

Vietnam veterans group creating metro legacy

By Valerie Biggerstaff For The Crier | Posted: Tuesday, July 14, 2015 10:12 am

2015 marks 50 years since United States troops entered Vietnam and 40 years since the war ended. A group that has worked for years to promote patriotism, assist new veterans, and honor the families of those who lost their lives serving in Vietnam is the Atlanta Vietnam Veterans Business Association. Two members of that organization, Art Katz and Bryan Tate, shared some of their personal experiences from the war.

When Art Katz was seventeen years old, he was recruited and joined the Coast Guard Academy, which offered him a free education. He graduated in 1963 and by 1965 was on his way along with his crew to the Philippines for training and transformation from a peacetime patrol boat to a wartime gunboat.

From the Philippines, Mr. Katz and his crew sailed the gunboat to Vietnam, where they patrolled the Mekong River Delta and along the coast to stop the movement of supplies by the enemy. These types of missions eventually forced the enemy to use the Ho Chi Minh Trail to move supplies. Katz was the commanding officer of thirteen crew members on a boat called Point Cypress. On board the Point Cypress were five .50 caliber machine guns and an eighty-one millimeter mortar.

In June of 1966, Art Katz asked for permission to conduct a radar surveillance patrol off the mouth of the Co Chien River. When three junks (ships) were discovered in the early morning, all five of the .50 caliber mounts on the Point Cypress gunboat fired. Two junks were heavily damaged and the third was destroyed.

While Mr. Katz was commanding a boat in the Mekong River Delta his wife Carol gave birth to a baby girl back in New York. The first time he met her was when he arrived home from Vietnam in December of 1966. Their meeting took place in a tunnel at Kennedy Airport. She was three months old.

Mr. Katz grew up in New York, but in 1979 he and his family moved to Dunwoody. He has raised his children here and now his grandchildren are growing up here too. He is the founder of a Dunwoody business, The Dunwoody Group, an executive search recruiting firm.

In 2005, Art Katz returned to Vietnam on a Southeast Asia cruise ship along with his wife and some friends. He says returning to Vietnam was a cathartic experience.



Memorial

The Atlanta Vietnam Business Association is leaving footprints across metro Atlanta. This memorial was placed by the AVVBA in memory of Major William Henry Seward who was killed in South Vietnam in March of 1968. The memorial stands in the central roundabout of Perimeter Place in Dunwoody.

The Coast Guard Academy honored Mr. Katz in 2010 as part of their Wall of Gallantry. A plaque was placed on the Wall to commemorate his actions in Vietnam. He describes the purpose of the Wall of Gallantry, “to provide inspiration for current cadets for what they have the potential to accomplish.”

Bryan Tate, just having completed an engineering degree in 1968, was drafted into the Infantry. Due to the recent Tet offensive, many soldiers were needed in Vietnam. He reported first to Fort Benning in Georgia and then to Fort Polk in Louisiana for training. In the summer of 1969, he was deployed about fifty miles west of Saigon.

Mr. Tate was the leader of a rifle platoon in the 1st Infantry, consisting of eighteen men. The platoon was moved around from one area to the next on four helicopters (called Eagle Flights). They would clear the area of the enemy and then move to the next.

Some of Mr. Tate’s time was spent on a rubber tree plantation as big as Dunwoody, where the local people gathered sap from rubber trees. The rubber plantation was owned by Michelin Tire Company. The most difficult part of his time was, of course, losing men in the platoon.

When Bryan Tate returned to the United States in July of 1970, he was advised by the military to change into civilian clothes before returning home. Feelings of hostility were high at the time. He believes one of the positive outcomes of the Vietnam War is how civilians are more appreciative of our military. Where as today people are quick to express their thanks to military personnel for their service no matter what their opinion is of the conflicts the US is involved in, that was not the case during the Vietnam War.

The AVVBA began in 1982 with a few Vietnam Veterans who gathered at Penrod’s in Buckhead. Today they meet in the Fellowship Hall of Dunwoody United Methodist Church and have over three hundred members. According to Bryan Tate, AVVBA Chairman, “the AVVBA is one generation of veterans helping the next” and they hope that tradition will continue forward.

The members hold raffles at their monthly meetings and donate the money to the USO. Members of the AVVBA greet military men and women as they arrive at Hartsfield Jackson Atlanta Airport. They also volunteer at the USO facility at the airport.

The group has placed twenty-eight memorials around Atlanta and Georgia to honor the families of fallen Vietnam veterans. At Perimeter Place shopping center, a memorial was placed in the roundabout garden. The memorial is in memory of Major William Henry Seward, a Marine who was killed in South Vietnam in March of 1968. There is also a memorial at Marist High School, which several of the AVVBA members attended back when it was a military school.

In 2000, the AVVBA placed a memorial at the Atlanta History Center and today it is part of the Veterans Park which honors all veterans from every conflict. Soil from the location of each battle the United States has fought in was brought to the memorial at Atlanta History Center and used in a Sacred Soils Ceremony to consecrate the ground at Veterans Park.

The AVVBA has set up a scholarship fund for new veterans to be able to attend college, another way they help the next generation. One deserving recipient never knew her father, but discovered at age

sixteen that he was killed in Vietnam. This inspired her to join the military. After twenty years she wanted to return to school. The scholarship helped her graduate from Georgia Perimeter College with honors. One hundred percent of money donated to the AVVBA scholarship fund is used for scholarships.

At first, Bryan Tate preferred not to talk about his war experience and avoided books and movies depicting the war. However, when a member of the AVVBA mentioned that he found it therapeutic, he joined. Today Mr. Tate is Chairman of the Board of Directors for the group.

After several corporate moves, Bryan Tate and his wife Johanna decided to stay in Dunwoody. He is the founder, Chairman and CEO of Digitel Corporation. He has served on the Board of the Dunwoody Chamber of Commerce, the Founding Board of the Dunwoody Convention and Visitors Bureau, and is a past President/Director of the Spruill Center for the Arts.

The Atlanta Vietnam Veterans Business Association is carrying out the words that make up their logo: they are "Proud, Patriotic and Professional." For more information on the AVVBA and the location of all twenty-eight memorials, visit their website at www.avvba.org.