



# VETERANS DAY

## HONORING *those who* SERVED

## THE ORIGINS OF VETERANS DAY

By The U.S. Department of Veteran's Affairs

In 1921, an unknown World War I American soldier was buried in Arlington National Cemetery. This site, on a hillside overlooking the Potomac River and the city of Washington, D.C., became the focal point of reverence for America's veterans.

Similar ceremonies occurred earlier in England and France, where an unknown soldier was buried in each nation's highest place of honor (in England, Westminster Abbey; in France, the Arc de Triomphe). These memorial gestures all took place on Nov. 11, giving universal recognition to the celebrated ending of World War I fighting at 11 a.m., Nov. 11, 1918 (the 11th hour of the 11th day of the 11th month). The day became known as "Armistice Day."

Armistice Day officially received its name in America in 1926 through a Congressional resolution. It became a national holiday 12 years later

by similar Congressional action. If the idealistic hope had been realized that World War I was "the War to end all wars," Nov. 11 might still be called Armistice Day. But only a few years after the holiday was proclaimed, war broke out in Europe. Sixteen and one-half million Americans took part. Four hundred seven thousand of them died in service, more than 292,000 in battle.

### ARMISTICE DAY CHANGED TO HONOR ALL VETERANS

The first celebration using the term Veterans Day occurred in Birmingham, Alabama, in 1947. Raymond Weeks, a World War II veteran,

organized "National Veterans Day," which included a parade and other festivities, to honor all veterans. The event was held on Nov. 11, then designated Armistice Day. Later, U.S. Representative Edward Rees of Kansas proposed a bill that would change Armistice Day to Veterans Day. In 1954, Congress passed the bill that President Eisenhower signed proclaiming Nov. 11 as Veterans Day. Raymond Weeks received the Presidential Citizens Medal from President Reagan in November 1982. Weeks' local parade and ceremonies are now an annual event celebrated nationwide.

On Memorial Day 1958, two more unidentified American War dead were brought from overseas and interred in the plaza beside the unknown soldier of World War I. One was killed in World War II, the other in the Korean War. In 1984, an unknown serviceman from the Vietnam War was placed

alongside the others. The remains from Vietnam were exhumed May 14, 1998, identified as Air Force 1st Lt. Michael Joseph Blassie, and removed for burial. To honor these men, symbolic of all Americans who gave their lives in all wars, an Army honor guard, the 3rd U.S. Infantry (The Old Guard), keeps day and night vigil.

A law passed in 1968 changed the national commemoration of Veterans Day to the fourth Monday in October. It soon became apparent, however, that Nov. 11 was a date of historic significance to many Americans. Therefore, in 1978 Congress returned the observance to its traditional date.

### NATIONAL CEREMONIES HELD AT ARLINGTON NATIONAL CEMETERY

The focal point for official, national ceremonies for Veterans Day continues to be the memorial amphithe-

ater built around the Tomb of the Unknowns. At 11 a.m. on Nov. 11, a combined color guard representing all military services executes "Present Arms" at the tomb. The nation's tribute to its war dead is symbolized by the laying of a presidential wreath. The bugler plays "taps." The rest of the ceremony takes place in the amphitheater. Veterans Day ceremonies at Arlington and elsewhere are coordinated by the President's Veterans Day National Committee. Chaired by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs, the committee represents national veterans organizations. Governors of many states and U.S. territories appoint Veterans Day chairpersons who, in cooperation with the National Committee and the Department of Defense, arrange and promote local ceremonies.

# 'Engraving' a new life

George Northup: Air Force veteran to small business owner

BY ASHLEY TERRY  
Staff Writer  
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From a two-decade career in the Air Force to a thriving laser engraving business, Hood County resident George Northup is living proof the sky actually isn't the limit when it comes to pursuing one's passions.

Growing up in Ollie, a small town in Iowa, Northup developed a desire for adventure that would later shape his remarkable journey. At the young age of 18, he decided to enlist in the Air Force on the buddy system, which guaranteed him and his best friend, Mickey Dean Ruggles, the opportunity to train and serve together. However, just two weeks after enlisting, Northup's best friend passed away in a car accident.

"They said, 'You're out. Your contract doesn't mean anything now, because it's not the buddy system.'" Northup said. "I thought, 'Well, what else am I gonna do?'"

Despite his tragic loss, Northup persevered, choosing to enlist anyway to embark on what would become a 20-year journey in the Air Force. He was initially assigned to the aerial port, where he was responsible for cargo preparation on the ground — though it wasn't long before he found himself in more dynamic roles.

"I was lucky," he said. "I never had to go to work eight hours a day and build pallets of cargo. I was always a combat mobility element team leader or a parachute rigger or an aerial port mobility flight team member, I was always TDY (temporary duty) on the go. I never had to go to work for a shift, so to speak."

Halfway through Northup's career, he cross-

trained to become a C-17 loadmaster, where he was responsible for the safe loading, securing and unloading of cargo and passengers. Northup explained that transitioning from being the ground support for cargo to being the sole enlisted crew member on the aircraft brought a new kind of excitement.

"That's where the real fun started," he said. "Every day it was a damn adventure. It was a different lifestyle and a different way of going about things, but still awesome. I was gone 300 days a year on a jet, seeing the world for 10 years — that wasn't too bad of a deal."

Northup visited so many locations during his service that he joked it was simpler to list the places he hadn't been than those he had. He explained that, while it might sound nerdy, his work on a cargo plane was vital to the war effort, as it involved delivering essential supplies to various locations.

"We were all over the world all the time. You never knew where you were going to be the next week. It was insane," he said. "Awesome, but insane."

Northup served in the Air Force from 1992 to 2012, when he retired in Charleston, South Carolina. At that time, he was still married to his wife — who was also active duty — and the couple remained in Charleston for a couple of years before his wife re-

ceived orders to relocate to Pope Air Force Base in North Carolina. A few years later, his wife received orders again to relocate to McChord Air Force Base in Washington State, where they stayed for several more years, before moving to Granbury in 2020.

Northup also reflected on his diverse assignments at bases such as Dover, Delaware and Okinawa, Japan, as well as the contrasts between places like Little Rock, Arkansas — which he humorously noted was far from paradise — and the charm of Charleston, which he considered a "different kind" of paradise.

After retiring from the Air Force, Northup sought a new direction for his career — one that took him from cargo planes to custom creations with laser engraving. Having started his first engraving business in 2014, he quickly discovered the versatility of the craft. Though he sold that business upon moving, he reignited his entrepreneurial spirit in the fall of 2020 when he established Laser Junky in Granbury, located at 316 S. Morgan St, near Wild Roots Salon.

He describes laser engraving as a process that allows for the personalization of a wide array of items, ranging from paper wedding invitations to bricks and "everything in between."

"It's never ending," Northup said. "What that business does, it's hard to put in a nutshell."

He explains that Laser Junky has a wide-ranging scope, as it includes commercial projects for aircraft and specialized engravings for firearms, while also offering personalized engravings for everyday items such as mugs and keychains.

"It started out as a hobby,

PLEASE SEE **NORTHUP** | D4



MARY VINSON | HOOD COUNTY NEWS

George Northup, owner of Laser Junky in Granbury, spent 20 years in the Air Force in several different capacities — everything from a parachute rigger to a C-17 loadmaster.

*"I got lucky in the Air Force. I had a great time. I was a kid. I was seeing the world. You were gone 300 days a year. I mean, I'm from Iowa, and before I knew it, I was in Somalia. And then from there, we went to France for six months, and then it's all the time everywhere, with never knowing where you're going next, or who you're helping."*

**GEORGE NORTHUP**  
Air Force Veteran

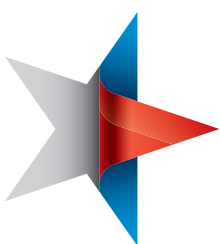


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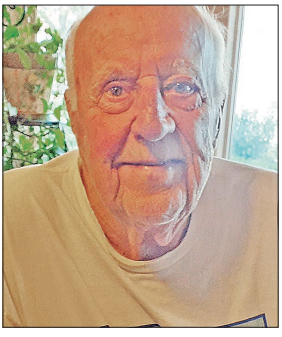
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**Colton Andersen**  
Unknown  
United States Army  
10 years



**Duane J. Barnes**  
Unknown  
United States Navy  
Unknown



**Sheila Bartley**  
Major  
United States Army  
1979-1996



**Trivor Beardsley**  
Specialist  
United States Army  
2016-2020



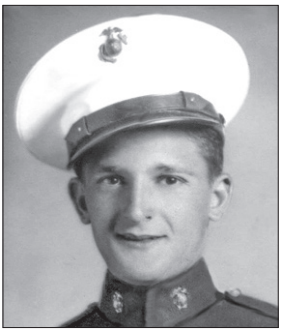
**Joe Berger**  
E7  
United States Air Force  
1954-1977



