

ALL GAVE SOME; SOME GAVE ALL

This week's veteran is Gary Caulk.

Gary spent most of his childhood in California, moving from the San Fernando Valley to Assumption in the summer of 1964. He completed his senior year at Assumption High School, graduating in 1965. On June 12, 1967, he was drafted into the Army, reporting to Fort Leonard Wood for basic training.

After completing Advanced Infantry Training at Fort Polk, LA, Gary was sent to South Vietnam. He was assigned to Company C, 1st Battalion, 12th Infantry Regiment, 4th Infantry Division which operated in the Central Highlands from Dak To in the south to Ban Me Thuot in the north. The first time Gary jumped off the helicopter after joining his unit at Pleiku, he immediately came under fire; welcome to Vietnam. On November 23rd, only ten days after Gary's arrival in Vietnam, the 4th Division's 1/12 Infantry helped the 173rd Airborne Brigade capture Hill 875 near Dak To. The 173rd had been fighting North Vietnamese troops on Hill 875 for three days and had suffered heavy losses.

Most of the time, his unit was on the move. Every night they would have to build a bunker by digging a trench, fall trees with a machete, and fill sandbags with dirt. In May, 1968, Gary was at the Landing Zone(LZ) Brillo Pad, near the Cambodian border. On May 16, Brillo Pad came under heavy fire at about 0200 when the North Vietnamese Army tried to overrun it. In the initial bombardment, two rockets landed at the front edge of Gary's bunker burying him under dirt, but he survived. He spent the rest of the night trying to prevent NVA flamethrowers who had breached the perimeter fence from reaching the bunkers. Everything was used to keep the barrel of his machine gun cool: water, cool-aide, oil, anything liquid. By the time the attack was repulsed, he had fired over 5,000 rounds, but no enemy had reached the bunkers. During May and June, his unit was in constant battle with the NVA trying to prevent men and supplies from crossing the Cambodian border.

Gary had many close calls like the one above. A grenade landed only a few feet from him, but it didn't explode. Once, helicopter gun ships were called in for support, but they mistook his bunker for the enemy. He and some other soldiers were sitting on top of their bunker when they heard the first rocket land. They dove into the bunker before a minigun completely destroyed the top of their bunker. He feels really lucky that he survived his year in Vietnam. At the end of his tour, he was a machine gun squad leader.

After his year in Vietnam ended in November of 1968, Gary returned to the United States to serve his remaining time at Fort Campbell, KY., being discharged June 11, 1968. Before reporting to Fort Campbell, he had thirty days leave. While visiting his grandparent's farm, he heard a hunter discharge a shotgun nearby. He instantly was flat on the ground, an instinctive reaction to his Vietnam experience.

Gary married Connie Pinkston in October of 1969. They have three children, six granddaughters, and one grandson.

Thank you, Sergeant Gary Caulk, for what you did for us.