

JEROME “JERRY” ECKERLE

Jerry Eckerle was born on August 14, 1944 in Cincinnati, Ohio to Albert and Bertha Mae Eckerle. He has two brothers, Marty and Bob, who now resides in Panama.

Jerry attended St. Michael’s Grade School in Brookville, Indiana and graduated from Brookville High School in 1963. Jerry was inducted into the United States Army on August 1, 1965 and was sent to Ft. Knox, Kentucky for basic training. He was sent to Ft. Eustis, Virginia for Aviation School to work on the Huey Helicopters. He was then assigned to Ft. Carson, Colorado for six months before receiving his orders for Vietnam. He deployed to Vietnam on July 26, 1966 and was assigned to B Company, 229th Aviation Battalion at An Khe, South Vietnam. He was assigned as a Crew Chief on the Hueys. He remembers his first day flying in a Huey in Vietnam and thought it might be his last. They came under enemy fire and when they landed and inspected the Huey, one of the bullet holes just missed hitting him in the butt by a few inches. It had penetrated the Huey thru the side and he says that he almost had a “Forrest Gump wound in the buttocks.” He flew many missions on the Hueys and looked after the maintenance to make sure they were in great flying condition. Many depended on his judgment. He returned to the USA and was discharged as an E-4 on July 26, 1967. He is proud of his service, especially in Vietnam, and considered it an honor to look after his fellow soldiers and keeping the Hueys in tip-top shape for their dangerous missions. He was awarded the National Defense Service Medal, Vietnam Service Medal, Vietnam Campaign Medal, Vietnamese Gallantry Cross with Palm, Presidential Unit Citation, Meritorious Unit Citation, Army Good Conduct Medal and Sharpshooter Badge for the rifle.

Jerry married his wife, Theresa (Schneider) on Oct. 1, 1971 and they have three children and eight grandchildren, 7 girls and one boy. Daughter, Julie Anne (Jay) Dudley, daughter, Melinda Marie (Mark) Koehne and son, Douglas Jerome (Erin) Eckerle. Jerry worked for over 45 years and retired from Hillenbrand Industries in Batesville.

He is a Life Member of the Southeastern Indiana Vietnam Veterans of America, Larry D. Fogle Chapter 71, the Batesville VFW Post 3183 and Batesville American Legion Post 271.

Today, he lives in Morris, Indiana where he is a member of the St. Anthony's Catholic Church.

Jerry played a vital part in finding the Huey Helicopter that is now on display in Lesko Park in Aurora overlooking the Ohio River. While he was accompanying a bus load of Veterans on a trip to Indianapolis to see the War Memorial and other monuments, the group stopped at the National Guard Armory in Shelbyville to see the Black Hawk Helicopters. While they were discussing the choppers with the Commander, Colonel Matthew Handy, Jerry asked if they had any "real helicopters" and was told the helicopter they were looking at cost \$17-18 million dollars. Jerry told him that "we flew in Hueys" and then asked if they had one and was told they did. They were then escorted to a hangar where an old Huey was stored and ready to be crushed. They told the Colonel that they had been looking for one for several years and that started the ball rolling to be able to acquire that old Huey that now is on display at Aurora. Thanks to Jerry Eckerle speaking up and asking, we now proudly display that HUEY and it will be there for generations to come.

Jerry is a great American Patriot and proud Vietnam Veteran.