

## **Vietnam War Veteran Eldon Ward, Purple Heart recipient**

Eldon Ward of Krebs, OK is a veteran of the Vietnam War.

"I volunteered into the US Army and volunteered for duty in Vietnam. However, by the time I had orders for Nam, I had formed mixed emotions about whether it was right for my country to be there. I do not do something just because someone of supposed authority says I have to," said Ward. "I decided to talk with the smartest man I ever knew. He said he also, 'did not know if the Nam war was right, But, right or wrong, if your country is at war, you fight it on their ground, not yours! Then, on return, you find if it was justifiable, and change things for the future'. From this discussion, I decided to go to Nam."

Ward received the Purple Heart for injuries sustained during his service.

"There was a big push to stop (transportation on) the Ho Chi Minh Trail where supplies were brought down from North Vietnam – we got there and there were all kinds of underground tunnels full of ammo marked from every country in the world and even from McAlester Army ammo depot," said Ward.

"We set charges in there and were going to blow it all up and were told to pull out and leave it alone. We pulled up to an old river bottom to pick up wounded soldiers. The enemy hit us again and my tank retriever took the first round." Ward said, "My job was performing maintenance in recovery, although my primary job, like all the guys, was infantry. I was always 'back-up' on tanks and personnel carriers when they went on a mission. That was my third time to get blown up and that time they got me for good.

"We were hit by an armor piercing round. Hit right in ammo storage rack full of explosives and grenades and rifle bullets. When the round hit, we were all waiting on helicopters, sitting on top of the Retriever because it was so hot and humid. It was at least 120 degrees with high humidity. That was the Vietnamese's best weapon – our predictability. I knew that but I had a weak moment and it cost me.

"I want all other combat vets to know I received the Purple Heart for holes in the front of my body and none in my back! I would never have a problem being a member of the Alamo, but I will not take a step for the benefit of a 'want-to-be-John Wayne,'" he said.

"I have three big scars on right side of head, I had one here in throat, and the right hand - the whole palm was hanging by about a half inch of skin and third degree burns on right side of body. These injuries were from shrapnel. I lost most of hearing and sight on right side. I was evacuated out by the first helicopter. I was sent to Quant Tri – to a MASH unit that was not far from the demilitarized zone – it was the MASH hospital that was farthest north.

"They operated on me and took all the metal fragments out of me, and doctor said I didn't have any blood left in me so they had needles in me giving blood. It was two weeks before I regained consciousness. The orderly would come in several times a day to move my head because I didn't have the strength to move my own head. The doctor said I shouldn't still be alive."

Ward recalled, "The first time I was blown up we ran over a mine with the retriever and blew the whole bottom out, another time there was a USO show 30 or 40 miles away and we stole the Col.'s Jeep (3 or 4 of us) and we drove to watch the USO singing, we ran over a mine coming back, which blew up the jeep, turned it over. I got my back hurt then, but didn't realize it. All four of us were able to roll the jeep back over on its wheels. We started it and got home. The Col was very upset the next day when he saw what happened, but nobody knew anything about

it. The Col was about like our chief. A very smart, compassionate man. He and the Major (assistant battalion Commander) were great guys.

Ward achieved the rank of E-5 and discharged as an E-2, serving from 1966-1969 in the US Army. He said he enlisted in the Army because "They are the ones who get things done! I have friends in the Navy, Army and Marines, and I respect them."

He served in Vietnam;,, Riley, KS; Carson, CO; Yokohama, Japan; and Fort Hood, TX. His job was Tank Recovery and Infantry. He received special training on Heavy Equipment, Maintenance and Operation and Track Vehicle Recovery.

While serving in Vietnam, some of the leadership did not meet Ward's approval. He would like future generations to understand in military life, "It is important to go along with training, but depend on one's own mind for survival."

"When I first got to VN, it was at Da Nang - at a big airport. Right in the middle of nowhere. No protection. No way to hide. They gave us an orientation to VN as we sat down on the runway. A guy said, 'you don't have to worry, we haven't been hit here in 3 months.' We were there about ten minutes and the Vietnamese gave us an orientation too - they starting lobbing us. The guy next to me had shrapnel go in one armpit and out the other one. He was dead before he hit the ground. We hadn't even been issued rifles. We were sitting ducks. I knew right then, if I was going to survive, I would have to depend on myself."

