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## In memory of ...

### Sanford man visits Vietnam to learn about the father he barely knew

By **TAMMY WELLS**  
Staff Writer

In October 1969, the day after his sixth birthday, a Wells boy learned that his father had died in Vietnam. Thirty-nine years later, Wayne Elkins Jr. and his wife Tracy have made an amazing voyage of discovery. It has been an emotional voyage for Elkins and has yielded the many-faceted reward of meeting others who knew his father, learning more about him and then traveling to the land where he lived for two short months before his death during the height of the Vietnam War.

The couple, along with others, will be sponsoring a school in Vietnam, named in memory of Wayne Elkins Sr. and two others in his company who died there so many years ago.

Elkins Sr. was just 23 years old when he and two other squad members, William McLaughlin of Roxbury, Mass. and George Davenport of Thomasville, N. C. were dismantling a bunker in Deo Cao Pass when it caved in, killing all of them. Elkins Sr. had enlisted in the Army and was first assigned to Germany before he was transferred to Vietnam on Aug. 2, 1969. On Oct. 4 that same year, his young life was cut short. He left a wife, Patricia, and two small boys, Wayne Jr., and James.

Wayne Elkins Jr. knew little about his father. It was a subject the family didn't discuss, he said earlier this week. His memories are few, just snapshots really, of time spent together long ago.



Top,  
Wayne  
Elkins Jr. of  
Sanford shows  
off his tattoo  
to some  
Vietnamese  
children while  
visiting the  
country recently.  
Elkins  
traveled to  
Vietnam to  
learn more  
about his  
father, who  
died in the  
Vietnam war  
when Elkins  
was a boy.  
Above,  
Wayne R.  
Elkins, Sr.,  
pictured in  
a military  
photograph  
at the  
beginning  
of the  
Vietnam  
conflict. He  
was killed  
during  
service in  
Vietnam, at  
the age of  
23.

"I remember playing in the snow with him when I was real little," said Elkins Jr.

Patricia moved her family from Wells to her family home in Massachusetts after her husband's death, but Elkins Jr. returned to Wells after elementary school and was raised by his grandparents. Eventually, he married Tracy and the couple now live in Sanford. He works in the gravel industry and races cars at Beech Ridge Speedway on the side.

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