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“It Will Be Alright. I Will Return.”

“The Army is very efficient and it makes men out of boys and workers out of slackers as it instills patriotism and a love of America.” Roger Dodd, my grandfather, served in Korea during the Vietnam War as a young, educated draftee who returned with a greater love for his country and a deeper understanding of the United States obligation to protect the free world.

My grandfather’s commitment to serve wasn’t the most motivated. As a young, intern teacher in Plymouth, Wisconsin, he was reluctant to give up two years of his life to a cause he didn’t fully understand at the time. Although he hadn’t fulfilled an undergraduate education major or a clergy vocation in order to be deferred, he changed his graduate degree ambitions to a PhD in English-education instead of a PhD in English literature, hoping the later entrance into education would deter his involvement in the war effort.

After being questioned by a student reporter for the local high school newspaper, Roger’s uncertainty about serving was unveiled. Shortly after the article was published, a WW2 veteran teacher accosted him in the teacher’s lounge, as the WW2 veteran generations joined the war effort under completely different circumstances. “We need teachers to show allegiance to American ideals of freedom-- the same ideals we are trying to preserve and instill among the Vietnamese.” In the early 1940s, democracy was threatened under Marxist rule and Communism. WW2 soldiers often lied about their age to enter the war illegally to fight against Hitler, whereas many people didn’t really know why U.S. soldiers were in Vietnam. The generational differences between WW2 and Vietnam veterans are immense: patriotism flourished in the late 1930s and 1940s, whereas the Vietnam occupation led to protests, conscientious objectors, and draft offenders fleeing into exile.

Despite Roger’s reluctance, he reported to the Fort Campbell induction center in February 1969, unwilling to join the 170,000 men who refused to report or became conscientious objectors. Basic training instilled a serious sense of humility and responsibility, but the eight weeks flew by and he received orders

to report to Fort Sam Houston near San Antonio, Texas for Advanced Individual Training as a medic. There, he was given an offer to enter a leadership academy because he had a college degree; he would receive the stripes of an E5 sergeant when training was completed. Initially he refused, but then a major convinced him with the possibility of going to Vietnam becoming remote. Roger was given one of four sergeant assignments ahead of sixteen others.

In AIT, Roger learned intensive first aid skills and was assigned to be a surgical tech at the end of the ten weeks, arriving at the Ft. Rucker, Alabama Army Hospital. As a surgical tech, learning was done by assisting the doctors, most being patient enough to explain the types of scalpels, clamps, sponges, etc were needed for what type of surgeries. My grandpa recounted one instance of reciting "The Raven" by Edgar Allen Poe for a doctor he was working with as they were always interested in his educational background. The parts of the poem he didn't know, the surgeon chimed in on.

After six weeks, the entire company received orders to move on: two hundred GIs from his original AIT Company went to Vietnam, the twenty who went to leadership school were assigned to Korea. My grandfather was able to avoid Vietnam. Instead, he flew to Seattle from Fort Campbell, then to Seoul, South Korea. He was stationed at Camp Casey, which was established within the Seventh Division to defend the Korea Demilitarized Zone.

In South Korea, my grandfather volunteered to tutor at a Korean orphanage that was run by a UW Madison graduate, an experience he described as gratifying. During his eleven month stay, he traveled to modernized Tokyo and Osaka in Japan, and at the end of his service at Camp Casey, Roger applied for early release so he could attend graduate school at the beginning of second semester.

In his recollection of his military service, my grandfather specifically mentioned that although he did not make any long lasting friendships or allegiance to his unit, he doesn't regret his experience. He experienced other cultures and different backgrounds, making him more understanding of those who have less, thus instilling a sense of tolerance.

The GI Bill was integral to the rest of my grandfather's life; today he is one of the most well-educated, intelligent, accomplished people I have ever met. His respect for higher education and

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opportunity has been passed down to his children: my two uncles and my mother, all of whom he created opportunities for to obtain college degrees, and this respect will be passed down to my cousins, sisters and I. After spending two years in the Army, he was given four years of additional college education and a stipend to live. He used this to finish his masters and doctorate degree at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Roger informed me that he would not have been able to obtain his doctorate degree without this money from the government, which means he probably wouldn't have had such an extensive career as a public educator, principal, and then district superintendent in Wausau, Wisconsin.

Along with the physical aspects of an experience, it is essential to explore the emotional results in order to understand the extremities of a situation, especially one as extensive and demanding as military service. I rephrased this in my interview, and my grandpa responded that he has made himself more aware of what is going on as a result—he tries to understand our foreign affairs, specifically mentioning his studies of military conflict in Afghanistan and Libya. More importantly, he makes a point of actually attempting to understand the origins and catalysts of a conflict before taking a stand, something he wouldn't have done if not for his drafting in 1969.

My grandfather serving in the Army during the Vietnam War influenced his perspective on military and foreign policy immensely: "We are the world's policemen." His ideals on war consist of strong foreign policy and protection and prioritizing anti-terrorist support "in order to further human rights and stifle oppression." I inquired about his specific idealism regarding the Vietnam War because it was so controversial, and he reiterated the fact that the United States has the responsibility to protect the free world; if we didn't have all of these "little" wars to contain terrorism in countries like Afghanistan and Iraq, the conflict would eventually muster into a world war. Roger Dodd's service in the Vietnam War provided him with a new perspective of the military. The military does more than just fight and protect: it instills patriotism, skills, and discipline. It is extremely efficient, moving millions of men and equipment internationally at very little notice.

Usually when I look at my grandfather, I see a short man, evenly tanned from his days at the golf course in his Floridian retirement community and wrinkles spanning his face, his eyes sparkling whenever

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he asks us to play the board game "Tee'd Off" or inquiring about we are learning in our school English classes. However, now I understand that he was once a young man, beginning his lifelong devotion to public education, drafted into a war he fully didn't understand, leaving Korea alive with a new sense of patriotism and diligence that never left. The aid Roger received through the GI Bill paved the way for the rest of his life and his succeeding generations of children, grandchildren, and future great-grandchildren. Prior to this interview, I saw my grandfather from the lens of pure adoration. He spent time with his many granddaughters (no grandsons to his dismay) and played a prominent role in all of our lives, no matter how far he lived. Roger's constant, sometimes excessive, encouragement encompassed a wide array of activities, from teaching us how to waterski for the first time and giving us advice at basketball tournaments and tennis matches. I knew he had served in the Army, but my knowledge ceased there because he never talked about it. I learned that the stubborn, giving man I had known all of my life had experienced an uncertainty only the heroes who serve our country possess. His service in the United States military changed his and his family's life for the better with the ample opportunity that succeeded his deployment.

After this interview, I realized the need for strong foreign policy and the United States' duty to protect the free world, something that results from our international presence overseas in the Middle East. I was exposed to the raw perspective and emotions of a veteran, something I have not experienced prior to this event because of my lack of exposure. I understand the origins of my family and their successes as a result of the Army's generosity, something I selfishly failed to even consider before this interview.

As a sheltered individual, I never understood war, simply because I didn't have to. Unlike the teenagers who willingly entered or were drafted during earlier conflicts, like Vietnam, the Korean War, and the two World Wars, my generation was never faced with the possibility of being drafted. I know how lucky I am for that.