

Missouri State Society Daughters of the American Revolution

Proudly Honors

Patriot of the Month

December 2023



Sam Murphy

United States Army

Sponsored by:
Platte Purchase Chapter, NSDAR

Sam Murphy enlisted in the Army at age seventeen in May 1969. He took his basic training at Ft. Leonard Wood. He found the military experience scary. They always were awakened early, then on the move all day. He knew he had to keep up with all the exercises, running and other orders because failure was not an option. At the end of basic training, he took the tests determining his placement. His individual (AIT) training lasted several months. He remained at Ft. Leonard Wood for sixteen months working in the motor pool and performing general office work.



Then he was sent to Vietnam as part of the Headquarters Company, 27th Engineering Battalion Combat, Airborne 18th Engineering Brigade attached to 101st Airborne Division. He was sent to Camp Eagle, a base in the middle of Vietnam near the A Shau Valley. He was trained as an Army Water Supply Specialist, 51N20. The qualifications for the job were numerous including math skills, map skills, and critical thinking.

He flew in at night to Bien Hoa military base to be processed, going wherever they needed him to go. He traveled from the airport to base Bien Hue by bus which had been sort of grenade-proofed. As he looked out the windows, Vietnamese civilians were staring back. Seeing them in person, some not very friendly looking, made the war suddenly very real.

He found himself in a completely strange place. Although the country itself was beautiful and the culture interesting, the people had nothing. The smells were memorable. The smells of urine, burning feces, rotting foliage, extreme heat and the smell of death were ever-present. Three and four-inch cockroaches were everywhere. He was dirty all the time and developed sores. There was no way to keep clean.

Camp Eagle had a water pipeline to a water source set up all the time. He operated the 3000-gallon-per-hour water purifying truck to keep the base personnel supplied with potable water. Sometimes the enemy would blow the water line. Someone would need to go fix the line in order to restore the flow of water. In order to do his job, at times he had to go outside the safe perimeter of the camp to smaller camps. When he was away at artillery bases, he lived in an Ammo Box bunker.

Because he wasn't always within the camp perimeter he and his partner armed themselves. What they weren't issued, they traded for. They had M16 rifles, grenades, knives, pistols, especially a .45 caliber grease gun.

By this time the Jungle had been sprayed with so much Agent Orange and Agent Purple (to ruin the rice fields) that the only thing left was "elephant grass", called such because it could hide an elephant. It was impossible to get all the inorganic chemicals out of the water during the purifying process.

He was sent to Khe Sahn during Operation Dewey Canyon II to support Operation Lam Son 719, the South Vietnamese invasion of Laos where there was some jungle left. Every day something new happened, and events were unexplainable. He learned not to trust anyone, especially the Vietnamese, be they military or civilian. Sometimes soldiers couldn't get to the truck for water. They were provided Iodine tablets to put in their canteens during these times.

He knew that combat action was nearby. It wasn't every day. He did his normal job of purifying water knowing he was in a hazardous place continuously day after day. It worked on his nerves. He kept somewhat sane by finding a friend and sticking close. They had each other's backs.

PFC Murphy was sent home after his year in Country to Ft. Belvoir in Virginia where he stayed for three months in the motor pool and then was released in December 1971. He was in service for 2 years, 7 months and 12 days. He received the National Defense Service Medal, Vietnam Service Medal, Vietnam Campaign Medal, and Marksman Badge.

When he came home he had to readjust to the temperature. Where everyone else was hot he was cold. When others enjoyed the Fourth of July noise, it was torture to him.

He went back to school and got his GED and then went to college for a time. He has lived in the Smithville and Kearney MO area all his life. He has a wife and two children. He has used his driving and survival skills in his civilian life. He is a member of the VFW, the Vietnam Veterans of America and the American Legion.

Platte Purchase Chapter, NSDAR, is honored to have Sam Murphy as its Patriot of the Month.