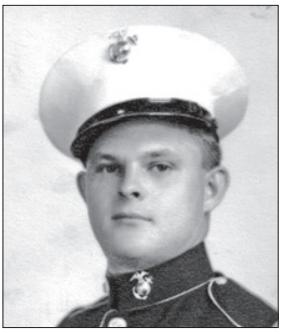
**Wade Blake Sr.**  
Staff Sergeant  
United States Air Force  
1948-1952



**Ron Bonneau**  
Petty Officer 3rd Class  
United States Navy  
1968-1974



**Columbus "Lump" Boulanger**  
Private First Class  
United States Marine Corps  
1943-1945



**Sidney Boulanger**  
Master Gunnery Sergeant  
United States Marine Corps  
1941-1968



**John Bowen**  
Lt. Colonel  
United States Air Force  
29 years



**Brandon Bryce**  
Staff Sergeant  
United States Army  
2003-2014



**Rich Burns**  
Sergeant  
United States Army  
1954-1975



**Jack Camp**  
Captain  
United States Army  
1967-1969



**Paul Carrell**  
Unknown  
United States Army  
2 years



**Scott Casey**  
Lt. Colonel  
United States Marine Corps  
1991-2012



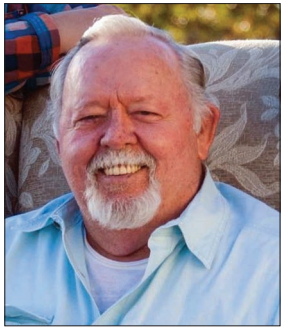
**Bryan Chambers**  
Sergeant First Class  
United States Army  
1985-1990



**Lawrence E. Charlesworth**  
PVT-2  
United States Army  
1953-1955



**Brian Clark**  
Unknown  
United States Marine Corps  
6 years



**Bill Clark**  
Boatswain's Mate  
United States Coast Guard  
1966-1970



**Kenneth Cobler**  
Specialist  
United States Army  
1966-1969



**Chris Cohenour**  
E-4  
United States Navy  
1964-1968



**Lowell Conder**  
Major  
United States Air Force  
1961-1981



**James Mike Conine**  
E5  
United States Army  
1970-1972



**John B. Cox**  
Major  
United States Army



**Nancy Cox**  
Tec 4  
United States Army  
1942-1943



**Samuel J. Cox**  
Lt. Colonel  
United States Air Force  
1940-1970



**Laurence DeYoung**  
Captain  
United States Air Force  
1964-1969



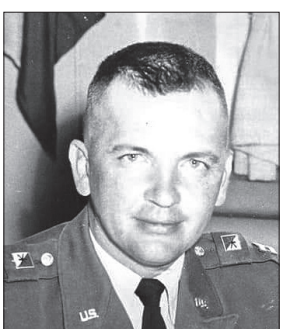
**Jerald Dixon**  
Sergeant  
United States Army  
1937-1945



**Stewart Drake**  
AE1  
United States Navy  
1955-1969



**Aubrey Dutschmann**  
SN4  
United States Navy  
1972-1977



**Dunavon Eads**  
Lt. Colonel  
United States Army  
1953-1976



**Eric Edmunds**  
Tsgt  
United States Air Force  
1966-2008



**William Edwards**  
Colonel  
United States Air Force  
1967-1995



**Claude Everette**  
Staff Sergeant  
United States Army  
1942-1944



**Carmond "Fitz" Fitzgerald**  
Captain  
United States Coast Guard  
34 years

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# Randy Turner: Hanging out with giants



COURTESY PHOTOS

Turner (First man standing on left) and his combat search and rescue crew in front of an HC-130 in Saudi Arabia, 1994. The men with rifles are Pararescue (PJs).

BY LAUREN DAVIS  
Staff Writer  
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Randy Turner's military journey began with a lifelong dream. "I wanted to be in the Army since I was 6 years old," he recalls, unable to pinpoint precisely why.

With his mother's consent, Turner, age 17, enlisted and was sent to Fort Benning, Georgia, for basic training just days after graduating high school in 1980.

His father had been a pararescue serviceman, commonly known as a PJ, during the Korean War, but didn't talk much about his experiences, so it wasn't something that stood out in their conversations.

Turner admits he didn't fully realize what his father had done until many years later and isn't quite sure how he overlooked it for so long.

He explained that there's a distinct difference between those who've attended Ranger school and those who've served in the Ranger battalion. Ranger school, he said, is like jump school — tough, but it's not the same.

"You earn your parachute wings at jump school, but that doesn't automatically make you a paratrooper. Similarly, Ranger school is grueling, but it's not the same as being in the Ranger battalion," Turner said.

The battalion is a way of life. The standard is everything. Turner recalled how they used to say, "You're not assigned to the Ranger battalion; you survive in the Ranger battalion." If you didn't meet the standard, you were out. There was no room for mistakes — any misstep, even something like writing a hot check, could get you kicked out. The pressure was constant and relentless, with no slack to be found.

It set an impressive standard for a young man fresh out of high school. The Ranger Creed, which Turner has memorized to this day,



Randy Turner (center with light brown T-shirt) with his Texas Air National Guard crew in Afghanistan in 2004.

became a guiding principle.

He began his journey in the Army's First Ranger Battalion, an elite unit in Savannah, Georgia, describing it as a fascinating environment. The constant physical and mental challenges fostered camaraderie and discipline. "They PT'd the snot out of you," noting that it was essential for developing the unique skills needed for high-risk operations.

Reflecting on his Ranger experience, he shares, "It was a lot of fun — I learned a whole lot — I got to experience everything from the jungle to the Arctic Circle," he recalls.

Despite facing dangerous situations, including a fall that broke his leg during training, he maintains his sense of humor, saying, "It's never the fall; it's always that last half inch that gets people."

"One of the most valuable skills taught to Rangers early on is the operations order process, or 'op order,' which includes everything from assessing a situation to execution," Turner explains, still clearly remembering them to this day. "What's the situ-

ation? What's the mission? How will the mission be executed? Who's in charge? (Command and Control) and what support is available?"

He notes these core questions form the foundation of any plan — whether military or civilian. "They are a solid roadmap for accomplishing whatever you're setting out to do, whether it's a business plan or any other goal," Turner said.

His interactions with Air Force Special Operations pilots inspired him to take to the sky. After four years in the Army, Turner thought, "How about if I fly?" With his experience and understanding of events on the ground, he figured he could be very effective up in the air. "Plus, if I die, at least I'll die cleaner."

He loved the Army, but after completing his enlistment, he attended the University of Texas at Arlington and participated in Air Force ROTC at Texas Christian University, which had a cross-town agreement. In 1987, he was fortunate enough to secure a pilot slot. In February 1988, he began pilot training at Williams Air

Force Base in Arizona.

Turner has a deep appreciation for the AC-130 gunship, often called Spectre, which he describes as a "very, very cool airplane." He was captivated by its impressive design, built for ground support and armed with two main cannons: a powerful 105-millimeter howitzer and a 40-millimeter cannon, similar to those used on ships for targeting enemy aircraft.

The smaller cannon fires rapidly, producing a distinctive "boom, boom, boom" sound. Additionally, the AC-130 features various machine guns and smaller cannons mounted on its side, enhancing its formidable presence in the sky.

"The aircraft has the ability to 'waste what they need to waste,'" Turner states. His Air Force career was just as eventful as his Army years. Despite his admiration for this remarkable aircraft, Turner never had the opportunity to fly the AC-130.

He began flying the rugged but versatile C-130. "Everybody wants to fly a fighter," Turner notes, "but I

PLEASE SEE TURNER | D7

## NORTHUP

FROM PAGE D2

and it's no longer a hobby, I can tell you that. It's insane," Northup said. "It's a five-day wait now to get something back from me."

Even though Northup's days aren't as adventurous as they used to be, he reflects on the thrill of his Air Force career, where he spent 300 days a year traveling the globe, experiencing new cultures and challenges.

"I got lucky in the Air Force," he said. "I had a great time. I was a kid. I was seeing the world. You were gone 300 days a year. I mean, I'm from Iowa, and before I knew it, I was in Somalia. And then from there, we went to France for six months, and then it's all the time everywhere, with never knowing where you're going next, or who you're helping."

He explained that when he

cross-trained to become a C-17 loadmaster and began flying on the jet, it elevated the chaos of his lifestyle to a whole new level. Northup stated that he was still gone 300 days a year, but that he was sometimes in a different country four times a day, engaging in operations that many people were unaware even took place.

