

BRUCE HOPKINS



Profiles 2017



Retired Col. Bruce Hopkins served as a Red Warrior 1LT platoon leader of both Bravo and Delta companies in 1969/70. He now helps support veterans through his cartoon artwork that he sells on his website :

vietnamveteranscartoons.com



Vietnam veteran creates for cause... CARTOONS

By Kristin Davis - The Free Lance Star

The unexpected call that started it all came late one night two years ago.

Retired Army Col. Bruce Hopkins hadn't spoken to the soldier in 45 years. They'd been in Vietnam then, Hopkins a platoon leader in the 4th Infantry Division.

The soldier on the line told how he'd recently lost his civilian retirement when the company he'd worked for went bankrupt. The Department of Veterans Affairs had denied the soldier's claim for benefits related to post-traumatic stress disorder. He was too sick to work.

When they finally hung up, Hopkins considered how he might help. He never got the chance.

The soldier died two weeks later of respiratory failure related to leukemia, he said.

Hopkins had heard similar stories — men and women who served in Vietnam or Korea “who are too old to work but don't have retirement like [career military personnel.]”

Perhaps he could do something to help them, he said. “I came up with drawing cartoons.”

DRAWING ON EXPERIENCE

The cartoons feature the distinct uniforms and weaponry of the Vietnam War. Prints sell for \$20 a piece, which Hopkins donates to the American Legion and Veterans of Foreign Wars.

The drawings are based on his own experiences in Southeast Asia, which he figures “are the same as 2 million others in Vietnam.”



He Says the LZ is Hot and We Gotta Jump

Some feature the kind of gallows humor singular to those who served there. There's a cartoon with two soldiers waist-deep in water and the words "So ... This is the Monsoon?" In another, a smiling soldier heads to a primitive shower. "First Real Shower in 60 Days," it reads.

One that is particularly close to home depicts live shrapnel falling in trees around a lieutenant calling in mortar strikes.

That was Hopkins' job, he said, and the jungle was so thick you knew the strikes were too close only when the shrapnel rained down on you.

He pencils out his ideas on a sketch pad he keeps next to a leather chair in the den of his home in Spotsylvania County. That's where a bulk of the work is done.

Once the bones of the cartoon are complete, he transfers the images to sturdy paper using a portable LightTracer at his kitchen table. Hopkins then uses watercolor pencils to add shades of greens and browns and grays. The originals are turned into high-quality prints at Creative Color in Fredericksburg.

When the veteran first started out, he figured he'd do the artwork and someone else would do the selling.

"No one was interested in the logistics," Hopkins said.

He's been figuring that out on his own — with a good deal of trial and error — ever since.

You can check out Bruce Hopkins Cartoon Artwork at:

vietnamveteranscartoons.com



BEGINNINGS IN BOYHOOD

Hopkins liked to draw as far back as he can remember. As a boy, he enjoyed his father's books featuring the World War II editorial cartoons of Bill Mauldin. They inspire him today.

Hopkins was an art major his first semester in college. But his dad, an infantry officer in World War II and Korea, "told me I would starve to death."

He graduated with a degree in business administration, enlisted in the Army and attended infantry officer candidate school. He arrived in Vietnam in 1970, and spent almost a year there.

There was no time for drawing in the jungle. It was only later, when he served in management roles for the Army and then the Guard and Reserves, that he "doodled" on scrap paper during long telephone calls.

He tossed them in the trash afterward. (Two secretaries, he later learned, retrieved them.)

"Every now and then, I did a cartoon for a friend," he said.

While serving as deputy to the commander at Fort A.P. Hill—where he worked from 1979 to 2001—he designed a T-shirt for the Boy Scout Jamboree held there at the time. It became a top-seller; proceeds helped establish a scholarship fund at the post.

For the last year, Hopkins has sold his cartoons on his website, vietnamveteranscartoons.com. He has sold them at VA hospitals and Vietnam reunions. He's added to his portfolio cartoons from Desert Storm and the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Business has been slow to take off, he said. Still, he donated about \$1,000 from the cartoons to the VFW and American Legion last year.

Hopkins said he hopes in the process he is bringing attention to the plight of many Vietnam veterans. "That's my main purpose."

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The Draftee



So ... This Is The Monsoon?