

Vietnam Vets Picnic by the VVA Northwood, IA, June 10, 2012



APR 1970 The State Society
Vietnam veterans Charlie Ardinger (left) of Decorah and Darrell Hull of Cherokee City talk about their experiences inside a museum inside the traveling Vietnam War museum which was featured at the annual Vietnam Veterans Recognition Day picnic in Northwood on Sunday.

Recognizing Vietnam vets

Traveling military museum visit is part of annual Northwood picnic

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NORTHWOOD — A traveling military museum visit is part of a special traveling museum brought back memories of war here in the Mekong Delta Sunday for Vietnam veterans and their families in Northwood.

The veterans, participating in the 11th annual Vietnam Veterans Recognition Day picnic at Sweetland Park, toured the U.S. Navy Archives Research Force and U.S. Army units.

Infantry Division Traveling Memorial and Museum from Decorah.

"The exhibit is dedicated to the joint Army-Navy effort to provide and supply troops in the Mekong Delta region from 1965 to 1970," said Charlie Ardinger, 69, of Decorah, a Navy veteran who transported Army troops on a jet-rescue Tanager troop carrier.

"You talked to take them out because you know you weren't going to get them back."

40-some years later, still vivid service recollections

NORTHWOOD — Dennis Hull of Cherokee City and Jeff VanDyke of Forest City, who both served in the Vietnam War after finishing high school in the 1960s, participated in the Vietnam Veterans picnic Sunday in Northwood. The two veterans said their memories of the war are still vivid.

Hull, 67, participated in heavy combat on Army gunboats in the Mekong Delta. He remembers an Army helicopter taking him what he liked to do when he landed in 1970. "I said, 'I like boats,'" he said. "The Army's got a lot of boats."

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PICNIC: Ardinger was part of the Navy task force

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all back," he said. "They really did their duty."

Most of the troops were still in their teens, said Ardinger, who enlisted in the Navy in 1960 and re-enlisted when his first tour of duty was over.

Ardinger was part of the Navy's Mobile Riverine Task Force, which worked with the Army's 9th Infantry Division, the "Old Reliables," in the first joint effort of the two military branches since the Civil War.

Although he wasn't personally involved in hand-to-hand combat, "You knew you were in a war," said Ardinger, who still has shrapnel in an eye from when his boat was hit by a B-40 rocket.

"If you heard a bang, you knew you'd better shoot back."

THE RIVER ITSELF POSED A HAZARD, with its strong current, Ardinger said. "If you fell over the side, you drowned. I lost a good buddy that way."

His friend was wearing a heavy flak jacket at the time, which the men were required to wear 24 hours a day.

A model of the Tanager is

in the museum, together with other Navy boats used in the Mekong Delta: the Alpha Boat; Patrol Boat Riverine (PBR); officers' command communication boat; and the Zippo, or flame-thrower, which burned napalm at the enemy.

"They quit shooting at us as much" after the napalm, Ardinger said.

The large military photo lining the walls of the museum show boats hit by river mines, South Vietnamese villages tearfully talking to U.S. troops about a raid by the Viet Cong, troops waist deep in muddy water, Huey helicopters, troops taking prisoners, troops boarding a carrier, helmets on rifles set into the ground in memory of fallen soldiers.

The names of 1,000 troops killed in action in the Mekong River Delta are borne on the exterior wall of the trailer.

"I know seven guys personally that died there," Ardinger said. The hospital "had guys they had to push aside — they knew they couldn't be saved."

"They were dying so fast; 1968 and 1969 were the worst years."



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Vietnam War veteran Charlie Ardinger, Decorah, talks about a model of the Tanager troop carrier, like the one he served on in the Mekong Delta region of Vietnam. The photos and models were in a traveling Vietnam War Museum that was in Northwood on Sunday at the annual Vietnam Veterans Recognition Day picnic.

MEMORIES: He was ambushed five times

From A1

"We were the only unit in the history of the Army to do river patrol," Hull said.

Vanddyke, 62, who was from Clear Lake when he enlisted in 1968, served in the Army's 1st Airborne Rangers. "I was only 19 years old," he said.

He was ambushed five times and ambushed the enemy more times than he can remember, but never had a scratch, Vanddyke said.

Hull was injured once when he was apprehending a Viet Cong who had jumped onto the dock where he was working.

"Shots were fired. I knocked him in the river and went in with him," said Hull, who was wounded when he was thrown into the open flywheel of an outboard motor.

Since Vietnam, Hull never puts his back to the wall, his wife, Linda, said.

Both Hull and Vanddyke acknowledged having trouble sleeping at night.

"Everything's a threat to me," Vanddyke said. "I'm watching all the time. I remember (Vietnam) every day."

— By Kristin Duehner