Ward said, "Since returning from the Nam, research has determined corporate-America wanted something they could not bargain for, so they lobbied for military occupation that they may steal it." Ward added, "Proof: combat forces wanted to go to Hanoi and finish it. But we were told it was not a war but a police action. As soon as it was given away, media started campaigning, "THE ONLY WAR AMERICA HAD HEVER LOST". American people are quick to buy government propaganda! Soldiers DID NOT lose a war, but while were fighting one, the people at home gave away our country. Nothing has changed, just gotten worse, with the desert wars and now in Eastern Europe." Ward said he felt the USA government had provoked these.

After discharge, Ward worked at the Army Ammunition Depot in Savannah. He said points were issued to employees at government jobs for disabilities, years of service, etc. Employees with higher points had more job protection, less chance of being laid off. He heard two men talking about not liking the system and wishing there weren't any ten-point veterans. "I was a ten-point veteran, receiving an automatic ten points because of being a veteran who was wounded and had a Purple Heart.

"I am associated with the Choctaws now! The first time Councilman Karr ran for election, I researched all the candidates. Karr was the best, so I voted for him. After he won the election, I wanted to know something about the Choctaw Nation so I made an appointment and talked to him. He told me about the Wednesday senior meals and he tried to share all he could about the Choctaw Nation. I started going to the lunches and realized I knew people there. They are very good people." Ward said the Councilman always has the latest, up-to-date information, and brings in speakers from different departments in the Choctaw Nation. Ward also spoke positively about Chief Gary Batton. "When I saw the Chief's slogan, "Together We Are More", I understood it. The more we are a united nation, the more of a 'backup' he has. More clout. The Chief wants people to come together more as a family." Ward said, "The older I get the more I study scripture and the more I see that is where people need to be. Things are going to change drastically in the future."

Ward said, "It is the law of averages for God to change the United States and it has also been prophesied. The media and politicians are already saying there is no 'United', but blue or red (democrat or republican states). There is no longer 'rule by law.'"

"Choctaws are a NEW NATION by purpose of ALMIGHTY GOD!" said Ward.

As a youth, Ward took responsibility to provide for himself and his siblings. "I was a grown man at nine years old," he said. He had two brothers and two sisters. I worked on a couple of farms and they paid me with milk and meat and stuff.

"I had been pretty much on my own since I was nine," said Ward, "And when the Army tried to turn kids into men by humiliating and scaring them to break them down, some of it was funny to me."

"One day in training, we had to get military clothes and fill a duffle that weighed about 70 pounds. The Sergeant wanted us to run up a hill carrying our bag. I got halfway up and a kid fell down, crying like a baby. The Sergeant was in his face, chewing him out, and I thought it was funny. The Sergeant made me carry both our bags up the hill."

Ward said, "I didn't conform. I wasn't scared, so they had me on extra details, trying to break me down. I would take a pick and shovel to the parade ground and dig a big hole, then carry the dirt with a wheelbarrow to dump it. Then I would go to another area, dig a second hole and bring the dirt back to fill in the hole in the parade ground, then would have to go fill in the second hole."

Ward said, "Combat vets seldom talk about their experience for several reasons. Today, people are beginning to follow what we said fifty years ago. Combat vets have a wisdom in the value of history that foretells the future.

When asked how he adjusted to civilian life after service, Ward said he still does not feel he has adjusted. "I worked and went to school at the same time."

He said, "When I first came back, those of us who were combat veterans would go to public places and couldn't sit with our back to the door. We would need to sit next to a window. Many of our family and friends thought we were nut cases. Then all the active shooter incidents started taking place a few years ago, and now you can't find a seat with your back to the wall."

Ward married after he discharged from the military. He and wife Esther celebrated 53 years in October 2023. "I am committed to God and a believer in Jesus," he proclaims. He advises everyone to study the New Testament, especially the Gospel of John. "Study it over and over and then study the books of Daniel and Revelations," said Ward.

He said he has been amazed in his lifetime of the fulfillment of God's prophecies.