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## Vet recalls his now declassified war effort

By Todd Glasscock reporter3@trcle.com May 20, 2017



Courtesy photo

For more than two decades Vietnam veteran Phil Block couldn't talk about printing propaganda leaflets to drop over the Vietnam countryside during the war.



He couldn't read what he was printing, he couldn't talk about it, couldn't tell anyone what he was doing, not even family.

For four years during the early 1960s, Phil Block worked a printing press at Gunter Air Force Base in Montgomery, Alabama, printing up leaflets in a language he didn't understand, while doing a job he wasn't allowed to talk about, one so top secret it wasn't on the books.

"I was a printing press operator with a .45 at my waist," he said.

Most days the U.S. Air Force veteran would spend regular hours at the press printing class materials for the base's on-site college, but during off hours, Block's supervisors would have him print up propaganda leaflets – all of which were in Vietnamese – that would be dropped over Vietnam.

This was in the early years of America's involvement in Vietnam, and the leaflets were part of the U.S.'s psychological warfare efforts, he said.

To this day he had no idea what the leaflets said and no one ever told him. "My supervisor didn't even know what we were doing."

All Block knew was that he was ordered to print them and that printing them was part of a high security operation. Every time the leaflets were printed, he was armed and armed guards stood in the room with him. He and the guards were the only people allowed inside.

After the leaflets were printed, all evidence was destroyed, he said.

"I had to strip the printing press," he said. Every template, every sheet was scraped clean. "It was like I never printed nothing."

The leaflets were dropped from planes over the Vietnamese countryside, something he learned going on missions himself. He would board a plane carrying the leaflets and the plane would fly out of Montgomery headed toward Vietnam. Once the plane reached Vietnam, under cover of darkness, they would fly over the countryside with doors open, and operatives like Block would drop the leaflets from the planes.

After two or three days, Block would be back in Montgomery printing more leaflets, no one the wiser that he had been gone.

When on leave, for instance, if his dad asked what he was doing, all Block could say was that he was just hanging out in Montgomery.

Because of the top secret nature of the missions, Block was told to keep mum about his duties for 20 years. And until recently, he never really cared to talk about the experiences, even though they are no longer classified.

He's talking about his experiences now, in part, because he needs assistance from the VA, which he's contending with over treatments for leukemia and associated blood disorders brought about by exposure to benzene used in the printing process. Higher rates of leukemia occur in workers exposed to high levels of benzene, according to the American Cancer Society.

His son, also a retired Air Force veteran, is helping him push through the VA's red tape, he said.

Because there is no record of his top secret work, Block said the VA is making it almost impossible to get assistance. His work was so top secret it's not marked on his discharge papers.

After putting in just a little over four years in the Air Force, Block returned to Toledo, Ohio, where he grew up, and started a printing business. He ran his printing business for 30 years before moving to Texas, where he had family.

He retired in 2008 as a national sales manager with Motheral Printing in Fort Worth.

Until recently, he and his wife, Carole Block, lived on a ranch in Burleson. Carole Block died in November and because of his health, Block has since moved into the Mustang Creek Estates of Burleson, which is honoring its resident veterans from 5-8 p.m. Thursday with a veteran appreciation and Memorial Day flag ceremony and cookout, said Iva Gasparova, an account executive at the senior living community.

The event is free and open to the public, she said. The flag ceremony will be performed by the Veterans of Foreign Wars. First responders also will be honored.

Those wishing to attend should RSVP Activity Coordinator Madison Forrest at 682-401-5302, Gasparova said.

“It means a whole bunch,” Block said of the observance.

It’s especially meaningful to him not only because he’s just recently been able to acknowledge his war efforts, but also because it will honor his fellow veterans who didn’t come home from Vietnam, and from all of America’s wars past and present.

He said he’s especially glad to see Vietnam veterans getting recognition for their service. Because Vietnam was so controversial, its veterans have long had a stigma attached to them, even among other veterans, and it’s just been in the last few decades that the stigma has worn away.

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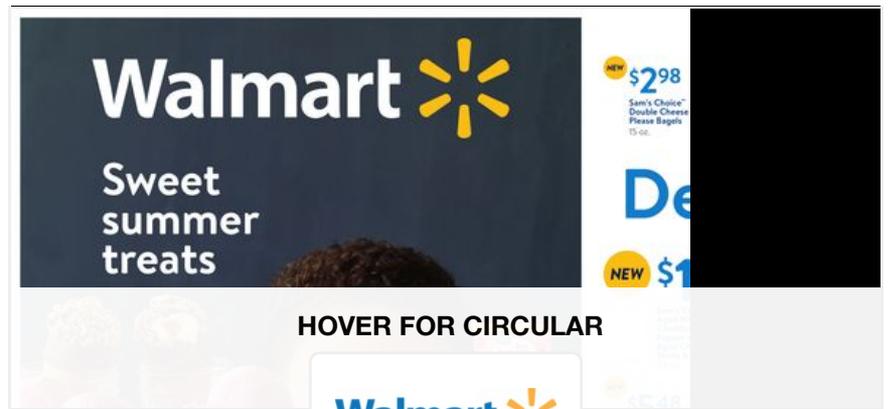
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