

Thaddeus Zebrowski and Thaddeus Feder Interview

Veteran Voices

Co-authored by Jordan Feder and Lexie Ruth

October 25th, 2023

Jordan Fedder had the honor of interviewing Thaddeus Zebrowski about his time in the US Army. He had a long decorated career lasting 27 years in the service of the United States. He served during the Vietnam War and saw many days filled with combat. In addition, he received many awards and much deserved recognition for his service, including a Purple Heart, numerous Bronze Stars for Valor and multiple Medals of Commendation for Valor.

Thaddeus began by recounting a harrowing journey that unfolded after deciding to leave high school. He was deployed for one and a half years to Vietnam. "In '68, I found myself in basic training after I quit high school. At the time, that seemed like a good option for me. Which was not a very smart thing to do, but I did it." His earliest memories were of basic training, doing pull ups, running and preparing for combat. "At The U.S Army Armor School in Fort Knox, KY, I learned how to work on tanks and drive tanks. My first assignment was to train trainees how to work on tanks. I got a lot of specialized training to be able to repair and work on tanks."

Thaddeus vividly described the jungles of Vietnam as both relentless adversaries and a harsh home for the soldiers who fought to stay alive. "The jungle was alive with the unknown, every step a gamble. We were kids, really, tossed into a world that aged us faster than time ever could."

Thaddeus spoke of the camaraderie among soldiers, he kept in touch with a good friend, Ron Cassa, from his days in the service. "The comradery with your buddies was the best part. You forge bonds that are unbreakable when you are in war together. We relied on each other to navigate the physical and emotional minefields."

When Thaddeus explained how he was injured. "I was on a tank, and we were on a search and destroy mission, and I hit a booby trap with the tank. The booby trap, when it went off, shot shrapnel up and hit me in the leg. I ended up having to be airlifted out for surgery, where they removed a bone from my leg. Then they sent me to Japan for the second operation where I

recovered. Then I was sent back to the United States. This was the end of my tour in Vietnam, because I was wounded.”

The impact of the war lingered beyond the battlefield. "I think it made me harder as a person," Thaddeus Continued. Jordan asked him if he had a good luck charm. He pulled out a handmade necklace from his bedroom, "It is a necklace with a tank and cross and crucifix. It was made out of brass rims from the used brass casings. I made this one day and used to wear it for luck."

Throughout the interview, Thaddeus was collected and matter-of-fact when describing Vietnam. He did not become emotional, but it was apparent that Vietnam changed him in many ways. He touched on the horrors he witnessed, “the friends we lost,” in a very stoic manner. I imagine this is a coping mechanism he developed after having to process this traumatic experience of seeing death and destruction day in and day out.

“When I decided to retire, I became a lobbyist in Tallahassee, FL for the Department of Military Affairs for the US Government. I enjoyed it and I was ready to live as a civilian after years of combat. It was a good chance for me to come back and use all the skills I had acquired while serving in the Army. My service prepared me well for this new position within the government as a civilian.”

He shared how the war shaped his perspective. You learn the value of peace when you've seen its absence. Every quiet moment becomes a treasure, and you yearn for a world where the only explosions are distant memories. When asked what message he would share with younger individuals, He said, “Don't take your liberties for granted. We all need to understand that a lot of guys died fighting for our liberty and freedoms.”

Thaddeus concluded by explaining how the Vietnam war left scars, visible and hidden. In summary he said, “we were soldiers, thrust into a brutal theater, and we carried its echoes long after the war ended. We didn't just fight a war; we became a living testament to its profound impact on the human soul. Everytime I look down and see the bone missing in my leg, I am reminded of the impacts of war. We must all remember the sacrifices many men have made for our civil liberties.”

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(First) (Middle) (Last)

2. PLACE OF RESIDENCE (Print)

2652 E Belgrade St. Phila Penna.

(Number and street) (Town, township, village, or city) (County) (State)

[THE PLACE OF RESIDENCE GIVEN ON THE LINE ABOVE WILL DETERMINE LOCAL BOARD JURISDICTION; LINE 2 OF REGISTRATION CERTIFICATE WILL BE IDENTICAL]

3. MAILING ADDRESS

same.

(Mailing address if other than place indicated on line 2. If same insert word same)

4. TELEPHONE	5. AGE IN YEARS	6. PLACE OF BIRTH
Regent 4464	20	Phila.
(Exchange) (Number)	DATE OF BIRTH	(Town or county)
	12 25 21.	Pa.
	(Mo.) (Day) (Yr.)	(State or country)

7. NAME AND ADDRESS OF PERSON WHO WILL ALWAYS KNOW YOUR ADDRESS

Alexander Zebrowski - 2652 E. Belgrade St.

8. EMPLOYER'S NAME AND ADDRESS

American Can Co.

9. PLACE OF EMPLOYMENT OR BUSINESS

Delaware Ave + Palmer Phila Phila Pa.

(Number and street or R. F. D. number) (Town) (County) (State)