

Joe Zacco

Vietnam



When did you enter the military?

“ I went in, in January 1966”

How old were you when you entered?

“I believe I had just turned 19 years old’

How long did you attend?

“3 years”

What boot camp did you go to?

“I went to Great Lakes, up in Milwaukie”

“How long was he boot camp?”

“I believe it was 3 months”

I have a question, what do you do in boot camp?

“I was the navy. We had a lot of physical training or PT. They taught us how to basically.... You didn’t go into any survival tricks or anything like that. It was pretty much learning to live with others; like Sailors on board ships. Believe it or not it had a lot to do with laundry and taking care of things. I referred to it as advanced laundry school. They had drilling and marching. They were like twelve hours days. I was very tired. Everything was rush, rush, rush. We had classes too. The classes were on things like ships, knot tying; things that I had when I was in the boy scouts myself. Most of it was geared toward getting going on a ship. Not everyone was on the ships anyway.”

Did you join the military voluntarily?

“Yes I did. It was actually during the Vietnam War. I was going to be classified 1a so I was going to be drafted into the army. I didn’t really want to go into the army at that time. Therefore, I enlisted in the navy. The deal was as long as I was in the navy before the Army called me up then I would be in the Navy. As it turns out I went in January 1966”

What rank did you achieve when you where in boy scouts?

“That was so long ago. I think it was called Tenderfoot. I didn’t go very far. Are you a tenderfoot?”

Yeah

“It was a great experience though. I learned a lot, it was nice to work with the kids learning survival techniques”

What branch of military where you in?

“U.S. Navy”

What equipment did you use on a daily basis?

“I was in Supply classified as a store keeper. So pretty much we worked with clipboards and calculators, things of that nature.”

Were you in boats or submarines in the navy?

“You will get a kick out of this. I was in the Navy for three years and never got on a boat. I was stationed a year in Glen Cove naval air station in Georgia from there I went to survival school and went to Vietnam. By that time I was already in the service, the navy for two and one half years. I had six months left. I was sure I would get put on a ship. Instead I was stationed naval submarine bound in Bolero California. In the total of three years I never got on the boat.”

What Navy rank did you achieve?

“An E3 support”

Were you wounded while in the military?

“No!”

Where you in any famous battles?

“I spent a year in Vietnam I went to survival school and we had counter insurgency school and from there I was flown from California to Hawaii; from Hawaii to Okinawa, from Okinawa to Da Nang. In Da Nang I worked on the naval support activity. It was on the piers. We off-loaded thousand pound bombs. We supported the army and the marines.”

What was your job?

“My job... we used to work 8 days straight, twelve hours a day. We were in supply so we worked with either the navy equip the Navy, boat mates that were off loading equipment such as jeeps or artillery. When we weren't working with the navy, we were working with Korean teams. The Korean teams were civilians that worked with the navy. I did that for 7 months and then the last five months I was

there I did back loading. Equipment that was going back to the United States such as damaged tanks and jeeps etc”

Did you receive any awards or medals for your service?

“Not really. We received campaign ribbons; The Vietnam Campaign Ribbon, the National Defense Ribbon and things like that. I got about four or five ribbons which was pretty good for three years. There were guys that have been in the service for twenty years that only got two.”

What was a normal day in the military?

“Like I said I was at three different duty stations. In Georgia I was also in the supply capacity. The most difficult part was the boredom of the routine. The twelve months I spent in Vietnam, we were one month days, one month nights. Typically we got up first thing in the morning and start off loading. That would go on for twelve hours.”

What was your most common routine in the war?

“In Vietnam, Da Nang, it was considered hostile. We actually got extra pay for that. While I was there it was like working a regular job. We worked for 12 hours straight. There was no additional duty. When you go to a duty station you work regular hours and then every so many days or weekends you get additional duty. But when you were in the zone where we were which considered was a war zone, you just worked continuously and then get a day off after twelve. When we were off we slept and if you had a day off you went over to the de young or a n enlisted men’s club and hear music eat relax and kick back with the guys. A big part was letter writing; today everyone has texts on their cell phones. We didn’t have that capability. I was able to call home once and it was a satellite hookup. It was called a Mars phone call. You had to put your name down and you got a certain amount of time to talk to your family back home. It was almost like a radio transmission. When I finally got a hold of my mother or father, when I was finished talking I had to say over and then they would speak. It wasn’t like a regular conversation.”

Who did you write to?

“I wrote to my parent and to my girl friend. Back then, it was one of the most exciting things to get a letter from your family or your girl. It was a big deal and you would wait for letters to come in. we used to get care packages. We used to get packages from home with cookies and all kinds of things.”

What type of fire arms did you use?

“When we went to basic we fired M16’s, machine guns. And 30 mm or 50 mm machine gusn. I was not infantry but we did have weapons training before we went over in survival school. Any time you were stationed on land in a war zone you had to go to survival school. Some of us had m 16’s others didn’t. We were in what was considered a relatively safe area. However, we were subject to mortar attack.”

Did you use any heavy artillery?

“No”

While at war what helped you pass the time?

Reading, music, writing letters that was pretty much it.”

Since got home from the war, how did your perspectives of things change?

“My perspective? It was interesting. When I was in the service my hair was always short. In the period of time I was in 66, 67 68 there was a big hippy movement in the country. You guys must have read some things about it; long hair was a big deal. So when I got out of the service, my old company was required to give me my job back which they did. So after I got acclimated, I started letting my hair grow.

People were pretty decent there were some people who were opposed to it; but most of the people I knew my friends and relatives were very supported.”

I see you brought some pictures can you tell us about them?

“This was taken in Da Nang in probably 1967 and this was taken in China Beach. There was what we used to call in country R&R. I don’t know if you guys, there was a TV series out China Beach. It was an area where you can go, there was a beach there if you got a day off you could swim or drink with your friends. It was supposed to give you... r and r was rest and relaxation. I was very fortunate to have two out of country R%R’s. I went to Hong Kong for five days and Taiwan for five days.”

Is there anything we missed or that you wanted to add?

“You basically covered it. One thing I would like to mention is the guys I was with for a year we were very close. We were fortunate to not be out in the bush, all the guys returned except for one guy. He got killed two weeks before we came home. Under most circumstances we were a support group, supporting infantry and marines. Our job was to make sure they had food clothes that kind of thing. We were subjected to mortar attacks.”

Are you still in contact with them?

“There are a couple of guys I am still in contact with. One guy was from Clifton, and another fella is out in California. I have not seen him in thirty five years. Because of the internet and face book, somehow he found me and got my number so we are trying to get together”