

MIKE KOLOSKI

**USCGC BARATARIA (WAVP-381) – May67 to Dec67
Navy Unit Commendation – 24 Apr 67 to 1 Dec 67**

July/August 2016 – Alumni Bulletin

Mike has written a very thoughtful piece (attached below) in three sections with the first relating to Community Veteran's Organizations, the second to the Veterans Health Care System and the third to Support Groups for Chronic Diseases. Mike has extensive personal knowledge about all three.

Hopefully, Mike's comments and those that others may add from their personal experiences will be helpful to classmates as they negotiate similar pathways. This writing by Mike started with the 50th Reunion dinner at the Marriott with a comment relating to his involvement with his local veteran's association,

Golden Journeys Booklet - 2015

Upon graduation I reported to USCGC BARATARIA ((WAVP-381) as an engineer-in-training (my one and only seagoing assignment). I spent three years performing ocean station duty in the Atlantic and Operation Market Time in Vietnamese waters.

WIKIPEDIA

During her Vietnam War tour, Barataria was underway 83 percent of the time and cruised over 67,000 nautical miles (124,000 km) without a major mechanical or electrical failure. Keeping a close watch on all moving craft in her surveillance area, Barataria detected, inspected, or boarded nearly 1,000 steel-hulled vessels traversing her area, any one of which could have been a trawler trying to sneak supplies to the enemy.

Barataria was called upon many times to use her main battery against enemy troops ashore who were engaged with allied forces; United States Army spotter planes reported all of Barataria's rounds on target, never once falling out of the target area. On one gunfire support mission, Barataria scored three direct hits on point targets spotted by aircraft.

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**VIETNAM FOR ME
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VA AND VETERANS HEALTH CARE
SUPPORT GROUPS**

AUGUST 2016 ALUMNI BULLETIN

Mike Koloski has written a very thoughtful piece (Attachment Four) in three sections with the first relating to Community Veteran's Organizations, the second to the Veterans Health Care System and the third to Support Groups for Chronic Diseases. Mike has extensive personal knowledge about all three. This writing by Mike started with the 50th Reunion dinner Saturday night at the Marriott with a comment relating to his involvement with his local veteran's association. I have had several conversations with Mike since that have helped me stay balanced, especially over these last four months. For Mike's suggestions and sharing of his experiences, I am personally most appreciative.

Koloski 68 Champaign, Illinois
18 December 1968

Dear Captain High,

We have just received your most welcome Christmas greeting and message. It does indeed seem that there is much news of my career and family. I should bring you up to date on I must apologize for being so neglectful in my reply to your annual letters. This is especially unforgivable when I consider the time you take from your heavy schedule to send individual messages to the class.

I am presently at the University of Illinois studying civil engineering. We were transferred last February upon my return from Southeast Asia. My studies will be completed in June I will begin work in ECOS, (God knows where).

You were correct in the comment about my long tour on the Barataria. I spent two and a half years on the vessel. Need less to say I had mixed emotions when I finally left the "old girl". Anxious to move on to a new station with different duties; I nonetheless left with a lot of memories and affection for the Barataria.

I had covered the whole of possible deployments on the vessel: weather patrols, Bermuda SPM, Refresher training, yard overhauls, and of course a wartime deployment. The commanding officer and I were the only original officers remaining at the end of my tour.

The tour in Southeast Asia was quite an experience. Although our contact with the enemy was not on so active ^{or} personal level as our people on the 92 boats, we did develop some appreciation of the

That name conflict. The most
comforting concept I derived from
the whole tour was the obviously
higher level of competence and
professionalism of the Coast Guard
compared to our sister service.

VIETNAM FOR ME

Mike Koloski

March 4, 2021

The area in Southeast Asia commonly referred to as Indochina has been a scene of conflict for millennia. Its land and resources are coveted by many. In the second half of the 20th century the United States was heavily involved in such conflict. US armed services, including the US Coast Guard, conducted military/combat operations against guerrilla and regular forces representing North Vietnam and its Communist allies. CG units in Vietnam included ships, smaller patrol boats, aircraft, as well as navigation facilities, and logistics/merchant marine inspection details. CG Academy graduates from many classes, including 1965, spent time in the region in the thick of the conflict. Our classmates captained 82 foot patrol boats and served as crewmen on larger cutters and tenders.

