

Kurt Bancroft

Lowe Veterans Appreciation Video – November 11, 2020

My name is Kurt Bancroft. I was in the United States Army. I was drafted in February of 1969. I went to, I was sent to Vietnam in July of 1969. I was in the Infantry and I went to the 1st, Infantry Division, the big red one. At the end, I was actually in the 2nd and 28th of the 1st Infantry Division in a mortar unit.

And the Vietnamization of the war came about at the end of 1969 and the 1st Infantry Division was the first division to be sent home, but it was just the colors that went home, not us soldiers. So, I was transferred out of the mortar platoon in 2nd 28th, and went to the 2nd and 2nd mechanized as a 50-caliber machine gunner on APC, which a personnel carrier, armored personnel carrier. And so we ran around the jungles in this APC for three months and they were sent home.

So then I was transferred from there to the Americal Division up at Chu Lai which is just south of Da Nang and I thought I was going to be a door gunner. I had an opportunity when I was transferring in to be a door gunner, but they found out. I was my MOS [military occupational specialty] was actually a mortar. So, they said they needed me in the field. So, when I got to my unit in Americal, they said we don't need any mortar people. So I ended up just being a rifleman until I was - I left until I left Vietnam in July of 1970.

I had a pretty easy tour as far as I survived it. I had I was wounded with some shrapnel minor wounds in my lower legs. They were just flesh wounds. I was very, very fortunate. Other people that were with me at that time lost their feet and one guy lost part of his hand and I just was lucky.

It was because I got to move around as much as I did. I got to see a lot of different parts of Vietnam that a lot of people don't. When I was in the 1st, 2nd, and 28th, we were down by a place called My Khe, which is just North of Saigon. When I went to 2nd 2nd we went to Dau Tieng, which is a village right next to the Michelin rubber plantation near Cambodia. So, and that was a little bit different terrain. And then when I went to Chu Lai up by south of Da Nang, that was very mountainous. So I see a little bit of little bit of everything.

I was in a number of firefights and I have to admit that those were very scary. They were very quick. I don't think any of them lasted more than two or three minutes at the most. It was all at night. I've never had anybody to my knowledge shoot at me during the day. It was always at night and what we shot back at was muzzle flash. I could see the muzzle flash of them shooting at us and tracers. And so you just shot in that direction. Again it was quick. Scary. I'll always remember, and I don't know if every veteran who goes through this when they're in combat like that, but I don't ever remember really being scared when it was going on. But afterward, when you got to think about it was like, kind of scary, like just what happened, you know.

So, I was only in the Army, 22 months, seven days because I got an early out to go to college. And so, when I got back from Vietnam in July of '70, I couldn't, I still had till February '71 before I could get discharged. But, because I went to college, I got out in December of 1970. So I was one of the reasons I kind of allowed myself to be drafted, as I didn't want to be in the service for any amount - the shortest period of time I could, which it worked out for me to be drafted. Almost joined the navy, but navy would have been four years and I so I backed out of that and just let myself be drafted.

When I came home, you know, there was a lot of dissent in this country. The only issue I really had was when I come back from Vietnam, I came to Seattle, actually Fort Lewis, which is in near Tacoma, but I flew out of Seattle. There was an airline strike going on. And so we had to wait at the airport to get a standby flight back to in my case back to Chicago Lansing and after about a day and a half I finally was able to get onto an airplane. And they sat me next to this woman. And this woman asked the stewardess if they would move me because she didn't want to want to sit by me and in my uniform and everything, so she knew I was coming back from Vietnam. And fortunately, the stewardess moved her and didn't move me, which I thought was pretty nice, but - but that didn't happen. That was really probably the only worse thing.

And unfortunately, back then. So 1970 till 19 roughly around 1985 you didn't really tell anybody you were a Vietnam veteran. You kind of keep kept it hidden because it just wasn't a popular thing to do like now most Vietnam veterans are proud to wear a cap or something that says they were a Vietnam veteran, but it took about 15 years for that to happen and now everybody respects military or at least they should.

And that's kind of these Vietnam veterans kind of led the way for that I guess you could say. I've had a lot of people since then thank me for my service, which I remember it used to be uncomfortable when they do that. Now, I take it as honor, the thank for that, appreciate that. Just like I said for so long, you didn't tell anybody. I've I can, I can, I have instances where I was in Florida and Florida's very veteran-friendly and I couldn't believe I could go to almost any bar, tiki bar, or whatever restaurant. And if I wore in a Vietnam veterans have people are buying me drinks, which is always pretty amazing, but -

Yeah, I didn't know a lot about Vietnam before I went. I took it upon myself afterwards to study the whole situation in Vietnam. It's probably a war that should never happened. But it is what it is. That's what it did happen. I did my small little part.

I believe I have roughly seven young men that I knew that never survived Vietnam and I think of them frequently here at Maple Rapids. Rocky Snyder was a friend of mine. Probably one of the reasons I loved myself to be drafted. He was a marine. He died and was killed I believe in '6-. Yeah, he was killed a 1967 on my 18th birthday. And he was only 19, actually he was only - he hadn't turned 19 yet. He was still 18. And that was always in the back of my mind that [?] Rocky could do it Kurt could do it and go over and serve the country.

So, I guess that's my story. I've made it back. I'm somewhat. I was very fortunate compared to a lot of people coming back from Vietnam because I had a job when I come back and I had family support. I had a job so I could get right on with my life. When I come back and I could put my experiences the good and the bad behind me, while I concentrated on other things, where there were a lot of Vietnam veterans come back to nothing. They didn't have jobs. They didn't have family support and then when the whole country didn't support you, it was pretty rough on a lot of them.