

Information gathered by Judy Allen January 18, 2023

Richard Blake, Veteran, from Bethel

He was in the 3<sup>rd</sup> Division and worked as a mechanic

"I was at Fort Polk in Basic Training and we had a breakout of Spinal Meningitis. Because of this, our Basic Training was longer – instead of the usual 6 weeks, our Basic Training was 8 weeks," said Richard Blake, veteran of the United States Army.

"Several people died while I was there. No one from my company got sick. We hung up 'sneeze sheets' between us and the others, creating small 'bedrooms'. We had to keep several feet between us at all times, and when we trained, we had to do individual training," he said.

"They started giving us shots to keep us from getting sick. We would get up, eat breakfast, then went to the infirmary to get shots – between five and eight a day! They would give the shots in arms, hips, anywhere they could find on our body that wasn't infected or red from the shots the day before!"

Blake said, "We had to test clear before we were able to leave Ft. Polk."

He continued, "I was one of two people able to skip AIT (Advanced Individual Training). 99% of the people had to take AIT to determine what job they would do. I was a mechanic for a long time before entering the Army, so I went straight to a mechanic job. While I was in Ft Jackson, South Carolina, I worked on lots of military equipment - mostly equipment used for camping."

Blake said, "In Germany, my main job was still mechanic, but I ended up being a glass cutter. I placed glass in windows and windshields, etc., of stuff damaged in Vietnam. After repairs, the items were sent back to Vietnam."

He reminisced, "There was a lot of paperwork associated with every job. Anything used for repairs had to be itemized on a paper trail. All of it had to be accounted for. Even if we got stuff that could not be repaired we had to create a paper trail to send it to salvage."

Blake served from 1967-1971. Nine months of that service was in South Carolina and the remainder in Germany. He was discharged as a Spec-4.

"I met my wife, Karen, through her brother while in service at South Carolina. She was seventeen years old," said Blake. They now live in Bethel, Oklahoma.

Blake is the son of Herman and Nola Parnell Blake. He grew up in Watson, Oklahoma. After the military, he and Karen ran the service station (then the General Store) in Bethel for 28 years before retirement.

Collected information at Smithville January 18, 2023. He called Friday, January 20 to add to his file.

Signed Judy Allen