

BY KENDALL DUFFIE
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

The Portland Veteran's Project came out of the blue for me. I knew I liked history and writing, but it only came together when I had the chance to visit Washington, D.C., last year on a school trip. Our group was running perpetually late, so we didn't get to go to the Vietnam Veterans Memorial until around midnight on our last night. The memorial was deserted, allowing us to each go through individually and have a personal experience with the wall.

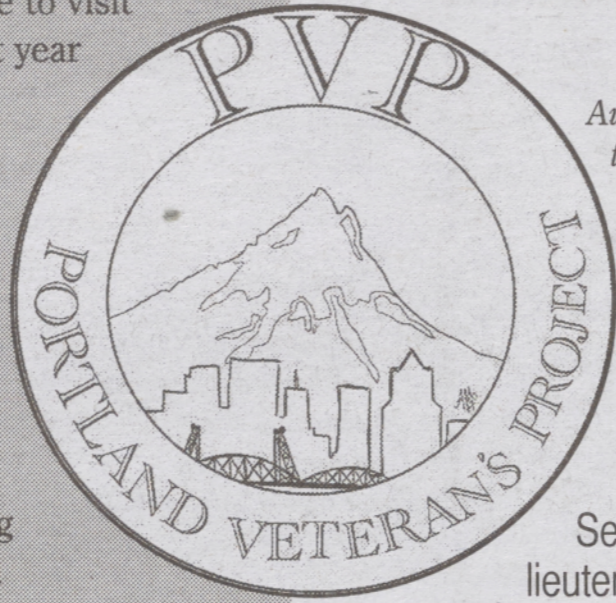
I started to wonder what had happened to every person on that wall. And I realized that the only way to get an idea of what they'd been through was by learning about what the survivors had lived through. I realized that there were veterans around me that I didn't even know: a man at the church where I work, my grandfather, friend's uncles and aunts. I started asking them questions, and I realized that other people would benefit from hearing what they had to say. The Portland Veteran's Project was born.

I've heard some truly amazing stories, so many of them events that I've learned about in history, that I've read about and studied, but became real when I heard it first person. It seems impossible that the people sitting across from you – some of whom use a wheelchair, or have had limbs amputated – have jumped from planes, scaled mountains, mended soldiers and sailed across the world, but they did. You feel like you're there right with them.

I truly believe these people have lived something extraordinary. I always ask my veterans this question last: How do you think service affected your life? What do you want the public to know? One response has stuck with me in a way that I hadn't experienced before. I knew I would never forget what this World War II veteran said. He told me, "You have to fight for what you feel is right. People are the same all over the world. They want one thing. They want safety for their family, they want a home, and they want an ability to support their home."

I feel so honored and grateful to hear these stories and to share them with the community. While I am not personally planning to join the military, this project has changed me. It made me more considerate and opened my mind to new opinions and viewpoints. I will be forever grateful.

Kendall Duffie is a junior at Oregon Episcopal School, a college preparatory school in Portland.



The Portland Veteran's Project

The following are excerpts from interviews high school junior Kendall Duffie conducted with Portland veterans. You can read the complete interviews at portlandveteransproject.wordpress.com

Author's note: I wanted the veterans to be able to tell me the whole, uncensored truth, while also protecting their privacy, so I've only used their initials and birth year when introducing them. I've also only used commission photos, or photos from their era, for the same reasons. – Kendall Duffie

A.L.

Age: 88

Served: Army artillery, second lieutenant, first lieutenant. Korea

In Korea, I served at the 38th parallel, attached to a platoon of the 7th division. As I mentioned, I was a forward observer, and I was facing a hill called Old Baldy. I arrived in Korea in March of 1953. I knew something was up, because instead of putting me on a troop ship to Korea, they put me on a Pan Am chartered airline and flew me there. When I got there, they said, "We don't need you to shoot down airplanes anymore because they've all been shot down. We'd like you to be a forward observer." I said, "Why is that?" They said, "We have a shortage of forward observers because of casualties." Great for my morale.

