

Retired Sgt. John Frederick Falkenrath will be honored at Edwardsville Veterans Day Parade

by Dan Brannan, Content Director
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EDWARDSVILLE - Retired Sergeant John Frederick Falkenrath, a Vietnam veteran, will be honored at the Edwardsville Veterans Day Parade Saturday night.

The Edwardsville Veterans Day Parade has a long-standing tradition in the community.

The Edwardsville American Legion Post 199 organizes the parade that begins at 7 p.m. Saturday, Nov. 11, near Eden Church on Main Street and ends on St. Louis Street. Ron Eberhardt is the coordinator of the parade and said Falkenrath is a perfect person to honor during the parade.

Below is how **Sergeant John Frederick Falkenrath**, United States Army Retired, told his story in his own words. **A profile interview with Falkenrath will follow after the parade on Edgkentoday.com and Riverbender.com on Sunday.**

"I was born on August 15, 1950, in a little town in southern Missouri called Lutesville. We moved to Collinsville when I was six weeks old. I've lived in Collinsville all my life except for the time I was serving in the military.

I was drafted into the Army on 24 April 1970. I did basic training at Fort Bragg in North Carolina. I did Advanced Infantry Training (AIT) at Fort Polk in Louisiana.

My Military Operational Specialty (MOS) was 11 Bravo. Just a simple infantry man or "grunt" or "bullet stopper" as we called ourselves.

After AIT came home for 10 days and then went to Viet Nam.

I arrived in Viet Nam on September 20, 1970. I served in I Corps with the Americal Division out of Chu Lai.

On May 30, 1971, we were on patrol in an area we called the "rocket pocket". We called it the rocket pocket because the Viet Cong or VC as we called them, would launch rockets onto the base from this area. We were trying to enter a village to search for weapons but had been taking enemy fire from the village for most of the day. Toward evening we were able to enter the village and search. It was getting dark and the Lieutenant (LT) didn't want to leave the village. The Platoon Sergeant, the other Squad leader and myself tried to convince the LT that we could not stay there, because we were unsuccessful in finding the VC that had been firing on us. The LT flat refused to pack up and move. He ordered us to set up our night defensive positions. Just after dark the VC snuck up along a rice dike and threw Communist manufactured grenades in on us. When the first grenade went off everyone hit the ground, the second grenade went off on my leg. The closest fire base fired illumination rounds to help us see during the

fire fight. I was able to look over my left shoulder and I saw my left foot pointed at me at a 90-degree angle. I knew I was in bad shape, but my leg was still attached.

I was extremely fortunate that a resupply helicopter was coming back to Chu Lai from out west and decided to stop and pick up the worst of the wounded (myself and my M-60 machine gunner). I was conscious the whole time until they put me out in the operating room. When I woke up in the recovery room, I realized that my left leg had been amputated above my knee.

After two surgeries in Chu Lai I was transferred to Camp Zama in Japan. Two surgeries there and I returned back to the States, to Valley Forge Army Hospital in Pennsylvania for further surgeries and rehabilitation.

I left Valley Forge on April 27, 1972, the day I was retired from the Army.

I spent several years trying to decide what to do with my life. I was urged to try going back to school. I was able to use Chapter 34 of the GI Bill to received a Bachelor of Science in Business Administration with an emphasis in accounting from Washington University in St. Louis Missouri.

I worked at Scott Air Force Base for The Department Of Defense for 34 years before I retired four years ago.

Let's back track for a moment, if you would be so kind. Yeah, back to that rice patty outside of Chu Lai, South Viet Nam, the one where my leg was almost blown off. I had been a Christian in my early teen years (or I thought I was). During my military service, I was anything "BUT" a Christian. So, as I waited for the guys to load me on the helicopter, I started praying (or trying to work a bargain with God). I said, "Lord, if you'll just get me out of here I promise I'll serve you". Wouldn't you know it, He got me out of there, minus my left leg below the knee. Just that act alone should have been enough to get me to walk the straight and narrow! I'm sorry to say, but it took two more of those "near death" experiences before I finally decide to give my life over to the LORD GOD almighty!!! Since then My God has continued to watch out for me!!! To this day, I don't know for sure why He has left me here, He must have had a reason. Just maybe for someone to read this..... "