

Gregory C. Kulm Selected DAV Outstanding Disabled Veteran of the Year



Recruit photo, 1968.

By Jim Hall

Service is an intrinsic part of Gregory C. Kulm's life. From serving his country as a young U. S. Marine in the jungles of Vietnam 36 years ago to overcoming devastating personal injuries and serving as a DAV Hospital Service Coordinator (HSC) at the VA medical center in Omaha, Neb., he has made service to others an important part of his life.

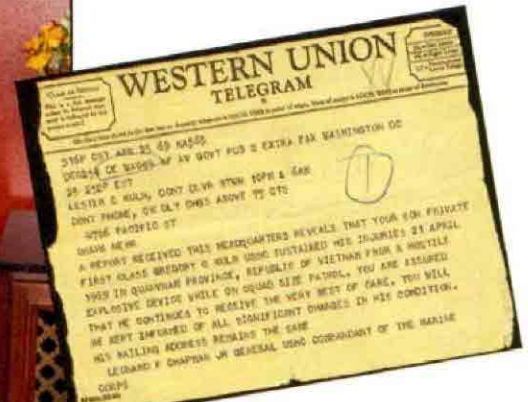
Recognizing Greg's unwavering desire to help others, especially disabled veterans and their families, the DAV is bestowing Greg with its highest individual honor. National Commander Alan W. Bowers will present the Outstanding Disabled Veteran of the Year Award for 2004 to Greg at the opening session of the 83rd National Convention of the DAV and Auxiliary in Reno, Nevada, July 31.

A native of Omaha, Greg grew up in a close-knit community. He attended local schools and still sees many of the people he grew up with. At a strapping 6'3" or 6'4," depending on who was doing the measuring, he participated in football and pole vaulted on Omaha Central High School's championship track team. Being a member of the state championship team earned him a coveted white high school sweater.

Following graduation from high school, Greg enlisted in the U.S. Marine Corps, ready to forge his own place in the world. The Marines honed Greg's physical skills and discipline on the parade grinder at Marine Corps Recruit Depot San Diego and among the sun-baked mountains of Camp Pendleton, Calif., during the summer of 1968.



Greg C. Kulm, 2004 Disabled Veteran of the Year.



By the following spring, the young private first class was on the other side of the world embroiled in the Vietnam War.

On the morning of April 21, 1969, Greg was waiting to get chow when word came down for a patrol to go out. He had just returned from a night patrol, but when lots were drawn, he drew

the patrol. Irritated about missing breakfast, Greg moved out on patrol with two other Marines. They started along the trail he had come in on from the night patrol a short time earlier.

Greg was the second man in the patrol. He scanned the area as they moved out. Ahead of him the patrol leader kicked something off the trail. Greg's first thought was the object might be a booby trap. Even as the thought registered, his world exploded, he was flung into the air and slammed to the ground.

It was a booby trap. The patrol leader was killed; Greg critically injured; and the Marine behind him was slightly wounded.

Everything had happened less than 100 meters from camp. The enemy had slipped in behind the incoming patrol and booby trapped the trail.

Marines immediately rushed to the aid of their comrades, securing the area as they moved. Greg was numb with shock when they reached him. Within minutes efforts to stop his bleeding were underway, he was administered pain-killing drugs and readied for medical evacuation. He still had no idea how massive his injuries were.

(Continued on page 34)

Disabled Veteran

(Continued from page 1)

Greg spent two weeks at the military hospital in Da Nang before being transferred to the 249th Army General Hospital in Japan. Before Greg arrived in Japan, military representatives visited his father, Lester, to inform him his son had been seriously wounded.

The severity of Greg's wounds was outlined in a telegram to Lester on May 10, 1969. It read: "This is to confirm that your son, Private First Class Gregory C. Kulm, USMC, has been admitted to the 249th Army General Hospital, Japan for further treatment. His current diagnosis is multiple fragmentation wounds on both legs, fractured tibia and fibula, multiple fragmentation wounds on his left arm and hand, abdomen with small intestinal injury, septicemia and hepatic failure. His condition is poor and prognosis for recovery is not expected. His brother, RM3 David J. Kulm, USN, is proceeding to the 249th Army General Hospital to visit him."

When David visited his younger brother in Japan, he was amazed by Greg's depleted condition. But, he also knew his brother was a fighter, and if anyone could pull through, Greg would. Greg did pull through, but his legs were so severely damaged they had to be amputated very high above the knees.

