

Jordan L. Clausen
23 270th Street
Osceola, WI 54020
715-294-4066
joe_lynn_15@hotmail.com

36

Up until the time I decided to apply for this scholarship, my grandfather would never talk to me about Vietnam. Every time it was brought up, he would simply dismiss the subject. My mother, as well as my grandmother, told me to stop trying. I nearly gave in to them, until this gave me the opportunity to hear my grandfather's war stories. Even if I don't receive this scholarship, I would like to thank you for the opportunity to better understand my grandfather.

My grandfather, Thomas Richard Lyford, was drafted into the Vietnam War in 1965, three months after he was married to my grandmother, Marcia Lyford. He was twenty years old at this time, and only one year had passed before he was shipped overseas. While in a jungle in Vietnam, my mother, Monica, was born. To this day my grandmother swears that Grandpa Tom came back a different man. I never understood why she believed this, until I sat down with him and asked him about his experiences in Vietnam.

Thomas Lyford's first days of service consisted of "nothing." This was due to the fact that they were in holding for three weeks. He says, "It was really boring, in boot camp they taught us team work, how to follow orders. We had NO time for screwing around; we were scrubbing barracks and marching in our free time." He was stationed, first, at Fort Knox, and then was shipped to Fort Devens, where he was stationed for a year. He was then shipped overseas to Ta'Nig. Up until this time, he was part of the 196th light infantry. The men traveled by ship to Ta'Nig, which was the longest voyage in combat history for Vietnam. The voyage went from Boston, to the Panama Canal and then to Vietnam. Upon arriving in Vietnam, he became part of the 25th infantry.

Jordan L. Clausen
23 270th Street
Osceola, WI 54020
715-294-4066
joe_lynn_15@hotmail.com

36

He carried an M79, was a part time squad leader and scariest of all, a part time radio man. I tried asking him about "close calls," he just sat there quietly and looked away, as if remembering something too painful to speak about. He did, however, tell me about a couple of his most memorable experiences. Thomas, and two fellow soldiers, were assigned a mission to meet with a sergeant. They were to travel down river and meet up with him. However, they were unable to find him. "We weren't about to go up the river after dark by ourselves," he said seriously, "So we pulled the boat onto the bank. We walked through rice patties for several hours because we knew our squad was set up somewhere ahead. We grew tired of walking and sent up a flare; luckily we ended up just in front of their position."

"There was one other time where I went M.I.A. for a day." He said suddenly.

"You were missing?" I asked.

"Technically, there was an outfit that was ambushed while out in the jungle. My squad went out to retrieve them and bring them back to base. We accomplished our mission but we were separated for a bit. So, I was marked as missing. To be M.I.A you had to be missing for two or three days."

My mother pulled me aside later and told me that I didn't get the whole story. She said it was too difficult for him to talk about and that while his squad was out saving the other outfit, they were also ambushed. They came into crossfire while crossing a trench filled with water. The trench was deeper than they thought. My grandfather's best friend was shot while trying to cross the trench; my grandfather saw this and tried pulling him out of the water. Instead, he ended up hanging on to his best friend with one arm, while holding onto bamboo with the other, to keep

Jordan L. Clausen
23 270th Street
Osceola, WI 54020
715-294-4066
joe_lynn_15@hotmail.com

(36)

them both out of the water. His best friend died that very night. It took three days for my grandfather's squad to find them both. Grandpa Tom never let go of his best friend. My mother also told me that in the movie *Platoon*, there is a scene where an entire squad comes under fire, and few survive. That squad was my grandfather's squad in real life.

Before my mother pulled me aside, Grandpa Tom told me a funny Vietnam story of his. He told me how he and his buddies played a game called Stretch. The point of this game was to throw a knife, or the top of a bayonet, as close to the other guy's foot as you possibly could, without actually hitting it. Grandpa Tom was walking into a buddy's hooch, when his buddy chucked his bayonet head at Grandpa Tom's foot, missing it by "a mile." Grandpa Tom then said, "If you're gonna do it, you gotta do it better than that." He then picked it up and threw it an inch from his buddy's foot. The dinner bell then rang, so Grandpa Tom walked out of the hooch. His buddy decided to try again, but he missed, and hit Grandpa's ankle through his boot. Neither of them realized that it has gone all the way through the boot until after dinner. Grandpa, at some point, looked down and saw a red splotch. Realizing that the bayonet had sliced through his boot and entered his ankle, Grandpa Tom went down to the aid station and put a butterfly on it. He then had to limp around for the three days left before he was scheduled to leave.

Thomas Lyford's service ended on August 1st, 1967. I asked him where he was when he found out that he was going home. He looked rather puzzled, and then said, "I don't know, some rice patty in the middle of Vietnam," with a smile on his face.

Jordan L. Clausen
23 270th Street
Osceola, WI 54020
715-294-4066
joe_lynn_15@hotmail.com

(36)

After the interview I sat there thinking how amazing my grandfather truly was. For the first time in my life, I saw him in a different light. After he served his time in the war, he returned to the states and to his family. He never did go to college; instead, he farmed for three years, hauled milk for four years, and was a Pepsi delivery man for thirty two years. I always knew that he was in the war, and from school I learned that Vietnam was one of the most difficult wars on the soldiers, but I never imagined that my Grandpa had seen things that I have only ever seen in movies. I have always thought my Grandpa to be an amazing person, and now I understand how he became who he is today.

I would like to thank you in advance for your time, for this opportunity and for your consideration.