

# VETERAN OF THE MONTH

## Tellico Village VFW Post 12135



**John Lacko** was born and raised in Chicago, Illinois. At 19 years old, he was employed by Illinois Bell Telephone Company (IBT) as a repairman, and at the same time, was operating his own towing and road service business. In the fall of 1968, he came home from his job at IBT where there was a letter from the draft board with his name on it. Inside were the words: "Greetings, Your friends and neighbors have selected you to perform in the Armed Service of the United States of America Military. You are to report for a medical exam and await further instructions..."

After reading the letter carefully several times, as his heart pounded, he wondered which friends and neighbors selected him for service.

In 1969, John went to the processing station and he passed the Army physical and was herded onto a bus around 8 pm to Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri. The bus arrived around 2 a.m. and his life was immediately changed forever. During basic training, he was given a few aptitude tests and was offered the Military Occupational Specialty (MOS) 31L Radio Repair. After basic training, he went on to his Advanced Individual Training (AIT) at Fort Gordon, Georgia. After training, he was given orders to go to Viet Nam.

John remembers the action started as soon as the plane landed in Hanoi. He was assigned to the 1st Infantry Division in Ahn Khe. There, he had various duties such as: perimeter guard duty, motor pool, vehicle and weapons transport. However, he does note that there was not a lot of time spent repairing radios. John would travel with his unit along the Mang Yang Pass known as the Ho Chi Minh trail several times from Ahn Khe to Pleiku, scouting for enemy positions and delivering supplies. Most times, he was unsure that he would ever return home.

John felt that he really matured while overseas. When he returned home in 1975 from his time in the Army, he went back to work for IBT for a few years. He then got married, to his current wife Sheri, and worked as a machinist, Computer Numerical Control programmer, machine shop foreman, and then became self employed for 30 years. He simultaneously attended continuing education at Northern Illinois University. John also pursued his education

in real estate and operated as a broker for several agencies, while Sheri, ran the businesses. They eventually sold the two businesses they started and John was asked to fill a position as project manager with a commercial construction company. With them, John built several retail stores including Hair Cuttery, Dress Barn, Starbucks, and various restaurants. He hired a great crew of sub contractors who became very proficient in their respective trades. After 5 years, he became tired of being on the road all the time, so he accepted a position in facilities management as Assistant Director of Facilities for a 472-bed senior care and housing facility. John made many friends with his staff, residents, and coworkers. During this time, Sheri and John used their vacations to work with Disaster Assistance Ministries (DAM) through their church to volunteer and go to sites hit by tornados, floods, and other natural disasters. John helped rebuild damaged homes in Iowa, Illinois, Missouri, and Kentucky for those who did not have the funds to rebuild on their own. DAM or the churches also provided financial support.

John entered retirement at 62, and after six months at home, he was out of projects and was climbing the walls. While waiting for Sheri to retire, he took a position with Auto Zone teaching driver safety and vehicle maintenance for several area retail stores. John and Sheri purchased a home in Tellico Village (TV) in 2010 and fully retired in 2015. John is a charter member of the Tellico Village Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) Post #12135, which was formed in 2016 and he served as its first Service Officer for four years. He is now on the Relief Committee and assist in addressing the needs of veterans who need an occasional hand-up in their lives. He volunteers for Habitat for Humanity home builds and does random repairs in TV as a "Stay in TV" repairman. John is also the coordinator for any handicap ramp builds in the county, coordinator of the bi-yearly Veterans Clothing Drive, and the Chairman for the Multi-County Veterans Resource Fair held each year in the fall at the War Memorial Building in Lenoir City. John views the VFW as a bridge for veterans who have a difficult time re-entering civilian life after their service to our country. He is very proud of being of service once again. His lovely wife of 49 years has been his business partner and the greatest influence in his life. They both are active volunteers in TV and enjoy their retirement immensely, but still serving.

The Tellico Village VFW Post #12135 General meeting is held at 7:00 p.m. in the Tellico Village Yacht Club every third Wednesday of the month. Further information can be found on the Post website at <https://www.tellicovillagevfwpost.org/>.