

Welsh

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Welsh believes that kind of personnel shuffling was one of the lessons learned from the Vietnam War. This explains why, in later wars, entire units were moved together. "Fragging" also became a problem during the later years of the war. The term, coined from fragmentation grenades, involved the assassination or attempted assassination by a soldier of a fellow soldier, usually a superior officer or non-commissioned officer. "We never saw any of that," Welsh said. "We were close and well disciplined. We were on a first-name basis with our squad leaders. We had mutual respect for them and they for us."

Welsh's time in Vietnam came to an end in December 1966. Though he didn't spend the full 13 months in the country, Welsh had plenty of time overseas that fulfilled the 18-month requirement.

At this time in the war, the American view of our soldiers had yet to deteriorate. When Welsh returned home, he did not endure the level of anti-war sentiment that most other soldiers suffered.

"I didn't know much about what was going on back in the states," Welsh said. "Nobody bothered me. Other guys that I knew had some dealings with people. I didn't care what they thought; I was just glad to be out of there."

Despite the media's reporting of the work being done in Vietnam, Welsh knows he and the rest of his battalion did the best they could for the country.

"We did more good for those Vietnamese people, not just to keep them from falling into the communists' hands but our medics were helping

the children. We gave them food and protected them from the Viet Cong."

His return to Yankton after more than two years away was pleasant, but duty called once again. This time, the assignment was a little closer to home.

The orders were to go to Paris Island, South Carolina, the East Coast recruit training base. He attended coaches school to become qualified to teach shooters' marksmanship on the firing line. Welsh also attended nuclear, biological and chemical warfare school and was named the Assistant Non Commissioned Officer In Charge (NCOIC) for NBC Warfare for Weapons Training Battalion.

In addition to the coaching duty, Welsh was sent to Primary Marksmanship Instructor (PMI) School to become qualified teaching the best marksmen in the world using the M-14 rifle and .45 Caliber M1911A1 pistol, .45 Caliber Thompson Sub-machine gun and M-1 Carbines.

He began his instructor position in January 1967 and spent the next two years working at the rifle range, teaching recruits how to shoot.

It was there that Welsh received a meritorious promotion to corporal and became a primary marksmanship instructor. After another six months, he was promoted to sergeant. Some of his platoons were the best qualified in their weeks in boot camp.

Welsh enjoyed his work but he didn't enjoy South Carolina. He recalls the bigotry that made him decide to leave.

"It was a wakeup call for me," Welsh said. "In the Marines, we were all green. There was no white, black, yellow or brown; we were green. It was a shock to see that kind of environment. I decided I was going to get out after four years in the Marines and go back to South Dakota."

However, similar to his time in adolescence, the small-town life of

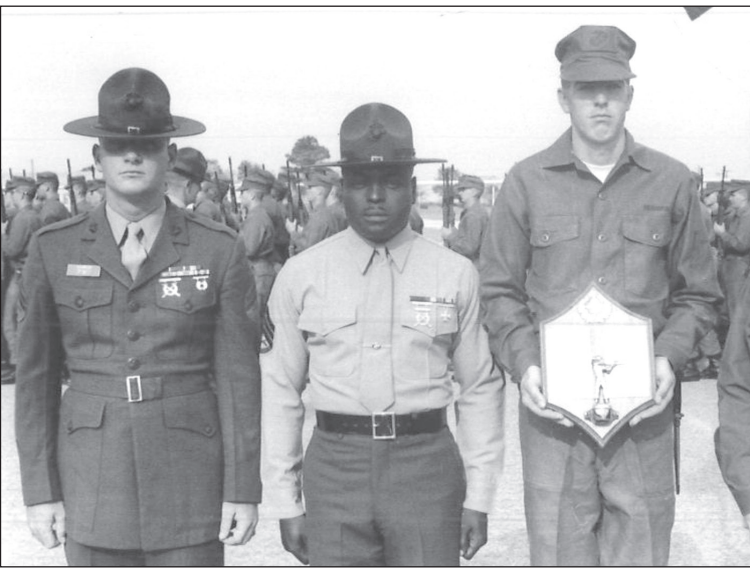


PHOTO: MIKE WELSH

In 1967 at a boot camp for East coast Marines in Paris Island, South Carolina, Mike Welsh (left) was a Primary Marksmanship Instructor (PMI) for recruits during their training before they were sent to Vietnam. Welsh's platoon of recruits had the best qualifying scores of any platoon that particular week at the rifle range. They received an award to recognize them from their drill instructor (middle). The award was given at the weekly recruit graduation ceremony.

Yankton was not enough to keep Welsh here for long. His desire for more opportunities led him back to California. In 1975, he acquired an associate's degree in business administration from Foothill Community College in Los Altos Hills, California.

"That time in the Marines really got me going in the right direction," Welsh said. "It gave me direction and allowed me to get my feet firmly on the ground."

By June 1977, Welsh graduated from San Jose State University with a bachelor's degree in business administration concentrating in international business. He also received two minors – area studies of the Far

East and geography. This education guided him towards his work in the semiconductor business for the next 25 years.

During that time, Welsh took many semiconductor, photolithography and mask making classes to understand the science and technology behind the craft. He also indulged in company sales/marketing courses when employed at National Semiconductor. Since then, he has completed all the course work for the California Real Estate exam.

Welsh feels good about his time in the Marines. In the tough atmosphere of war, Welsh learned some important skill sets that prepared

him for later in life.

