

Tori Hook
Honors US History II
Mr. Mealy
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Soundcloud link: <https://soundcloud.com/victoria-hook-88413328/new-recording-2>

Quillen, Nelson. Personal interview with the author. Lancaster, PA October 7, 2017.

Overview by Tori Hook

Nelson Quillen was 20 when he started his first days in Vietnam. He grew up in Indiana with a family of 4 other siblings. He didn't have a good relationship with his dad, but because of the Vietnam war that changed. He was injured three times, and was able to heal very well. In the interview he explains some of the struggles of being injured, and how he overcame the struggles. He also explains how the training for the war was very difficult, and some of the things he had to do war very insane. Today he thinks the war made him into a better person and fighting had a huge impact on his life. His wife even made a few comments on how he changes. It also say's how it was very difficult to readjust to coming back to the United States after coming back from Vietnam. I definitely learned a lot about war and its hardships from this interview that I had no idea happened.

Question(Tori Hook): Okay so my first question is, when were you born? And where did you grow up?

Answer(Mr. Quillen): That's too many years ago. I was born October 4th, 1946 in Gary Indiana.

Question(Tori Hook): What was life like as a kid?

Answer(Mr. Quillen): Hard.

Question(Tori Hook): Why?

Answer(Mr. Quillen): Well, we weren't poor but we weren't anywhere near rich or anything. With five kids, you guys got four, we had five.

Question(Tori Hook): Were you drafted into the war or enlisted? If you were drafted how did you feel after you found out?

Answer(Mr. Quillen): enlisted

Question(Tori Hook): How did your friends and family react to you going into the military?

Answer(Mr. Quillen): My dad and I didn't get along, and when I went in he had regrets. And when I went to Vietnam, He had so many regrets about it that he quit drinking the whole time I was in Vietnam.

Question(Tori Hook): Do you remember anything from your training or camp experiences in the military?

Answer(Mr. Quillen): I probably do, but I don't know what to say. The airborne training was pretty hard. Three weeks you didn't walk anywhere. You ran everywhere. Even when you weren't on duty, you better be running if you're out.

Question(Tori Hook): Were you in the war from the start to the end? If not how many years?

Answer(Mr. Quillen): No

Question(Tori Hook): How many years?

Answer(Mr. Quillen): Five months, June 5th, 1967 to November 24, 1967.

Question(Tori Hook): Do you recall any memories from the trip to Vietnam?

Answer(Mr. Quillen): The trip to Vietnam. We all tried to get drunk on the plane.

Question(Tori Hook): What was your duty in the war?

Answer(Mr. Quillen): I was an infantryman.

Question(Tori Hook): Were you injured at all during the war?

Answer(Mr. Quillen): I was wounded three different times. On this paper is a list of the three times and where it was. The first one was 7 days after I got to Vietnam. I didn't even make it out into the field. I was on patrol the first week around the airbase that I flew into and a Charley, which is what they're called, stood up and

threw a grenade at us. And of course everybody turns around and started shooting him. Before we were done, you couldn't tell he was a human even.

Question(Tori Hook): What do you think the worst hardships of the fighting was?

Answer(Mr. Quillen): The worst hardships. Cold nights and dead bodies

Question(Tori Hook): How did you feel about fighting in a foreign country?

Answer(Mr. Quillen): Well, the Vietnam War was because of the communists trying to take over the whole country, and anything to stop communism, back then, was ideal for you to go and do.

Question(Tori Hook): What was your most vivid memory of the war?

Answer(Mr. Quillen): Hill H 75

Question(Tori Hook): How did you feel when America withdrew its forces in 1973?

Answer(Mr. Quillen): How did what?

Question(Tori Hook): How did you feel when America withdrew its forces in 1973?

Answer(Mr. Quillen): Oh in 1973, well I was glad to see it. I wish it would have happened a lot sooner. We would've lost a lot less men. I mean we lost over 68,000 men.

Question(Tori Hook): Did any of your close friends fight in the war with you?

Answer(Mr. Quillen): I had two guys that we had met in the 82nd airborne in Fort Bragg, North Carolina. We were there together for over six months, and all three of us went to Vietnam at the same time. Two of us came home, one didn't, he was shot on Hill H 75 when we had one of our own 500 pound bombs dropped on him. And the only thing that was found of him was his one arms that had a tattoo that

matched his cousins that went in the army the same time he did and I did. And that's the only thing they had to bury of him.

Question(Tori Hook): Looking back on your experiences in the war, do you think the war had a positive impact on your life?

Answer(Mr. Quillen): Yeah, it sure did. For many many years I had nightmares, flashbacks, I toss and turn at night. I'd even smack her around, my wife, not knowingly you know in my sleep. That was the worst parts.

Question(Tori Hook): What do you recall was going on in Vietnam and in this country then?

