

Campbell's actions in U.S. Navy earned him Silver Star, Purple Heart

By Bob Pomorski,
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Richard Campbell, a member of Lockport VFW Post 5788, was just a regular guy growing up on the South Side of Chicago in the Bridgeport area. He was the third oldest of seven children. His father was a truck driver and tended to be a hard drinker when he was at home. His mother ended up working as well to support the family.

Rick made sure he was involved in activities to get away from the unpleasantness at home. He played baseball, and worked at the State & Lake Theatre in downtown Chicago. Rick attended Kelly High School and while there, joined the Army ROTC program. He was in the program for all four years and as a Lieutenant, led the team to back-to-back first place finishes in "drill competition."

After high school, Rick went to work for Eastman Kodak. While working, he remained cognizant of the draft for the Vietnam War. Knowing that he was ripe for the picking, instead of waiting to be drafted, he enlisted in the Navy in July of 1966. The Navy became overloaded with enlistments, and there was a waiting period to see if you were accepted. In October 1966, the Navy came calling. Rick was sent to Boot Camp at the Great Lakes Naval Base in Lake County, Illinois.

He spent four months in Boot Camp and then was shipped off to Rhode Island. There he was a bosun mate on board the USS Yosemite, which was a destroyer depot ship. The USS Yosemite had an excellent surgery staff and Rick worked alongside them learning the trade. After only a few months on board ship, Rick was transferred back to Great Lakes to attend Hospital Corpsman School. Corpsmen are medical specialists in the Navy who may also serve in a Marine Corps unit.

While attending Corpsman school, Rick met the love of his life, Denise. "Cookie" as he calls her, was going to modeling school and attended a USO dance in Chicago. On their second date, Rick asked Cookie

to marry him, and in March of 1969, as his next orders came in, they were married. In April, Rick and his new bride were sent to Camp Pendleton, in California, where Rick would attend Fleet Marine Force School for the next six weeks.

While at Fleet Marine School, Rick learned how to be a Marine – there he had physical training, marksmanship training, and field medical training. He was on his way to becoming a combat medic. Next, Rick was assigned to the 2nd battalion of the 3rd Marine division and the entire unit was shipped off to Vietnam by way of Okinawa.

Landing right in the Da Nang Valley, Rick was transferred to the 3rd Medical Battalion Field Hospital. The assignment was to spend the next six months in the field with the Marines, embedded into Fox Company. During the next three months, Rick saw his share of wounded Marines and civilians. His company would come across injured civilians that had stepped on landmines that had been planted by the Viet Cong. Rick always helped the injured in whatever way he could.

Then one August day, the 7th to be exact, as Rick remembers all "crap hit the fan." Fox Company was on a mission as part of Operation Idaho Canyon when the unit came under heavy fire from the North Vietnamese Army. That is when Rick's medical training, and valor, rose to the occasion.

Following is an excerpt of the details that transpired that day from his Silver Star citation:

"On 7 August 1969, during

Operation IDAHO CANYON, highest traditions of the Marine Corps and of the United States Naval Service."



Richard "Doc" Campbell, a member of Lockport VFW Post 5788.

accompanying a platoon moving up a hill northwest of the Vandegrift Combat Base when the Marines came under an extremely heavy volume of rocket-propelled grenade, small arms, and automatic weapons fire from a company-sized North Vietnamese Army force occupying a well-concealed bunker complex, wounding several Marines. Quickly moving to the point element, he observed the fallen Marines lying in dangerously-exposed positions. With complete disregard for his own safety, Petty Officer Campbell fearlessly moved across the fire-swept terrain to reach the wounded. Undaunted by the enemy rounds impacting around him, he gallantly remained in his precarious position to expertly administer first aid, and then assisted in moving the casualties to covered positions. Although wounded while caring for one of the casualties, Petty Officer Campbell boldly carried the wounded Marine approximately 100 yards through intense North Vietnamese fire until he reached a relatively safe position. During the second assault on the well-entrenched enemy, he was dressing the wounds of a Marine in the battle area when a North Vietnamese soldier rushed his position. Reacting instantly, Petty Officer Campbell drew his pistol and killed the hostile soldier. Despite his painful wounds, he continued to aid the casualties and would not submit to medical evacuation until he was relieved by another Corpsman. By his dauntless courage, bold initiative, and unwavering devotion to duty in the face of great personal danger, Petty Officer Campbell inspired all who observed him and upheld the

highest traditions of the Marine Corps and of the United States Naval Service."

