

Grady J. Stewart

December 26, 1931 ~ August 14, 2021 (age 89)



Services

A service summary is not available

The Life of Grady Stewart

I was dirt poor in childhood. When I was born in December 1931, my mother was only 15-barely grown herself. We moved almost every time the rent came due. This was in Texas. Sometimes I stayed with my paternal grandmother in Dallas, other times with my maternal grandfather in Houston.

I was in Houston when I quit school – in the fifth grade! My Mom made very little money, so I became skilled at breaking parking meters for change and stealing hubcaps. Eventually, I hitchhiked to El Paso. I got a job washing dishes at a barbeque place. The owner let me eat there and sleep in a room in the back.

One night, two policemen woke me up and took me to jail. I learned that my boss had an illegal gambling operation. They took me before a judge, who gave me a choice between the Army and jail. I told him I was only 15, but he said the Army will take you!

I called my mother in Houston and told her if she signed for me to go into the Army, I'd stay in touch and keep her informed about my whereabouts. She did, so that's how my military career began.

My basic training was at Fort Ord, in Monterey. I went to the education center. I took the equivalency exam for elementary grades and passed. Though I'd left school early, I was a reader! Once, I had a paper route in an office building. There was a bookstore on the ground floor. I'd go in the back and read the Zane Grey westerns and Tarzan books. I couldn't afford to buy them, but the store owners didn't bother me so I read and read.

After basic, I went to a six-week leadership class at Fort Knox. I was assigned to an Armored Engineer unit. However, I went for Airborne – jump school. The pay was almost \$55/month more than for Armored. Well, at Fort Benning, the jumpmaster was supposed to pit us down on a stream, but we landed on blacktop instead. Five people got broken legs that night. I broke both of mine.

So much for Airborne. I went to school and became an armor and artillery mechanic. I was stationed in occupied Japan. While there, I went to the education center again. This time, I got my high school equivalency. When war broke out in Korea, my unit was sent to the front, where Russian tanks tore ours up. One of my varied jobs was to keep the mechanisms that moved the gun turrets functioning. My first tour was 18 months. My unit lost over 160 people. I got three Purple Hearts. I didn't get one for frostbite – the injury that bothers me to this day.

Then, after time at Fort Hood and Fort Knox (where I was trained as a tank commander), I was sent back to Korea. I was busted while at Fort Hood. I was always a good worker, but paydays and bars and fights got me into trouble more than once. I also married while at Fort Hood. My wife and I had two daughters. I was gone most of the time though. Our marriage didn't last.

When my second tour was over, I wanted to go to Airborne again, but I couldn't because of a heart flutter. I ended up in Alaska, a sergeant in a recon unit. My unit was rotated to Fort Lewis, in Washington, and that was the best assignment I ever had. Washington is beautiful. Also, our recon unit was competent. We had a team that was capable of getting things done, which is a wonderful thing to be a part of.

By 1957, I'd been in the Army for 10 years. I had problems with my ears and my vision, so I wasn't eligible to be in a combat unit anymore. I re-enlisted and asked to go to language school. Once, again, I took a GED exam. I achieved the level of a college sophomore, and headed to Monterey, where I studied Vietnamese.

I graduated, and in January 1959, I went to Vietnam, one of 650 American personnel. We worked with Vietnamese units, in an office, reading and translating letters and documents. We wore civilian clothes. The clothes I brought from the states weren't appropriate for the steamy heat in Saigon. I went to a tailor shop, and that's where I met my wife-to-be.

Christina was Chinese. She was a member of a church, and her congregation walked from Guangzhou to Hong Kong to flee persecution by the incoming Communist regime. Her dad had died on this trek, and she was hit by Chinese artillery. Because of her injuries, she couldn't bear children.

I went back and forth. Back to Fort Hood, in and out of more trouble. To Hawaii, where I taught escape and evasion. Then back to Vietnam, and to Christina. She spoke Cantonese, a little Vietnamese, and studied English. I had English and Vietnamese and studied Cantonese.

On my third tour there, we married. We lived in Hue. I loved it there. I lived as a civilian. I worked for a colonel who valued my work as an interpreter, and was eventually promoted to an E7, which is a very hard grade to achieve. Back in the states, I worked at O'Hare airport in Chicago as an advisor for the Army Security Reserve. In 1970, I left the Army, after 23 years of service.

My post-Army Career took me all over the place. I was a civilian employee of the Air Force in San Antonio. I worked for the Air Force, in logistics, at Wright-Patterson AFB in Dayton, Ohio. I was a contract employee for the Israeli Air Force. I went to Israel many times. Christina and I both loved it there. We got to travel a lot. We saw Europe and went to Egypt.

On December 21, 2006, I lost Christina. My life began to change. My first wife's mother had always liked me, and she reunited me with my daughters. Their mom had married a Midwestern guy and moved with my girls, so they were settled in Wisconsin. When I began having problems, one of my daughters decided I'd need supervision. I lived with her in Eagle. Then I had a place in West Allis. However, now I'm here, where I get more constant care.

All my life, I was eager to advance my education. I took full advantage of the GI Bill. I studied business administration and psychology in Emporia, Kansas, and got my masters' degree right before my benefits were exhausted. My mother used to say I couldn't get him to go to school. Then, in the Army, no one could keep him away. Though I hadn't gone past fifth grade, I never quit reading and learning. With this device in my room that magnifies the printed page, I still read today.

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