

Kevin F Shephard US Army Date entered: May 13<sup>th</sup> 1968

I was drafted into the US Army

Basic Training: Ft. Gordon, Georgia

AIT: Ft. McClellan, Alabama

Deployed to the Republic of Vietnam for 1 year 2 day's

Finished my last 6 months at Ft. Carson, Colorado

In Vietnam I was assigned to the 1<sup>st</sup> Infantry Division ( Big Red One ) Troop B 1<sup>st</sup> Sqdn 4<sup>th</sup> Cav

**Poignant memory:** Our unit was assigned to a S&D (search & destroy mission ) in the Michelin Rubber Plantation with many other units. We were told that Intelligence had information that several Platoons of North Vietnam troops were held up in the Plantation. At the time we had in our unit an Arvin Shoulder (former captured North Vietnam shoulder who spoke English). We were advised that at approximately 3 AM, B-52 bombers were to hit the targets and than we would advance. The bombing never happened and we advanced at 6 AM. For most of the day we fought very hard and had many losses on both sides. At one point we came across a body of a North Vietnam shoulder who had a letter in his hand. The Arvin Shoulder told us that this shoulder was 18 years old & the letter was a dear John letter. This Shoulder had been fighting for over 3 years. This fact brought a new prospective on the war for me.

The fact that these young men were no different than us & were fighting a war that they believed was the right thing to do for their Country. They left their Family's & were told that we (US) were the enemy trying to destroy their Country. This was an eye opener for me and I gained a great deal of respect for them as Human Beings.

**Homecoming:** Back at the end of WWII, we had won the war and as the men returned they were Honored and respected, as they should have been. With Vietnam, we did not win the war and most of this Country was not in favor of us being engaged in this war. So, when I came home other than my Family I was not thanked for my service & felt that I was not appreciated for what I did. Before I was drafted I had a girl friend and when I left for the war she asked me several times why I was going to fight this war. I told her that I believed in this Great Country and that I wanted to keep us all free to live peaceful lives. About 8 months after I was in country (Vietnam), I stopped receiving letters and found out that she was protesting the war while attending SUNY Albany. She was an organizer of the war protesting on campus. When I came home I was very upset about the divide in this Country, the fact that we were not being supported and found myself quiet confused at times.

**What location were you in:** While in Vietnam most of my time I was located north of Saigon along the Cambodian border. This was about 30 miles north of Saigon. During the monsoon season we were assigned to Highway 1 and performed day & night patrols to guard against the North Vietnamese planting road side bombs in the roadway.

**General Duties:** I was assigned to a mechanized unit with the 1<sup>st</sup> Infantry Division. My first duty was a driver for an M-48 tank. After about 5 months & was promoted to SP-5 ( sgt ) and given command of a tank (tank commander). The last 2 months in Vietnam I was a driver on a VTR (vehicle tank retriever). Most day's we would patrol and perform S&D (search & destroy) missions

**What were your feelings in combat:** For the entire year I was serving in Vietnam, I was in the field. Several days after I arrived in country we had been ambushed by a small regiment of North Vietnamese soldiers. During combat I was very scared and always praying for it to be over soon. During combat it was a chaotic and tense time. Many times you did not know who was firing on you or where it was coming from. You did not know when the enemy would stop firing, so we would keep firing long after they would stop or were dead. My biggest concern

was to be able to keep my fellow shoulders safe & that I would not do anything that could harm them.

**Any injuries:** the only injuries were one time I was bitten by a scorpion and had to be air lifted to a hospital because of a very high fever. After my service ended I was diagnosed with Agent Orange associated with herbicide exposure. The following are a list of my illness that I am suffering with today:

- Hypertension
- Type II Diabetes
- Tinnitus
- Bilateral Hearing Loss
- Neuropathy
- Central Tremors

**What was daily life like; did your equipment work well; how was it compared to the enemies:** On any given day we would never know what we would be assigned to next. Many times we would be ordered to assist other units that were engaged in a fire fight. Because we were mechanized unit and could travel (very slowly) we would often have our orders changed. Most days we would patrol areas looking for the North Vietnamese troops and try to capture them. Our orders were that we could not fire our weapons' unless we were fired upon.

The equipment we had was far superior to the enemies. In each tank we stored enough fire power to last us a day or two. We had the ability to call in air support if we needed it. The enemy shoulders only had what they could carry on their backs. Most of the time, they only had enough ammunition to last for several hours. They had very little in the way of uniforms. They wanted to look like the South Vietnamese people. We were told that before they would engage us in a firefight they would smoke marijuana to give them courage.

**How were your officers:** Most of the officers I had were young and some were fresh out of officer candidate school. They had very little combat experience and were learning, just the same as we were. I did not run into any officers that were serving a second tour of duty.

**Did you receive any decorations, medals:**

- National Defense Service Medal
- Vietnam Service Medal w/2 stars
- Republic of Vietnam Campaign medal w/device 1960
- Bronze Star w/ V Device

**Funniest or most inspiring thing you experienced:** When I first landed out in the field with 6 other men I was the first to come

off the Chinook helicopter. One sgt for the unit we were assigned to, shouted out that I have Tree (nick name) (a reference to my height). He was clamming me for a member on his tank. For the rest of the year that I was stationed in Vietnam, everyone called me "Tree" by name. Not sure Anyone knew my real name, good reason for dog tags.

**What person do you remember best:** SSG Lee Kilgore. He was my 1<sup>st</sup> sgt for 8 months of my deployment. He had 16 years of service in the Army and had the most knowledge, self control and the ability to command than anyone I have ever met. His personality and up-beat attitude made us all feel comfortable under his command. If you worker hard for him he would treat you as an equal, regardless of his rank. He looked the part of a true Professional Shoulder and played it as well. He was my mentor and hero.

**What experience left the greatest impression on you:** During my entire service with the Army I went at everything with a good attitude. I strived to do my very best every day I served. I gave 100% all the time and I came away from this experience a much better person. I have a great deal of Pride in this Great Country & fell today that it was a Great Honor and Privilege for me to serve my Country. I do not have any regrets and I thank

the Good Lord every day that he was watching over me & kept me safe during my service.

**Did you perform any unusual service or duties:** For one week while my tank was out-of-service I volunteered to be a door gunner on a Huey helicopter. Not only did I enjoy flying in a helicopter, but it was the first time I got a hot meal and every night and a cot to sleep on.

I am extremely proud of my service in Vietnam and feel fortunate to be a part of the greatest Army in the world. The Good Lord was watching over me every day and kept me safe and out of harm's way. For this I am very grateful. Ever since I left Vietnam I pray for my brother shoulders that never made it home and keep their Families in my prayers.

When I built my first home in 1975, I have been flying the American Flag from a tall flag pole & hope to be flying the American Flag until I die. I do this in remembrance of all the Shoulders who fought for this Great Country and their Families. I love the United States of America and all we stand for and I would fight for this Country all over again if I had to.

I am also, extremely proud of my Daughter Kathleen who served with the US Air Force for many years and was deployed