Upon graduation in June 1965, I was assigned as a student engineer to the CG Cutter "Barataria (WAVP 381), homeported in Portland, Maine. During the first 2 years of my assignment the ship performed several ocean station patrols, search and rescue missions and had a major shipyard availability for repair and maintenance.

In April of 1967 the "Mighty B" sailed to Vietnam to join other Coast Guard and US Navy vessels to become a part of "Operation Market Time". Market Time was a continuous off shore barrier patrol of larger ships along the coast of South Vietnam. Their mission was to detect, identify, track, and board vessels suspected of carrying men and supplies intended for Viet Cong forces waging guerrilla warfare against the US, United Nations, and South Vietnamese regular forces who were protecting the interior. While on patrol, Market Time vessels were also called upon for shore bombardment as needed.

Reflecting back on the time spent in Vietnam aboard the ship, my recall blurs into a continuous span of long, hot days and nights spent performing boring duties away from family and friends. The excitement of shore bombardment and port calls between patrols didn't seem to break the monotony.

A couple of memories do stand out. One involves those occasions when the ship was visited by any of the smaller patrol craft that operated inshore along the shallow coastal waters and up the river systems. These patrol craft would come alongside for "underway replenishment", receiving fuel, food stuffs, mail, movies, and ice cream from our much larger vessel. Exchanging stories and experiences with their crewmen was a welcome break in routine. A couple of times a classmate or upper classman who I knew from the Academy would be the skipper. I quickly realized that these men were constantly risking their lives on a daily basis. To me, sharing a little ice cream or a movie was small reward for their courage.

Memories of port visits are few and faded. The time spent ashore, that I do remember vividly, was when I went "in country" to visit a tiny village in South Vietnam. I'm not sure I ever knew

the name of that little village set in the Mekong Delta surrounded by acres of rice paddies and jungle. Around one hundred South Vietnamese lived in the village; extended families, babies through grannies, lived in the dozen or so thatched homes. The village had rich soil for rice as well as access to saltwater just a mile down the Delta. Consequentially it was an enticing prize to the Viet Cong fighters who surrounded it on three sides.

A contingent of US Marines was based in the village to protect the villagers and keep the Viet Cong at a distance. I visited the village on two occasions - each time by motor life boat. The Barataria sailed as close as water depth would allow and lowered one of its boats with myself and eight crewmen aboard. The small boat motored up the river and the ship moved out to deeper water to wait. I was in charge of the boat, although I'm sure that the rest of the crew breathed a lot easier knowing the next senior person was a grizzly Chief Bosun Mate. So did I!

It's one thing to man a small boat maneuvering under the watchful eye of the mothership. Motoring into salt grass, up a river with no sight of the ship or any other familiar object is, indeed, quite another situation. Just what the heck were we doing out there; Market Time was supposedly an off shore operation?

Well, we were there because we had been tasked by our captain to design, fabricate and install a set of playground equipment for the village school. We had learned from the Captains' grapevine, that US operating units sometimes took on projects to help Vietnam citizens. This was a good public relations gesture. Providing the helpful gesture, also gave a solid boost to ship's morale. As Barataria's Damage Control Officer, I had dominion over both the physical materials and skilled crewman to get the job done. Lucky me!

Consequently, there I sat, in a small boat, motoring upriver with a knot in my throat and flutter in my stomach. We "smelled" the village long before we saw it. I say this not to be derogatory, but rather to acknowledge that the aroma of rack upon rack of drying fish spoke to the good fortune of the village having access to the richness of the sea.

Once ashore we were welcomed by villagers and introduced to the USMC sergeant in charge who showed us around the complex. The "tour" ended at a machine gun emplacement on the perimeter of the villagers' homes. At the invitation of the Sergeant, I peered over sand bags and observed lush rice paddies stretching for many acres toward a distant tree line. At the moment there was no farming taking place. The gunners explained that recent VC activity was prohibiting work in the rice paddies until the Marines could push the VC back further into the jungle.

As I peered over the emplacement, I heard the distinct pop of a rifle from the tree line. Needless to say, I ducked down and became very intimate with the sand bags. I glanced over to the Sergeant who wore a sheepish grin. "Not to worry, sir,,,,, you never hear the one that gets you," he quipped. Needless to say - I was not amused.

