

- **WELCOME HOME: Underwater demolitions expert Ron Flockton saw Vietnam through a diver's mask**
- **Ronald "Froggy" Flockton Sr. served two tours in Vietnam with the Navy after graduating from elite Underwater Demolitions Team training.**
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• Ron Flockton's uniform while serving with an Underwater Demolition Team in Vietnam might best be described as minimalist. Courtesy photo

Ronald T Flockton, Sr.

Rank

Chief petty officer, E-7

Branch of service

Navy

Service time in V...

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*This is part of an ongoing series profiling local veterans of the Vietnamese War. The town will recognize Vietnam veterans this November with a long-overdue 'Welcome Home' celebration on Veterans Day.*

PLYMOUTH – Ronald Flockton Sr.'s nickname gives a good indication of his service with the Navy in Vietnam.

But "Froggy" Flockton's work with one of the Navy's Underwater Demolition Teams is just part of the story of the Plymouth native who served with the elite special warfare unit.

Flockton served two tours in Vietnam, surviving numerous shellings and mortar attacks. But the closest he ever came to a firefight was in the Caribbean, during the so-called Dominican Crisis of 1965.

Flockton's war was largely fought underwater, helping to build bridges in remote jungle valleys, and retrieve bodies and equipment.

Flockton's service started many years before most people ever heard of Vietnam. It ended well after the war was over.

Flockton was living in Kingston and attending Silver's Lake's vocational program when he decided to leave school and join in the Navy in June 1957.

Flockton had been in the carpentry program and wanted to become a Seabee, a member of the Navy's construction force. He completed a four-year stint before he even turned 21 and was serving a second hitch at Guantanamo Bay in 1963 when he was tapped for training with the elite Underwater Demolition Teams, the precursor of the Navy Seals.

Flockton graduated with Class 29, completing jump school, underwater swimming school, dive school and an eight-mile swim off the coast of Puerto Rico.

"Anywhere from 10,000 feet in the air to 120 feet underwater, that's our operating area," Flockton said.

He was 28 and already considered an old man when he arrived in Vietnam in January 1968 with Navy Mobile Construction Battalion 53.

He was building a Special Forces camp on Marble Mountain outside Da Nang when the enemy launched the first Tet offensive. Five men died that night in the camp. One left his shelter because he wanted to put on a pair of boots.

Flockton and his unit then moved inland to Nam Hoa, where the battalion constructed a pontoon bridge for 60-ton tanks across the Perfume River.

Perfume? "Because it stunk. And, oh god, I was swimming in that stuff," Flockton said.

Flockton cleared the way for the bridge's 24-inch pilings.

"The Viet Cong tried to blow up the bridge numerous times, but couldn't penetrate it at all. As far as I know, it's still standing," Flockton said.

Flockton spent nine months in Vietnam on his first tour and then returned home for more training. He was in charge of security at Red Beach in Da Nang during his second nine-month tour.

Flockton spent a lot of time in the water, retrieving lost equipment and dead bodies. "Every time someone drowned, guess who they called?" he said. "Guys would try to cross rivers and they couldn't swim. They'd slip on the smooth rocks and fall. They'd lose a lot of weapons too. We'd dive for M-60 machine guns. They'd clean them up and use them."

Flockton spent eight more years in the Navy after rotating out of Vietnam in late 1969. He worked as a construction supervisor in Diego Garcia and Guam before closing out his career as a recruiter in Norwood.

Flockton remembers feeling disrespected when he returned from the war and shied away from both fellow veterans and the ocean.

Flockton has not been to the beach since he left the Navy in 1978. "I saw plenty of that," he said.

He finally reconnected with local veterans in 2006 and has been commander of VFW Post 1822 for the last four years.

"There was a reason we were over there, but a lot of people didn't understand it and a lot still don't," Flockton said of the war. "The welcome home was not pleasant, but it was the same as the guys coming back from World War II and Korea and a lot of guys from Iraq and Afghanistan. That's now starting to materialize."



