

Remembering Vietnam

Residents recall events from the Tet Offensive 30 years later

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"The Year of the Monkey was bad," Kenny Dean said as he thought back to the time he spent in Vietnam during 1968 when the Tet Offensive was taking place between January 1 and March 7. "Two-thirds of all killed and wounded was in that one year."

Dean, who works at the U.S. Post Office in Reynoldsburg with fellow Vietnam veteran Mike Taylor, nearly became one of the casualties as he and fellow Marines walked through the Phu Luong Mountains.

The United States suffered casualties in and around Hue City, the location of the Imperial Palace which was hit on Feb. 12, 1968 — the Chinese New Year — but Dean survived. He managed to avoid the gun fire, grenades while walking through the open rice patties, but there in the mountains a grenade was thrown on him.

Dean was walking along the top of a crater when he was hit. It felt like a ball bat hitting him. Sixty mortar rounds were being fired at them and they couldn't retreat until the Huey gun ships came in. The man behind

Dean was dead and shrapnel killed the next man in line. B-52 would drop bombs along the Ho Chi Minh Trail and within 24 hours, he said, the Viet Cong would have spider traps built in the dust of the craters.

"It's sort of a helpless situation when you're wounded and you can't retreat," said the Purple Heart recipient.

Dean knew the experience was more than he anticipated when he arrived on Dec. 11, 1967.

"The first thing I saw getting off the aircraft at Da Nang Air Base were stacks of coffins being shuttled to graves administration," he said.

Taylor witnessed a similar sight, arriving in April of 1969 after the Tet Offensive.

"I was in the Air Force. I was in a reasonably safe place," Taylor said, explaining that a Cobra gun ship was pounding the hill outside the runway with explosives as he stepped onto the ground. "They evidently had somebody pinned down up there, and I mean it was within sight. I'm thinking, 'How can this be? This is an Air

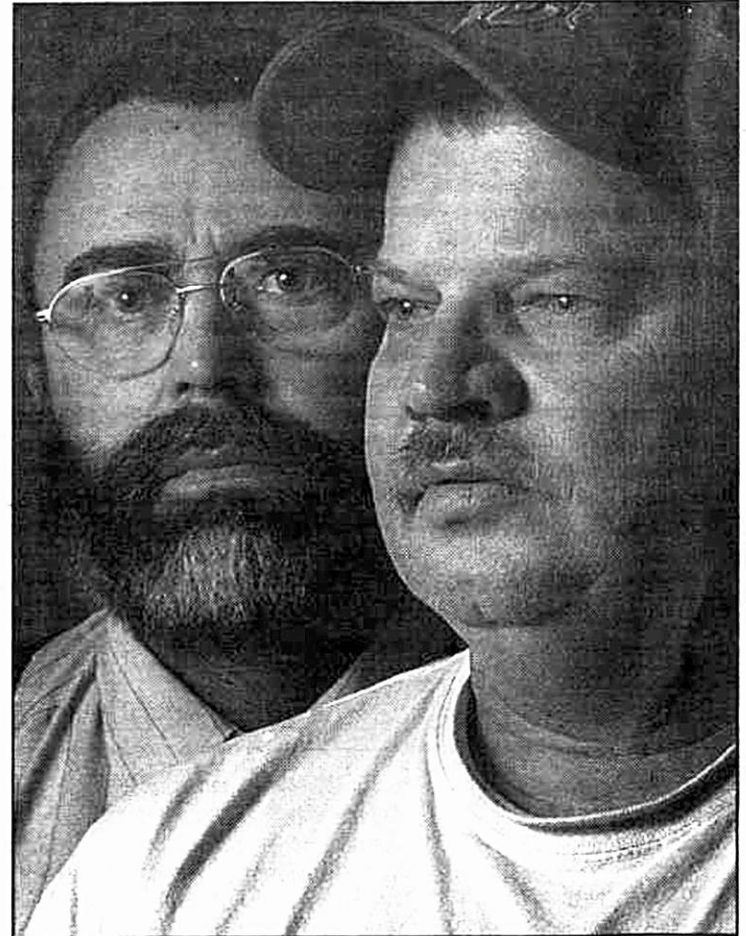
Force base, everything around it should be clear.' And they are just blowing the side of this hill away. Our big flat bed trailers with a bench down the middle of it, that's how we transported back and forth from barracks to shop and to flight line, and it took us around the morgue. Body bags were stacked up like cord wood. I was a little older than he was. I was 21. I had just gotten to the point where I was thinking I might be invincible, then you see this. You see them unloading the bodies off of the trucks and helicopters. It's pretty ghastly. It really is. The other thing I can still see or feel is the smell there."

