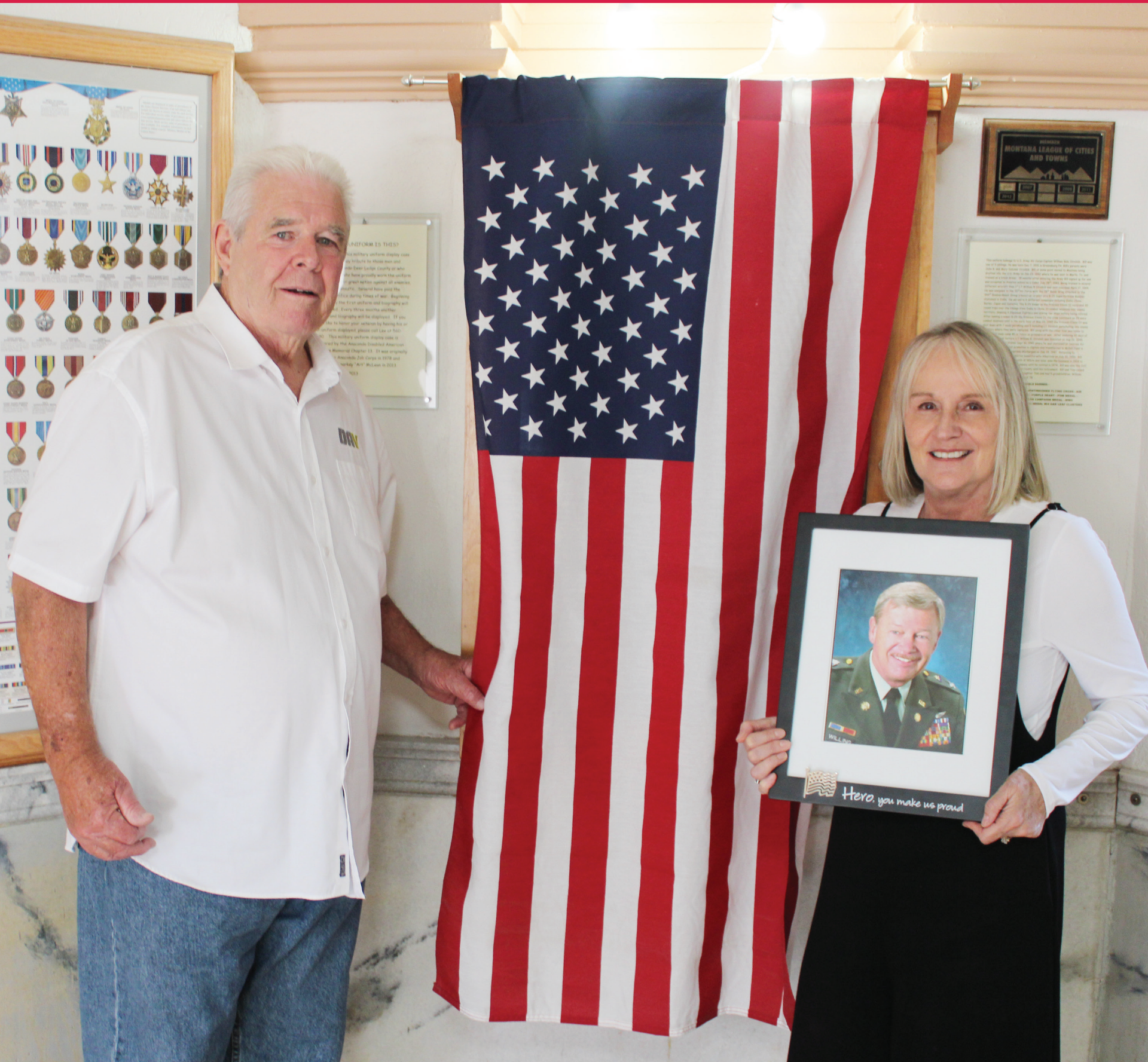


Smelter City Seniors

VOLUME XVI, NUMBER 4

A QUARTERLY PUBLICATION PRODUCED BY THE ANACONDA LEADER

OCTOBER 2025



HONORING A
HERO

page 2

VIETNAM
VETERANS IN THEIR
OWN WORDS:

