



VETERANS
HERITAGE
PROJECT



SINCE YOU ASKED

ARIZONA VETERANS SHARE THEIR MEMORIES
VOLUME XIII

Since You Asked: Arizona Veterans Share Their Memories, Volume XIII
Conceived, edited, designed and published by
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Larry Bohlender

April 1966 - June 1987
United States, Thailand



Can't Take Family to the War Zone

An Interview with Larry Bohlender

By Kaylynn Wohl

Without conscious awareness of his interest in joining the service, Ohio native Larry Bohlender dedicated 21 years to a service that would change his life forever.

In November of 1965, Bohlender was 24 years old and working at a newspaper when his service was "desired" by the United States. In hopes of joining sooner than his time to be called, he enlisted in the Air Force in early 1966 where he was subject to a three month waiting period for training.

At that time, he also put in paperwork for officer's training school, but he went ahead with basic training at Amarillo Air Force Base, which is one of the many bases that no longer exists. Bohlender notes with slight exaggeration, "It had the distinction of being able to go from about a 60° temperature to a 25° temperature in two or three minutes." He was also married at the time when he finished training, and was thereafter quickly assigned to Suffolk County Air Force Base in Long Island, New York, which no longer exists. "You can't take family to the war zone," he said reminiscing about his longing for his wife.

In Long Island, "[he] worked in the public information office. I had earned a Bachelor of Science Degree in Journalism. Somehow I managed to keep that particular field in the service. Not everybody does," Bohlender says with a soft chuckle.

A year and a half after arriving at Suffolk County Air Force Base, he was sent to Officer's Training School in San Antonio, Texas. By the time he finished, he had already been through four ranks in the Air Force: Airman Basic, Airman Third Class, Airman Second Class, Airman First Class, Staff Sergeant, and Second Lieutenant. From there, Bohlender was assigned to what is now called Joint Base Lewis-McChord in the "lovely spot" of Tacoma, Washington. The first of his two daughters was born there.

Soon, he received orders to go to Southeast Asia. In June of 1969, he went to Korat Royal Thai Air Force Base located in Thailand. Instead of being in public information, he transitioned towards photography "in a small unit called 601st photo flight." This unit had two jobs, one being called Battle Damage Assessment (BDA).

Air
Force

Putting cameras in every flight that left the base, this team documented the planes dropping bombs and then assessed the bomb damage. Bohlender, however, was part of a team called Combat Documentation. His team of combat photographers sometimes went on flights, but their main objective was to find stories to build movies from.

They produced a story every four to five weeks due to their constant travel throughout Southeast Asia, even including spending time in Taiwan, which was formerly Nationalist China. Bohlender's job was to write the stories and run the team of about five photographers with both still cameras and movie cameras. "Excellent, excellent people," he says proudly. "The closeness in the teamwork that you have with people in the service is unlike any other. It's different from your family. Family is the people you love and your kin. These are friends who don't have to like you, but they do, and you become close to them. You look out for each other. That's one of the great things that I took from the service."

The stories Bohlender and his team worked on allowed them to travel and frequently leave the airbase in Thailand. "We'd end up in Bangkok and stay in the same hotel since we had all kinds of luggage. We almost always overnighted there, and then we'd take off to whatever place we were going to next. I was able to fly nine combat missions as a photographer. I actually flew 11, but I cheated on two that I wasn't supposed to be flying," he says laughing. "I hadn't taken my Jungle Survival School yet; I bribed the pilot to let me go."

He recalls from 1970 "one of the most interesting stories that we were able to do" involved the time when his team met an Air Force veteran still in the service from World War II, where he had flown missions over the bridge on the river Kwai in eastern Thailand, not too far from Burma border. This was significant because the 1957 WWII film, *The Bridge on the River Kwai*.

"We were able to get it setup so that he would fly over the bridge and we were on the ground. We were able to sync that to the movie which was our main reason for going to the bridge on the river Kwai," Bohlender recalls fondly. "I couldn't help but say 'Gee, I remember this part from the movie!'"

