

U.S. Army Europe and 7th Army

contact: paoci@eur.army.mil
phone: 49-6221-57-5815 / DSN 370-5815
fax: 49-6221-57-6376 / DSN 370-6376



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VIETNAM VET STILL SERVING BRINGS 40 YEARS OF KNOW-HOW TO U.S. ARMY EUROPE-LED AVIATION TASK FORCE IN IRAQ

By 1st Lt. Sean Spencer
2nd Battalion, 147th Aviation

LOGISTICAL SUPPORT AREA ANACONDA, Balad, Iraq -- If you stick around the military long enough, you'll become accustomed to change.



1ST LT SEAN SPENCER

Chief Warrant Officer 5 Greg Dahn (right), a maintenance test pilot for Task Force XII's 2nd Battalion, 147th Aviation talks to a fellow Soldier at Logistics Support Area Anaconda, Iraq. Dahn is a Vietnam veteran the Soldiers of the 2-147th regularly call on for his four decades of experience.

After serving just 10 years in the Army a Soldier will talk about "the good old days," and how he's seen everything from weapons to uniforms change drastically over that decade. And if so much has changed in 10 years, it's difficult to imagine how much has changed in the past 40 years.

Chief Warrant Officer 5 Greg Dahn doesn't have to imagine. He has lived it.

Dahn joined the U.S. Marine Corps in 1968 as an M14 rifle infantryman, and the following year he found himself deep in the jungles of Vietnam.

Dahn served a 19-month tour in Vietnam, and in late 1971 left the Marine Corps's active component to join the Marine Corps Reserve. Four years later he decided to leave the service entirely.

Another four years passed, and duty called again. Dahn joined the Minnesota Army National Guard in 1979, and has served there for the past 28 years. He is now a maintenance test pilot with 2nd Battalion, 147th Aviation. The unit is part of Task Force XII, led by U.S. Army Europe's 12th Combat Aviation Brigade.

Dahn has become a technical adviser for the Soldiers of the 2-147th in more ways than one. In addition to his ability to spot aircraft deficiencies as a maintenance test pilot, Dahn also provides a level of experience and perspective that is rare in today's Army.

The Vietnam conflict is similar to the Operation Iraqi Freedom, says Dahn, on the battlefield and the airfield.

"Helicopter tactics used in Iraq were adapted, and much improved, from those used in Vietnam," he said. "OIF is better managed (than the Vietnam conflict). There are more guidelines on how Soldiers should handle themselves."

But, he adds, today's enemy is different.

"We fought communists in Vietnam. They were more disciplined," he says. "Guerilla tactics and booby traps such as improvised explosive devices were used then and now. The Viet Cong were better at it than the Iraqis."

This tour in Iraq is not the first time he's been asked to call on his wealth of experience since Vietnam. In 2003 he was deployed to Kosovo as a NATO liaison to the Kosovo Liberation Army, working for a Finnish admiral.

As the years have turned into decades and the military has changed, and so has Dahn. Aside from the now 58-year-old's gray hair and wrinkles, he says his goals for each conflict are very different.

"My goal in Iraq is to ensure the line companies have aircraft to complete their missions," he said. "My goal in Vietnam was just to survive."



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