

Danville man's diligence rewarded with two careers, two stars

By Gary Peterson

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As near as retired Army **Maj. Gen. Ron Lowe** can figure it, his work ethic took root on his grandparents' Missouri farm.

"Missouri farm families were hardworking families," said Lowe, 70, who was born in the Ozarks of southwest Missouri, grew up in Santa Cruz and now lives in Danville. "Even though we moved away when I was 3, I spent most of my summers when I was young back on their farm. I was involved in baling hay, tending to livestock. They made their own soap. Sunup, sundown, working in the fields."

Lowe is currently involved with five organizations, including **East Bay Stand Down**, a four-day biannual event that serves homeless vets and will take place in September. Lowe is its new executive board chairman, replacing Denver Mills, who founded East Bay Stand Down in 1999.

"It's very fulfilling to be involved in all those things," said Lowe, who has three sons, two of whom live out of state. "It's not so overwhelming that I can't have a life and enjoy my retirement."

Lowe's affinity for diligent and meaningful work has served him, his country, his employers and his communities well.

He was captain of his high school football team, an all-conference guard at 180 pounds. He attended San Jose State, where he joined the ROTC program. He earned a business degree, then headed for Fort Benning, Ga., and U.S. Army basic training.

Within a year he was a company commander responsible for a 3-kilometer stretch of the border between East and West Germany at the height of the Cold War.

"I remember wondering how in the world with my 27 vehicles and 200 guys I was going to keep the hordes of East Germans and Russians from invading West Germany," he said, laughing. His next assignment was as an **adviser in Vietnam**, where "they needed captains. So after two years in the Army, I was a captain."

Unhappy with the way Vietnam vets were treated on their return to the United States, Lowe separated from the Army in 1970. He accepted a job at what was then Pacific Telephone. But after a couple years, he missed the military. So he joined an Army Reserve unit, and for the next quarter-century pursued dual careers -- at the phone company and in the Army.

"To be successful in the Reserves, you need two things," said Lowe, who received assignments to the Pentagon and South Korea and became accustomed to working weekends and red-eye flights in order to serve both careers. "If you've got a spouse, you need a supportive spouse. You also need a supportive employer. I had a very supportive wife."

It was at the phone company that **Michael Slattengren** met Lowe.

"He was one of the best managers I worked for," said Slattengren, also a Vietnam vet. "I've never been in Ron's house, but I'd like to see how he has his desk organized. He's got a lot of things on his plate and does everything well."

Lowe retired from the phone company in 2000, about the time the Army placed him back on **active duty** and sent him to Hawaii. There he was **chief of staff for the United States Pacific Command**, which is responsible for all U.S. forces in the Pacific theater. He and his wife Lindsay returned to Danville for good in 2004. If you didn't ask him, you'd never know he rose to the rank of two-star general.

"He's just a very humble person," Slattengren said.

After returning home, Lowe began volunteering for every veterans-related cause he could find.

Mike Conklin, founder and CEO of the San Ramon-based **Sentinels of Freedom** nonprofit that helps severely wounded combat veterans, was the first to stoke Lowe's passion for volunteerism.

"We had an opportunity to go national," said Conklin, who needed to assemble a board of directors. "He's the first guy I thought about."

Conklin quickly discovered that Lowe "pretty much knows everybody everywhere. He said, 'Let me make some calls.' The next thing I know we're at Walter Reed hospital and the doors are flying open. They realized we were for real."

Lowe didn't stop there. He asked his contacts at the phone company to interview **Manuel Mendoza**, the first soldier helped by Sentinels. Mendoza lost both legs in an IED explosion in Iraq. He had no college degree. He was hired and has been on the job for eight years.

"I don't think there is one person in our community or maybe in the state who is involved in so many things on a local basis to support the military and our veterans," Conklin said of Lowe. He's also a stickler. While he was chief financial officer of Sentinels of Freedom, Lowe was in charge of verifying receipts. One day Conklin went to Office Depot and bought several hundred dollars of office supplies.

"Ron walks in and says, 'This Office Depot receipt, there's a \$1.57 charge for a candy bar,' " Conklin said. " 'We don't buy candy bars. I need \$1.57.' I said, 'OK, here's two bucks.' He said, 'No, we don't do cash. You have to write a check.'"

"That's how thorough and detailed he is. I had to stand back and say, 'He's right.' "

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