

## Speech that Don Rottman gave at Thomas Jefferson High School on Veterans Day...

Good Morning, My name is Don Rottman. I am the Junior Vice Commander of the Pleasant Hills American Legion Post 712.

The Vietnam War was a long costly conflict that pitted the Communist regime of North Vietnam, supported by the Chinese. Its southern allies known as the Viet Cong fought against South Vietnam and its principal Ally the United States. It was the first televised war that showed the reality of war. As it became increasing unpopular at home, the United States ended with the withdrawal of U.S. forces in 1973 and the collapse of South Vietnam. The unification of Vietnam fell under Communist control two years later. More than 3 million people died including 58,000 Americans were killed in the war. We never lost a battle but could not win the war.

*Now I want to paint a picture of how it was for me...* Back then there was a draft system. Males had to register when they turned 18 years old. My classification was 1-A. I did not apply myself in high school because I had no interest in going to college. I enjoyed working with my hands as a welder and was interested in racing cars.

I graduated in June of 1964 and began working in the mill in August. I was drafted in December of 1965. I left Pittsburgh two weeks before Christmas and was shipped to Fort Lewis, Washington assigned to the 4th Infantry Division.

We started with basic training, which included physical training, discipline, harassment and working as unit. After basic training, we move on to Advanced Infantry Training. You were assigned your military duty, a rifleman, a machine gunner, assistant gunner etc. I was selected as radio man. My duties were to work with the platoon sergeant, coordinate the fire teams in an attack and call in choppers to extract the wounded and dead. I had to direct fire support from the choppers and bring in the reinforcements.

My basic combat uniform was an full automatic M-16, 500 hundred rounds ammunition, 2 grenades, 5 smoke grenades to mark positions for choppers and a 25 pound radio plus 2 extra batteries at 5lbs each and a whip antenna. Besides all that we carried 4 canteens of water (1 gal), a gas mask, bayonet, and entrenching tool, plus C-rations enough for 3 days. C-rations were cans that contained food, fruit chocolate bar matches and cigarettes. Most of these cans were dated 1943 and 1944.

We never carried tents or any kind of sheltered, you just dealt with the elements. My outfit was on the Cambodian border in dense jungle. It was so thick that sometimes the sun could not get through. So you were damp and wet all the time. The average temperature was close to 100 degrees and the humidity was just as high. So we never wore any kind of flak jackets.

Our mission was to stop the North Vietnam from bringing supplies and troops to the region. We ran "Search and Destroy" missions daily, some lasted 3 weeks, so there were no showers or change of clothes. The only good thing was we all smelled the same! We were re supplied with, food water and ammo by chopper.

The night ambushes scared me the most. You could pick any area that you thought the enemy would pass through and wait. When the enemy was in your kill zone you would let the first couple go through. Then open up with everything you had then move to the rear and assemble and get out of the area because you didn't know how many were behind them. The only time the North Vietnamese would attack you is when they thought they had the upper hand, so you rely on your training and your brother to get you out of a bad situation.

I have no regrets about my time in the service other than the loss of some very good friends. It is amazing how close you get to each other in two years "Brothers in Arms". Most of us still keep in touch with each other. In Vietnam we did not understand the politics of war, we fought for each other.

The only negative reaction I have is the way some veterans were treated when we came home. We were not accepted as Veterans. We were called Baby Killers, Drug addicts and other derogatory remarks. We were told to stay in groups in airports and train stations. And not wear your uniform in certain areas.

This is why many Vietnam Veterans work with are current Veterans and service organizations. To help them adjust to civilian life and give them the welcome home they deserve.

On this Veterans Day make a pledge to yourself to thank a Vet for his or her service. This includes your grandfather, dad or mom and men and women in uniform. You will not believe how good it will make them feel.

I received several medals but the one I'm most proud of is my Combat Infantry Badge which means I was in combat for at least 30 days. My unit also received a Presidential Citation. My dad was surprised I got a Good Conduct Medal!

Thank You for your time and God Bless America