"I learned self-confidence that I didn't have when I left Yankton," Welsh said. "I remember being a sophomore in speech class with Bob Whitmore as my teacher. We were supposed to give a three-minute speech. I was scared so much that I shook and almost threw up. I did such a terrible job. Before you know it, I was speaking in front of officers and large groups."

Welsh currently resides in Los Altos and is heavily involved in both Eagle Scout and Boy Scout clubs as a troop leader.

"I always teach those kids to set goals," Welsh said. "You start something, you finish it."

As a veteran, Welsh is also a member of VFW Post 791, the American Legion, 1st Marine Division Association, Marine Corps League, Vietnam Veterans of America and 1st Battalion, 5th Marine Vietnam Veterans.

"I'm always learning," Welsh said. "I shouldn't be here today. That is why I have such a positive attitude on life."

Medals/Citations/Commendations that Welsh received during his service:

- Republic of Viet Nam Campaign Medal

- Viet Nam Gallantry Cross Unit Citation

- Viet Nam Service Medal
- National Defense Service Medal
- Marine Corps Good Conduct Medal

- Navy Unit Commendation
- Navy Presidential Unit Citation
- Combat Action Ribbon
- Dress Blues Honorman Award.
- Meritorious advancement to Private First Class, Corporal and Sergeant.

- Meritorious Mast for "PMI of the Quarter"

Nebraska

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court, he could go to jail or Vietnam. So you never were quite sure who you were fighting next to."

He said the best friend he ever made in the service and trained next to was stabbed in a fight on base — not in a fight with the North Vietnamese.

Wieseler went into the service thinking he wanted to be a chopper mechanic but after completing testing when he enlisted, the Army put him in Air Traffic Control training, a career he continued until he retired this year.

"I considered myself very lucky because after I got over there, I realized the chopper mechanics were hanging out the chopper doors as gunrunners in the day and did re-

pairs at night," said Wieseler. "I was young — just 19 years old — and had rarely been out of Nebraska when I was sent across the world. ... It certainly changed my perspective on life."

There was always noise in the sky and, on the first day, the new recruits learned outgoing artillery was quite a common occurrence every day.

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) is not a problem for Wieseler but he recalls a lot of drug abuse while over there and he saw a lot of bad stuff. Age meant no difference for buying beer either. He recalled metal containers — six feet by four feet — being delivered to the base, full of beer with a line of soldiers, a block and half long, waiting in line for a taste. Both debilitating habits were sometimes the only relief the soldiers got from the craziness they saw day in and day out.

"The first barracks I walked into,

I turned and saw two guys shooting up (with drugs)," said Wieseler.

He and his buddy both trained in ATC and had orders to go to the airfield but were assigned other duties when they got to camp. His buddy's mother worked in the Department of Defense and he wrote to her telling her what they were doing and, to Wieseler's surprise, they were soon placed at the airfield.

There were a lot of good memories among the bad. Poker games could always be found 24 hours a day in the barracks and the soldiers sometimes fashioned surf boards and puddle-jumped in the waters around the base.

But there were no songs when the boys came home or happy welcomes.

Ed Kleinschmit traveled to Vietnam on a slow ship at a speed of 23 mph, he estimated. It took the ship about a month to make the trip, and Kleinschmit had not even

walked out of the landing craft onto the South Asian beach when a body bumped the side of the ship and several thousand soldiers realized it was real. It was 1967 and Kleinschmit had spent two years in the National Guard.

"I finally realized somebody had given me the right to freedom and I owed it to someone else," said Kleinschmit. "It was scary, though, thinking about being captured." But he knew he had to do it. He went to his local draft board and enlisted for two years in the Army.

Kleinschmit was on foot, pushing through the swamps, continually looking for the North Vietnamese. The troops were always watching for small bands and snipers. It was kill or be killed.


"We were trained; our values were changed or we would have gone insane," said Kleinschmit. "We were raised 'killing is bad,' but the army told us killing is good and

when we got home. We never got rid of it; we couldn't wash it away."


Almost 50 years later, he still has flashbacks. His family knows to leave him alone until an episode passes. Going to church is one of the hardest things Kleinschmit says has to do. Many times, the memories are the strongest there. Reconciliation with God is almost insurmountable and he finds little peace for his soul. He has two sons who followed in his footsteps and he is as proud of their service as he is of his own.


"My time was not wasted," said Kleinschmit. "I knew I had a purpose; I needed to protect our freedom just like others before me."

Jerome agrees. "I have always loved my military career and service; it's why I was put on earth," he said. "There'll always be war until there's only one person left on earth."



The Mission Statement of the Yankton School District is to optimize student potential for success in a global society.





Belief Statement...

PARTNERSHIP
1. Education is a partnership among the community, parents, students and school personnel; high standards are essential for this partnership to be successful.

SAFE ENVIRONMENT
2. The school system provides a safe educational environment, which encourages physical, emotional, and academic growth in a culturally diverse society.

ATMOSPHERE POSITIVE AND SUPPORTIVE
3. Learning is enhanced by a positive and supportive atmosphere, which encourages creativity, builds self-esteem, and recognizes students' success.

INDIVIDUAL STUDENT FOCUS
4. Learning requires recognition of each student's instructional style and the use of effective methods, which make learning interesting and individualized.

VALUES INTEGRATION
5. Ethical values, including an appreciation of diversity, integrity, compassion, courage, commitment, and responsibility, are integral to the learning process.

STUDENT RESPONSIBILITY
6. With proper guidance, students are capable of making informed choices and are responsible for their actions.

LIFELONG LEARNING
7. Education must support life-long learning by teaching students to access and apply information for success in a global society.

Adopted by the Yankton School Board
on June 14, 1993, Action #93-347
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