Answer(Mr. Quillen): Well, as far as us we were trying to fight against the communists. We had two elements of the enemy. One was the north Vietnamese army and then we had Vietcom which was south Korea people that wanted communism that was the second element of it. And when you try and fight against someone that all of them look the same. We had Vietnamese kids would be carrying grenades under their arms and come up to us and try to blow us up.

Question(Tori Hook): What was your most frightening experience?

Answer(Mr. Quillen): When we had to fight hand-in-hand. Bayonet there (shows hand) bayonets... "inaudible." I spent three and a half months in a hospital in Japan the last time I got wounded.

Question(Tori Hook): How did the war affect your life?

Answer(Mr. Quillen): I guess in all aspects of my life. I think it probably made me a better man. I guess you call me that anyway. Adjusting to coming home that was hard, that was hard. You get off the airplane and people threw tomatoes, apples at us, spit at us.

Question(Tori Hook): What was the highest rank you ever received?

Answer(Mr. Quillen): Sergeant E 5. I still carry that rank.

Question(Tori Hook): What was your duty for that rank?

Answer(Mr. Quillen): To kill people. It was leadership. E 5 was leadership.

Question(Tori Hook): After the war, how did you deal with going back to your normal lifestyle?

Answer(Mr. Quillen): You never come back to a normal lifestyle. Never. I mean when you go through something like a war that just changes you completely. Your friends look at you differently. I had friends that were my best friends before I went over and they didn't want anything to do with me when I got home. But I did my duty.

Question(Tori Hook): When you got back did anything big change in the society?

Answer(Mr. Quillen): Yeah, they were all hippies. Yeah I had quit in my senior year to go over to Vietnam, and when I came home I went back to school. I had already gotten my GHD which is equivalent to your highschool, but I went back to highschool and went back through the whole year. The whole auditorium was packed and they all stood at graduation. That was pretty neat, but in a way I wish that never happened either.

Question(Tori Hook): Was is hard to go back to school?

Answer(Mr. Quillen): Well, it was I mean when you're 3 years or 4 years older than the kids in school you know. Some of them tried to be badass you know, and that upset me some.

Question(Tori Hook): Did people see you different?

Answer(Mr. Quillen): Well, they did see me different you know. I didn't put up with their bullshit.

Question(Tori Hook): How did you feel when Saigon fell in April, 1975?

Answer(Mr. Quillen): Well, I was glad, I was glad. At least it was over. There was 2,500,000 guys that went to Vietnam. Yeah, there was 2,500,000 men that went to Vietnam, but only 20,000 of them were actual fighting guys. The rest of them were supporters. So that makes 2.5 million only 500,000 were actual combat. The rest of them were cooks or whatever you know, truck drivers.

Question(Tori Hook): Instead of combat did you ever think about going into the marines or airforce?

Answer(Mr. Quillen): Well marines is fighters too, combat. With being with the airborne, you have to be airborne before you can go to rangers or special courses and I had two guys that I knew that were from Pennsylvania, brothers they went and tried to be special courses. Well, they dropped out because they just couldn't take it, the training.

Question(Tori Hook): Was the training hard for you?

Answer(Mr. Quillen): The last training before I went to Vietnam, they had jungle warfare. I was in Florida in the everglades for three days and had to get out. So I mean yeah it was rough.

Question(Tori Hook): Did you form any friendships with your comrades?

Answer(Mr. Quillen): No, well the problem is Tori, you didn't make friends because you lost so many people, and it hurt too much to make friends at the time. When I left Vietnam then I went to Korea. I made some friends there and none of them that I hang out with now or anything. They don't live here, but I got a couple letters from a guy from Missouri, and I didn't care a whole lot for him in the first place, but he hung around with five or six of us in Korea. And none that I really pile around with know anyway.

Question(Tori Hook): Is there anything else you want to say because I have no more questions?

Answer(Mr. Quillen): I was told I got a bronze star, but it never caught up to me. About a month ago, on TV there was a guy in Lancaster that got a bronze star in World War 2, and he just got it.

Answer(Mr. Quillen): It was an exciting life, but I'd do it all over again. I think most airborne guys were tough enough and hard enough that they would go back again.

Answer(Mr. Quillen): One seventy-third airborne is what I was in. That unit was told by interrogators, the ones that had been caught, that they were most afraid of the one seventy-third. That's that's bad.

Question(Tori Hook): What was the food like?

Answer(Mr. Quillen): Do you like lima beans? Well we had rations from World War 2, cans and I got one meal that had lima beans in it. Now can you imagine eating lima beans to begin with, but being 40 years old too in the can. That ruined my whole experience with lima beans. I won't eat a lima bean today. Some of the guys they really loved lima beans and I'd trade them, if somebody had spaghetti and meatballs, I'd beg them to trade me. There was no such thing as ice cream in Vietnam. They had a little pound cake. In a can. In these sea rations, but no all of them only some of them with certain meals. And I carried one around for a month and had it on my birthday in Vietnam for my 21st birthday. I hope you spend your 21st birthday at a decent place with family you love. I won't be around, but you know.