

30 DAYS OF HONOR ★ *A Salute to Local Vets*

Top secret work

Veteran Bob Nikolay decoded secure messages during the Vietnam War

DAN RICHTER
FOR GANNETT CENTRAL WISCONSIN MEDIA

MARSHFIELD — Bob Nikolay was 23 years old, working along with his dad and brother on the family farm near Marshfield, when he was drafted into the United States Army.

Nikolay went on to serve in Saigon in the Vietnam War until he was discharged two years later.

Recently, Nikolay, 74, talked about his time in the Army, his civilian life since and the Never Forgotten Honor Flight he hopes to take in the near future.

Q: What did you do in the service and where were you stationed?

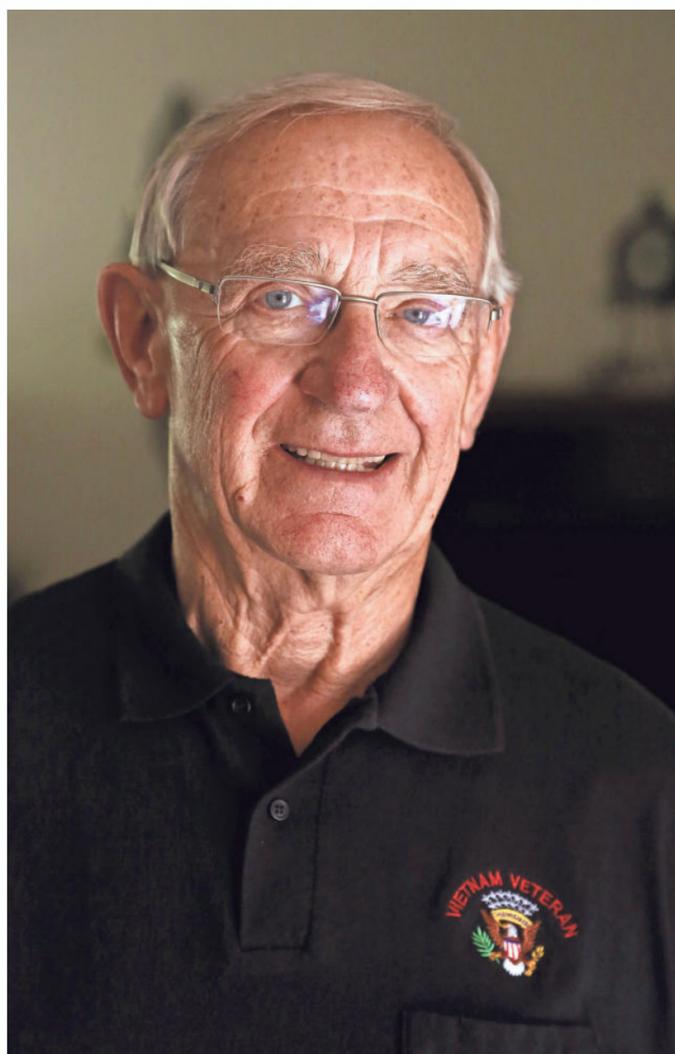
A: I was stationed in Saigon and was a crypto material specialist. We'd get cards containing secure messages and then decode them in our office. Then we'd distribute the message to others in Vietnam. Each unit got their own cards and the cards were top secret, containing classified information.

Q: What is your most enduring memory from your time in the service?

A: One memory I have is of Christmas Eve 1964. I was in Vietnam and the hotel across the street from where I was staying blew up. Luckily, they didn't get our hotel. It was the first Christmas I spent away from home, and in those days there wasn't communication like there is today. There were some Catholic churches around where I was staying so I went to church, but being that I was the only 6' 2" blond guy in the place, I definitely stood out.

Q: What do you most want people to know about the conflict in which you served?

A: When I first got into the Army I had to look on a globe to see where Vietnam even was. We flew over on a four-prop Army plane and came back on a commercial jet. I was fortunate that I got to fly both ways. What really hurt me the most was all the protestors there were when we got off the base in San Francisco. My father was in World War I and I had a brother serve in Korea, so I



DAN YOUNG/GANNETT CENTRAL WISCONSIN MEDIA
U.S. Army veteran Bob Nikolay helped decode classified material when he served in the Vietnam War.

was just doing my duty like they did.

Q: Tell us about your life after the service and how your time in the military affected your civilian life.

A: After I left the service my brother and me bought the family

farm near Marshfield. I went to tech school and learned blueprint reading. Later on, I started working for a guy in construction and two years later I bought him out. The company is called Nikolay Transport Co. and I've been doing that ever since. We haul sand and

ABOUT BOB NIKOLAY

Age: 74
Residence: Marshfield
Conflict involved in: Vietnam War
Military branch: United States Army
Years of service: 1963 to 1965
Rank upon discharge: E4 Cryptologic Material Specialist



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U.S. Army veteran Bob Nikolay as he served in Vietnam.

gravel, do demolition, excavating, that sort of thing.

Q: What do you hope going on an Honor Flight trip will do for you and why are you looking forward to it?

A: About 10 years ago, my wife and I went out to D.C. and saw it all, but I'd like to go back again. Seeing all the names on the memorial wall, it's just devastating to me that they had to die for naught. Sometimes the only person you can talk to about it is with someone who's been in the service, and even then they might not want to talk about it. Sometimes distant memories are best.



A flight to never forget

The Central Wisconsin chapter of Never Forgotten Honor Flight celebrates its fifth anniversary this spring. Since April 2010, the Honor Flight program has taken 1,828 veterans of World War II, Korea and Vietnam and 1,106 guardians from Central Wisconsin Airport to Washington, D.C., to view the memorials built in honor of their service.

30 Days of Honor is a project of Gannett Central Wisconsin Media to profile veterans who have taken an Honor Flight, or are scheduled, and to encourage more veterans to do so. Profiles will appear each day April 26 through Memorial Day.

Veterans may apply for a free Honor Flight (or loved ones may apply for them) by filling out an application. The only qualification for a veteran to take an Honor Flight is to have served in any branch of the U.S. military during the periods of World War II, the Korean War or Vietnam War. Veterans do not have to have been in combat. The applications and more information are available at <http://www.neverforgottenhonorflight.org>

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