

A Veteran's Journey from Moonscape to Beachscape

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In a continuing effort to bring recognition to our Veterans who live here, we have a special story about Randy Elliott lives at Toscana. You may not know Randy, but he has been here for 15 years enjoying the peace, quiet, and beauty of Highland Beach.

As a color-blind youth, he was rejected by West Point but joined the ROTC program at Stetson University in DeLand, Florida. He then entered the Army and signed up for the toughest of training including Airborne School and Ranger Training. He was then assigned as a Nuclear Weapons Officer in Germany. Wanting to join the action in Vietnam, he volunteered for the famous 101st Airborne Division, the Screaming Eagles, now Airmobile. Promoted to Captain, he became a Company Commander for the



506th Infantry, typically including four platoons totaling over 120 or more elite infantry soldiers.

Randy spent 17 months in Vietnam from 1967 to 1968 and experienced some of the worst fighting of the entire war in areas from the Central Highlands to Chu Chi to the defense of Saigon. He was right in the middle of the infamous “Tet Offensive” and joined other units in combined actions against the massive invasion attempt by regular North Vietnamese troops.

Few have survived the kind of large unit, close order clashes involving thousands of soldiers on both sides. It was all over the news in the U.S. In a few days, thousands of Americans were killed but the slaughter of the NVA was breathtaking. In his book he would write years after the war, he said the enemy “attacked in enormous numbers...and we were cutting them to pieces.” America’s firepower and technology were so superior, but it did not dissuade the enemy from their cause. The enemy simply could win by not losing the war, given the protests at home.

The death and destruction he witnessed left an indelible mark on his mind and soul, forcing him to reconsider whether he could justify the war at a time when so much dissent was going on back home.

In one battle, he was able to kill an enemy soldier who had just thrown a grenade that exploded behind him and hit his back. Bloodied, he continued the fight. Later, in another major clash involving hundreds of soldiers, a recoilless rifle shell grazed his helmet before hitting a tree behind him. The impact fractured his skull, broke his jaw, and peppered his body with shrapnel. He said he remembers nothing more until he woke up in a hospital in Japan days later. Severely wounded, he would spend months in hospitals undergoing various operations and physical rehabilitation.

Randy did find time to write a book, entitled “Moonscape, Thoughts of War”, Xlibris.com, 2014, about his exploits focused on the impact of war on our youth who are called to battle. It is also a book about Randy. Not a war history book, it is “intended to show the horror of war in stark and unvarnished fashion, that is in truth.” The book cover has a picture of the landscape of war in Vietnam – it looked like craters on the Moon.

Here is a partial quote from his prologue which is quite revealing and powerful for anyone:

“The infantry
I am proud of what I was.
I was the infantry, I was this country.
My sweat was rivers, my blood was its rain.

We shared our pain, we shared our loss.
We were not brave, we harbored fear like no others.
We did what our country asked of us.
We gave our best. We did what we thought was right.
We tried our hardest..."

He was medically discharged but was able to rejoin the Army as a Reservist and over years rose to the rank of full Colonel. At the same time, he was able to work for the Department of State as a Foreign Service Officer and became an analyst for Middle East affairs and was assigned to Henry Kissinger's staff.

In an incredible intersection of events, during Operation Desert Storm, Colonel Elliott was activated from the Reserves and assigned to help restore the government of Kuwait after the devastation done to their country by Saddam Hussein's forces. This was a restoration of all government departments and facilities, the country's infrastructure, and communications. With 17 Colonels in his Kuwait Task Force command and the success they had in one year from 1990 to 1991, he was promoted to Brigadier General and awarded the Legion of Merit.

After he retired from the military, he and his wife, Roberta Palestine, lived in the Washington D.C. area and eventually settled in Highland Beach. Roberta is a physician and specialized as a dermatologist, did her training at the Mayo Clinic, and owned several practices as a doctor and entrepreneur. Randy started and later sold ELCON, a construction company to rehab/rebuild homes, and still manages rental properties today in Florida.

They consider Highland Beach a "gloriously attractive and safe" place. It is so beautiful and well kept from its north to south borders. They have 4 children and 7 grandchildren. This is a time in their lives where they can enjoy the serenity and beauty of their home here with activities involving boating, target shooting, friends, and travel. They love the idea of being located between two major airports for ease of travel without the commercial sprawl found in both Boca Raton and Delray and elsewhere.

The rest of the prologue from his book is as follows...

We thought of home often
We died without fanfare, without glory; no one was watching, no bands were playing.
Those who came home from the jungle will always be different men.
But we will always be brothers. We will always be proud Americans.

For sure, it's been a long journey from the Moonscape of Vietnam. The Elliotts have paid their dues and deserve to live their good times in paradise.

Welcome home!

