

MISSOURI STATE SOCIETY DAUGHTERS OF THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION



Proudly Honors
PATRIOT OF THE MONTH
SEPTEMBER 2025



FREDERICK CHARLES GARDNER
UNITED STATES NAVY
MAY 12, 1962 – DECEMBER 11, 1970
HOSPITAL CORPSMAN THIRD CLASS (HM1)
FLEET MARINE FORCE (FMF) ENLISTED WARFARE SPECIALIST
Sponsored by: Valley of the Meramec Chapter, NSDAR



I grew up in Detroit watching Victory at Sea and The Silent Service television programs. These programs influenced me to join the U.S. Naval Submarine Service when I grew up. I joined the Navy Submarine Reserve just prior to my high school graduation in 1962. I attended Basic Submarine School during the summer of 1962 and returned to Detroit for one year prior to going on active duty. On November 22, 1963, I was on active duty in Washington, D.C., when President John F. Kennedy was assassinated. My unit was quickly formed into an Honor Guard, and we performed that duty along Pennsylvania Avenue and at Arlington Cemetery.

Shortly thereafter, I received my orders to Groton, Connecticut, aboard USS Skipjack SSN 585, a nuclear-powered Fast Attack submarine. There, I earned my Dolphins, the Submarine Warfare insignia. In 1965, I went to Hospital Corps School at Great Lakes with the goal of returning to submarines. In order to do that as a medical corpsman, I had to be E5, and I was only E4. So I put in for and received orders to the hospital at the Submarine Base back in Groton, Connecticut. I was there one year and knew that promotion was coming soon, but life took a 180-degree turn. In September 1966, I received orders to the U.S. Marine Corps Base at Camp Lejeune for the Field Medicine School. I was going to VietNam ... didn't see that coming! Goodbye Navy blues and submarines ... Hello Marine Corps greens and my new nickname "Doc".

On November 10 (the Marine Corps birthday), I landed in Okinawa and, ironically, was promoted to E5. On November 12, I landed in Vietnam and was assigned to the Third Marine Amphibious Force and served in Chu Lai and Tam Ky, providing medical treatment and supplies to Marines in the field. In November 1967, I rotated back to the U.S., and like all combat vets, I was a changed man. PTSD would haunt my life journey.

I ultimately returned to "riding the boats" in 1968 aboard the ballistic missile submarine USS Theodore Roosevelt SSBN 600 after attending Nuclear and Submarine Medical Schools. I spent my remaining years in the Navy aboard the Roosevelt as an Independent Duty Hospital Corpsman.

Upon discharge on December 11, 1970, I continued my education, earning a Bachelor's degree

and two Master's degrees. Despite this, I struggled in the corporate world. It wasn't until 2013 that I could no longer deny PTSD, and was admitted to the PTSD Unit at the North Chicago VA Hospital. There, within the brotherhood of other combat veterans, I faced my demons.

Service has always been my medicine. In caring for others, I've found my own healing, purpose, and peace. For many years, I played the bagpipes and was always available for military events and veterans' funerals.

August 2024, at my wife's urging, I reluctantly made the journey back to the place where I left my youth-VietNam. However, something totally unforeseen happened this time. God had a plan when a touring group of NVA veterans inadvertently intermingled with us U.S. veterans. With the assistance of our interpreter, I was united with an NVA veteran who was at Chu Lai and Tam Ky at the same time I was there. With a twinkle in his eye and a sheepish grin, he said, "You missed me." Peace was made between the two of us, and the war was finally over.

Today, you can find me "on the air" on VietnamVetRadio.org from 10:00 AM - 11:30 AM, taking requests and playing music from the Vietnam Era. Semper Fi!