

National Veterans Creative Arts Festival

MILITARY COMBAT EXPERIENCE

Not on My Watch

ALLEN ECKMAN
VA BLACK HILLS HEALTH CARE SYSTEM
FORT MEADE, SOUTH DAKOTA

Allen Eckman served in the Marine Corps as a field radio operator in Vietnam in the mid to late 1960s. One of his most important responsibilities was to care for the casualties. “We never left a man on the battlefield,” Eckman says. “Not on my watch. Sometimes I helped carry them out of harm’s way myself and put out the first call for aid. I stayed with them until the chopper carried them away.”

When Eckman returned from combat, he faced the challenges of post-traumatic stress disorder. Part of his therapy has been to create cast paper sculptures, one of which was titled *Marking the LZ*, which won first place in the 2006 National Veterans Creative Arts Competition. The sculpture was a self portrait mounted in an acrylic case accompanied by original photos, insignias, badges and other military artifacts that he collected during his time in Vietnam. “Creating this has made it possible for me to deal with some of the very hard stuff in a very small way,” Eckman said.



Eckman, who is now 60, received first place in the 2007 competition with a paper sculpture he named, *Not on My Watch*, which represents this vital part of his military combat experience in Vietnam. “In combat, we protected and fought for one another, and when we needed help we got it,” he says. “Thanks to VA [the Department of Veterans Affairs], we still do.”