

Two Wars; A common experience

by Ben Goff
News Editor

America celebrated Veterans Day Sunday; a day to remember and acknowledge the sacrifice and service of the men and women of the armed forces. In the 1960's the United States was engaged in a bloody and controversial conflict in Vietnam- four decades later an all too similar conflict presents itself in Iraq. Director of Security and Campus Services Stan Jacobsen served in the US Marine Corps from June of 1963 until Dec. of 67' in Marine Air Traffic Control unit 68, based out of Beaufort, SC, and is a veteran of the Vietnam War. Student Chad Campbell served in the USMC from July of 2002 to July of 06' in Marine Air Traffic Control unit 28 out of Cherry Point, NC, and is a veteran of the present Iraq War.

Jacobsen, as a college graduate, entered the Marine Corps as an officer, while Campbell entered the marines before attending college and served as an enlisted soldier. While the paths that these two veterans have taken and the wars they served in may be different in many ways, their experiences tell a strikingly similar story.

What was your motivation for joining the Marines?

Stan Jacobsen: "I was going to the Eastman School of Music and I realized that I wasn't going to make it as a professional musician. We didn't have a foreign legion like the French where disillusioned people go, so I joined the marines [laugh]."

Chad Campbell: "I wanted to see what it was all about/

I got scammed by the recruiters."

When you joined did you expect to go to war?

SJ: "Yeah, I figured I probably would- Vietnam was on the horizon... I was [originally stationed] in Japan... and I volunteered to go to Vietnam because I wanted to see what it was all about."

CC: "Yeah, I joined right after September 11."

Can you describe your experience in Vietnam/Iraq?

SJ: "It's not like World War II where you can go back behind the lines and take a rest...there were no lines...you're under attack 24-7."

CC: The troops on the ground face what seems like a hopeless situation, where you're told to win the hearts of the Iraqi people and at the same time there could be people around every corner waiting to kill you. You have to shake hands and pass out candy to kids with one hand while keeping the other one on your M-16.

Why do you feel that we are engaged in these wars and are still there?

SJ: "[The American people are] like a herd; we're like a herd of cattle..."

CC: "It's Complacency"
SJ: "Exactly, we're becoming a nation of complacency, where the people in power are able to abuse it."

What kept you going in Vietnam/ Iraq- what was your motivation?

SJ: "I had a job to do..."

CC: "The [marine corps] really does motivate people to do their job."

SJ: "And it creates a lot of pride in people."

CC: "Yes, exactly."

SJ: "Many people are fighting because their friends got killed- it becomes very personal."

CC: "...It gets very personal when you're just walking down the street waiting for someone to shoot at you before you can shoot back" and you're seeing your friends come back dead.

What was your reaction the first time you were in a combat situation?

SJ: "Well, I wasn't infantry, so I wasn't in the thick of it. I know the first time I heard incoming rounds it scared the hell out of me."

CC: "The first time we had incoming everybody got excited- scared, obviously, but we got excited that we might get the chance to respond to something. Of course the other side to that is the complacency that sets in...just going about your business while there's incoming rounds."

Has your experience changed you at all?

SJ: "It made me very anti-war... I'm not against defensive wars. If we were attacked I'd join the marines again today. [But Vietnam wasn't like that] your taking people who are 18, 19- in the prime of their lives, to fight a war for no reason."

CC: "It made me realize what war really is..."

SJ: "There's nothing glorious about war. It's not something that you go into without thinking...It's not something you go into spur-of-the-moment, and it's not something you go into without an exit strategy."

CC: "[Iraq is] not a war- it's a police action."

SJ: "And it's worse than a war because nobody wins."

CC: "Yeah, exactly."

Invading Iraq was easy...getting in was easy. Getting out is not."

What kind of interaction did you have with the indigenous peoples of the countries you were in?

SJ: "I interacted quite a bit with the Vietnamese...in rebuilding, reconstructing villages, building bridges. It was called the 'People Helping People' program...marines would go out and help with things, and there were Vietnamese who worked on the base."

Did you feel isolated or unable to fit in when you returned home?

SJ: "You risk your life for a year then you come back and the citizens treat you with disdain. It was recommended that when we left the base we didn't wear our uniforms because of the hostility the civilians felt for the military

"Fortunately today the public realizes that it's not the military personnel who cause the wars, and that they themselves are the primary victims of hostile actions. Today Americans realize it is the politicians and business interests who are primarily responsible."

What does the Marine Corps and service to your country mean to you?

SJ: "I'm extremely proud to have been in the marines, and I'm proud of the corps and all the men and women who are in it. What I'm not proud of is the motives of the politicians who send the marines and other military forces into battle for less than noble reasons."

"I feel the [Marine Corps] is a great organization, it's got great people... 'The roughest, toughest fighting machine there ever was!'"