

30 DAYS OF HONOR ★ *A Salute to Local Vets*



Service had lasting impact

Mark Krueger's post-war life shaped by time in Vietnam

By Karla Swita
For Gannett Central Wisconsin Media

WAUSAU — In 1965, registering with Selective Service amid the Vietnam War was at the forefront of young men's minds across America. One of those young men was Mark Krueger, who had graduated from Stratford High School and moved to Wausau to work for Zastrow the Beer Man and Channel 7 as a cameraman.

"One day on a whim I stopped downtown at the draft board on First and Scott streets. There was a room with blackboards hanging all around with all these numbers on them. I told them my name and date of birth and the lady turned around and pointed at my number and said, 'your letter's going out next week,'" Krueger said. "I left there and went right over to the Air Force recruiter. I thought that rather than crawling around on my belly getting shot at in the rice paddies, I'd try to get in the Air Force and learn a trade."

ABOUT MARK KRUEGER

Age: 70
Home: Wausau
Conflict involved in: Vietnam War
Branch: Air Force
Years of service: 1966 to 1970
Rank at discharge: Sergeant

Question: What is your most enduring memory from your time in the service?

Answer: Sometime after I had been rotated back to Texas at Dyess Air Force Base, we would fly back to Japan on two- or three-month temporary duty assignments. While we were there, we flew down to Cam Ranh Bay in South Vietnam. That was the most heart-wrenching part, because what we were doing was flying back pallets stacked with body bags of U.S. service people killed in action. We would fly them back to Tachikawa, Japan, so they would be processed, identified and shipped back to their families. ... That was tough to see. That hurt.

Q: What did you do in the service and where were you stationed?

A: I was in Okinawa for a year and a half as an aircraft mechanic on C-130 cargo planes. I got a TDY, temporary duty assignment, to Ubon Royal Thai Air Force Base for three months. While I was there, I volunteered for five combat missions.

Eventually, I was promoted to sergeant and was a crew chief in charge of maintenance. I was discharged out of Dyess Air Force Base in Abilene, Texas.

Q: What do you most want people to know about the conflict in which you served?

A: The worst thing about Vietnam for me was the fact that we weren't allowed to win the war. We went in there and died and sacrificed our lives. We went through bloody hell for all those years and escaped by the skin of our teeth. When the Viet Cong marched into Hanoi, we weren't allowed to finish what we went there for. That's what hurts, too.

Q: Tell us about your life after the service and how your time in the military affected your civilian life.

A: I was home on leave and I went to see a close friend of mine — we were Stratford boys. He was working as a detective for the sheriff's department under Sheriff Gianoli. They gave me a job application, and I filled it out. On New Year's Day in 1971, I walked in the front doors and was sworn in as a deputy sheriff. Because of the things I experienced in the military, and the people that I lived with and worked with for four years, it gave me a good perspective on people and their problems. I found out through flying those combat missions that I'm not going to fold under fire.

Q: Are you looking forward to going on the Honor Flight?

A: In 1987, I was in Emmitsburg, Maryland, for fire investigation school for two weeks. One weekend a bunch of us took a bus to Washington, D.C., and I got to see the Vietnam wall. ... There's just a feeling about the place. It just takes over. I know I'll have that feeling again.



Mark Krueger served in the Air Force during the Vietnam War.



T'XER ZHON
KHA/GANNETT
CENTRAL
WISCONSIN MEDIA
Mark Krueger,
of Wausau,
served as a
sheriff's deputy
after serving in
the military.

A FLIGHT TO NEVER FORGET

» The Central Wisconsin chapter of Never Forgotten Honor Flight celebrates its fifth anniversary this spring. Since April 2010, the Honor Flight program has taken more than 1,700 veterans of World War II, Korea and Vietnam from Central Wisconsin Airport to Washington, D.C., to view the memorials built in honor of their service.

» 30 Days of Honor is a project of Gannett Central Wisconsin Media to profile veterans who have taken an Honor Flight, or are scheduled, and to encourage more veterans to do so. Profiles will appear each day April 26 through Memorial Day.

» Veterans may apply for a free Honor Flight (or loved ones may apply for them) by filling out an application. The only qualification for a veteran to take an Honor Flight is to have served in any branch of the U.S. military during the periods of World War II, the Korean War or Vietnam War. Veterans do not have to have been in combat. The applications and more information are available at www.neverforgottenhonorflight.org.



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