

Christmas Away From Home

Here are a couple news items for our Vietnam Veterans. First, MSUM applied for and received a grant as one of six communities in Minnesota to host programs on Minnesota Remembers Vietnam. The project is being funded by the MN Humanities Council and kick off for the program is scheduled for April 2018. Beyond the Yellow Ribbon Moorhead and the Heritage Education Commission are partners in the project. Watch this column for details in 2018.

There is also a Minnesota PBS initiative on Minnesota Remembers Vietnam. Their website is <https://www.mnvietnam.org/> and they are encouraging Minnesota Vietnam Veterans to tell their story. A recent news release said that they would like to hear stories of spending Christmas away from home and family. Although the site accepts stories from all people, I don't feel right putting mine there since I did not serve in Vietnam. Don't worry, here is a short version of my four Christmases spent in the Air Force.

In 1964, I was stationed at the University of Indiana and was able to catch a ride to Minneapolis and then boarded a train to Newfolden and spent Christmas at home. It was pretty normal since I'd been in the Air Force for only six months. In 1965, I was stationed at Goodfellow Air Base in Texas and had a very memorable Christmas. It started in November when my friend Al received an invitation to spend Thanksgiving with his uncle and aunt in Albuquerque, NM. He asked if I want to go with him, so I did. The family was really nice with a son, Bud about five and daughter, Peggy a student at the University of New Mexico. Apparently, they thought I was okay as well because a week after we returned to San Angelo, I got an invitation to come back for Christmas. OK, it was from the daughter, Peggy. Of course, I accepted and brought two friends, Dave and Bill with me. Peggy arranged for two of her girl friends to spend time with us and it was wonderful. It was the first time I'd seen luminaria, paper bags with sand and lit candles inside. They lined their driveway with them for Christmas. Peggy and I exchanged letters for a few months while I was in Texas and in Japan. Christmas 1966 and 1967 were spent in Misawa, Japan. I purchased an inexpensive plastic Christmas tree, put some tinsel on it and had it in my room for Christmas 66 and 67. Yes, I had my own private room. I also remember playing Christmas songs on my Sony reel-to-reel tape player/recorder. My favorite was a Christmas album by Leontyne Price. Since our security wing was on duty 24 hours/7 days, we did not get any special time off for Christmas. After getting out of the Air Force, I kept the plastic tree and put it up each year until it fell apart. I tossed the tree a few years ago.