

Missouri State Society Daughters of the American Revolution

Proudly Honors

Patriot of the Month

May 2024



Robert “Bruce” Gesellschap

United States Marine Corps

Sponsored by:
Saint Charles Chapter, NSDAR

Mr. Gesellschap enlisted in the United States Marines on August 13, 1964. He went to Boot camp in San Diego and infantry training at Camp Pendleton. After returning from a 30-day leave, he was sent to Hawaii where he was assigned to the 3rd Battalion 4th Marines. Shortly thereafter, he boarded the USS Calvert, a WWII era troop ship, for the trip to Okinawa. He arrived at the port at Naha on his 18th birthday. He then boarded the USS Vancouver for the trip to Red Beach, Da Nang, Vietnam.



In Vietnam, he helped establish several mountain top fortifications and were engaged in various unit sizes/types of patrols, night-time ambushes. In early December 1965, his company was re-assigned to the 3rd Battalion, 7th Marines at Chu Lai. During one operation, there was considerable combat activity with artillery and mortar shells landing on nearby enemy positions and incoming small arms fire. Fields of sugar cane were burning along with the occasional structure. As his company was moving down a road one day, a young woman, perhaps 14 or 15 years of age, approached Mr. Gesellschap and in broken English said “please, you take my baby, he die here, you take my baby, he die here.” He states that he often sees her in his mind’s eye and hears her pleading with him to take the child.

Upon his return from Vietnam, he was stationed at Camp LeJeune, NC for about six months and then went to Polaris Missile Facility near Charleston, SC. Mr. Gesellschap liked this assignment as the living quarters were in the middle of a heavily forested area and he was able to hike, hunt and fish. One day on one of these treks, he found a black snake, which he took back with him and threw it into the second-floor recreation room. The room cleared quickly but he was concerned about someone jumping out of a window to get away from the snake, which he took back to his quarters. The snake bit him and he learned the hard way that it must have had some kind of sheath on it’s teeth that became embedded in his skin, as he slowly, over time, picked those things out as the bite healed. His comment, like Forrest Gump: “stupid is as stupid does.”

With six months remaining on his enlistment in March of 1968, he returned to Vietnam as a Sergeant E-5 due to heavy casualties among NCO’s during the TET offensive. Once in country, on April 27, he was attached to K Company, 3rd Battalion, 4th Marines which was located in the Khe Sanh area of operations near the DMZ, where some of the heaviest fighting was taking place. He was med-

evacuated on June 25. He states that this short period of his life was the most difficult of his life as of the six other men he had arrived with on April 27, three were killed in action, two were med-evacuated (one who had been wounded for the third time which went he would be sent home) and the whereabouts of the sixth was unknown. Mr. Gesellschaft was sent home as his enlistment would be over about the time that his wounds would heal.

He received an Honorable Discharge in August 1968 and returned to St. Louis, his hometown. He married his first wife Patricia and had two children before divorcing in 1988. He later married Norma, who had two daughters. They now have ten grandchildren, one great-grandchild and another expected in March 2024. He resides in Dardenne Prairie. He worked for Mark Andy for 32 years and then worked as a handyman until he retired in 2009.