

Missouri State Society Daughters of the American Revolution

Proudly Honors

Patriot of the Month

December 2022



Milton J. Murry

United States Army

Sponsored by:
Reverend John Clark Chapter, NSDAR

Milton J. Murry completed two years of Basic ROTC at the Missouri School of Mines and Metallurgy from 1960 to 1962. He completed Advanced ROTC in 1963 and 1964 to finance the completion of his BSEE degree and received a commission as second lieutenant in the U.S. Army in January 1964. His two-year service obligation was from 1964 to 1966.



Milton was assigned to engineering school at Ft. Belvoir, Virginia, from May through August 1964. When he completed training, he transferred to the 864th Engineering Construction Battalion at Fort Wolters, four miles northeast of Mineral Wells, Texas. He was assigned to base construction at this Army post, which housed the United States Army Primary Helicopter School.

In late March 1965, Milton received orders deploying him to an unspecified theater of operations -- Vietnam. His battalion serviced all the equipment they had and loaded it onto railroad cars to be transported to a port for shipment. An advance party was sent ahead of them to secure equipment when it arrived at Cam Ranh Bay, Vietnam.

The rest of the battalion was transported on a troop train to Oakland, California. The troop ship, USS General Leroy Eltinge, broke down at dock, so they didn't leave until Friday, May 13, 1965. The ship also broke down several times in the Pacific, and they had to be towed into Midway Island. There were 2,497 troops on that ship.

At Midway Island, after a four or five-day delay, they transferred to another troop ship, the USS Barrett, which had come back from its route to Guam. This ship was also not in great condition. It had a bent propeller, and the whole ship shook with every revolution of the propeller. They arrived at Cam Ranh Bay, Vietnam, on June 9, 1965. There was a rainbow visible to their south, which Milton thought was a good omen.

Their mission was base camp construction, line of communication construction, and maintenance. There were no roads. His platoon built the roads, storage facilities, and warehouses. They started leveling areas of sand above their base camp, which was on the beach. Milton's platoon used the following equipment: 830M tractor scrapers, Allis-Chalmers bulldozers, HD 16 road graders, jeeps, two 2 ½ ton trucks, and a water tanker. He

believes there were about 48 men in his platoon, the Company D Earth Moving Platoon; Milton was the platoon leader.

His platoon faced many problems that can develop when you work machinery in sand. One of them was the fact that bearings on the pulleys that the scraper cables used to raise and lower the pan would be totally destroyed in one day of operation by sand in the bearings. They had to manufacture their own bronze bearings and have operators constantly pump grease into the bearings so no sand got to them. The second problem was the Allis-Chalmers bulldozers had to be moved in reverse so sand did not destroy their radiators. If the bulldozers were driven forward, the treads threw sand which would blow through the radiators. Another problem was that the Ford jeeps would become stuck on sand ridges or rows about 14 inches high. One wheel would be off the sand, and no power was delivered to the wheels. They were always digging them out.

Another non-equipment problem was that the sand, which they had miles of, was too fine and round to make good concrete. They created aggregate for the concrete by using a rock crusher, which they set up at the base of a rock hill toward the ocean side of Cam Ranh Bay, to crush granite rock found on the hillside. An additional problem was the heat; because it was so hot -- temperatures reached about 108 Fahrenheit during the day -- once the concrete was poured, it had to be wetted and covered with sand immediately. His platoon did a lot of their work at night when it was cooler, if they could.

It was very early on in the war when Milton's battalion arrived in Vietnam, so they had no problem with attacks or mortars where they were stationed. However, they were aware of the war around them. There were freighters set out in the harbor a good distance away to the south that brought munitions. His battalion could hear the freighters constantly throwing grenades over their sides in case someone would try to swim up to their ship to blow it up. When Milton drove a jeep about 20 miles up the coast to Nha Trang for supplies, a sniper hiding in a rubber plantation shot at him; fortunately, it was a single shot weapon, and the sniper missed. In late April 1966, close to the end of his tour of duty, his platoon could see artillery blasts up in the mountains to the west; the fighting was coming closer.

Milton is very proud of the great work his platoon completed during his tour of Vietnam. He notes that some of that work is still in place when he views images of Vietnam today. If you look at that area now, you will find two ship piers and sheet piling driven to give greater depth to provide additional berth for deep-water freighters.

After his two years of active duty, Milton Murry served in the U.S. Army Reserves until 1970. He held the rank of captain at his time of discharge. Milton received the U.S. Army Vietnam Service Medal and the Missouri Vietnam War Veterans Recognition Medallion. He did a video interview through the Missouri Veterans History Project in which he details his tour of duty in depth; the interviews recorded through that program are archived in the Library of Congress.