

Vietnam Strong

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America; a proud nation full of hope, dignity, determination, and pride. Citizens working toward a life filled with happiness. A country filled with many brave, hard working men. All their lives would be changed forever. Vietnam was a war filled with uncertainty in the eyes of many brave young souls. My grandfather was one of these soldiers called to duty; he was 24 and thinking about starting a family of his own. He was stationed in Fort Louis as a machinist. He repaired many firearms and tanks to keep his team fighting. When discussing the experience of a Vietnam soldier; I saw anguish in his eyes, as though he could see war like it happened yesterday. He still has battle wounds; on his hands he only has nine fingers. Through this man I can see a young soldier with hope and love in his heart for his country and his fellow mates who unfortunately were not so lucky. Vietnam was a war filled with stories, emotions, and memories.

I had seen a picture of my grandfather and all the other men at Fort Louis. When looking at it, he had told me, " These were good men. I was lucky to have them by my side; I wish more of them would have made it

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home." Even through the terrors of war, friends can be found; they protect one another and give support when weakness strikes. Without reason to keep pushing, many soldiers gave in to depression and sorrow. When my grandfather talked about the stories and relationships he built with these men the anguish in his eyes seemed to fade. In his words, " Even the scariest most uncertain things can be brightened with the right people standing next to you." He felt honored to stand with these men in the line of combat; even if going home did not happen for him, at least he could share it with men who shared joy for life and pride for being an American.

When asking my grandfather how he felt about the war, his answer was very simple, " A lot of soldiers including myself never were told what we were fighting for. I, for three months, did not know what I was sacrificing my life for. I was only there for one thing; to finish what I had started so I could go home. Going to war makes a person very grateful for what they have." Emotions run rampant in combat, the question of going home and saying goodbye is a hard thing to cope with in the time of war. America is a very Christian country. Shooting someone for no good reason was a hard thing to do for many of these men. My grandfather's response to this was, " I only shot to save myself and my country, but I always believed that I missed. I don't think about how many innocent people I may have killed. War is the

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closest feeling you can get to slowly dying; but, you need to keep your emotions back otherwise the bullet won't kill you; your head will."

While interviewing my grandfather, he told me about the images, the smells, the noises; he remembers this clear as day. He states, " I can still see all the dead bodies we walked through looking for dog tags to send back to America. There is nothing that smells worse than a dead body in humid weather." He remembered the rain, and how it poured for 15 days straight without letting up. Then one day all of a sudden the sun would shine and all of the men would smile because life had just gotten a fraction better. He said, "The worst thing that could happen to you was to get captured because there was no getting out and if you did, an angel was looking after you that day." He never got captured, but many men in Fort Louis did. He told me Vietnam soil is not like American soil; it is wet, sloppy and caved in; much like the country. American soldiers were put together, strong, brave, and healthy.

The Vietnam War affected many who came home. Some families fell apart due to shell shock. Many soldiers lost girlfriends and fiances from being gone for so long. However, it made many stronger. My grandfather married my grandmother a short time after arriving home. They got married in Massachusetts and later settled down in Wisconsin where they started their family. My grandparents made a life for themselves after the war. However, it

made many soldiers racist towards the Vietnamese. He stated, " It is hard to treat someone with the respect when for two years of my life they were shooting at me." War changes lives. American families were affected all over the country.

The Vietnam War has educated many future generations whether it is history, family, or the future. Younger generations can learn from the elderly experiences and be the change to the future of America. This nation has gone through generations of sorrow. It is now up to the future generations, to keep this country in a place of freedom, pride, dignity, and happiness. It is our turn to sacrifice ourselves much like the generations before us did; we need to fight, be courageous, and show bravery to keep the nation we love safe. America has gone through pain and suffering of tragic loses to our people and Nation; yet we continue to defend our honor. My interview with my grandfather gave me a peek into what it actually means to be an American. The Vietnam War changed society positively in a way of righteousness. I am forever grateful, and thankful for all the men and women who serve in this country's name and all who have sacrificed because without soldiers, America would not stand.