Now at 51, he said he feels a stark contrast to the chaotic lifestyle of constantly being on the move, as he navigates the quieter routine of civilian life. While he cherishes the friendships and experiences from his time in the military, he admits that adjusting to a more mundane existence has brought its own challenges, filled with boredom and anxiety.

"In both of my jobs, I was job is not to wake up every day at six and be there at eight for an eight-hour shift

of processing passengers or building cargo pallets or whatever they want. We would get back from a trip on a Tuesday, and it might be the following Thursday by the time we left again, and you weren't expected to be at work during that time, because you're always gone."

He explained that many of his friends in the Air Force held regular positions, working set shifts and processing passengers like they were at a civilian job. Northup noted the stark difference between their experiences and his own chaotic lifestyle, which made adjusting to civilian life even more challenging.

"It shouldn't even be the same job, but it is, if that makes sense, so it was pretty cool," Northup said. "It was a shock to the system (when I retired) not being around the world every week doing different stuff with different people."

While the experience was definitely unique, Northup said he sadly regrets his decision to enlist in the Air Force, as it meant spending two decades away from his father, who he described as his "best friend."

"I regret the whole thing really," he said. "I left for 20 years, and then three years after I retired, my dad died, so I missed all that time with him, which makes me regret it."

Ultimately, Northup's transition from the Air Force to civilian life weaves together a compelling narrative of adventure, sacrifice and reflection, showcasing his ability to embrace change and discover new passions.

His journey also highlights the importance of adaptability and the pursuit of fulfillment — reminding us that new beginnings can emerge from even the most challenging experiences.

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# Opportunities and friendships: Ray Rodriguez's military perspective

BY LAUREN DAVIS  
Staff Writer  
lauren@hcnews.com

Ray Rodriguez was enjoying life as a student at the University of Texas — joining the military was not part of his plan.

Rodriguez graduated college with an accounting degree in December 1970. Like many young men of his generation, Uncle Sam called the following month as part of the military's lottery system.

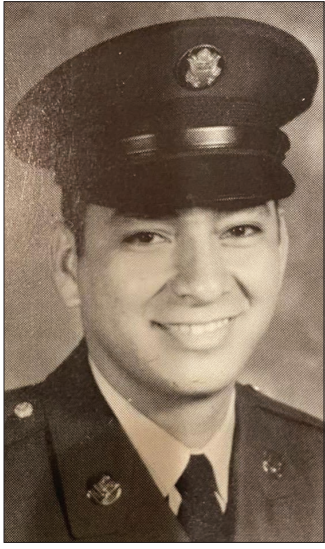
"My number was 36, I was drafted into the U.S. Army," he explained, referring to the system that randomly selected birthdates for conscription. "The lower the number you had, the more likely you were going to get drafted."

"When I reported for duty, they put about 50 of us on a bus in San Antonio and drove us to Fort Polk, Louisiana."

During his first days there, Rodriguez noted the isolation he felt. "I knew no one ... you're going to a place you've never been before, so I was a little nervous."

However, he quickly adapted to the routine of basic training, which lasted about eight weeks. During this time, he participated in the physical demands of Army training, such as marching and learning to handle weapons.

He qualified with the M16 rifle, the standard firearm used at the time. His train-



COURTESY PHOTOS

In December 1970, Ray Rodriguez graduated college with a degree in accounting. Like many young men of his generation, Uncle Sam came calling the following month as part of the military's lottery system.

ing also included "bivouac," an exercise where soldiers camped overnight in the woods for two or three days to practice survival skills with minimal equipment.

"There at Fort Polk, when they discovered I had a degree, they asked me — many times — to go into the officer program," Rodriguez said, explaining that becoming an officer would have required a longer commitment. He preferred to fulfill his two-year draftee obligation and then find a civilian career. "Two years was enough for

me."

Unlike many of his peers, Rodriguez did not receive orders to serve in Vietnam. Instead, after basic training, during a brief stint in a "holdover unit" at Fort Dix, New Jersey, which he refers to as "a mixed bag of nuts," Rodriguez and some fellow soldiers were tasked with park sanitation for several weeks.

Lifelong friendships can begin in the oddest of circumstances, such as doing laundry. Rodriguez met another soldier while folding bed sheets. "I noticed he wore a University of Texas Longhorn ring. And I said, 'Are you a Longhorn?' He said, 'Yes, I am.' I said, 'Well, I am too!'"

That chance meeting sparked a lifelong friendship that has lasted over 50 years. The two became roommates in Heidelberg, Germany, and shared many experiences, including traveling and working together. "He moved to New York City, to Manhattan. We speak once or twice a month."

In Heidelberg, Germany, Pvt. Rodriguez worked in a postal unit, where the soldiers were given bunks in old German barracks. His job involved traveling to smaller postal units around Heidelberg, about 30 to 40 miles away, to help sort and distribute mail and packages.

He also made regular trips to Frankfurt Airport with a

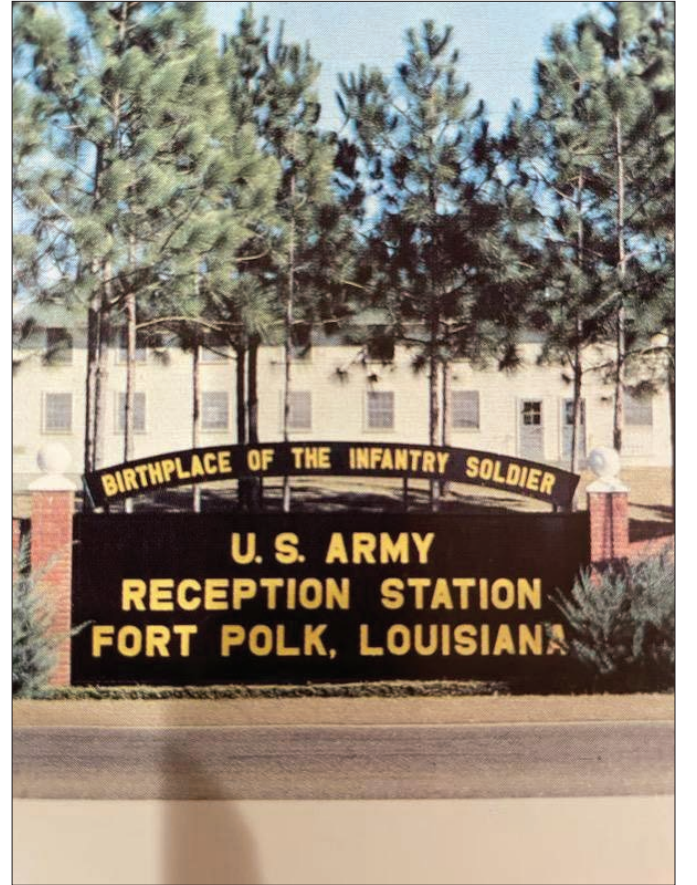
small team to pick up mail from the United States. They brought the mail back to the main post office in Heidelberg, where it was sorted and distributed to different military units across Europe.

Reflecting on his time in the military, Rodriguez appreciated the opportunities it provided. "I got to travel ... I went to England, France and Italy," where he discovered a love for Italian food. In Germany, he attended Oktoberfest in Munich. "They had good food and good beer, too," he laughs. He also traveled to Tunisia, in Northern Africa. "For a young 21-year-old guy, I learned a lot."

"I remember going to Paris for Christmas and attending midnight mass at Notre Dame, which was special. Then I went to St. Peter's in Rome for Easter midnight mass, which was also a memorable experience."

Upon returning to the U.S., Rodriguez smoothly transitioned to civilian life. He secured a job with the IRS in the metroplex. "I put all my possessions in my MGB and drove to Dallas," he says, crediting his military experience with teaching him valuable life skills. "I learned independence, how to adapt, and how to treat people in life."

Though his time in the military was brief, Rodriguez remains grateful for the experience. Today, he cel-



During his first days at Camp Polk, Ray Rodriguez noted the isolation he felt. "I knew no one ... you're going to a place you've never been before, so I was a little nervous."

brates Veterans Day with quiet recognition from his family. "I get phone calls or texts from my daughters saying, 'Thanks, Dad, for being in the military.' So, that's kind of nice."

Rodriguez's service can be summed up in three words: pride, opportunity and experience. While he may not have chosen his path, he

made the best of it. Rodriguez knows the military may have changed, but he encourages young people to consider it as an option. "There's going to be some discipline involved, but take advantage of the opportunities," he says. "If you've got time, give it a try. You never know what interests you might discover."

