

Bernard Holthaus

Bernard Holthaus of Fort Loramie was drafted into the Army and sent to Vietnam in 1968, where he spent a year in the jungle.

Holthaus was drafted in May, 1968 and sent to take basic training at Fort Polk, LA.

"Tiger country, they called it," he remembered, but he said he wasn't sure why. "It was very physical training. They were training us for fighting in the jungle. We didn't have a clue."

His advanced infantry training took place at Fort Ord, CA, and when it was done, he had 30 days leave before being sent to Vietnam.

"In the country, we traveled from place to place all the time," he said. He was a member of the 1st Air Cavalry Division, Air Mobile Company D, 1st Battalion, 8th Cavalry.

As a member of an air mobile combat assault unit, he was often taken with his company by helicopter and dropped into the field to fight for two or three weeks at a time.

"Sometimes the helicopter couldn't even land, and we had to jump out. Some guys got their legs broken before they ever saw combat," he said. Field rations and water were also brought into the field by helicopter and just dropped into the area where the soldiers were located.

"The water was in big rubber balloon-like things that wouldn't break when they hit the ground," he said. "And the rations were just tossed out to us."

"We kept moving," he explained. "We were fighting all the time, so I can't say I was stationed here or there. I was just in the jungle. We established a perimeter at night and stood guard. That was where where our camp was...wherever we were."

People die in war. In a battle fought Nov. 27, 1968, the day before Thanksgiving, Holthaus can't remember exactly where, his company of 150 men was reduced to nine who weren't killed or injured.

"They sent Charlie Company in to help us, but it was all over," he said.

"I carried a radio while I was in Vietnam. First for a

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squad, then for a platoon and finally for the commanding officer of the company. I don't know how, but I was never hurt."

Once, he said, he was taken from the field for eight hours, suffering from dehydration. While he was back in a base camp getting fit enough to go back into combat, the radio operator who had replaced him was killed.

"I guess the biggest difference in the way wars are fought now is the technology available to assist the troops," he said. "And no one ever flew air strikes to soften up things for us. We just walked through the jungle and the rice paddies till we encountered the enemy. Sometimes, they picked us up and took us to the enemy by helicopter, but often we just walked."

Shortly before he was due to come home, Holthaus was sent to Sydney, Australia for five days of R&R. Sydney was considered the best destination for R&R from Vietnam, because it was a five-day reprieve from the war. The other destinations, such as Hawaii, Okinawa, or Japan, were three-day trips. Because Holthaus had already served for nearly a year when he was granted R&R, he was sent to Sydney. He returned to Vietnam to fight and count the days until he could come home to the states.

When he got back to the U.S. he spent six months at Fort Benning, GA, and while he was there, he was informed that his father was sick and had had an operation. He was transferred first to Columbus and then to the Army National Guard post in Lima, where he could finish his two year commitment to the Army and still go home every day to help out on the farm. He was the second of Bernard and Ruth Holthaus' thirteen children and their oldest son. He was 20 years old.

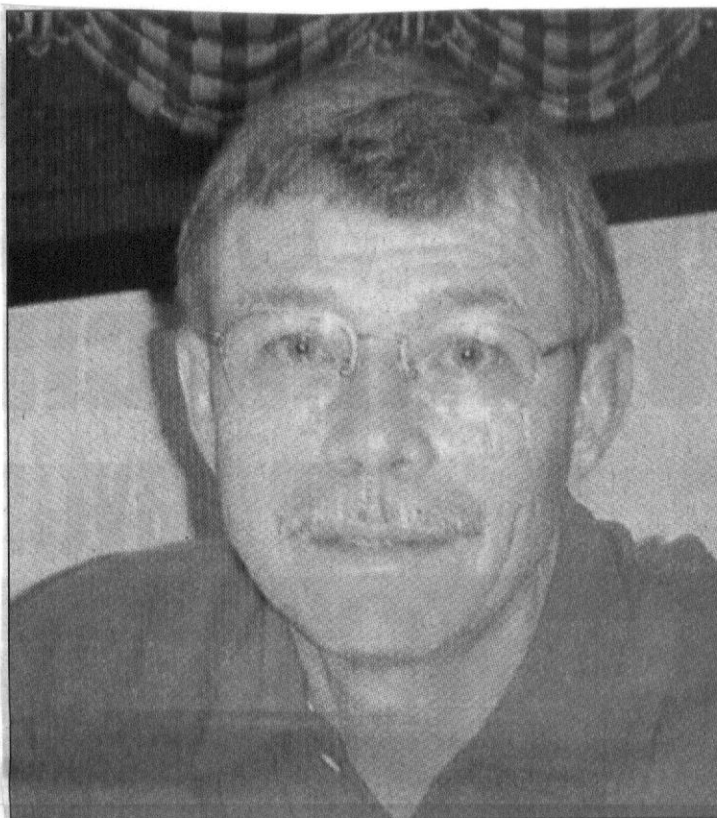
When he was released from the service, Tom Morsey from Frank Morsey and Sons poultry producers, called Holthaus and offered him a job.

"I never had to look for a job," he said. "The offer was waiting for me when I got out. It meant a lot. I drove a truck for them for 20 years," he said, "and I went to Honda, 14 years ago."

Holthaus and his wife Bobbi have three children, and now they have a granddaughter, Kaitlyn.

His experiences as an air mobile assault soldier in Vietnam were simply terrible. Tears glittered in his eyes as he spoke and he admitted it is a time he isn't anxious to talk very much about, even after more than 30 years.

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BERNARD HOLTHAUS