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Sarah Nawn
RICHARD T. NUSKE MEMORIAL SCHOLARSHIP

The Vietnam War was a painful and traumatic experience for the soldiers involved. This war was a long and brutal battle for both sides that resulted in more than 57,000 United States casualties over the span of about sixteen years. One in every three military personnel saw combat in Vietnam during this era. The men who fought in Vietnam were brave and selfless souls who faced and overcame adversity every day.

The soldiers who were brave enough to serve our country during this time share a unique bond to this day. This bond does not exist within one branch, but throughout all of the branches of the military serving during the Vietnam era. Men who never served together have the ability to meet and share a bond over the war just by knowing that the man next to him had a similar experience all those years ago. These men all went through a period during the war when they were afraid, angry, proud, and determined individuals. When emotions are strong enough, they have the ability to stay with us for a lifetime. I believe this why these men share such a strong bond over their experiences.

My Father, Joseph Nawn, served three years of active duty in the United States Army from 1972 to 1975. During his service he was an infantryman and received Airborne training as well. He was stationed in Panama for a while which was a training site that prepared men for the environment that they would encounter in Vietnam. The time spent training in Panama was not pleasant by any means. The men who were sent to Panama at this time knew their next destination was likely going to be Vietnam. This information caused a sense of urgency in the men to try and absorb as much information from their training as they could in order to be as prepared as possible. However, they were still able to take the edge off because of the men surrounding them. The camaraderie shared between our service men at this time was stronger

than one could imagine. These men relied on each other constantly both physically and mentally. A bond like that cannot be compared without experiencing it firsthand. I believe this is why people have such a hard time relating to service members in general. Many servicemembers suffer both physically and mentally due to their time in the service. Physical pain and disfigurement are more relatable on a certain level for most people; however, the mental afflictions many of these men faced were not understood by anyone, except for the men who happened to be standing next to him.

The men who fought in the Vietnam War were under an immense amount of stress which was only enhanced when they got back to the United States. Sadly, the civilians of the United States at this time were not supportive of the military's actions. The country was divided which brought about tremendous tension surrounding the war; resulting in constant protests, riots, and hostility towards individuals who fought in the war. The veterans took it upon themselves and fought to change the minds of the people. These men were able to convince the public, "to separate the warrior from the war."

The closest my father came to being deployed was when his entire brigade from Fort Bragg was suddenly given orders to fly to San Francisco. The brigade was flown across the country with full intent on sending them to Israel for the Six Day War in 1973. While they were in San Francisco they slept underneath the planes so they would be ready to leave in a moment's notice. While they slept, they were surrounded by wire so the men could not get out and invaders could not get in. However, the war ended abruptly, and they never got boots on the ground in Israel. This situation is a common occurrence in the military due to changes within global relations and resulting threats. This shows how flexible soldiers must be in order to adapt to an environment that is constantly changing.

My father was serving towards the end of the war when the United States efforts were focused on bringing our country's men home rather than sending more men overseas. His experiences in Panama during training to prepare the men for the war in Vietnam was the closest thing to combat that he ever saw. He returned to the States after completing this training; however, his time in Panama would leave lasting effects on his body.

Thousands of veterans served in the Panama Canal Zone during the Vietnam War. Panama was one of the locations that Operation Ranch Hand occurred during this time which exposed the men to Agent Orange. The list of diseases caused by exposure to agent orange is comprised of very serious conditions such as ischemia heart disease, lung and trachea cancers, prostate cancer, multiple myeloma, Hodgkin's disease, non-Hodgkin's lymphoma, Parkinson's disease, type 2 diabetes, peripheral neuropathy, AL amyloidosis, chronic B-cell leukemia, chloracne, early-onset peripheral neuropathy, porphyria cutanea tarda, and soft tissue sarcomas. However, there are more conditions related to agent orange exposure that are not on the VA's Agent Orange list such as hypothyroidism and hypertension. My father currently suffers from ischemia heart disease, type 2 diabetes, and hypertension. This means his heart's major blood vessels are diseased, he has high blood pressure, and he currently has to take insulin shots to help control his diabetes. Unfortunately, Panama currently is not included on the list considered for disability benefits for Agent Orange exposure. This is a frustrating aspect of the VA benefits for my father because he feels that these health issue originate from his time in service, but he cannot be compensated.

Towards the end of my father's contract, he was participating in a jump with his airborne unit when the jump ended with a rough landing. He saw a Doctor on post to get some X-rays taken. He went to work the next few days while in harsh pain. Three days after the X-rays were

taken, the Doctor called my father's leadership to inform him that he needed to return to the clinic on base. My father had broken his leg during the landing and had been walking around on it for days. This ultimately led to knee and hip problems. He eventually had to get hip replaced and also suffers from knee issues.

Although my father had a little bit of a rough experience in the army health wise, he made many lasting friendships with the men around him. There are still several men that my father keeps in contact with to this day. Growing up I heard many stories about these same friends. That's the beauty of military service, they may have to deal with difficult situations or have devastating memories from that time, but the good times and the pride of serving their country outshine the negative.

I grew up hearing stories about how and why my father chose the army when enlisting. My grandfather served in the army before him, but that isn't where my family history in the army ends. My father was the fourth generation to serve in the United States Army. My father was proud to continue the tradition but was somewhat disappointed when he was the first one in the family to not see combat. My father will always be a hero in my eyes, not just because he's my dad, but because he was willing to volunteer in order to help protect others. My father's stories and overall outlook on the Army inspired me to join the Army myself. I am currently serving in the United States Army Reserves because I wanted the chance to experience a small fraction of the positive experiences that he did. The Nawn family has now served in the United States Army for five generations. Serving in the army has allowed me to form a stronger relationship with my father through common experiences and interests, and for that I am grateful.