Bohlender notes his experience in Southeast Asia contrasts from those who served as Army Infantrymen down in the jungle of Vietnam. "I don't suspect it was quite as nice for them. It wasn't that the place we lived was so nice. It was the that the people of

Thailand were so welcoming and accepting."

Thailand is known as "the land of smiles." Bohlender completely supports this statement as the friendly locals made his experience so pleasant. He was even able to learn some "rudimentary Thai" to help converse with some of the locals at the airbase. A few of his greatest characteristics are his desire to be kind to everyone and his interest in making friends with people who are of a different culture. "It's amazing how far you can get with a smile," he says kindly.

In terms of communication during this time period, "It was different," he states. "We didn't know it was difficult back then." Two forms of communication included letters by mail or occasionally "we could make tapes which were reel-to-reel in those days."

International phone calls were difficult, short, and few. He recalls setting up a phone call in Bangkok to his wife back home. "It was about four to five minutes. It was a terrible connection, and people were waiting. But at least we could hear each other's voices. I think that was the only time that whole year I was able to talk to her. I did send letters though...perhaps not as often as I should have."

Recreational activities drastically differed between the Vietnam War and now, especially for those enlisted. They usually worked 12-hour days. Off duty, Bohlender recalled hanging out at their buildings called "hooches." Playing frisbee in the field was also an option, as well as listening to music, such as Johnny Cash, on a tape recorder. They spent many nights eating at the Officer's Club where country bands, usually from the Philippines, played nearly every night of the week. "We would also talk about... gettin' home. Those types of things," he says softly. "It was the same thing every night because there was no place to go; it was a routine."

His journey home when his tour ended was not routine, however. He was assigned a travel date for his flight home. He arrived several hours early at the airport in Bangkok and was offered an earlier flight on a military C141 aircraft, and hoped to get home sooner. The military flight terminated in Japan, however, and he found himself stuck at the same airbase three days later.

When he finally arrived at home, Bohlender reunited with his sorely-missed loved ones. "My first daughter was three months old when I left, and I hadn't seen her for a year. She didn't greet me all that great. It took a while to get her convinced why I was there. We tried to make up for what we had lost over

all that time.”

He was stationed at McClellan Air Force Base in California, another now-closed base. His younger daughter was born there. This was just three years before the war ended. Bohlender says, “There were a lot of protesters. They made their way to a highway crossing that most of us had to use to travel to work. They made sure that we were aware of what they thought of us.”

In 1972, Bohlender left active duty and returned to Ohio with his family. Joining the Air National Guard in Toledo helped him adjust to civilian life, and he served in that unit for the next 15 years.

At age 45, Bohlender retired from the guard with the rank of Major. He kept up with his interest in writing and spent several years teaching and advising the student newspaper for the Journalism Department at Northern Arizona University, Flagstaff. He later went to a southern California community college and taught there for six years. Then in 1993, Bohlender began teaching and advising the student newspaper at Glendale Community College in Arizona. Although Bohlender is now retired, 26 years later he still substitutes and stays involved with the newspaper. “I guess I must like it,” he says with warmth.



THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

April 4, 2013

Ms. Barbara Hatch
Carefree, Arizona

Dear Barbara:

This is just a quick note to thank you for your moving gift. Each day, I am moved and inspired by the generosity of the American people, and I appreciate your thoughtful gesture.

Thank you again for the gift. I wish you all the best.

Sincerely,

Senator John McCain

WASHINGTON, D.C. 20510

December 15, 2016

To Whom It May Concern,

I am writing on behalf of the Veterans Heritage Project (VHP) in support of their mission to *Connect Students with Veterans*.

The non-profit organization VHP has become a strong voice for veterans throughout Arizona. In their immersive learning program, hundreds of middle and high school students interview veterans every year, research history, and write & publish the veterans' experiences in their hardbound book, *Since You Asked*, for preservation in the military archives at the Library of Congress. Throughout the school year, VHP also brings first person historical accounts and lessons of personal responsibility, and appreciation for our service men and women to thousands of additional students through in-school oral history lectures from veteran partners.

