

Gerald E. Poe

This is the twenty first in a series of articles that we hope to publish for years to come. With this series we want to honor Service Members that served our great Nation. As I mentioned in the last article, we need your help to honor these fine Americans. If you have someone you would like us to include, please help us research and develop articles. Our email address is mhamlegionpost113@gmail.com

I have to start by saying that this is a very condensed story of Jerry Poe's life, there is so much more that could have been included about all aspects of his life, so when you see Jerry ask him to tell you about his life. Gerald (Jerry) E. Poe was born 27 September 1931 in Selingrove, Pennsylvania to Ida Kerstetter and George David Poe. Jerry's mother and father both worked, his father was away a lot, so his mother carried much of the load at home. Jerry had six brothers and sisters Joanne, Goerge Jr. Nancy, Marlin, and two sisters that died in infancy. Later they would add two half-sisters Theresa and Jane. Jerry's family like many families in the area was very poor and his parents had a stormy marriage.

Jerry was born with rickets and the Doctor said there was little hope. He had gone from a birth weight of seven pounds down to two, he was so tiny they say he could have fit in a cigar box. Medical personnel told Jerry's mother to take him to the hospital to leave him to die. Instead Jerry's mother took him to Mrs. Noggle, a woman in the area who prayed over him and she told Jerry's Mom exactly what she needed to do. This woman told Ida that Jerry would live a charmed life, what a true statement that turned out to be.

Because this happened when Jerry was so young he did not know about it until much later in life when he was asked to visit a woman who was dying. Jerry describes the encounter "I sat in the rocker next to the bed and offered my hand, she took it and her grip was like steel, it scared me though I didn't know why, and I started to pull back as she spoke. I never had anything grip my attention, as did her voice, I could see a soft smile in her eyes and her voice was as gentle as an angel. Still holding my hand she said I want you to remember me and to always remember your life is charmed. You will do good and good will be done to you."

Family was important to the Poe's, the extended family used to gather at Grandma's house to play and have a meal together. There were 67 cousins out playing and having a great time. When World War II came

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along Jerry's Uncles Fred, Bill, George, and Ervin left to go off to fight in the war. Jerry followed the war learning every large Army unit following their moves on a large world map on the wall in his room. On December 16th 1944 Jerry's Uncle Bill was killed.

At age 14 Jerry's parents divorced and Jerry decided he wanted to enlist in the service. He went to the Army recruiters office, but he was out to lunch so Jerry went to the Navy recruiters office and signed up. He had to modify his birth certificate so that he could join. So at age 14 Jerry went off to training and on to his first assignment in the Navy. Please note that I have selected stories from Jerry's twenty-four-year military career spanning from World War II, Korea and seven tours as a part of the Special Forces during Vietnam.

On his first ship Jerry sailed to places like France, Turkey, Greece and Libya. In 1949 he was reassigned to the USS Missouri, and in 1950 he started shore duty as he prepared to leave the service, but President Truman extended everyone for one year so Jerry went back to serve on the USS Missouri which ended up providing ground support fire from the ship off the shore of Korea. When the Chinese entered the war, they pushed the American and South Korean forces back, Jerry and one of the officers from the USS Missouri were on shore calling in supporting fires from the ship as the American and South Korean forces were pulling out and moving south. Jerry and the officer he was with ended up in the middle of the fighting as they were calling in fires. At one-point Jerry looked up and there was a Chinese Soldier standing over him about to stab him with his bayonet. Jerry felt the bayonet go into his left wrist and pin his hand to his rifle. He grabbed his wrist as it was bleeding profusely and as he looked up the Chinese Soldier was ready to strike again; in a split second the Chinese Soldier fell over having been killed by a US Marine. Along with all the American and South Korean forces taken off the shore to move south there were 100,000 civilians also taken off the beach and moved south.

Jerry returned to the United States in April of 1951. He was discharged on his 21st Birthday 27 September. He earned his GED from Selingsgrove and then went to Bucknell University he wanted to be an engineer, but his math skills were not strong enough, and he missed the military life. Things just weren't the same in civilian life. There is a deep connection with all the people you serve with that just can't be explained.

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In 1953 he and two buddies decided they were going to join the Army and go airborne. His buddies joined but didn't go airborne.

From the very first day in the Army until he was promoted to Sergeant Major 16 years later Jerry Poe was always promoted ahead of his peers because he worked harder and longer, tried harder, and did every job to the best of his abilities.

