



FROM LEFT: Francis Guenther served during the Vietnam War, but because his brother was already in action, Francis stayed stateside; Philip Donner was a member of the marines during the Korean War. He was drafted at age 20. "I couldn't buy a drink but I was old enough to fight. When Uncle Sam called, you answered, followed orders," he said; Terry Buschelman served in the marines for 25 1/2 years before retiring in 1988.



Memories

P&D Correspondent Linda Wuebben Tracked Down Some Northeast Nebraska Veterans And Asked Them To Share Some Of Their Memories Of Service

BY LINDA WUEBBEN
P&D Correspondent

Since our forefathers signed the Declaration of Independence, the United States has maintained the militia — a fighting force ready to defend the country's honor and home.

Still today, men and women volunteer to serve their country.

And those who do still remember ...

• Going back to the Korean War, 82-year-old Phil Donner, a native of Crofton, found himself drafted on his birthday at the young age of 20.

"I couldn't buy a drink but I was old enough to fight," said Donner. "When Uncle Sam called, you answered, followed orders. I joined the Marines and I'm proud of it, too." He trained in San Diego to load a howitzer, but never had to shoot it. His company traveled to Japan but never saw any action. It was at the end of the Korean Conflict when he served from 1952-54.

Donner learned many things in his tour of duty. He learned respect for his superiors and how to follow orders. He would do it again in a heartbeat.

"I grew up and still have a lot of good buddies," said Donner. "You looked out for each other; had each other's backs. You would do anything for each other, still today."

• Being a paper pusher was not what Francis Guenther of Crofton expected when he served in the U.S. Army from 1966-68. Guenther's brother Daniel was serving at the time in Vietnam, and after the incident in which the Sage Brothers of Niobrara were all killed during night maneuvers in the South China Sea off the coast of Vietnam, it became common practice not to have brothers serve in a war zone at the same time.

When Guenther enlisted, his papers were stamped with the initials TRAPP and he was permanently assigned as supply personnel at Ft. Leonard Wood for his entire tour along with about 1,000 other new trainees. What had happened as the war heated up, he explained, is the army needed soldiers who were able to keep up with the shuffle of paper. He became a secretary and was at the beck and call of a battalion commander who favored working at night.

"It was a good duty," said Guenther. "I never pulled KP but I had to be available for the commander, whenever."

He knows he would have served in Vietnam if that were his orders but he saw a lot of soldiers return to muster out the last few months at Leonard Wood. They had serious mental problems and suffered from what is diagnosed today as post-traumatic stress disorder.

"It is totally different for soldiers coming back today," said Guenther. "And that's good. Soldiers need to be appreciated."

• Steve Keiser of Fordyce agreed with Guenther's description of soldiers returning from Vietnam.

"I had more thank yous from the Australians than I did when I got home," said Keiser of his Rest &

Recreation visits to Australia during his Vietnam tour of duty from 1968-1970. "They were very grateful we had controlled the communist menace because they knew they were next in line."

Keiser said there are still hard feelings today for servicemen from that Vietnam era which was classified as a conflict, not a war. He is very proud of his service during the conflict in Southeast Asia and said it came with a healing process.

"You know, men died and were wounded, followed orders, did their job and came home to feelings of disapproval in the United States," said Keiser. "But you can't hold a grudge forever. I talked about it, got it off my chest and let it go."

"We have reunions and we sometimes talk about the war," said Keiser. "But generally we talk about our families and our lives. We have a bond with the guys from our unit which

you don't find anywhere else. We fought through life-and-death-situations and backed each other every day. It's a silent bond which I can't explain."

• When Rich Millage of Fordyce finished high school, he realized he had always wanted to be a Marine. He would be a

Marine still today if he could but after getting married, he had to accept he couldn't give 100 percent to the Corps and give 100 percent to his wife Tricia. Something had to give. He served five years and was part of the Marines who liberated Kuwait City during the Gulf War.

"When you trust someone with your life, especially in combat, you have a bond; you are a band of brothers," said Millage. "You create a trust you will not find anywhere else for as long as you live."

During his time, Millage also saw the world traveling to Korea, Okinawa, Germany and the Philippines. He considers the men he served with his brothers, closer than blood brothers.

"When the bad guys are shooting at you, you have to trust each other," said Millage. "If I got a call from someone in my unit today who needed help, I would be out of here, trying to find a way to help them."

Millage also remembers morale being an important part of service life. His wife Tricia wrote him every day — although he didn't receive one every day. Many times when mail did get delivered, there were several letters but for those men who never received a letter from home or a girlfriend or anyone, he said one could see them feel left out more and more. That would not be good in a situation where you depend on the guy next to you, he said.

"It's important to support the troops even if you don't support the cause," said Millage. His wife often wrote to many other soldiers in his unit just because he said they needed a pick-me-up — there is nothing better for a serviceman or woman.

• Michaela (Arens) Purcell of Omaha and formerly Crofton, joined the Army because she was Daddy's Girl and Daddy always wondered "what if" about being in the service.

"It was an idea I had in my head," said Purcell. "Like my dad, it was one of those things if I never did it, I



ABOVE: Steve Keiser and Paul Dominguez shown in a snapshot taken in Vietnam in 1969. "We fought through life-and-death-situations and backed each other every day. It's a silent bond which I can't explain," Keiser said. LEFT: Rich Millage is from Fordyce, Neb., and took part of the liberation of Kuwait City during the 1991 Gulf War. BELOW: Michaela (Arens) Purcell joined the military after graduating from Crofton High School and served as a convoy medic in Iraq during the Iraq War.



would wonder my whole life if I could have." The military service was a wonderful experience and she learned many things about herself.

Purcell joined after high school and wanted to make a difference. She served as a convoy medic for eight years and was injured in a freak accident in Iraq, suffering a broken leg.

"I learned you can push yourself further than you ever dreamed" said Purcell. "I learned leadership skills and (how to be) a micro-manager, both of which are important in the service, and that makes my dad laugh," said Purcell. When she enlisted she wanted to be a medic and had to join a medical unit in Des Moines, Iowa, to serve in that capacity.

"I was at a point where I would be part of a Homeland Security team

and a mission would demand we be ready to go in 72 hours, boots on the ground," said Purcell. She and her husband, who was also a military man, recently left the service to start a family. It was time for a change. The couple were both very passionate about the service but have adjusted to civilian life. Along with military training, Purcell was able to receive her education as a registered nurse through the school assistance offered to soldiers. She now works at Creighton University Hospital in ICU. Her husband is a police officer in Omaha with a canine unit.

Purcell had special memories of her military career, including her deployment. Realizing every day she and her fellow soldiers were going out into situations most people would never see was an eye-opener



and those situations push a teen or 20-year old person to face a very adult role.

"I prayed to God every time we went out to face the tragedies on our missions He would keep us safe when we left our safe zone," said Purcell. The physical and mental challenges she faced every day in Iraq over a nine-month period taught her she could handle a role she never imagined herself in.

"I was forced to lead and also be responsible for the well-being of others and found I was good at it," said Purcell. "It took a while but eventually I recognized I was handling situations like emotional stress in the soldiers under my command. The

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WE SALUTE THE MEN & WOMEN OF OUR MILITARY

Throughout our nation's history, those who have answered the call of duty deserve our recognition and our thanks. We respect the sacrifices their families have made, and remember with gratitude those who have lost their lives defending this great nation.

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