

Don Hartman



LEGIONNAIRE

Like many Veterans, each has different story and took different paths in arriving at the status of being called a 'Veteran'. I grew up and graduated from high school in Bloomer Wisconsin in 1965 and attended what is now called MATC in Madison Wisconsin studying Civil Engineering. In May of 1967, I received a letter informing me of my upcoming draft eligibility and becoming 1A. I was bused to Milwaukee for a physical, which I passed, and was told upon graduation from MATC, I would be inducted. Weighing my options, I visited the US Air Force recruiter. With a background in Land Surveying, I was administered a by-pass specialty test in that field and passed. I was offered a delayed enlistment which guaranteed me a slot in that field. Entering the Air Force in August of 1967 and already having a specialty; after Basic Training I reported directly to a duty station, skipping Technical School. I immediately cross-trained as a Geodetic Computational Specialist which enhanced my ability to contribute to our mission. Five months after enlisting I was assigned with the 1370th Photo Mapping Wing to Tuy Hoa Vietnam arriving there on February 3rd, 1968; 4 days after the beginning of the Tet Offensive, arguably, the deadliest campaign of the entire Vietnam War.

My specialties were used in the Photo Mapping and in the plotting of bombing coordinates for radar bombing. When I tell folks we had computers in Vietnam in 1968, they find it hard to believe. After serving two tours in Vietnam, I returned to Forbes Air Force Base in Kansas. I married my wife, Barb, (also from Bloomer) in 1969. Barb moved to Kansas with me working at the Air Base in the Regional Support Exchange System, supporting Military PX and BX stores.

With the beginning of the Space Program and eminent elevation of the NASA program before the moon landings, our Unit was re-designated the "1st Aerospace and Cartographic Service". I was separated from active duty in 1971 and officially assumed the role as a VETERAN. After my discharge, my wife and I returned to Wisconsin, settling first in Madison, Wisconsin where I began a 32-year career with the Wisconsin Department of Transportation. It was there that I honed my skills working in Design, Graphics and multi-media Communications. In 1978 we moved to the Mt. Horeb area, settling in Springdale Township. I retired from State service in 2004 and began a 13-year career running my own Taxidermy Business. Because of some physical disabilities, I have had to give up that pursuit to focus on my next chapter of my life.

Like many Veterans from the Vietnam Era; after the cold reception we got after returning from the Service, we were not eager joiners in Veterans Groups. My father and grandfather, who were WWII and WWI Veterans respectively, always encouraged me to join the American Legion and the Veterans of Foreign Wars. I promised them I would, so finally after my retirement from State Service and after my sons were grown and out of college, I found I had time to commit to Veteran organizations. I joined the VFW here in 2000, and the American Legion in Bloomer, Post 295 in 2002.

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In 2017 after seeing that my hometown of Bloomer had built a Veterans Memorial Park, it prompted me to ask myself this question, "if community much smaller can build a Veterans Memorial, why not Mt. Horeb?"

I first talked with members of VFW Post 9511 to see if they thought it would be a project they would like to see happen and support. After receiving their approval, we formed a committee and contacted the American Legion Post 113 by attending one of their Saturday morning breakfasts events. With a folder of information containing a plan and pictures of other Memorial projects, it was there that I found a large group of Veterans who had been talking about building a Memorial in Mt. Horeb for several years. After transferring my Legion membership to Mt. Horeb Post 113, our VFW committee partnered to form an exploratory committee of members of the American Legion, the VFW and the Wisconsin Vietnam Veterans Chapter IV. We began to meet and explore options and sites available in Mt. Horeb. Offering my background in Design, Planning and Graphics to the committee they had me pursue several alternatives. I began to develop sketches and ideas of the creation of a central structure theme to focus on. First developing sketches of the "Freedom Tower". Then seeking out Technical help from the Tech Ed instructor at MHHS to develop CADD drawings of the Freedom Tower. He assigned a Student, Mat Thompson, an aspiring Architect to the project. Working closely with Mat, he developed shop drawings and 3-D files that I could take to a Monument company to determine if our draft design could be built. After meeting with several companies, one agreed that the conceptual design could indeed be constructed. That was the beginning of a 3-year odyssey that would result in the building of the Mt. Horeb Veterans Memorial Park. I would like to state that the entire conceptual design was rendered with Veterans input. From the heart and soul of the Memorial's central area surrounding the Freedom Tower to the pentagon design of all the Tributes on the Pentagon footprint, it was designed for Veterans by Veterans.

As a Veteran and a member of American Legion Post 113, the VFW Post 9511 and Wisconsin Vietnam Veterans Chapter IV. I am proud to have been able to share my talents and the wisdom that I have gathered over the 50 years since I became a Veteran. Being a Veteran is a lifetime commitment, once a Veteran, always a Veteran. We serve our Country for life. I offer this quote to reinforce our dedication to serve.

"AS VETERAN'S, OUR LEGACY WILL NOT ONLY BE MEASURED BY
OUR SERVICE, SACRIFICE AND WHAT WE DID IN THE PAST.
BUT WILL ALSO BE MEASURED BY
WHAT WE DO NOW AND IN THE FUTURE."

That future is now, not only for Veteran's but, for all in our Community.