

## Story

Michael Scantlin story, interviewed by Judy Allen at his home in Stigler on 5-2-24 at 10:15 am

Michael Scantlin is a veteran of the U.S. Army, serving in Vietnam. He said when he first arrived at Vietnam he was with the 179<sup>th</sup> Intelligence attachment as a clerk, then later transferred and worked at the Education Center in Long Binh where he worked a year. A friend who went to basic with me encouraged me to transfer to Education.

"I taught a class and tested others for their GED. There was an initiative called the 100,000 project – the Army was supposed to draft 100,000 illiterate men and send them to school for a year, each them to read and write and then send them to the Army. Most of these men were actually sent straight to Vietnam after basic, and part of them are who I had as students. They would go to school half a day and then work half a day," said Scantlin.

Scantlin was drafted in 1965 for nineteen months, discharging in 1967. It was January 6 when I got home. I was married and teaching school in Muskogee when I entered service. I had been married to JoAnn for two years before I left," said Scantlin. While in Vietnam, Scantlin kept in touch by mail with JoAnn and his father. "I got a letter from JoAnn about once a week, and wrote home about once a week."

He achieved the rank of E5 prior to discharge. "In Vietnam, no one was below an E3. When I got there, I was still and E1 and was given two promotions at the same time. I don't think I got paid but \$70 a month, and I took an allotment out and sent to my wife each month. She also worked, teaching at Keota school and lived with her parents."

Scantlin said he did not consider making a career of the military. In addition to wanting to go back home to JoAnn, he had a job waiting for him at Hilldale School in Muskogee, the same job he left when joining the Army. He and his wife both retired from teaching elementary school at Hilldale.

Scantlin's basic training was in Fort Bliss, El Paso, Texas, and he did Advanced Individual Training (AAIT) at Fort Huachuca, Arizona. He made a friend in basic, Charles Copeland, who lives in Keota. They are still friends. Another friend was Tommy Lewis, the man who encouraged Scantlin to transfer to the Education unit. Tommy moved to Sallisaw.

Medals and citations received included the National Defense Service medal and the Vietnam Campaign and Service medals.

Scantlin said his draft notice came in January, and the superintendent of the school where he worked wrote a letter and asked the draft board to wait until June when school was out, because it was hard to find a replacement teacher in the middle of the school year. Enlistment was deferred until June 1.

Scantlin's home in Stigler is across the road from the house he was born in. A springtime visit to his home will find a small herd of cows grazing in a nice green pasture between his first home and current house. "I already had a few cows, although not many. When I came back after two years in the Army, my dad had never sold a calf, so I had 20 heifers ready to calve!" said Scantlin. "I sold them and had enough money to make a down payment on a house."

Scantlin has two brothers: Charles lives in Texas and Jerry lives in Stigler. Jerry is younger and served in the military in Germany prior to the Vietnam War breaking out.

Scantlin performed well in training and in his job. "I didn't really mind the work or marches – after the blisters were off my feet the first few weeks!" he said. "We would take a physical

fitness test – run a mile in a certain time, climb a ladder, qualify at the firing range . . . – the ones who didn't pass, got recycled, started over until they did pass. This meant they stayed in basic longer. There were fifty men in a platoon, and four platoons made a company."

Scantlin said military life was full of routine. "I was 25 when I went in. They tell you everything you need to do. When we went to Vietnam, you didn't have anywhere to go. When I first got there, they would show a movie every once in a while."

Military life helped him gain a larger appreciation for the finer things of life. "On the day I left, there were about fifty of us on a bus going to Saigon. The bus driver had the door open. Vietnamese were passing us on little motorcycles. I was on the front row in the bus with the door open and thought about the possibility of one of the Vietnamese through a bomb in and blowing us up on my last day in Vietnam. When leaving Saigon, I looked down from the plane and let out a big breath! I was relieved to be leaving Vietnam."

Scantlin said, "I am a member of the Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW). I have held every office there from Clerk to Commander. People here in Stigler support the VFW, but I don't the camaraderie is the same as it was after WWII."

His parents were Haskell Scantlin and Thelma Raye Bond Scantlin. "Dad was a farmer and a non-schooled veterinarian. He was called Doc Scantlin. He only went to 8<sup>th</sup> grade and was self-taught on animal medicine."

Michael Scantlin said he attended school in Stigler and then Connors and Northeastern Colleges.

A family tradition that has been passed down is being involved in Decoration Day at the Garland Cemetery on the third Sunday in May. "We still go!" he said. "My parents and grandparents on dad's side and several uncles, an aunt and a lot of cousins are at Garland. My great-great grandparents came over on the Trail of Tears. Great-great grandfather was seven and great-great grandmother was five when they came over. They settled in the Garland area and did not speak English – just Choctaw. I think when they got to Oklahoma, my dad said there were seven brothers. A couple of scouts were sent out to Garland and it was chosen to settle in that community."

Scantlin added, "We also have an Indian cemetery (San Bois Cemetery) that I keep mowed and we decorate it the fourth Sunday in May. My great grandparents and two uncles are buried there."

He said, "I remember living with my grandmothe. Grandmother had fourteen kids and two died in infancy. My grandfather was killed in 1918 in a barn at the age of 48. My dad was eleven at the time and an older uncle was two years older. They had a younger brother and were all sent ot Jones Academy. They took them in a buggy and the older uncle beat them back home by cutting across the mountain. They took him back and he beat them home again. They didn't take him back a third time! My dad stayed in Jones for three years. He said he was the whitest one there and had a friend that was full-blood and two years older. Dad said that boy was his banker because if you had any money, the big boys would take it away!"

He and JoAnn have two daughters, Melissa Scantlin of Muskogee and Katrina Wafford of Fort Gibson. They have three grandchildren by Katrina. "All have their Choctaw cards and a grandson is graduating from OU Pharmacy School!"

Scantlin's advice for future generations is, "Study hard while in school because you never know when you will need your education. If you have it, they can't take it away from you. An opportunity may arise that you will need your education."