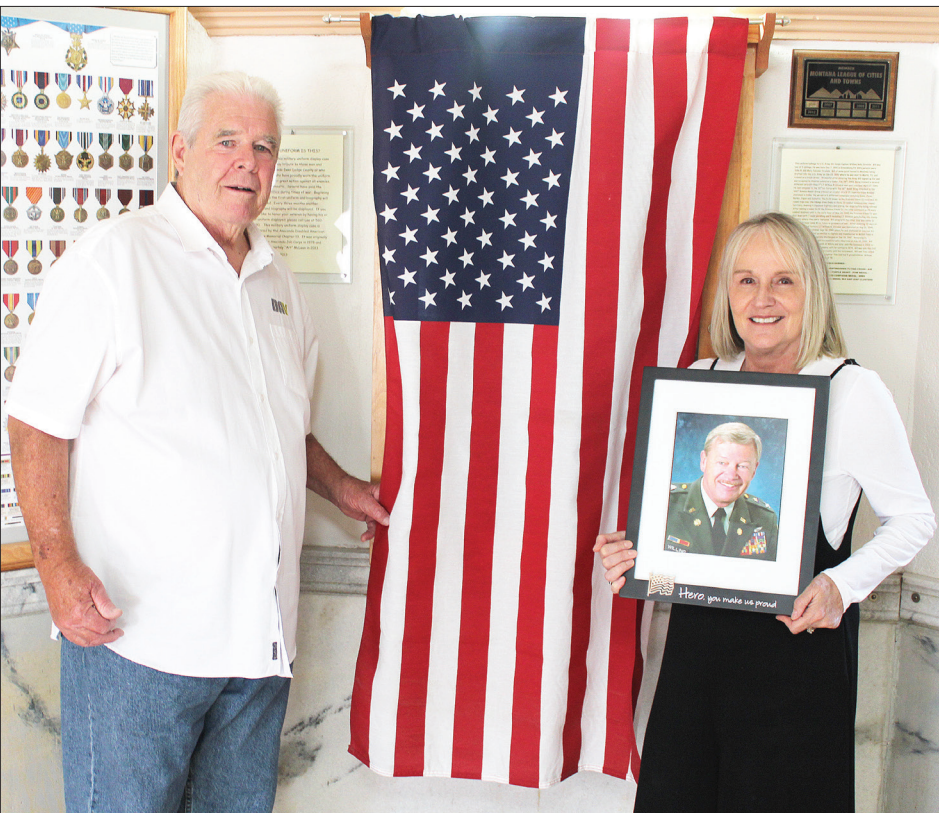
Bill Willing
Paul Beausoleil
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Memorial

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The Anaconda
Leader

Honoring a Hero: The Uniform Tribute is returning to Anaconda for the final time



Lee Burt, left, and Nonnie Willing stand in front of the Uniform Tribute at the county courthouse in Anaconda, where the uniform of Willing's late husband, Col. William "Bill" Willing, will go on display. Leader photo: James S. Rosien

Uniform of the late Col. William "Bill" Willing, Montana's highest decorated Guardsman for Army and Air, to go on display at the Courthouse with a ceremony Nov. 7 at 4 p.m.

BY JAMES S. ROSIEN
EDITOR

In the first floor of the Anaconda-Deer Lodge County Courthouse, just after you go down those few steps and go past the first door on the right, just before you reach the corner to turn toward the County Attorney's Offices and Justice Court, there's a display case with a chart next to it showing all the medals that can be awarded to a member of the United States Armed Forces.

Installed by the Disabled American Veterans (DAV) chapter that up until a few years ago had been active in Anaconda but has since merged with Butte's, this is the Uniform Tribute display that for close a decade had been the scene of the popular Uniform Tribute Ceremonies where often-living but sometimes deceased veterans from Anaconda, along with their families, would be honored with recognition for their

service to their country by having their uniforms put on display. The ceremonies include reading their service record, the medals they earned, and essentially tell their stories. But as Lee Burt, past DAV commander in Anaconda and founder of the Uniform Tribute, always made clear, the veterans know their stories, they know what they did, so the tributes are for their families who very often do not know, and I would add to that the public who read the veterans' stories posted with each tribute, who otherwise almost certainly wouldn't know.

It's been several years now since the last ceremony was held, but Burt is bringing it back one last time, and he couldn't have made a better choice for the final tribute, though for this veteran it truly will be for posterity as he sadly departed for the Post Everlasting less than two months ago: the late Col. William

See UNIFORM on page 3

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The Decorations and Awards of the U.S. Armed Forces display is part of the Uniform Tribute at the courthouse, showing what the veterans chosen for the tribute had earned during their service. Leader photo: James S. Rosien



Nonnie Willing looks at a photo of her husband, who passed away in August. His uniform will go on display at the Anaconda-Deer Lodge Courthouse on Friday, Nov. 7 with the ceremony set for 4 p.m. Leader photo: James S. Rosien

UNIFORM from Page 2

“Bill” Willing, the highest-decorated Guardsman in the history of Montana for both Army and Air, veteran of over 500 combat missions as a helicopter pilot in Vietnam, and after his service ended he continued to serve his fellow veterans, his country and state, through the VA.

Willing’s story has been told in a feature article on him for this publication last year, and more importantly it’s being told in his own words in this edition via Anaconda Junior/Senior High School students who conducted interviews with him before he passed away, along with other Vietnam War veterans from Anaconda – Paul Beausoleil, Jeff Frank, John Aspholm, Pat Tracy, Gerry Berry and Mickie Nazer, the latter of whom spoke on the Vietnam Veterans Memorial at Kennedy Common – in order to produce a magazine for the veterans and their families, “In Their Words: A youth tribute to Vietnam veterans.”

It is with our tremendous gratitude to the students – each of whom has a byline for their contributions – and to their teachers Erin Hansen and Megan Casey, Principal Erik Swanson and Vice Principal Dakota Norris, and to the veterans themselves, that we are able to bring those stories “In Their Words” to our readers in this

very special edition of Smelter City Seniors. Without them it would not have been possible. Thank you.

But most importantly of all, Willing’s story will be told at the Uniform Tribute Ceremony on Friday, Nov. 7 at 4 p.m. at the ADLC Courthouse, where before the uniform is unveiled Burt will talk about for Willing in a single day during the war.

“You can’t explain the life of Bill Willing in one page. You can explain a day in his life,” Burt said. “The main thing about the uniform display is we’re proud of Bill, and the display shows what each medal he earned is for.”

