Texas Aggies Elected to National Leadership of Military Order of the Purple Heart

By John Bircher, Military Order of the Purple Heart, Inc. Public Relations

On August 11, 2012, two distinguished Aggie Alumni, Bruce McKenty ’70 and Bill Bacon ’67, were elected to key leadership positions in the Military Order of the Purple Heart, Inc., a national veteran service organization with more than 44,000 members, each of whom have been wounded in an armed conflict with the enemies of the United States.

Bruce McKenty of Lakewood, Washington was elected as the National Commander of the Military Order of the Purple Heart. Bruce entered TAMU in the Fall of 1966. He was in the Corps of Cadets in Company B-2, was on the Fish Drill Team in his freshman year, and was a member of the 2nd Brigade Color Guard in his sophomore and junior year. McKenty graduated TAMUI in 1970 with a Bachelor of Arts degree, and was commissioned as a 2nd Lieutenant in the U.S. Army Field Artillery.

Upon Bruce’s entry onto active duty he completed his Officer Basic Course at Fort Sill, OK and went on to flight school in route to his first assignment – Vietnam, where he was assigned to F Troop, 1/9th Cavalry, 1st Cavalry Division at Bien Hoa as an AH-1G Cobra attack helicopter pilot. During his tour he was wounded twice and has the unique distinction of being one of a small handful of Army helicopter pilots who survived being shot down with an SA-7 heat seeking missile. During his tour he was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross, the Bronze Star, Two Purple Hearts, and numerous Air Medals, with three being awarded for valor.

Bruce went on to spend 21 years in the Army serving in various command and staff assignments in Field Artillery and Aviation, and retired in 1991 as a Lieutenant Colonel. During his Army career he earned a Master of Science from the University of Southern California in 1984 and in 1986 graduated from the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College at Fort Leavenworth, KS. After his retirement from the Army, Bruce was a general contractor in the greater Seattle/Tacoma area until his final retirement in 2001.

In 2002, McKenty joined the Military Order of the Purple Heart and discovered one of his greatest passions, that of being a volunteer service officer for his local chapter, assisting all veterans to receive their rightful benefits from the Veterans Administration and other government agencies. In 2004 he discovered a new passion as a volunteer at the local VA golf course. The
American Lake Veterans Golf Course located at the American Lake VA Hospital in Lakewood, Washington lost all federal funding in 1995. That year, a group of veterans petitioned the VA to keep the golf course operating with only volunteers and public donations. It has not only survived but continues to improve through the commitment and dedication of volunteers like Bruce, who is now the Manager of the American Lakes Golf Course. Since joining The Order in 2002 Bruce has been the adjutant, finance officer, and service officer at chapter and department levels, was elected four times as Department Commander and twice as the Commander of National Region III. In 2010, he advanced to the leadership of the National organization and was elected this year to the position of National Commander. Bruce and his wife Francine reside in Lakewood, Washington.

Bill Bacon was elected as the Commander of the seven-state, Region V of the Military Order of the Purple Heart. Bill entered the Agricultural and Mechanical College of Texas in 1962 as a Fish in Squadron 1 where he spent the next two years. Bill graduated with a Bachelor of Science degree in Animal Science from Texas A&M University in August, 1967.

Bacon as Region V Commander

Bacon (R) in Vietnam 1970

In September, 1967, he entered service in the US Army at Ft. Dix, NJ. After Basic and Advanced Infantry training he was transferred to Ft. Benning, GA for OCS where he was commissioned a 2nd LT of Infantry in July 1968. After parachute school he spent a tour at Ft. Wainwright, AK. In December, 1969, Bill was sent to Vietnam and assigned to the 2nd Bn/ 1st Infantry of the 196th Brigade, Americal Division based on LZ Hawk Hill in Quang Tin Province. Bill served on Battalion staff before being assigned to a rifle company. As Commander of A Company, his unit was in close contact with a force of NVA regulars in Kham Duc near Laos. On the second day the fighting got very intensive, and Bill was severely wounded earning a Purple Heart Medal.

Bill was returned to Brooke Army Medical Center where he was treated and eventually retired from the Army for physical disability due to his gun shot wound. In addition to the Purple Heart Medal, Bill was awarded the Bronze Star with “V” Device and second Oak Leaf Cluster and the Army Commendation Medal.

He spent the next thirty years working in the food industry. Although he worked in production, purchasing and other related fields, his primary function was in sales and marketing where he
worked with such companies as Kraft Foodservice in their Chicago area headquarters as well as Vice President Sales for Wilson Foods Corp in Oklahoma City.

A member of the Military Order of the Purple Heart since 1992, Bill became the National Membership Director in 2001. In 2004, Bill became National Adjutant with headquarters in Washington, D.C. He retired from employment with the MOPH in 2008 and remained active in his local Chapter before his election to the national leadership this year.

Bill spends his time traveling with his wife Debbie, seeing their two children and four grandchildren. Bill also enjoys working with veterans and volunteers at the Kerrville, TX VAMC at least two days a week.

These two distinguished Alumni are members of the organization now known as the "Military Order of the Purple Heart of the U.S.A. Inc..." (MOPH). The MOPH was formed in 1932 for the protection and mutual interest of all combat wounded veterans and active duty men and women who have received the decoration. Chartered by the Congress, The MOPH is unique among Veteran Service Organizations in that all its members were wounded in combat. For this sacrifice, they were awarded the Purple Heart Medal. With grants from the MOPH Service Foundation, the MOPH and its Ladies Auxiliary promote Patriotism, Fraternalism, and the Preservation of America's military history. Most importantly, through veteran service, they provide comfort and assistance to all Veterans and their families, especially those requiring claims assistance with the VA, those who are homeless, and those requiring employment assistance. Through the VAVS program, MOPH volunteers selflessly provide assistance to hospitalized veterans at VA medical facilities and State Veterans Homes.