

MISSOURI STATE SOCIETY DAUGHTERS OF THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION

Proudly Honors



RICK GRONNIGER

UNITED STATES ARMY
SPECIALIST (E-4)

MAY 6, 1969 – OCTOBER 20, 1970

as

PURPLE HEART PATRIOT

JANUARY 2025

Honoring his service and Sacrifice

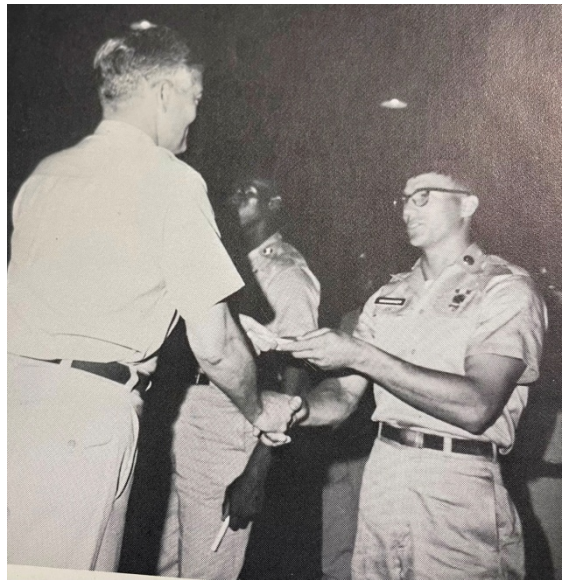
Sponsored by: St. Joseph Chapter, NSDAR



Rick Gronniger was born in Troy, Kansas, on October 3, 1949. After graduating high school, he worked on a surveying crew doing dike work on the Missouri River. In 1969, Rick was drafted into the army. His oldest brother had served in Germany and Turkey and was now home. Another older brother was still serving in Vietnam, which he would later get to visit once he arrived. Rick completed basic training at Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri, and Advanced Infantry Training at Fort Polk, Louisiana. On his 20th birthday, October 3, 1969, Rick boarded a commercial plane to Saigon.

After arriving in Saigon, Rick was sent to his base camp in Pleiku. His platoon fought in the area of An Khe and north to the DMZ. In early April while on patrol, Rick sustained a leg injury when he inadvertently stepped on a sharpened bamboo punji stick covered in feces. For this injury, he was awarded his first Purple Heart Medal. After recovery, Rick returned to duty. On April 26, 1970, he was with his patrol and preparing to set up camp. A fallen tree blocked their path. As Rick was going around the tree, he stepped on a compression grenade. The explosion resulted in him losing most of his foot and injuries to his face. Rick states the eyeglasses he was wearing saved his vision. The heat from the blast immediately severed nerves and blood vessels in his foot, so initially there was no bleeding or pain. He was treated in the field and he climbed into a medevac chopper himself, where the pain started. Morphine was administered and he does not remember anything until he was at the remote field

hospital. After two days he was taken to the 249th Field Hospital in Tokyo, Japan. While there, two high school friends, also in the military, came to see him and the three tried to persuade the doctor to let them take Rick out to the World's Fair that was being held in Tokyo. Rick was eager to go, but the doctor nixed their plans. After a week, he was transferred to Fitzsimons Army Medical Center in Denver, Colorado, where he remained until his discharge on October 20, 1970.



Rick was not as concerned with losing his foot as he was with losing his vision. His eyes were bandaged for two weeks and he was unsure if he would ever be able to see again. Prayer answered, and his vision was saved with some scarring around his eyes. In Colorado, they amputated his leg six inches above his ankle and he was fitted with a prosthesis. The day he got his new leg, Rick got up and started walking with no difficulty and hasn't stopped since.



Rick has always been a positive person. He went to Vietnam with no fear. He knew God would allow him to come home alive. Rick received two additional Purple Heart Medals, one for his leg and one for his facial injuries. He also received a Bronze Star medal and a Bronze Star with Valor Medal for courageous actions before his injury.

Rick returned to Kansas and worked on a farm the following year. He then attended the Kansas City Business College on the GI Bill. He received a degree in Design Drafting. He worked in that field and later in other areas until his retirement. Rick and his wife, Claudia, live in St. Joseph, Missouri.