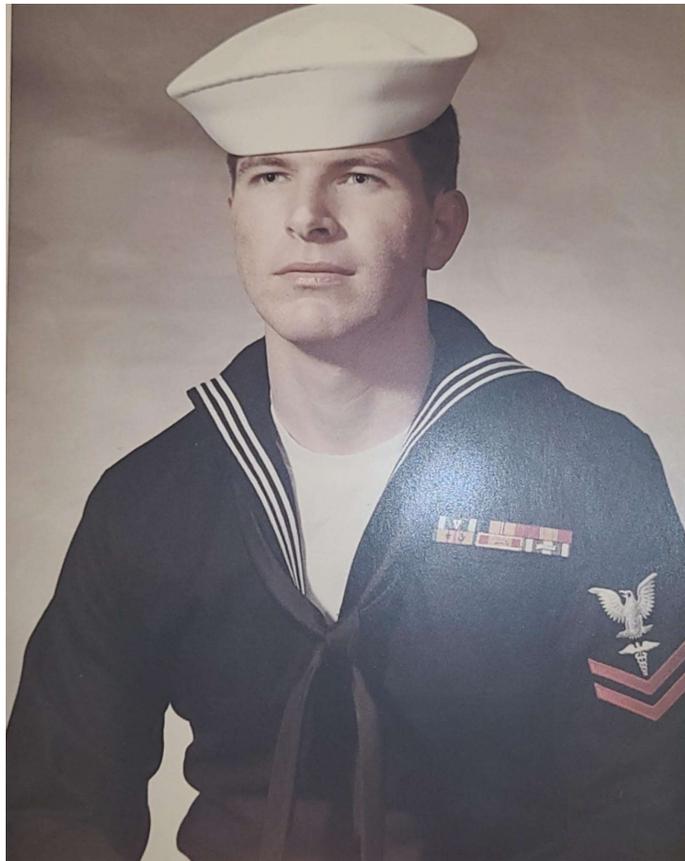


# **GARY C. JOHNSON**



**US NAVY 1969-1971**

**US ARMY RESERVE 1996-2000**

**GARY C. JOHNSON**  
**US NAVY 1969-1971**  
**US ARMY RESERVE 1996-2000**



Gary Clifford Johnson was born December 12, 1948 in Ida Grove, Iowa. Gary has two sisters: Vicki and Patricia. Gary's father was Clifford. His mother was Virginia. Gary attended elementary, middle & high school in Ida Grove, Iowa graduating in May 1967.

Gary enlisted in the Navy in June 1967. When he enlisted in the Navy he was assured that, following basic training, he would attend Hospital Corps School and serve as a hospital corpsman. Gary reported to the Naval Training Center in San Diego for basic training. Following basic training he attended Hospital Corpsman School at Balboa Naval Hospital, San Diego, California. He next completed Field Medical Service School at Camp Pendleton, California which is an eight-week course that prepares Navy hospital corpsman to serve with Marine units.

After his training at Camp Pendleton, Gary was stationed at Bethesda Naval Hospital in Maryland for one year. At Bethesda, Gary was assigned to an orthopedic ward where he provided care to high ranked military officers. While at Bethesda, Gary received his orders for Vietnam departing in March 1969. After a stop in Okinawa, Gary landed in DaNang. During the Vietnam War, Da Nang Air Base was used as a primary entry point for American service members fighting in the Vietnam War. It was used by the U.S. Marine Corps (USMC) as well as the U.S. Air Force (USAF).

Gary was assigned to the 1st Marine Division, 2nd Battalion, Echo Company. A company is comprised of three squads. Gary would rotate going on patrol with each of the three squads. Gary felt that the best way to serve and save lives was being with the squads on patrol. Corpsmen on the battlefields of Vietnam were focused mainly on quick treatment and evacuation for wounded or injured troops. They resuscitated, stopped bleeding, managed pain, and whatever else was necessary to keep troops alive until they could be evacuated. The most critical were evacuated by helicopter. The medical kit of the corpsman and his prompt response often meant the difference between life and death.

For that reason, Gary felt the best way to save lives was to participate with patrols or on sweeps. On a sweep, a company of Marines would follow Army tanks. The hope was the tanks would trip the booby traps or flush out the enemy. During a sweep, troops were looking for caches of food, supplies or weapons.

