

Veteran Shares Memories of Loss

Iola Man Recalls Vietnam War.

By Holly Neumann

Ron Scott, of Iola, a veteran of the Vietnam War, recalls his time of service, the best friend that he lost there and what Memorial Day means to him.

“Being drafted was probably the one single event in my life that tempered my manhood,” said Scott. “That passage of time taught me to successfully deal with the many challenges I’ve encountered throughout my 73 years.”

When Scott arrived at boot camp, he realized that he needed to shape up.

“Boot camp mentally toughened me up,” he said. It taught me obedience, loyalty, teamwork and respect for leadership.”

Graduating with honors, Scott headed to Advanced Individual Training (AIT) to be trained as a Radio Operator and then waited to be shipped out to who knew where.

“The word came down, Red Alert,” he said. “I was 25, drafted and going to Vietnam.”

He recalls saying good-bye to his mother the day he flew out to the Processing Center.

“We had arrived early and talked about a lot of things, something we rarely did,” said Scott. “She was very upset over the fact that the government was sending her only child to fight, what in her mind, was an unpopular war.”

He went on to say that it was not that he didn’t believe in what the county was doing, it was that he wanted to make a difference.

“Very deep inside, I knew I couldn’t, he said. “Vietnam was one of the most plundered nations in history, no one has ever conquered the Vietnamese people, its invaders have been soundly defeated.”

Terrors of Battle

As he headed to Vietnam, he had nightmares of being stuck in the middle of a fire fight, trying desperately to get air support while every Vietcong was taking a bead on his position.

The signs and sound of fighting soon became reality.

“We woke up to mortar round explosions, small arms fire, machine guns and AK47s,” he said. “We didn’t know what was going on, except that all hell was breaking loose.”

Literally getting caught with their pants down, they scrambled out of their bunkers, then ran under cover to throw on some clothes.

"It was nuts," Scott Said. "I grabbed my gear, strapped on a bandolero ammunition carrier and jumped in an armored personnel carrier (PC). I wanted to get after the guy that messed up my dream date with Raquel Welch. As far as I was concerned, I was going to get him on the first fire fight."

According to Scott, it didn't take long before they started receiving thick fire, ricocheting off the PC and ammo boxes, with splinters of wood flying everywhere.

"it dawned on me that someone was actually trying to kill me," Scott said. "Me, Mr. Cool, voted best dressed and best looking senior year of high school."

Fear took over and Scott took cover down in a hole of the PC.

"My homie fired off a couple of bursts from his M-16 then dropped down. He was as frightened as I was, but he was doing something about it," Scott said. "He looked at me and said, 'I know you're scared, but man you got to do something besides just sitting down there, while it's all happening out here.'"

Scott knew he had to do his part.

"I fired off a quick burst from my M-16 and then dropped down again," he said. "Everything around me was happening at the speed of light. Hen my homie drooped again, he gave me a look I will never forget. It was like he knew we were both going to die."

When it was over, no one from his section had been lost.

"I never slept well in 'Nam, but from that point on, sleep was pretty much a stranger and still is to some degree," he said. "as the old saying goes, you never forget you first time."

Scott, came home from Vietnam with a Purple Heart and Air Medal in October 1968.

"I got spit at," he said. "I was called baby killer."

His homecoming was anything but welcoming.

Losing a close friend

Scott traveled to see his best friend Roland (Ron) Charles Hamilton.

"He had been in the Marine Corps for two years," Scott said. "I pleaded for him to not volunteer for 'Nam."

The two friends lost touch with each other, only Scott to find out later that his friend had left.

"he went and did it. He had too much to live for. Didn't he know how valuable he was?" said Scott. "The news terrified me, I was helpless to do anything."

Haunted by nightmares, Scott lived in fear something terrible would happen to his friend.

"He was playing a dangerous game with fate, said Scott. "My anxieties turned into anger."

To some degree, Scott did not want to know what was happening.

"I had just gone through it with all my buddies and did not want to feel those feelings again," he said. "I never wrote. I had an ongoing debate with myself, should I write, why should I write, He'll be OK, no he won't."

Hamilton was not OK. In fact, he lost his life in Vietnam.

"I got a telegram and even made a joke that it was probably my mom wanting to know if I was regularly brushing my teeth, he said. "It was from my mom all right, but the contents were lethal and it read like a letter bomb. Ron Hamilton killed in Vietnam. Come Home.

Scott told himself it must be a mistake.

"It was supposed to be me that died in 'Nam," he said. "with eyes tightly closed, fists clenched, I prayed to God to hear my prayers."

Unable to bury his personal grief along the side his friend, Scott never let go.

"I have never said good-bye," he said. "though my memories of him may be growing dim, nothing fogs the fondness that persists in my heart. I am getting older, but Ron will never have to say that. He will remain forever young, forever strong."

Scott still wakes up at night and asks his maker why he was spared.

"Will I ever know? The beautiful Wisconsin strong dark night answers, 'yes and the dawn is surely coming," said Scott. "I will continue to seek your face in the constellations of my dreams. See you then, brother warrior."

And so, as Memorial Day approaches, Scott reminds every one of the importance of paying tribute to those that fell in battle.

"We set a day aside to stay aware of those brave individuals. Their loyalty to this great country," said Scott. "These individuals were not pretenders of patriotism, for I feel they still stand eternal guard."

"the Memorials should always remain important to the public because of what it means," he continued. "These are the brave men and women who heeded their countries call and fought for what they believed in."

Scott, who is often seen kneeling at the base of the Memorial Wall at the Sheveland-Taylor Veterans Memorial park in Iola, prays that those that have lost their lives are at peace.

"They gave so much," he said. "They strived to keep our country strong, righteous and noble. There are none nobler than those that lay in the deepest sleep in the service to their country."

Photo 01:

Ron Scott kneels in front of one of the monuments at Sheveland-Taylor Veterans Memorial Park in Iola and says a prayer for those who have lost their lives while serving in the military. *Holly Neuman photo.*

Photo 02:

No caption