

U.S. Air Force A/2/C Nicholas F. Tkachuk

I graduated from Chesterton High School in Chesterton, Indiana, June 1961. I ranked 55 out of our class of 155. A fellow classmate, Wilson Fitzgerald Halley, ranked 1st in the Class, and was our Valedictorian. I joined the U.S. Air Force that June, and Wilson was accepted into Harvard University. In 1965 I met Wilson for the first time since high school at the Bank in Porter, Indiana. We talked. He had just Graduated from Harvard. I just finished Active Duty with the U.S. Air Force. He told me that he was going to Vietnam as an Army Officer. I told him that I was an A/2/C with the Air Force and that I served in Vietnam in 1962 with Det 1 5th Comm. SQ Division , 315th Air Division (Combat Cargo). We discussed Vietnam. We each expressed our concern. I wished him well, and as friends we said good bye to each other.

In June 2005 A classmate from CHS, Marea (Cox) O'Neil, wrote of 'A Note from The Virtual Wall'
Tay Ninh Province lay on the northern side of the "Parrot's Beak" area of Cambodia which protruded into South Vietnam, forming an unmolested sanctuary for VC and NVA troops and supply areas. The area around the provincial capital, Tay Ninh City, was disputed ground throughout the war and became even more so as the infiltration of North Vietnamese Army units increased during 1968.

On 27 November 1968 the 4th Battalion, 9th Infantry, was engaged in a bitter fight about 3 kilometers southeast of Tay Ninh City. At day's end, 26 Americans were dead - six from a supporting helicopter unit, two from a 22nd Infantry unit, and 18 from the 4/9 Infantry:

D Co 4th Bn , 9th Infantry , Lt Wilson F. Halley, Chesterton, Indiana died that day from Hostile fire.

1LT Wilson Fitzgerald Halley

US Army

Died November 27, 1968

South Vietnam

Cause of death: Hostile fire

God bless America, Our Soldiers, and my friend and classmate, Wilson Halley, who gave his life to protect our freedom.

E-6/SFC Richard Dale Benzel

US Army

Died December 6, 1962

South Vietnam

Cause of death: He died trying to disarm a booby trap set by the Viet Cong.

SFC Benzel was born October 06, 1932.

He was 30 years old at death.

He was from Portland, Oregon.

He was Married, Caucasian, and his religion was Protestant.

On the Vietnam Memorial in Washington D.C. his military rank was listed as E-7/SFC showing that he was promoted to his E-7 rank after his death.

His casket was draped with an American Flag and was placed in a C-130 315th Air Division (Combat Cargo) Aircraft which left Siagon, South Vietnam for his return to the United States.

Passengers on this flight included U.S. Army & Air Force troops returning from their Vietnam Mission.

I am U.S. Air Force A/2/C Nicholas F. Tkachuk assigned to team #5 of Detachment 1 5th Comm Squadron Division 315th Air Division (Combat Cargo) and I was on this Aircraft returning from my TDY assignment in Vietnam. The flight would first take us to the Philippines at Clark Air Force Base. During this 5 hour flight SFC Benzel casket sat in the middle of the aircraft in front me. This brought many thoughts to mind. At that time I did not know the Soldiers name or how he died. Looking at the American Flag on the casket made me feel proud to be an American and I was proud of this Army Soldier. My Vietnam experience is full of many memories, but the memories of this flight with SFC Benzel has a lasting memory I shall not forget. This was 1962 in Vietnam. The early years of a conflict that would take so many lives.

Detachment 1 5th Comm Squadron Division members of my unit included:

CAPT John L Gordon

TSGT Jimmie W Greene

SSGT Errol V Sawyer Jr.

A/1/C Roscoe R Hurley

A/1/C Ted W Miller

A/2/C Raymond Sarinana

A/2/C Norman J Scrofani

A/3/C Robert Duran

Our mission in Vietnam was for the purpose of performing operational duty for the 315th Air Division (Combat Cargo). 5th Comm Squadron Div was the communication link for all 315th Air Div activity in South Vietnam.

God Bless America and the Military, those that served, and those who gave their life to protect our freedom.

A/2/c *Nicholas Tkachuk*



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After my active duty with the U.S. Air Force, June 15, 1965, I entered college at Indiana University. I was privileged to use the G.I. Bill our government made available for veterans. No one in my family ever went to college and I could not afford it on my own.

As the Vietnam War continued the people against the war began to make themselves heard. This happened to me. I was taking an English Composition class at Indiana University North West Campus in Gary Indiana. Our class assignment was to write of personal experiences that effected our life.

My thoughts immediately went to the day I left Vietnam. I wrote a composition about the feeling I had about the flight home with me sitting along side the Flag Draped Casket of U.S. Army E-6/SFC Richard Dale Benzel. I wrote of how proud I felt to look at our American Flag and how I was proud of this Army soldier who gave his life for our country.

The professor gave me a Grade "D" and mentioned that he did not support the war and that I chose the wrong topic.

Go figure! The returning soldiers from Vietnam were not welcomed with open arms by many people of our country. My Professor made it clear.

I did pass English Comp with a "C" Grade but I was disappointed with the action taken by my Indiana University Professor.

As time went by, there were more outspoken people against the Vietnam War. They demonstrated in 1968 at the Democatic Convention in Chicago. Not peaceful, with a full scale riot against the President of the United States and the Vietnam War.

No, Vietnam Veterans were not welcomed home with open arms & gratitude. They were looked down on. The Vietnam experience, our brave troops who served, our troops that died, never did get the recognition that they deserved. Go figure!

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