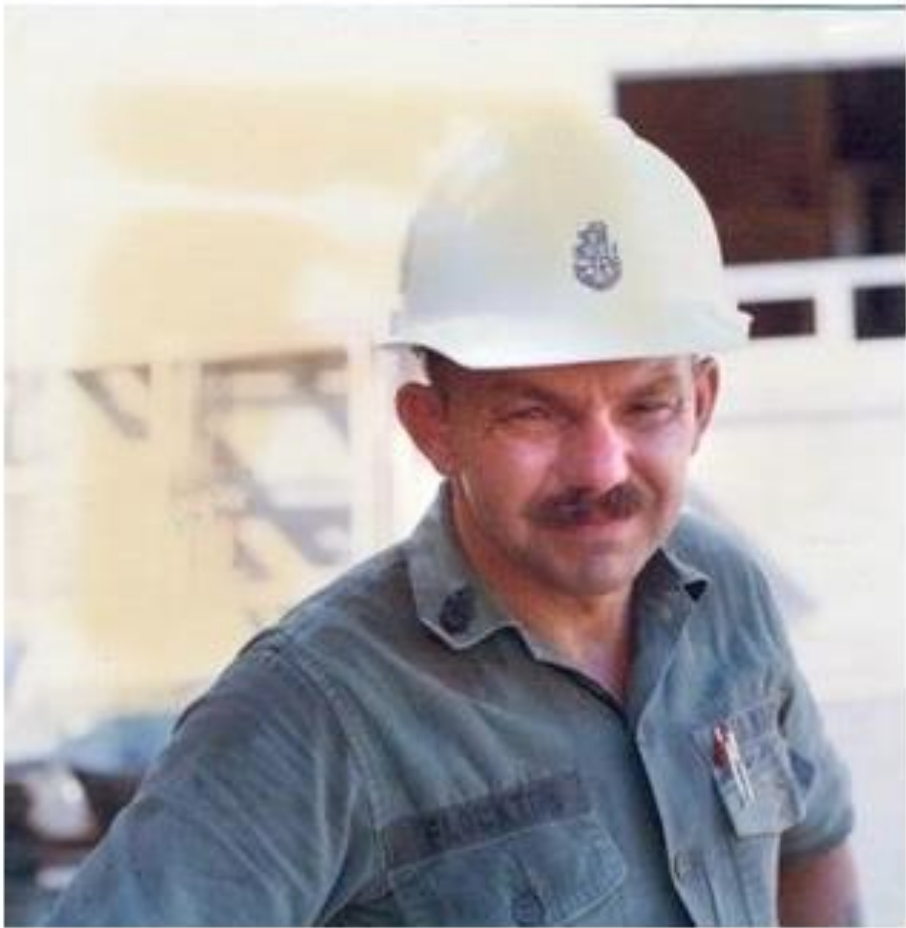
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Ron Flockton's uniform while serving with an Underwater Demolition Team in Vietnam might best be described as minimalist. Courtesy photo



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Ron Flockton, right, relaxes with the corpsman who helped with his underwater gear during construction of the Am Mi- Bridge over the Perfume River in Nam-Hoa, Vietnam, in 1969. Courtesy photo



Q Zoom

In 1976, near the end of his 22 years in the U.S. Navy, Ron Flockton worked as a construction supervisor on the island of Diego Garcia. Courtesy photo





Q Zoom

Ron Flockton has served as commander of VFW Post 1822 for the past four years. He completed two tours of Vietnam while serving with one of the Navy's Underwater Demolition Teams. Courtesy photo



Q Zoom

Ron Flockton takes a break from diving while helping to build a bridge across the Perfume River in Nam-Hoa, Vietnam, in 1969. Courtesy photo





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Ron Flockton's home away from home in Da Nang was Frogsville, home of the Navy's Underwater Demolition Teams. Courtesy photo

<http://plymouth.wickedlocal.com/news/20160627/welcome-home-underwater-demolitions-expert-ron-flockton-saw-vietnam-through-divers-mask/?Start=1>