



'VFW'S UNIQUENESS is our best SELLING POINT'

By Richard K. Kolb

It's gone down in history as "post-Tet"—the Communist offensive in early 1969. The war in Vietnam—contrary to what many Americans believed—was hardly over by then. It was simply entering another phase.

In the offensive's first three weeks alone, some 1,140 GIs were killed in action. Heavy fighting lasted more than a month. Immersed in that combat was the 199th Light Infantry Brigade. Before his tour was up, John Gwizdak commanded Co. E, 4th Bn., 12th Inf., 199th LIB.

A year in the field taught this infantry officer some valuable lessons. Foremost among them were the eliteness of the American fighting man and the essence of leadership under pressure.

"That's why I chose *Follow Me* as my motto," says Gwizdak. "Emphasis must be placed on individual leadership—of the caliber displayed by infantry squad leaders in Vietnam. This applies to all levels on down the line. Real leaders evoke

responses. They show that individuals can always make a difference."

RECOGNITION AND REMEMBRANCE

Like many seasoned combat vets, Gwizdak understands the crucial role of recognizing and remembering sacrifices made in war.

"It's a priority," he said. "Paying tribute to those lost in battle, as well as their families, is essential. Freedom is bought at a price, and it is our responsibility to educate the public about these sacrifices."

Concern for the living is equally important, too, adds the Chief. "With the much-ballyhooed budget surplus we should repay a debt—to all those who sacrificed for their country," he stresses. "Lost care' should be the rallying cry. Use the budget surplus to increase medical benefits for needy veterans.

"VA patients wait too long for appointments and aren't assured care in old age. And while we are at it, let's bring women vets to the forefront, and put some focus on their special health needs."

Though foreign policy rates low on the scale of concerns to voters, VFW members know its importance. Active-duty personnel are being shortchanged on equipment and entitlements, having to make do with much less. "Stretching the rubber band to the breaking point is dangerous," he says.

As for peacekeeping, it is "a form of diplomacy backed by bodies." The Chief thinks America "should shore up other nations so they assume more responsibility in their own backyards. After the U.S. provides symbolic intervention, NATO should take over in Bosnia and Kosovo. We are jeopardizing the skills and abilities of those in the combat arms to do their jobs."

At home, VFW members have another service to perform. "The more we do for the community," says Gwizdak, "the more positive publicity we generate. The public knows a volunteer effort based on selflessness when it sees one." He favors new youth recognition awards and likes the idea of a separate community service con-



John Gwizdak was a heavy mortar platoon leader in Co. E, 4th Bn., 12th Inf., 199th Light Inf. Bde. He is pictured here as a 2nd lieutenant in July 1969 at a hasty forward fire position in Vietnam.



Gwizdak became commander of Company E in September 1969, leading the unit for the last four months of his Vietnam tour.