

I recently had the pleasure of meeting and interviewing Roger Morrissey about his service and experience in the Vietnam War. Mr. Morrissey was initially drafted into the Army, and later re-enlisted. He served in the 1st Infantry. Before being deployed he was sent to many stateside schools, including Ranger School, which he felt helped prepare him for Vietnam. He was in Vietnam from 1967 to 1969, serving with multiple unconventional units. He spent time with Military Assistance Command, Vietnam – Studies and Observations Group (MACV-SOG), which was a special operations unit conducting covert and unconventional operations. He also served with a Long Range Reconnaissance Patrol, or LRRP Unit. These units were tasked with patrolling deep within enemy-held territory. He said he liked the LRRP unit much better, because it was “like hide and seek.” Mr. Morrissey was also asked to join Delta Force, but did not accept the offer because of the added burden it would place on his family to be uprooted.

From this interview, I learned a few life lessons and developed a greater understanding of what Vietnam Veterans experienced. The first thing I learned from Mr. Morrissey was about the thoughts and values of the average soldier. He expressed that whatever political opinions someone may have had before deploying to Vietnam were put on hold, and that the fighting was done for the men standing on either side of each soldier. Whatever a soldier may have thought about the war was set aside, because the mission and his brothers came first. For me, this was a reminder that no matter how far away a war is and no matter how they differ from one another, the soldiers fighting for our country must come together to fight with and for their brothers. This also made me wonder why civilians in our country cannot seem to come together better, setting their differences aside, to work more cooperatively for the common good of their communities or our country as a whole.

From my interview with Mr. Morrissey, I also learned that some of my perceptions of the war in Vietnam were incorrect. In terms of my perceptions of the war and those fighting it, most of them came from a book I recently read called “Going after Cacciato” by Tim O’Brien. This was a fantasy novel rooted around a daydreaming soldier on guard duty in Vietnam. Mr. Morrissey was able to shed light on the realities of the Vietnam war, starting with the very premise of the novel. Due to the active war, the situation in Vietnam could get spotty at any moment, so a soldier who spent his whole shift on guard duty daydreaming was probably not a great soldier, because he was risking not only his own life but those of his fellow soldiers with his lack of attention. Another thing that Mr. Morrissey cleared up for me was the thoughts of the average soldier while in Vietnam. In the novel, the main character thinks about why his country is at war and about other very political thoughts frequently. As I mentioned before, Mr. Morrissey described the thoughts of the soldiers as very in-the-moment. When in a warzone, a soldier’s thoughts centered more around his brothers and the task or threat at hand than deep, complex, political thoughts.

Mr. Morrissey also shared his experiences from when he returned from Vietnam. Upon his arrival at the airport on American soil he was immediately met with protestors. Between insults and accusations of “baby killer,” he was heckled throughout the airport. This was shocking and eye opening for me, because not only was I unaware that this type of treatment occurred, but I was appalled to hear that someone who sacrificed for their country and their brothers would be treated so poorly. This harassment was unfair to the soldiers, because they were not the people

who decided to go to war in Vietnam, the politicians were. This mistreatment was part of the reason that Mr. Morrissey decided to re-enlist. One of the major takeaways from this interview for me was that soldiers make a lot of sacrifices, and the least we can do as civilians is to show respect, such as by not protesting against soldiers. Soldiers go through many difficult challenges in war, so it is unacceptable to make their life even harder when they return home.

A final important life lesson I learned by interviewing Mr Morrissey focuses on the unexpected adversaries that come one's way. No matter how virtuous one's intentions may be, and how much one has sacrificed for the greater good, the end result may still be received by others in a negative light. This speaks to the creed of a soldier, and the integrity of a person. One must stay committed to their goals, as adversities will arise, but perseverance is the mindset one must have to achieve their goal. I will always remember the sacrifice of Mr. Morrissey for his country, his brothers in war, his family, and in the end for me. I will use the freedoms he fought for to better myself and the world around me.