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FEATURED

We Shall Not Forget

Vietnam vet hangs on for more military adventures

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Doug Jenkins receives a medal for his service during the Vietnam War. Jenkins was deployed to Vietnam in 1967. Contributed

In 1967, Doug Jenkins was at a softball game with his family. A special forces unit from a North Carolina base put on a display.



“One of those soldiers jumped out of a helicopter with a parachute and landed right in the middle of the softball diamond, and I said, ‘I’m going to join the Army,’” Jenkins said.

Jenkins served in the U.S. Army as a sergeant during the Vietnam War and remained in the Army until 1993. He received two bronze stars during his military career.

Military career

Born the youngest of eight siblings in Highland, he grew up in Dodgeville. He currently lives in McFarland where he and his brother are part of the American Legion Post 534.



Although Jenkins had already planned to enlist, he became even more motivated when his older brother was drafted into the U.S. Army.

“My next older brother was in Vietnam and my intention was to get in the Army and to get him out of Vietnam, because only one kid (per family) could be in a combat zone at one time, and I wanted to take his place so he could come home,” he said.

Jenkins volunteered to join the infantry unit. This was the quickest way for him to get to Vietnam and take his brother’s place overseas. He was 17 at the time, and his parents had to sign for him to join.



Jenkins planned to go to airborne school, because it guaranteed deployment. However, in January 1969, water was discovered on his left knee and he could not pass the physical to attend airborne school.

“The Army had other plans for me apparently,” he said. “They sent me to sergeant school.”

Before Jenkins completed sergeant school, his brother returned from Vietnam, and the two brothers ended up completing back-to-back tours in Vietnam.

Jenkins did not initially see himself becoming a sergeant.

“I barely made it through high school,” he said. “I was 42 out of 44 kids, didn’t like school and to get put into, or trained to be a leader as a sergeant wasn’t something I had planned for, but I had learned early on to seek responsibility and take responsibility for your actions.”

Jenkins was deployed to Vietnam in 1969.

He had just turned 19 and was leading 16 men as they traveled through Vietnam.

“I was in a 50-vehicle convoy, and I was the last armored personnel carrier in the convoy,” he said. “We were coming out of Cambodia — it was probably about noon — and we got ambushed ahead of us, and when the dust and the chaos kind of cleared, we were getting shot at with RPGs and small arms.”

To his side was a sergeant and a private hunkering beside a Jeep that had been hit.

“They couldn’t move,” he said. “They would have been either killed or taken prisoner.”

Jenkins learned in sergeant school to never stop moving during an ambush, so they kept moving until they were out of the kill zone.



Once they were clear, he radioed to the lead vehicle that they had been ambushed and to stop the convoy. He and a group of men went back for the sergeant and private. They had to go all the way through the kill zone to another safe zone where they could turn their vehicle around. On the way back through the kill zone, they grabbed the two men and put them in the vehicle, and both escaped uninjured.

After the Vietnam War ended, Jenkins stayed in the Army. He and his new wife went to Germany. He later spent a year in Fort Knox and was deployed to Korea in 1973. When he returned from Korea in 1974, he was sent to England on a special assignment. He was drafted into drill sergeant school from 1975 until 1977.

He returned home at age 26 and spent 15 years in the Army Reserves. He became a painter and got a degree in real estate. He had four children, one of whom is also a painter. He retired in 2018, but still helps his son with work.

Busy retirement

In his retirement, Jenkins had been planning on traveling, but he felt unfulfilled in his life's journey. He prayed to God and asked what his life's purpose was.

On Christmas Eve 2017, he received a call from Karen Andro at First United Methodist Church to ask if he could help with the church's Christmas meal to feed homeless in Dane County.

"I was so distraught when I got done of the pain and sorrow that I could see in these homeless peoples' or hurting peoples' lives," he said. "I could see the pain and sorrow that they were going through."

He immediately decided to take action.

"This is nonsense in America to leave people out on the street who are suffering when we have so much," he said.



On Easter Sunday, April 1, 2018, Jenkins started the American Rescue Division, an organization designed to help get homeless people off the street. He worked to help give them temporary and permanent housing and to find employment.

After one year, Jenkins had to discontinue the organization due to lack of funding, but he still wanted to help those suffering.

He is now running for president as an independent candidate. He has been to 161 congressional districts in 18 states to speak with people and gain exposure before the 2020 election.

Kevin Passon

