For the 2002 Veterans Day Issue of Folsom Life (published by the Mountain Democrat of Placerville), I interviewed five war veterans and recorded their personal stories. Though the articles are in the first person, and the integrity of the veterans' words was maintained, the pieces did require lengthy interviews, reorganizing and editing. I love writing first-person accounts, but these were especially moving.

WAYNE SPENCE

Wayne Spence, now 78, quit high school in 1942 to join the Navy because he didn't want to wait. He was 17, and his mother signed for him, he said, because she thought he'd be turned down. She made sure he put his right birthday on the application form and was shocked when they took him. But, Spence says, she ended up proud. Both of Spence's sons fought in Viet Nam, one with the Navy and one with the Marines. The patriotic Spence started the Veterans Day Parade in Folsom – marching the first year by himself down East Bidwell Street. He sometimes flies every armed forces flag in front of his house, in chronological order, and has even planted his yard with red, white and blue flowers.

I joined the Navy at 17. They had what they called the "kiddie crews" – you had to join when you were 17 and serve to your 21st birthday. Nobody really wanted that because that was four years and we all knew the war was going to be over in six months.

I served on the USS Laning, a destroyer escort. The USS Fechtler was our sister ship. On May 5, 1944, we were off Africa, near Algiers. I had just gotten off watch at 4 a.m. and our radar people had picked up a German sub contact. This was one month before the invasion of France, and the Germans were trying to sink all the ships they could. Our captain asked permission to investigate, but the order was to stay where we were. They sent out the Fechtler and it was immediately sunk, and as it sank, it exploded. Our ship was close enough that we felt the explosion.

We picked up the survivors. I was dropping a fire hose. The guys from the Fechtler would grab ahold of the handle and we could pull them up. I don't know how many guys I pulled out of the water. The guys were all wet and had no dry clothes, so we gave them our blankets and our clothing. In 1970, I went to a reunion of the crews from the Laning and the Fechtler and this guy from the Fechtler was asking everybody, is there a man named Spence here, where's Spence? His name was Knapp. When I met him, he threw his arms around me and hugged me and then he said, you're the guy that saved my life. He knew because he had my shirt with my name on it.

(A few hours after this interview, Spence read in his monthly USS Laning newsletter that Mr. Knapp had died in February.)

During World War II, German subs were in our harbors, New York, Philadelphia, Boston. That's the absolute truth. They were sinking our ships right in our harbors. They controlled the East Coast. We were sending supplies to Britain, so they were sinking the ships. They didn't want supplies to reach Britain and Europe.

The Navy built destroyer escorts, or DEs. They were sub killers. Our only objective was to sink subs and escort convoys. The Navy had seven DEs and the Coast Guard had six. That's all there were. We were told that if we stayed afloat for one year, we'd be lucky. We knew that, but nobody really cared because we knew we could beat the odds. It was scary, but when you're 17, 18, 19, why that's adventure. Well, a spooky adventure. Germany said after World War II that if it hadn't been for these DEs, they would have won the war. They controlled the Atlantic. There wasn't (an allied) ship in the Atlantic that was safe till we put these DEs into commission.

When D-Day came, we were operating in the Mediterranean. We escorted ships to the landing. We didn't know D-Day was happening. When we first heard, we learned that this was the biggest landing that was made and that we would be going home now. But we didn't go home. They sent us to the South Pacific.

In the Pacific, I was the ship's oil king. One of the oil king's jobs is to test the water every day. You make your own water from the sea, with an evaporator. The best water goes for the boilers and I had to make sure it was perfect. To test it, I used a soap solution. It was mostly all alcohol, so I had to go to the engineering officer and then the medical officer to get it. Then I had to make my solution. The thing was, I didn't drink. But there was a ship store, and the commissary man had a big ice cream freezer and he made ice cream every day. So I made a deal with him, or I guess he came to me first. He said, give me soap solution and I will make you ice cream. He'd put the soap solution into his freezer and everything would freeze except the alcohol so he'd be able to scrape all the other stuff off and get his alcohol. To me it was a good deal, because I got ice cream.