When Rick was finally evacuated from the battle field, he was sent to the hospital ship called the USS Repose. He was on board healing his wounds for a few days and then sent to the 3rd Medical Battalion Hospital where he spent the next four weeks rehabbing. While there, he also received a Purple Heart for his injuries. After rehab, Rick was sent to Pearl Harbor for a few month's for "R & R." That is when Cookie saw the first signs of PTSD in Rick. Certain things would trigger an event, but

Rick just shook it off. He was sent back to Vietnam in November of 1969; that is when the entire 3rd Marine Division was ordered to pack up and pull out, heading to Okinawa.

As 1970 rolled around, Rick finally got back to the U.S. and was stationed once again at Camp Pendleton. His tour of duty was up and he was asked to re-enlist. Having already served his country admirably, being married, and starting a family, Rick turned down the offer. Instead, Rick and Cookie moved back to Chicago to return to a normal life. Rick did spend two more years in the Naval Re-

serves, and then 13 more in the Army National Guard.

While back in Chicago, unbeknownst to Rick, he was recommended for the Silver Star for valor in combat while in Vietnam. The Navy was looking to locate him for over a year and finally came upon him through a friend. They asked if he would attend a special ceremony in his honor and "if he could still fit into his uniform," as Rick states with a smile. Rick donned his Navy uniform, and brought Cookie and his twin sons down to the Naval Armory.

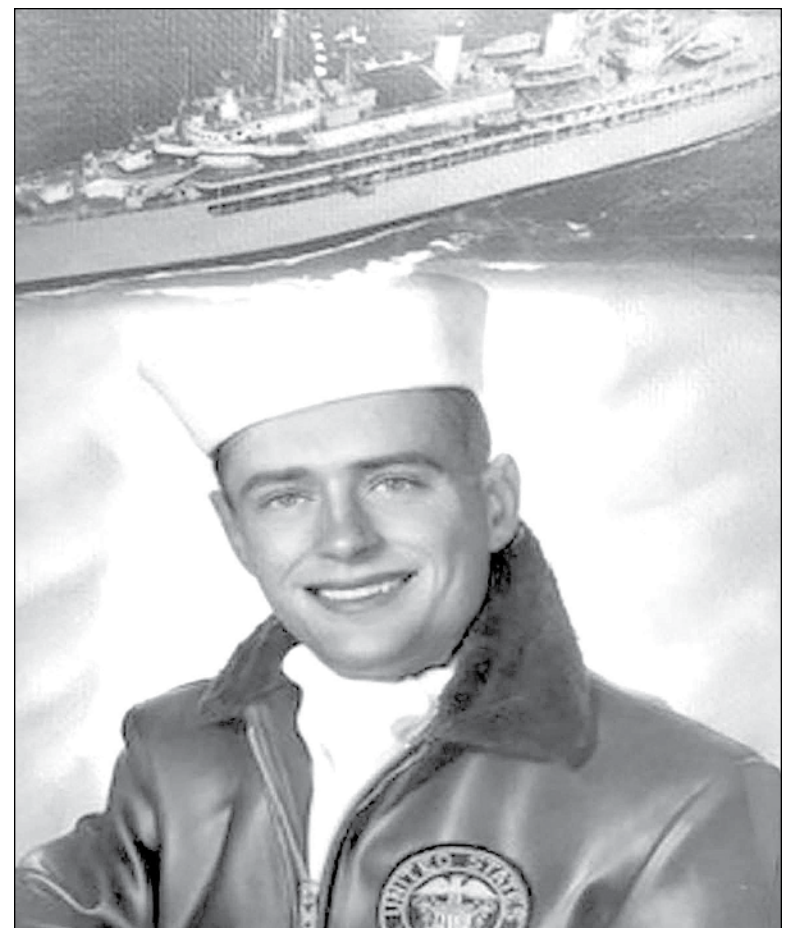
For the man who was treated disrespectfully upon returning home from Vietnam for having served his country, he was given a full military ceremony of honor by the Navy and the Marines, one befitting a Silver Star recipient. When asked about what he did that fateful August day, Rick replied, "I was just doing my job, and would do it again."

Today, Rick and Cookie live in the Joliet area and enjoy traveling to their summer home in the Upper Peninsula. They try to spend as much time with their four children, Richard Jr., Christopher, Timothy, and Erin, of whom they are very proud. They are extremely blessed to have 11 grandchildren which, as he says, "are the best part of his life." Their goal is to spend as much time with all of them when they can.

For his time in the Navy, Rick earned the Silver Star, a Purple Heart, and the Vietnamese Cross of Gallantry with Palm. But what really strikes a chord with him, was a little note that a young boy and his family left on Rick's car after they talked together at a store. It was a thank you note to Rick for his service to the country. Rick has that thank note right up there next to all his other prestigious military awards and medals.



Rick Campbell's Silver Star presentation ceremony during his time in the U.S. Navy.



Richard "Doc" Campbell during his military service in the U.S. Navy. Campbell served as a Navy Medic and earned the Silver Star and Purple Heart.