



Fred Malone was injured during his service in the Navy during Vietnam. He received the Purple Heart. This is the story of his

# Sacrifice & service

## Purple Heart Day honors veterans

By DAMIAN DOMINGUEZ  
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**Fred Malone was still in a hospital bed when the Purple Heart was pinned to him — and he still had a shard of aluminum stuck under his right arm.**

**H**e enlisted in the Air Force in December 1954, and though patriotism certainly played a role in the now 79-year-old man's decision, he had another motivation.

"I didn't feel like I wanted to work in a textile mill the rest of my life," he said.

He was trained to be a heavy equipment mechanic, a skill he'd later go to school to master when he was stationed in Fort Belvoir, Virginia. During his early tours, he was stationed in Iceland — where he worked on everything except heavy equipment — and Alaska.

"While I was there, my main job was running the cable car up and down the mountain," he said.

He came back to Greenwood, his home, not long after — and in 1964 enlisted in the Navy. There he landed a role with the Seabees, the U.S. Naval Construction Battalions, which put his skills to the test. The Seabees were responsible for building roads, bunkers and depots, among other things needed by front-line troops.

The Seabees took him to Spain in the summer of 1964, then Guantanamo Bay in '65.

"I maintained stand-by generators scattered all over the base," he said.

It wasn't long before he made his first of two tours to Vietnam, and found himself stationed in the first city American troops landed in during the Vietnam War.

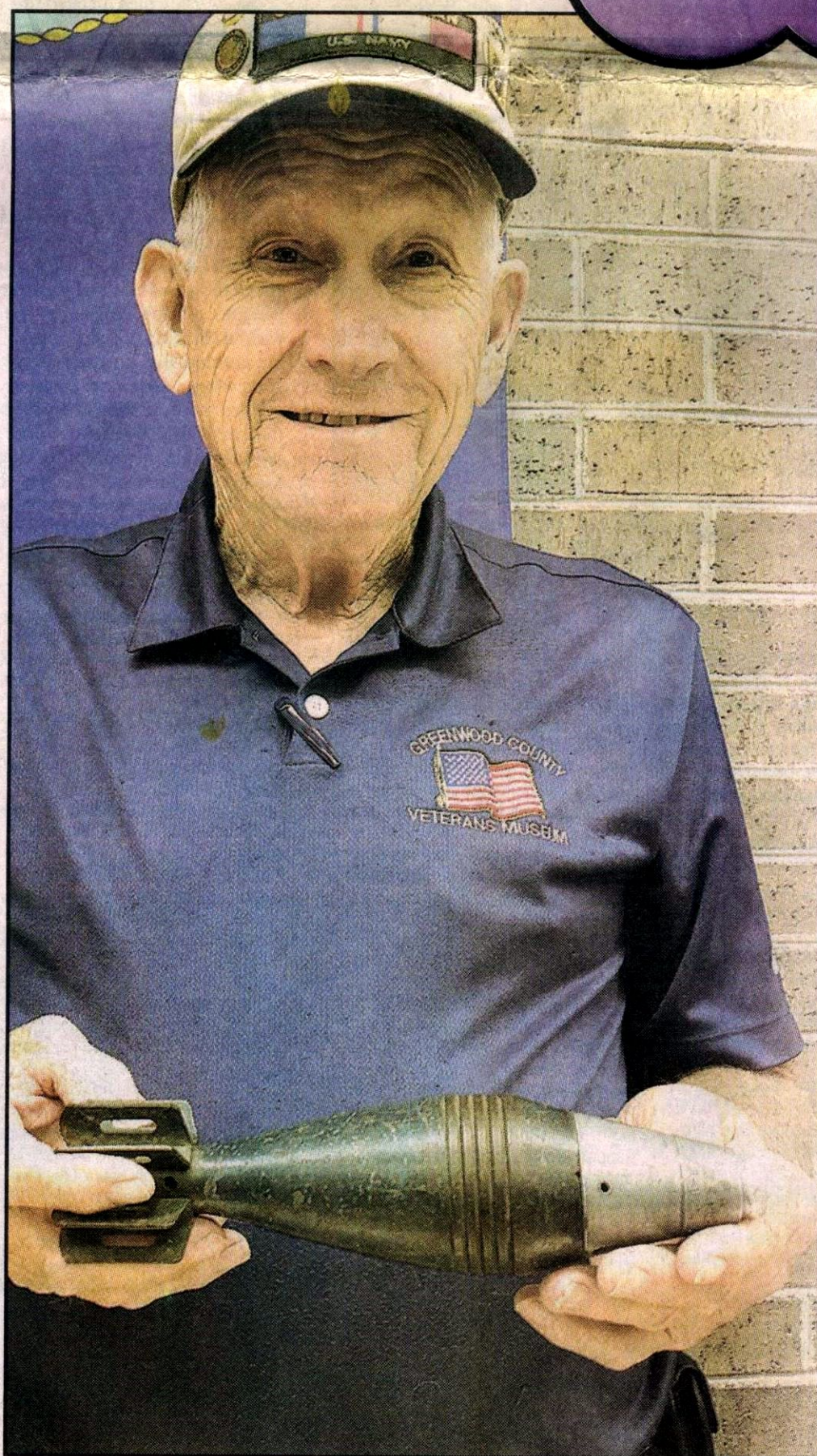
"We were on the defense line in Da Nang," he said.

