

# VETERANS NEWS & NOTES

## Veterans Commemorate 50th Anniversary Of Vietnam War With 'Alive Day' Stories

(NAPS)—Army veteran Ron Hope was piloting a helicopter in Vietnam to extract a company of soldiers, when he was shot down. His left brachial plexus—the network of nerves that sends signals from the spinal cord to the arm and hand—was crushed. He also broke both legs, suffered compound fractures in six vertebrae and had third-degree burns covering 55 percent of his body.

The Texas native was honorably discharged from the Army and turned his focus to recovery. He went on to enroll at Tarleton State University and dedicated 40 years to serving his fellow veterans. Each year on July 15, Hope hosts what he calls a “celebration of life” gathering to mark his Alive Day and remember the battle buddies he lost. “I met a lot of good people in Vietnam. Unfortunately, I don’t have many of them left, but I still remember them and those we left behind.”

Alive Days are now common among veterans who have survived catastrophic wartime injuries, whether visible or invisible. These special days mark the anniversary when they almost died serving their country. Many Vietnam-era veterans have reached 50 years’ worth of Alive Days. DAV (Disabled American Veterans), a nonprofit charity that helps veterans get their benefits and services, honors those milestones through a new online series of articles and podcasts featuring Vietnam heroes.

For example, Marine veteran Bobby Barrera had been in Vietnam for only six weeks when a massive explosion rocked his vehicle, causing severe burns over 40 percent of his body and leaving him without a right hand or left arm. While his family marks the anniversary of the day—Sept. 16, 1969—every year, Barrera says, “My real Alive Day was when I married my wife, who gave me a renewed reason to live.” With her sup-



**Marine veteran Bobby Barrera was severely injured in Vietnam but 50 years later, he celebrates being alive and with his family.**

port, he went back to school and they started a family. He also found meaningful work with DAV, helping other veterans and their families.

Another Vietnam veteran, Jim Sursely, thought only of sports as a teenager—football, baseball and basketball. But while driving down the street in his Minnesota hometown, he saw a sign that read, “Uncle Sam Needs You.” Sursely went to see an Army recruiter and three months later, was inducted into the military. A year into his service, Sursely stepped on a landmine, immediately losing both his legs and left arm.

After accepting and adjusting to life as a triple amputee, Sursely moved to Florida, where the new construction business brought more accessibility and opportunities in real estate. Today, he and his wife run their family business and he is one of the top real estate professionals in the area. Sursely is proud to say that he enjoys life with his four children, 12 grandchildren, and three great-grandchildren. And he continues to honor his Alive Day and looks forward to celebrating his 51st next year.

To read more about these and other Alive Day stories and learn about the support available to veterans of all generations, go to [www.DAV.org](http://www.DAV.org).