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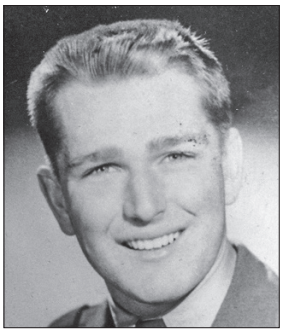
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United States Army  
1971



**Robert Greathouse**  
Staff Sergeant  
United States Army  
1965-1973



**Jeffrey Guerrero**  
TSGT  
United States Air Force  
1951-1953



**Steve Haga**  
E-6/Tech Sgt.  
United States Air Force  
1981-2001



**Larry Hamilton**  
Staff Sergeant  
United States Marine Corps  
1965-1976



**James Hanlon**  
Staff Sergeant  
United States Air Force  
1968-1971



**Raymond Hansen**  
Corporal  
United States Army  
1970-1972



**Tanya Hatch**  
PFC E3  
United States Army  
2004-2006



**Richard Hattox**  
Sergeant E-5  
United States Army  
1975-1979



**Joseph Hollingsworth**  
Unknown  
Texas Air National Guard  
15 years



**Gary Hubbard Sr.**  
Private First Class  
United States Army  
1956-1964



**Richard John Huchel**  
Lt. Colonel  
United States Marine Corps  
1958-1962, 1966-1989



**John Huddleston**  
Bkr 3rd Class  
United States Navy  
1945-1947



**Commodore (CH) Huddleston**  
Petty Officer 3rd Class  
United States Navy  
1943-1946



**Vergil Humphrey**  
Unknown  
United States Army  
1944



**James "Jim" Humphrey**  
Sergeant  
United States Marine Corps  
1965-1971



**John Ingram Jr.**  
1st Lieutenant  
United States Army Air Corps  
1942-1945



**Lyle Ivie**  
Specialist E4  
United States Army  
2005-2008



**Gary Keel**  
CW3  
United States Army  
1966-1987

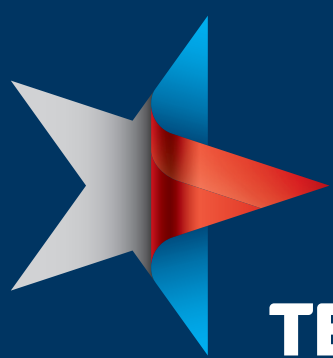
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**Walter (Ken) Keener**  
Specialist 4  
United States Army  
1956-1958



**Kim Keith**  
MSGT  
United States Air Force  
1977-2000



**Richard Klinetob**  
Sergeant  
United States Army Air Corps  
1943-1945



**Joseph Krieg**  
AW2  
United States Navy  
1975-1995



**Jerome Kunkel**  
QM3  
United States Navy  
1959-1963



**Douglas Letz**  
Unknown  
U.S. Army Texas National Guard  
22 years



**Travis Lowrance**  
E7  
United States Navy  
1960-1987



**Tim Lundy**  
Master Sergeant E8  
United States Army  
1983-2007



**Johnathan Martin**  
Corporal  
United States Marine Corps  
2012-2016



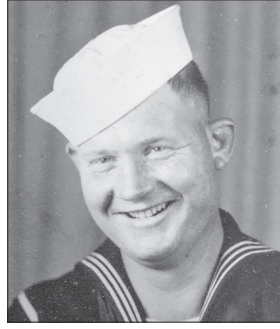
**Julian Massey**  
Private  
United States Army  
WWII



**Lowell Massey**  
Private  
United States Army  
WWII (KIA 1944)



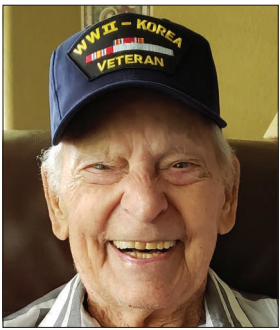
**Jeremy McCollum**  
Unknown  
United States Marine Corps  
2002-2008



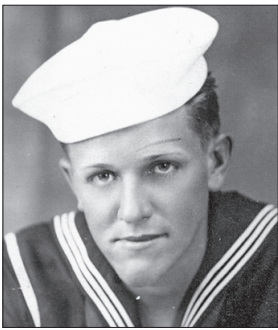
**Dan McInroe**  
S2C  
United States Navy  
1943-1945



**Pamela McRoy**  
E-4  
United States Army  
2009-2016



**Ray Menefee**  
Captain  
United States Air Force  
WWII & Korea



**V.F. Tommy Meyer Jr.**  
Unknown  
United States Navy  
1946-1947



**Darrell Morrison**  
Specialist 5  
United States Army  
1968-1970



**Andrew Nace**  
Sergeant 1st Class  
United States Army  
1996-2013



**Larry Nace**  
Commander  
United States Navy  
1953-1977



**Winston Newman**  
Master Sergeant  
United States Army  
1950-1987



**Don O'Brien**  
E5  
United States Army  
1972

**TURNER**

FROM PAGE D4

wanted to fly a C-130.”

The Ranger battalion mantras Turner learned served him well in the Air Force: quitting simply isn't an option. “While technically you can quit,” Turner says, “doing so means you're finished. There's no room for hesitation or surrender. If you say, ‘I can't,’ or anything resembling that, the response is clear — ‘See you later. Goodbye.’”

His first missions took him to the Middle East, Germany and Africa, where he witnessed the fall of the Berlin Wall and participated in the invasion of Panama. He speaks with pride about the C-130's capabilities, which included dropping troops, tanks and supplies. Turner's squadron operated those C-130's globally, often in high-risk situations.

Turner's service continued through Desert Storm, Bosnia and Operations Iraqi Freedom and Enduring Freedom. His tone is matter-of-fact as he recalls the long hours, grueling deployments and dangerous missions. “There's a war on,”

he says simply. “You handle business.”

When asked about humorous moments, Turner responds with a grin, “Humor is what you use to get by. There's so much of that.” However, his tone shifted when he spoke about the media's portrayal of military conflicts.

Turner's experience as an information warfare officer sharpened his critical thinking and made him keenly aware of how information is shaped and shared with the public.

He lost trust in national media during his service, watching reporters post stories that felt utterly disconnected from the reality he witnessed. “I would see my airplane on a news story and wonder, ‘Were we on the same continent? Because that is absolutely not what is happening,’” he recalls.

Throughout his career, Turner never lost his admiration for the military. “I mean, you get to hang out with some giants ... you can accomplish just about anything if you decide you're going to do it,” he concludes.

Turner shared a vivid

memory from his time in the military, recounting an experience at a small airfield called Rafha, located on the Saudi-Iraqi border. “There was a C-130 taking off and landing there every 10 minutes for two weeks, around the clock.”

Without air traffic control to assist, Turner and his fellow pilots had to navigate the airspace on their own. “It was a very challenging deal,” he explained; flying conditions were made more difficult by oil well fires, night-time operations, and the sheer number of planes in the air.

Turner recalled a mission where they were transporting about 130 soldiers from the 101st Airborne late one night. “Having been a grunt myself, I have a soft spot for grunts,” he said. “These soldiers, who had been in the desert for months, were seated on the floor of the plane, with only a tie-down strap for support.”

He and his crew had what they called “box nasties” — simple sandwiches packed for long missions. But when the loadmaster informed Turner that these soldiers hadn't seen fresh white

bread in months, he and the rest of the crew knew what to do.

They passed their sandwiches back to the soldiers, who were grateful for something as simple as a fresh loaf of bread. “Nobody wanted to be the guy that took the last piece,” Turner said, describing how the soldiers were tearing off little bitty pieces of the sandwich and then passing it to the next guy. The same happened with the hot coffee they offered — another luxury the soldiers hadn't experienced in months.

Turner was struck by the humility and camaraderie of the soldiers, who shared everything equally, making sure no one took more than their share. “It's almost like the last supper,” he said, reflecting on the moment. “What's too much to take care of a guy like that?”

“When you see the movie ‘Band of Brothers,’ that's it,” Turner added, emphasizing soldiers' deep care for one another.

Despite seeing combat on multiple continents, Turner downplays his own experiences in making a comparison. “I've been shot

at on four continents,” he said with a shrug. “Big deal. Those guys, though. Those grunts. They were living in misery.”

Turner offers sobering thoughts on the repetitive nature of warfare. “We still make the same mistakes we made in Vietnam, the same ones from the First World War,” he said, his voice tinged with frustration. Yet, his advice to young people considering a military career is grounded and practical. “Go talk to someone doing the job you think you want,” he advises. “The recruiter has one job, but the person actually doing it will give you the real story.”

When asked to sum up his military experience in three words, Turner paused before saying, “Foundational ... rewarding ... and privileged.”

