

Pat Bowe: a heroic life of service

By Craig Rullman
Correspondent

Sisters resident Pat Bowe is no stranger to sacrifice.

Raised in Beaverton, Oregon, Bowe volunteered for the U.S. Army as a young man, and served two tours in Vietnam with an infantry reconnaissance platoon, as part of the 173rd Airborne Brigade. In Vietnam, Bowe was severely wounded twice, received a Bronze Star with a combat V device for valor, and ultimately returned to Oregon where he served 33 years in law enforcement.

Soft-spoken, and admirably humble, Bowe recently



PHOTO PROVIDED

Pat Bowe in Vietnam.

sat down with *The Nugget* to discuss his extraordinary life of service and sacrifice.

“You get to the point where you don’t even care about the enemy, you are just trying to survive the living conditions,” Bowe said of his time in Vietnam, where the 173rd Airborne initially operated out of Bien Hoa.

In addition to monsoons — great deluges of seasonal rains that defeated all attempts to stay dry — the southern portions of Vietnam where Bowe was deployed were thick with leaches, poisonous snakes, and triple canopy jungle that made every aspect of fighting, and everyday survival, more difficult.

Between 1966 and 1967, Bowe and his 40-man platoon of reconnaissance soldiers were charged with conducting long-range patrols into the jungle and bush, where they set up ambushes, scouted enemy positions, and engaged in sustained combat against a hardened and determined enemy.

“We were always engaged,” Pat said.

Bowe noted that during World War II the average veteran served 30 days a year in combat. In Vietnam that

average jumped to 265 days.

“The guys we were up against were strike troops,” Bowe said. “The elite of the North Vietnamese Army. They really knew how to fight. It was nothing like World War II. It was all jungle fighting. It was hell in a hand-basket.”

The 173rd Airborne, a storied outfit, also accomplished the first combat parachute jump since the Korean War. Bowe and his comrades were dropped in an area near the Cambodian border, where there was a large North Vietnamese Army presence, and where the 173rd was meant to set up a blocking position while the 4th U.S. Infantry Division, the “legs” in infantry parlance, attacked from a different direction.

Bowe was severely wounded in combat, shot in the stomach, the bullet tearing through his body and damaging his lung, liver, and blowing out a rib. After almost eight months of convalescence, he returned to the field, where he was wounded a second time, struck by shrapnel from a grenade while attacking a Viet Cong base camp. For his actions that day, Pat was awarded a



PHOTO BY JIM CORNELIUS

Pat Bowe has had a long and distinguished career in public service.

Bronze Star for Valor.

Typically modest, Bowe told *The Nugget*, “Well, the citation says a lot of things, but it never looks like what actually happened.”

Bowe still carries shrapnel in his body from his time in combat, which also means that should he need it, he can never make use of an MRI.

When Bowe left the U.S. Army he returned to Oregon and became a sheriff’s deputy in Marion County. He served Marion County in a number of capacities, from patrol deputy, to detective, before laterally moving to the newly formed Keizer Police Department. Bowe was among the first officers hired by Keizer, and worked as a patrol officer,

detective, patrol sergeant, and detective sergeant. He retired from the Keizer Police Department as a lieutenant, and for a time served as the interim chief of police.

But Pat Bowe’s service to his fellow citizens wasn’t finished. After retiring from the Keizer Police, he returned to Marion County and served 10 more years as a sheriff’s deputy. And he still wasn’t finished. Bowe served on the planning commission for five years, the city council for two years, and after moving to Sisters several years ago with his wife of 48 years, Sandy, he has served on the Sisters School

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