One time the crew had a party and some guys broke into my locker and took my soap solution. The next morning I had to ask the medical officer for some more alcohol. He said, wait one minute, you got that yesterday. I said, well my locker was broken into and it was all gone. They didn't worry about finding the guys who did it. They just stationed marines at the heads. These guys put the soap solution into their coffee and drank it, and the soap was cleaning them out, so everybody knew who they were. I don't remember anybody being court-martialed over it. They felt it was embarrassing enough.

I used that soap solution to barter another time. The commissary man was also our ship photographer and he was going aboard the Missouri for the surrender of Japan. I said, I don't want ice cream, I want pictures. So I traded him soap solution for pictures and now I have original pictures from the surrender of Japan.

Before the bombs were dropped, we planned to invade Japan. The U.S. had named the beachheads after automobiles. There were a lot of automobiles in those days, at least two dozen, names like Stutz, Franklin, LaSalle, Hupmobile, Zephyr, Hudson. You won't find any Japanese automobiles in the list, but look what Japan built its economy on after World War II.

I came back to the states in January 1946. We were sent to a discharge center, processed and discharged. There was no band playing when I came back and nobody

greeting me. That's what I tell these Viet Nam vets.

I was in the reserves until 1952, when I was called up to go to Korea. President Truman called it a police action. That ticked the marines off. I was on the repair ship USS Hector. We'd sail from Japan to Korea and repair the ships there. I don't care where I was, Africa, Japan, Korea, all the towns were alike. They were all fine people. I never met anybody I disliked anywhere.

I would have stayed in the Navy if I could have. But I couldn't because at my rate I would have been out to sea all the time, and I was a family man with children at home. But if they'd take old men, I'd go back in right now.

RAY CASE

Ray Case, now 66, was a career marine from 1953 to 1976. He signed up in Louisiana, the day he got his high school diploma. He was 17. He retired in California as a master gunnery sergeant. Case fought in Korea and served three tours in Viet Nam. He also spent 96 days as a prisoner of war in Laos. His military valor earned him a chest full of awards: five Purple Hearts, five Good Conduct medals, three National Defense Service Medals, two bronze stars with valor, three U.S. Navy commendation medals, two Viet Nam Crosses of Gallantry, two Presidential Unit Citations, and three Viet Nam Campaign medals.

I had graduated from high school, but the fact is I didn't get to go to any graduation celebrations. There was a war going on. They handed me my diploma and the marine recruiter was right there. In fact they had a whole squadron of marines there. There were five of us that all went in the same day. Two didn't come back from Korea, and the other two didn't come back from Nam. I am the sole survivor.

Korea is a forgotten war. People don't talk about Korea any more. It was called a police action. People were firing at you so you had to fire back. Believe it or not, we're still in that police action. As I'm talking right now, we are still losing kids over there. Even though there's a truce, we have peacekeepers there now and things are still happening.

In Korea, I was a mean, green fighting machine. That's what they told me to do. They trained me to kill. That's what I went to Korea for. When the higher-ups tell you you gotta go in there, you do it. It's a job. I went over there for God and country. In the Marines, it was the Marines first, God and country second, family third. I was there for six months and I got wounded. I had just turned 18 so I received my first Purple Heart at age 18. I got hit by shrapnel, all over. They patched me up and reassigned me to Pearl Harbor, then back to Korea.

I got to Viet Nam the first time in 1966. I ended up serving three tours. I was a sniper. I was involved with black operations in what's called the First Force Recon. We had special training for guerilla warfare. In the Navy you have the Navy Seals. In the Army, it's the Green Berets. With the Marine Corps, you have First Force Recon. There were always six or seven of us. We were disguised all the time. Our job was to take out the

enemy before our troop movements got to the same vicinity. We were up in the trees, on the ground, in the water. We lost quite a few snipers.