He discovered a love for Greek food during his travels. “Real Greek food — man, it's fantastic,” Turner said enthusiastically, noting his plans for the upcoming Greek Food Festival in Fort Worth.

Turner's military service still influences his life today, especially around holi-

days like Memorial Day and Veterans Day. He refuses to say, ‘Happy Memorial Day’ and sees it as a somber time to remember those who have fallen. “It's like Patton said, don't grieve their loss, celebrate that they existed,” he paraphrased.

One of the more difficult transitions Turner faced was returning to civilian life after deployments. He described the sensory overload he experienced after coming home from war zones where everything was “a shade of brown” and nothing worked. “It took me two or three days to get back into it,” he admitted.

His nephew, who also served in Iraq, struggled similarly, having to consciously stop himself from reacting to everyday objects that might have been threats in a war zone.

Throughout his journey, Turner remains grounded, finding value in the relationships he built, and the lessons learned through adversity. His experiences reflect the resilience of those who serve, and his humility illustrates the profound effects of military service on individuals and the nation.

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# Dennis McIntire's remarkable military journey

BY LAUREN DAVIS  
Staff Writer  
lauren@hcnews.com

"So, son, you graduate in a couple of weeks. What are your plans?"

18-year-old Dennis McIntire recalled the moment his father confronted him in his room in San Antonio just weeks before his high school graduation in 1976.

McIntire pushed his long hair away from his eyes, and uncertainty edged his voice as he answered, "I thought I'd just kind of hang out, kind of figure it out."

His father, a former Army soldier, was having none of it. "Not here, you won't," he insisted.

McIntire initially aspired to become a diesel mechanic but lacked the means to fund his education. "The Army that you don't love, like I do, would pay for your training," his father said.

Inspired, McIntire spoke with a recruiter and discovered he could train as a helicopter mechanic.

He didn't plan to join the military at all. He had always said he would never do it, but he joined the Army.

His first promotion was uneventful. "I guess I'm an E-2," McIntire said, pinning on his "mosquito wing," which was just a one-bar rank — the start of an incredible military career.

## STATIONED ON THE 'ROCK'

His journey took him to the "Rock," the affectionate name for Hawaii, where he worked as a helicopter mechanic at Schofield Barracks. He bought a motorcycle and often rode to the beach after work to surf and have "a blast."

Young McIntire thought Army life was great, but he quickly noticed the duplicity of many people in the all-volunteer Army. He noted, "So many people had just a horrible attitude. I mean, you'd have thought they were drafted."

McIntire explains that despite their berating of the Army, "Most of these folks were hypocrites because after they ended their four years, they re-enlisted."

"I hung out with the wrong people and had a bad attitude, like many kids do." Then he realized, "Why do I feel so horrible?" At 19, McIntire learned a valuable lesson: "Attitudes are contagious, and I'm going to eject myself from this group of people."

He decided to straighten up, follow the rules, cut his hair, polish his boots, and focus on his job. His hard work paid off. "I did very well as a mechanic," McIntire recalls and consequently was selected to become a crew chief.

Soon, he was in charge of the VIP aircraft for the commanding general of the 25th Infantry Division. Watching new pilots take to the skies sparked his desire to fly.

## SKYWARD

At 21, McIntire's dream came true when he started flight school on Valentine's Day in 1980. He showed a natural talent for flying and graduated with honors that December; shortly afterward,



Camp Page, Chuncheon, Korea: McIntire serves as a Black Hawk medevac instructor pilot.

COURTESY PHOTO

he was flying Hueys.

He was a young pilot eager to learn. "Helicopter pilots have to be addicted to adrenaline," McIntire said, and he was. He loved flying.

He recalled, "Sometimes they say flying is hours and hours of boredom punctuated by moments of sheer terror." This comment would soon prove prophetic as McIntire faced challenges that would test his skills and courage.

## TREE LESSONS WITH JOE

His time in the cockpit taught him important lessons, especially from veteran pilots with tough attitudes. "Post-Vietnam was not good to them," he noted.

McIntire was a warrant officer, or WO1, with only a few hundred hours in a helicopter, flying with Joe, a Vietnam-era pilot known for his bad attitude. They were on a training mission in Florida when Joe said, "Take-off check."

"I did the take-off check, and Joe pulled up on the collective, lurching the helicopter up and then straight toward the pine trees."

"Joe, we're going to hit these trees!" I said.

"He says, 'Ah, shut up.' And we lopped off the top seven feet of the pine trees on each side of us. The treetops just vaporized."

McIntire anticipated significant damage to the Huey. He thought Joe was acting recklessly and was concerned they would return to find gouges under the blades, which he had seen before from hitting trees.

Joe got out and told McIntire to shut the aircraft down. During the shutdown, McIntire waited as the blades came to a stop — expecting to see significant damage.

He was stunned — there was no damage to the rotor blades. It was clear where the trees had knocked dust and dirt off the blades, but the blades were unharmed. McIntire wanted to ask questions, but a WO1 wasn't supposed to, and Joe's terrible attitude didn't help.



Dennis McIntire weeks before basic training in 1976.

"A few days later, we were off duty," McIntire revealed. "Joe was at the bar. He was getting drunk. You know, a lot of Vietnam War guys had a lot of stuff, a lot of baggage. 'I said, 'Hey, Joe, let me ask you. That day that we hit those trees, how did you do that without damaging the blades?'"

"He says, 'It all has to do with the angle you hit them with. You've got to hit them straight on or from the top of the blades and never underneath; otherwise, you'll damage the blades.'"

"I was like, 'Oh,' so I cataloged that," McIntire said.

## DEAD. DEAD. DEAD.

A couple of years later, McIntire was a chief warrant officer, or CW2, pilot-in-command of his own aircraft in the medevac unit, flying with a young WO1 co-pilot.

They arrived at a site in Fort Benning where a heat casualty was in critical condition in 100-degree heat. The situation was dire, and they needed to act quickly.

The landing zone was too small to accommodate McIntire's helicopter because a long pine branch was hanging over it. McIntire knew he

couldn't land directly on top of the branch without damaging the rotor system.

Recalling his training from Joe, he hovered at the edge of the landing zone, dove under the branch, and then pulled up on the collective to chop it off.

"So, I landed, picked up the guy, flew him to Fort Benning Army Hospital, and the guy lived. And guess what? No damage to the rotor system!"

He recounts numerous close calls that could have ended in tragedy. "In 28 years as a pilot, I can tell you, no kidding — five times that I should have been dead," he states candidly. "I mean dead, dead, dead — inches or seconds made the difference."

"How I survived is by the grace of God."

## BLACK HAWK ON THE MOUNTAIN

Despite the risks inherent in his job, McIntire's passion for flying and serving his country never waned. His tales of near disasters and successful missions attest to his skill as a pilot and his unwavering commitment to the Army and the people he served alongside. "It's all about the mission," he

says.

He recounted a near disaster on a mountain in Alaska when he lost both engines due to a phenomenon called rotor droop, a flaw in the early Black Hawk helicopters. "... causing me to auto-rotate from 125 feet. It all happened in a matter of seconds while landing," he explained.

"We were falling out of the sky," he explains, "when I saw the treetops ..."

He pulled up on the collective, managing to execute what he called the "luckiest hovering auto" onto the mountaintop. His passengers, five pathfinders exiting his helicopter, were probably thinking, "That was the coolest landing ever."

"The truth was we just basically crashed on top of this mountain," McIntire admits.

## HYPOTHERMIA AND WIND SHEER

While flying medevac for the Rangers in Dahlonega, Georgia, CW2 McIntire and his crew encountered an unprecedented cold front, unlike anything he had seen before. Oak trees were being blown 10 to 15 degrees — it was horrendous. He knew they couldn't even start the helicopter.

"We had 60, 70 mph winds," McIntire recalls. He informed the Ranger camp commander that his crew was grounded and unable to fly.

However, at 2 a.m., they received a call about a Ranger student with hypothermia who was in critical condition. It was a life-or-death situation, so McIntire and his crew made their way to the helicopter. Despite the raging winds, they knew they had to try at least.

Recalling another lesson learned from a Vietnam-era pilot while a crew chief in Hawaii trapped at the top of a windy mountain in Mauna Loa with 45 mph winds, he prepared to start the helicopter despite the storm.

Knowing the Huey has a 30-knot wind limitation for starting with a 15-knot gust spread, McIntire had his short medic stand on sandbags

to hold one of the blades. "I cranked the engine up to 40%, had him release the blade, and we were good to go."

He had to battle a 70-mph headwind to reach the patient, struggling to maintain speed and control. "It took forever with a 20-knot groundspeed," he said. But on the way back, flying at 90 knots with a tailwind, he had a ground speed of 160 knots. "I remember thinking, 'Wow! We are moving!'"

