

LIFESTYLE

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Longview man pens books on war vets

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A 1966 Lobo, Michael Dan Kellum wanted to write a book before he ever went to college.

In 1967, with the Vietnam War in full swing, Kellum dropped out of college to join the U.S. Marine Corps. His experience in the war led him to publish two books on "American Heroes: Grunts, Pilots & 'Docs'", which tell the wartime experiences of many men, including several from East Texas. Kellum is planning to have two book signings Thursday.

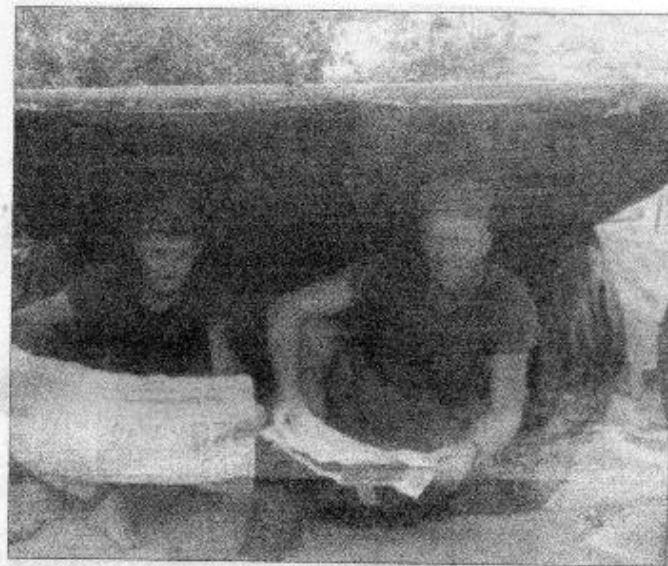
"I hope the people who read the book have a respect for what these people did," Kellum said. "A lot of people say Vietnam was a bad war, and that we shouldn't have been there. But we're just the messengers. We went over and served our country the best we could, and I would hope that people would honor them."

Kellum enlisted as a Marine in October 1967. He had the option of either being a private first class or going through a commissioning program to become a lieutenant.

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Michael Dan Kellum is seen during the Vietnam War.

Michael Dan Kellum
Special to the News-Journal



Michael Dan Kellum/Special to the News-Journal
U.S. Marines 1st Lt. Michael Dan Kellum and Staff Sgt. Joe Strausbaugh read the Longview newspaper in April 1970 at the Big Sand Dune, south of Da Nang, Vietnam.

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"That was a no-brainer. I went through the commissioning program," Kellum said.

Before being sent overseas, Kellum said, he attended a church service where he went up to a balcony and prayed to God to protect his men.

Michael Kellum
Author

"If anything was to happen — being injured or killed — I would have rather had it happen to me. I didn't want to have to live with losing somebody else's child," Kellum said.

His books tell his story as well as those of fellow U.S. Marine Pfc. Billy Northcutt of Longview, who was killed in action, and Cpl. Harold Bridges, who lives in the Tatum area.

"Between the two books, I've included the names of 1,019 Marines and 42 Navy Corpsmen. (We called them 'Docs.') Add in some other personnel from the other services and the total number of men mentioned in my two books comes to 1,109 men," Kellum said. "The actual research, interviews and writing consumed 21 years of my life. It was a total labor of love for my fellow Marines and Docs on my part and time well spent to make sure people didn't forget them."

Kellum began work on the



Longview native Michael Dan Kellum has written two books on the Vietnam War.

book in 1989. It took him 21 years to finish it.

On May 7, Kellum presented a set of hardback books to Ross Perot in Plano to thank him for honoring his former battalion commander Lt. Col. Bill Leftwich Jr. The Perot Foundation had presented a bronze statue depicting Leftwich to the most outstanding Marine captain in combat each year from 1979-2011, Kellum said. Leftwich was killed in a helicopter accident in 1970.

Kellum intends to present a set of his books to the Longview Public Library. He will sell and sign books at the library from 10:30 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. Thursday, and he will sign and sell books at Johnny Cace's Seafood and Steak House from 5 to 7 p.m. Thursday.