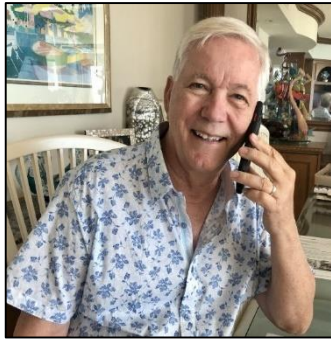


A Veteran's Journey from Moonscape to Beachscape

John Shoemaker

In a continuing effort to bring monthly recognition to Veterans residing in the Town of Highland Beach, this month's article features a special story about Mr. Randy Elliott, who resides in Toscana. Mr. Elliott has been living in the town for 15 years enjoying its beauty and peace and quiet.



Mr. Elliott's story as a Veteran began when he was rejected admission into the United States Military Academy West Point, as he was color-blind as a youth. As a result of this, he joined the Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC) program at Stetson University in DeLand, Florida. Subsequently, enlisting in the US Army, he signed up for the toughest of training, Airborne School and Ranger Training and was ultimately assigned as a Nuclear Weapons Officer in Germany. Mr. Elliott's desire to join the action in Vietnam, led him to volunteer for the famous 101st Airborne Division,

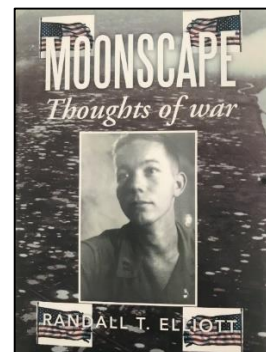
the Screaming Eagles, now Airmobile. He was promoted to Captain and became a Company Commander for the 506th Infantry, which typically included four platoons totaling over 120 or more elite infantry soldiers.

From 1967 to 1968, Mr. Elliott spent 17 months in Vietnam and experienced some of the worst fighting of the entire war in areas from the Central Highlands to Chu Chi to the defense of Saigon. He was right in the middle of the infamous "Tet Offensive" and joined other units in combined actions against the massive invasion attempt by regular North Vietnamese Army (NVA) troops. Few have survived that kind of large unit, close order clashes involving thousands of soldiers on both sides. The event was all over the news in the United States. Within a few days, thousands of Americans were killed but the slaughter of the NVA was breathtaking.

In Mr. Elliott's book *Moonscape, Thoughts of War*, he writes, the enemy "attacked in enormous numbers... and we were cutting them to pieces." America's firepower and technology were so superior, but it did not dissuade the enemy from their cause. The enemy simply could win by not losing the war, given the protests at home. The death and destruction he witnessed left an indelible mark on his mind and soul, forcing him to reconsider whether he could justify the war at a time when so much dissent was happening back home. In one battle, he was able to kill an enemy soldier who had just thrown a grenade that exploded behind him and hit his back. Bloodied, he continued the fight. Later, in another major clash involving hundreds of soldiers, a recoilless rifle shell grazed his helmet before hitting a tree behind him. The impact fractured his skull, broke his jaw, and peppered his body with shrapnel. He said he remembers nothing more until he woke up days later, in a hospital in Japan. Severely wounded, he would spend months in hospitals undergoing various operations and physical rehabilitation.

Moonscape, Thoughts of War

Mr. Elliott found time to write the book titled "Moonscape, Thoughts of War", Xlibris.com, 2014, about his exploits focused on the impact of war on our youth who are called to battle. The book is also about him; it is not a war history book. The book is "intended to show the horror of war in stark and unvarnished fashion, that is in truth." The book cover has a picture of the landscape of war in Vietnam – it looks like craters on the Moon.



A partial quote from Mr. Elliott's prologue which is quite revealing and powerful is:

"The infantry
I am proud of what I was.
I was the infantry; I was this country.
My sweat was rivers, my blood was its rain.
We shared our pain; we shared our loss.
We were not brave, we harbored fear like no others.
We did what our country asked of us.
We gave our best. We did what we thought was right.
We tried our hardest..."

Although Mr. Elliott was medically discharged, he rejoined the US Army as a Reservist and over the years rose to the rank of full Colonel. Simultaneously, he worked for the Department of State as a Foreign Service Officer and became an Analyst for Middle East affairs and was assigned to United States Secretary of State and National Security Advisor Henry Kissinger's staff. In an incredible intersection of events, during Operation Desert Storm, he was activated from the Reserves and assigned to help restore the government of Kuwait after the devastation done to the country by Saddam Hussein's forces. This was a restoration of all government departments and facilities, the country's infrastructure and communications. With 17 Colonels in his Kuwait Task Force command and the success they had in one year from 1990 to 1991, he was promoted to Brigadier General and was awarded the Legion of Merit Medal.

After retirement from the military, he and his wife, Roberta Palestine, lived in the Washington D.C. area and eventually settled in the Town of Highland Beach. Mrs. Elliott is a physician and specialized as a dermatologist. She completed her training at the Mayo Clinic. She owned several practices as a doctor and entrepreneur. Mr. Elliott started and later sold ELCON, a construction company that rehab/rebuild homes. Currently, he manages rental properties in Florida. They have four children and seven grandchildren. The Elliott's consider the Town of Highland Beach a "gloriously attractive and safe place" that is beautiful and well-kept from its north to south borders. This is a time in their lives where they can enjoy the serenity and beauty of their home here with activities involving boating, target shooting, friends and travel. They love the idea of being located between two major airports for the ease of travel without the commercial sprawl found in both Boca Raton and Delray Beach and even elsewhere.

More of the prologue from Mr. Elliott's book is:



We thought of home often
We died without fanfare, without glory; no one
was watching, no bands were playing.
Those who came home from the jungle will
always be different men.
But we will always be brothers. We will always
be proud Americans.

For Mr. Elliott, it certainly has been a long journey from the Moonscape of Vietnam to now. He has paid his dues and he and his family deserves the good times they are living in paradise.

Welcome home!