

American troops started going to Vietnam in 1965 to fight against North Vietnam and their allies, the Viet Cong, in South Vietnam. Around 3 million American soldiers were sent over and almost 60,000 of those soldiers died while fighting in Vietnam. With some of the infamous events like the Tet Offensive and Mai Lai massacre, which gave many people uncertain thoughts about America's purpose there, the Vietnam War was an unforgettable and indispensable part of America's history.

My grandpa was straight out of high school when he decided to go to war. He was unsure of what career he wanted to pursue and ended up enlisting at age 17. His family was nervous for him and had some ambivalence regarding his decision. My grandpa didn't really know what to expect from the war and had a lot of apprehension, especially as the time in which he needed to leave got closer and closer.

About halfway through the flight to Vietnam in April of 1967, he landed in Japan to refuel the plane. He saw Mount Fuji and some huts, and that is when it hit him that he was really going to fight in the Vietnam War. When he was landing in Saigon, the cabin of the plane started to get warmer the closer he got to the ground. While walking out of the plane, he was overwhelmed with the smell of garbage. Eventually he got acclimated to the heat and smell, but it took some time.

While serving in Vietnam, my grandpa started out in the motor pool. This was the area where they fixed the trucks that soldiers used. After spending some time there, at some point he was asked to ride in the passenger seat for convoys, which usually lasted a day or two and occurred three times each week. He found this job to be more interesting and engaging compared to maintaining the vehicles. The convoys he was on went to support the "grunts". The grunts were the infantry soldiers who bore the responsibility of the most perilous duties in the war. As

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someone who went on the convoys, his daily job was to gather supplies that the grunts may need-
“anything and everything”. He went to countless villages during his time serving and witnessed
widespread damage, the result of napalm being dropped over the country.

Since he was there for 2 tours, there were many memorable experiences he had that he
shared with me. The first memorable event for him happened within the first week he was there.
While he was loading sandbags into a truck, he got shot at by a sniper. He could hear it whiz past
the top of his head. In an immediate reaction to it, he jumped in the trunk of the truck and stayed
there for some time before it was clear. Another event that came to his mind was when he went
to visit his cousin, Jimmy. Jimmy was a fighter pilot in the Marines and was stationed in Chu
Lai, while my grandpa was stationed in Long Binh. He informed me that these bases were not
close to each other. In fact, he had to hitchhike to the local airbase and then hop on a C130
Transport Plane delivering helicopter blades to Chu Lai. This experience was memorable to him
because he was in a foreign country and didn't know anyone from home. Being able to see a
familiar face helped give him a sense of comfort and helped him feel a little closer to home. One
other event that helped him feel a little less homesick was when his father sent him a real
Christmas tree. He told me that it was the only Christmas tree around, and soldiers that
were stationed in other villages came to see it. Although this Christmas tree was just a small
gesture from his father, it helped me better understand how people were able to come together
even in a time of great hostility.

Directly after the war when my grandpa came home, he threw out everything he had from
his time in Vietnam except his army jacket and dog tags. A short time after being home, he saw
Americans outraged by the events of the My Lai Massacre and the people who initiated it. He
cried for those condemned soldiers, as the public rebuked them. His own mother was very upset

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about it. He tried explaining to her that you're in a different state of mind in Vietnam and you think totally differently. The "brutality and blood" gets to a lot of people. His mother was unable to grasp this frame of mind. Now, although he wasn't defending Lt. William L. Calley Jr, (the lieutenant responsible for this event) he tried explaining how the man probably wasn't himself and got carried away. This was a new perspective for me to see and helped me better understand the mental and emotional effects of war.

Lt. Calley wasn't the only soldier that was banished though. When Vietnam vets returned home, they were treated with disrespect and detestation. People called them names such as "baby killers" and didn't recognize their service. For many years they were not appreciated, but after some time people came around and realized the sacrifices these veterans gave.

After getting out of the war, my grandpa decided to get a job at a nearby factory. About a year after working, he got the idea to attend some classes at tech school. Later he attended school at UW-Whitewater. After obtaining a degree in education, he started working at the Menominee Indian School District. Working there has given him the opportunity to experience cultures and traditions different from his own. Though most Vietnam veterans hadn't felt honorable for decades after the war, I am glad to see they eventually received recognition for their noble service. For example, I've experienced my grandpa being recognized at local Memorial Day ceremonies, Veterans Day commemorations, and Pow Wow entrances. I am proud of my grandpa's participation during these times. I can sense the appreciation that people have even after so much time has passed. My grandpa has been lucky enough to participate in the Stars and Stripes Honor Flight. This is an event where veterans are flown to Washington, D.C for a day to see all of the memorials. They also visit the Arlington Cemetery. At the Cemetery, within the last ten minutes they had before they needed to board the plane and leave, he was able to find the

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grave of his cousin Jimmy. This was an emotional moment for him and he vividly remembered his time visiting him in Vietnam. It was very moving to be a part of the welcome home ceremony when they came back and to be with hundreds, if not thousands, of family, friends, or even strangers who came to honor these veterans.

No soldier is the same after war, whether it be mentally, physically, or both. For my grandpa, after the war he was stuck with night terrors. When he has these episodes of intense panic and fear, he yells and flusters his body all while still sleeping. As someone who has seen these episodes first hand, it is evident that war affects people in a variety of ways.

Having a grandpa who served has made me have high levels of admiration for other veterans. I try to express my personal gratitude with gestures displaying the message of "thank you for your service" for all veterans. My mom who is a nurse at the Milwaukee Veterans hospital recruits me for volunteer activities, in an effort to give something back. I have put flags on graves of those who gave their lives for their country. I recently served at a Veterans Day banquet. Here they had pictures posted of young men, not too far off my own age, each from Wisconsin counties, who died in service.

Although I had heard stories about Vietnam from him as a younger child, I didn't have the knowledge of history to really know what he was talking about. But now that I am older, hearing his story was like putting all the fragments together to understand his life while serving and after serving. Even though I'll never know what it is truly like to experience what he did, hearing his story has allowed me to understand how his service shaped who he is today. The last thing my grandpa said during our interview was this, "I wouldn't give up my 3 years of service for all the tea in China."

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