

Missouri State Society Daughters of the American Revolution
Proudly "Spotlights" our May 2012
Patriot of the Month



John Collins

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**Independence
Pioneers Chapter
Independence,
Missouri**



John Edward Collins was born on May 10, 1948 in Kansas City, Missouri, graduating from Northeast High School in June 1966. He entered the U.S. Navy in January 1967. After basic training at the Naval Training Center, Great Lakes, Illinois, he served on various ships for short periods of time, performing routine naval duties. In July 1968, he transferred to the Naval Inshore Operations Training Center in Mare Island, California, to begin training for Riverine warfare in Vietnam. This included training on various types of small arms, including M16s, M60s, M79s (grenade launchers), and 50 caliber machine guns, as well as medical training, as they did not have corpsmen aboard their boats. This involved Survival/Evasion/Resistance to Interrogation/Escape training, where he learned how to survive in case of capture in Vietnam.

He soon headed for the Republic of Vietnam to join a River Assault Force in the Mekong Delta. Initially, he served on an ASPB (escort boat) but during his time there, he served on other boats, including the Monitor (command boat) and Tango boats (i.e., boats which dropped off Army troops from the 9th Infantry). John was involved in the Giant Slingshot Operation, which was a naval operation of epic proportion.

His final assignment on the river was on a Zippo flame thrower boat that used napalm to burn out thick foliage along the river banks to allow safer debarking for the 9th Infantry. This boat was called "God of Hell's Fire" by the crew. Their

motto was “Custom Cremators”, and their slogan was “We burn to please!”

The boats in this division would normally anchor in a different river each night, using shotguns to shoot anything that moved, including driftwood, branches, or anything that could possibly drift down the river and hide the enemy or contain explosives. Sometimes they felt like sitting ducks. They were attacked time after time, but somehow managed to survive.

While on patrol on the Ben Tre River in February 1969, John sustained injuries from a B40 rocket during a firefight. The rocket hit his 50-caliber machine gun, rendering multiple wounds to his hands and covering him in blood. He was medically evacuated to a Mobile Army Surgical Hospital unit for triage, and eventually flown to Japan for surgeries that would take place over the next five to six months. While in the hospital John was promoted to Gunners Mate Third Class. Due to his injuries, which required skin graft, John was returned to the United States, and eventually received an early release.

John has struggled with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder from the beginning of his departure from the Navy, due to several different stressors he experienced while in Vietnam. He has made progress through counseling.

John’s awards, medals, and citations include:

- Purple Heart
- Navy Achievement Medal w/Combat V
- Vietnam Service Medal
- Republic of Vietnam Service Medal
- Combat Action Ribbon
- Vietnamese Cross of Gallantry
- Presidential Unit Citation
- Navy Unit Citation

After his discharge in May 1970, John attended the University of Central Missouri, Warrensburg, Missouri, receiving a Bachelor of Science in Industrial Management in May 1975. He married Lila J. Lewis Amendola on May 10, 1971 in Miami, Oklahoma. They have one daughter and two grandchildren. Until his retirement in 2011, he worked as a sales manager for a large company that produced construction equipment.