

AWAY FOR CHRISTMAS

Local Veterans share their stories of being overseas during the Christmas season.



Ronald J. Howell

173rd Airborne Brigade, 3rd Battalion, 12-24-1970 - My unit operated inside Cambodia. The government never knew we were there the

Day, they attacked with heavy mortars and RPGS. The battle lasted for three hours. We called in an Artillery Gun Ship. I lost two men and had six wounded men including me. We counted real bodies of over 32 Northern Vietnamese Army men and women dead. We didn't wait for the Brass to show up. We went and blew up the caves with ammo, weapons, food, medical supplies to high heaven that morning. Then we celebrated Christmas.

- **Ron "RJ" Howell**

Christmas Day, 1987 - We met Bob Hope at the Persian Gulf. Lee Greenwood sang, "God Bless the USA" to us. There wasn't a dry eye in the house. Barbara Eden was there and so was Tony Stevens.

- **Roy Fraizer**

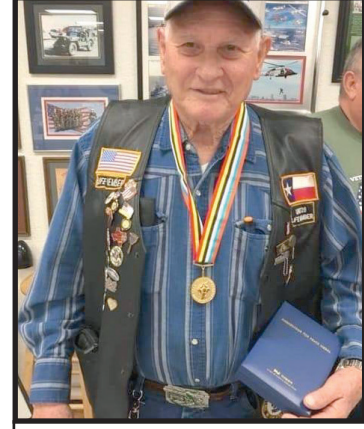
Joined the Army Artullery at age 23 in El Paso, Texas, on Spetember 21, 1954. I was on a ship to Korea during the Christmas Season. Several of the men were pulled from the ship in Anchorage, Alaska to help with artillery weapons manufacturing. My wife joined me in Alaska where we lived on base. We spent two Christmases in Alaska. Discharged on September 19, 1956, Ft. Lewis, Washington.

- **E.L. Barton "Bart"**

9th Marines, Dec. 1971 - Camp Schwab, Okinawa. Commander mustered the unit out of barracks, and had us muster at the air field. We boarded C.H.- 46's and flown to Hamby Airfield, disembarked and marched to Camp Foster. We were entertained for a couple of hours with the

USO Bob Hope Show returning from Vietnam. Helo'd back to Camp Schwab.

- **Dennis Boyd**



Charlie Martin

Christmas time, Korea - In Korea, at Christmas, we'd either get a turkey or ham dinner delivered. Well,

the train that was bringing all the food had come through. It was all robbed. We didn't know who did it. We had bologna, instead. That was much better than rice.

- **Charlie Martin**

Vietnam, at age 19, a wife back home in Pampa. There were no festivities - no lights, no make shift tree, no gifts. I was in a place of eminent danger, just hoping for the best. My gift was making it back home alive.

- **Jim Duvall**

whole year. My platoon operated on the Ho Chi Minh trail, but this time we were only 10 miles inside of Cambodia.

We were with another platoon from 1st Battalion. This platoon had never been in Cambodia before and the LT. was very nervous. We found a large stock of ammo, weapons, and a large cave system and we were going to blow it up. We were told there was a cease fire for 18:00 on Christmas Eve to 18:00 on Christmas Day. Choppers brought hot food, mail, and drinks for Christmas Eve dinner. If the Northern Vietnamese Army didn't know we were there, they did now.

At around 21:00 hours, we were really enjoying ourselves when, out of the night, the Northern Vietnamese Army started playing Christmas music. This got our attention. We could see with our eyes before that the Northern Vietnamese Army were maneuvering around us for an attack.

At first, the LT. wouldn't believe it, as we were told of the cease fire they agreed to. But after I told him to prepare for an attack and

he saw that my men where getting ready.

He did the same to prepare.

The music played all night and they wished us a very Merry Christmas.

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As we celebrate the birth of our Savior, we're filled with gratitude for all of the blessings He has bestowed upon us. We're honored to be a part of this community and to celebrate this special time of year with all of you. We hope the spirit of this holy season fills your heart with enough peace, love and contentment to last all year.

From our family to yours, Merry Christmas!

Thank you for being such an important part of our year.

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Amazing Grace

Amazing grace, How sweet the sound
That saved a wretch like me.
I once was lost, but now I am found,
Was blind, but now I see.

'Twas grace that taught my heart to fear,
And grace my fears relieved.
How precious did that grace appear
The hour I first believed.

Through many dangers, toils and snares
I have already come,
'Tis grace has brought me safe thus far
And grace will lead me home.

The Lord has promised good to me
His word my hope secures;
He will my shield and portion be,
As long as life endures.