Their base was beside the village, and Marines were

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**ABOVE:** Fred Malone holds a 60 mm mortar shell similar to the one that injured him during his service with the U.S. Navy in Vietnam. **TOP:** Purple Heart Day honors veterans who were awarded with the Purple Heart — a medal honoring those wounded or killed while serving in the military.





# PURPLE

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stationed behind the base, firing parachute flares along with high-explosive mortars onto a Vietcong drop near the village.

A reach into the wrong box, and marines firing the flares loaded up 60mm mortars instead. Three mortar rounds rained down on the base, two hitting and detonating, and a third landing in nearby sand without exploding.

"Lights out was at 10 o'clock. I had already got my shower and was settling into bed," Malone said.

A fellow engineer was laying on a nearby bunk with his arm draped over his eyes to block out the light from the still-lit bulbs when the mortar landed on the roof, feet above him.

"It peppered him with shrapnel all over his body," Malone said. "Tore a chunk out of his arm."

Another man in the base was standing near his locker when the mortar landed beside him.

"It crushed his ribs, collapsed his right lung," Malone said. "But he made it back into the mortar hole."

Malone himself was sitting on his bed when one of the mortars hit the building next door. Debris and shrap-

nel hit him, lodging a piece of the aluminum cap to the mortar under his right arm.

Through the disarray and confusion, Malone said no one died, though 23 people were injured in the friendly fire. The Seabees had their own medical group with equipment to treat people, but that night he said their portable X-ray machine burned out from overuse.

He had been injured in a friendly fire explosion and shrugged it off, going to work the next morning. He was ordered to go to the sick bay because his commanders knew he had something stuck in his arm.

A few days later, he was admitted to a hospital, where a Navy Hospital Corpsman took a look at Malone's injury.

"He said, 'I won't take it out,'" Malone said. "He said it was aluminum, not steel that I had stuck in there, and to remove it he would have to cut near muscle and could damage it."

To this day, Malone still has a piece of the mortar in him. It was while he was still in the hospital that he was awarded the Purple Heart.

"I don't know why they chose to put me in the hospital, because I didn't feel too bad," he said. "But yours is not

to wonder why, yours is to do what they tell you."

While Malone was being awarded the medal, he said he didn't know if he deserved it. He didn't feel like there was anything to his injury — the metal lodged in his arm is about the size of half an Aspirin tablet, he said.

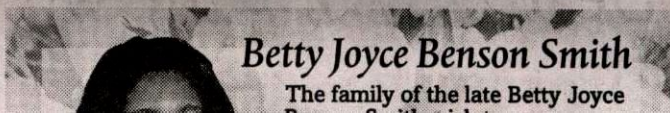
"Different people feel different ways about it," he said.

Monday is the 235th anniversary of the day Gen. George Washington first proposed the Badge of Military Merit, the commendation that would later become the Purple Heart.

"The General ever desirous to cherish virtuous ambition in his soldiers, as well as to foster and encourage every species of Military merit, directs that whenever any singularly meritorious action is performed, the author of it shall be permitted to wear on his facings over the left breast, the figure of a heart in purple cloth, or silk, edged with narrow lace or binding," Washington wrote in 1782.

"The road to glory in a patriot army and a free country is thus open to all."

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**Betty Joyce Benson Smith**

The family of the late Betty Joyce