A lot of what I did and where I went is still classified and I can't talk about it. I still get letters from the government reminding me.

In 1969, I was shot in the leg and the arm and captured and I became what I call a guest of the Laotian government for 96 days. I had been in Laos on a special mission. I'd rather not talk about it. It's one of those things you don't talk about. I lost 43 pounds. They fed us rice, leftover rice, that's all. A lot of the guys I was in with had dysentery and they had malaria, what you call jungle rot. They weren't all Americans who were in those camps. There were Brits and Australians, too. The military negotiated our release – they released two of their POWs for every one of ours. There were 35 prisoners in when I first got there. There were six of us left alive when I got out.

I captured about 30 of the enemy. I turned them over to South Viet Nam. That was my job, to capture them and turn them over.

Altogether, I was wounded five times in two wars. I've still got a bullet in my spine that they can't operate on. It sets off the alarms when I go through the airport checks. But I have a piece of paper that I show them and it's never been a problem.
When I came back after Viet Nam, people were protesting. When they'd see you come out and you've got a fist full of medals and ribbons, they couldn't handle that. They thought you had been in combat and they called you baby killer. I don't hold it against them. I figured it was ignorance. They didn't know the full story. I figured every one of those bullets I took was for one of those guys who didn't have to go.

I have no regrets. None whatsoever. I belong to 16 veterans organizations. I still believe in God and country. I'd sacrifice my life right now, at the age of 66, if they wanted me to. I'd go anyplace the government sent me. But it would take a lot of pills on the plane to go with me.

JUNE GRIEG

June Greig, now 79, joined the Women Marines only because her brother was going into the Marine Corps. She met her husband, also a Marine, in San Diego and stayed in California to raise her family. She remembers her experience in the Women Marines as an adventure. "It was a century ago," she says now, "it was a different time." But it was an adventure she hasn't forsaken. She is a member of the Marine Corps League and was looking forward to the Marine Corps Ball a week after this interview. She enjoys Women Marine conventions, where she says she still meets many nice women. "Of course," she adds, "a lot of them are much older now."

My brother and I joined the Marine Corps together in 1943. We were the first pair in Minnesota to join together. We were always very close, and when he said he was going into the Marine Corps, I said, well, I'm going too. That's the only reason I joined,

because I thought I could be near him.

They held a banquet in downtown Minneapolis for us because we were the first brother-sister pair to join the service in Minnesota. We even got to be on the radio. That was way before TV, of course.

He was called up a few weeks later and was sent to San Diego. I was sent to boot camp in North Carolina. After boot camp, I asked to go to San Diego to be near my brother. The day I got there I called him, and that same day he had been shipped overseas to the Pacific. I didn't see him for two and a half years.

It was a different time in those days. I was the only girl that I knew of that was going into the service. In those days, there was a Marine poster that urged the women to join to free a marine to fight. For every girl who joined, who worked in an office, then a guy didn't have to do that job and he could get out there and fight. The women had some restrictions then. We had to cut our hair. It couldn't touch the collar of our coat or blouse. And we had to wear a girdle, even the thin girls.

I had a chance to be transferred to either Hawaii or Alaska. i wrote to my brother and said, should I do that? And he said, no, because he said some of those girls don't have a very good name. So I said, OK. And I didn't go. I don't feel bad now because I've been to both places anyway. I'm kind of glad I stayed where I did because I enjoyed it. The San Diego weather was wonderful, especially coming from Minnesota.