Willing’s uniform will be the 29th and final one displayed at the tribute. His widow, Nonnie Willing, said she’s very honored that his uniform has been chosen for the final tribute, and how honored her husband would be as well.

“I know he came to some of the uniform displays, and he had a lot of respect for the men and women who served,” she said. “He was involved in everything, and he always wanted to help his fellow veterans.”

Now, on to the veterans and their stories, as told to AJSHS students for “In Their Words,” starting with the late Col. Willing.



Before he passed away, Col. William “Bill” Willing talked with students from Anaconda Junior/Senior High School about his experiences in the Vietnam War for a magazine they published about veterans of that war. Photo by Grace Galle.

In his own words: William ‘Bill’ Willing

BY TEAGUE CROMWELL,
GRACE GALLE AND LONDON
MOSES
AJSHS STUDENTS

“Dear son, got your grades, time to join the Army.”

This was the message Colonel Bill Willing would receive while on a worldwide venture. He thought to himself, “Dad, there’s a war going on!”

Little did Bill know he would go on 512 combat missions as a gunship pilot in the Vietnam War. Bill would go through the hardships of war firsthand, which caused him to advocate strongly against it.

On these 512 combat missions, he was shot down a total of five times.

In an interview at the Hearst Free Library, Bill put it simply, “We took a lot of bullet holes.”

When asked about the camaraderie with his fellow

soldiers, Bill described it as “unbreakable; we were brothers, we were family.”

Bill’s bond with his fellow soldiers was so tightly knit, as he mentioned, “We just fought to save each other and to get home to our families.”

When visiting the Wall of Death in Washington D.C., he compellingly said, “I can put my name on spots where mine should have been.”

The war in our country’s eyes was fought to prevent the spread of communism, but in Bill’s eyes, “We were only there to save American lives.”

When asked about the traumas of combat, Bill bravely told horrific stories that openly illustrated the reality of war.

“People shot at you,” he said.

In just two months in Vietnam, 57 of 160 aircraft would be shot

See BILL on page 4

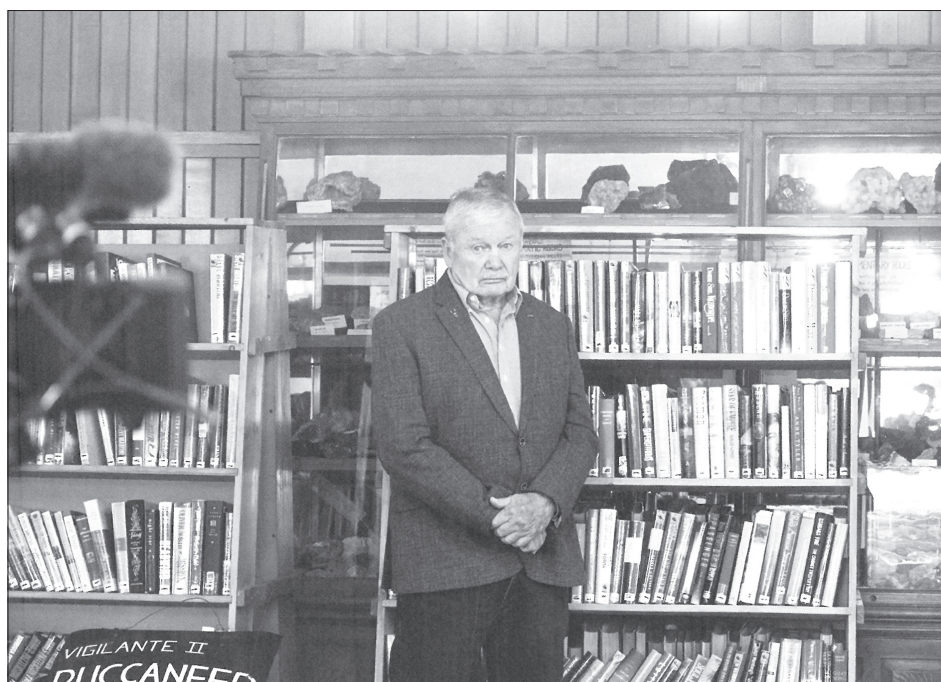
BILL from Page 3

down in his unit. The high chance of being taken out of the sky was one of many shocking experiences that Vietnam helicopter pilots went through.

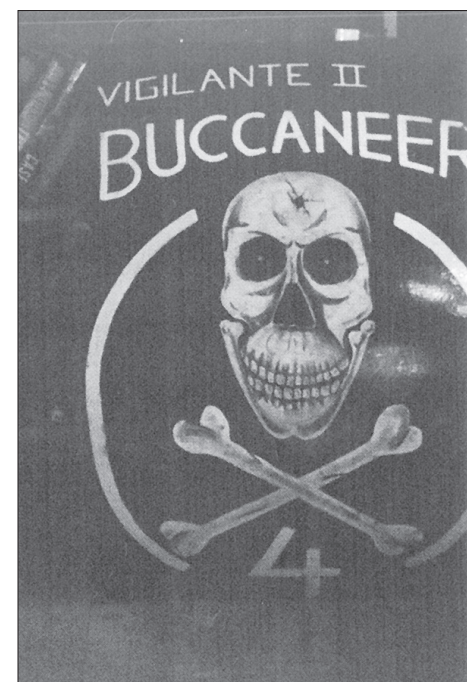
Most operations for pilots were along the Ho Chi Minh Trail or on the "Fence" which was the border of Vietnam and Cambodia.