VHP has built a strong reputation with the support of hundreds of volunteers, veteran and civic groups, local corporations, and others throughout AZ. They are the single largest contributor to the Library of Congress of veteran stories written by youth and published within 12 volumes of *Since You Asked*.

I am proud to support programs that develop an appreciation for our veterans, make history relevant to young people, build a sense of citizenship among youth, and encourage life-long learning to ensure we have informed and responsible future leaders.

Sincerely,

John McCain
United States Senator

JM/xmk



Office of the Chancellor

2411 W. 14th Street, Tempe, Arizona 85281 - 6942 • T 480.731.8000 • F 480.731.8120 • www.maricopa.edu

Arizona is home to 650,000 veterans, representing all branches of the military. The Maricopa Community Colleges proudly serve more than 10,000 of these veterans and their families. Utilizing a multi-faceted and unified approach, the Maricopa Community Colleges are committed to ensuring that there is a web of support to help them succeed in higher education.

We strive to bring together the right people, the right organizations, and the right student veteran voices, to help craft and develop local and state-wide efforts to support and encourage the improvement of services directed towards veterans.

With streamlined access to quality educational opportunities, diverse programming, strategic planning, along with holistic student support, the ten colleges are working together to assist veterans in achieving their academic, career, and personal goals.

We pride ourselves on being responsive to our students and take great pride in listening to their voices. Through the Veterans Heritage Project, student veterans are able to share their challenges and triumphs with others who will venture down their same educational paths.

The experiences the veterans share are transformative and heartfelt. Please join us in our effort to demonstrate how Maricopa Community Colleges are dedicated to serving those who serve.

Gratefully,

Maria Harper-Marinick, Ph.D.
Chancellor, Maricopa Community Colleges

Chandler-Gilbert | Estrella Mountain | Gateway | Glendale | Maricopa Corporate College | Mesa
Paradise Valley | Phoenix | Rio Salado | Scottsdale | South Mountain



DOUGLAS A. DUCEY
GOVERNOR

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WANDA A. WRIGHT
DIRECTOR

January 13, 2017

Veterans Heritage Project Barbara Hatch
PO Box 1297
Carefree, AZ 85377-1297

Dear Barbara,

Plutarch, a great historian once said, "The mind is not a vessel to be filled, but a fire to be kindled." Veterans Heritage Project has been a catalyst for that fire. The Veteran Heritage Project relies on student volunteers to record the stories of veterans that will ultimately be sent to The Library of Congress. As an educator, seeing the excitement of the students when they prepare for the first meeting with "their" veteran gives me so much hope that these next generations respect the history that created these United States. The relationships established between student and veteran is long-lasting and mutually beneficial. It is an inspiring mission. Telling my story to my student has given me immense pride. Reflecting on my 30-year career in the Air Force and the Arizona Air National Guard and the good work the military accomplished while I served brought a smile to my face on several occasions during the interview. I was reminded that I was part of the defense of our great nation. I am humbled and grateful to have had that experience.

It is time for women who are veterans to tell their story. Each of those who have served, deserve the right to be acknowledged as veterans and should tell about their experiences, good or bad.

There are too many untold stories of heroic acts by women who don't believe they have anything of value to share. Now, as the Director of the Arizona Department of Veterans' Services, I challenge that and ask that all those who served talk about what they have done. These stories enrich our heritage and should not be lost!

I applaud the efforts of the Veterans Heritage Project and appreciate all it has done to keep the story telling going. Keep going and keep growing!

Sincerely,

Wanda A. Wright
Director

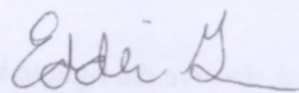
February 8, 2017

Dear Veterans Heritage Project Contributors and Community,

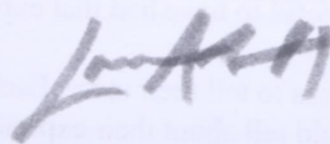
The people who comprise Maricopa Community Colleges are a diverse set of individuals that reflect the best and brightest hopes of our nation. Our colleges are the site where anyone can come to focus on achieving their American Dream. The beauty of our system is that we are available to everyone; however, we are particularly proud of our service to our veterans, the men and women who secure our ability to accomplish our mission for the broader community.

