

Vietnam Veterans Scholarship Essay

By: Jack Raynor

During my interview with Eric Blomsterberg, he shared his experiences serving in the 11th unit of the Marine Corps during the Vietnam War from 1968 to 1971. He reflected on the emotional toll of war and the camaraderie among Marines. Then, he discussed how his upbringing and his father's immigrant background influenced his perspective on life and how he approaches military service with a sense of duty and responsibility.

Mr. Blomsterberg was born in 1945 in Hawthorne, California. Growing up, he attended school with the Beach Boys and graduated from Hawthorne High in 1963. Before his time in the service, he began a career in drafting mechanical plans for aerospace companies. However, in 1964 he received his first draft notice. According to Mr. Blomsterberg, "[the draft] wasn't a surprise. Every guy over 18 expected it." He was sent to Oakland to take a physical, but he was immediately sent back home because he had braces on his teeth. He expected to be called back in one year, so he waited for the notice in the mail, but that turned into four years. In 1968, he got his second draft notice. After passing a physical in LA, Blomsterberg made a choice: instead of getting drafted into the army for two years, he enlisted in the Marine Corps for three years.

In September of 1968, he reported to San Diego for boot camp. Mr. Blomsterberg's description of the experience mirrors the brutal portrayals in films like "Full Metal Jacket. The initial shock of drill instructors' relentless pressure was a rude awakening. Yet, amidst the physical and mental strain, a sense of duty took hold. He had already begun his career in mechanical drafting for a couple of years, so he was used to getting up early and working hard.

After boot camp, Mr. Blomsterberg went to Quantico, Virginia for training as an artillery mechanic. He was there for about ten weeks until being sent back to Camp Pendleton. Then, he went to Twentynine Palms for three months on temporary assigned duty (TAD). Upon arriving back in Pendleton, Mr. Blomsterberg made a sacrifice that I thought was extremely honorable; when a friend of his, Gary Hamm, only had eight months of service remaining in the Marine Corps, Mr. Blomsterberg asked that they move his friend down on the list. In turn, they moved Hamm down, but Mr. Blomsterberg was placed first on the list to go. That next week, he was sent to staging. For three weeks they were familiarized with the current developments in Vietnam. Then he departed for Vietnam with his unit.

After less than one day in Vietnam, an air raid siren started going off—which, after the alarm—sent Mr. Blomsterberg running off to the bunkers. Soon after, Mr. Blomsterberg was assigned to a combat base in southwest De Nang. It was home to the 11th Marines, the artillery unit—which Mr. Blomsterberg was involved with.

Afterward, he spent ten months at a combat base in An Hòa, two weeks back in De Nang, and two weeks in LZ Baldy. During his time, every day was something new. Some men persevered, and others became "salty." This was the term that the Marines used for the people who became jaded from the stresses of constant combat.

After a year, Mr. Blomsterberg explained to me that “there were many good memories and a lot of bad memories.” One time, he volunteered to go on patrol early on a Saturday morning. What was meant to be a walk through the rice paddies quickly turned into a perilous situation. First, the infantrymen who accompanied Mr. Blomsterberg got in a shoot-out. Then, during a break, the First Sergeant stepped on a landmine—severely injuring himself and the Marine beside him. They had to call in Huey helicopters as well as gunships to help them secure the area.

Mr. Blomsterberg’s main MOS (Military Occupational Specialty) was called a 2131, an artillery field mechanic. He repaired Howitzers so they could be sent back to combat. Working out of the S-4 logistics office, he ensured all the batteries had sufficient ammunition and the people had enough food.

When he first got out of the service, Mr. Blomsterberg did not have time to join a veteran’s organization. In the 1970s he had a young family and a couple of daughters. For three years he continued working in drafting to build the machines that make cabinets. Then, he had an opportunity to work with the USPS. When he wasn’t working graveyard shifts for the Post Office, he was in school to get his associate’s degree. Starting in 1980, Mr. Blomsterberg worked as an engineer in California until his retirement in 2015.

In 2000, many years after his service in Vietnam, Mr. Blomsterberg joined the South Bay Chapter of Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW). For the past twenty-four years, Mr. Blomsterberg has contributed in various ways to the organization. He has held about every position imaginable including commander, chaplain, and quartermaster. Many of these positions he held while he was working. Mr. Blomsterberg maintained his connection to the military and veterans through this organization.

Reflecting upon my interview with Mr. Blomsterberg, I was impressed with his incredible sense of duty. He told me about his father, who raised three boys all by himself after the death of his mother. Mr. Blomsterberg’s father was an immigrant who wanted to instill virtues into his sons. This upbringing resulted in the incredible work ethic that Mr. Blomsterberg exhibited through his service in Vietnam as well as in his career.

When I asked for advice, Mr. Blomsterberg told me to always “Think about yourself, think about your family, [and think about] your friends.” I completely agree; future generations must keep these values in mind. Mr. Blomsterberg embodies the lesson of service to others and service to your country. I feel that so many of my generation have lost their sense of responsibility to society. A lot of so-called role models in pop culture today crave attention and accolades for their feats. They post pictures of themselves on social media hoping for likes and to monetize their popularity.

People like Mr. Blomsterberg are the true heroes that society ought to honor and hold up as role models. He served his country knowing that there was a lot of risk involved. He could have fled to Canada to avoid service like some people did, but he lived up to the values of service and responsibility instilled in him by his father. He was not boastful about his service or his accomplishments. He recounted his story in a modest and dignified way. It was a true honor

to interview Mr. Blomsterberg, hear about his life story, and learn life lessons from him about what it means to live a humble life of service.