I'll never forget my 21st birthday. It was June 22, 1944, and I was on the train to go back to Minnesota to visit my family. In Nebraska, the train stopped in North Platte. We were only there for about 15 minutes. In those days the women that lived in town would make snacks and coffee and bring them over to the depot. They had a canteen room, and when we got off the train they invited us into this room where we could have something to eat. They did it for all the service people. If it was your birthday, they would give you a birthday cake. It happened to be my 21st birthday, so I got a cake to take on the train. I had a lot of friends after I got that cake on the train. I can't remember how we cut it, but we ate it. I always thought that was so sweet of those ladies to make cakes and have all that food for the service people passing through.

But that was wartime, and everybody kind of stuck together. They were like family almost, and you just trusted each other. That was the good part of going through that era.

Most of the men, when they came back from overseas, they didn't talk about it. Some of them had never seen a Woman Marine before. Some liked us and some didn't - they couldn't get used to it. Now, today, it's old hat. I suppose it would be hard for Women Marines today to understand.

MYLES MCTERNAN

On Jan. 3, 1973, Air Force Capt. Myles McTernan, then 24, was the last person to bail out of the last B-52 bomber shot down over Viet Nam. The cease-fire was signed 25 days later. The navigator of a six-man crew, McTernan survived four and a half hours in the sea, in what he was later told were shark-infested waters, without a life raft or any means of communication. It was his 119th combat mission. Now 54, McTernan grew up in Boston and served three tours at Mather Air Force Base in Rancho Cordova. He retired in 1991 as a lieutenant colonel and lives in Folsom.

At the end of 1972, President Nixon ordered a bombing campaign over North Vietnam. Our B-52s bombed Hanoi every day for 11 days. I think Nixon's order to do that was indirectly responsible for bringing the North Vietnamese to the peace table. We hadn't used B-52s until that year. The first one was shot down on Thanksgiving eve. We didn't use them because we didn't want Russia to get hold of one. We didn't want to give them any more information than we had to.

We were at Dyess Air Force Base in Texas, fat and happy, and we started reading in the newspaper about all the B-52s being shot down. We knew we'd get a call to come back over to Guam. We flew a bomber over there because they were losing so many. We got there Christmas Day. I actually missed Christmas Eve, going across the International Dateline.

I flew a mission on Dec. 27, day 9 of the 11-day war. One hundred B-52s took off from Guam, one a minute, for one hour and 40 minutes. The round-trip flight took 17 hours.

What was different about this bombing raid was that this time we went all the way to Hanoi. Hanoi was the most heavily defended aerial base since World War II. We were also afraid to go up there because of the Hanoi Hilton – we didn't want to hit our POWs. But the North Vietnamese didn't come to the peace table, so Nixon said, we want to get this over with, so go north.

When the bombing campaign was over, we had obliterated Hanoi. We got all their shipping yards and their missile defenses so they didn't have much any more to fight back at us with. We thought the war was over and they'd come to the peace table, so we had an end-of-the-war New Year's party. We were in Thailand then. We partied hearty. We rested on Jan. 2, and on Jan. 3 we were notified that we had to fly out again that night. North Vietnam hadn't come to the peace table yet.

As the navigator, where I flew was a little hole underneath the pilot with no windows. I just had a little radar scope to look at. The bombardier was next to me and the other four crew members were above us. The bombardier had optics so he could look out. The flight from U Tapao, Thailand, was three hours. The bombing takes 20 to 25 minutes. We didn't go all the way to Hanoi, just north of the demilitarized zone. We were getting ready to drop our bombs from 35,000 feet when I heard the pilot say there was a missile coming at us. When you're on a collision course, you know it because the

missile stays in the same spot in your window. But when you're dropping a bomb, you have to stay straight and level to hit your target. That's the only time you fly straight and level. We couldn't alter our course, and we got hit. We lost two engines immediately. The flight controls and the hydraulic and electrical systems were damaged and all the windows were shattered. We immediately decompressed and had to use oxygen masks. Fuel was leaking, and the bombardier and I got soaked.

