

DIRK MOYER

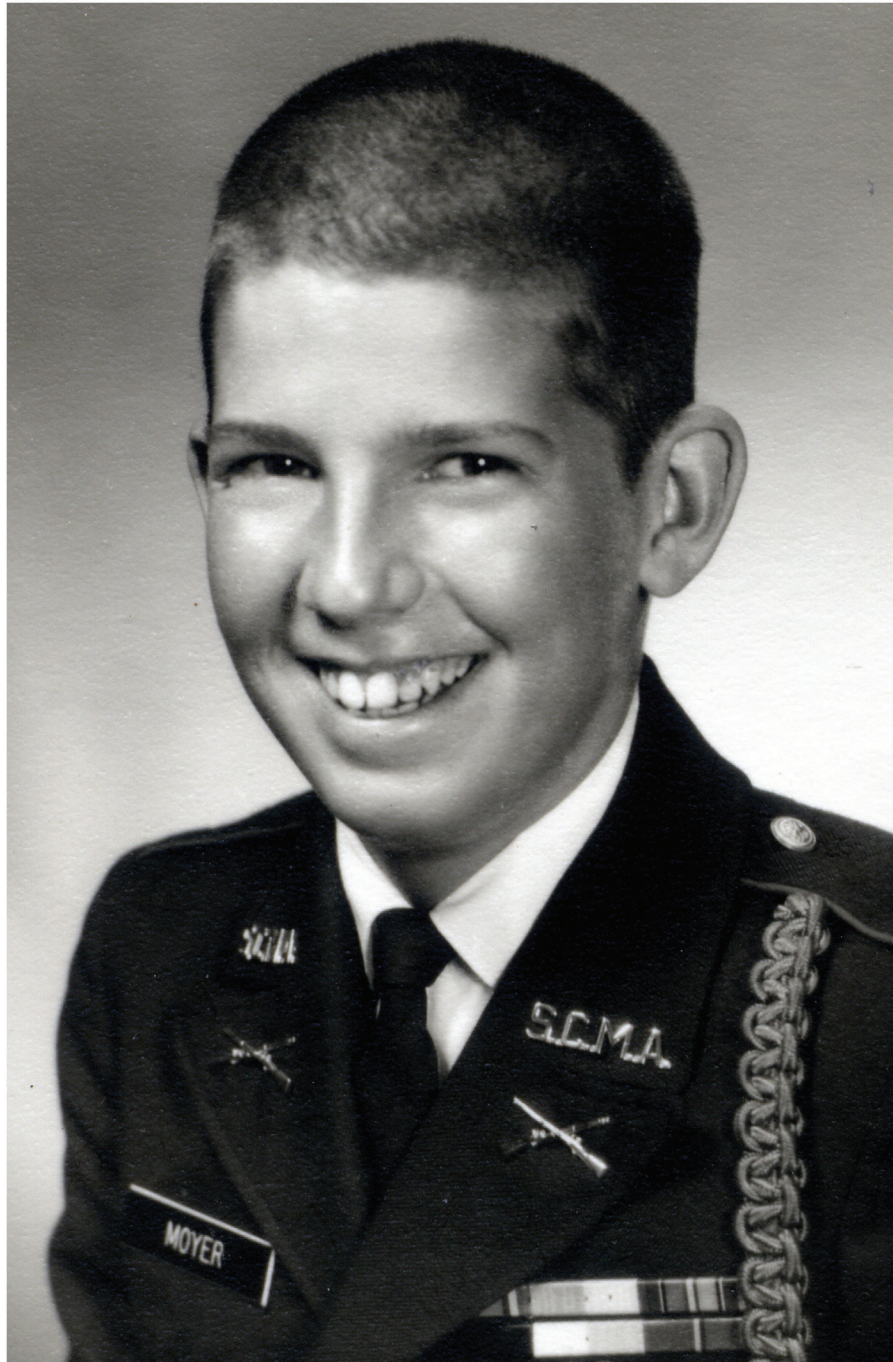
VETERAN



by Kevin Roe

“The two best decisions
I ever made were joining
the military and marrying
my wife Lynn.”