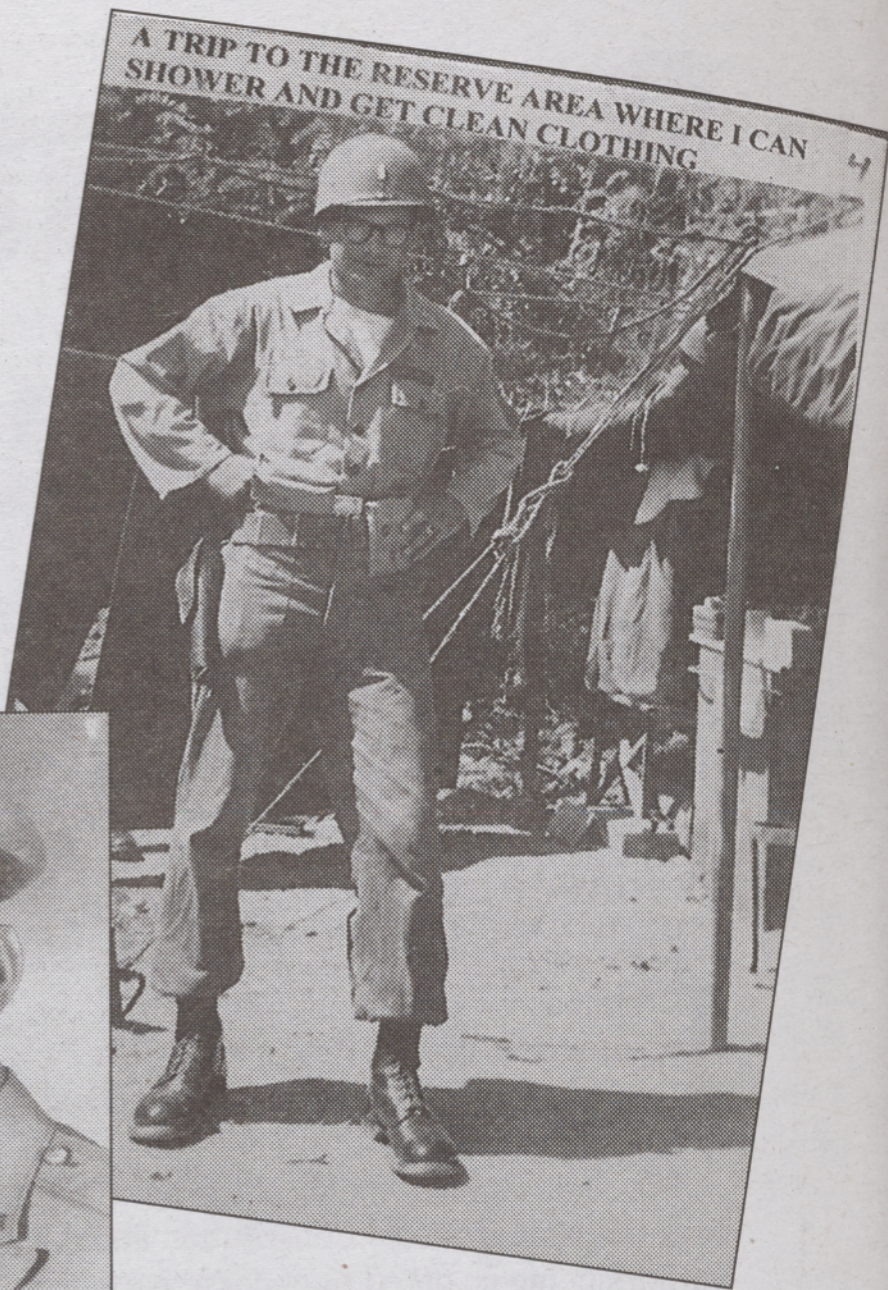
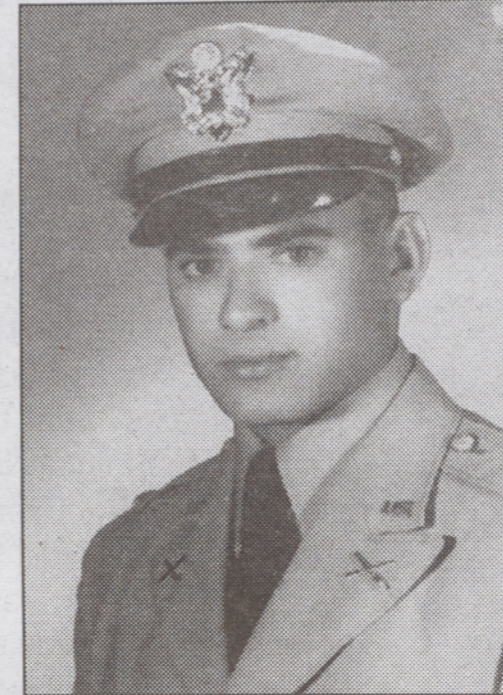
Tell me about any specific memories or experiences that stand out.

