

SENATE TAX COMMITTEE WRITTEN TESTIMONY:

PERSONAL TESTIMONIAL OF VETERAN RICK MILNER ( Olathe, Kansas)

SENT TO: Senate Tax Committee (Re: HB2036.)

January 11, 2024

TO: WHOM IT MAY CONCERN:

To my surprise, the above named Bill 2036, has passed the house with a vote of 123 to 1 . Miraculous! I understand that the last hurdle to cover would be for the Kansas Senate to approve same. As a Kansas Disabled Veteran I would like to present my testimony.

I've read many of your testimonials with arguments of the Bill's, constitutionality, along with various Counties describing the "hit" this Bill would be to their county coffers and I am not writing here to banter over these arguments. I am writing merely to remind our honorable legislators that, to date, disabled veterans have been pretty well forgotten by the state of Kansas. Recent recorded conversations within the Leavenworth County commission indicated that the description of a disabled veteran is none other than "disrespectful". In fact, one LV County commissioner described a disabled veteran, that suffered from sleep apnea, obtained a VA rating of 100%. It is obvious that this commissioner is simply uninformed.

I wish NOT to seek some "pity party" here..... but I would dispel such rhetoric and give you a minds-eye into the life of this aging combat veteran.

Circa 1964, I was a floundering college student that sat- out of school for a semester to simply "regroup". That was the wrong year to regroup..... Vietnam was in full swing, and there was an urgent demand for young soldiers. Thinking I'd like to delay my military obligation, I joined the National Guard to continue towards my college degree thereafter. I returned to night school and attended meeting every month. Several years transpired and I met and married my bride of 58 years.

Fast forward eleven months, my unit was called- up for active duty. After advanced infantry training, individual Guardsmen were placed in a pool of veterans available for Vietnam. Against my new bride's desire, I decided early on not burden my her with children, knowing I was headed for an unclear future.

In late 1968 I peered out of the window of a troop plane, waving goodbye to my beautiful new wife. She headed to her parent's unfinished basement for the duration, writing a letter EVERY day I was gone. Understand, mail is like GOLD to a soldier. I witnessed the suicides of two soldiers that missed "mail call".

I found myself in the Oakland military airport, and housed in an airplane hanger full of 5000 troops. A day later, I was flown shipped out and finding myself in Cam Ranh Bay , Vietnam. As the door opened, I was hit in the face with the sweltering smell of burning defecation. With tears in their eyes, I said goodbye to our airplane stewardesses. The tears were significant.....for what was to transpire.

First night in Vietnam, two of us were placed in a guard tower and told in emphatically not light up a cigarette. Disregarding these instructions, my tower mate lit up, to which I heard the crack of a firearm, and the ensuing round hitting my partner in the head. Blood and brain matter saturated my body.

Understand if you would, I always considered myself pretty tough, but I have to admit... I could not quit vomiting. I knew then that this was no football game, it was "serious shit."

The following day, orders arrived. Eighty of us were loaded onto a C 129, strapped to the floor and heading for parts unknown. 30 minutes later, our plane descended into Da Nang Vietnam, that was under rocket attack. The unpressurized cabin, making a drastic descent, caused many of the men to bleed out of their nose and ears. All of we "greenies" thought it was over. By the skill of the pilot and the grace of God, we made it. Once again, I'm thinking "this is not going to be good".

Two weeks in DaNang, I was ordered to perimeter guard duty, awaiting further orders. I was housed in a sandbag cloaked barrack, that was immediately hit by a evening barrage of Viet Cong rockets, killing two very "green" brothers. Another wake up call; my mind enveloped by confusion.

Two weeks later, permanent orders handed down. An Airborne Unit in Quang Tri, located on the DMZ, had suffered tremendous casualties, needing warm bodies. Chinook after Chinook, loaded us up and headed North, with no clue of our destination. In flight, with incoming rounds piercing the fuselage, the young Lieutenant screams, "sit on your flack jackets.!" Under fire, the twin bladed choppers dove into a sandbagged compound, quickly dumping all of us onto the "metal-clad" tarmac; 80 men scrambling for the bunker.