While flying under planes along this vital location, they would get covered in the dangerous herbicide, Agent Orange. Pilots had to pick up downed airmen and dead bodies, which ended up filling the helicopter.

While not directly in combat, Bill and his comrades would spend time at the camp using nicotine and alcohol, some getting drunk every night in order to self-medicate. It is important to note that this was not the decision of many of the soldiers, as in training camp, the sergeants would call out, "One smokes, you all smoke..." -if you weren't the one dropping the cigarette butts,



Left: Col. Willing stands near a bookcase at Hearst Free Library where he and other Vietnam veterans were interviewed by AJSHS students. Right: The insignia of his helicopter, Vigilante II Buccaneer, is pictured. Photos by Grace Galle.



you were the one picking up everyone else's.

There were four cigarettes provided in every meal to help "take the edge off of combat," he said.

Still, war shakes soldiers to the core, and Willing and

his comrades came back from Vietnam as individuals without support.

The war left many, including Bill, with health complications.

"Two things killed us in Vietnam: Agent Orange and PTSD. Some never mentally came back from Vietnam. The war was wrong; old men sent the young to die," he said.

Vietnam would define some soldiers for the rest of their lives. Willing went on to spend

38 years in the Army. He made many charitable donations to orphanages in Kon Tum, Vietnam.

Willing greatly opposes war and advocates for peace.

"I would never want another human going to war," he said.

Bill believes that war should be negated by sitting down and talking along with making friends rather than enemies.

"Learn and ask questions so history doesn't repeat itself," he said.



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In his own words: Paul Beausoleil

BY BRODY GALLE, LANDEN KRIESEL, AVERIE NIELSEN AND JOHANNAH UTZ
AJSHS STUDENTS

During the war, Paul Beausoleil was stationed near areas along the Quang Tri River.

"The ground reminded me of a bloodbath bath because of the deep brown soil," Beausoleil said during a recent interview.

After graduating from Anaconda High School in 1965, Beausoleil went to San Diego for basic training. He spent twelve weeks there. He soon enlisted in Vietnam in June of 1966.

Beausoleil served as a corporal in the Marines while in Vietnam and later retired as a sergeant. He reminisces very fondly on his deployment and says he "doesn't regret anything."

One memory, in particular, has stayed with him over the years. He recalled a young Vietnamese girl



In Their Words

A youth tribute to Vietnam veterans

named "Gung." She was five years old. He described her as innocent, noting her ingenuity.

He must have stood out to Gung's grandmother as well. She requested that Paul adopt Gung and take her with him back to America, saving her from war-torn Vietnam. His deployment



Top left: Paul Beausoleil is pictured on the front cover of the magazine "In Their Words: A youth tribute to Vietnam veterans" produced by Anaconda Junior/Senior High School students. Above: Beausoleil is interviewed by students for the article about him. Photos by Grace Galle.

See Paul on page 6

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Paul Beausoleil shared photos of his time in Vietnam for the article in the Anaconda Junior/Senior High School-produced magazine, "In Their Words."

PAUL from Page 5

and young age - he was only 19 - held him back. Six decades later, Paul often thinks of Gung as a representation of what could have been. He dreams that she became a successful businesswoman, as he saw much ingenuity in her. She and other Vietnamese children would polish old ration cans and turn them into mirrors. He spent three months in her area while he was on patrol, with the war leaving only a photograph and fuzzy memories.

Beausoleil came home in July of 1967. After returning, he then spent another three years in the U.S. Marine Corps.

"War isn't just being in the trenches," Paul stated. He often

looked at the good in his life, stabilizing the people around him. When his mother wrote to him worried, he replied back with a photo letting her know, "We was just sitting around eating sandwiches." Always, Paul clung to hope, memories of family holidays, and images of home. "It's always Christmas and it's always home," that gets soldiers through, he said.

After Vietnam, Paul spent time on a ship named the USS Bon Homme. He set sail to Korea on this ship but never beached. When asked about daily life on a warship, Beausoleil stated, "It's everything but a city," explaining how the ship had many services a normal town

would, but it still wasn't home. "The ship was almost normal until you entered the flight deck."

Despite the distance from home, he looks back fondly on his service.

Smelter City Seniors

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Jeff Frank is interviewed by AJSHS students about his experiences in the Vietnam War. Photo by Grace Galle.

In his own words: Jeff Frank

BY HAYDEN LUNCEFORD,
TREYTON PATRICK, JAELYN
ZEREN AND ZACH BLODNICK
AJSHS STUDENTS

The most important moments in a person's life usually stand out in memories. For Jeff Frank, though, the moment that defined his future isn't one he can recall at all. He was a soldier in Vietnam, and the conversation was with a chaplain.

"I told him what happened," said Frank, who was a lieutenant in the U.S. Army Air Corps. "He talked to me for say, 15 minutes, and it was one of the most important talks that I ever got and I can't remember a word of it."

He credits this moment as the reason that he does not have post-traumatic stress related to the war. However, his other memories—good and bad—remain vivid, and he readily shares them with trademark humor.

After his talk with the chaplain, Jeff wishes he knew what he said so he could help the fellow soldiers who suffered from PTSD, because this conversation about what had happened on Jan. 3, 1969 cleared his mind.