Suddenly, he hit a wind shear and lost his tailwind, causing his airspeed to rocket up to 160 knots. "The max speed on a Huey is 124 knots on a good day," McIntire explains. "And the last number on the airspeed indicator is 140, with two marks after that, probably indicating 150. But on this flight, the indicator was pegged at the twelve o'clock position past the 150 mark."

A "retreating blade stall" — a rare occurrence — caused the nose of the helicopter to pitch up violently. McIntire saw stars through his night vision goggles. His co-pilot, Don Law, cursed in frustration as he watched the medics perform CPR on the patient in the back.

McIntire held his cyclic position, waiting for something worse to happen when the aircraft shook forcefully. Finally, the nose returned to level flight with no catastrophic control system failure.

"I dropped the Ranger off at the hospital. He's alive, and hopefully still today. I don't know."

## POWELL AND CHENEY

McIntire's career as a pilot took him to many places and involved various missions. From 1984 to 1988, he was an instructor pilot at Fort Rucker, Alabama. "My students performed better because I worked so hard to produce a great Army product," he said proudly.

Despite his success as a flight instructor, he was still happily surprised to find his name on the CW3 promotion list. "I love the Army, so in everything I did, I wanted to make sure it was better," he noted.

He understood that reaching CW4 was tough. "That's where the rubber meets the road, and as a CW4, you were about equivalent to a major. But a CW5 — with the respect of a colonel — was as rare as a unicorn; you never saw many of them."

Then he was stationed in Alaska with the 6th Infantry Division, flying Hueys and then Black Hawks as an instructor pilot for four years.

In Alaska, McIntire was the go-to person for VIP demonstrations. "I was directing every flight — the Hueys, the Chinooks — working with the Air Force, the A-10s, and the F-16s," he explained. He coordinated Army operations with the Air Force and managed the timing of all the aircraft — air assaults and the Chinook artillery sling loads.

"Whenever there was a mission like that, they always called on me to plan it. I had a great reputation,"

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MCINTIRE | D9

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**David Orcutt, Navy**  
Owner  
Submariner 1989-1997  
USS Newport News, SSN-750  
Retired in 2012, Reserves Commander

**SFC Danny Vick, Army**  
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2/198th Armor Division,  
Headquarters Company Master  
Gunner & Platoon Sergeant



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United States Air Force  
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E5  
United States Army  
1967-1969



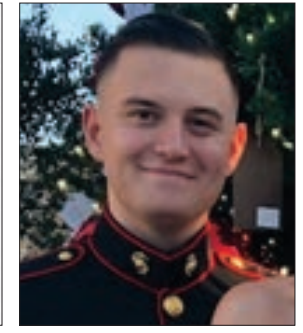
**Robert Paige**  
MSGT  
United States Air Force  
1957-1977



**Juan Pedroza**  
Unknown  
United States Air Force  
4 years



**Michael Rebarchik**  
E4  
United States Air Force  
1960-1964



**Cody Reynolds**  
Lance Corporal  
United States Marine Corps  
2018-Present



**Warren Glenn (Rick) Rickabaugh**  
Petty Officer 3rd Class Aviator  
United States Navy  
1943-1946



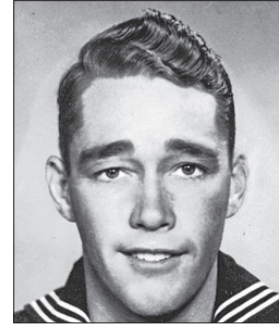
**Charles Rickgauer**  
LCDR  
United States Navy  
1963-1984



**Nelson Roberts**  
Sergeant  
United States Marine Corps  
1951-1953



**Fredrick Santiago**  
Major  
United States Army  
1990-2015



**Billy John Sargent**  
Boatswain's Mate 1st Class  
United States Navy  
1951-1954



**Roger Algene Sargent**  
Private First Class  
United States Army  
1943-1949



**Norman Lee Schlittler**  
Major  
United States Army  
1954 (Career)



**Kevin Sklark**  
TSgt  
United States Air Force  
1999-2015



**Ronald J. Stevens**  
SSG  
United States Army  
27 years



**Dick Stultz**  
Lt. Colonel  
United States Air Force  
1964-1989



**Mike Sympson**  
E4  
United States Air Force  
1965



**Woodrow Thompson**  
Unknown  
United States Navy  
1944




**Dennis Thompson**  
Unknown  
United States Army  
1968-1971



**Gary Towers**  
E4  
United States Air Force  
1963-1965



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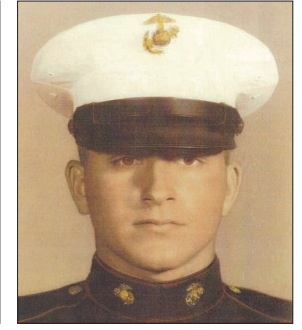
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Petty Officer 2nd Class  
United States Navy  
1974-1978



**Shores (Sam) Turner**  
E5  
United States Army  
1968-1970



**Gary Werley**  
Sgt  
United States Marine Corps  
1967-1971

**MCINTIRE**

FROM PAGE D8

McIntire said with pride. He remembered flying Colin Powell and Dick Cheney during two separate VIP missions.

**INSTRUCTING WITH EXCELLENCE**

After Alaska, he was stationed at Fort Riley, Kansas, with the 1st Infantry Division. He was promoted to CW4, which was a shock to him as he didn't have a college degree yet.

Then he was stationed in Savannah, Georgia, with the 3rd infantry Division, still flying Black Hawks.

**CHASING BAD GUYS**

During this time, he participated in drug interdiction missions in the Bahamas and Turks and Caicos, known as OPBAT.

He worked with the DEA and Bahamian drug enforcement to intercept boats smuggling drugs from Jamaica. "We would take these Black Hawks and fly 100 miles out to sea with the latest night vision goggles," he explained. They would intercept fast boats called GO-FASTS, which could go 60 knots.

"That's fast for a boat, but practically hovering in a Black Hawk," McIntire said. "You're behind them doing 60 knots and throw your lights on them. And the strike force team has got their guns, and they're ready to shoot the engines out as the drug smugglers throw their arms up. I had such a blast doing that mission."

He was tasked with reconnaissance on another operation but discovered the target was already on the island. As they approached, the smugglers jumped into their

boats to escape. McIntire maneuvered the Black Hawk beside them, creating intense waves that pushed the boat back to shore. "They all threw their hands up," he recalled. "I landed on the beach, and the Bahamian authorities arrested them."

**UNICORN SIGHTING**

After Savannah, McIntire was stationed at Camp Humphreys in Korea for a year and found a new favorite food; "I love Korean food. I love Bulgogi, which is beef," he said. "You have to be careful because there's Pagogi, which is chicken. Then there's Kagogi, which is a dog, so you have to be careful. But Bulgogi — I love that."

Upon returning to the States, he was a CW4 and thought he had no chance of making CW5. "It's a very tight cut, with only about 200 CW5s in the whole Army," he noted. So, when he checked the promotion list, he was shocked to see his name on it. "I couldn't believe it!"

Following Korea, McIntire was stationed back to Fort Rucker; this time, he was responsible for 400 instructor pilots and 1,500 flight students each year. "Here's a guy with no college credit," he said, reflecting on his unexpected achievement of CW5. "I'm still waiting for the Army to say they made a mistake!"

McIntire's love for the Army resonates through every story. His journey, one that began reluctantly, blossomed into a fulfilling and impactful career lasting nearly three decades.

**THE ESSENTIAL STRONG MILITARY**

Despite his extensive experience, McIntire remains humble. "And even though I

know I'm the least traveled, least decorated helicopter pilot you'll ever meet, I had a blessed career."

Reflecting on his time in the service and the values he still holds, "... there's what makes you a man, what makes you a man of integrity. I'm old school — a handshake, a man of my word. And I will always have your six if you are a fellow warrior."

He emphasized the importance of military service, saying, "It's absolutely essential that we have a strong military because without that, evil will try to take advantage."

**REMEMBERING THE LOST**

McIntire sums up his military experience in three words: "Blessed, exciting, and the third, you know, it would be at times unbelievable," adding, "I did love it."

Veterans Day is tough for him because he has lost many friends. "If you've watched 'Black Hawk Down,' it was my stick buddy, Cliff Wolcott, who was killed in the first helicopter that was shot down. I helped him through instruments in flight school, and we were lifelong friends."

"I have a deep love for other military service members," he states. "We joke around. There's always that, but you know what? Those jabs about other services are all fake. We love each other. We absolutely love each other. We are all brothers and sisters in arms."

