

Beyond the Battlefield: From Death and Devastation to Divine Dedication

[Alvin Goodman](#) | Nov 30, 2011, 4:29 p.m.



Edwards and his wife, Carolyn.



Rev. Dwight Edwards in an early photo.

Rev. Dwight D. Edwards, 66, of suburban Harrisburg, is a Vietnam veteran who has devoted his life to public service, counseling, and ministry.

He enlisted in the Army on June 28, 1963, and was assigned to the 11th Air Assault Division while in the U.S. He completed one tour of duty in South Vietnam from August 1965 to May 1966 with the 1st Cavalry Division, Delta Company 1/12th Cavalry Airborne and was discharged from the service in 1968 with the rank of E-4.

He served in a recon platoon and his job was to acquire details about enemy troop movements or other information and report to the battalion commander. Life expectancy in his unit was 17 seconds in combat. Two of three squads in the platoon were decimated in a matter of minutes during his tour.

Citations received included the Combat Infantry Badge, Parachutist Badge, Air Medal, Nation Defense Medal, Good Conduct Medal, Vietnam Gallantry Cross with Palm, Vietnam Campaign Medal with two stars, Vietnam Service Medal, Presidential Unit Citation, and the Air Assault Badge.

After his discharge, Edwards became a welders' helper at the Naval Shipyard in Philadelphia. In 1968, he served as a veteran in public service as a teacher intern with the Philadelphia School District. From 1972 to 1974 Edwards was employed as a probation officer in the juvenile division of the Common Pleas Court of Philadelphia.

Other early employment included therapist at the Philadelphia Psychiatric Center (1974-77); director of Safe Streets Inc., a Philadelphia halfway house (1977-78); a counselor at Philadelphia Community College (1978-80); counselor at Philadelphia Veterans Multi-Service Center (1981-82); and readjustment counseling specialist and team leader/director at the Olney Vet Center, U.S. Dept. of Veterans Affairs (1982-88).

Edwards served as executive director of the Vietnam Veterans Health Initiative Commission of the Pennsylvania Department of Health from 1988 to 1996 and was program administrator of the Cancer Control Program in the State Health Department, also in 1996. He served as a counselor in the Harrisburg School District from 1996 to 1999.

A native of Philadelphia, Edwards attended Thomas Alva Edison High School, receiving a GED in 1964 and his diploma in 1968. Thomas Edison High had the highest number of casualties in the Vietnam War for high schools in the United States. He received a BA degree in elementary education from Temple University in 1972. Edwards attended Antioch University from 1975 through 1976 and received a Master's of Education in counseling, after which he attended Lancaster Theological Seminary (1995-2000), receiving a Master of Divinity Degree.

From 2001 to 2007, Edwards was pastor of the Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Carlisle. Prior to that, he was spiritual leader of AME Churches in Parkesburg, Marietta, and Mercersburg. A friend described Rev. Edwards as a "riveting, old-time 'fire and brimstone'-type preacher."

Among his numerous awards were the Rosa Parks Community Service Award of the Interdenominational Ministers Counsel of Harrisburg (2009); Certificate of Appreciation, Veterans

of Graterford (Prison), where he counseled inmates (2007); Certificate of Appreciation, Vietnam Vets of Mechanicsburg (1998); Certificate of Congressional Recognition for Community Service, U.S. House of Representatives Congressional Black Caucus (1996).

Also, Veterans of the Vietnam War Service Recognition Award, Secretary of Health Outstanding Employee Award, Thomas Miller Outstanding Service Award, Vietnam Veterans of America and the Philadelphia Stand Down Appreciation Award (1994), Mechanicsburg Area Veterans Council Service Award (1993), and a Commendation for Service to Minority Veterans from the Black Vietnam Era Black Veterans of Western Pennsylvania (2001).

In 1990, Edwards received a Service Recognition Award from the Pennsylvania Concerned Citizens for POW-MIAs. He also was the recipient of the Chapel of the Four Chaplains Legion of Merit in 1989 and a Commendation from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, Readjustment Counseling Service for serving as acting deputy regional manager of Region 2 in 1988.

Edwards developed a curriculum for healthcare professionals regarding the adverse health effects of Vietnam service. He edited and revised *The Vietnam Experience*, a nationally acclaimed diagnostic and treatment manual for physicians regarding the treatment of diseases and psychological disorders associated with Vietnam service. He also prepared a quarterly newsletter for commonwealth veterans.

Edwards was involved in the preparation of several TV documentaries, including a 1995 Emmy Award-winning program, *Reunion, Class of 1965*; a 1992 documentary, *Vietnam, The Dream Shut Down*; a 1986 PBS Frontline program, *The Bloods of 'Nam*; and was host of the *Veterans Recovery Hour* WDAS radio program from 1982 to 1989 in Philadelphia.

Edwards married Carolyn Brewington-Edwards. The couple has a blended family of six children, Shawn, Pam, Michael, Kevin, Kelly, and Stephen, and 10 grandchildren.

Although retired from the active pastorate, Edwards continues to be involved in religious affairs. He said he is thankful to the Almighty "and mindful of all he has done for me," adding: "If it had not been for the Lord on my side, I don't know where I would be."

Two years ago he authored a book entitled *Expressions of a Madman*. It is a compilation of poems he wrote over the years on a variety of subjects. The book sells for \$15, including shipping, and can be purchased by contacting Rev. Dwight D. Edwards, 6664 Springford Terrace, Harrisburg, PA 17111, or via his email address, dedwa28@aol.com.

If you are a mature veteran and have interesting or unusual experiences in your military or civilian life, phone Al Goodman at (717) 541-9889 or email him at klezmer630@comcast.net.