

VETERAN'S CORNER

Tualatin man believed events in his first Army Ranger Vietnam Long Range Reconnaissance Mission (LRRP) were leading him to the last day of his life

BY DALE POTTS

You just never know! Bill Manderfeld moved down the street from me in 1978. His oldest daughter, Keri, quickly became best friends with my oldest daughter Janet. I found that he also worked for IRS. Bill had served in the Army in Vietnam and then finished college. I had served in the Navy after college. We both finished our active military duty in December, 1969 and were home for Christmas, me in Northern California and he in Portland area. We both soon were working at IRS.

Bill moved his family to Sherwood in 1979 but returned to Tualatin in 1990. We have a lot in common. We are both Catholic. Both weekend warriors, he in the Oregon Army National Guard, me in Navy Reserve. We both had Ford Mavericks when he moved to Tualatin. As the years passed, we independently bought the same model of car as each other. That continued through 1998 when I had lunch with him and found we both were driving 1997 Nissan pickups. Bill was the Master of Ceremonies at my IRS retirement party in 1999. But it wasn't until a few years after my retirement that I learned that Bill was a purple heart recipient; wounded in combat in Vietnam.

He is proud that he is an Army Ranger but doesn't talk much about his Purple Heart. When he does, he has a compelling story. It starts with his transfer to K Company, 75th Ranger Regiment at Dak To after serving in the infantry in Vietnam. On his first LRRP – long range reconnaissance mission – on Nov 1, 1968 (All Saints Day) he came to believe it was the last day of his life. First, a Catholic Army Chaplain boarded their insertion Huey (helicopter) with Bill and the other two members of LRRP team. It was the only time Bill rode with a Chaplain. Before getting off at a nearby base, the Chaplain recognized Bill from attending religious services and asked him if he wanted to receive communion. Bill did.

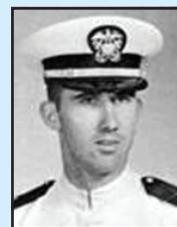
Bill's team was headed for an area with NVA (North Vietnamese Army) activity. Their five-day mission was to find out what was going on. Their Huey was accompanied by two helicopter gunships. When approaching the insertion area, the team climbed down the helo's gliders, holding on with one hand and their rifle with the other. They did that, feeling as young men, that they were invincible. As the helo briefly hovered above the ground, the team jumped off, immediately found cover and surveyed their area. When assured they

had not been detected, they cautiously moved to a nearby hill. One of the team members discovered an enemy communication wire and they followed it up the hill. They were passing a foxhole freshly dug by NVA to ambush them when an AK-47 fired at them. Bill dove into the foxhole and then pulled his team leader in with him. They didn't know what had happened to their third member who was carrying their radio but he eventually joined them in the foxhole.

They radioed in their position and reported they were under attack. Although not pinned down, they knew that the NVA were trying to encircle them. They spotted several hundred NVA high above them in a heavily forested area, moving between well concealed bunkers. As Bill tells it, they were aware of an NVA soldier crawling down the hill toward them. They couldn't get a direct shot so heaved a magnesium hand grenade towards him. It hit a tree and they heard a thud, thud as it rolled back down the hill, it went off about ten feet from the fox hole. The magnesium started fires in the trees and underbrush around them, clearly marking their position for the NVA higher on the hill. A second purpose for that grenade was to provide a smoke trail for air support fire, ideally providing a safe area for them. Ten feet was way too close. Two helo gunships arrived, and began shooting up the jungle around the team. An extraction helicopter followed but was damaged by machine gun fire; forcing it to return toward the closest air base, accompanied by the two gunships. Then, laying in the foxhole, Bill told his two fellow team members that he thought this was the last day of his life. He explained about it being All-Saints Day, the Chaplain giving him Communion, rescue copter hit, and now they were in foxhole, under enemy fire. Meanwhile they were alerted that two F-4 Phantoms were nearby, ready to unload bombs where the team wanted them. The F-4's dropped their bombs as directed and then returned, firing their guns. The three team members hugged the bottom of the foxhole but when Bill and another member were hit by shrapnel, their team leader called the planes off. Then knew they had to get out of there before dark. Another extraction helicopter came to the area and radioed them directions to the nearest level landing site. As the three ran, they heard enemy soldiers crashing through the underbrush behind them and shooting at them. As the helicopter picked them up, the team and the helo gunner sprayed the jungle area with gunfire to avoid being shot down.