-Dirk Moyer



Early Memories

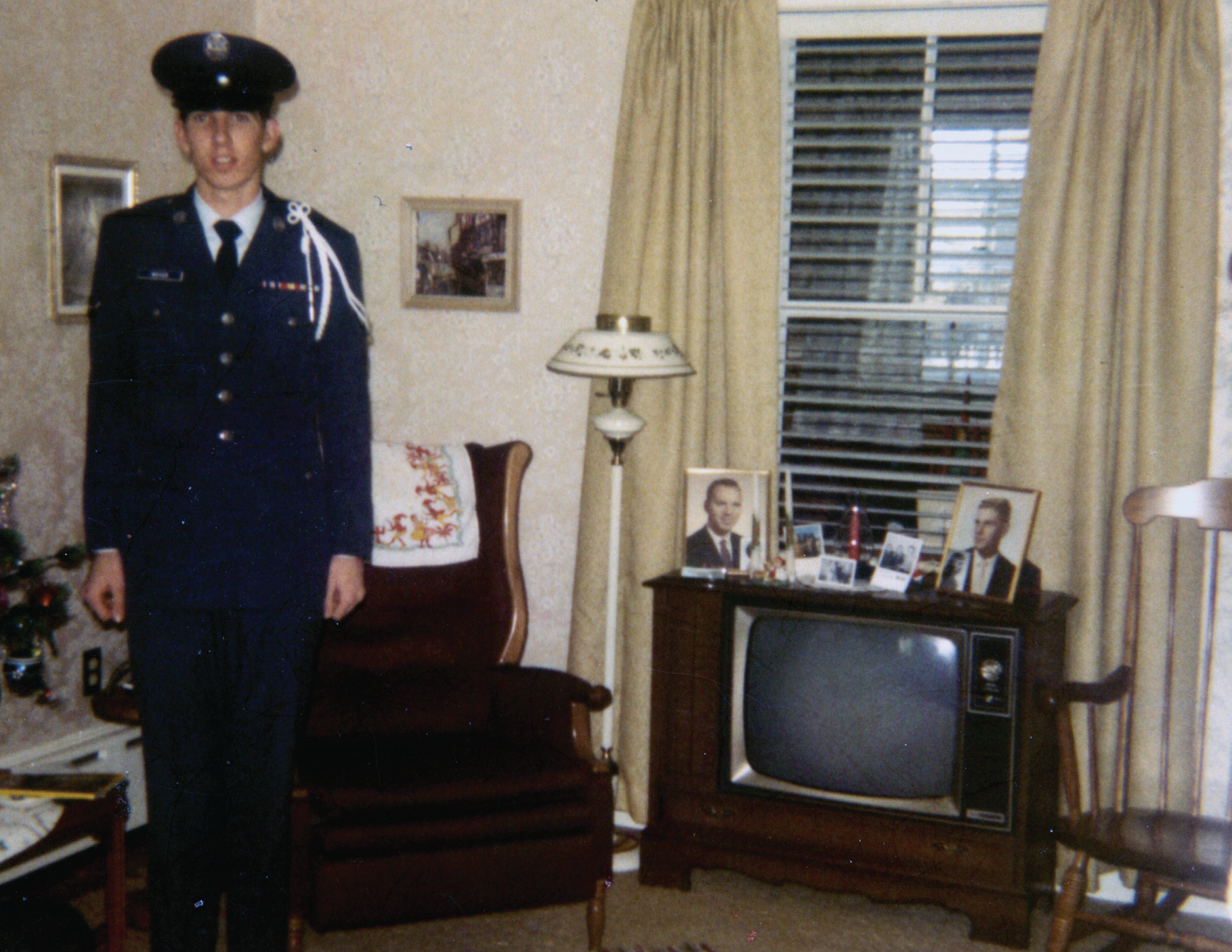
Born April 4, 1953 Dirk Moyer's earliest memories of the Vietnam conflict began in the 1960's. When Dirk was in 4th and 5th grade he remembers the Kennedy Administration talked about weapons being used by Cambodians, that they were AK57s from Russia. These weapons were being used in Cambodia at the Vietnam border. Dirk started learning about the conflict from both rumors and news reports. He recalls that just after Kennedy was shot and Lyndon Johnson sworn in, that President Johnson made clear there was conflict going on near the Vietnam/Cambodian border, and that people in small villages there were being shot and killed. He heard this from news reports. Actually, Dirk recalls, there was a war over the opium fields, a war of drugs going on, and guns being sent to control the drug money. As Dirk left elementary school he remembers President Johnson saying he was sending military advisors over to help resolve the conflict. When Dirk was in the 8th grade, the early 60's, he remembers people beginning to protest over our involvement in Vietnam.



High School

Dirk was in high school in 1966 when he found out that a boy he knew was killed over in Vietnam. This is when he began to realize that the government was lying and that the United States was not simply sending military advisors, we were sending actual troops into combat situations. Soon after that the late 60's came and Dirk remembers the hippie movement getting going in 1967 and 1968, and marijuana becoming popular. Public awareness increased over the government lies, and people understood that troops, not just advisors, were being sent. The beginning of the Nixon administration came and Nixon claimed his famous line, "I am not a thief". Dirk remembers Nixon trying to convince the American people that nothing was going on and that the United States was not involved. Dirk already knew this to be a lie. He had heard about the Ho Chi Minh trail, which were supply trains for refugees of the drug war and for arming the communists, where there was recruiting to fight in the conflict. Dirk knew that the UN had gotten involved. The UN supply convoys were being attacked by the drug lords and were being supplied with Russian AK47s. Then in 1968, when Nixon started sending troops by the volume, Dirk knew the situation was serious. It was not classified as a war, but our country sending troops to protect the convoys and were being shot. This woke Dirk up as to the gravity of the situation.

