

"Peace"

I was drafted in 1969. I was 23 years old, a college graduate & had been an active opponent of the US invasion of Viet Nam since 1964. Through dumb luck I was not sent to Viet Nam. I had been trained at Fort Knox Kentucky as a tank driver, fully anticipating that I would be sent to Viet Nam, but I ended up in the lucky half of my training class. I spent the rest of my time at Fort Knox as a tank driver, then as a Company clerk, then as a Battalion legal clerk. I remained anti-war in the service as I had been anti-war prior to being drafted.

When the killings at Kent State occurred in May, 1970, while I was still in training, we had a Company assembly at which the Company Commander raised for discussion the issue of what had happened there. I raised my hand & spoke about how the students were exercising their rights to free speech as American & that they had posed no threat to the National Guard troops who fired upon them. The Captain responded in no uncertain terms against what I said. When I sat down, a young member of my platoon, barely 18-years old, a high-school drop-out from some rural community in the South, said to me, "I didn't know people could have ideas like that."

Also during my time at Fort Knox I got to know many soldiers who had served in Viet Nam who were just completing their tour of duty before they could be discharged. I heard all kinds of stories of their experience in Viet Nam, about the country, the people, about the things they or what their fellow soldiers sometimes did. It made me aware of how scared, & how overwhelmed they were by the experience. No one came home undamaged.

Many, perhaps most, of my fellow soldiers, were also against the war. Most would not have been in uniform if not for the draft, they were either drafted, or had enlisted in the hopes of getting a "better deal" & avoiding combat—it didn't always work. Many, perhaps most, had no understanding, beyond the slogans, about why the United States was in Viet Nam.

In the years since, working for peace with other members of Veterans For Peace, I've become even more aware of the damage that war does, not just to those killed or wounded, civilians or soldiers, but to anyone who has experienced the horror of war. I continue to work for peace, attend weekly & monthly peace vigils, other rallies & demonstrations, & raise my voice in the community both as a veteran & as a poet.

It is important to remember that the history of the Viet Nam war is also the history of the resistance to the war & we need to honor the Peacemakers as well as the Warriors — they were often the same person.

—Dan, Albany