Yea, when this flesh and heart shall fail,
And mortal life shall cease
I shall possess within the veil,
A life of joy and peace.

When we've been there ten thousand
years
Bright shining as the sun,
We've no less days to sing God's praise
Than when we've first begun. John Newton

Merry Christmas!

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December 2003, Iraq War - I was born and raised in Pampa. I graduated from Christian school. I joined the military after 9/11. I did three years in active duty military.

My basic training unit was the first basic training unit that was activated after 9/11 happened. I went to basic training on October 31st, almost seven weeks after the attack. I was stationed at Fort Hood. We were deployed to Iraq in 2003. My total deployment time was 13 months. The first infantry division went into Iraq first in 2003. We went to Iraq right after they did.

The way we got deployed was odd. We got our deployment orders and that was it. We didn't know where we were going, we just knew that we would deploy. We took all of our equipment and loaded it up on the train. What ended up happening was that the war in Iraq started and all of our equipment was gone. We sat at Fort Hood for a month without any equipment, trying to figure out what was going on and when we were actually going to deploy. We had no idea. We assumed we were going to Iraq because we were watching the news.

As time progressed, we just kept thinking that we were going to Iraq. Finally, we got orders to go to Iraq. A week later, we were on the plane. What we found out later was, due to the politics, they were trying to get us to go to Turkey. They wanted us to land in Turkey and go south into Iraq. They were trying to do that, have us go south into Iraq and the first infantry division go in north from Kuwait. We were going to clear the country from both top and bottom. They couldn't make it work. They finally sent us to Kuwait and go through Baghdad since the first infantry had cleared the way.

We set up station in Crete and that's where we stayed for deployment. My particular deployment at Christmas was kind of weird. We started December 1st in what was called, Operation Red Dawn. It was a 30 day mission. Our mission was to catch Saddam Hussein. The mission went 24 hours a day, seven days a week. We were typically running 20 hour days on that mission. On December 13th, we caught Saddam Hussein.

For us, we worked our tails off for 13 days in December. On that day, we actually caught him. After that, we kinda had a break. From the 13th to the end of the year, we took it easy.

For Christmas, it was weird because it was not typical Christmas weather. Of course, you're in the desert which has a warmer climate. It's one of those things where you look at the calendar and realize it's almost Christmas. Then you go back to work and do stuff and have that same realization again. You don't even recognize that the holiday is there.

We had people sending letters and packages which really meant a lot to us. We had a lot of stuff from

people we didn't even know. Of course, this is eight to ten months in a new country. The war was still fresh and this Christmas was after the war in Iraq. There were a lot of people sending stuff to the soldiers. A lot of businesses would send their merchandise to us. That was pretty cool.

It would make it feel like Christmas to us. We had Christmas trees and the guys wives would send them decorations and stuff so we'd decorate the trees. It was to help bring Christmas to us while deployed.

I remember someone sent us egg nog. We couldn't have alcohol over there. In the evening, we would sit around playing cards while drinking egg nog. It made it feel a little more like Christmas.

We had a battalion when we were stationed in Crete, Our battalion commander had made a Christmas tree mural on one of the walls. Anybody who got Christmas cards and wanted to share them could hang them on the wall. We got a lot of Christmas cards from all over the country from people we didn't even know. Anytime someone got a card, they would take it and put it on the mural. By the end of the season, that tree was covered in cards.

Christmas felt different. Growing up, Christmas was a big deal in my family. I didn't realize it until recently but being deployed changed my thoughts on Christmas. When you join the military and get deployed, you become a brotherhood. We made our own Christmas there.

For me, the abundance of people who took the time to send us stuff overseas was surprising. People we didn't even know and who didn't know us would send us stuff. Anytime anyone thinks of someone other than themselves, it's meaningful, especially to the person on the receiving end of it. That is what I am most thankful for, the people who would take the time to do selfless acts.

- AJ Taylor, Combat Engineer, 12 Bravo

Age 21, Christmas 1965 - Onboard USS *Enterprise* (The world's first nuclear-powered aircraft carrier. As of 2012, the U.S. Navy's longest-serving combat vessel, and third oldest commissioned vessel after USS *Constitution* and USS *Pueblo*. Inactive since December 2012 with official decommissioning on 3 February 2017) in the South China Sea up and down the coast of Vietnam. Bob Hope was scheduled to entertain the troops that Christmas, but like many other days the rainy weather would not allow transport of the celebrity to the ship. My day was spent, as any other day, doing my assignment, assembling bombs.

Christmas-1966 - Coast of Vietnam, Onboard USS *Enterprise* - Weather permitted actresses Diane McBain and Tippi Hedren to come aboard for the servicemen. Most of the entertainers spent their time with the officers chatting it up. I was able to come up top to watch them awhile, but later returned to my duty, loading bombs.

