

In Remembrance of *Mike Daoust*

12th SPS, Phù Cát
1968-1969

RIP: 11-21-2002

Steve Gattis



DAOUST, MIKE

Hello to all. I wish everyone a happy Thanksgiving. As we enjoy this day, take a few moments to think about Mike Daoust and his family and friends. Then, make a specific effort to tell your family how much you love them. Mike's family and close friends in Michigan are having a pretty rough time right now. They are all wonderful people and still need a couple of prayers.

At the suggestion of Brian, I flew to Cleveland, Ohio where he picked me up at the airport after he drove in from Baltimore. He drove us to Ann Arbor, Michigan where we spent the night. The following morning, we were greeted by a couple of inches of beautiful snow, and a good drive to Bay City. We met with Mike's family at 0900 and then met many of his friends, cousins and brother Vietnam Veterans. Everyone thanked us for coming. Mike's Mom and Dad, his cousins and the veterans surprised Brian and me by talking to us about us. Mike met with the veterans almost every morning at a local 7-11 where they had coffee. He told them stories about Brian and me and the VSPA. These people welcomed us with open arms as if we were members of their family. What a reception and what a beautiful funeral! There were a lot of people and even more at the viewing. The funeral director had to add several pages to the guest book three different times and said he had never had that happen before. Mike was loved and respected by many many people.

Being at the funeral was an honor. Brian and I were pall bearers along with Mike's Stepson and three of Mike's cousins. The VVA had an honor guard. At graveside, the American Legion, VFW and the DAV all had a joint color guard. The rifle team fired a 21 gun salute and they presented the flag to Betsy. No one seemed to care that we were in the snow because Mike loved the snow and had been waiting for the first big snowfall.

The family gave me the opportunity to speak at the funeral service in the cathedral. The following is from my notes:

"I am here today with Brian Thorne. We had the honor of serving with Mike in Vietnam. We met him during a time know as TET. Mike had already been in-country a month when we were assigned to his hooch. We spent the next 11 months with Mike, virtually ever day... sleeping during the day and working along the base perimeter during the night.

We were members of Phantom Flight. We all had training and prior assignments, but now we were in Vietnam, part of a unit that proudly proclaimed, 'We own the night.' Mike took us under his wing, guided us around the base and talked about being on post, which, for us, was Air Base ground defense and constant waiting to repel an attack.

Mike was good at everything. He could handle an M16 like it was an extension of his arms and hands. He was incredibly accurate with a grenade launcher and soon worked his way to a position as a grenadier on a boat that patrolled the waters of Phù Cát. While working the Neptune boats, Mike was commended numerous times for capturing suspected Viet Cong after he had sunk their sampans... all, during the night which was so dark you couldn't see you own hands.

Mike was really good at everything. From football in the sand to making sure there was enough beer for everyone, Mike was a great friend to everyone in our unit. And, when it came time to relax, he played a mean 'air guitar.'

As things go in wars, we lost friends. We also said good-bye to our brothers as they left to return to what we called the World, knowing that we would probably never see each other again. Mike left Vietnam in January, 1969. Good-byes were tough, but you got through it because it happened almost every day. Brian and I lost touch with Mike. In fact, none of us had contact with each other until 1997 when Mike made it possible through his dream of the Vietnam Security Police Association.

Mike and about a very small group of other Air Force Air Policemen and Security Policemen gathered in a hotel in Atlanta in 1995 and formed an incredible association that now has almost 700 active members, all who were Air Police or Security Policemen in Vietnam and Thailand. Mike was the President of the association from 1996 through 1998. I'll never forget the phone call I received from him in 1997 to welcome me to the association and to talk about the time we had been apart. The first time the three of us were together again was in 1998 in Washington, D.C. The three of us have been together at every reunion since then, living Mike's dream of the VSPA and our motto, 'We take care of our own.'