**In Gary's Own Words, April 29, 1969**

"I was immediately assigned to 1st Marines, 2nd Battalion, Echo Company and was replacing the former hospital corpsman who was killed in action. That reality weighed heavy on my mind. A short time after joining Echo Company, I met Andrew "Andy" Rankin. Andy was in Echo Company and began his tour on December 18, 1968. He had the rank of E-3, Lance Corporal.

As I became acquainted with Andy and the other marines in Echo Company, I realized that each of us was mindful of the fact that we could be wounded or killed in action. As a hospital corpsman I was dedicated to doing my job to take care of each of the Marines in Echo Company. I routinely accompanied each of the three squads on patrols. Andy and the other Marines always looked out for me. They knew I wanted to be there for them in case one of them was injured from booby traps or enemy contact. They would refer to me as "Doc" and sometimes affectionately referred to me as "Mom".

As a hospital corpsman, I always was concerned about the availability of back up when I had a severely wounded casualty. When we were on patrols, we were very distant from the battalion areas. The only backup available would be through radio contact requesting medivac helicopter. If medivac helicopter was available, the estimated arrival time might take up to 15-20 minutes.

It was shortly after 13:00 hours on April 29, 1969 when I was on patrol with Andy's squad. We had stopped for a short break. Suddenly there was an unexpected loud explosion throwing sand and dust into the air. After the sand and dust settled, I looked to see if there were any squad members injured. I saw Andy lying on the ground next to a small crater in the sand. It appeared that he had stepped on a booby trap. I carefully maneuvered my way over to the area where Andy was lying and found him lying on his back. The normal procedure is for the squad leader to clear the area, check for more booby traps, before allowing "Doc" to administer first aid. Gary was at Andrew's side within seconds of the explosion.

When I reached Andy, he was awake and it was apparent that he was in mild shock. I immediately clamped off some major arteries with hemostats I had in my medical bag and applied dressings to other shrapnel wounds. While I attended to Andy other squad members maintained security. I called to squad leader to radio for a medivac helicopter so we could get Andy to a hospital for intensive trauma care. I recognized how severely wounded Andy was and assured him that a medivac helicopter would be coming to transport him to a hospital. I also assessed that he was beginning to experience moderate to severe pain and subsequently administered Morphine injection to manage his pain.

In light of Andy's severe injuries, I knew he needed to have immediate intensive trauma care. The amount of time that would pass before the medivac helicopter would arrive concerned me greatly. We needed to get Andy to an intensive trauma center as soon as possible. Suddenly, as if out of nowhere, a small helicopter appeared and landed near our location. When the helicopter landed a one-star general got off the helicopter and summoned the squad leader. The general indicated that when he was in the air passing near our location he overheard the radioman's transmission for request of a medivac helicopter. The general indicated that he wanted to go ahead and transport Andy to DaNang where he could get the emergency care he needed.

As we carried Andy over to the helicopter the general directed me to come along. Because of the severe nature of Andy's injuries, I requested the men carrying Andy to place him on the general's front cockpit seat upside down with his face-up head hanging over front edge of seat so as to keep blood in his torso and head and avoiding further blood loss from shrapnel injuries involving lower abdomen and lower extremities. The general's helicopter took off in flight with me tending to Andy. Meanwhile the general radioed ahead to DaNang Hospital and requested surgical team to standby and ready. When we arrived and landed at the DaNang Hospital the surgical team was waiting with gurney on the runway tarmac and immediately rushed Andy into surgery.

I thanked the general for what he had done. I followed the surgical team into the hospital and was directed to the surgery waiting area. They informed me that I would be updated regarding Andy's condition after he was out of surgery and in recovery. I saw a Chapel nearby and stepped away from the waiting area. I

entered the Chapel and prayed for Andy. After praying for Andy I returned to the surgery waiting area.

After several hours passed one of the surgeons came to the waiting area and spoke with me. The surgeon informed me that Andy’s injuries were so extensive and that despite multiple units of blood he did not survive the surgery. I requested to pay my respects to Andy and was taken to the area that Andy lay and quietly paid my respects.”