Dirk reached his senior year in high school in Huntington Beach, California and an incident happened that he will never forget, as it affected the rest of his life in a surprising way. At school students were not allowed to hold hands or kiss the opposite sex, but Dirk was kissing his girlfriend one day. When he was grabbed from behind by someone, he reacted immediately and threw a punch, finding himself hitting his vice-principle. He was immediately expelled from school, not finishing his last semester of his senior year.



Signing Up and Boot Camp

Because he was expelled, Dirk had to sign up for the draft at age 18. The draft lottery came for 18 and 19 year olds in 1970 so he and his friends gathered around the TV the night of the lottery, and Dirk's birthday was drawn at #22. He knew he was about to be drafted. The next day he went to the recruiting office and because of his draft number he was told he had 9 days. In 9 days he would get a letter from the draft board and be called into either the Army or Marines. Not wanting to be in either of those branches Dirk asked questions. He was told that since he had not graduated he could not go into the Coast Guard or Air Force but that did leave the Navy. Deciding on being a Navy fireman he went to Los Angeles the next day with some friends to take an aptitude test for the armed services. It was a Thursday and a four part all day test.

On Monday the navy recruiter was not there, but the Air Force recruiter was. The Air force recruiter actually laughed at the Navy fireman idea saying that all in the Navy learn to fight fires first thing. Hearing Dirk's story the Air Force recruiter told him that if he signs up for 6 years he can get an education package in the Air Force.

Dirk signed up.

As fate would have it he was sent back to the same high school to finish, now as a government employee. The vice-principle had to let him back in, but with a smile on his face knowing that if Dirk screwed up now he would be sent to jail. Dirk was to finish high school and be sent to college, then serve the rest of 6 years in active duty. So the next day he enlisted in the Air Force buddy program with two friends. They had scored differently on the aptitude tests, however, so were never actually in the service together. But the day after Dirk's last high school exam he was sent to the University of Chicago to their engineering program. He had scored in mechanical on the aptitude test so was to learn mechanical engineering: how to build and fix aircraft. He was to learn everything that made a plane work. In the winter of 1972 Dirk received certificates in Air Frame on Fixed Wing Aircraft (A.F.I.) and Air Plant on Multiple Jet Engines (A.P.M.E). He was now sent to boot camp in Texas. Unfortunately the Vietnam conflict had escalated in 1970 to 1972 and the peace protests had started. There were government policies and lies over the rice fields in Vietnam, which Dirk recalls learning were really opium fields. There was a drug war going on.



The Conflict

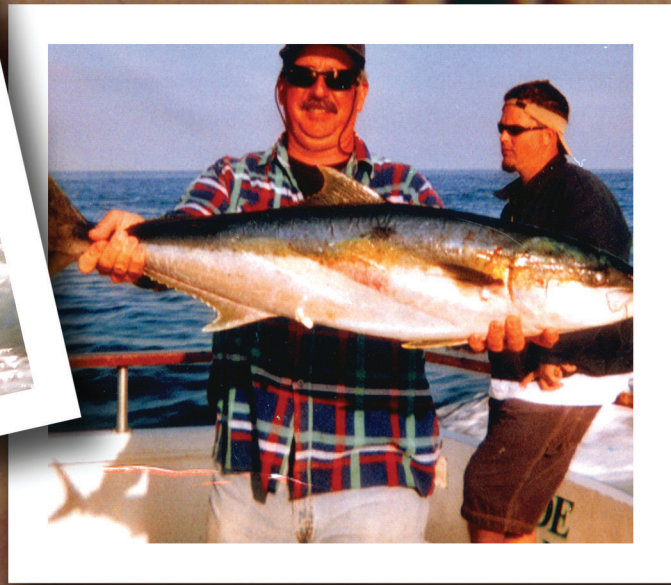
Right after boot camp Dirk got orders to go to Minot North Dakota to pick up a B-52 bomber and got assigned to a crew and a particular plane. The number on his B-52 was A7033-F. His crew had this particular plane they were responsible for and Dirk was in charge of maintenance, making sure everything functioned properly. He was an E5 Staff Sergeant, and was the In-Flight Engineer. They first went to March AF Base in Riverside CA, but that was closed in 1973 and about 30 planes were sent to Thailand and Guam. Dirk and his team of a Pilot, Co-Pilot, Bombardier, Electronic Warfare (EWO) Officer, Navigator, and himself, were to shuttle planes back and forth, bringing a good one to the war zone in Thailand, and a broken one back to be fixed in Guam or the United States. He was known as the In-Flight engineer, the only non-commissioned officer and the only one without an ejection seat. He had to crawl around the plane fixing things and make sure for the rest of the crew they could reach their destination. He brought planes to both Beale AF Base in Sacramento and Castle AF Base in Merced, California. They kept fresh and well-maintained aircraft ready for the conflict going on in Vietnam.