Partnering with the Veterans Heritage Project, our district has had the distinct honor of capturing the variety of stories of those who have served our nation in uniform and who are involved in our Maricopa community, embarking on their next steps of service toward our country, as civilian citizens. By exploring—and celebrating—each of these stories, this project is working to preserve the foundational values of our country's heritage, sharing the lessons of the veterans we salute and furthering the goal of giving access to knowledge to everyone within our community.

Sincerely,



Eddie Genna
Associate Vice Chancellor, Public Affairs



Lawrence Robinson
Director, Center for Civic Participation

Ten colleges and two skill centers dedicated to student success.

Chandler-Gilbert | Estrella Mountain | GateWay | Glendale | Mesa | Paradise Valley | Phoenix
Rio Salado | Scottsdale | South Mountain | Maricopa Skill Center | SouthWest Skill Center

Serve, Preserve, Honor

January 31, 2017

Barbara J. Hatch
Executive Program Director Veterans Heritage Project
P.O. Box 22058 Phoenix, AZ 85028

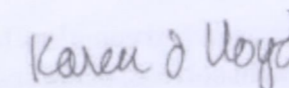
Dear Ms. Hatch,

On behalf of The Library of Congress Veterans History Project, I congratulate you, the participating students and your board of directors for collecting another outstanding group of interviews from Arizona veterans. As the newly-appointed director of the Veterans History Project and a retired Army Colonel, I was especially pleased to learn that women veterans were the primary focus of your efforts this year. You are to be commended for your dedication and hard work.

With more than 101,000 collections in this ever-growing archive, the Library of Congress Veterans History Project has grown to become the nation's largest oral history repository. We could not have accomplished this important milestone without the annual participation of the Veterans Heritage Project. You continue to shine as a stalwart example of volunteerism, and for that we are very grateful.

Congratulations on your newest editions of *Since You Asked*. Thank you for your continued participation. Keep up the good work!

Sincerely,



Karen D. Lloyd
Director





January 24, 2017

Jennifer Lane, Sherry Adams, & Contributing Authors
VHP Publishing School, Maricopa Community Colleges Edition
Glendale Community College
6000 W. Olive Avenue
Glendale, Arizona 85302

Dear Jennifer, Sherry, and Contributing Authors:

On behalf of Veterans Heritage Project and our Board of Directors, congratulations on publishing the first Maricopa Community Colleges Edition of *Since You Asked: Arizona Veterans Share Their Memories* and contributing to a record-breaking year! Your incredible dedication to engaging students and veterans in VHP's educational enrichment program resulted in 30% more veterans sharing their stories of service this year. What an outstanding achievement and tribute to those who have served our nation! Because of your hard work, today there are more than 1,500 oral histories preserved in 13 Volumes of *Since You Asked* and available for future generations in the Library of Congress!

Students, you may not yet fully realize the impact your actions make in the life of your veterans, or even the impact your VHP experiences will make in your future. Even though you may feel a powerful connection with your veteran today, or an understanding of what it means to serve others, to persevere, or to strive to do your best, the lessons from your veterans will continue to resonate with you throughout the rest of your lives. What a gift! Your veterans are proud of you and take comfort in the knowledge that your generation appreciates and will uphold the values for which they fought.

Chapter Advisors, we so appreciate your passion and countless hours in leading your students! Because of you, students are able to engage in design, problem solving, decision-making, and investigative activities. Not only do students strengthen their academic skills, they become excited about what they are learning and deepen the soft skills of interpersonal communication, confidence, and respect for others that is required for effective leadership.

