

Interviewed in Bakersfield and by phone summer of 2023 by Judy Allen

Sergeant Curtis Glenn Wyrick, a Vietnam era veteran, volunteered for service in the U.S. Army in 1969. He served in the 6th Battalion, 9th Infantry.

"I went to the Navy recruiter first, because my dad was in the Navy during WWII, but they said I was Army material," said Wyrick. His basic training was in Fort Ord, Monterey, California. "I thought it was kind of scary. I wanted to learn - I didn't want to miss anything. I thought I would probably go to Vietnam, so I really paid attention!" he said.

After completing Advanced Infantry Training, Wyrick received orders that he was being sent to Alaska instead of Vietnam. In Fairbanks, Alaska, Wyrick was a Squad Leader. "I had to give classes – like a school teacher! I went to school to learn cross country skiing. I also went to Fort Greely in Alaska to learn mountain climbing." After Wyrick completed training on skills, he came back to teach them.

"One time in winter training, we passed by a lake where Will Rogers and Wiley Post had been killed in a plane crash. I knew they were from Oklahoma. I was proud to walk by that lake." Wyrick said in winter they had to have a rope connecting all the men in case of blizzards. "It could snow so hard you couldn't see the man in front of you, so we needed the rope to not get lost. I remember thinking, 'I hope the guy in front knows where we are going!'"

Wyrick said, "I remember our Captain. He looked like a blonde Elvis Presley. He was a real tough guy, but treated everybody good. He had hair that touched his ears. We couldn't get away with that!"

Wyrick said, "Our First Sergeant took me to dinner one time. He seemed like a good person. He went to Vietnam and we saw in the Stars and Stripes that he didn't get back. The first Sergeant had a dog that was half wolf and half German Shepherd. We called him 'Short' because everyone who was there for a short time was known as a 'short'. The dog stayed with us when the Sergeant went to Vietnam." The dog was used as a guard dog.

"I was happy I joined the Army. I was three months shy of 22, so was older than the rest. I could drink beer and they couldn't! I had a few friends from California and some from Tennessee and Kentucky that I hung around with. The ones from Tennessee and Kentucky drank moonshine." Wyrick said he took a little drink, but it was "rough stuff" and he didn't want any more of it.

Medals and citations received by Wyrick included: Good Conduct; National Defense Ribbon; Presidential Citation; Expert Infantry Badge. He received a badge for going over 100 miles cross country skiing. "I was in the 100-mile club! We were called the Manchu Warriors. We had an extra little badge we wore on our shoulders. We thought we were tough," said Wyrick.

He said after reaching the rank of Sergeant, he was happy he no longer had to be on kitchen duty. "I was in charge of about 12 guys, and had extra responsibilities."

Shipping out for the service, Wyrick said goodbye to his parents, Glenn Wyrick and Thelma Inez Caldwell Wyrick. He gets his Choctaw blood from his mother's side.

"When flown to Alaska, Wyrick said the coffee pot on the airplane's service tray looked like a Russian-style coffee maker. "We had bought Alaska from Russia and had only been a state about ten years." Wyrick said he loved Alaska, in spite of it being 60 degrees below zero at times. "It was the coldest recorded year at that time!" He said they were on alert all the time because of Russia.

The worst part of Wyrick's training was "throwing grenades." He said, "As soon as you threw a grenade you had to get behind a wall to avoid the shrapnel." Wyrick's grenade training was intense, and they heard stories of soldiers who did not get behind the wall quickly enough.

He said the food in the chow line was good. "That is where I first learned to eat eggs!"

Wyrick was called back to train at Fort Ord after he had been in the service two years. "I was told that one reason I was sent to Fort Ord is because I was Advanced Infantry and an expert in Infantry. I was told some of the better people are chosen to come to Fort Ord."

His time at Fort Ord was spent training others. His job was to teach Guard Duty. "If they didn't do it right, I would flunk them. One guy was perfect in everything until he came to me. I would say, 'Halt, who goes there?' and the trainees had to respond correctly. This guy didn't, and when I flunked him, the other trainers tried to talk me into passing him anyway because his other scores were perfect. I explained that if you don't pay attention at Guard Duty, it was very dangerous and people could get killed. I would not pass him."

The newspaper from Wyrick's home town of Sanger, California, arrived once a week, helping him stay apprised of local news. "I also called home every one or two weeks. I had to have a lot of quarters to use the phone, because it was so expensive! I wrote letters to my mom and after I got paid, I would send money home. At the end of the month, I usually wrote and asked her to send it back! It costs a lot to live in Alaska," said Wyrick.

For recreation, he enjoyed going to town. "There was a river than ran through Fairbanks. Some of the guys would fish. I fished a couple of times. We would go camping on days off."

Wyrick said, "The first time I saw the Northern Lights, I just stared at it. I waited for it to change colors, but it was mostly a kind of green color all the time."

Prayer was a part of Wyrick's routine. "I tried to keep the spirit going!"

Military experience made Wyrick proud of his country. "Every time I would see a flag, I would stand up and salute it. Service changed me. I am worried about our country, and hope it doesn't go downhill too far. I am proud I could do military service. It was a big part of my life."

When discharged, he came through Fort Lewis in Washington and flew home from there. "When they were checking me at my final physical, I had a thermometer in my mouth when they stuck my finger for a glucose reading. I bit the thermometer in half! I had glass and mercury in my mouth!"

Arriving back in California, he discovered his girlfriend had found someone else. "I got married a couple of years later to Maria Teresa Coronado." Wyrick has two children, a girl and a boy.

Wyrick attended school after being discharged from the Army. I stayed with a cousin in Reedley. I went to a carnival and bought a ten-dollar bag of marijuana. I got busted, and it was a felony. I went to jail – no more school. I couldn't get good federal jobs after that. April 29, 2023 marks me 34 years clean and sober!"

Wyrick said, "Everyone should be proud we have veterans, so they can do the things and have the freedoms we all have. Every choice available - if it wasn't for the military, they would all be lost."

Wyrick spoke of following his father's footsteps to the military. "My dad worked for the federal government in the Bureau of Reclamation forty years after his WWII service. Dad worked on the canal that takes water down to Bakersfield. Mom worked in a packing house. My Indian grandfather died in 1969, the same year I joined the service. My uncle was also a military guy."

Wyrick remembers having chicken dinners every Sunday when he was growing up. "Now all the old folks are gone and I am the old one! Everyone has their own family events now. We used to have dinners at Grandma's house. She would tell us she was from the same ancestry line as President Harrison."

Advice to future generations from Wyrick are, "Get an education and vote! You need to vote. If you don't vote you don't have anything to say."