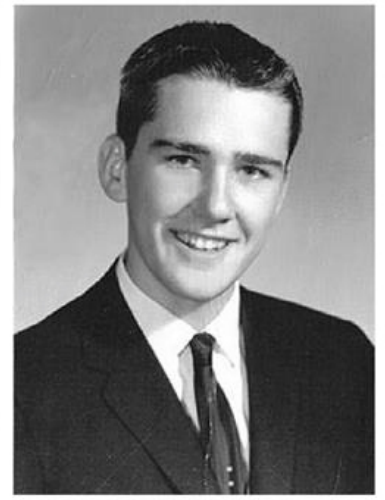
DONALD MOCK

Company, 1st Battalion 1st Marines 1st Marine Division, III Marine Amphibious Force. On May 5, 1968, Mock suffered wounds from an explosive device during ground fire in Quang Tri Province, South Vietnam. Quang Tri City borders North Vietnam to the north and Laos to the west, making it the most vulnerable capital in South Vietnam and a prime target of the North Vietnamese. In 1968, it was part



LARRY MASSIE

of the Tet Offensive. Losing it to the North would have established Communism in South Vietnam. Because it was a major capital, a North Vietnam take-over would have been both politically and psychologically embarrassing, attesting to the fear that South Vietnam could not sustain its government. The battle for Quang Tri City was a major victory during the 1968 Tet Offensive. The primary U.S. contingency in the battle for Quang Tri City was the 3rd Marine Division and its sup-



JOHN STROME

port groups, among them the 1st Marine Division, III Marine Amphibious Force, of which Mock was a member. The battle began January 31, 1968, and the city was cleared of the NVA by February 6, but the NVA attempted another take-over of Quang Tri City in May, 1968, the month Mock was killed, just a year after his high school graduation. His

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medals include the Purple Heart, National Defense Medal, Vietnam Service Medal, and Vietnam Campaign Medal.

Larry Glenn Massie died at Go Cong in the Mekong Delta on June 20th 1968. He was the third Tonkawa man to die in Vietnam. Massie started his tour March 12th, 1968. He was a clerk/typist with the 45th Military Intelligence Company, 519 MI Battalion. He was 19 years-old at the time of his death. Massie died of wounds received from friendly fire during a hostile engagement. He received the Purple Heart, National Defense Medal, Vietnam Service Medal, and Vietnam Campaign Medal. He is buried in the Tonkawa IOOF Cemetery.

The fourth Tonkawa alumnus who died in Vietnam is John Clarence Strome. He was wounded at Tay Ninh, close to the North Vietnamese border in the Mekong Delta on August 25th, 1968. Strome graduated in 1962 and received a college deferment. Tired of worrying about his military obligation, Strome left OU to join the Army. His Vietnam tour began May 12, 1968, and he was assigned to "A" Company, 5th Special Forces Group. Strome's company split into two units, a guerilla unit whose mission was reconnaissance in enemy territory and a strike force. SP4 Strome was a medic with the 3rd Mobile Strike Force Company. Friends remember him as a quiet but fun classmate. Wayne Solomon was a classmate and buddy who says of John,

"He had a great liking of the outside and Martial Arts. We had the usual escapades with making model rockets which did not always launch the way we hoped and camping. We would sometimes stay up all night trying to photograph lightning strikes. John was probably the kindest person I knew; he never expressed a bad thought or action towards anyone." DeWayne Lindsey, Strome's friend and neighbor still searches for details of Strome's death and confirms that Strome liked putting together models, rockets, cars and airplanes." Strome was an only child, twenty-four years old when he died from small arms fire. He received the Purple Heart, National Defense Medal, Vietnam Service Medal, and Vietnam Campaign Medal.

Honoring those who served:

Joe McAninch

(Editor's Note: The following feature is the twentieth in a series of profiles that will honor the Vietnam War era veterans from Tonkawa. The bulk of the work and research was completed by Mike Schatz.)

Joe McAninch
Honoring Those Who
Served in the Vietnam
Conflict

Joe McAninch is a Vietnam Veteran who arrived in Vietnam three days after the Tet offen-

sive. In a letter to Mike Schatz, McAninch reports that he was an assistant crew chief at Charleston Air Force Base in South Carolina when he received orders for the 777nd tactical airlift squadron at Mactan Air force Base, Mactan Island, Phillipines. "I arrived at Mactan on New Year's Day, 1968," he says. "My first assignment was NCOIC of the wash rack. Three weeks later, I was reassigned as assistant crew chief at Tanson NHUT Air Force Base, Saigon, Vietnam. Our mission

was to fly combat support, such as ammo, food, fuel, and mail. We stayed in Vietnam until we flew 75 hours, then we returned to Mactan for a wash, an inspection and repairs, then back to the war zone. My next assignment was crew chief of 61-751 C130B. I was a flying crew chief, which meant I went with the aircraft. In August of 1968, our squadron was moved to Clark Air Force Base, and in December I went stateside for discharge. "



JOE MCANINCH