A Soldier's Experience in Vietnam: Johnas Freeman [1]

No regrets?

No regrets. I think if I had the same situation, the same scenario to face I would do the same thing over again. I think that I grew up. Really. In Vietnam, I began to appreciate things. A cold drink of water. Something out of the refrigerator that was cold. Uh, you were literally in a hundred, anywhere from 90 to 120 degree temperature at any time in the shade. Several days I had to go without food. Um, and I think I just grew up because a lot of things I was used to having around I didn't have any more, and I was in a life or death situation. I had never been in a situation like that before, and think I grew up in those 13 months.

When you returned home how was your reception once you returned?

At that time when we were looked at those veterans who were coming back were looked at as enemies because there were a lot of people who were against the war, and I see some of these guys now having these --parades. The best we received when we got off the plane in the United States was a military band. Maybe four or five American people wept for us, but other than that there was nothing. And so it made me feel bad that I had placed my life on the line for a country that really didn't care anything about me basically, because they were against the war. My job as a military man was to go and eradicate any forces that would come up against us. We were really protecting the United States and these people did not receive us well when we came back, and during that time it was both racial problems, racial tensions, and then tensions from the war. I think at that time the United States was in a mess. It was in a big mess, and we paid for a lot of the problems that they had, and that just wasn't right for the military veterans.

Did you have any difficulties readjusting since you returned?

Yes. I went through maybe, uh, about 90 days of depression. Not to the point where I needed assistance from a doctor or from the VA Hospital, or anything like that. It was just finding myself again and trying to cope with some of the feelings that I had and some of the animosity that was felt by the veterans, I'm sorry, not by the veterans, but by the civilian people of... It was just horrible that you had to deal with feelings from the war. You had to deal with these people around you who looked down their noses at you and thought you were the enemy or some curse that had come back to them. It was very hard, but I think that somehow... and I wasn't that close to the Lord then. I prayed frequently, but I found a lot of my relief in alcohol. I'm fortunate, I didn't get hung up on it like many men did and go to other drugs that were stronger and more addictive than alcohol.

Why do you think this was the case when veterans came back? I've often heard this from other veterans.

I don't know. Uh, it was just the way the people felt, their attitudes toward us. We did nothing but really try to protect ourselves once we were placed in that combat situation. Uh, and we were protecting them above all because communism was spreading a few years in the early '60s. We'd just had the -- situation, we had the --, we had the Cuban situation, and it obvious communism was about to engulf us. I think this was the United States' way to say, 'Hey, it's time for us to get our people, and it's time for us to get involved. If not, we're going to sit being peaceable and loving and people are just going to come in and empower us. It would be like sitting in your homes with the doors open and unlocked and the people outside want to get in and harm you and you just open the doors for them and I think the United States made the right move. I feel like they're stronger and they did not use enough force as they did in the Gulf War. When you go into war you're supposed to let it all hang out, you either win or lose. You don't fight for 10, 12, or 15 years and come back with no winner and no loser. Nobody wins and nobody loses in a situation like that, and I don't feel that that's really what war is about. If you declare war then you fight it with all your power, all your might, all the forces available to you, to try and win it.

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