We wanted to go to Da Nang Air Force Base in South Vietnam, but the pilot thought the plane was too big to land there, so we alerted the search and rescue aircraft that we were going to bail out. You have to bail out over water. Because I was downstairs, my seat was designed to eject downward. I was supposed to eject before the bombardier, but he ejected the same time I did and my seat got stuck. When I saw I was stuck, I looked for help from him, because he was supposed to be there, but there were just straps floating in the air. I heard the pilot on the mike ask if there was anybody left in the aircraft, but I couldn't reach my microphone. He had heard two ejection seat rockets from downstairs and assumed we had both ejected, so he bailed out, too.

I knew what I had to do. I had to get out of my ejection seat and wrap myself like a ball and bail out through the small escape hatch. I couldn't take my life raft with me because it wouldn't fit through the hole. All I had was my survival vest, two life preservers, my parachute, flares and guns. It was pitch black out, but I expected I'd be rescued because I thought the rescuers knew where we were.

The rest of the crew was rescued, but they couldn't find me because they thought I'd ejected with them. They didn't know I had actually ejected about 10 miles out to sea. I was told later the waves were eight to 10 feet high and that I was out there four and a half hours and that there were sharks in the waters. My parents actually got a telegram saying I was missing in action.

I don't remember anything from the time I jumped, when it was dark, until the sun was over the horizon. I had what's called pain amnesia. I was floating in the water by myself. My parachute was stretched behind me. I made the mistake of pulling off my parachute harness and I poked a hole in one of my life preservers. After that, I had to keep blowing it up. My radios didn't work, my flares didn't work, nothing worked. I wasn't helping myself to be found.

Survival is a thing where you keep yourself occupied. In any survival situation, you can't dwell on what's wrong. You need to work on whatever you can do to survive. Ground survival is a little different. You can make shelter. My survival was taking every piece I had on that vest to see if it would do something. And blowing up that life preserver.

The water was warm, about 70 to 75 degrees, but your body temperature is warmer, 98 degrees. Your life expectancy if you're submerged at 70 degrees is 24 hours. If you go down in the Arctic, your life expectancy is about 20 seconds.

It was 10 years later, when I met a guy at Mather who had been in the command

support at Da Nang, that I learned how I was rescued, and how close I came to not being rescued. He said a little aircraft had gone out to sea to look for me but the plane's fuel became so low the pilot had to return to base immediately. As he was making his left turn to go back , he looked down and saw a spot of color. I had just hit the top of a wave and was briefly visible. He radioed the helicopter to pick me up. If he hadn't run out of fuel at exactly that time, he wouldn't have found me.

I was a mess. I had ingested a lot of salt water, so my insides were messed up. The right side of my face was smashed in from the jump, I was burned from the fuel spilling on me, and every one of my fingers was cut. But I could walk. I was extremely lucky. It's a horrible thing when you live through it, but I survived and all the other crew members survived. They're all still alive today.

I left Viet Nam in February 1973, after the cease-fire. I was back in 1973 and 1974 for training missions. The war ended poorly, unfortunately. South Vietnam fell back to Communist rule. It's getting better now, but we lost the war to all intents and purposes. That's why there is so much heartache over the whole thing. I think we should have gone, but we shouldn't have prolonged it.

DAN HERD

Irvin Daniel Herd, always called Dan, entered the Army Aug. 28, 1940, right after his 19th birthday. The United States wasn't officially in the war yet, and Pearl Harbor hadn't been bombed, but, Herd says, "I figured I was going to go to war." He did, in October 1943 – and became a part of history. He landed at Normandy in the D-Day invasion on June, 6, 1944, and saw action at the Battle of the Bulge and the crossing of the bridge at Remagen. He was one of the soldiers who helped liberate France and several "slave labor camps." Herd, who grew up on a farm in Oklahoma, enlisted for three years but stayed nearly five. He has never been back to Europe. "I've seen enough of it," he said. "It's in my memory grandly."

