

Flanary mans missile stations in Germany during Vietnam

'There were fun times, and there were miserable times'

By Rylan Boggs
Blue Mountain Eagle

John Day resident Vern Flanary was an Army specialist based in Germany in 1968 and 1969.

Stationed in Bamberg, Flanary was responsible for helping keep the fleet of vehicles at the base running as well as manning missile stations during drills. Thankfully, they never had to use any of the missiles, Flanary said.

"There were fun times, and there were miserable times," Flanary said, remembering bivouacking in the mountainous Black Forest in Germany "was not fun."

While in Germany, he said there was the constant, looming possibility they would be moved to Vietnam.

"I got lucky," Flanary said.

Even though it's been nearly four decades, he can still recite his serial number, saying it's embedded in his brain.

Flanary remembers the grueling physical training that was part of basic training almost fondly, saying he enjoyed the regular meals, exercise and fresh air. He compared his training to the movie "Full



The Eagle/Rylan Boggs

Vern Flanary poses for a photo in the John Day Elks Lodge Wednesday, Nov. 2.

Metal Jacket," saying it gave a good picture of what basic training had been like.

Despite not serving in Vietnam, Flanary says he ran into the same disrespect Vietnam vets received when returning home. He says many veterans had to go underground and disassociate themselves with the military. Though he is not active in veteran affairs, Flanary says acknowledging and taking care of veterans is deeply important to him.

"I honor respect and will support all of our veterans here," he said.

Flanary, who moved to Grant County from Portland five years ago, said, "Grant County is a great place for a veteran."

RAY

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"They were flying so high," Ray said. "They were a gung-ho outfit. When he left again, they never came back. They don't know what happened to them."

At one point, Ray was given a choice to go on war patrol.

"One out of four wasn't coming back," he said.

He chose instead to return to New London. Traveling on the Skipjack submarine to Connecticut, his sleeping

quarters were in a torpedo room. In New London, he taught new students about submarine service.

"Every day we would take a load of students out to Long Island Sound to practice diving and surfacing," he said. "It was a perfect place to train because the water had a depth of 100 feet."

He said submarine pay was good with 50 percent more base pay and 20 percent for sea duty.

"Instead of \$60, I was paid \$118 a month," he said. "It was about as far away as you can get from logging life."

In March 1946, Ray returned to Oregon. His parents bought a 10,000-acre ranch east of John Day while he was in the service, and he went to work for them as a ranch hand. He bought a log truck in 1970, driving until his retirement at age 62.

In 1991, Ray attended the 50th anniversary of the attack on Pearl Harbor in Hawaii with his wife, Evelyn.

"It's unbelievable how it's built up," he said. "I couldn't find the submarine base where I worked."

He and Evelyn live at Valley View Assisted Living

Facility in John Day. Ray had two brothers who have passed on, one who served in the Army and the other in the Air Force. One of Ray's grandsons made five tours in Iraq during his 14 years of service in the Army, and another grandson is in the Coast Guard in North Carolina.

When asked what he learned from his time in the service, Ray said, "You learn to obey orders without question. You learn to respect your elders. It wouldn't hurt anybody to spend a year in the service."

TET

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He also remembered the constant mud and ensuing skin disease in the Mekong Delta. Besides the one week of rest and recuperation in Taipei, on which he declined to give details, Van Voorhis kept his men busy, either patrolling or getting ready to patrol with only the occasional break to relax.

He said basic training was grueling, though not entirely unenjoyable, and compared it to the movie "Full Metal Jacket," saying it was an accurate representation of what basic training was like for them.

In particular, he recalled one-on-one bayonet training with padded poles approximating the weight of the rifles they used. Van Voorhis described it as "organized chaos."

He received extensive training, broad and specialized, for his military occupational specialties, including a crash course on delivering a baby. This particular bit of knowledge came in handy when, in the middle of the Tet Offen-

sive, Van Voorhis said he had to help deliver a baby.

Van Voorhis said, when he returned from Vietnam in November of 1968, he was handed a new uniform, pushed out the door and told "good luck." Van Voorhis was shocked by the hostility of his own generation when he returned. He said he was spat on, called "baby killer" and treated with general disrespect when he returned home.

"It took me a long time to forgive this country and my generation for doing that to me," he said.

Like many other veterans, he quickly learned to blend in. However, Van Voorhis said he could always spot other veterans even in a classroom full of people. He said there's something about the way the military taught them to carry themselves that he could always pick out. On class breaks, he said they would always group together to talk and smoke.

He said he began to see attitudes toward veterans change after the First Gulf War. He said it was the feeling among Vietnam veterans that "no veteran will come back to this country and be

treated like we were."

Today, Van Voorhis is extremely active in veteran affairs. He works with the Veterans Affairs Office and Veterans Service Office. He is a member of the American Legion and Veterans of Foreign Wars. He is the chairman of the Veterans Committee at the Elks Lodge and works with the state Elks organization.

"I will do anything I can for any veteran in Grant County," he said. "I don't care what branch of the service. I don't care what their MOS was. I don't care when they served. If there is something I can do to help them, I will do it."

He said many veterans don't get the recognition they deserve, and regardless of where they served and in what capacity, they are veterans and deserve to be acknowledged and thanked for their service.

Though Van Voorhis is no longer able to enlist, he said he would do it all over again if he could.

"I would go to Vietnam again, even knowing the outcome," he said. "I would do it all over at the drop of a hat and feel honored to do it."

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