I think the thing that bothered me the most was when I was out at the radar station, and I was told that the Chinese had infiltrated my outpost, Westview. My replacement had become a casualty. That was very depressing. It could've been me. Seventy-two hours later, the war was over. I realized how stupid this whole thing was: The war was stupid. The other thing I recall

(was that) most of the senior, professional Army people felt that the war was never won, that there's a stalemate. I think that 43,000 young Americans got killed for no purpose, for no reason at all. I felt very bad about that, as an adult. I feel bad about the Vietnam war. I feel bad about a lot of things – about what's going on in the Middle East today. But, at that point, I just felt how lucky I was that I wasn't there, but also sad. That was the first time, in the history of the United States, without a victory. That was a shame. Today, we have this problem with Korea, because we never won the war. Had we won the war, we wouldn't be in the fix we are today.

Do you remember the day Pork Chop Hill was attacked?

July 6, 1953, at 11 o'clock. I can't remember what I had for breakfast this morning, but I know exactly what I saw on July 6, 1953. It was the most unbelievably



horrible sight I've ever seen in my life. I'll never forget it. It was just terrible.

Thousands of Chinese swarming up the hill against a small unit of American soldiers on the South post. It lasted five days, and in five days, the management decided to pull out. They left Pork Chop and turned the hill over to the Chinese. We had 273 casualties in five days – heavy. How many casualties were there in the Chinese? We counted 1,500. I could see Chinese stacked two or three deep in the trenches. It's hard to even think about it, because it was just seeing your friends – your brothers – massacred. (People) ask, "Did you ever kill anyone?" I have to be careful how I answer that question. I say, "I never pulled a trigger. I have no idea how many casualties I created. All I know, if I saw enemy activity, I just

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A.D.

Age 43

Service: United States Army. E4 specialist, first lieutenant, captain. Afghanistan and Iraq.

On returning from service:

There was a point at which the transition from the time difference was a little bit tricky; you're used to staying up. It's a full cycle. I remember at one point being awake, and laying in bed, like, "This is stupid. I can't go to sleep. I should just get up and do stuff. I'm just going to run to Walmart, because I know they're open 24 hours, and I know I need to pick up a few things." I distinctly remember walking into Walmart at like 3 in the morning. The lights were super bright, and I remember being in the toothpaste aisle, because I needed toothpaste, and I'm (thinking), "This is crazy. How is it that we have 40 different toothpastes to pick from?" Because I had just spent nine months going to the (post exchange) that had two. I literally had to sit down in the aisle for a moment, to catch my breath, because I'm

like, "I don't remember how to do this anymore. How do I pick this?" But then I got better. I can see where people get overwhelmed, and can't get out of that to find their way back.

How did your military service affect how you think about wars today?

I try to remain neutral in that I try to remember that the people who are being sent over there are being sent over there to do a job. They may not agree with the job, but they volunteered, and they signed up, so they're going to do the job. I think that people that haven't been through that experience maybe don't realize that. I've had people who have tried to get into a philosophical debate over the war in Afghanistan or Iraq. I point to things like, because we were in Afghanistan, little girls were able to go to school. Who are you to say, "Well, we shouldn't have gone into Afghanistan." So basically, you're saying that you wanted to allow that to happen? To not let little girls be allowed to go to school?



Then, they get into, "Well, the culture, blah blah blah." Well, I understand their culture, but my way of thinking is all little girls should have that. That, to me, is a fundamental right. If there's a culture that's denying that right to a subset of people, then I do think that we need to help those people. I try to turn it around that way.

Probably the biggest thing I did (in Iraq) was to authorize the expenditure of some money that allowed a part to be flown in that was then used to fix the pump that allowed a whole town of people to have running water. They hadn't had running water because someone had spoken out in the town against (Saddam Hussein), so he cut off that person's hand, and then broke their pump, so the whole town was punished. We don't understand things like that, because we don't have a government that does that. As much as people think our government is so terrible and awful, when you put it into perspective like that, it's very different.