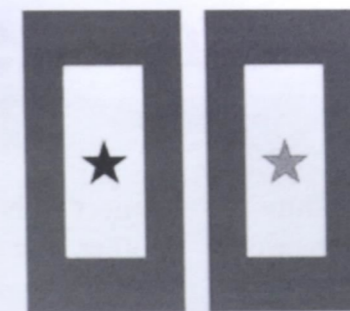
Thank you all for making a positive and lasting difference in each other's lives, and for making possible our mission to *Connect Students with Veterans in order to Honor Veterans, Preserve American's Heritage and Develop Future Leaders.*

In partnership,

Michelle DiMuro, CFRE
Executive Director

Cc: Dr. Teresa Leyba Ruiz, Interim President, Glendale Community College
Dr. Maria Harper-Marinick, Chancellor, Maricopa Community College District
Dr. Paul Dale, President, Paradise Valley Community College

Veterans Heritage Project - PO Box 22058 - Phoenix, AZ 85028 - 1-877-vhp-PROJ (847-7765) - www.veteransheritage.org
A 501 (c)(3) non-profit since 2009



A GROUP NO ONE WANTS TO JOIN

I am a Gold Star mother. I have been introduced, before, with a pride in the person's voice as if I did something really great to achieve this title, this gold star. I want you to know that I did not do anything great. I did, though, have an amazing son, Sgt. Michael A. Marzano, USMC, who believed in this country so much that he made the ultimate sacrifice which, in turn, made me a Gold Star mother. When he joined the Marines in 1999, I became a Blue Star mother. If you are like me way back then, and asking yourself, just what is a Blue Star mother, here is the history.

*During World War II, the **Blue Star Mothers of America, Inc.** organization was formed in the United States to provide support for mothers who had sons or daughters in active service in the war. The name came from the custom of families of servicemen hanging a banner called a Service Flag in a window of their homes.*

Of course, the odds are that whenever you send someone into war, there are going to be those who do not come home safe and sound. That turns Blue Stars into Gold Stars. Please understand that no Blue Star wants to be a Gold Star. In fact, they don't know what to say, because the reality is that they can also become one. I did not know what a Gold Star was until I became one after receiving "the knock on the door."

Michael truly loved the flag, our country, and his Marines. He wanted to keep the bad guys "over there" so he volunteered to go to Iraq in 2005. Two months after arriving as a warrior, he was caught in an ambush at a hospital while trying to help doctors, nurses, and patients held by insurgents. On Mothers Day 2005, I received my knock on the door—and the title of Gold Star. Once you receive "the knock," alerting you to the loss of your child, a gold star is placed on top of the blue.

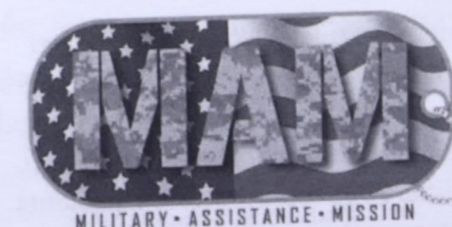
Sadly, you can't revert back. A new journey begins. How a mom, dad, or family deals with the loss of their hero is personal. I chose to pull up my Marine mom bootstraps and support the fellow brothers and sisters in uniform that my son loved. We now have an organization bearing his initials: MAM. Military Assistance Mission (MAM) provides financial and morale aid to active duty service members, their families, and our wounded. Michael would like that. He made me a Gold Star, and now I am trying to make him proud of me.

They say, and it is true, that the greatest casualty is to be forgotten. I think no greater words are spoken. With the writing of remembrances of our veterans, we keep alive what should never be forgotten. A first-hand sacrifice must be shared in order for those left behind to heal. Veterans Heritage Project's *Since You Asked* program is writing history books. I am grateful this project exists and continues to educate and remember those who donned the uniform.

Michael was a force bigger than life. He won't be forgotten, and neither will the deserving men and women whose stories you will read in this book.

Enjoy, and remember...Freedom is Not Free.

With Patriotism,
Michael's Gold Star mom,
Margy Bons



MARICOPA COUNTY COMMUNITY COLLEGES
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JUL 20 2017

