

## Decades later, Ron started to feel the effects

**Ron:** My name is Ron and I was drafted in 1968; drafted into the Army. I was sent to Vietnam where I was a replacement for the First Infantry Division. Our main goal there was to do search and destroy missions. We were northwest of Saigon near the Cambodian border and this was the jump-off point to go to Saigon. So, our mission there was to look for the movement and resupply of troops and caches coming through from Cambodia.

At the time, you were working on adrenaline. You didn't think about it. You just reacted and did what you had to do. It wasn't until after it was all over that you finally had a chance to take a moment and think about what that experience was and what it was like and how scared you were. I was with those guys who had the same experience I did. I didn't have to explain anything because they were there, they knew it. We shared our thoughts, but they were all common thoughts and a lot of them you didn't even have to speak, you just sensed it. You knew it and when you come home and you're not with those guys, you're by yourself. Then, those thoughts come back to you. There isn't a day goes by that I don't think about Vietnam. It was not popular to be in the military. You wanted to disassociate that.

So, as soon as I got out of the service, I went back to work and I didn't talk about it. It was probably 15, 20 years later and it showed up in my work. I was a manager/supervisor and I was dealing with fellow employees and I'd be unhappy with their performance or what I expected and my expectations were probably too high. I know that now. I didn't know it at the time. But I expect everyone to have the same expectations that I did. They did not and I would be disappointed by their performance and I would let loose on them. It was just the frustration and anger that was built up in me and it came across in everything that I said and the way I expressed myself even though it wasn't directed, or I wasn't even necessarily aware of it.

I've done personal counseling at the Vet Center and I've done family counseling with my wife at the Vet Center and then I have done group counseling. You go there, you don't know anybody and uncomfortable because your unfamiliar surroundings, unfamiliar people, but it doesn't take long to where you have a sense and feeling that you belong. You're a brother. You are accepted unconditionally. They offer counseling for Veterans and families, spouses, and they have group meetings. They interview you and talk to you and think if you can be benefitted by coming into the group, they'll invite you to the group. The thing I liked about it is that other guys were having the same problems, same experiences that I was. It's an entitlement that you have earned as being a Veteran. A lot of us feel, well, I'm taking away from somebody who's more severely impacted by their service than I am. And that's the way I felt too. But that's not necessarily the case. It really isn't. It's something the government has set up; you are entitled to. It's recognizing or admitting to the fact that you have issues. You have a problem and you need some help, some guidance to help you get through that.

I tell everybody that my two years in the Army, when I was 20 something was 5% of my life. Now, it is probably 75% of who Ron is. And it's not just the combat part, it's the experience of being in the military.

We would always go down to D.C. for Veteran's Day and we would participate in the program there at the Vietnam Veteran's Memorial and I went twice and I saw these



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yellow hatters; these people walking around with yellow hats and they were helping the visitors and talking to them and explaining things with them and I asked, how do you become one of those? And it was explained to me, they were volunteers with the National Park Service and you just make application and there is no schedule. You come and go as you can and put in as much time as you can. For me, it's been all about giving back to Veterans and I have approximately 1,000 hours a year that I volunteer military connected between the Vietnam Veteran's Memorial, the cemetery and the airport.

You need to find something that excites you and is rewarding to you. It doesn't have to be a job where you're getting paid. It can be any services that you do, but find something that is meaningful to you and get involved in it.



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