

Jerry's early childhood was spent living on Piermont Avenue in Nyack and growing up near the Hudson River. He felt it was a great place to be a kid. Along with his siblings and friends, Jerry spent his days fishing and exploring the river. In wintertime, they'd go out and play on the ice, break off icebergs, do all manner of things on the river that was seemingly perfectly safe. He would recall stories of pirates and other interesting characters they pretended to be. He was there as the Tappan Zee Bridge was being built and remembered watching the earth-movers, those giant trucks with tires twice as big as he was, and seeing his sleepy river town transported into a construction site to create the new bridge. Years later, Jerry would return to living on the river, this time in a houseboat at the Nyack marina.

On October 24th, 1969 — the day the hand grenade ripped apart his body — Jerry's tour of duty in Vietnam ended. It would take five days of surgery, but the doctors were able to save Jerry's life. He was eventually transferred to the Army hospital in Japan, then to Fort Dix and finally on to Valley Forge in Pennsylvania where he spent a year in physical therapy. It was here that Jerry received his first of three Purple Hearts as Colonel Dan Grant pinned the Purple Heart onto his shirt.

After he was discharged from the hospital, he returned home to Rockland County with his wife and infant son. Like many other soldiers returning home from a war zone, Jerry found it difficult to readjust to civilian life. But he was determined that his injuries weren't going to stop him from living a normal life and providing for his family.

Jerry traveled all over the world as Production Stage Manager for Frank Sinatra and others and then walked away from all of that in 1986 to follow another calling — helping veterans. Even though at that time it had been about 20 years since Jerry's tour in Vietnam, he knew he hadn't fully "come home." He realized there were a lot of people out there like him and being Jerry, he decided to do something about it.

He was a Combat Sgt. in Vietnam, felt himself to be a regular U.S. Army grunt, and bared his soul to get his message where it was most needed. Because of his experiences in the military and in life, his sense of humor and self-effacing way of

telling stories, he would bring out his own vulnerabilities, which gave other veterans a feeling of security, camaraderie, knowing they could trust Jerry, who was like them, a combat vet. They would open up to him — he was one of them — Jerry had been where these vets had been — had seen things similar to what they had seen — had the same demons haunting them...as haunted him till the day he died. Jerry had to deal with his own psychological wounds of war — the unseen bullets that inflict as much pain as the hand grenade that took his right leg and nearly his life.

His concern and efforts for veterans went well beyond his 30 year career at his 9:00 - 5:00 day job as Director of the Veterans Service Agency. He worked tirelessly for the last 32 years of his life, to help veterans of all wars.

In 1987, after organizing Rockland's Vietnam vets, VVA Chapter #333 was created. As their first public act of coming together, Jerry and the vets set up the Memorial Day Watchfires, an annual event to commemorate all those who have died in wars, or those who still have not come home.

Caring about the men and women who have worn this nation's uniform, no matter where or when they served, Jerry formed New York Vets in 1992. Through that organization, he established the Camp Shanks Museum in Orangetown, New York which was dedicated on June 6th, 1994, the 50th Anniversary of the Normandy Invasion. This was in the area where 1.3 million GIs left U.S. for North Africa and the European Theatre of Operations during World War II. Back then, it was known as "Last Stop — USA" since many would never again return to U.S. soil.

One of Jerry's proudest accomplishments was the Community Veterans Medical Clinic that Jerry proposed and campaigned for through the VA system so that our veterans didn't have to travel over an hour for VA medical appointments. The first one of these medical centers was established here in Rockland County in 1996. Now there are 1400 such local veterans' medical clinics throughout the United States, treating thousands of veterans on a regular schedule.

Jerry opened Rockland's first homeless veterans' shelter — MIA (Missing in America) in Valley Cottage in 1996. He created the Annual Buffalo Soldiers' Award and the Women Veterans Recognition Award, as well as the Rockland

County Service Medal, to honor those who served in Afghanistan, Iraq and in the Global War on Terror. He felt this was a way to connect with a new generation of returning vets to ensure they were aware of and accessing their well-deserved GI benefits.

In 1993, to honor the veterans of “The Forgotten War,” Jerry set up a permanent memorial to Rockland County’s KIA in the Korean War, at the Gary Onderdonk Veterans Cemetery at Rockland Community College in Suffern, New York. This led to the formation of the Korean Vets Eagle Chapter which brought together Rockland’s Korean War Veterans and is still in existence today. These were the veterans of “The Forgotten War” — no longer forgotten because of Jerry’s efforts.

On two different occasions, Jerry arranged for the Vietnam “Moving Wall” to be displayed at Rockland Community College in Suffern. Many veterans had not visited the Vietnam Memorial in Washington, D.C. and this gave them an opportunity to view a replica of The Wall locally, and to remember the friends and family members they had lost in ‘Nam.

Jerry wouldn’t have expected a bronze plaque placed in his honor at Nyack Memorial Park, where he spent so much of his life and he would now smile at the thought of it. He would be honored to have a place near where the veterans of earlier wars were memorialized. When asked what he felt would be most remembered about him, Jerry’s reply was, “Probably my sense of humor. The ability to laugh is magic, to take a bad situation and at least be able to smile at it in some way, or to spin it in some way and take some of the steam out of it.” A long time has passed since Jerry played near the Hudson River, and he will be remembered by Rockland’s veterans for a long time to come — not only for his irrepressible sense of humor and engaging stories, but also because of his love, respect and unending selflessness for his fellow veterans and the Rockland community.

This quote by Theodore Roosevelt was a favorite of Jerry’s:  
“It is not the critic who counts; not the man who points out how the strong man stumbles, or where the doer of deeds could have done them better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood; who strives valiantly; who errs, who comes short again and

again, because there is no effort without error and shortcoming; but who does actually strive to do the deeds; who knows great enthusiasms, the great devotions; who spends himself in a worthy cause; who at the best knows in the end the triumph of high achievement, and who at the worst, if he fails, at least fails while daring greatly, so that his place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who neither know victory nor defeat.”