### **Reflecting on his Time in “Nam”**

Gary served as a Corpsman in Vietnam from March 1969 to March of 1970. Of the 58,220 killed in action, at least 639 were United States Navy Hospital Corpsmen. When Gary was enroute to Vietnam in Okinawa, they were instructed to leave their personal belongings in a box in case they didn’t come back. Gary wondered if he would come home.

After serving in Vietnam and returning to the states, Gary served out the remaining one year of his enlistment at the Base Dispensary, Naval Air Station, Millington, Tennessee. Gary was discharged in March 1971 but continued to serve.

Gary later wrote a letter to Andy’s family members. Here is the letter, In Gary’s own words.

*“To the family members of Andrew “Andy” Rankin, Lance Corporal, USMC – I hope perhaps it can be of some comfort to you to know that Andy did not suffer in a lot of pain. The unexpected blast and explosion that occurred when he triggered the booby trap happened so instantaneously. When I tended to Andy, he was awake but in mild shock. When he began to experience moderate to severe pain, I administered Morphine injection to manage his pain. Perhaps, also, I hope it can be of some comfort to you to know that he received the most expedient and best medical/surgical care I am sorry for your loss, and I want you to know that. The memorial in honor of Andy that you and your siblings made to the St Charles County Veterans Museum is awesome! I honor, respect, and thank Andy for his service. I thank you and your siblings for allowing me to*

“Thanks to the general’s compassion to intercede with getting Andy transported immediately to the DaNang Hospital. To me it was God’s grace in action”

*share this narrative with you about the events surrounding the day Andy was wounded.*

*Respectfully, Gary Johnson*

### **Inseparable Bond**

From the beginning, the U.S. Navy and the Marine Corps have fought together in the air, on land and at sea. It is said, the tightest bond of all has always been between Marines and Navy Corpsmen who serve with their Marines. More than 10,000 U.S. Navy Corpsmen served with the Marines in Vietnam. Of those, 645 were killed in action and more than 3300 wounded. Gary watched several of his brothers fall. He would devote his life to serving others.

#### **"I'm the One Called "Doc..."**

I shall not walk in your footsteps,  
but I will walk by your side.  
I shall not walk in your image,  
I've earned my own title of pride.  
We've answered the call together,  
on sea and foreign land.  
When the cry for help was given,  
I've been there right at hand.  
Whether I am on the ocean  
or in the jungle wearing greens,  
Giving aid to my fellow man,  
be it Sailors or Marines.  
So the next time you see a corpsman  
and you think of calling him "squid",  
Think of the job he's doing  
as those before him did.  
And if you ever have to go out there  
and your life is on the block,  
Look at the one right next to you...

## **Continuing to Serve**

After his time in the Navy, Gary used the G.I. Bill to attend college in Marshalltown Iowa for two years. He became aware that the University of Iowa, Iowa City, Iowa opened a Physician Assistant Program. Gary subsequently applied for admission in the Physician Assistant Program and was accepted. He graduated from the University of Iowa Physician Assistant Program in 1975 and received the Bachelor of Science Degree in Medicine. Gary went on to get a Master's Degree in Health Promotion and Education. While at Millington, Gary became highly fond of Tennessee and lives there today. He continued to serve, working 26 years as a physician assistant at the Alvin C York Veterans Administration Medical Center located in Murfreesboro, Tennessee. Gary continues to reside in Murfreesboro.

Gary's Naval and Military Career Highlights include:

- U.S. Army Reserve; Captain; Army Medical Specialist Corps, Sep. 1996–Jan. 2000
- U.S. Navy; Hospital Corpsman 2nd Class (E-5) with a Letter of Commendation from the Commanding Officer, U.S. Naval Hospital, Bethesda, Maryland.
- Vietnam service assigned to 1st Marine Division, 2nd Battalion, 1st Marines Echo Company. Participated in three major ground operations including Dodge City, Pipestone Canyon and Durham Peak.
- National Defense Service Medal
- Vietnam Service Medal
- Vietnam Campaign Medal
- Vietnamese Cross of Gallantry Ribbon
- Navy Unit Commendation Medal
- Good Conduct Medal
- Honorable Discharge

Gary Johnson visited the St. Charles County Veterans Museum on May 13, 2022 to share his story about Andrew Rankin. Andrew and his family had previously lived in St. Peters Missouri a short distance from the museum.