Greg was transferred to the U.S. Navy Hospital at Oakland, after two weeks in Japan and was a patient for

eight months in Oakland. While there he received visits from childhood friends Patricia Elliott and Tom Bersch before being transferred to the VA medical center in Omaha as an inpatient in December 1969.

After nearly two years of operations and rehabilitation in military and VA hospitals, Greg was medically retired from the Marine Corps in January 1970. He was ready to get on with his life and went to work as a dispatcher for the Nebraska Department of Law Enforcement and Patrol in Omaha in 1970.

During his next 10 years as a dispatcher, Greg married, and though the marriage ended in divorce, Greg was blessed with two daughters, Amee and Allison; and a son, Aric, a U.S. Navy veteran.

Unfortunately, Greg's operations and treatment eventually left him unable to continue his work as a dispatcher. Between 1980 and 1996 he was employed in a variety of work between bouts of illness.

A life member of DAV Chapter 2, Omaha, and several other veterans' organizations Greg became active assisting other veterans, involved in legislative efforts on behalf of veterans and their families, and participating in community events and speaking engagements representing veterans. Additionally, he has served in a variety of elected and appointed capacities in veterans' organizations within his community. Greg is currently serving his fourth year as a member of the Douglas County Veterans Affairs Board.

(Continued on page 35)



Greg Kulm, DAV Outstanding Disabled Veteran of the Year for 2004, goes through his Omaha Central High School Yearbook with former classmates Pat (Elliott) Short and Jeanne, his wife.

Disabled Veteran

(Continued from page 34)

In 1996, Greg was hired as the DAV HSC for the Omaha VA Medical Center. His efforts resulted in a highly effective program that ensured timely transportation for sick and disabled veterans to and from the medical center.

While employed as the HSC at Omaha, Greg renewed a relationship with another childhood friend, Jeanne Lynn Reed. Jeanne, a professional medical secretary, had met Greg again at a party in the mid-1980s. Greg loaned Jeanne his high school sweater because it was chilly. Jeanne promised to have the sweater cleaned and get it back to him later. Shortly before their 30th high school reunion in 1998, Jeanne called Greg and, kidding, told him if he ever wanted to see the sweater again, he had best be at their reunion.

It was a championship sweater with his football and track pin. He showed up with reinforcements – another woman. But, it wasn't a serious relationship. Within a few weeks Greg and Jeanne were dating, and on Sept. 4, 1999, they were married at Lake Tahoe, Nev.

It was a good time in their lives, both were divorced, their

children were grown and they were comfortable in their careers, and ready to share their lives again. Unfortunately, another challenge loomed on the horizon.

Jeanne followed Greg into retirement in January 2002. She was concerned about his health and wanted to spend more time with Greg. Then the dreaded news came. On Aug. 16, 2002, Greg was diagnosed with lung cancer at the VA hospital. Greg and Jeanne prepared for a new battle together.

Prior to retiring, Jeanne had worked for an oncology specialist, who agreed to treat Greg.

Currently, Greg is undergoing a second round of chemotherapy in his fight against cancer. For Greg there is no defeat and no surrender against this newest challenge in his life.

"I'm taking it one day at a time," he says, "one day at a time."

Greg has lived his life helping other disabled veterans and their families. For this and so much more, the DAV is honored to recognize Gregory C. Kulm, a man who knows how much can be accomplished by succeeding one day at a time, with the Outstanding Disabled Veteran of the Year Award for 2004.

DAV



Retired U.S. Air Force Colonel Frederick G. Lagergren, left, stops by for a visit with Gregory C. Kulm, DAV Outstanding Disabled Veteran of the Year for 2004. Lagergren, who served as a DAV volunteer driver when Greg worked as the DAV Hospital Service Coordinator at the Omaha VA Medical Center, nominated Greg for the DAV's highest individual award. Right, U.S. Marine Corps Brig. Gen. Leonard E. Fribourg presents the Purple Heart Medal to Lance Corporal Gregory C. Kulm, seated, during a ceremony at the U.S. Navy Hospital at Oakland, Calif. in 1969.

Below, Greg Kulm, the DAV Outstanding Disabled Veteran of the Year for 2004, and Jeanne, his wife, enjoy a morning visit to the Veterans Memorial in Omaha.