Dean winced, recalling it too. For Taylor it was like stepping back 2000 years in time.

"The air was unbelievable," Taylor said "You're talking 98 percent humidity."

Plastic coated clothes hangers were rusted inside, he said.

"Little patty dikes were usually put to maybe 18 inches in diameter and



Kenny Dean, left, and Mike Taylor served in the Tet Offensive during Vietnam. Both served in the Marines and vividly recall their time spent in Vietnam and the Tet Offensive. Dean was injured during the Tet Offensive and received a Purple Heart for his endeavors.

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Residents recall service in Vietnam

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they were brackish with stagnated water," Dean said. "Their cemeteries were round circles supposed to represent the womb. They would put people in fetal positions. The morning time was real foggy and we'd run patrols out of there, and all of a sudden you'd just would hear this grenade spoon fly. All of a sudden you'd hear your people crying or saying, 'Oh my God'. We were always the ones out in the open, they were in the shade, you know who would get the worst end of the stick on that deal."

During the 12 months and 15 days he was in Vietnam, Americans always sought out the Viet Cong, while they waited in the tree lines with automatic weapons and mortars.

"I had stateside boots for about seven or eight weeks in monsoon season," Dean said. "There's nothing spookier than going in the morning time when there's fog and it's dark and you're going through stagnated water and you're all muddy, and all of a sudden you hear grenades starting to thud, thud in the mud and blowing up. It's psychological. I can see why a lot of young guys were messed up."

Military forces during World War II got an opportunity to move to the back lines for rest and relaxation,

according to Taylor, but that did not happen in Vietnam.

"There was no safe haven... they even hit the U.S. Embassy in the middle of Saigon, they hit it with an anti-tank cannon" he said, explaining he was in a safer place than men like Dean by being in the Air Force. "It wasn't like being out in the actual jungles or actual rice patties. As a matter of fact, they took our rifles away from us, so that we couldn't do more harm from the inside."

Dean's cousin was in the Battle of Khe Sanh while he was in Hue City, and the story is about the same.

"For just over six weeks they were pinned down while we were in Hue," Dean said. "They couldn't have any supplies or food. C1-30s would be so high up in the air because of the anti-aircraft the Vietnamese had around them, they would drop the food and supplies and their enemies would get it. They would take the bodies and stack them up like cord wood, and the rats were eating their bodies.... We had all this fire power, but they didn't seem like they used it right."

Loaded planes, according to Taylor, might go out on a bombing mission and have to dump the bombs in the water because they could not get permission to drop them on the ground. He said he was later told they had to have permission from the province chief to drop the bombs.

By the time the pilot contacted the base, the base contacted headquarters which contacted the Whitehouse which went through the Vietnamese and the province chief, the Viet Cong were gone.

"I hope we never go somewhere where any of my family or I fight with my hands tied behind my back again," Taylor said.

Thinking back on the anniversary of the Tet Offensive, Dean said, it is common in war to have a conversation with a guy and as the man heads down the trail hearing the kacking sounds of an AK-47 and word comes back that the guy is dead.

"Being a grunt everybody got wounded or killed," he said.

Both men are glad the American public has come full circle and is once again supporting its troops, while war is waged on terrorists, as they did those returning from World War I and World War II. But Dean said he wishes the country would stop training its enemies.

Afghani terrorists, like Ho Chi Minh before them, learned tactics from Americans.

Vietnam, Dean and Taylor said, changed their lives forever.

"None of us went over there just for the hell of it," Taylor said. "We thought we had a cause to go over and fight for, just like our guys do now."



A picture of Kenny Dean in Vietnam along with various pictures and medals from his service. Dean received the Purple Heart after being injured during the Tet Offensive.