

“Change”

I enlisted in the Air Force right out of high school in 1962, just shy of my 18th birthday. In the fall of 1965, my C-130 wing was moved from Langley AFB, VA to Clark AFB in the Philippines, as part of LBJ's initial Vietnam troop buildup. We were rotating 16 planes and maintenance crews from Clark to Tan Son Nhut Airport in Saigon to do much of the in-country hauling for the US Army - mail, supplies, ammunition, entertainers, etc.

I went to Saigon as a C-130 radar/nav aids repairman from December 1965 to February 1966 and witnessed quite a bit locally, though I wasn't in the field. I returned unscathed to Clark - just missing a Viet Cong rocket attack on Tan Son Nhut by two weeks - but shortly developed hepatitis and was hospitalized for nine weeks. As my discharge date had passed and I had a college acceptance for September, I talked my way on to a medivac flight and spent another seven weeks in Chelsea Naval Hospital. I was released from the hospital and the service in August, on my 22nd birthday, just in time to go to freshman orientation. I only lasted one semester (disorientation and a little PTSD, I know now), and I got married and worked until I was able to get into a second college.

My experiences in the Philippines and Vietnam caused me to major in Asian history as an undergraduate at my second college, which, in turn, caused me have growing doubts about the War and colonialism. By the time I was a junior, I was treasurer of student government and co-leader of the 1969 October and November Moratoriums. For the former in October, another vet and I traveled to DC with our wives for the March on Washington. He and I were asked to join other vets and active GIs, and we ended up at the head of the March carrying one of wooden coffins with the names of the Vietnam dead. Somehow we found our wives by the speakers' platform at the Ellipse afterward in the crowd of 500,000.

That spring (1970), I had just been elected president of student government when the invasion of Cambodia and shootings at Kent State occurred. I was permitted to address the faculty senate, the first student to do so, and secured a peaceful, voluntary strike for the remainder of the

semester. I also returned to Washington to testify before the congressional hearings on Cambodia and Kent State.

My experiences in Vietnam and the antiwar movement - coupled with what was happening in civil rights/Black power, feminism, and personal expression - further led me to graduate school in college administration, ten years directing higher ed programs for the disadvantaged and inmates, and another 30 years in New York State government. One way or another, I'm sure that people of all ages who lived through the 1960s and '70s were fundamentally affected. I know I was.

— *Russell, Clifton Park*