

Often considered one of the greatest, if not the greatest, failure in the history of the US Armed Forces, the Vietnam War was warranted as a means to contain communism in Southeast Asia. The Domino Theory, proposed by President Harry S. Truman at the start of the Cold War, proposed that communism in one nation would spread throughout the region in which it resided. Using that reasoning, thousands of young Americans, including now Vietnam Veteran George Bunce, were drafted and sent to Vietnam to fight a war whose justification and execution caused widespread discord in the past and a consensus of critique in the present.

George Bunce was born in 1949 in New York City to parents June and Lester Bunce. At the age of seven, he and his family moved to Southern California where he went to school in Ontario and Culver City. On July 16, 1969, Bunce was drafted as an airmobile artilleryman into the Vietnam War, where he was assigned to the 25th Infantry Division, C Battery 1/8 Artillery, leaving behind his parents and siblings. His battery was positioned at Cu Chi, Vietnam, and he stayed in the Army until July of 1970.

Originally, Bunce was not happy when he found out that he was being drafted into the army. However, he, alongside his other fellow soldiers, felt that he had the obligation to serve. His ancestors, including Sergeant Timothy Bunce, who fought in the Revolutionary War, and his grandfather and father, who fought in World War 2 and the Korean War respectively, were all precedents for his duty to his country. Even though it was an unpopular war at the time, and still remains so in public view, he and other draftees still went to Vietnam.

Bunce observed that a war waged by governments was being paid for by the lives of Vietnamese civilians and American soldiers. He said that to this day he wonders what some of the men that were lost would accomplish if they had gone on to live after the war. Alongside the casualties dealt to American soldiers, Bunce described that an inevitable but tragic price of a war is the amount of civilian death and friendly fire that occurs, something that he regrets witnessing. From the destruction of villages to the execution of prisoners and the lasting effects of chemicals such as Agent Orange, there was a dark side to what he believes would be the most beautiful place had it not been for the situation.

However, during his time in Vietnam, Bunce met some of the finest men that he's ever known. He experienced and witnessed the kindness of humanity from people on both sides of the war, even during times of violence. He described a medic who would treat both Vietnamese people and American soldiers and one instance of himself and fellow soldiers distributing food to Vietnamese village elders so that children would not have to dig through piles of spoiled food.

As he came back home, Bunce and other soldiers were not often given a warm welcome due to the extremely negative opinion of the war from American civilians and soldiers alike. Still, Bunce wanted to honor the men that he fought alongside, living his life to the fullest because some of his compatriots couldn't. By utilizing the GI Bill, he was able to pay for his education, help pay for a house, and receive full treatment for illnesses caused by Agent Orange, allowing him to now live in the South Bay with his wife. Like other Vietnam Veterans, Bunce suffers from PTSD because of the

war, but is taking classes with other retired soldiers in order to help him deal with the mental health condition.

Listening about Mr. Bunce's experience in the war helped me acknowledge the massive divide in perspective of a war that occurs between a country's government, its civilian citizens, and its soldiers. For the many civilians and government officials that are grateful to never have to take up arms against our government's enemies, it would be very easy to say that the use of force is reasonable to protect our nation's principles and contain opposing ones. However, for a young person that becomes a soldier, they risk the possibility of never living out their life and seeing their loved ones in order to serve their country. And although joining the armed forces is widely considered an honorable thing to do, Bunce asserts that "there's no glory to it. Your only job is to keep yourself and your fellow soldiers alive." While the rest of us at home are discussing the ideological clashes that supposedly occur during war, the people actually on the front lines have different priorities and an irreplicable first-hand account of the horrific actions that take place during war.

I am a direct descendant of Vietnamese refugees, so I find it important to truly understand the impact of the war because it has affected my family directly. My grandfather was a Second Lieutenant in the South Vietnamese Army who fought alongside and safeguarded two American soldiers. Just like Mr. Bunce, his main concern was to keep his men alive. Both of them had in jeopardy the ability to see their families again and would have to rid other people of that privilege on the road to obtaining theirs. In a conflict where over 1.5 million soldiers and 2 million civilians were killed, the amount of families that were and continue to be torn apart by the war is a part of history that often gets little coverage. The stories of ordinary people like my grandpa and Mr. Bunce are seldom told compared to the perspective of the issue presented by people who have never set foot on a battlefield.

As the conflicts in Ukraine and Israel continue in the present, I am left wondering how similarly soldiers today view the current wars compared to veterans of the Vietnam War. On both sides of each war, there are people who are not there on their own accord, fighting battles that are being commanded and endorsed by governments with which they have little or no direct contact. I am no more than two years younger than Mr. Bunce was when he was drafted, so I can't help but think about the thousands of people my age that are fighting for a cause they barely have a say in instead of being in the safety of a school or a job. Although these soldiers have weapons in their possession, they have no power compared to politicians that sent them to a place unknown to both parties.

By interviewing someone who was put into this very position, I was able to learn about the sacrifices that everyday people make for governments that don't even know who they are. By going directly to a primary source of one of the most pivotal events of the modern day, one can understand the struggle that soldiers and veterans continue to go through. No presidential speech, news report, or history book can more accurately or thoroughly record what it truly means to

sacrifice for one's country better than the account of someone who has actually sacrificed for their country.