

the Foxhole

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By: Nick Malueg

Since the beginning of time, men have fought wars for honor, land, freedom, and peace. "Vietnam was our friend at that time," said Milton Malueg, a former U.S. Marine, and my Grandfather. "Remember that there is no greater gift you can give than your life for a friend." Milton seemed so calm as he rattled off that bible verse, but it seemed it had a much deeper meaning to him. Vietnam had affected my grandpa in a deep, unchangeable way. The events and people of that land still hold a place in his mind and heart. As the events unfold in this essay, so will your understanding of, Milton Helmuth Malueg, thoughts on the land he called his friend and enemy. The public has only known Vietnam to be an enemy. In many ways this is true, even for former Sgt. Malueg. He saw up close and personal, the true horror of war in a foreign country.

Milton arrived in Vietnam in November of 1967. On his way down to Milwaukee before basic, he met a woman named Linda. Linda was not my grandma, although her importance is shown during and after the war for my grandpa. Linda was the woman that made mail calls exciting for my grandpa. They would talk weekly about their future kids, home, and life together. After the war, my grandpa was very excited to meet his girlfriend in Neenah, Wisconsin. He asked his dad to borrow the car and drive down to meet her. He picked her up and took her to a movie. After the night they sat and talked in the frosted car about the wonderful night. Then, abruptly, there was a person pounding on the window, it was her dad. He opened up the car door and started to yell at my grandfather. He said, that a Vietnam veteran will never marry my daughter and forced him to never talk to her again. My Grandpa was respectful to this hurt father and never saw her again. The confusion he faced from a man who never even knew him, and never wanted to either, tore my grandfather's heart.

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My grandpa made known the importance of a woman in the war, and both how they help and hurt. He talked about how he lost a Corporal because of the loss of his wife back in the states.

This Corporal took a rest and recuperate (RNR) to meet his wife in Hawaii. Shortly after he went back to Vietnam he received what my grandpa called a, "dear John letter" which was that his wife back home was leaving him. Shortly after, his mind was not right going into battle and ended up losing his life.

My Grandpa was sent down to Cam Lo and immediately moved to Alpha 3. Alpha 3 was the third Marine installation from the ocean across the demilitarized zone. These installations were bombarded daily by artillery from the North Vietnamese Army (NVA). This, of course, was only the beginning of the horror that was in store for the India Company of the third battalion, third marine regiment, third marine division.

I asked the 74-year-old former Marine about the horrifying sights he had seen in Vietnam. Little did I know what he was about to describe to me. Over the course of his 13-month Tour in Vietnam, he was hit twice in the back with shrapnel and once in the shoulder with a grenade. This gave him the honor of receiving the Purple Heart Award.

This was not the only thing that happened to my grandpa. He explained through some writing that I later read, that during an ambush he was positioned right next to a rifleman. During the firefight, the rifleman was shot in the head, which caused his head to literally explode on one side. Milton was unlucky enough to have this blood, flesh, and brain matter splatter on his face. He said that that had to be the most devastating thing that could ever happen to a soldier.

My grandfather's religious faith was a daily thing during the war. If you asked anyone from the India Company they would say that two men were very spiritual in Vietnam, my grandpa and Hector Moreno. Milton and Hector would say a prayer before each patrol, ambush, and

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operation. They prayed that within God's hands, they would all be safe from harm and would be protected from doing "the Unnecessary" such as killing innocent civilians without cause.

Beyond praying before heading out, their spiritual foundation never crumbled. Milton explained a time during the battle when he was located in a foxhole. At the tip of his gun, a 152 artillery round blew up his machine gun and blew off his flak jacket. The shrapnel that splattered off ripped gashes in his back (He still has shrapnel there.) He felt the pain and blood run up and down his back, but instead of getting reckless and afraid, he prayed to God that if the next shell should strike him he would have a quick and painless death. He then began to recite the 23rd psalm, which is recited at many funerals to show that a person had faith in our lord.

During the war, support was shown to all of the soldiers by the South Vietnamese. Although they didn't see the locals all that often, he stated that when soldiers went on rest and recuperation, they were treated with nothing but grace and love.

One time my grandpa was brushing his teeth. A boy named Chen was looking at him like he was crazy. He put some toothpaste on Chen's lips and spits it off. Milt laughed and said that it was good for his teeth, though the boy did not understand. So he gave Chen his toothbrush and toothpaste and watched as Chen rode his bike down the road thinking that this invention would make his teeth instantly white. Milton still wonders if Chen made it out alive before the NVA took over South Vietnam, but he will always look back with a smile and a small chuckle.

He said one day he was in Vietnam, as you have seen, was an enemy and a friend. You can only imagine what this war has done to men like Milton H. Malueg. He still looks back fondly on the bonds of friendship he made with his company and the local people who made an unbearable war somehow bearable. He still has a permanent reminder of what real war is like. It is positioned next to his kidney, and when it gets cold, he can feel the chunk of shrapnel start to cool and ache. He realizes that he was blessed because if that next round had come to him that



day, his name would be sitting next to Billy Prom's on the Vietnam Memorial Wall. On a final note, if he was asked to serve in a war under the same conditions, he would say yes because remember, "The greatest gift you can give is your life for a friend."

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