

PACT Act

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Radiation Exposure

The VA has added three new response efforts to the list of presumptive locations. If you took part in any of these efforts, the VA will automatically presume you had exposure to radiation. Those locations and periods of service are:

- Cleanup of Enewetak Atoll, from Jan. 1, 1977, through Dec. 31, 1980,
- Cleanup of the Air Force B-52 bomber carrying nuclear weapons off the coast of Palomares, Spain, from Jan. 17, 1966, through March 31, 1967.
- Response to the fire on-board an Air Force B-52 bomber carrying nuclear weapons near Thule Air Force Base in Greenland from Jan. 21, 1968, to Sept. 25, 1968.

VA Health Care

The following veterans, who may not have been eligible for VA health care in the past are, or will be, eligible for it now.

Category 1 — Veterans

who participated in a toxic exposure risk activity while serving on active duty, active duty for training, or inactive duty training.

Category 2 — Covered veterans, which means any veteran who on or after Aug. 2, 1990, performed active military, naval, air, or space service while assigned to a duty station in, including airspace above:

- Bahrain
- Iraq
- Kuwait,
- Oman
- Qatar
- Saudi Arabia
- Somalia
- United Arab Emirates or

On or after Sept. 11, 2001, performed active military, naval, air or space service while assigned to a duty station in, including airspace above:

- Afghanistan
- Djibouti
- Egypt
- Jordan
- Lebanon
- Syria
- Yemen
- Uzbekistan
- Any other country determined relevant by the secretary.

Category 1 and 2 veterans, who served from Aug. 2, 1990-Sept. 11, 2001, will be eligible for hospital care, including mental health services and counseling, medical services, and nursing home care for any illness effective Oct. 1, 2024.

Category 1 and 2 veterans, who served from Sept. 2, 2001 to Dec. 31, 2006, will be eligible for hospital care, including mental health services and counseling, medical services, and nursing home care for any illness effective Oct. 1, 2026.

Category 1 and 2 veterans, who served from Jan. 1, 2007 to Dec. 31, 2012, will be eligible for hospital care, including mental health services and counseling, medical services, and nursing home care for any illness effective Oct. 1, 2028.

Category 1 and 2 veterans, who served from Jan. 1, 2013 to Dec. 31, 2018, will be eligible for hospital care, including mental health services and counseling, medical services, and nursing home care for any illness effective Oct. 1, 2030.

Category 3 — Veterans who deployed in support of

a contingency operation. Contingency operations include: Operation Enduring Freedom, Operation Freedom's Sentinel, Operation Iraqi Freedom, Operation New Dawn, Operation Inherent Resolve, and Resolute Support Mission.

Category 3 veterans will be eligible for hospital care, including mental health services and counseling, medical services, and nursing home care for any illness effective Oct. 1, 2032.

Surviving spouse and other family members

If you're a surviving spouse or child, who was deemed incapacitated before the age of 18, you may be eligible for these benefits:

- A monthly Dependency and Indemnity Compensation (DIC) payment. You may qualify if you're the surviving spouse or child of a veteran who died from a service-connected disability.
- A one-time accrued benefits payment. You may qualify if you're the surviving spouse or child of a veteran who the VA owed unpaid benefits at the time

of their death.

• A survivor's pension. You may qualify if you're the surviving spouse or child of a veteran with wartime service.

If you claimed any of the above benefits in the past but were denied and you think you may be eligible now, we strongly encourage you to contact our office so we can reevaluate whether or not you're eligible.

So many details of the PACT Act are still being worked on but we will keep you as updated as quickly as we can. If you're on Facebook, please like our page.

We also encourage you to go to our website where we've made a special "PACT Act" tab to keep you informed and updated. You can find the links to Facebook and our website below.

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Bullet holes in water jugs at Chu Lai

Gary Fawcett's "revelation" in Vietnam

By Brian Jopek
OF THE LAKELAND TIMES

Eagle River resident Gary Fawcett is a native of Beloit and a few years later, his family moved to Oshkosh, where he went to school.

That's where he met his wife, Shelly, and they were married in August of 1967.

"We were married in August, he was drafted in September," she said. "The reason he was drafted was he already had four years of deferment and he needed one semester (of college) to graduate."

Gary Fawcett was drafted into the U.S. Army, doing his basic combat training at Ft. Campbell, Kentucky and then training for Vietnam at what was known as Tigerland, the training camp at Ft. Polk, La., that was part of the U.S. Army Advanced Infantry Training Center.

