

VIETNAM: Nichols remembers thinking 'I don't want to die naked'

Continued from 1A

Nichols. One day at the Quang Tri base in central Vietnam, Nichols remembers standing in line for the showers after coming back from patrol. He stepped into an outdoor shower stall, his flak jacket, helmet and weapon close by. The shower came to an abrupt halt as the base came under attack.

"Rockets and mortars started coming in," Nichols recalled. "The alarm sounded over speakers. I remember running to the perimeter and thinking, 'I don't want to die naked.'"

As he and another Marine ran side-by-side, a rocket exploded "10 meters behind us." Nichols, knocked out for a short while, awoke to see the other man dead, only yards away. Later, after medics had taken the soldier away, Nichols noticed a jagged and bloody piece of shrapnel embedded nearby. He removed the chunk of metal and still has it, a poignant reminder of the brutality of war and the randomness of who died and who didn't.

Other memories haunt Nichols, too. He remembers a boy riding a water buffalo toward the perimeter of Camp Carroll. Though warned to turn around, the boy kept on coming. An officer ordered Nichols and other Marines that if the rider came any farther, they were to shoot him. He crossed the perimeter and, in seconds, the boy and the water buffalo lay dead.

"Later, we learned he was retarded," Nichols said. "He loved the chocolates the Americans gave out. That's why he had come."

The experiences kept coming. More often than not, Nichols admitted he "was pretty damn scared" in Vietnam.

This is tough stuff. Every veteran has their own searing memories. On the tour bus, the veterans told their stories over a microphone to the others, usually just before arriving at a destination significant to the speaker. Many of the stops brought strong emotion.

The group hiked with one



Bill Stilwagen (blue shirt) tells vets about the Long Hung Catholic Church, a refuge for women and children caught in a crossfire between South and North Vietnamese troops after Americans pulled out of Dong Ha.



Paula Nichols shows off photos she took to children gathered at the old Quang Tri Airfield.

of their members to the spot where her father had died. She carried photos, flowers, medals, a letter he had written to her shortly before his death and a poem she had penned in his honor. She read the letter and the poem. The veterans saluted as "Taps" wafted from a recorder.

They accompanied a fellow veteran to a village where he had spent time. He met a woman who he gave medicine to when she was a 15-year-old girl. She rode up on a motorcycle, and both of their faces lit up with recognition. She invited the American veteran to her

home.

In 1968, Nichols' time in Vietnam ended so abruptly that he'd never said a proper goodbye. The young Marine was called home to Texas when it appeared his mother was dying from an aneurysm. When his mom recovered, he got ready to return to the war. Waiting for his flight, however, he got word his father had suffered a stroke. Nichols never made it back to Vietnam. Later, he learned many of the men in his unit had died in an artillery attack.

"Honestly, I have always felt guilty," Nichols said.



Workers hauling tree trimmings inside The Citadel in the Imperial City at Hue, Vietnam.

"It still eats at me. Maybe I could have made a difference."

Probably not, though, he admitted. He likely would have come home in a coffin just as they had.

Nichols' wife, Paula, experienced her own awakening during the Vietnam tour. At first, Skip hadn't wanted her to come along to a place that had caused him so much pain. But she insisted. She didn't

want him to face it alone. Plus her husband didn't like to talk about Vietnam and she needed to know more.

"It made me more understanding," Paula said. "I found out more in two weeks than in 46 years of marriage."

Nichols is glad she insisted on coming. "It made an important connection for us," he said.

Together, they visited such places as the Highway

of Horror, the Tu Duc Tombs, Hamburger Hill and the Vinh Moc Tunnels, a complex of passageways dug by locals to evade U.S. bombing. They took a dragon boat cruise and walked on China Beach.

Nichols said he loves the country and the people, despite Vietnam being the site of so much violence. During the trip, he felt amazed by the people's warmth.

"They didn't seem to hold any animosity," Nichols said. "They were warm and welcoming."

"Everyone wanted to talk," Paula said. "We'd draw a crowd. They wanted to practice their English."

Nichols said even though he returned to Vietnam, he realizes now that it wasn't possible to really go back. The Vietnam he knew doesn't really exist anymore. Take Da Nang, for example.

"I didn't even recognize it," Nichols said. "I had thought of it as my 18-year-old self, but it has changed."

Nichols remembered two-story buildings, shacks and Quonset huts near the airport. He and Paula found skyscrapers, golf courses, luxury hotels, private villas, resorts and even a Dragon Bridge that breathes fireworks and spouts water.

But, standing back on that red Vietnamese soil, he felt some of his demons loosening their grip. Visiting his own list of significant places and those of others brought some of Nichols' murky memories into focus. After seeing Camp Carroll, Quang Tri and other spots and talking to fellow veterans, he can now fill in some of the gaps.

"Before, I would try and put the pieces together into a giant puzzle where I didn't even know what the picture was," Nichols said. "This trip allowed me to add my pieces to others'."

Contact Kathy Aney at kane@eastoregonian.com or call 541-966-0810.

JUDGE: Harney County had highest voter participation in the state with 72 percent

Continued from 1A

leave Harney County during their 41-day occupation of the refuge to protest federal land-use policies.

A recall election will be held by June 28.

Earlier in the week, Harney County citizens voted decisively in this week's primary for candidates who opposed the armed occupation of the refuge.

Harney County had more candidates on the ballot than in any primary election in recent history, according to Oregon Public Broadcasting. In discussions about federal lands, some candidates echoed the rhetoric of Ammon Bundy and other occupation leaders.

