



As we approach Veterans Day tomorrow, today marks the seventh anniversary of my Uncle Rick's death at the age of 77. As I was raised by a single mom in New Jersey, Rick was a father to me in many ways. One of the best storytellers I've ever known, he was a true Renaissance Man with interests ranging from Dave Brubeck to fine carpentry. He built all of his son's bedroom furniture as he restored a late model MG, and learned to play piano.

He was also a US Army veteran who served in Vietnam. Aside from seeing photographs of him in uniform, and holding his Purple Heart medal, we had never talked about his service.

In the fall of my senior year at George Washington University, I took a class on the Vietnam War. The final exam was a mixed media project including a research paper and a video interview with Rick about his experiences in Vietnam. He was very receptive to the idea, and we set Thanksgiving break for the videotaping.

The beginning of the interview went smoothly, as Rick talked about why he volunteered for the Army (he was actually hoping to avoid being drafted to Vietnam), and the kind

of work he did as a communications officer, often embedded with Special Forces units operating in Vietnam at the very beginning of America's involvement in the conflict.

The tenor of the conversation changed as Rick described a horrific story involving the North Vietnamese Army's attack on a particular village they had suspected of providing intelligence to American and South Vietnamese forces. I won't go into the bloody specifics here, but even though the interview happened 35 years ago, I remember the ghastly details as if they were told to me yesterday.

He began to weep. He didn't cry. It was quiet, reserved weeping over the memory. I didn't know what to do, so I awkwardly concluded the interview. It was the first (and last) time I ever saw Rick so emotional, and we never spoke about it again. Still, he never asked to erase the interview, and I submitted it with the rest of the assignment.

On this Veterans Day, I don't tell this story to contribute another narrative about a supposed "fragile" or "brooding" nature of our vets - quite the opposite. As C.S. Lewis, a veteran of World War I, would say later in his own remarkable and accomplished life, "we remember the trenches too well." My uncle experienced some horrible things in war, and carried them for the rest of his life. At the same time, he became a man of deep faith who built successful businesses, was a good father and husband, a great (and fun!) uncle to my brother and me, and played a role in leading me to Christ.

Veterans Day is an opportunity to not only celebrate particular men and women who have served, but to appreciate anew the virtues of courage, sacrifice, and perseverance.

"Though I walk in the midst of trouble, you preserve my life; you stretch out your hand against the anger of my foes, with your right hand you save me. The Lord will fulfill his purpose for me; your love, O Lord, endures forever - do not abandon the works of your hands" (Psalm 138:7-8).

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