That portion of the post was called "Tigerland" because it resembled a jungle environment.

"Some guys got Germany, some guys got Vietnam," he said. "I guess that's the short end of the straw, went to Vietnam. So, we trained at Ft. Polk."

"You used to call it 'Ft. Puke,'" Shelly said.

Fawcett was an 11 Bravo, the Army's designation for infantryman, and flew into Da Nang, Vietnam, on April 4, 1968, the day, Shelly noted, that Martin Luther King, Jr. was assassinated in Memphis, Tenn.

"I got one week of training in Vietnam and then they gave you an M16 rifle, ammunition and sent you on a Chinook," he said, referring to the Boeing CH-47 Chinook helicopters the Army used to ferry troops and supplies to fire bases in forward

areas. "We were supporting the Marines up in Chu Lai."

Fawcett said that was when he had what he called a "revelation."

"We were supporting them and I had to carry supplies up to the Marines who were fighting in the jungle," he said. "We were out in the rice paddies and I had to go in there with two 5-gallon jugs of water, one in each hand. I'm 25 years old, carrying this water and I got to where the Marines were and both these jugs were full of bullet holes and empty. Both of 'em. And not me. That was my revelation."

Following that experience, Fawcett said his unit was always fighting, traveling "the same circuit."

"It was probably 50 or 60 miles, going in a big circle," he said. "That's where I got my Bronze Star. Fighting at Chu Lai."

Fawcett said he was for a time during his combat tour in Vietnam the radio operator for his commander, an Army captain, which he said "was really stupid but he had the Scotch."

"He and I were always together," he said. "I was older than most of the people there. Most of them were young draftees."

After carrying the commander's radio for a time, Fawcett said the captain one day asked him a question.

"Hey, Fawcett, do you know how to type?" he said. "I said, 'Well, captain, it's the first time I've ever volunteered for anything but yes, I do.' He said 'OK, we've got all these vacancies here because everybody's getting shot and I don't have a company clerk.'"

Fawcett at the time was assigned to the Americal Division's 196th Infantry Brigade and said his captain told him he would go back to Da Nang to be the company clerk and if he demonstrated he could "do the job" he could stay at Da Nang until it



BRIAN JOPEK/LAKELAND TIMES

Gary and Shelly Fawcett

was time for him to go home.

"At that time, if you stayed in Vietnam and extended there to where you only had three months left to serve in the Army back in the States, you could just go home," Fawcett said. "You didn't have to get re-assigned for that last three months. That's just what they decided to do with that war."

"He was over there from April of '68 to May of '69," Shelly said. "I remember he said he was going to extend because he wouldn't have to go anywhere."

Gary Fawcett said while at Da Nang, he had "hot meals and a jeep" and did something that was relatively rare in the Army or in the U.S. military in general.

"I called officers by their first name," he said with chuckle. "I had gone from a private first class to a buck sergeant. We had all these slots and had to fill 'em up. The captain said 'Make yourself a sergeant.' So I did."

He was discharged from the U.S. Army on May 27, 1969.

"He came back and started summer school," Shelly Fawcett said. "He only had 13 credits left to graduate."

Homecoming

Gary Fawcett was one of 106 veterans flown to Washington, D.C. on the Oct. 3 Never Forgotten Honor Flight which originates from Central Wisconsin Airport (CWA) in Mosinee, and he said a big reason going on the

flight was important to him was his coming home from Vietnam in 1969.

"I got back home from Vietnam a day early and flew into Appleton," he said. "I didn't have much money with me at the time and I got a cab driver to take me back to Oshkosh, about a half hour away."

Fawcett said when the cab got to Oshkosh, he intended to pay the driver who said something Fawcett wasn't expecting.

"He said 'No, welcome home,'" Fawcett said. "He's the only guy who welcomed me home besides my family."

Shelly, a school teacher, said she was working that day.

"I got home and there Gary was on the back porch," she said.

"That was my 'Welcome home,'" Gary Fawcett said. "That's why this Honor Flight was something special for me."

As far as Gary Fawcett knows, he was the oldest veteran, at 80, on the Oct. 3 Never Forgotten Honor Flight and described the scene when the plane load of veterans entered the terminal at CWA around 11 p.m. with people applauding, shaking his hands and saluting him "after 50 some years."

"So, it was tear jerking for me due to the fact I never had that," Fawcett said. "I don't know that any of them did that were with me."

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