

## A U. S. Marine

David Jack Drage was “born a Marine” 10 Jun 1947, in Elyria, Ohio. Fast forward to June of 1966. The Vietnam War is raging. Watching the news on television, seeing people protesting and spitting on the American flag made David angry. Angry enough to decide that he wanted to go to Vietnam and fight for his Country.

So, in June of 1966, David joined the Marines. By July, he was on Paris Island, South Carolina in basic training, doing so well that he was promoted to 1<sup>st</sup> Lieutenant. In December of '66 he got his wish – he shipped out to Vietnam.

David was part of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Marine Division, serving in the Corp of Engineers, driving large pieces of equipment, stationed at the DMZ.<sup>1</sup> It was a difficult time for him. A time he rarely talked about in later years. Seeing your buddies blown up just a few feet away changes you. Then in October of 1967 the nightmare became a reality for him. David was caught in a rocket attack and thrown against a piece of equipment. It shattered his left knee and he was sent to the Naval Hospital on Guam, spending 4 months there recovering, after which he was sent back to the States. He arrived back home with a bad limp, a cane and two Purple Hearts. He was honorably discharged from the Marine Corp in June 1968.

Being a typical young man of the late 1960's, David bought a motorcycle after he got back to Ohio. He was pursuing his dream of becoming a commercial airline pilot. David loved to fly! But, a drunk driver took all of David's dreams away on the night of June 6, 1969, just four days before his 22<sup>nd</sup> birthday. David was riding his motorcycle when he was hit head-on. David spent 92 days in a coma and lost his right arm as a result of the accident. He spent 5 years off-and-on in a VA Medical Hospital recuperating.

I met David in 1991. Never did I meet a more independent person! I often told him that Marine was spelled “S-T-U-B-B-O-R-N” and that he had the word written across his forehead. Look in the dictionary under stubborn and there will be David's picture!

The one thing everyone always noticed about David, through it all, was his wonderful spirit. He was always an inspiration to those around him. And David loved his fellow Veterans. For several years he even worked as a Veteran's Councilor for the North Carolina Employment Security Commission, helping other disabled Vets to get jobs.

Time and arthritis took its toll on David's body. The cane gave way to a manual wheelchair. The manual wheelchair gave way to an electric wheelchair. Eventually the time came when he couldn't even maneuver the electric wheelchair on his own and he had to totally depend on others to move him from one place to another.

David Jack Drage, born a Marine June 10, 1947 in Elyria, Ohio, died March 31, 2008 in the hospice unit of the VA Medical Center in Syracuse, New York. David Jack Drage. My husband. My Marine.

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<sup>1</sup> Demilitarized Zone – a dividing line between North and South Vietnam.

As he lay wasting away the last few days of his life, he never lost his beautiful spirit or his love of his fellow veterans. At the end I told him that the word “stubborn” was no longer written on his forehead. Now it said “HERO.”

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