

Topic: My uncle in Vietnam

Abstract: This is a story that the population is all too familiar with; the Vietnam War. The story follows a young man as he was drafted by the Army to defend America from a formidable new enemy. As the story states, this young man will carry out his duties with valor and honor, despite hellish conditions and nightmarish scenarios. War is not only in Vietnam as protests rage across America as people's perspectives change.

Key Words: Vietnam, Uncle, War, Drafted, Duty, America, Perspective

Narrative: Vietnam

My uncle hasn't talked about the war ever. I approached him during one of our weekly visits and asked him cautiously and respectfully if he would be willing to answer some questions for me. To my surprise he said yes. Some parts of our discussion were hard for him, to the point of tears. I think this talk we had really brought us closer and the more we talked the more at ease he became. The effect being in a war has on a person doesn't end, even if you don't lose your life, you never view things the same.

My uncle is 62 years old. He was 19 when he was drafted, 20 when he first went to Vietnam, and turned 21 there. He was already married and his wife gave birth to their first child while he was away. He was excited to be a father and deeply regretted not being there for my aunt during the delivery and missing many exciting firsts that go along with a first child. He received many care packages and lots of letters and there was no access to phones. When he was drafted he felt like it was part of his duty and job as an American citizen to defend your country. He understood why we there but feels it was gone about the wrong way and did not completely agree with that aspect. He was a tanker and had a rank of Spec. 4 Division I troop 3rd division 11th armor. He served from January 1970 to December of 1970. He was stationed at Longbend most of his time spent in the bush in Cambodia.

Living conditions and daily life were not good. He was a tanker so that's where he lived, in the tank. He said they would put up tarps behind the tank. Out of the year he served our country, he spent about two weeks in a rural area, most of his time spent in the jungle. They had 5 gallon buckets of water they used for bathing, when fresh water wasn't delivered they showered in the rain. He spoke highly of his commander, he said he was a very good man that looked like he was about fifteen years old and had graduated from West Point. During the times when they had no fresh water they weren't required to shave. To beat the jungle heat or jungle fatigue as he called they would cut off their pants and shirts. Thankfully during his tour, he received no physical injuries. He mentioned about his Commanding Officer being on his second tour and had been injured in his first.

Since he was a tanker use of weapons was an everyday thing. .50 machine gun was the main gun on the tank, 152 mm main gun, and m16s were everyday weaponry. They also used m79 grenade launchers. He said they weren't afraid of chemical warfare.

There wasn't always much in the way of food and entertainment. For most of their entertainment they played cards. Drug use was very popular among soldiers, a lot of marijuana use from what I've heard. They were given rations of food by the Army and they cooked it in their helmets. Most of the time they ate Vietnamese food made the Vietnamese soldiers they served along side. He said a lot of the men didn't really care for the Vietnamese food but he like it and it was a hell of a lot better than the Army rations cooked in his helmet.

A question that is probably on everyone's mind and I asked, now looking back I probably shouldn't have...What is the worst thing that you saw? He became teary and

looked away and didn't give me an answer. I'm sure everything they saw was terrible, and we've all heard the horror stories. Another uncle of mine who was also in Vietnam and has now passed away, told my dad about how he was in the bush as well and had been ordered to shoot anything that moved.

He said the war gave him lots of memories some good and some bad. He doesn't believe we were wrong for being there, that we were there for the right reasons and we went about our being there in the wrong way. He mentioned television having a huge impact on the average Americans' perspective on the war. He thought television gave a very negative image of the whole thing. He doesn't think Americans were ready for what they saw and didn't know how to process the amount and topics of information being pored into their living rooms on a daily basis. He feels this crippled the effect that they had there, and that the war tore America apart and no one was united. The war had many lasting effects on him as well. He told me that war makes you a stronger person in a lot of ways and weaker in others. He still harbors a lot of anger and resentment for what he went through. Sometimes you have to learn to just depend on and trust the people around you, your life depended on them being attentive, knowing and doing their jobs and doing them well. That experience made him well aware of who he could and could not trust.

He told me several stories about his tour. He told me when he spent time in an actual compound, there was an indigenous Vietnamese working the gate and he got off at five. One a Vietnamese woman set a bomb just outside the compound. The bomb went off and no one was hurt.

In the compound the water for showers was heated by the sun and he used the showers frequently when they were available. One morning one of the guys went in the

shower and got blown to pieces. Someone had planted a bomb.

Everyday he was in the compound they weren't allowed to leave it and one of the guys had some deal with someone. That man would leave everyday and come back with a big bag of money.

He heard a story about one of the pilots went somewhere and was coming back with cans of Coke. He had it hid on the plane and when he was flying back one of the cans got stuck in the landing gear and crashed.

When his tour was over and he was heading home, tying up loose ends, turning in his weapon, the alarm sounded. His commanding officer told him to just go and get out of there. While people were firing at each other one he got in a jeep and drove he said a long ways. He arrived at a helicopter just as it was getting ready to take off, he ran up and threw his bag on there and jumped in. During and alarm everyone had somewhere they needed to be, his buddy got in the truck to go to where he needed to be and got hit by a missile. He said he was so happy to be out of there and able to come home to his family.

Just as protesting was happening in the United States, the Vietnamese were also protesting, some wanted them to go and some wanting them to stay. Vietnamese went to the embassy to come to America. They were flying people out like crazy in huge helicopters. A lot made it and a lot did not.

Our veterans have been through a lot protecting our country and freedoms. We sometimes take that for granted. It is important to sit down and think about where we come from as a nation. Also, to remember those who have died for us, left their families to protect ours, and those who have lost friends and family members in tragedy.