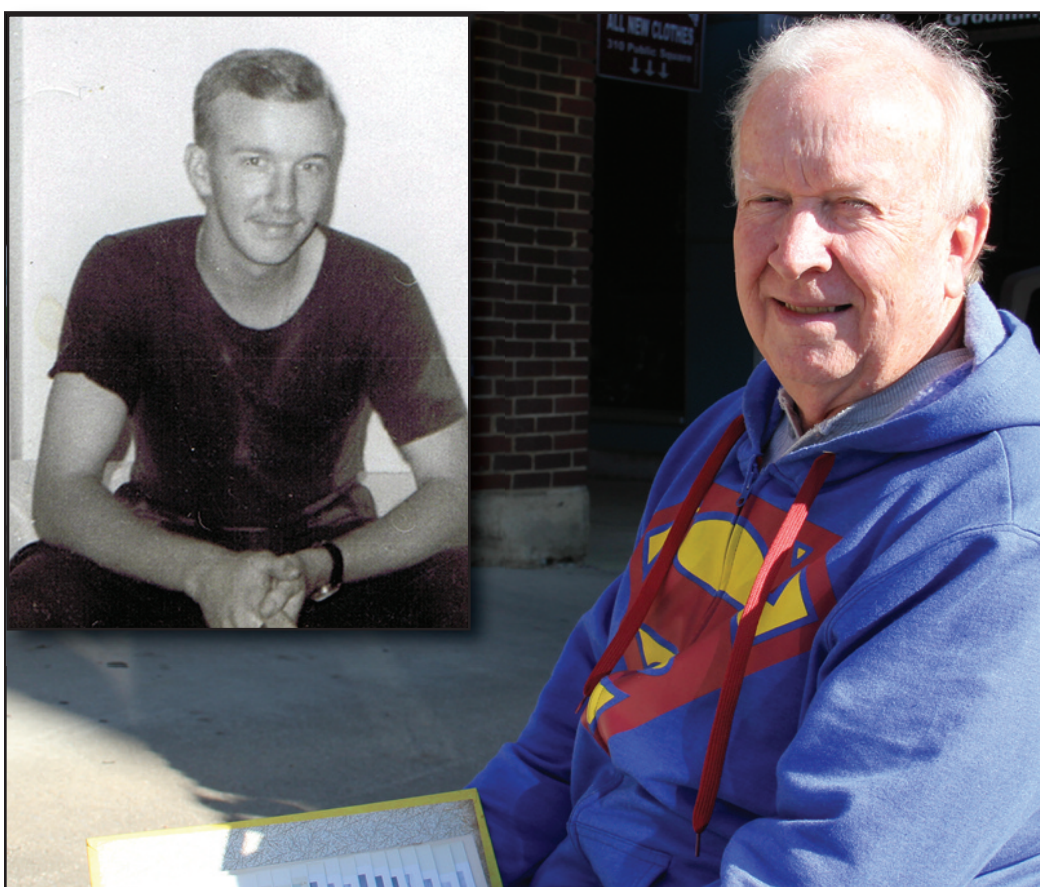


VETERANS OF VIETNAM WAR

Local veterans recall changes in public opinion



Dick Scholl served in Vietnam War from September 1969 to June 1970.



Travis Giles served in Vietnam War from September 1966 to September 1967.

War veterans are respected. Americans show appreciation for their service and honor them more than they honor most people. But there are some veterans who were left out.

When veterans returned from Vietnam, there were no parades or public celebrations.

Attitudes started changing during the past 10 years, and efforts were made to make up for the mistakes of the past.

"I appreciate how people treat you now," said Larry Rooks, a Vietnam Army veteran. "But we're lucky to live in Adair County, too, because Adair County's always been kind of patriotic."

Rooks and other local Vietnam veterans have witnessed and appreciate the changes that have taken place over the years.

HOMEcomings

When Vietnam veterans came home, old friends and strangers alike treated them differently than before. Some veterans were physically attacked.

Army veteran Travis Giles said even VFW posts would not accept Vietnam veterans.

"It was kind of strange after we came home because it seemed like people you'd known all your life kind of looked at you different," said Rooks.

Joe Hare, another Army veteran who is now the Columbia VFW Post Commander, said he came home in 1968, just before the opposition got really tough.

"Personally, I was never mistreated, but people that

were friends before, it seemed like they tended to shy away from us a little," Hare said.

Giles said people made fun of him everywhere he went and called him a "baby killer."

Dick Scholl, who deployed in the Army's 1st Infantry Division in Vietnam, was very fortunate to go back home to a small rural community where he had lived his whole life and be treated the same. But he was still aware of what his fellow veterans were going through.

"I know one guy, he got off the bus at Columbia, that's when we had a Greyhound Bus down there, he was dressed in his uniform and he walked around the square and somebody hit him, punched him, because he was in the Army," Scholl said.

Many veterans tried to avoid the problems by changing from their uniforms once they reached the bus stations and never telling anyone they fought in the war. They put away their Army hats and jackets and never wore them.

"For a long time you didn't tell anybody you'd even been in the service," Rooks said. "You never mentioned it. Even on job applications or anything, you didn't do that because they wouldn't hire you."

Giles just stopped associating with people. He kept to himself and his family at home on the farm and at work in the factory.

"People that had never been over there didn't know what it was all about," Giles said. "They just wanted to

protest and stuff like that."

Hare feels the opposition to the war came about in part due to the draft, in addition to drugs. Members of the younger generation wanted to do their own thing, and the draft told them what they had to do.

"Younger people at that time started having more ideas on their own, I guess you'd say," Hare said. "Get further away from Daddy and Momma's apron strings."

As movie stars and member of Congress became opposed to the war, their feelings spilled down towards the public as well, Hare said.

"Everybody thought you were a dope addict or a baby killer or something like that," Rooks said.

Rooks thinks the issue

was simply the country's perception of the war.

"Everybody was pretty much against the war, and they kind of laid that on the veterans like it was their fault," Rooks said. "I think they realize now it wasn't something they chose to do."

TODAY

Vietnam veterans are now treated very differently.

"People have come up to me and thanked me for serving their country," Giles said.

It took a long time to get this far.

"I know that around the nation there was a backlash against Vietnam veterans where we didn't get the respect and honor that we deserved," Scholl said. "It took probably 30 years to win

that honor and respect. And now we feel like we're accepted."

Some military bases, including Fort Knox and Fort Campbell, have hosted belated "welcome home" celebrations for the veterans. They can now proudly wear their hats and jackets without fear of repercussions.

"You don't have to be on guard and not mention it around people," Rooks said.

Giles thinks the change in opinion has to do with the changing generations.

"A lot of World War II veterans have died, and the Vietnam veteran is the next generation," Giles said.

Hare, Scholl and Rooks believe the change is from the nation realizing that soldiers who go over to wars are not bad guys and they do not all choose to go. They

are simply doing what their government tells them to do because they want to serve their country and protect their families.

"I was willing to die for my country if necessary," Scholl said. "I would have died for the freedoms that I read about in history, and for my family and my friends."

Hare feels the same way.

"There's a saying that's floating around that's very true: 'An American soldier does not hate the enemy in front of him, he loves the family behind him,'" Hare said.

By James D. McIntosh Jr.
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Joe Hare served in Vietnam War 1967-68.

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