In 1962 Jerry volunteered to go Special Forces. Over the years Jerry served seven tours in Vietnam with the Special Forces. I will not cover all of Jerry's tours here, but I will briefly talk about a couple of the harrowing missions he was involved in. On one mission in 1963 four American Special Forces Soldiers were on a patrol in a known VietCong area. On the fourth day of the patrol the four of them woke up and realized that all the Vietnamese Soldiers that were supporting them were gone, and that they were surrounded by VietCong Soldiers. Jerry said that the VietCong Soldiers took their shirts and shoes and then tied their hands together. As they were led away up the trail it seemed as though the VietCong were in a hurry to get somewhere. About noon they arrived in a small village and the four of them were thrown in a pig pen guarded by two soldiers. Suddenly they could hear the screams of artillery shells raining down on the village, when the guards ran off the American Soldiers knew they needed to get out of there as well. Jerry and the other three took off and ran to a stream. They took two days to get downstream far enough that they felt safe enough to get out. They got picked up and took a chopper back to their base, happy to be alive.

In 1967, on another tour, Camp Crowe was attacked by communist infiltrators from Burma. They succeeded in taking out a high antenna system and it knocked out communications. Since Jerry was the First Sergeant responsible for this area, he went out to Camp Crowe which meant that someone else had to run the convoy that he was scheduled to run. SFC Perdok took command of the convoy. About forty miles north of Korat, Thailand they were ambushed. Jerry was told to return to Lop Buri on commercial airline immediately without any explanation. Jerry thought something had happened to a family member back in the states but when he got back to the base, they told him that SFC Perdok had been killed. Jerry was very close to Paul Perdok, so he escorted Paul back to Pennsylvania for his funeral and burial. Jerry mentioned how he returned to Thailand but nothing was ever the same again without Paul.

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On another mission in 1968 Jerry was in a chopper near Don Phuc close to the Cambodian border making a sweep of the area. The gunships made runs over the rice paddies and when Jerry's group was still 12 miles out from their landing zone, they took a hit to the main rotor. They were spinning out of control and Jerry said he could see the ground coming up so fast that he was sure death was only moments away. When the chopper hit the ground, it exploded. Jerry said he can still remember, in slow motion, going through the windshield from his seat behind the co-pilot, I could see the glass break and the blood and then the cold air and water in my face and then over his whole body. He couldn't lift his right arm above his shoulder and neither leg would function. He was sure that the Vietcong would be looking for anyone that may have survived the crash. The Americans sent gunships that stayed on station all night. Jerry could see the Vietcong only one hundred yards away. In the morning a rescue ship came in and picked up the three dead soldiers, the pilot who was badly injured and Jerry. Jerry was sent to the 8th Field Evacuation Hospital. He had a broken shoulder, and his right hip and pelvis were fractured, and he had a broken tail bone. He was sent to Japan and then back to Walter Reed in DC to recover.

Jerry retired in 1970. He held numerous jobs mainly as production manager at different facilities in different areas of the country. He and his wife Eleanor divorced. While working in Arizona for Neils Detroit Diesel he met Dianne. In 1978 Dianne and Jerry were married. They made several moves and in 1988 they packed up the dogs and cats and moved to Black Earth. In 1988 Jerry joined the Vietnam Veterans of Wisconsin Chapter IV where he served as the secretary for 20 years and is a life member. He is also a life member of the VFW Post 9511 in Blue Mounds.

Jerry received numerous awards for his actions while in the service. He received the Three Bronze Star with V Device, Air Medal, Purple Heart, Vietnam and Korean Service Medals, United Nations Medal for Korea, Presidential Unit Citation, Presidential Unit Citation with 5th Special Forces, Presidential Unit Citation in Korea – USS Missouri, Meritorious Service Medal with an Oak Leaf Cluster, Army Commendation Medal, Comat Infantry Badge, Senior Parachute Badge, Master Parachute Badge, Free Fall Parachute Badge, Thai Master Parachute Badge, Vietnamese Master Parachute Badge, Good Conduct Medal, NCO Professional Development Ribbon, RVN Civil Actions. But to Jerry the most important thing about his service is all the men and women he served with. The bond amongst

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service members is something that cannot be broken, there is such a strong bond among those that are fighting side by side.

Jerry is a humble man who served our Great Country from 1946 to 1970, he has truly lived a charmed life. He is still serving our community and the Veterans in our area. Please send Jerry a card to thank him for his service. His address is Jerry Poe, 4511 Blue Mounds Trail, Black Earth, WI 53515-9720.

Let us Never Forget that Freedom is NOT Free

Written by Jerry Hook in coordination with Jerry and Dianne Poe