

MONTAGNARD GREAT-GRANDMOTHER HAPPY TO CALL GREENSBORO HOME

K Ben Nash doesn't go long without hugs. It's been that way since she arrived in Greensboro with a group of Montagnard refugees in 1992. According to Greensboro's Major Mike Linnane, U.S. Special Forces (Retired), "As soon as she landed, we recognized each other. She still had her unique smile."



Neither one was smiling on their first meeting in 1969 -- on the other side of the globe. "I was posted at Ben Het Special Forces Camp in Vietnam's Central Highlands. We monitored and interdicted traffic on Ho Chi Minh Trail. The North Vietnamese didn't like us to the point of sending tanks to take our camp out."

Linnane was wounded and evacuated to Pleiku as a litter patient. "K Ben was the first nurse to get to me."

Fast forward to 2019, K Ben is married to Steve Nash, a retired Navy Seal who made four combat tours of Vietnam. "No, I didn't meet her in Vietnam, says Nash. "We met in Asheboro."

As associate members of the Greensboro Marine Corps League, the Nashes help with fund-raising activities at Belks in Friendly Center. According to K Ben, "I've received lots of hugs there! At least six soldiers in the past few months have thanked me for treating them in Vietnam."

To the combined Nash family, Steve brings three children and five grandchildren. After retiring as a Navy SEAL, he traveled the world as a professional photographer for Associated Press for 23 years.

K Ben Nash has five children, 13 grandchildren, and two great-grandchildren. "All are American citizens," she is quick to point out.

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The combined Nash family isn't as typical as it may seem. Steve Nash's first wife and a son were killed in an auto accident.

K Ben Nash started her family during the worst of political turmoil and war in her country. Both her brothers were killed in combat while serving with the South Vietnamese Navy. She joined the Army first, but found her true calling as a field combat airborne medic.

Assigned to U.S. Army Special Forces, her team operated trauma stations for personnel wounded while operating from small outpost camps in the highlands near the borders of Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam – think Ben Het.



COMBAT MEDIC K BEN SURVEYS GREEN BERET BUNKER IN CENTRAL HIGHLANDS THAT HAD JUST BEEN OVERRUN BY ENEMY TROOPS

She was wounded on two occasions after being inserted into landing zones to treat wounded personnel on the ground. Per Steve Nash, “small pieces of shrapnel are still coming out of her body.”

The Montagnards continued to fight against Communist forces long after Allied forces pulled out. Finally, they were almost left without a country. “The North Vietnamese never liked us and the South Vietnamese grew to dislike us because we resisted so long,” reflects K Ben Nash.

According to Linnane, “North Carolina has the largest Montagnard population outside Vietnam – and Greensboro probably has more than any other city.”

He says that isn't by accident, “Fort Bragg, Special Forces, and Montagnards – you can't have one without the other! We couldn't have done without them in Vietnam. At Ben Het, we had 12 Green Berets and 400 Montagnards!”

To K Ben Nash's chagrin, space doesn't permit identifying the large number of individuals who helped her and her family acclimate to America and become citizens. To those parties, “I could never thank them enough for what they did.”

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Obviously, it was an uphill battle. “I worked for Southern Foods 17 years. I often got up at three a.m. and worked three jobs.” Even so, she kept house, continued to raise her children as a single mother, and volunteered at Lutheran Family Services.

“My grandchildren graduated from Northeast Guilford High School and UNCG,” says K Ben Nash. “They have good jobs. One is a nurse, another’s wife is a doctor and he will soon become a doctor himself.

As part of Vietnam War Commemoration Ceremonies on March 30, Major General Arnold Fields, U.S. Marine Corps (Retired), presented K Ben Nash with a citation and her personal Vietnam Veteran Lapel Pin in appreciation for her service.

She had previously received the South Vietnamese Cross of Gallantry, as well as several unit and personal awards.

After two retirements and his personal family tragedy, Nash spent four years in China and almost a decade motor-homing around the United States. He often visited veterans he knew from his Navy SEAL service.



One such visit was to a Green Beret Medic from Asheboro who was heavily involved in helping Montagnard refugees assimilate in their new country. He introduced K Ben and Steve Nash -- the rest is history.

Mike Linnane has been previously written about in these pages:

https://www.greensboro.com/life/harry-thetford-one-brave-man-of-the-green-berets/article_543d60c3-cc68-5637-9b22-b8bbef3af44b.html

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Harry Thetford is a retired Sears store manager and author of "Keep Their Stories Alive." Contact him at htolharry@gmail.com or 336/707-8922.