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John Cook
photo by Chris Fritchie



Protecting Our Protectors

By Wendi K. Cartwright

“WATER ... C-RATS ... A BIBLE.” Not a surprising answer from a veteran of the United States Marine Corps to the question of what items he would take to a desert island. The water and Bible are understandable ... but C-Rats? Then he explained, “military food,” the individual combat meal rations issued to service men and women. This level-headed response typifies the straightforward style of John K. Cook, Collin County’s Veteran’s Service Officer. As an appointed officer for the past eight years, it is Mr. Cook’s responsibility to assist Collin County veterans and dependants in obtaining benefits to which they may be entitled. He also assists in representing veterans or dependents for service-related disabilities or pensions and is an advocate for our veterans in the appeal process if a claim is denied. It’s a daunting responsibility, but the passion in

his voice speaks volumes, “Helping vets and their families has been the most rewarding job I’ve ever had in my life.”

Austin, Texas was home to Mr. Cook and his four siblings. Being close in age to his two brothers and two sisters created a close-knit family and fond memories of his childhood. That strong sense of family didn’t stop when John married Sharon, his wife of 36 years, and they became the proud parents of son Chris and daughters Shanda and Sharla. Six “precious grandkids,” ages nine months to seven years, followed.

The love for family and a desire to serve our country run deep in the Cook family. For over 60 years, the United States Marine Corps has been a part of life for Mr. Cook and many of his family members. In 1945, his father served in World War II, fighting in the Battle of Iwo Jima. His brother,

son-in-law and two nephews have also proudly protected our country. Inspired by his father’s service, Mr. Cook enlisted in the Marines and cites his proudest professional moment as “graduating from Marine boot camp.” While serving in the Vietnam War, Mr. Cook was wounded in action. He was awarded the Purple Heart Medal, the Vietnam Campaign Medal with Four Bronze Stars and a Combat Action Ribbon for his individual efforts, while his unit was awarded the Vietnamese Cross of Gallantry with Palm and a Navy Unit Citation. First-hand military experience, coupled with more than 25 years of work with the Veteran’s Administration, the Texas Veteran’s Commission and Veteran Services, provide Mr. Cook with the skill and motivation needed to provide support to all veterans of Collin County.

Frisco’s Veteran’s of Foreign War (VFW) Post 8273 understands exactly how much John Cook means to the veterans of Frisco. Tony Arbisi, Service Officer for the Frisco VFW, and retired Marine, called Mr. Cook “the most dedicated serviceman I’ve ever met. He’s either at the hospital helping some guy get benefits or taking a down-on-his-luck guy to lunch. He’s constantly on the run. He’s a thoroughbred. If he can’t help someone get benefits, it’s because there are not enough hours in the day.” The feeling is mutual. Mr. Cook stated he is “very impressed with the caliber of people” at the Frisco VFW Post. He also described it as “one of the best Posts I’ve ever been to...a very friendly, small-town atmosphere where people really care about people.”

Achieving a positive outcome for each veteran is the goal; the formation of lasting relationships is the prize. Mr. Cook fights every day to protect the benefits of veterans in all Collin County cities. Securing necessities for survival and maintaining faith it will happen is Mr. Cook’s mission. In other words, “Water ... C-Rats ... a Bible.” Inspiring words to live by.

Wendi Cartwright is a freelance writer living in Frisco.