

George Leiby

United States Army, Vietnam Veteran

Service Dates: May 16 1966 – [unknown]

“Be a friend, not an enemy.”

George Leiby was born on September 18<sup>th</sup>, 1946, to Oscar and Leona Leiby. The Leibys lived in Kutztown, PA, where George and his nine siblings grew up on the family farm. Oscar drove a school bus and worked as a custodian at Max Antonio Elementary School to provide for the family. Leona was a homemaker and took care of the children.\*

Growing up on the farm, George and his family didn't have much, but they had each other. His family was very poor, but they were frugal. George didn't have a bedroom for himself, and he had one drawer for his clothes. “I didn't have a sweater until I was 16 years old.”

George had a tight-knit family. When he was 10 years old, his aunt and her son moved in. For the next three years, 16 people lived in the Leiby household. Another memorable moment was their Thanksgiving celebrations; all of George's relatives came to the farm, and one time, he counted 64 people in the farmhouse.

In Kutztown, there was a one-room schoolhouse where the Leiby children went to school. In grade school, there were only six people in George's class. He graduated from Kutztown Area High School, where he met his high school sweetheart, Sandy, who he would later marry.

After high school graduation, George entered the Electronics Training Center, an 18-month electronics program in Allentown. After graduating, he was hired by Boeing Aircraft, where he worked shortly before enlisting in the Army.

George chose to enlist because he had lost his school deferment. “They were drafting anybody that had a heartbeat, pretty much. And I was not going to be drafted and put in the infantry; I had made up my mind.”

At the time, the Army had a special program that allowed recruits to choose their own schooling, instead of being assigned a position. With his background at Boeing, George chose avionics repair, a 35-week course.

On May 16, 1966, George was shipped out of Harrisburg to attend eight weeks of basic training in Fort Jackson, SC. He was just 20 years old.

George became a model Army soldier, and he was recognized for his hard work by earning the role of squad leader. He was responsible for 12 other soldiers, and he would tell them what to do. “I was very busy. I would make sure my squad had all their bunks made correctly, and for no more pay.” George earned only \$78 a month and had to pay for a haircut every six days, which lowered his monthly income.

Then, George completed his advanced individual training (AIT) in Fort Gordon, GA. His company, “Charlie,” was under the command of a Second Lieutenant, who fresh out of officer

candidate school, which meant the Second Lt. wanted the best company of the battalion. The Second Lt. was tough on the men, and the days were long with extra work.

George slept in old WWII style barracks, where 20 men slept on each floor. Each morning, the recruits were woken up by Lieutenants repeatedly slamming a baseball bat into a metal garbage can until the men got up. Before they could stand in line to eat chow, the recruits had to pass a physical test. They had to swing on monkey bars – a ladder in the air – to earn their meal. “If you do that successfully, you get to stay in the chow line.”

While at Fort Gordon, George encountered a problem. He did not sign an Army waiver, which would have shortened the time he was required to be in training. During this time, George met Tim Oberleigh, and they became very good friends. Because George did not sign the waiver, he was assigned extra duties as punishment, like kitchen police (KP), where had to clean pots and pans. He was given guard duty and charge of quarters (CQ), and he had to stay up during the nights, with no sleep, to keep watch. “They jerked me around for months.” Tim, who lived "off-post" did not receive the same treatment.

Finally, George was able to continue his training through a career group. He chose the signal core school, which was a 28-week course on communications equipment, and was sent to Fort Monmouth, NJ, with his friend Tim. In the end, George had spent 51 weeks training with the Army.

Before getting stationed in Bong Tao, Vietnam, George and Sandy married on [need date]. While George was in Vietnam, Sandy went to Reading University to study nursing, and she found time every day to write him a letter.

Arriving in Vietnam, George remembers the weather conditions. “It was a hot, miserable day.” There were mosquitoes everywhere, and the soldiers didn’t have netting on their bunks until a few months into their **tour**.

In Vietnam, George’s job was to take care of communications equipment, including the REL-2600. He would sit in towers on the Viet Cong **Hill** and protect the equipment, which ran on generators. “Being in communications – line of sight – you got to get up [in the towers], and that’s always an advantage. You don’t want to be down in the gully.” George was safer on the hill than in man-to-man combat on the ground.

While stationed in Bong Tao, George was distrustful of the Vietnamese public. “In general, it was a different war. In WWII, the U.S. went in, took over, and cleaned up an area, and you held that area forever. Not in Vietnam. The VC (Viet Cong) would come out at night, in their tunnels, and shoot their citizens. I never felt safe going off the hills.”



George was trusted with extra duties, like showing their battalion's station around to high-ranking officers. Sometimes, he would give tours to officers when he was sleep-deprived. "I would finish my midnight to noon shift, and I was ready to go to bed. My company commander chose me to give a tour to high-ranking officers, and I felt proud and honored." With all his extra duties, George earned the Bronze Star metal, a high achieving award.



Another highlight of his service was the Army's R&R, their Rest and Relaxation time. The Army allowed their servicemen to take R&R outside of the country, so George and Tim took their wives to Hawaii for five days. "My best time in the Army was those five days there. And the worst day in the Army was the fifth day when you had to say goodbye to your wife and you don't know if you're ever going to come back. It was very tough."

George left Vietnam in [need date]. He returned to Kutztown, and noted how the community treated him terribly for being in the war. "You didn't want anybody to know you were in the service because you got treated like crap. That was a low point in my life."

His time in Vietnam left a mark on him: "War is hell. I don't want anyone else to experience it." George credits his wife, Sandy, for helping him cope with his time in Vietnam. "I still have issues. I have anger issues. I haven't necessarily addressed it properly, but Sandy was extremely helpful to me."

After his service, George worked some miscellaneous electronics jobs before landing his 35-year career with Med Ed. George and Sandy had two children, Kathy and Steve, who remain local to the area. He kept in touch with Tim, who died of cancer in [need year], and still keeps in contact with Tim's wife. Today, George continues to live near his Kutztown family farm and enjoys retirement by tending to his own farm and seeing his siblings, children, and four grandchildren.

George kept all of Sandy's love notes and has them in his attic today.