Frank was serving as a convoy commander for the 88th Transportation Company, following in his jeep en route from Qui Nhon to An Khe, when the enemy ambushed his convoy.

His actions that day would later earn him the Bronze Star Medal with "V" device.

Frank was awarded for his heroism and personal bravery. According to the Department of Army Headquarters, Frank ordered his driver to enter the kill zone, where the Jeep was hit by a B-40 rocket. Frank said that soldiers knew that if they heard gunshots, they were safe. He knew he was hit because he didn't hear the explosion.

When Jeff gathered himself, he realized that his driver and his gunner were severely wounded. Despite being injured, he regrouped and was able to drag his men to safety in a nearby ditch on the side of the road. After he got them to the ditch, he realized he was the only one not severely wounded, only having a little bit of shrapnel in his legs and his arms, so he started shooting into the tall grass to

See JEFF on page 9

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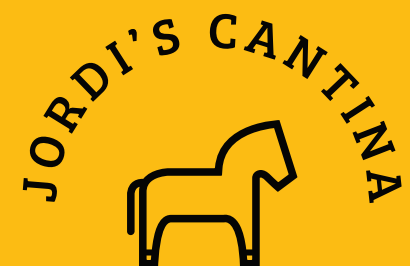
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Jeff Frank smiles during his interview with the students. Photo by Grace Galle.

JEFF from Page 7

create noise, making it seem like there were more men there than just him, trying to force the enemy to retreat from this attack.

When the Medevac came, he declined to board, telling his men: "I've got to clean this mess up. I'm still in command," he said. Afterwards, a soldier asked him, "Wasn't that your Jeep that just got drug by?"

When Frank replied yes, the soldier remarked, "And you're still living."

"I guess so," Frank said, laughing as he told the story.

According to the document from the Department of the Army headquarters, Frank's leadership and bravery in that incident were critical in successfully stopping the attack. Despite the constant barrage of enemy gunfire, he maintained his position and did not fall back.

Frank arrived at the hospital

and received the medical care he needed and ended up getting the news that his two men had passed. It started bothering Frank that these two men were killed because he ordered them into the kill zone, but Frank said, "I ordered myself too."

Frank's injuries weren't bad enough to have to stay at the hospital and when he was leaving the hospital to go back to the company, there was a chaplain that had caught his attention.

He happened to be a Catholic and it happened to be a Catholic Chaplain. After going in, he started talking to someone, which happened to be the best thing Frank had done. This talk about what had happened in the attack cleared his mind.

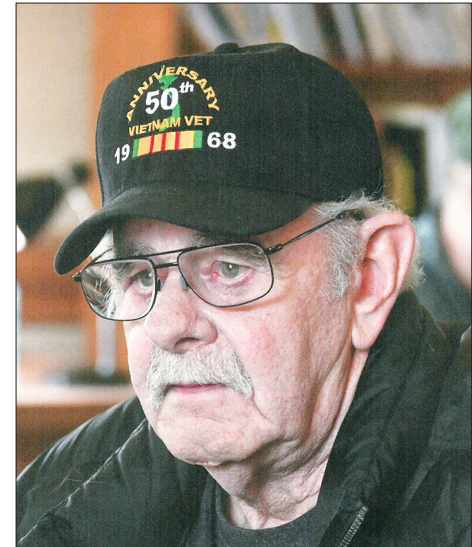
"I just wish I knew what he said, I could've probably helped other guys that suffered from PTSD," he said.

In his own words: John Aspholm

BY GAVIN BROWNING,
TYSON O'DONNELL, JADE
MOSES AND RACHEL LOOMIS
AJSHS STUDENTS

When he wasn't fearing mortar attacks in Vietnam, John Aspholm spent his days repairing helicopters.

"They wouldn't have flown without him," his wife Audrey recalled in a recent interview alongside her husband. Aspholm was called a "hangar rat," which meant repairing damaged helicopters that had been hit by fire from small arms. Aspholm volunteered for the military draft in July of 1967 and was sent to Fort Lewis, Washington, for basic training. He signed a year-long extension to his hitch in exchange for a promise to be taught welding. He joined the 765th Transportation Battalion in Vung Tau, Vietnam.



John Aspholm is pictured during his interview with students for "In Their Words." Photo by Grace Galle.

John was stationed in Vinh Long, a prime target for the Viet Cong, which meant guard duty. Long shifts in hot and humid weather are stationed in guard towers and bunkers overlooking

See JOHN on page 10



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JOHN from Page 9

the perimeter of the air base. The monotonous shifts were broken by gunfire twice, facing two ground attacks head-on. Shadows danced through the thick jungle brush, the dark of night cut by illumination flares dropped by helicopters.

"When the sun went down, there was no telling what could happen," he said. "You didn't know what or where the road was. We'd do our best to get out of there as quickly as possible; there was no safe place out there."

Much of his work entailed welding airframes and replacing damaged chin bubbles. He recalled on one occasion welding weapon mounts to helicopters, "We couldn't put any U.S. Army tags on them because they were flying into Cambodia, and we weren't supposed to be there."

There was plenty of work to go around, but there was also friendship. He recalled pals including John Chaves, who he talked to so much that they ran out of things to discuss,

leaving weather as the only topic remaining. There was also Flash, who earned his nickname by always being the first one in the bunkers when enemy mortars fell onto the base.

