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Period 5

Sergeant Donald Neudecker

Army; Military Police

2 1/2 Years of Service

Interviewed in 2016



Sergeant Donald Neudecker was born in 1948 in Southgate, California and raised in Buena Park along with Huntington Beach. Neudecker was the son of a military man and grew up being aware of the chaos that is war. Growing up, Mr. Neudecker wasn't the model of self discipline and responsibility that one may meet today. "I was a bad kid, man. I almost never went to class. I lived in Huntington Beach, you know? So I was usually out surfing instead of going to class or I hung out at the Student Union Center. I was a straight D student." Donald Neudecker did have aspirations, however. When he was a child, Mr. Neudecker always had an interest in becoming a police officer. Which highly influenced his MOS, or Military Occupation Speciality, in the Army. Not only that, Donald Neudecker was influenced by the 'nitty gritty' war movies with John Wayne that he fancied so much. "I always watched those war movies. The John Wayne, action- crazy stuff." Mr. Neudecker's grades, interest in police work, and fascination with action movies all resulted in his enlistment. Mr. Neudecker figured he would be drafted anyways as his grades were not top notch and since he already had an interest in combat, he

decided to enlist and train to be Military Police. Ironically enough, Mr. Neudecker began to realize he didn't enjoy the limitations that came with being in the Army. "I had people telling me when to get up, when to get dressed, when to eat, sleep, exercise. I didn't appreciate that. I didn't like authority." Regardless, Mr. Neudecker remained dedicated to completing his duties.

One particular experience Mr. Neudecker recalls is the 'gas drill' he endured in training. "Cadets had to wear their gas mask and open it, just a crack, in order to be able to identify the gas that was filling the room. Chlorine gas is deadly, so you better identify it fast so you can put your mask back on. I remember one cadet in particular who didn't follow the order. So when he gave the wrong answer, his gas mask got ripped off. He got the hell out of there so the gas wouldn't kill him." Another punishment Mr. Neudecker recalled was the "6x6x6," in which one had to dig a hole that is six feet wide, six feet deep and six feet long underneath the barracks and then proceed to refill the hole-all in one night. "One cadet, this dude always screwed up, ended up having to do the '6x6x6.' We hadn't thought it was a real punishment until one night, when he had messed up again, our D.I. (Drill Instructor) led us out of the barracks. He told the guy to dig a hole, six feet wide, six feet long, and six feet deep. Our D.I. told him not to leave from beneath the barracks until he was done, and that he would be measuring the ditch. The next morning, our D.I. threw several cigarette butts into the ditch and told the cadet to refill the hole. Our D.I. said, 'If you fu** up again, you're going to dig up this hole and bring me back every single butt. I'll count them.'" Although Mr. Neudecker may not have enjoyed obeying authority, his hard work in training still paid off as he was rewarded with an expert badge for being a master with the pistol.

Prior to being sent to Vietnam in 1967, Mr. Neudecker was sent to varying bases across the United States. Mr. Neudecker had worked on bases in California, on Fort Gordon in Georgia, and on the Van Nuys Missile Base. While on the Van Nuys Missile base, Mr. Neudecker's job was to protect the eight missiles the base had and be prepared to fire if any unrecognized aircraft flew overhead. As these missiles were nuclear tipped, it was vital that they be guarded more so than usual. The base was oddly located across Victory Blvd from civilian housing. Therefore, Mr. Neudecker was to patrol the main gate, limited gate, and the exclusion gate which held the missiles. In case of any mishaps, Mr. Neudecker was also trained to disarm the missiles. "I don't see why I was trained to disarm the missiles. There was a 'two man rule' that you had to follow to get into the silos. If you went into the silos, you had to take a soldier, whose main duty was working with the missiles, with you. I never understood why I had to learn if I was already going to be with a guy whose job was to disarm the missiles!" If Mr. Neudecker was not patrolling the base, his duties took on those of a standard police officer. Meaning that he patrolled the streets, directed traffic if necessary, and settled any disputes. Following his duties at the multiple bases, Mr. Neudecker was eventually sent to Saigon, Vietnam.

Saigon, as one may expect, was not a comfortable location to be stationed in. "It was humid, hot, there were mosquitos everywhere and I had to be constantly aware of my surroundings as weapons were always being set off. But the C-rations weren't that bad. We could get cigarettes, toilet paper, biscuits, canned grub, and plastic spoons or forks." In Saigon, Sergeant Neudecker was still to patrol and keep watch, however, in Vietnam his focus was on guarding the B.O.Q. (the Bachelor's Office Quarters), the B.E.Q. (Bachelor's Enlisted Quarters.), and the American Embassy. In addition to his patrols, Sgt. Neudecker was also a

customs inspector during this time, checking luggage and patrolling the civilian airport in watch of possible offenders.

Sgt. Neudecker became truly entangled in the war on January 30th, 1968. The date of the Tet Offensive. The ratio of battalions was eight to one. Eight being the Vietnamese and one being the American side. The Vietnamese had blown a hole into the American Embassy. "Only two MPs were qualified to man the M79 grenade launchers. Another set of MPs were able to take out the Vietcong commanders but they were killed after that. The Vietcong had to retreat and regroup because they just lost their leaders. The plans died when their commanders died. The Vietnamese still had machine guns, claymore mines, RPG's, assault rifles, and AK 47's, though. We had M16 rifles, .45 caliber pistols, jeeps with M60 machine guns, and only two M79 grenade launchers available in the whole city." While the Vietnamese may have lost their commanders, they still maintained the bigger supply of weaponry. "Then the Vietcong started infiltrating the B.O.Q. and the B.E.Q. There was an alley that led to the quarters, where the Vietnamese could hide out and fire. A two and a half ton truck filled with MP's went into the alley to hold off the Vietcong, but because there were abandoned buildings and walls to hide behind, the MPs didn't see where to shoot at or where the shots were coming from. We didn't know, during the attack, whether or not our troops were dead or alive, we just had to assume they were dead. And they were." With rifles in hand, Sgt. Neudecker recalls bracing himself for battle, and bravely fighting through the heartache of knowing fellow soldiers had been killed. In the end, the American forces won and were able to reclaim the American Embassy and Saigon.

After Neudecker was discharged, he married his girlfriend, whom he had met when he was on leave in the Philippines. Neudecker had to wait until he was discharged in 1969 and

officially classified as a civilian in order to marry his wife. Following Sgt. Neudecker's transition from soldier to civilian, Sgt. Neudecker's wife had to go through the process of getting a visa. They honeymooned in Tokyo after Mrs. Neudecker received her visa. Following their honeymoon, they moved to the United States where they would have a son. Mr. Neudecker received a loan from the Veterans Administration to help him buy a house. The G.I. bill would also help him later on as he readjusted to the civilian lifestyle. This transition would prove to be difficult as American citizens mistreated him, and other veterans as they returned home from war. "It wasn't a warm welcome home. We got curses thrown at us, our faces were spit on, people hated us. I guess a movement against war had started while we were away. People didn't see it as us just doing our jobs. They didn't see us as fighting for our country. We were just murderers and baby killers to them. Though the Vietnamese were murdering us too." Mr. Neudecker worked as a mailman following his return to the United States. Now Neudecker resides in Moreno Valley and his son, now forty-five years old, is married and lives not too far away.

Sergeant Donald Neudecker is a man of courage and valor. Perhaps he doesn't view himself as a hero but I know that myself along with the King High Remembers committee, view his service as something truly special and important to remember. We thank Donald Neudecker for being an American hero, and for his bravery when our nation was in a time of grand devastation.