

Atop Hill 362, three miles below the DMZ in the Quang Tri Province of Vietnam, Michael John Bednar's Platoon was ordered to establish a radio relay station. As they hacked their way through the jungle with two-foot-long machetes to the crest of the hill, the 2nd Platoon descended the other side of the hill to scout defenses. They had not gone far when the marines met a hail of mortar and machine-gun fire. The men were hiding in small trenches just 20 feet away from their enemies. Every third man was wounded, but they still tried to man the weapons.

It was a harrowing night for I Company when tragedy struck. At 5 pm Bednar was running down the hill and quickly knew he was in trouble when his gun quit firing. He was shot from the opposing fighter with an AK 47 which entered in his bellybutton and exited out his left side. As he was running he also got shot in his left leg which ended up cutting his nerves. Michael Bednar was struck by the bullets. He fell near another wounded Marine, named Uker, just as some NVA soldiers emerged from a clump of trees. Both Marines played dead, but the NVA wanted to make sure. One of the NVA soldiers plunged a bayonet into Uker who was laying beside Bednar. After he groaned, they realized he was still alive so they shot him in the head. Five times the soldiers jabbed Bednar with bayonets but he refused to cry out. Leaving him for dead, the soldiers snatched Bednar's cigarettes and watch then moved on to find other wounded Marines. Bednar layed there for about 18 hours drifting in and out of consciousness until he heard some men chopping trees. He wrapped his guts with his shirt and tried walking but couldn't because of his damaged nerves in his leg. So for the next few hours he would cry out and crawl until he passed out again. Finally a man heard him and asked him what his name was and what position he was. He replied in saying he was part of the Company I,

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3rd Battalion of the Fifth Marines. This Marine loaded him onto a chicken wire basket and Bednar was quickly hoisted up by helicopter to a hospital where he stayed for about eight months in the Philippines. Bednar's unit suffered a casualty rate of 45 percent; 18 dead and 65 wounded. As for the NVA, the *New York Times* reported that "they vanished into the countryside."

This is the life changing story of my grandfather, Michael John Bednar. Michael is from and currently living in Haugen, Wisconsin. He was 17 years old when he volunteered to join the Marine Corps. His marine title was a Sergeant, where he had the duties of a machine operator, radio operator, and MOS # 0311 fighter. He was stationed in many places such as California, Hawaii, the Philippines, Vietnam, Illinois, North Carolina, and Okinawa, Japan. He also served for eight months in Cuba performing guard duty at the Naval Base. From February 1968 to February of 1969 he was stationed in Iceland.

As we finished talking about his battle I asked him how he felt now about his service and he replied, "Proud!" He told me that although this was a one word answer it's meaning stood for so much more with all of the trials he had to experience. Later, he went on to say that because of the war it took away the feelings of a future and security. My grandfather said that there is no logic to life or death in combat and after serving life feels like, "It ain't no big thing."

Fighting for your country is obviously no simple task and not having your family near you can be really difficult. I asked him if he could describe the bonds/friendships that he made with fellow soldiers and he replied with Act IV, Scene III, in regards to King Henry V's battle in William Shakespeare.

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“We few, we happy few, we band of brothers:

For he to-day that sheds his blood with me

Shall be my brother; be he ne'er so vile,

This day shall gentle his condition:

And gentlemen in England, now a-bed,

Shall think themselves accurs'd, they were not here,

And hold their manhoods cheap, whiles any speaks

That fought with us upon Saint Crispin's day.”

In battle many soldiers knew that they would probably never see their friends again. They tried not to make too strong of connections with everyone in their troop, more like four or five good friends, that way the heartache could be just a tad more bearable. Michael also stated that although he may never see all of his troop buddies from the war, those men that he lived with, suffered with, and fought in combat with everyday, are his true, close friends, that share a special bond.

One interesting thing I was informed about is that there are many Vietnam reunions. He has traveled to D.C., California, Las Vegas, Colorado, and some other local ones also. He said that it is nice to be reunited with old friends and to hear stories that you may have forgotten over the years.

During one of his reunions in D.C. he visited the Vietnam Memorial Wall and was able to trace some of his old buddies names and how he felt so much pride, sadness, and also how it brought back memories of his service.

Obviously war is never an easy concept to cope with but as the interview came to a close I asked him if there were any good times during the Vietnam War. He said one of

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his favorite times was when he was on a boat traveling from Hawaii to Japan on a warm, comfortable day. As he was staring out the back of the boat all he could see to the horizon was a green fluorescent stream of water behind the boat's propellers. They also enjoyed smoking cigarettes, having a cool drink of water, or beer, attending a 200 man barbeque, and of course playing Liars Cards. He gave me such a smile as he told this story and it gave me a clearer understanding of the multiple experiences that occurred during his service and how much that has affected him today.

I am so grateful for not only my grandfather and his brave service, but also for the men and women who still serve our wonderful country to this day. Protecting our country is such a huge and challenging task and they risk their lives each day for us and for the freedom we receive. As citizens we need to remember to thank our soldiers whenever we have the chance, to let them know we appreciate all they do for each one of us and how much it truly means.

I feel honored and blessed to have the opportunity to be taught by my own grandpa the price of freedom. I have seen the scars on his stomach, legs, and back, and it brings tears to my eyes knowing they are his price he had to pay for me. I am so very proud of him and his service to our country. Because of the Vietnam soldiers' service, it is through their nightmares that I am able to dream, to pursue my future goals. God Bless the U.S.A.