

My grandpa served in the US Army as an air traffic controller during the Vietnam war. His experiences in a foreign country fighting for his life and in turn mine, changed him beyond measure. The way he approaches the world changed because of the war. His stories of his time overseas are often mixed with humor and dread. There are stories that show me what war does to a country and how quickly it affects those around it. I've learned about the Vietnam war in school several times but mainly in passing. It never felt all that real, and most of the time it's hard to even imagine. My grandpa's stories made it real. In many ways they're a slap to the face. He doesn't seem like a veteran at first glance and I think that's what's surprised me the most as I got older. He seems to hide all his stories and horrors locked away, only showing themselves in odd ways that simply make him seem a little crazy, or in the form of stories. He can talk forever about his time in the war, but also after. His whole experience wasn't just the war. There's a whole nother life *after* those violent events. Those stories are filled with even more humor and smiles. It's easy to see his love for what he did in the Army. He definitely comes off as a crazy old man, but he's got millions of stories locked away, I just have to have the patience to listen and enjoy. Veterans, like my grandpa, remind us of the valor, deduction, and courage this country has. They were once ordinary citizens who joined the armed forces to protect this country, its values and its citizens. Each member of the military joined with the knowledge of the potential hardships that await them, yet they still do it. The veterans that retire each year, either willingly or not, carry with them a deep sense of pride and loyalty to both their branch of service and their country. My senior marine instructor and marine instructor like to remind us "Once a marine, always a marine." Each service carries a similar motto or pride with them wherever they go. War vets remind us of the hardships our country as a whole went through for each and every war we have been a part of. They make the sacrifice and horrors real. Without them we would be more prone to repeating our mistakes. The stories told to children and grandchildren and friends will follow them throughout life. Stories of their service cement their dedication and loyalty to our country.

Veterans inspire patriotism in all of us. They are the embodiment of faithfulness to this country. Veterans are those who were willing to sacrifice themselves for our freedom, both in times of war and peace.

The pain, loss and suffering that veteran families have gone through and are going through is a constant reminder of the great men and women we have lost and the holes left in their families. These losses remind us that our history is not as easy as it might seem when learning about it.

To me my grandpa's stories don't feel like a stereotypical war vet's stories and that makes them feel more real. Even though I know that some of them are, the way he tells them makes them sound like they were just yesterday or even a thousand years ago. I think other children with grandparents who were in wars or in the military have a similar experience. Having that personal connection makes everything more important. They make us think about how our lives could be different if they hadn't made it. Stories and experiences like these are what empowers the younger population. Without veterans we would only know about wars through school.

Learning at school is oftentimes disconnected from the rest of our lives. Without veterans to make everything seem real, us as a country would be more prone to making the same mistakes. Thinking of it on a smaller scale though, not knowing someone who was in or is currently in the service likely means they have less respect for the armed services. A lack of respect for any group is a dangerous thing in almost all situations. Veterans carry with them a wisdom that is different from someone who never experienced the military. Their wisdom and stories are what will be remembered. And it's so important that we *do* remember.