I asked my family to send brownies or cookies. They mailed them a month early and they arrived a month late. When I opened the box, expecting a delicious treat, there was green growing fungus on my delayed gift. Disappointed.

25 Comrades, mostly pilots, paid the ultimate sacrifice in those 2 years that I was on the USS *Enterprise*.

- Johnny Achord



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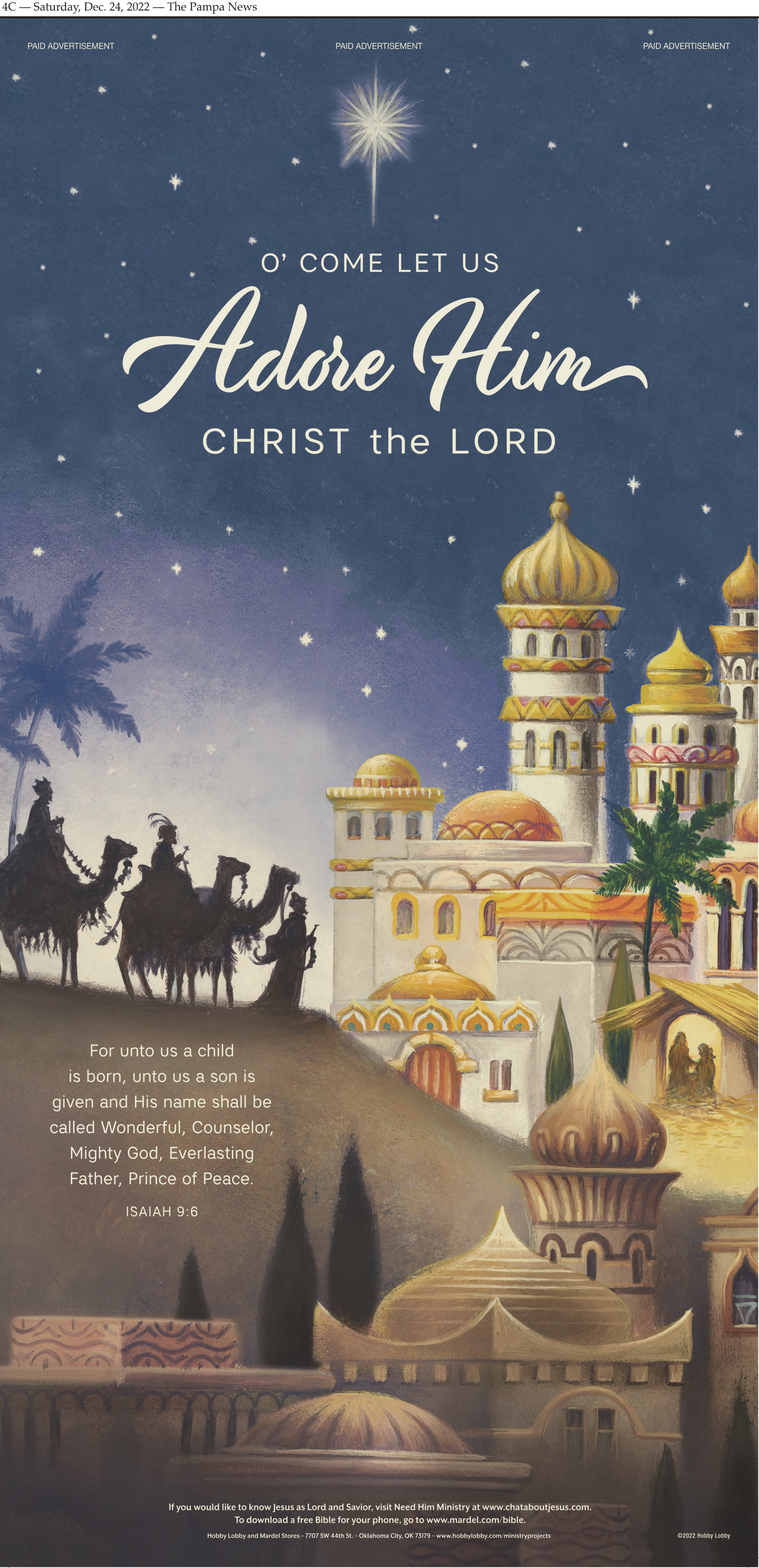
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CHRIST the LORD



For unto us a child
is born, unto us a son is
given and His name shall be
called Wonderful, Counselor,
Mighty God, Everlasting
Father, Prince of Peace.

ISAIAH 9:6

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