I landed at Omaha Beach for the D-Day invasion. We knew we were going to be part of the invasion of the French coast and that we would probably be among the landing force. But even when we went out we didn't know where we were going to land. Actually, we didn't even know when we were going, by gosh, until General Eisenhower ordered us to embark on the ships.

When we got to Omaha Beach, there were iron posts sticking up along the beach to puncture any landing boats that went in. They sent 94 people in to blow them up before we landed. Most of them died. A guy in my platoon was one of the 94 and he was lucky to be alive.

(The Battle of the Bulge, fought in Belgium during an unusually snowy December 1944 and January 1945, was Germany's attempt to break through the Allied lines, trap allied armies and reach the seaport at Antwerp. It was the largest land battle of World War II

in which the Americans participated. The Allies won the battle after five weeks, but at huge human cost.)

At the Battle of the Bulge, there was snow on the ground, about a foot. We were in our dark uniforms and I had my section in an old artillery emplacement with our mortars set up, and the Germans came through. We were so surprised to see they had their tanks and their troops all in white. Our tank destroyer battalion discovered them and knocked out the lead German tank and proceeded to knock out the other tanks. We had American troops in some of the buildings up on the second and third stories and they had what they call molotov cocktails. They showered these explosives down on the tanks and set the tanks afire and immobilized them.

(As the Americans advanced across Europe, the Germans destroyed the bridges along the Rhine River to keep allied troops from entering Germany. When the Americans reached the bridge at Remagen, it was the last bridge left standing.)

I saw my first jet plane at Remagen. I was surprised as hell. It was a German plane and it dropped a bomb. It only missed the bridge tower by 12 feet. The bridge didn't fall then, but later it did collapse. We had fighter protection overhead, but our planes couldn't catch the German jet. It was so much faster. We already had some troops across, and we put up pontoon bridges to take the rest. We had brought three big pontoon bridges with us, so big that all the armor in the world could go across them. The pontoons were made of some kind of floatation material inside. I was on a little island up the Rhine. My job was to help put the pontoon sections together. I rode across the bridge on a tank after they put the bridges in.

At the end of the war, we were under Patton. I met him. I thought he was a pretty good general. He was not big and statuesque like people think. He weighed about 160 pounds. After the war, he took us into Czechoslovakia and what he ultimately wanted, by gosh, was some of the Lippizaner horses that were there. The allies had transported them up from Vienna to preserve them (from the Nazis) and I guess food was at a scarcity in Czechoslovakia then and he didn't want the Germans to butcher them for food. We were outside Pilsen and the horses were kept on a farm out there and he more or less confiscated two of them and sent them back to the states to his ranch in Texas. Then he died in an accident on the German autobahn – I think it was about October; the war had been over in May.

I killed about 20 people. The main thing over there was not to be wounded and, you know, to take out the enemy in any way you could whatever. We had to answer fire. They weren't all Germans. Some were White Russians that had been captured and made to fight by the Germans, and some of them were French. The way the Germans controlled them was to put in a squad leader and NCO and assistant NCO and when the captives didn't fire, the squad leaders would shoot them themselves.

One time I received shrapnel in my left knee cap. It's still lodged in there. The guy next

to me received a piece of shrapnel in his jugular vein and he died, and the guy talking to me kneeling in front of me received 260 pieces. I was extremely lucky because shrapnel disperses in a circle like a pie with a piece cut out of it. I happened to be standing in the only safe spot, where that piece was out of the pie.

I was over there almost five years. I'd enlisted for three, but when my enlistment expired they didn't let me go. When I left in 1945, they flew me to France. It was my first time on a plane. There were three camps that processed people to return home. My camp was the Lucky Strike camp. All the camps were named after cigarettes.

I received a lot of ribbons, but I didn't get my bronze stars until 1999. My lawyer had asked to see my war mementos, and when he saw that I had not gotten my bronze stars, he did the paperwork and arranged for them to be presented to me. Former President Bush presented the medals and I got to meet him.