While there was group cohesion, there were also cliques. There were the "juicers" – or the beer drinkers, and the "heads" – or the potheads. John recalled that he once his replacement for the guard shift was so high that John had to take an extra nine-hour shift, making for a long 18 hours straight.

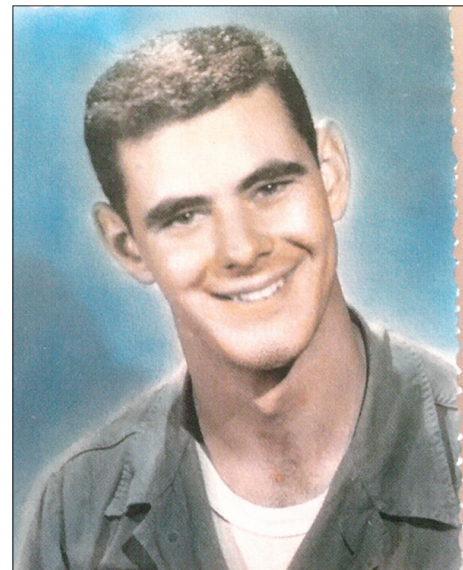
After the war, John met his wife Audrey. They had been classmates but didn't really get acquainted until his return.

Their love story was remarkable. Audrey said they never really wrote to each other but knew that the night they saw each other after he returned that he was going to be the one she married. After John returned from his time in Germany, he called Audrey while she was in St. Ignatius, teaching English, to

pick him up. He then spent three weeks in a motel and married his wife. They moved back to Anaconda and had a daughter named Rachel and a son named John.

Now Rachel lives in Anaconda, with her husband and daughter. John lives in Paris, France, with his wife and two sons.

John Aspholm provided a photo for the magazine article about him from his time in the Army during Vietnam.



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In his own words: Pat Tracy

BY REMINGTON BUSSARD,
LORENZO MCCARTHY,
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AJSHS STUDENTS

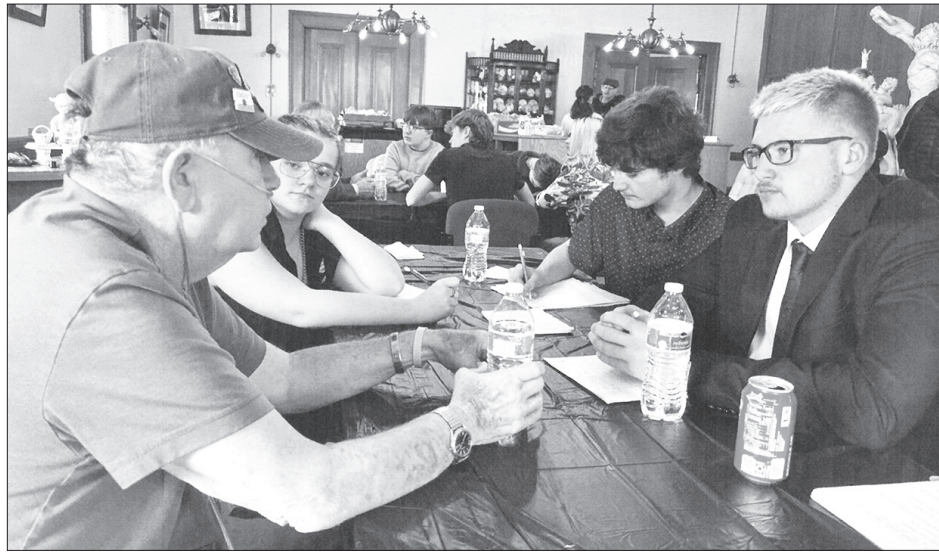
Pat Tracy, a 25th Division Reconnaissance and Intelligence Officer, had arrived in Vietnam on July 21, 1968.

Stepping off the plane, Tracy instantly found himself in paradise. Lavishly green forests were warmed by a summer sun. However, that quickly changed when Tracy caught glimpses of life in Vietnam.

Technology was primitive. Cities were filthy. The water was brown; the air was muggy.

It was a jarring scene for a recent high school graduate. Upon receiving his draft notice, he enlisted with his friend Jerry Thomas.

He reflected on the Fall of Saigon as inevitable: "I knew it was going to happen sooner or later."



Pat Tracy is pictured during his interview with AJSHS students at the Hearst Free Library earlier this year. Photos by Grace Galle.

He described missions in which he and his team would clear an area, only to retreat and let the enemy take it back. The cycle would repeat a few weeks later. It led Tracy to believe that leadership was giving up more land than was necessary, which led to the Fall of Saigon.

All the while, Tracy made meaningful connections at war.

He initially trained at Fort Lewis

before he and Jerry Thomas were separately assigned; Tracy went to Arizona for reconnaissance and intelligence training.

During his missions in the 25th Division, he was tasked with finding Viet Cong camps with three Americans and three South Vietnamese troops, who he trusted with his life.

Tracy's missions involved exploring the jungle, sighting

enemy camps in six person groups. When they would find an enemy camp they would provide coordinates of where the camp was to their superiors.

Throughout their missions they were sometimes caught, but always rescued before being captured. They were rescued by helicopter pilots when needed. In between the

See PAT on page 13

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In his own words: Gerry Berry

BY SHEALEE NOVAK,
BRAYDEN VILLASENOR, RUBY
LATRAY AND JESSE JONES
AJSHS STUDENTS

“Tiger! Tiger! Tiger!”

