

# Vietnam book includes coastal veterans

For the thousands of Delaware men who served in Vietnam from 1968 through 1972, “Nancy’s Vietnam Mailbag” was a connection to home. Through the column, which ran up to three times a week in Wilmington’s *Morning News* (which later joined with the *Evening Journal* to form *The News Journal*), the soldiers, sailors, airmen and marines talked about their war experiences, complained about life in the jungle and relayed funny tales.

“They were so anxious to tell their stories,” says Nancy E. Lynch, who wrote the column as a young reporter just out of the University of Delaware. “We got letters from guys who were working in air-conditioned offices and letters from guys who were writing from fox-holes. We got letters that still had the mud of Vietnam on them.”

“Nancy did a wonderful thing by the mailbag and we all enjoyed it very much,” says Lance Hall, 62, a 1963 graduate of Lewes High School who served in Vietnam in 1969 and 1970 as an accounting and finance specialist with the Air Force. “The mailbag was ours, so it meant a lot. It also let us know we were not alone and a lot of other folks from Delaware were there too.”

For decades, the pictures and nearly 900 letters that the servicemen sent to “Nancy’s Vietnam Mailbag,” as well as copies of nearly all of the columns, sat in a box in Lynch’s barn in Bethel. And now, Lynch, a native of Wilmington who spent her summers at her parents’ cottage in Rehoboth Beach, is writing a book based on the letters and columns. The 400-page “Vietnam Mailbag: Voices from



Photograph by Kevin Fleming

the War, 1968-1972” is scheduled for release next May, in time for Memorial Day and 40 years after Lynch’s column premiered on May 20, 1968.

In conjunction with the book, Lynch has set up a Web site, [www.VietnamMailbag.com](http://www.VietnamMailbag.com), on which she has posted an index of Delaware natives who served in Vietnam. The list, sorted by the year the servicemen wrote to or were mentioned in the column, has more than 1,500 entries. “We are really trying to find these guys,” she says. “We are looking for their input in the book.”

“Vietnam Mailbag: Voices from the War” will be in two parts. Part one will focus on the letters and the mailbag columns. For part two, Lynch plans to interview a dozen or so of the letter writers. She intends to speak with at least two servicemen who corresponded with her during each year the column ran, and to



Photograph courtesy of VietnamMailbag.com

Lance Hall, who graduated from Lewes High School in 1963, served in Vietnam in 1969 and 1970. Now living in Germany, his memories will be part of a book by Nancy Lynch, who corresponded with Hall and dozens of other soldiers in a daily newspaper column “Nancy’s Vietnam Mailbag.”

select a cross-section of upstate-downstate, officer-enlisted, covering all four branches of the military. “I want to know how the Vietnam War influenced their lives, and how they are doing now,” Lynch says.

Hall, who lives in Trier, Germany, near the border with Luxembourg, is one of the men Lynch is interviewing. “My mother saved all the copies [of “Nancy’s Vietnam Mailbag”] and I was looking through some of them just two days before I heard from Nancy,” Hall says. “Fate?”

Lynch also plans to interview Roxana resident Tom McBride, a native of Wilmington who in his mailbag letters “adopted a persona,” Lynch says, of a short, chubby rocker who was always on a diet. “He wanted us to send him Metrecal,” the ‘60s version of Slimfast, “and wrote about his many zany adventures.” His *nom de plume* was “Mop,” which means “plump” in Vietnamese. Years later, Lynch met McBride at a book signing and he proved to be “a hunky, tall, serious Vietnam vet,” she says.

Lynch, who has been reading through the letters and columns for more than a year, says it is uncanny how familiar they seem to her. “They put me right back in that place, back in the zone of that time,” she says. “It is almost like I can hear choppers in my head.”

She believes that the time is right for her book. “The letters are as powerful to read today as they were then,” she says. “They will make you laugh and they will make you cry. And there are so many parallels with Iraq today. What my guys — and I came to think of them as ‘my guys’ — went through 40 years ago was so similar to what we are hearing about Iraq.”

“There are many parallels between all wars,” says Hall. “But man never learns from the past. We just keep going full speed ahead and the politicians keep making their legacies at our expense.”

Lynch says that she always saw her column as her way of thanking her “guys” for their service. This book, she adds, is an extension of that gratitude.

“When I was doing the column, I felt I was in service to those guys,” she says. “This book is my thanks to the Delawareans who put their lives on the line for us.” ■

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