

Bill Estrem
Specialist 5th Class
U.S. Army

Vietnam



Bill Estrem graduated from Waldorf Junior College in May, 1966. The war in Vietnam was already going on at this time. Bill decided to enlist and fight for his country. He enlisted in the fall of 1966 and worked for Tweedt Construction until his active duty in January 1967.

Bill left for Basic Training by bus from Des Moines, Iowa, to Fort Bliss, Texas. His next stop was Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri, where he received his AIT training. After a short leave back in Iowa, Bill headed to Fort Devens, Massachusetts. About October 1, 1967, he shipped off to Vietnam to begin his year of duty in a shower/laundry unit.

While in Vietnam, his unit moved numerous times to keep up with any unit that need their services. His accounts of his time spent in Nam reminded many of the TV show MASH. Their wardrobe consisted of cutoffs and no shirts most of the time. Often they bartered for what they needed with high-ranking officers who wanted an extra nice job of getting their uniforms to look sharp—or to have a nice, warm shower.

The items received were usually various bottles of some of the best alcoholic beverages to be found. With these items the guys constructed a bar in a bunker. There they could entertain themselves as well as any officers that might be there to receive their services. The name of their establishment was painted on a board above the shelf of bottles which consisted of all the names in his unit run together in one word.

Bill had time to write to his parents, fiancée, and others almost every day. His family and friends knew something must be going on when nobody received any mail from him for almost a month. As it turned out, this was during the Tet Offensive, and their unit got hit quite hard. No loss of life was reported, however. Bill took pictures of the huge water bladder that was blown up, as well as a Vietnamese chapel. It was a scary time for all, but they were glad to be safe in their bunker. Of course, eventually all parties involved received a huge bundle of mail all at once. It wasn't until the mail came through that those in the States realized what had been going on over in Nam.

Bill returned from Vietnam to the Des Moines, Iowa airport on October 5, 1968. What a joyous day that was for Cap and Imogene Estrem and Ardy! He and Ardy were married one week later on October 12, 1968, in Mapleton, Minnesota. After the remaining month on leave, he reported for duty to Fort Rucker, Alabama. He returned to Iowa at Christmastime to bring wife and as many wedding gifts that would fit into a Chevy Malibu back to the trailer house he had found for them to live in for the next year. The newlywed Estrems made their home in a trailer park outside the Post in the town of Enterprise, Alabama.

At Fort Rucker, Bill was assigned to do office work. His job was to process new recruits. Often he would do a whole class of guys coming in for helicopter pilot training before being sent to Vietnam. He enjoyed his time at Fort Rucker, as he worked with several civilians from the local area.

Many times, after work he would be able to socialize with them and their families, or other couples living in the same trailer park.

Bill was discharged from the Army on January 19, 1970. At that time he returned with Ardy to Slater, where he built houses

with A.W. Tweedt. He and Ardy built their own house on the lot at 103 9th Avenue, which he had been paying off while on Army pay. He resided there until his death on August 10, 2006.



Bill and Ardy Estrem