From that day forward, sleep days and patrol nights. Weekly firefights commonplace. Air assaults in and around Hill 937, commonly known as "Hamburger Hill". Continually fighting off leeches slithered under our sopping wet fatigues, avoiding buried bungee' sticks, venomous snakes and total fatigue. Continuous rain and sweat, 24 hours a day. Infrequently catching a moment of sleep, hunkered under a poncho, and confronting an exhausting, continuous fear of death. Village after village burned to the ground with few survivors. Mounting body counts required every day. Medivac choppers constantly in and out. Thunderous air strikes shacking the earth. All in all, a soldiers mind ....delirious with confusion. Then, sun faintly rises through the jungle while forlorn eyes peer to the sky as "freedom birds" streaked for THE WORLD. Every man dreaming of his trip home. For the believer and the NON-believer, .....Another prayer, then.... "move out."

With various injuries, I'm shipped to the DaNang hospital. A short stay there since more serious injuries arrived, hour after hour. From the hospital I was returned to the DaNang compound, awaiting further review. Being a "short timer" and a over-flowing hospital, orders were issued to ship me home to the Leavenworth Fort Hospital.

July of 69, I was returned home via commercial air transport. Arriving in Seattle, I'm greeted with a group of screaming young college kids, "Welcome home Baby Killers !! Holding back my aggression, I quickly slipped through the crowd. My mind is dizzy....."what the hell is going on in America?"

I had a day lay-over, and no cell phones in 69; with my wife having no idea I was heading home. I hastily headed for a Walmart, buying jeans and sweatshirt, and dumping my uniform in the trash. I was not going to be assaulted by these degenerates. Did they think I signed up for this voyage??

Landing into KCI, loaded up in a military van, and headed for the Leavenworth Fort Medical Center. Bags deposited at the Fort, and allowed to immediately board a VA Transport for home. Still vivid in my memory..... arriving at my wife's parent's home, her mouth falling open, I hugged the breath out of my beautiful wife. God, I was alive and home. Yet, I immediately fell into depression thinking of all the brothers I left behind.

July 4th was an untimely week to return home, with fireworks blasting all night long, I got NO sleep. But, I was home!! The following day, off to Sears to renew my auto insurance. Allstate Agent informs me they could not renew my policy....."I had not driven a car for six months and needed to wait for a month" before I could initiate a new policy. At that, the sales fellow will attest, I was fortunate not to be arrested for "assault". I have never spent a dime in Sears since then. As always, the returning soldier hears, "Thank you for your service!"

With serious, undiagnosed PTSD, hearing loss and eye site injuries, I petitioned my old college for re-admission. With the compassion and assistance, of THREE RETIRED MILITARY Professors, I was personally accompanied to graduation.

56 years later.... With numerous, successful business ventures, retaining my first and only soul mate, both of us raising two upstanding children, I have retired in relative comfort. I still suffer from "combat inflicted health issues", but at age 80, its simply nice to wake up every day.

SIDE BAR: Of all things last month, my daughter signs me up for "Kansas City Life Flight", wherein some 88 retired War Veterans (2- WWII, 2- Korean, 84 Vietnam) loaded up on a chartered jet, and headed to Washington, DC. Each Vet had a personal, volunteer chauffeur. Handshakes, hugs and memories, never stopped. Upon our return, hundreds of Kansas kids and citizens met us at KCI, screaming, "Welcome Home"!! Finally...finally.....

So, please understand, nearing the milestone of 80 years, we are fine. WE will survive without a property tax exemption, but SO many of my disabled brothers are NOT fine. They are hurting. Taxes have literally taken their homes. They are mostly unemployable and truly our Country's Unintended Consequences of War. It is NOT right. As a God Fearing State, we need to step to the plate and salute our Vets. HB 2306 will accomplish that end.

IN summary, I feel blessed to have the liberty stand here and glorify some 58,700 soldiers that have not been availed of that liberty. They have NOT the opportunity to be respected as a "disabled veterans". for the ones that survived, might we acknowledge the "forgotten, unintended, consequences of war"?

If you please, let us unite as a body that acknowledges the sacrifices of our State's Disabled Veterans?

Respectfully,

Rick Milner,

Combat Vietnam Veteran