

Tipton County Museum, Veterans Memorial & Nature Center



April 2019 Veteran of the Month

Bob George Willis

Bob George Willis was born January 28, 1942, in Oakland, California. He was raised for the most part in the Oakland Bay Area but did for a short time live in Denver, Colorado, and Redding and Pleasanton, California. He joined the Marine Corps on March 16, 1960 but delayed going to boot camp until June 22 in order to graduate from Oakland Technical High School. Upon graduation he went to Marine Corps Recruit Depot in San Diego, California for boot camp. After boot camp and Individual Combat Training at Camp Pendleton, California he reported to 4th 155 Howitzer Battery at 29 Palms, California for training as a Field Artilleryman. He spent the next 4 years at 29 Palms; Okinawa, Japan; and Camp Pendleton, California as an Artilleryman, Explosives Truck Driver, and 6 months as a Rifle Range Marksmanship Coach while on Okinawa. As the end of his first enlistment approached, Bob determined that there was not much future in the Artillery and opted to reenlist to go into one of the aviation fields.

Bob arrived at the Naval Air Technical Training Center Memphis (Millington) in April 1964. While at Millington he bought his first car, got married, and graduated from Crash Crew School all in a 4-month period. When he left Millington, he reported to Marine Corps Air Station Cherry Point, North Carolina where he served as an Aircraft Crash Firefighter (with a brief 6-month tour as a Military Policeman). Over the next 26 years he served on Crash Crews at Marine Corps Air Stations and Facilities in North Carolina; Okinawa, Japan; Virginia; Hawaii; Iwakuni, Japan; California; and as a Drill Instructor at Marine Corps Recruit Depot Parris Island, South Carolina. September 10, 1968, Bob reported to Marine Aircraft Group – 36 at Phu Bai, Republic of South Vietnam where he served as a Section Leader in the Crash Crew for 13 months.

After retiring from the Marine Corps as a Master Gunnery Sergeant, with 29 years, 10 months and 13 days of active duty in February 1990, Bob went to work for the U.S. Coast Guard as a civilian Fire Chief at the Coast Guard's largest base in the United States - Elizabeth City, North Carolina - where he worked until 2006, retiring with 16 years 4 months service. He earned numerous awards and recognitions including Civilian of the Quarter and the Professional Designation as a Chief Fire Officer from the International Association of Fire Chiefs. While living in Elizabeth City, Bob also volunteered as a Paramedic with the County Rescue Squad for 16 years. In 1983, while serving at Marine Corp Air Station Cherry Point, Bob met his wife, Pat. After a whirl wind courtship, they began their 35-year marriage. Bob and Pat moved to Drummonds in April 2012 to be closer to his sons George and Larry.

Bob's awards and decorations from the Marine Corps include the Meritorious Service Medal, Presidential Unit Citation, Navy Meritorious Unit Citation, Good Conduct Medal (9 awards), National Defense Medal, Vietnam Service Medal with 4 campaign stars, Sea Service Deployment Ribbon with 1 star, Drill Instructors Ribbon, Republic of Vietnam Gallantry Cross with Palm and Frame Unit Award, Republic of Vietnam Civic Action Honor Medal with Palm and Frame Unit Award, Vietnam Campaign Medal with Device, Rifle Expert Badge (9 awards), Pistol Expert Badge (9 awards), and numerous Letters of Appreciation and Citations. Bob is a member of the Veterans of Foreign Wars, American Legion, Vietnam Veterans of America, Marine Corps League, Aircraft Fire Fighting & Rescue Association, and the Tipton County Veterans Council. Bob volunteers at the VA Medical Center twice a week helping Veterans with their My Healthy Vet accounts. He was nominated for Veteran of the Month by Melissa Oaks.