Those were the three words that Captain Gerald (Gerry) Berry said as he piloted a CH-46 Sea Knight, nicknamed ‘Lady Ace,’ away from the U.S. Embassy in Vietnam.

It was 1975 and his 34th flight that day. On board were the U.S. Ambassador and Vietnamese refugees.

“There were people everywhere, waiting to get picked up,” Berry said in a video interview.

After seeing the number of people who were promised safe passage to the United States, Berry believed that the government had let them down and that more efforts should have been made to get people out.

“Once Saigon fell, it all felt like it was for nothing,” Berry said when

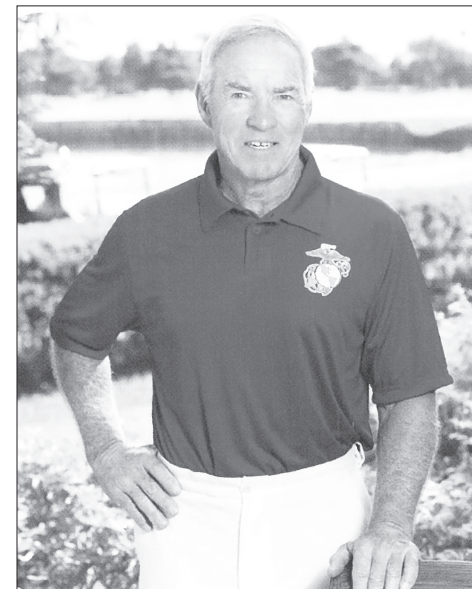


asked about the fall of the former Vietnamese capital.

Before Berry enrolled, he felt that Americans served a noble cause. However, after the Fall of Saigon, his perspective changed, and he realized that they didn’t do that much. Though Berry felt bitter once Saigon fell, he also felt that the U.S. gave the war back to South Vietnam

at the correct time and any more time spent in Vietnam would have been a waste.

Before the war, Berry graduated from Simpson College in 1968, knowing there was only a little time left before he was drafted into the war. He enlisted on his terms and took a test to join the U.S. Marines. He joined the Marines, following in



Gerry Berry provided photos for the magazine of his time during Vietnam and a portrait photo of himself wearing the Marine Corps emblem.

the footsteps of his father, who had served during World War II. After passing his test, he spotted a photo of a man in front of an F-4 Phantom Jet on his way out the door.

“Can I do that?” he asked the Marine officer. Berry took another test and, sure enough, he passed.

See GERRY on page 13



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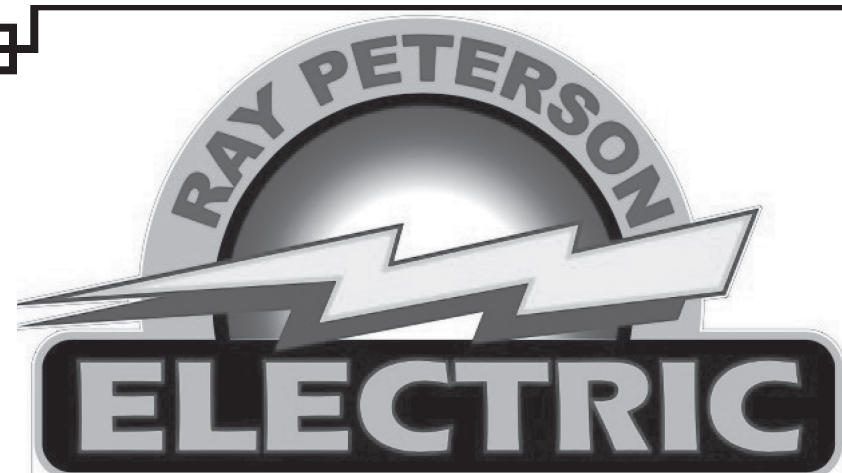
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PAT from Page 11

missions, he was at camp for a few weeks recovering.

"We didn't have time to be depressed," Tracy expressed after talking about camp.

While life eventually went on, some things remained difficult. Tracy was heavily impacted by the effects of Agent Orange, including chronic heart and lung problems.

"They said the government knew, but I don't want to believe they did," he said regarding the effects of the herbicide.

Additionally, Tracy has struggled

with PTSD, like many veterans. War experiences leave haunting memories.

The PTSD was made more challenging by the way soldiers were received at home by people who disagreed with the war and the soldiers who fought.

When Tracy came home, some members of the public were upset by the war and the soldiers who fought in it. Tracy was spit on and yelled at when he landed in Oakland on his way home.

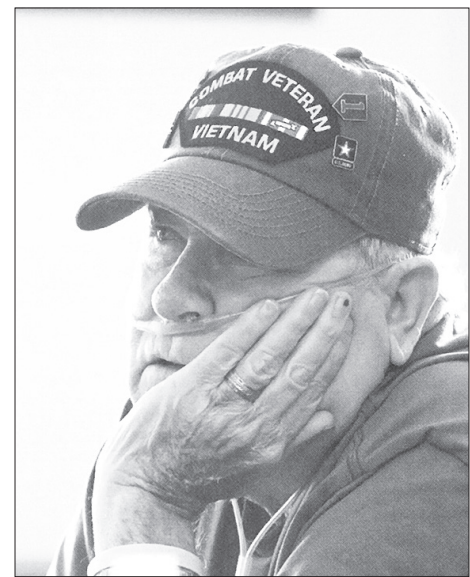
When he arrived home, his

family and friends treated him differently, avoiding the topic of war.

