

VIETNAM ERA VETERAN RICHARD LONG

By Richard Long

This writing becomes autobiographical. It's my story, short and not terribly exciting. When I graduated with an Associates Degree in Business and Accounting, I immediately became draft eligible. I had a low number so I chose to enlist in the Air Force. Basic training and Tech School were at Amarillo Air Force Base. Upon completion, I received my first orders—Eielson AFB, 25 miles into the tundra from Fairbanks, Alaska. I was devastated! When the fog cleared, I realized it wasn't Vietnam. It was, after all, 1967!

My duties for 18 months were to track flight crews for B-52 and KC-135 aircraft as they went temporary duty in and out of Vietnam. That job followed me to both of my next duty stations, Clinton-Sherman AFB, OK and KI Sawyer AFB, Marquette, MI.

It was in Alaska I ended up accidentally being AWOL! An office mate had a cousin that was the winter caretaker of Mt McKinley Lodge. He invited me to go with him to the closed hotel for the Christmas holiday. In 1967, one train each week went from Fairbanks to Anchorage and then back to Fairbanks—the hotel its only stop in each direction. We disembarked and were met by the entire winter community, about 20 people. We had great fun raiding the kitchen to find huge salad bowls to use as sleds! Long story short, we missed the train on its return to Fairbanks. Our host called in a bush pilot to rescue us. We slunk back into the office a day late. Thankfully, no one was any the wiser.

It has been an absolute joy to interview our Honored Veterans and write these stories for the last 26 months. The reminiscing has brought tears and laughter. There has been joy and education. And, I have seen dedication beyond expectations. The Sunflower Veteran population is truly a group of honorable men and women. I thank them all for this opportunity.