

Purple Heart veteran

Nathan Doyle Watson served two years, from 1968-1969 in the 669th Army Transportation Unit. He was stationed in Vietnam. His boot camp and jungle training were in Fort Polk, LA. He achieved a rank of Specialist E-4.

Watson said, "I was told that because I was married and had a child that I really didn't have to go to Vietnam. But I just went and did my duty.

"It took four days to fly to Vietnam – we were hijacked," said Watson. When we left Seattle we were on the way toward Russia and we crossed the borderline and got in their airspace territory. They forced us down. There was a mig on each side. I could see them, they were shooting their weapon ahead of us, not *at* us, to warn us. The pilot was pointing his finger to show 'go down'. Our pilot did go down and I guess he checked the landing area two or three times. The pilot told us, 'The President of the United States already knows what is going on.' We landed safely.

They just guarded us. We landed on a small island. I don't believe it was for the type of aircraft we were riding. It was for fighter migs.

We stayed in their territory three days. The only meal they gave us was cheese. One meal over three days. On the plane, they would feed us ever so often. Food was in a certain place, after two days, we all kind of got out of hand and took food ourselves, then the food was gone. By the time we were fixing to leave, we were low on fuel, I guess from circling the landing area there. They didn't give us any fuel, so we all had to push that plane and turn it around in the runway. That was so it wouldn't use so much fuel to turn around and take off. We all boarded the plane and they let us go.

After that, we thought we would come back to the US. We were low on fuel, and when we left there, our plane had so much power when we left their landing area, which was made of metal sheets, we kind of picked up the metal sheet. We had to go to Tokyo to get fuel. They fed us there, and that is when we found out we were going straight to Vietnam, not the US."

Watson was based at Quy Nhon, Vietnam. "I stayed there the entire time. I saw combat.

"My job was to drive cargo from one place to another. Transports were sometimes hit. Mine was hit. I was injured and got a Purple Heart," said Watson. Other medals and citations included Vietnam Defense, Good Conduct, Marksman and Sharpshooter.

"I had never driven a cargo truck," said Watson, but said he liked it ok. The most difficult part of military lifestyle for Watson was being away from home.

"When I first got to Vietnam, I started driving cargo from point A to point B. We could carry anything from apples to a bomb. I remember an instance of one of the most dangerous things we were asked to do – haul white phosphorus. Just one bullet could set the whole thing off, so they would put us at the very back of the convoy of 40 trucks. I didn't know I was carrying it until after we arrived, and was told that was the reason I drove at the rear of the line. After doing that six or seven months, they decided we didn't have enough protection. If a convoy got into an ambush, it would take a helicopter and gun truck too long to come to our aid. They wanted someone with us all the time, so they formed a gun truck with the convoy. My cargo truck was the one picked! I stayed with my truck, but the cargo truck was turned into an armored truck. We put steel and sandbags around it and we had weapons. All we did was go with the convoy. There used to be two of us. One would stay kind of at the rear and one at the front. If anything happened, we could get there quick. I did that for five or six months. I was the

driver, and we had a radio man and machine gunner. Three of us rode the steel armored truck with a convoy of 40-50 trucks. It would take all day to get to our destination.

Our gunner truck was hit by a rocket. After that, my truck was no good. Other times we would get sniper fire. There was a certain place right at the bottom of a mountain we were told 'if you are going to get hit, this is where it will be.' The drivers were told not to pile up at the bottom. There were other countries there doing the very same thing. The time I got hurt, it wasn't even American cargo – it was a Korean convoy we were guarding." Watson said they remained until help arrived because the second gunner wasn't there that day.

He received promotions overseas. "I was a Private when I left for Vietnam. Soon as we got over there I became an E-1 and with time, kept climbing," said Watson. He discharged as an E-4."

He said a guy he met from Tennessee, named Russell, was a memorable friend in the service, as they worked together almost until the end of service.

Asked how wartime service affected him, Watson said, "I guess I grew up a little."

Letters were the best way for Watson to keep in touch with family. "I got letters just about every week. At one time, I had a pile of letters this high (measuring about a foot and half)." He said it was protocol to burn all letters before coming home.

"I was married and had a child so I wanted to come home. The military was not for me as a career," said Watson. "After I got home I went back to the job I had when I was drafted. It was a pallet factory." Watson worked at the factory a total of 42 years. "They were good to me so I stayed and made a living."

He and his wife, Martha, have been married since 1966. They have a son, Donald, and a daughter, Monica, who is deceased.

"I had my wife and one child before I left, and I knew it would be rough for her as well. From where we lived, it was close to a creek. There used to be a road that goes down to the creek, not far from the house. There was a big rock - and you could see the house from the rock. I went down there by myself - or maybe had my little boy with me. I knew I wanted to get in contact with my wife in some way. I placed a quarter on the big rock on the side of the road and put another rock on top of it. It wasn't until four months or so later, I wrote a letter and told her what I did. So, she went down there and found the quarter," said Watson.

"When I first came home, I was disappointed to see what my brother was going through. He was having trouble breathing, and I had that symptom, too. The doctor said nothing was wrong. My brother had such severe symptoms, he was put in a Veterans Hospital. I went to visit him and compared it to the hospital in Talihina. I was disappointed to see where they put him. His name was Wendall. He is now deceased."

Watson's military service has helped him believe that the US should show support to allies as much as possible. "We should keep our promises. I feel people helped us and we should do all we can to help them."

"I don't sit around and talk about the military service. This (interview) is probably the second time I have talked about it. I think my son wondered about my time there. I wondered about my dad and he didn't talk much, didn't say a whole lot. I have never talked to my son about what I went through. I attempted several times but didn't," said Watson. "The only person who really remembered the plane and the Russians was my pastor. By the time I got back, that was

an old story. He remembered – he had two sons who were over there about the same time I was.”

Watson said his priorities are family and faith. “Family means a lot. They can pull you through difficult times - and I advise everyone to become a Christian.”

He and his wife attend Buffalo Presbyterian Church. He said the attendance averages about twelve people. He learned Choctaw language as a child. His parents were Simeon and Ora (Johnson) Watson.

Watson was selected as the Choctaw Veteran of the Month December of 2021.

Nathan Doyle Watson served in the 669<sup>th</sup> Transportation Unit from 1968 to 1969, achieving the rank of Specialist E-4. He received the Purple Heart after being wounded. Specialist Watson was named Choctaw Nation Veteran of the Month December of 2021. He is from Watson, Oklahoma, which is in Choctaw Nation District 3.