

Duane Bjerke "Mr. B" 1945-1951

Born on a farm in Hatton ND on 20 May 1926, Duane Bjerke graduated from high school in 1943, just in time to fight in the Big One. His dad told him he had to finish the fall plowing first, but his mother had different ideas, so she enrolled him at Concordia College. Duane attended a semester, but decided to drop out to join the Army on 11 April 1945.

After completing basic training, he volunteered for airborne so he headed for Ft Benning, GA. Making six jumps, was awarded his wings and assigned to an airborne unit in Japan. Serving his time, Duane was then honorably discharged from the Army on 25 June 1946.

With the benefits of the GI bill, he headed back to Concordia College to finish his BA degree with majors in English, History and Psychology. During senior year, a veteran friend told him if they joined a local reserve unit and made one jump, they would earn \$600. That was a lot of dough back then. Before they could make the jump and receive the bonus, the Korean War caused the immediate activation of their reserve unit.

Duane landed at Pusan and was assigned to 187th Regimental Combat Team (special forces), then headed north to Wonju, close to the 38th Parallel. Duane can remember hearing the enemy trumpets and single handedly captured two North Korean and a Chinese soldier together.

Soon the unit commenced airborne training in preparation for a major combat operation. Early in the morning on 31 March 1951, Duane participated in a drop behind enemy lines. On the way down, with a machine gun strapped by his leg, he was hit with shrapnel and then busted his right leg on impact. He was helicoptered to a local medical unit, and then transported back to Japan on C-47.

After three orthopedic operations, Duane spent five months rehabbing in hospital at Fukuoka. Returning stateside in July 1951, he was assigned to inactive reserve duty from Ft Carlson in Colorado.

Employed as a salesman for a short time, Mr. B searched out an opportunity to step into an education career. He started teaching high school in Hawley, MN and then transferred to NYA, MN where he was a teacher, coach, athletic director and finally principal for a 27 year career. During that time Duane earned his MA degree at U of M in 1966.

Married in 1951, he now has 3 sons and daughters, twelve grandkids and nine great-grandkids. Duane loves to sing, play the piano and the guitar. You will often hear him singing at Nyes piano bar in Nordeast.

His words of wisdom for the younger generation is, "get involved." Duane firmly believes that all youth should spend six months completing military training to enhance discipline. Duane is our oldest active member and the only charter member. He is a life member of VFW, American Legion organizations, and the DAV.

Being injured in combat, Duane has never been officially awarded the Purple Heart or the Combat Infantry Badge or a unit Bronze Star. Post member Howard Johnson unofficially presented Duane with

a CIB at a past monthly meeting. A Service Officer is currently pursuing evidence for a Purple Heart, but his military service history was burned in the fire at Kansas City.

We stand at attention and salute a double war fighter of the Great Generation, Duane Bjerke. The Lake Minnetonka VFW Post thanks you for your dedication to our country and our Post. Salute!