My crew and I swiftly returned to the village schoolyard and quickly got down to business measuring for our construction needs. It may have been due to an outgoing tide, but I recall

making better time motoring back to the ship than we did sailing in. Two weeks later, my damage control petty officers having finished the play equipment, and having been assured that the VC had been "dealt with", we made a return trip to the village to install the playground set at the school. We then met with the grateful villagers, took PR snaps and shared some celebratory soda pops and snacks. This all took place during our last Market Time patrol.

A month later the "Mighty B" began its homeward journey. I left the ship in Honolulu and flew home to meet my wife and travel on to the University of Illinois to study civil engineering. I never went to sea again. If it weren't for my Vietnam experience, I would have had no "war stories" to share with my children. On the other hand, I may not, many years later, have developed Parkinson's Disease, nor experienced a bout of prostate cancer. Both of these conditions the Veterans Administration presumes may have been due to exposure to Agent Orange, the defoliant of choice in Vietnam.

I say this not in anger or with remorse. Rather I note them as facts to show that the Vietnam "Conflict" and the story of our "Class of '65" are closely intertwined and, perhaps, ongoing.

HELP FOR VETERANS IN NEED

Mike Koloski

May 30, 2016

VETERANS ORGANIZATIONS

I am a member of two veterans organizations: MOAA, (Military Officers of America Association); and VFW (Veterans of Foreign Wars). My membership to MOAA is essentially passive. I joined at the urging of Paul Blayney who informed me of the active and effective voice that MOAA provides in support of issues critical to veterans compensation and wellbeing. As a member for over 10 years, I agree with Paul's analysis.

My membership in the VFW is much more active. I am a life member and participate actively in the local "post". I have served in all of the leadership positions at the local post, including two terms as Post Commander. Before I joined the VFW, I assumed the VFW was an "old boy's chowder and marching society" where member's continuously spun war stories at their "canteen" while drinking copious amounts of amber liquids. Since joining, I have come to believe the VFW, along with the American Legion, is the foremost proponent of veteran's welfare on both a national and local level.

I happen to be writing these notes at 4 PM on May 30, Memorial Day. Linda's day started much earlier than mine, as she prepared breakfast at the Post for members participating in planned ceremonies. I slept in till 0630, dressed in VFW garb, and met her to drive to our first ceremony at Bramlett Cemetery in rural Wallowa County, Oregon. There, a contingent of around fifteen men and women raised the flag, sang the anthem, offered prayer and laid wreaths in honor of all veterans living and dead, rendered a 21 gun salute and closed with the playing of TAPS, while local community members looked on. Four similar ceremonies followed as we worked our way across the County stopping at peaceful, beautiful cemeteries, each festooned with the flags that members had placed earlier in the Weekend. Needless to say the day was moving and rewarding.

Yet, Memorial Day is not the only rewarding activity. It is no more important than voting to send a contribution to a veteran's family in need of food. Or, sitting on a committee, deciding which student should receive one of the three college scholarships the Post awards annually to children of veteran families. Or, the graveside services of a veteran regardless of whether they belonged to VFW or not. Or, presenting the "colors" at the local rodeo ground. Or, simply listening to a comrade relate for the tenth time how proud he is of his grandson who had just graduated from Marine Basic.

Yes, I live in a small town, and relationships are strong. But VFW makes everywhere a "small town". If you served in Vietnam you might think about joining your local VFW. If your service in the Coast Guard was more general, consider the American Legion. Hey, be proud of your service and help others help veterans!

VA and VETERANS HEALTH CARE

Other than the usual VA home loan and exercising my education benefits through the GI Bill, all of my contact with the Veterans Administration has taken place after 2010 when I was diagnosed with Parkinson's disease. The VA recognizes PD as a "presumptive" outcome from exposure to Agent Orange.

What this means is that, if as a serviceman you served in an area where you may have been exposed to agent orange, then subsequent development of Parkinson's Disease is presumed to be service related and in line of duty.

This was not the case for the hundreds/thousands of Vietnam vets who in the early going had to individually "prove" a relationship between their ailments and Agent Orange. There are now numerous health conditions that are "presumed" to be connected with Agent Orange and other environmental conditions in war zones from Vietnam to the Middle East. These include heart conditions, cancers, neurological ailments, diabetes, mental issues, etc. While these "presumptive" rulings make application and award of disability and health benefits easier, the process is still involved and time consuming.