Bill and his buddy were sent to an aid station. The medics had them undress and went over their bodies with magnifying glasses to remove all the shrapnel. Bill remembers it as very embarrassing. They were standing buck naked while American nurses (they hadn't seen an American woman in over four months) were walking by them, doing routine duties. In Vietnam, Bill had rapid combat advancement. In less than ten months, he was promoted to Private First Class; next to Specialist; and then to Sergeant.

Bill was with me at the September 14 City Council meeting, along with a large contingent from our local VFW Post, where Mayor Lou Ogden noted that Tualatin has a patriotic history and a large veteran population. He asked Councilwoman Nancy Grimes to read the Proclamation declaring Tualatin a "Purple Heart City" Her last sentence was – *"the City Council encourages our residents and Tualatin city businesses to show their appreciation for the sacrifices Purple Heart recipients have made in defending our freedoms, to acknowledge their courage, and to show them the honor and support they have earned."*



Ensign Dale Potts

Dale G. Potts has organized and MC'd Tualatin's Memorial Day observation for the past 13 years. He is a Navy Vietnam vet, serving as the Public Affairs Officer of the Aircraft Carrier USS Yorktown. After active duty, he remained in the reserves, retiring as a Navy Captain (same rank as an Army Colonel). His civilian career was primarily as the Oregon Public Affairs Officer for IRS. Contact Dale at vet.dale@gmail.com.



The young men felt invincible when standing on a glider, with a rifle in one hand and the other holding on to a helicopter strut. As the Huey hovers between four and eight feet above the ground, Rangers throw their ruck packs (each weighing over 100 lbs.) and excess gear away from drop area, and then jump.



Rangers Jim Zwiebel and Wild Bill Manderfeld (right) at Dak To, Vietnam in 1968. Bill did 15 LRRP missions, 11 as team leader before Promoted to Operations NCO.



Bill Manderfeld (second from left) chatting with Dale Potts, Joe Lipscomb and Joel Dulashani.



City Councilman Frank Bubenik listens as Councilwoman Nancy Grimes reads the proclamation.



Map showing Dak To area in Vietnam.



There were four Purple Heart recipient present when City Council proclaimed Tualatin a Purple Heart city... Going from right, Bill Manderfeld is third person; Jaynie Mintz, is the fourth; John Soliz, who told his story at City Council meeting, is the sixth and Joel Dulashanti, seventh. Joel provided the wording and laid the initial groundwork for the proclamation. He also helped bring Purple Heart status to Beaverton and Forest Grove as well as the state of Oregon and I-5 highway within Oregon borders.

Photo's by Tony Rizzuto

Free Vet Breakfast Here On Nov 9, Sign Up By Nov 3 To Attend Event

All veterans are invited to a free Veteran Recognition Breakfast on Monday, Nov 9. This event is being held at the Juanita Pohl Center, 8513 SW Tualatin Road, in Tualatin, starting at 8 am with program including speakers and drawings lasting until 9:30 am.

Five speakers will be sharing some fascinating military experiences. These include a Marine helicopter pilot who had 820 combat flights in Vietnam and went to become a Marine One Helicopter pilot for three Presidents. One is a woman who served in both Afghanistan and Iraq in a Army MP unit. Another was an Army Purple Heart recipient wounded in Afghanistan who returned to active service after having a leg amputated.

Advance registration is required by November 3; veterans call (503) 691-3061 for free admission, non-veterans pay \$6 by registering online www.tualatinoregon.gov/recreation/pohl-center-special-events.