Later in the war heat-seeking SAM missiles from China could now reach the B-52s so the planes had to explode them with electronic warfare and try to avoid plane damage. The B-52 had 8 jet engines so lots of heat for the heat-seeking missiles to find. The crew in a B-52 had to make the missiles explode far enough away to avoid plane damage. The enemy wanted to knock down, or at least disable, a B-52. Dirk recalls 12 ever knocked down this way but many being damaged. Damaged planes would be taken to the USA or stockpiled in Guam to be fixed which was the job of Dirk and the crew. Unrepairable ones were taken to George AF Base in Arizona to be scrapped for parts. Dirk's common route was Thailand to Beale AF Base; then they could bring a fresh plane back to Thailand.

By 1974, however, there was no more saturated bombing going on in Vietnam and the B-52s were being phased out. The major conflict had ended.

However, since the B-52 could hold 5 nuclear bombs and wing pods of electronic missiles he and the crew had a new job after the Vietnam conflict.











Angel Flights

After Vietnam Dirk was assigned back to his original B-52 aircraft A7033-F, yes the same original plane. He was assigned to do what were known as “Angel Flights”. Angel Flights kept B-52s in the air 24 hours a day with nuclear bombs on board, always ready for the worst. He was to fly 36-hour missions once a week, not always knowing where he was over the earth. Dirk, as the In-flight Engineer, was in charge of the mechanical end of the mission, keeping the plane in the air in good condition. Packets of information and electronic signals were sent to the pilot and EWO officer telling them where to go and what to do. Where the plane went was entirely their responsibility., Dirk was to keep the plane in mechanical condition to get there. Two officers together had to confirm the decision in their orders to drop a nuclear bomb, which thankfully never happened.

Since March AF Base had been de-commissioned, Beale AF Base near Sacramento had become Dirk’s home base and Castle AF Base near Merced a weigh-station.

By 1975, since the United States finally officially was no longer involved in the Vietnam conflict and Dirk was offered and “early out”, being honorably discharged after 5 years instead of the full 6 years. His military career had ended.



Post Vietnam and Family

With the Vietnam protests Dirk found that nobody cared about the veterans returning from Vietnam and other Vietnam era missions that he had been involved with. He saw the American youth as split and torn apart over drugs and protests. From experience he had understood that a big part of the conflict in the war itself had been over who would make money off the opium fields and other drugs. It was a tough war to return from as returning soldiers were not always greeted well by the community. The military had offered him a package however, which gave him a start with an education, a couple years of health insurance, and a year of dental. He was even offered a VA loan for buying a house. He was also able to finish his general education for an AA at a community college near home in California.

He also found the love of his life, Lynn Ellen Charon, and they were married on September 28, 1985. They have three wonderful children they love dearly, Sierra, Christopher and Forrest, and a grandson Logan and granddaughter Scarlet. He says he is very blessed with his wonderful wife who is a lawyer, and his children and grandchildren. He has been involved at church for 25 years as well.

Dirk currently works for the city of Long Beach at the Long Beach Port as a supervisor of maintenance. He has a crew of 82 and they do the maintenance on roadways, terminals, water systems, electrical systems, pump stations, and sewer stations.



MORTAIL
SAN FRANCISCO

Dirk the Man

Dirk relates that entering the military helped make him a man. He went from a troubled youth with not much of a future and kicked out of high school to a responsible caring man from his experiences. At 18 he calls himself a grease monkey working on cars, to now a man with a great wife, job, and family. The military gave him an education at the University of Chicago and here in California. It put him in good physical shape and taught him survival skills and the value of hard work and responsibility.

Going into the service was definitely a good thing for Dirk as it gave him direction and made him productive. He has no regrets. After returning home he was able to take a full year to sail around the world in a boat he helped build. Now he loves to spend the weekends with his beautiful wife Lynn. He loves being active and in the outdoors. They play golf, travel in their motor home, ride motorcycles, water ski, and he loves camping and fishing and having friends over for a BBQ.

Dirk is a veteran.

