

## **James R. Studle Interview**

### **Veteran Voices**

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Connor, Coy, and Evan had the honor of interviewing James R. Studle about his time in the US Navy. He served in Vietnam from 1969 to 1975. He joined the military after graduating from high school. Instead of waiting to be picked by the draft, after his number was nearly called, James decided to join the Navy. During his time in service, James seemed most passionate about his role as an education petty officer, which he earned shortly after scoring the highest out of the 80 men in his company.

James began his story describing how the draft influenced him to join the military, “I had actually done a semester at Bloomington, Indiana at Indiana University and it wasn’t a great success. So I knew that I was going to be drafted because I lost my deferment.” He decided to join the Navy specifically because the other reserves were, “already packed full and had waiting lists and I didn’t want to take the chance and it turns out it was the right move.” Then shortly after, in August of 1969, at the Great Lakes service center, northwest of Chicago, he went to boot camp for 8 weeks. He describes how the one thing you never learned in the navy was to shoot a gun, stating “if you’re not shooting a gun, you’re probably not getting shot at so that complements my first objective, don’t get shot at.”

He found boot camp to be quite easy, making it through the eight weeks while avoiding many of the more physically demanding duties. He explained, “I never had to work in the kitchen. I never had to stand guard at night and miss out on sleep. I never had to do any of the physical challenges. So I pretty much sailed through boot camp other than just being lonely and scared to be away from home” This made it easier for him to continue through the rest of his service, but also created a subversion of expectations for what was to come.

James qualified by virtue of having the highest test scores in his company. As an education Petty Officer, he worked with the “less intelligent guys, and at the time Vietnam was mostly poor and uneducated, which was the reason they instituted the

lottery.” He also speaks about the unfairness of the draft in relation to connections, stating “if you knew somebody high up in government, you just didn't go.” Highlighting the underlying injustices in the draft system.

James was a family man, and he placed a high value on his family connections, this is proven by the fact that he did not keep in touch with anyone from his past life outside of family members. When asked if he kept in contact with anyone he served with, he directly stated, "absolutely not. No. It is something my wife's critical of me about. I've basically kept in touch with no one from any part of my past life; except for my family." He reinforces this prioritization of family ties over other relationships later on, saying, "I don't have any friends from high school, or college, or the military, or my previous work life. In fact, in my most recent work I had a partner and I haven't even spoken to him since 2016." He also stated how when he initially joined, he joined with his friend. They told them they would be together, but ended up being separated across the world from each other never seeing each other again.

On the ship, James worked as an intelligence yeoman planning bombing missions in the Gulf of Tonkin. His role involved lining up squadrons and payloads in a small secure room. The ship had various crew ratings designated by colored shirts for jobs like maintaining planes and loading weapons. At sea, the schedule was grueling 12-hour shifts with little to do off-duty, except sleep. As going on the flight deck during operations was dangerous. He recalls odd Navy terms like calling a snack "gedunk.” The long hours with lack of activities made downtime boring, mostly just sleeping.

James finishes off by speaking about the realities from his service in Vietnam. Stating that, “most of us were not necessarily proud of that service. It was just something that we were forced to do. We had no other choice. I mean you’d registered for selective service but you know you’re not going to have to go to the military. We didn’t have a choice. We had to register or else leave the country, which a lot of people do. Most veterans don't bring up themselves, at least from that era.”

We are extremely fortunate to have had the opportunity to interview James R. Studle and learn about his past experiences in the service, especially during Vietnam.