



Thomas D. Murphy Served in Vietnam, 1969

Thomas D. Murphy enlisted in the U.S. Army in Vietnam as a PFC in the 25th Infantry Division. He enlisted in June 1968 after President Lyndon Johnson had ended all graduate school deferments a few months before. The Tet Offensive had just taken place and the Army needed soldiers. Virtually every one of his college buddies was in the same precarious situation of getting drafted even before the summer of 1968 ended. He enlisted that June rather than wait for the dreaded draft notice to arrive in mailbox. So all the best laid plans he had for himself graduating from Wheeling College in May 1968 and going on to the University of Maryland School of Law in the fall were abruptly cast aside. In June 1969, his unit was on patrol in an area known as Parrot's Peak, close to the Cambodian border. While out on combat patrol missions "You just wore a shirt, boots and as much ammunition as you could carry and slog through the triple-canopy jungle," said Murphy. "That has, in effect, ruled who I am... And there isn't a day that what happened to me, either subconsciously or very consciously, affects me."

A major battle erupted at Fire Base Washington about two miles away as two North Vietnam regiments attacked a much smaller American company. "At first light, we went out to the edge of the jungle, marching toward the fire base on patrol," he said. "Most of the area had been cleared and was open. I was on line with my unit searching the area, and there was not much out there except this lone tree. And from behind this tree jumps an NVA soldier with an AK-47. He didn't even have a helmet on. I had an M-16. He shot me and I shot him. I lived and he died."

Murphy suffered a serious chest wound. He spent two weeks being treated in Vietnam and then two weeks in a hospital in Japan. He was then flown to the United States, where he ended up close to home at the former Walter Reed Army Hospital in Northwest D.C. His family was there to meet him when he arrived - but he said he was the only wounded soldier brought in that night whose family was able to be there. "I was in the ambulance as we left Andrews Air Force Base and we're going around the Beltway - the Beltway had just opened a few years earlier - and were on the way to Walter Reed, and I was just overwhelmed seeing that familiar concrete highway and realizing that I had survived to come home."

Murphy was awarded a Purple Heart for his service actions. He went on to become a Rockville attorney and eventually became the only Vietnam Veteran to be elected president of the Bar Association of Montgomery County, as well as the Maryland State Bar Association.

Murphy has resided in Rockville, MD with his wife Mary Barron Murphy and family for 40 years. He is proud to say that his oldest son, Tom, Jr., is about to be promoted to Colonel in the U.S. Army, a far cry he says from his exalted E-4 rank!