"Back home, my friends didn't know how to act around me," he said.

The combination of these two views on Vietnam veterans has, at times, complicated his personal and social lives.

In fact, Tracy said that the interview for this article was the first positive conversation he's had about the war since returning home.



Pat Tracy is pictured during his interview. Photo by Grace Galle.

GERRY from Page 12

Then, he spent eight months with the U.S. Army learning how to fly. By January 1969, he was in Vietnam flying helicopters.

He recalled that the vegetation "was pretty hard to work around, but I'd rather be flying above it than walking through it," Berry said, adding that the U.S. tried to remove it with poisonous Agent Orange. Fortunately, Berry's health wasn't affected by the herbicide.

War was a memorable experience that he wouldn't wish upon anyone, he said.

"War is diplomacy out of the barrel of a gun," he said, adding that his service showed him how war affects everyone and how propaganda can change opinions. While the U.S. went to Vietnam to fight the spread of communism, public support for the war decreased after the Tet Offensive.

"The Tet Offensive was a propaganda win for Vietnam but a loss for their military," he said.

After coming home from Vietnam, Berry continued to serve in the Marines. He served for 25 full years before retirement and even flew in the Gulf War before his retirement in 1993.

Throughout his time, he was awarded three Distinguished Flying Crosses, two Single Mission Air

Medals, two Meritorious Service Medals, 46 Air Medal awards, the Navy Commendation Medal, and the Combat Action Ribbon. In total, he has spent over 4,800 hours in the air flying.

Now, Colonel Berry is a decorated Vietnam War veteran who welcomes opportunities to share his stories and his thoughts on war in hopes that future conflicts can be prevented.

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E.A.S.E. (Empowering Aging Seniors Electronically): 1:30 p.m. every second and fourth Thursday.

Lunch is served Monday through Thursday at noon at the Metcalf (Meals on Wheels only on Fridays). Menus are available monthly from the center; menus are subject to change. Meals on Wheels services also are available, as is the van transportation service. Call (406) 563-3504 if you're interested in receiving Meals on Wheels or to arrange transportation to and from the center for lunch. The Smelter City Senior Citizens' Center at the Metcalf is located at 115 E. Pennsylvania Ave.



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In their own words: Mickie Nazer and Anaconda's Vietnam Veterans Memorial

BY ERIN HANSEN
AJSHS ENGLISH TEACHER

Mickie Nazer was one of the lucky ones.

He safely returned to his hometown of Anaconda after serving in the Vietnam War. He raised a family, ran a business, and built a life.

All the while, he was constantly aware of those who didn't get the same chance.

"Nobody ever did anything for the eight soldiers that never made it back from Vietnam," he told a group of high school juniors at the Hearst Free Library.

Wearing a mechanic's jacket labeled "Mickie" and a cap embroidered with "the 101st Airborne Division," Nazer told the eager students a story.

It wasn't a war story, though. It

was about the journey to establish a Vietnam Veterans Memorial at Kennedy Common. Nazer told the story at a luncheon organized by AJSHS students. He was joined by fellow Vietnam veterans Paul Beausoleil, Jeff Frank, John Aspholm, Bill Willing, and Gerry Berry, who joined remotely.

Aspholm's wife, Audrey Aspholm, and Kristy McKay, who also helped with the memorial, spoke as well.

It took only three years from fundraising to completion, said Audrey Aspholm.

"If it was that easy to always raise money, that would be something," she said. "It tells you something about how people feel about veterans."

Members of the group spoke to an attentive and silent room, as

See MEMORIAL on page 16



Mickie Nazer is pictured for the "In Their Words" magazine standing next to the Vietnam Veterans Memorial at Kennedy Common. Photo by Grace Galle.

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Mickie Nazer discusses the Vietnam Veterans Memorial. Photo by Grace Galle.

MEMORIAL from Page 15

students were fixed with reverence. They organized the luncheon as part of their research into the Vietnam War, particularly the battle of Saigon.

During the last eight years, Frank has visited Megan Casey's Honors American History class to share his Vietnam experiences.

"I wanted to do a community outreach project," Casey said, adding that she collaborated with the English department to make it a journalism project.

The result established relationships between generations and preserved stories into the future.

Students were fixed with reverence as veterans shared experiences. They were moved by the realization that the men were teens themselves when they went to war.

Aspholm shared that nearly half of her graduating class, which included John Aspholm and Nazer, left for Vietnam after graduation.

"They went because they were drafted, and they had to go whether

or not they had other things to do," she said.

Those who came home found life forever changed.

McKay, who is the daughter of a Vietnam Veteran, shared that her father's life had been difficult as a result of his service.

He had dementia caused by exposure to Agent Orange. She held a letter her dad wrote as part of therapy.

"I wished I'd been a lot more patient with him," she said.

Ultimately, the memorial is about healing, Nazer said. It honors the fallen, but it comforts the living. It also serves as a reminder of sacrifice and Anaconda's role in the past.

"We have two Medal of Honor winners in Anaconda," Nazer said. "That is really exceptional."

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