McIntire continued, "I'm not the guy who wears a hat that says 'retired Army' or anything like that. I don't mind if someone else does, but I feel like many people do it just to get that 'thank you for your service' comment ... I don't want that. I want to — in my own way — be."

# From the battlefield to the drill field

## Veteran Steve McCoy reflects on 22 years of military service, leadership

BY ASHLEY TERRY  
Staff Writer  
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Once a soldier facing the harsh realities of war, Granbury resident Steve McCoy now finds purpose in leading the next generation — proving that the heart of a warrior never truly fades. McCoy's journey began in Tennessee, but it was in the bustling halls of L.D. Bell High School in Bedford where he met his future wife and took his first steps toward his future. With a young family to support and aspirations for a better life, McCoy enlisted in the military right after graduation in 1992, at the age of 19. "When you get married before you get out of high school and you have some children to take care of, you kind of need insurance and, you know, Jiffy Lube wasn't cutting it," McCoy said, with a chuckle. "You got to have your priorities because the decisions you make in life kind of sets the path on where you need to go." McCoy noted that he chose to enlist as an 11 Bravo infantryman because he wanted to fully engage in a meaningful role. "Joining the military, you kind of want to be all you can be," he explained. "You kind

of just want to jump in with both feet and do something that's worthwhile." With this particular military occupational specialty known for its frequent deployments, McCoy was soon thrust into the rigors of basic training and subsequently deployed to Germany. After three years there, he was deployed on missions that would take him to the heart of conflict in both Bosnia and Macedonia. "On deployments, you get put in situations of things that you question, 'Why am I doing this?'" McCoy said, adding that one particular experience he had in Bosnia was pretty harrowing. "It's minus 55 degrees, the ground's frozen, there's snow past your knees, and you're having to sleep on the ground," he recounted. "And then when spring comes and things start melting and thawing out, you realize that you've been laying on anti-personnel mines that have been planted all over the field." While luckily none of the mines detonated, McCoy explained that he was acutely aware of the malevolence surrounding him, noting how some individuals would plant anti-personnel mines in their neighbors' yards. "There was one time a guy was cutting his yard with a

sickle because they don't have lawn mowers, and his two daughters were watching him cut the grass, and he stands on this personnel mine and blows himself up in front of his daughters," McCoy said. "So, you have to sit there, and then you have to try to somehow console the daughters, while trying to get to the guy, but you can't just run over there, because you don't know if you're going to stand on the land mine, so you have to probe in the ground to see if there's any other land mines, just to get to this guy ... It's just crazy things." McCoy explained that another eye-opening experience was when his team crossed the Sava River, as they were tasked with monitoring the zone of separation that divided Serbia from its neighbors. During missions in local towns, they often found signs of life — televisions still on, food left on tables — but no people. "It looked like there was life here just moments ago, but no one's there. The whole town is a ghost town," McCoy explained. "At this point, you realize, 'OK, we're actually late, and everybody's been rounded up.' Over there, there was tons of mass grave sites, so that's where they were or they

were murdered and dumped in caves." McCoy described the situation as a modern echo of historical atrocities, likening it to the actions of Nazi Germany dictator, Adolf Hitler, where people were targeted and rounded up due to their religion or ethnicity. "It's crazy," he said. "You think, 'How is this possible? How is this happening?' But it happens. It still happens to this day — you just don't know about it." While the military definitely had its challenges, McCoy notes that there were some good times as well — particularly the strong camaraderie among service members. "Everybody has a job, right? Everybody knows their position, not like on the civilian side, where it's just kind of how everybody's out for themselves," he said. "You have a reason when you're in the military to cover your battle buddies' back to make sure that they stay alive. I'm responsible for this person, he's responsible for me, and we're responsible for a team. It's all a team effort, and that's going to be something I'm going to miss — the camaraderie and the bond that we have as a group of guys that essentially become a family."



Army Veteran Steve McCoy has spent 22 years serving in the military, with 14 of them serving as a drill sergeant. McCoy is pictured with his wife of 31 years, Leigh Ann McCoy, who currently serves as Hood County's treasurer.

McCoy has served a total of 22 years in the military, beginning with the delayed entry program in 1992. After an active-duty stint that ended in 2000, he took a break from service but returned in 2009 to join the reserves. Since graduating from drill sergeant academy in 2010, he has dedicated himself to training soldiers — marking 14 years as a drill instructor. "It is something that you

sign up to do," McCoy said, regarding the military. "We all have our own demons. I had gotten out because it was weighing on me, and so you let yourself get out to work on your issues, and you fix them. But then you find yourself sitting around thinking, 'I didn't finish what I started.'" McCoy said he was inspired

PLEASE SEE  
McCoy | D12



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Private First Class  
United States Army  
1942-1945



**William (Dub) Wiggins**  
Private  
United States Army  
WWII



**Robert Williams**  
Chief Warrant Officer 4  
United States Army  
1966-1986



**Daniel Wilterding**  
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United States Navy  
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# From fields to the frontlines

## The journey of Diana Vasquez

**BY LAUREN DAVIS**  
Staff Writer  
lauren@hcnews.com

**D**iana Vasquez's life began in the fields of Texas, where she was part of a migrant family of farm workers. Growing up, her family traveled from Texas to Wisconsin and Washington State for work.

"I was born in Texas, but my family did a lot of migrating when I was growing up ... harvesting whatever was in season like asparagus, sugar beets and cucumbers. That was our main source of income," Vasquez recalls. As the youngest of five sisters, her upbringing was steeped in hard work, resilience and challenges.

Schooling was often interrupted by their nomadic lifestyle. "I never stayed in the same school for more than five months," she says.

Vasquez attended school in Wisconsin for half the year and returned to Texas for the other half.

This instability strengthened her desire for a consistent education. "I wanted to stay and finish school with my other friends," she explains. After high school, Vasquez graduated from De Leon High School in Texas, determined to carve out a different path for herself.

Following graduation, Vasquez moved to Georgia, where she felt a calling for

something greater than the traditional life her older sisters were pursuing.

### DESIRE TO SERVE

Vasquez always had an innate desire to help others, a quality that set her apart from a young age. "If somebody was struggling, I knew I had to help them," she said. Her mother often shared stories of Vasquez's selflessness, like when she would literally give her shoes to children in need while visiting family in Mexico. "I knew you weren't like the other girls," her mother would say.

From an early age, Vasquez knew she wanted to be more, and it came as no surprise when she later enlisted to serve in the United States military, driven by a calling to make a greater impact.

### THE ARMY CALLED

Many of her friends were getting married and starting families, but Vasquez wanted more. "I wanted to assist others and see the world," she reflects. The military offered her that opportunity, promising adventure and the chance to serve.

In 1998, Vasquez made the decision to join the Army. "I wasn't really scared. I've never been the scared type," she states confidently. Her fearless, adventurous spirit was evident; she embraced challenges and sought new experiences like jumping out of planes and bungee jumping.

Once in the Army, Vasquez traveled for deployments to Afghanistan,



COURTESY PHOTOS

Diana Vasquez before deployment to Iraq in 2004.

Iraq and Kuwait. "I actually did get to see the world," she says. Greenland and Iceland were just two places on a long manifest of countries she visited, but her favorite place was Dubai.

She fondly recalls a time in Dubai during her R&R when she enjoyed sand surfing, parasailing and going to the mall. "Despite the uniform, you still want to feel pretty sometimes," Vasquez shares, "So I went to the mall and got myself a makeover."

"Then they asked if I wanted to buy the product." Admiring her reflection in the mirror, she responded, "Yeah, I'll buy everything that y'all put on my face."

"I didn't know the currency translation, and I spent \$800 on makeup!" she laughs, recalling the surprise she had to share with her husband. "I still have all that Mac makeup."

### FROM MECHANIC TO CRYPTO LINGUIST

Vasquez served in two military occupational specialties. Initially trained as an aviation mechanic, her path shifted dramatically after 9/11. She transitioned to military intelligence, becoming a crypto linguist.

"I had a top-secret clearance," she explains, reflecting on the gravity of her responsibilities. "We did a lot of collection and jamming of types of communications

they had — like push-to-talk radio communication. My job was to collect and jam whatever was being said."

Working with an interpreter who would translate communication, Vasquez and her team deciphered whether a situation was urgent and required dispersing or if it was nonthreatening.

Throughout her 10 years of service, Vasquez faced the realities of combat, albeit indirectly. While she never shot directly at anyone, her role in intelligence was crucial in identifying threats and guiding operations.

"We worked closely with special forces, providing

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Diana Vasquez, 2022.