Let me say at the outset, that I have always been treated with warmth, dignity, and concern in all my contacts with the Veteran Health Care System and my VA advocates at all levels. Furthermore, having shared waiting rooms, cafeterias, lobbies, and lines with other veterans of all ages, colors, and socioeconomic levels, I can say I have never seen anyone treated other than myself.

For sure, the health system is taxed to keep up and serve all who need care, but the folks whom I have met from receptionist to specialist don't seem to let this affect the care they provide to the individual patient.

The process of "getting into the system" is one in which wait times and "red" tape can be frustrating. As to that, I cannot overemphasize my advice to work with an advocate. An experienced and savvy "advocate" to guide you through the process and fill out and submit documents in your behalf is invaluable. In my case, I used advocates assigned to each County through the Oregon State Department of Veterans Affairs. Other states may have similar systems. If not, then advocates can be found through veteran's organizations and programs promoting veterans rights.

A good advocate knows the lingo, machinations, and key people in the claims process. They can also "size" up immediate needs the veteran may have and "fast track" action to the extent the system will allow.

Perhaps one of the biggest hurdles is not with the system but with your own psyche. Someone who's programmed response to adversity is "NO EXCUSE SIR!" may find themselves reluctant to accept health benefits." Perhaps your economic situation makes this an acceptable stance. For

those of us whose primary income comes through social security and retirement benefits, a different attitude may prevail.

Another perspective comes from my older brother who retired from the Army as an O-6 many years ago. He contracted prostate cancer many years ago and underwent surgery to remove his prostate. He is financially set from other retirements and investments yet also accepts disability compensation from the VA. When the subject of VA disability benefits comes up in conversation, he remarks that his VA stipend is little recompense for thirty years of wearing Depends.

I am of course happy to discuss my experiences with classmates on a one-to-one basis.

SUPPORT GROUPS

Today there seem to be support groups for everything. Name a human illness, emotional hurdle, or personal aspiration and you can usually find a support group intended to assist people struggling with that issue. Why is this the case? Simply because support groups can be tremendously helpful.

In fact, you are a member of at least one support group. It's the support group we joined in the Summer of 1961. Faced with significant physical and emotional challenges as we first stepped across the threshold of Chase Hall, we eagerly accepted the benefits of the Class of 1965 Support Group. Today we remain members of that vital group.

I also belong to the Wallowa County Parkinson's Disease Support Group. In fact, Linda and I helped found the Group and continue to serve as Co-Facilitators. The size of our group waxes and wanes as new people join and others move on. Currently we have over a dozen active members. Similar groups in urban areas could have 50 to 100 members. Our group meets monthly, except during the summer months. A typical meeting (which is very informal) might include a short program dealing with an aspect of PD. This program may be presented by a member with special knowledge or a visiting professional.

Then comes a minimal "business" discussion which usually deals only with housekeeping items or future activities. Lastly, we grab up refreshment and move into fellowship and personal "sharing". While larger groups go through a similar agenda, the "sharing" portion might be conducted in smaller subgroups.

The major reasons members participate and the benefits they receive are several:

1. PD is a chronic disease that is complicated and progressive. Not everyone presents the same symptoms or is in the same stage of impairment. Therefore, a patient has a great "thirst" for information on their particular situation and possible futures.
2. Treatments for PD are numerous and varied ranging from medications and therapies to life style alternatives. Medical knowledge and research changes constantly and patients want to be up to date on current happenings with the disease.
3. Finally; patients need to understand they are "not alone" in their experiences and struggle. Progressive impairment is a frustrating situation and being able to voice that frustration and receive empathy is very helpful.

Our local support group is organized under the umbrella of a statewide, non-profit called Parkinson's Resources of Oregon (PRO). They provide training, scientific information and offer special seminars and activities as well. While these activities are more accessible to groups in Oregon's urban areas, nonetheless, we find PRO's sponsorship extremely helpful. As with most major diseases and life issues there are also national foundations and organizations helping

inform people on Parkinson's Disease and supporting research efforts both financially and through advocacy.

While the information above deals with my particular experience, by extrapolation, it is applicable to support groups in general. If you are facing personal struggles, whether they involve grief, lose, addiction, illness, or family crisis, I urge you to explore the possibility that there is a support group out there that can help you deal with your needs.

Please feel free to contact me for more information or advice on your specific questions.