

Bryan Nicholas response to questions about what helped him stay connected during his year in Vietnam. for the Hatfield Historical Museum exhibit that opened in 2017:

MAKING CONNECTIONS: Preserving Soldiers' Humanity in the Korean and Vietnam Wars

5/21/17

In our family and in our factory worker culture, we cut the cord pretty early in life. You had your own rifle at the age of 14, you had a factory job after school at 16, you had your own car at 16, you were entirely responsible for your own finances when you got out of high school – no snowflakes in our town. When I went to college, I only went home when they closed the dorms. I worked two jobs during the summer and I gave my parents money for room and board.

My mother sent letters for a couple months but that stopped when my father got relocated and one of my younger brothers ended up going to jail. I did not enjoy writing and wrote perhaps three letters to my family during the 12 months. My girlfriend at the time was a freshman in college and we were not very close, so we had a few letters going through the motions.

We did not have a chaplain at our base, so the guys who wanted to go to church or synagogue had to travel about an hour to chapel. I was not religious before, during, or after.

I dropped out of college in May 1967 to due lack of funds. Two months later, I lost my draft deferment and received my reclassification to I-A. My draft notice followed two months after that. I enlisted so that I would not have to be in the infantry. I scored pretty high on the military tests and was encouraged to go to Military Intelligence School. The recruiting sergeant told me that intelligence analysts never go to Vietnam. Eight months later I was sitting behind an M-60 machine gun watching the artillery flashes and tracer rounds fill the night sky west of Saigon.

I enlisted in the army to meet my service obligation and not get killed. As a bonus I was given the GI Bill for college.

My military service taught me the ways of the world, good and evil, and I came out a highly motivated individual. I met my wife while in the Army. I went from being a C student to being an A+ student while working three jobs. I took on any challenge and had no fear of failure – that's what happens when you walk around for a year knowing a rocket could fall on your head at any moment.

--Bryan Nicholas