

Military equips Barth for life of public service

Written by Brenda Johnson Brandt

“Everything I know today came from the military,” said Terry Barth, who served two tours in Vietnam, had a 20-year career in the Marines and is now active with the local veterans’ organizations and club.

“I wouldn’t trade my military experience for anything,” Barth added.

He acknowledges that he grew up while in the military. He learned lessons and got an education.

Barth said he believes every single kid in America should spend two to three years in active duty in order to grow up and to appreciate the freedom in America.

Barth was a technician—a very good one, at that. During his first Nam tour in 1965-66, his job was to keep the planes flying. He has a great deal of respect for those who saw and are seeing front-line duty, as that was not part of his responsibility.

As Veterans Day nears, the country is reminded that it’s a time to honor all veterans and current military personnel, no matter what their specific contribution to the U.S. military.

Barth was a young 18-year-old when he entered basic training in 1962



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Barth admits he basically had never been off the farm when he graduated from high school in Holyoke in 1962 and entered the U.S. Marines.

He laughs when he recalls his recruiting officer coming out the day after his senior prom and he was hanging out in Lee Struckmeyer's basement.

The recruiter went out to Barth's home, where the family dog tore his britches. Barth said he did feel sorry for the guy. He signed up for the 120-day delay program with an aviation guarantee contract.

Barth ended up in the electronics field. After boot camp and infantry, he took 36 weeks of electronics training, including 20 weeks of avionics training in Memphis, Tenn., and 16 weeks of aviation electrician training in Jacksonville, Fla.

As a private in the Marine Corps at Jacksonville, Barth said he was living on beans and hambone, making \$95 a month.

He then took a 16-week aviation electrician class, where he came out first in the class. He made his private first class stripes and earned lance corporal rank meritoriously as he came out of school.

Assigned to VMFA-115, a fighter attack squadron, from June of 1964 to June of 1965, Barth and crew received intensive training to go to Vietnam.

At that time, Barth said they flew their planes to Atsugi, Japan. They closed down Atsugi, then went to Iwakuni, Japan, before going into Da Nang, Vietnam, in October of 1965. The Marines shared an air base with the Air Force in Da Nang.

F4 Phantoms flew regular drills for three months until real combat started in January of 1966, according to Barth.

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As a technician, Barth just kept the planes flying in Vietnam. He said he carried a rifle for 13 months but wasn't allowed to have ammunition on his body.

Barth said he learned real fast that the planes were where it was safe. Off base, kids would put hand grenades on their trucks.

Barth was plenty satisfied to keep the planes flying. He credits his mechanical inclinations to his heritage of growing up on the farm.

In July of 1966, Barth's squadron returned to the states and he was assigned to a station operation and engineer squadron in Cherry Point, N.C.

His purpose there was to keep the World War II planes and search and air rescue helicopters running.

From 1967-68, Barth was a tactical data systems computer technician. He trained at the Marine Corps training base in Twentynine Palms, Calif., and was then assigned to the Marine Corps logistics base in Albany, Ga.

He said they supported eye-in-the-sky technology to give generals a picture of control aircraft in combat situations.

From 1970-71, Barth was senior maintenance manager for tactical data systems in New River, N.C. He had made E-7 gunnery sergeant rank by then.

Barth is quick to admit he wasn't a very good student in high school, but he applied himself in college and graduated cum laude from Pensacola Junior College in Pensacola, Fla., where he attended from 1971-73.

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He earned an associate degree in electrical and electronic engineering technology.

In 1973, Barth took an instructional course in San Diego, Calif., then was assigned to Twentynine Palms as a senior instructor for tactical data system computer technician courses for a year.

At that point, he was one of 200 accepted for limited duty office, based on his technical skills. Because they were temporary limited duty, they could be reverted back to enlisted status at any time.

As a result, he had to continue to apply for all enlisted promotions. So by the end of his service in 1982, Barth had attained E-8 or master sergeant rank and warrant officer ranks CWO1 and CWO2.

He was commissioned a second lieutenant in 1974.

As an electronics maintenance officer from 1974-75, Barth was with the 9th communication battalion in Camp Hansen, Okinawa.

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Barth's military service in the U.S. Coast Guard, where he served for 20 years, has equipped him with a strong foundation in public service. He has worked for the U.S. Coast Guard, the U.S. Navy, and the U.S. Marine Corps. He has also worked for the U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary, the U.S. Coast Guard Reserve, and the U.S. Coast Guard Civil Engineer Corps. He has been involved in numerous public service projects, including the U.S. Coast Guard's "Operation Sea Guard" and the U.S. Coast Guard's "Operation Sea Guard 2010".