When you understand the way the military works, you have to ask, what are the odds of three guys being together in 1968 and then meeting again 30 years later to lead an organization dedicated to the preservation of our history in Vietnam and to pass-on the hard lessons we learned through our experience in Vietnam? All, thanks to Mike and his dream.

The Vietnam Veterans of America gave Mike their National Veteran's Award in 1998 because he cared so much and did so much for so many veterans. Vietnam veterans have a saying, 'All gave some, some gave all.' Mike gave all the time, not just when it was convenient or when he had to.

No matter what we do in life, it is always hard to lose someone we love. It is much easier if we understand that in grieving, we grieve for ourselves and the fact that we feel a deep loss. If we preserve Mike's dream and the memory of his life and achievements, we both honor him and reach out to others just as Mike did. It also becomes easier for us if we imagine Mike as he approaches the gates of Heaven to have his first conversation with St. Peter. Standing in line, Mike watches a Marine approach St. Peter who says, 'What did you do on earth?' The Marine answers, 'Sir, I defended my country, Sir.' St. Peter then says, 'Very good, Son. Welcome to Heaven.' A Soldier from the Army approaches next and St. Peter asks the same question. The Soldier responds, 'Sir, I defended my country.' St. Peter then says, 'Welcome to Heaven, Son. You may pass through the gates.' The next to speak to St. Peter is a Sailor who also says that he defended his country and is welcomed into Heaven by St. Peter. When Mike walks forward, St. Peter asks him what he did on Earth. Mike responds, 'I was an Air Policeman and Security Policeman in the United States Air Force.' St. Peter smiles and says, 'Welcome to Heaven, my Son. Would you mind doing me a favor before you enter Heaven? Would you guard the Gates of Heaven for me while I take a break?'

It is much easier for me to know that when it comes my turn to approach the Gates of Heaven, that Mike will have all of the Vietnam Vets organized and waiting to say, 'Welcome home, Bro. Welcome home.' Thank you."

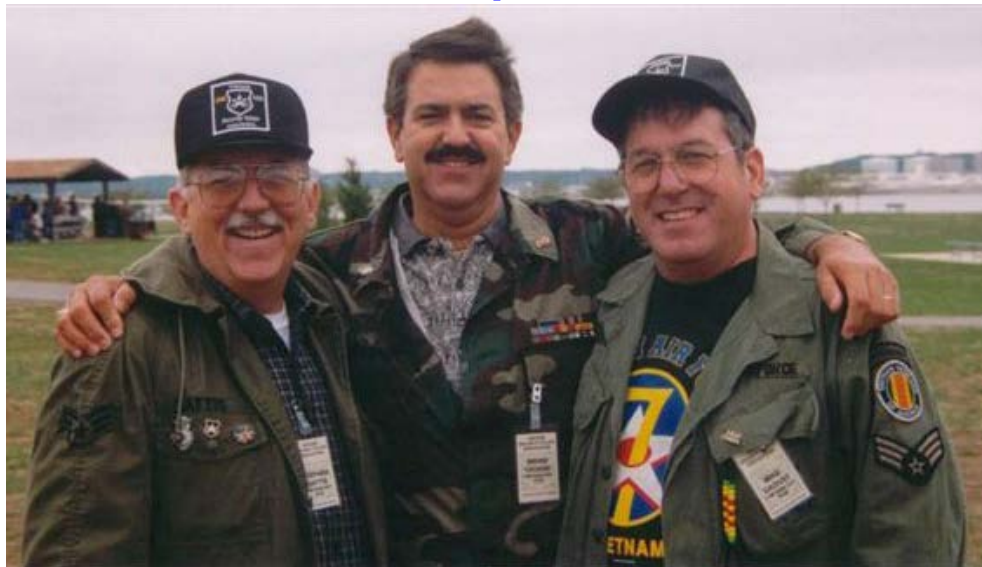
Thanks to all for your support and kind words. Betsy Daoust sends her love and thanks.

My best to all of you.

Steve Gattis

Mike Daoust
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We Take Care of Our Own

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