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# VASQUEZ

FROM PAGE D11

them with the information they needed to carry out missions," she said. Witnessing these operations from a distance was both thrilling and devastating. "It was really tough for me," Vasquez admits, grappling with the death she saw.

Vasquez's experiences in the military were not without their emotional toll. "I know that in spite of the bad guys being as bad as they were, they still had someone out there — a mother, a father, a family," she reflects thoughtfully.

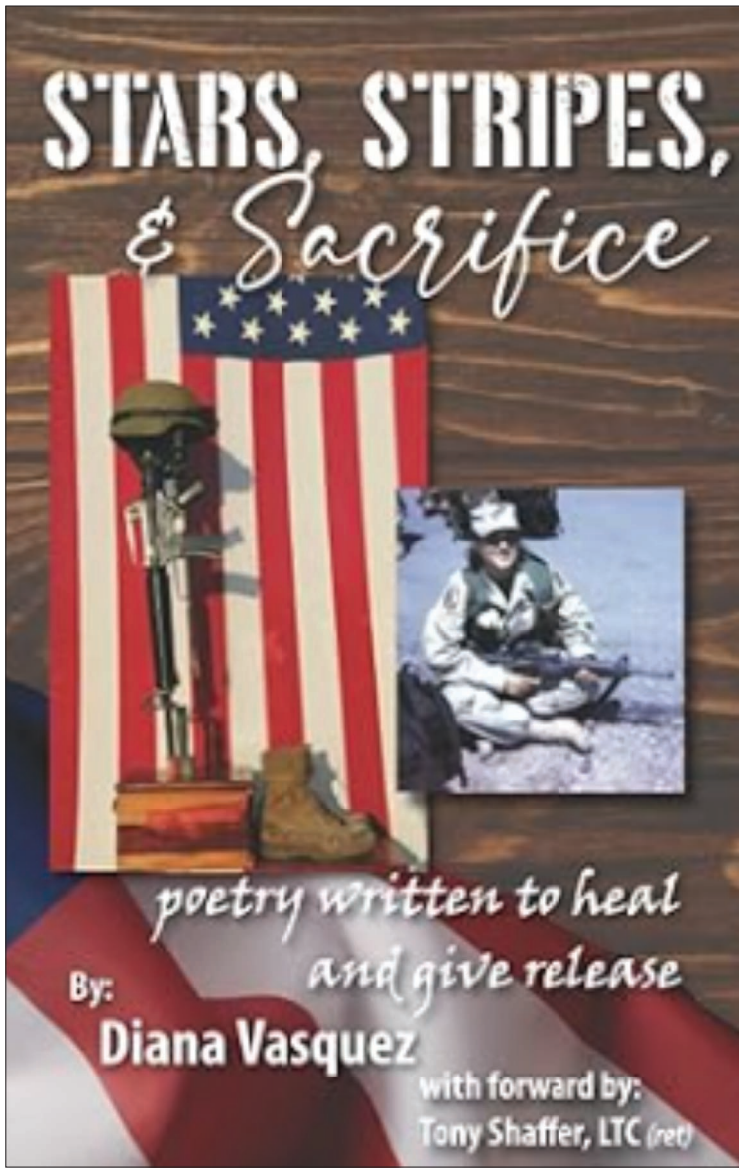
The burden of making life-and-death decisions weighed heavily on her. Yet, for all the challenges she faced, Vasquez looks back on her military career with pride. "I have no regrets — no remorse," she states firmly. Her adventurous spirit and desire to help others defined her journey from the fields of Texas to the frontlines of military service. "Despite all my injuries," she says, "I've had 51 surgeries from head to toe... it's all worth it."

Today, as she reflects on her path, Vasquez embodies the strength and resilience of a woman who has not only served her country but has also inspired those around her, particularly her nieces and nephews, showing them that there is more to life than what meets the eye.

Vasquez revealed the challenges she faced as a female soldier and the trauma she endured. "As a female, it's almost like double trouble." She explained that the dangers didn't just come from the enemy but also from within her own unit.

She discussed the issue of military sexual abuse, stating, "There is a lot of military sexual trauma that happens to females that goes unspoken." Vasquez courageously spoke up about her experience with a Marine non-commissioned officer who tried to undermine her.

"He was a higher rank," she shared, "I spoke up, and he tried to get me in so much trouble... I wasn't going to be a victim." Thankfully, she had a supportive chain of command that believed in her and recognized her char-



Diana Vasquez's book *Stars, Stripes, and Sacrifice*, published in 2022, is a collection of her thoughts that tell the story of her military experience.

COURTESY PHOTO

acter and integrity.

"They knew that I was married and wasn't one of those that would mess around or lie," she said. The support she received from her superiors during that tough time was validating.

However, Vasquez pointed out that the abuse challenges were not limited to interactions with male soldiers. "You have to look out for your male counterparts. But try being sexually harassed by a female." This added complexity made it hard for her to determine whom she could trust. "You're danged if you do and danged if you don't," she said.

Vasquez's story is one of resilience in the face of adversity. Her

commitment to raising awareness about sexual trauma in the military is a crucial part of her narrative. Through her advocacy, she aims to bring about positive change for future generations of service members.

### BE THE CHANGE

Vasquez also reflected on how her military experience changed her. She mentioned, "You kind of lose a part of yourself in the service," and acknowledged that while she may never return to the person she was before, she aims to be a better version of herself. Vasquez stressed the importance of personal growth, stating, "If you want to see a change, you've got to be the

change."

Vasquez has been proactive in creating support systems for veterans, particularly women. She initiated a nonprofit 501(c)(3) called Stars, Stripes, and Sacrifice, which includes an annual backpack drive for homeless veterans.

Each backpack is filled with essential items and serves as a reminder of kindness and support. Vasquez explained, "Everybody deserves a blessing. Whether you served or not, you're still an American, and you shouldn't be going without," she says.

Reflecting on the broader community of veterans, Vasquez spoke about the friendships she built during her service, noting, "I am still friends with 80% of the people that I served with." These relationships formed a strong bond of camaraderie and loyalty, which she holds dear.

"The ones who deserve the recognition are the ones who didn't make it home," Vasquez says. The pride in her service shines through as she shares, "It was an honor for me to serve. I think the American people are worth it."

The Stars, Stripes, and Sacrifice Fundraiser dinner is Nov. 9 at Tacote Mexican restaurant in Glen Rose from 4-10 p.m. There will be food, games, prizes and a silent auction benefiting the organization. Items being raffled off are a 2024 Polaris 4-wheeler, for which 200 tickets will be sold for \$50 each, and a Kott 125 Dirtbike, with 100 tickets for sale at \$25 each.

For more information or to purchase tickets, call 254-979-6359, visit Stars Stripes and Sacrifice on Facebook at <https://m.facebook.com/SgtDianaVasquez>, or the website: Stars, Stripes & Sacrifice or scan the QR code below to purchase on Amazon.



# McCOY

FROM PAGE D10

to return to the military service because he recognized a lack of discipline among some younger service members, both active and veteran.

"Instead of just complaining about it, I decided the only way I could try to make a difference is to go and become a drill sergeant," he said. "I have been training troops for the last 14 years to try to instill the old-school method of discipline and train them the proper way."

McCoy explained that his job as a drill sergeant isn't just about yelling; it's often a strategy to capture attention. He explained that while his earlier approach as a drill sergeant relied on traditional methods of discipline, he learned over time that this particular age group of kids nowadays, once you start yelling at them, they get this glazed look over their face, and now, they're not hearing anything. You have to get their attention other ways, because they'll just tune you out."

While one common misconception about the military is that soldiers are always engaged in combat, McCoy emphasized that many people are also unaware of the vast array of jobs within the military. While some may think all military personnel are combat-focused, he pointed out that only certain roles, like infantry or special forces, are directly involved in fighting.

"They don't understand the supporting MOS's like cooks, the supply sergeants, or the mechanics," he explained. "Those job titles have certain skills that the government has spent thousands and thousands of dollars on these guys teaching them how to do these skills to know how to keep the military working; it's not all fighting, and I think that's where people get misunderstood about the military."

Now, after two decades of dedicated service and leadership, McCoy feels it's the right time to embrace the next chapter of his life. At 51, with 22 years of service — and experience leading fellow soldiers — McCoy is ready to retire, as he is currently waiting on orders for when his last day will be.

"It's been a long time coming," he said. "I think under different circumstances I would love to stay in until I'm 60, but I think 22 years is plenty of time."

McCoy is currently employed full time as a project manager for James Kate Roofing & Solar in Granbury — a position he described as being "the best job" he's ever held. He has been married to his wife, Leigh Ann, who serves as Hood County's treasurer, for 31 years. Together, they have three children — Tiffany, Destine, and Chase — and eight grandchildren.

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