

Kevin Nguyen, Abraham Castro

Period 2

John Kirk Ferguson

United States Navy

1952 - 1981

John Kirk Ferguson

John Kirk Ferguson was born on April 17, 1935 in Great Falls, Montana. He lived in Great Falls for the first nine years of his life and in 1944 Ferguson moved with his parents to Riverside, California. In his new home his friends began calling him by his middle name, Kirk. Kirk would attend Riverside Poly High School and graduate as the class of 1953. At this time in Kirk's life he joined the Navy Reserve in order to avoid the military draft going to the Korean War. Kirk Ferguson was only a junior at Poly High School when he decided to join the Navy Reserve in 1952.

By joining the Naval Reserve Kirk was deferred from the draft. Many young men in the United States were being drafted into the United States Army to fight in the ongoing Korean War. For the next five years John Kirk Ferguson would receive training every Wednesday at the Naval Reserve Center located in San Bernardino, California. Kirk also attended boot camp in his senior year and learned many life changing skills the service had to offer, like first-aid, respect toward seniors, and time management. It was not until the year 1954 that Kirk set sail on a United States destroyer for his training. After his graduation from Riverside Poly High School in June 1953, John Kirk Ferguson attended the University of California Riverside (UCR) when the campus opened in February 1954. It would be three years until Kirk graduated with a BA Degree.

After his graduation from UCR Kirk Ferguson attended Naval Officer Candidate School (OCS) in Newport, RI, where he worked painstakingly every hour of the day. Here he learned strict discipline and how to efficiently use every moment of the day. When training was officially completed Kirk Ferguson became the Assistant Navigator and Division Officer in the Gunnery Department on the ship, USS Rochester. Kirk learned pretty much everything about every ship to which he was assigned and proved to be a very special sailor. Other ships he was aboard were World War II destroyers, (Sd-539), US EATON (DD-510) and USS Tingey, a high speed transport, USS Diachenko (AFD-123) and the ammunition ship USS Flint (AE-32). It was not long until John Kirk Ferguson's experience was needed on the front lines of one of the most horrific wars the entire world has yet to see, Vietnam.

John Kirk Ferguson served in the Republic of Vietnam for one year of his life. Kirk was deployed to South Vietnam in November of 1969. By rank Kirk Ferguson was a Lieutenant Commander (LCDR) and was also the Commanding Officer for the STAN'S, Strike Assault Boat Squadron. The STAB's consisted of twenty speed boats containing machine guns and other dangerous weapons. For most of Kirk's experience in Vietnam the STAB's operated on the Mekong River and other rivers along the Cambodian border. Ferguson's job was to make sure no North Vietnamese or Viet Cong soldier was able to pass the Cambodian border and cross into South Vietnam. Most attempts to cross were at night because the day time was much too obvious. During the day the STAB's were moored alongside US BEN WA (APB-35), the mother ship anchored in the Me Kong River. When dusk arrived the STAB's left the base and moored alongside the canal one kilometer apart from one another waiting for an attempted enemy crossing. Attempts during Ferguson's year in combat in Vietnam he saw many firefights between his men and the enemy. However enemy conflict was only one problem he had to

worry about while serving in the Vietnam War.

As many may know Vietnam is a country with a lot of wildlife and vegetation. The dense jungles and forest gave an entirely new idea of combat and for many Americans this became a disadvantage. The chances of a Viet Cong ambush were high because of their ability to hide in the vegetation. In order to prevent ambushes the United States helicopter gunships sprayed Agent Orange, a chemical defoliant into the foliage. In only one day this chemical could take all the leaves off a single tree. The trees were not the only things affected by the uses of this chemical. Many civilians as well as sailors were exposed to to the Agent Orange. Many of Kirk's friends who fought alongside him would develop cancer and other diseases. Even Ferguson himself would see the effects of the chemicals used in Vietnam.

During Kirk Ferguson's tour of duty in Vietnam, he faced the unspeakable horrors of war. The nights that he spent defending the Cambodian border were long and difficult. A problem that his squadron faced everyday were mosquitoes. The presence of mosquitoes was inevitable because of the big body of water that Kirk and his squadron were patrolling. In order to withstand the constant presence of mosquitoes Kirk and his squadron applied many bottles of mosquito repellant.

Kirk saw a lot of combat during the nights in Vietnam. During the daytime he rested on board US BENEWAH preparing for the long nights. There were also other flame-thrower boats and boats that could fire a powerful stream of water to destroy enemy fortifications alongside the shore line. Concussion grenades would be dropped over the side of USS BENEWAH at night to discourage enemy swimmers carrying demolitions charges.

Kirk Ferguson would serve a whole year fighting for the United States in the Vietnam War. In November of 1970 Kirk returned to the United States. During his year in Vietnam along the Mekong

River there had been over three hundred attempted crossings, none of these attempts were successful. While defending the border against the enemy forces several hundred enemy forces were killed and ten or fewer U.S Navy Sailors were killed in action. A result of his service Vietnam John Kirk Ferguson learns that our government should not fight in war unless they intend to win.

Kirk Ferguson's next duty station was the Commander in Chief, Pacific (CINCFAC) Staff, assigned to the Navy Desk of the Battle Staff, responding to peacetime emergencies in the Pacific Ocean. He was assigned to the Battle Staff from January of 1971 to November 1973. For those years Ferguson lived in a one bedroom apartment on Waikiki Beach, Honolulu Hawaii. Following the CINCPAC Staff duty, Ferguson became the Commanding Officer of USS Flint (AF-32). Aboard this boat Kirk was deployed on two six month deployments to the Indian Ocean and the Western Pacific Ocean. From 1975 to 1981 Kirk worked at the Pentagon funding changes for amphibious and service Force ships in order for them to complete missions with more capability. On the date of May 31, 1981 John Kirk Ferguson retired from active duty.

Lieutenant Commander John Kirk Ferguson served a total of twenty-nine years in the Navy. His long career in the United States Navy made him the man he is today. Throughout the twenty-nine years he has served the country he earned many prestigious medals. A total of fifteen medals and ribbons that Kirk Ferguson acquired during his one year in Vietnam and for his time aboard various United States Naval ships. During his career he had numerous promotions that ranked him up in the Navy. In November of 1957 Kirk Ferguson was commissioned an Ensign and by July 1972, after four other promotions, Kirk was promoted a final time to the rank of Commander.

Having served in the Navy for many years Kirk Ferguson adopted many skills that proved

useful. Being in the Navy taught him patience, perseverance, good time management and many more important life skills. Ever since Kirk's first days training in the Navy Reserve he had always had a knack for typing. He became very good at typing and was able to type up to sixty words in only one minute. With his ability to type and his memories from the twenty-nine years he served in the United States Navy Kirk Ferguson got the idea of writing and publishing a book. Rightfully named, *Odyssey at Sea: Kirk Ferguson's Career in the United States Navy* is an autobiography written by John Kirk Ferguson. Preserving his legacy on paper. Countless legacies are being lost every day but his will never be forgotten. The honor in bearing the unspeakable horrors of war will never be tarnished.