But voters were clear they preferred candidates who opposed the occupation. For the county judge seat, to be vacated by Grasty, current county commissioner Pete Runnels got 53 percent of the vote. That means he'll take office without a November runoff.

For the county commissioner race, two candidates who also opposed the occupation will face off in November: political newcomer Mark Owens, who works in the hay and farming industries, and incumbent Dan Nichols, who decided to run at the last minute because he felt

Harney County needed consistency in leadership after the occupation.

Harney County had the

highest voter participation in the state, with 72 percent of eligible voters submitting ballots.

HAPPY 90TH BIRTHDAY!
NORMA FRENCH
MAY 29th!

Greetings may be sent to Norma at
Sun Ridge Retirement Community
3234 SW Nye Avenue #18
Pendleton OR 97801

A.C.E. CAR CLUB OF ECHO HIGH SCHOOL

CAR SHOW

MAY 28, 2016 • 12-5pm
DOWNTOWN HISTORICAL ECHO, OREGON

- Student Cars Wanted!
- All Cars & Motorcycles Welcome!
- Volleyball Team Italian Soda Bar!
- Football Team BBQ (Burgers & Dogs)
- Food, Raffles and Fun For All!

Registration Starts 10am Day - Of Show Only

CLASSES:	2010-NEWER	BEST LOW RIDER
PRE-1930	BEST MUSCLE CAR CLASSIC	BEST RAT ROD
1930-1939	BEST MUSCLE CAR MODERN	BEST MOTORCYCLE
1940-1949	BEST IMPORT STOCK	BEST OF SHOW
1950-1959	BEST IMPORT MODIFIED	PEOPLE'S CHOICE
1960-1969	BEST STOCK OVERALL	AT LEAST I HAVE A CAR
1970-1979	BEST TRUCK CLASSIC	BEST PEDAL CAR
1980-1989	BEST TRUCK MODERN	BEST BICYCLE
1990-1999	BEST CUSTOM OVERALL	
2000-2009	BEST WORK IN PROGRESS	

Car Entry Fee: \$20 Student Car Entry Fee: \$5
with student ID

For information, call ACE Club advisors
Rick Denning (541) 571-4417
or Mitch Correa (541) 701-8929

Find us on Facebook www.facebook.com/ACEAutomobileClubofEchoHighSchool

LIFE FLIGHT NETWORK PUBLIC OPEN HOUSE

Sat. May 21 • 9am-1pm
5250 NW Doolittle Lane
Pendleton, OR

Paid Advertisement

Rogers Toyota of Hermiston

1550 N. First St. Hermiston OR 97838

HUGE INVENTORY SELL DOWN

Now Through Tuesday, May 31, 2016

Residents of Hermiston, Oregon and surrounding areas,

Here at Rogers, we have recently had a huge influx of New Toyotas and Quality pre-owned vehicles. Our future inventory levels rely greatly on how quickly we can sell this inventory. In effort to make sure we can continuously provide you with the best selection of new Toyota's and Quality pre-owned Vehicles, WE MUST SELL ALL OF OUR EXISTING INVENTORY NOW!!

In order to do this we are going to provide you with our biggest savings of the year by offering every vehicle on our lot at EMPLOYEE PRICING plus \$1. That means you pay \$1 over what our 30 employees pay and what I pay when purchasing one of our vehicles. Plus, you get to couple that with some of the biggest rebates, special leases, and lowest interest rates from Toyota that we have seen all year. There are no exceptions: New Rav4, Camry, Corolla, Prius, Tundra, Sienna, Sequoia, Avalon, Highlander, 4Runner, Prius C, Tacoma, Prius V, Yaris, Land Cruiser, Certified Toyota, or one of our 100 pre-owned vehicles, you pay what employees pay plus \$1.

Not only do you pay \$1 over employee price, but if you have a pre-owned vehicle of your own that you would like to trade in or would like to sell you will get to take advantage of one of the strongest used car markets we have seen in the last decade. That means you get more for your trade.

- Huge inventory
- Used cars from \$4,995*
- New car payments from \$99/mo**
- 0% interest on 10 new Toyota models
- 2 years or 25,000 miles No Cost Maintenance and Roadside Assistance on all new Toyotas

In summary, come in today to take advantage of the our lowest prices, your highest trade-in values, and the best financing of the year!

Sincerely,
Glenn Silaski

New and Used Car Inventory

Tundra • Tacoma • Rav4 • Corolla • Sienna
Camry • Highlander • Prius Family • 4Runner
Over 100 Quality Pre-Owned Vehicles

Glenn Silaski
General Manager
Rogers Toyota of Hermiston

*Stk# 16T381A 2005 Buick Rendezvous \$4,995. **Stk #16T394 2016 Toyota Corolla S Plus. MSRP \$21,125. Now \$19,046 after \$1,000 lease cash from Toyota Financial Services. 3yr/12k mile year lease. All payments plus tax, license, title, and dealer charges. All vehicles eligible for 0% on 60 months on approved credit are as follows: 2016 Camry, 2016 Camry Hybrid, 2016 Prius Liftback, 2016 Prius V, 2016 Avalon, 2016 Avalon Hybrid, 2016 Sienna, 2016 Rav4 and 2016 Rav4 Hybrid. No security deposit required. A documentary service fee of \$75 may be added to vehicle price or capitalized cost. Does not include taxes, license, title, processing fees, insurance and dealer charges.

For questions or more information go to
www.toyotaofhermiston.com or call 541-567-6461