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Patrick Kelly
Army
1969-1971
2016

Patrick Kelly

Patrick Kelly is one of the many United States Veterans that fought for America in the Vietnam war. He served from 1969 through 1971 and faced many life changing experiences; from finding out the terrifying news of being drafted, to seeing brothers die, to having Thanksgiving in a can, to finding out he was going home. On behalf of King High School would like to say, Welcome Home, Mr. Kelly.

In 1948, Patrick Kelly was born at March Air Force Base in Riverside, California, where the military life was normal. His father was in the Army and participated in World War Two. Kelly states, “My father missed D-day by the skin of his teeth. He jumped out of a plane and landed two miles away in a tree with a branch in his back, but he would always say ‘That was the luckiest day of my life.’”

Mr. Kelly lived in many different areas due to his father's involvement in the military. Places such as: Germany, England, Okinawa, Taiwan, and the Philippines as well as the United States. In 1966, Kelly graduated from Ramona High School and began attending Riverside City College. Unfortunately, he dropped out due to a motorcycle accident and a surgery in 1967. "I dropped out of school after my motorcycle accident and surgeries in 1967. After another surgery in November 1968, I was drafted into the U.S Army in February 1969". He was 20 years old.

When he was drafted, he was not given a choice of which branch of service he was drafted into. He was sent to Fort Ord in California for Basic Training, which he said was easier for him than others. Because his father had been in service, he knew the reality of training and what was or wasn't true, causing him to be separated from the others. Later, he was sent to Fort Sill, Oklahoma for Artillery Training.

On July 12th, 1969, he was sent to Vietnam and was assigned to the 5th Infantry Division 4th Artillery near the "Demilitarized Zone" in Quang Tri (Camp Red Devil). He drove a 5 ton Ammunition truck and his Unit carried approximately 250,000 thousand rounds for the 5th Infantry, 3rd Marines, the 101st Airborne Division, and other Army Units.

Kelly described his unit and anyone else in the military, as being brothers. He said, "When you are all alone at war, the guy next to you was really the only family you have. You kind of accept death as your reality." Mr. Kelly said that he made some of his best friends during the war. "What was most memorable about my friends were their different personalities and the different things that they carried around with them, like one of them had a heavy accent and always carried around picture of his wife".

Kelly told us that contact with family was usually slow. Letters sent home could have taken weeks, but they had free postage if they wrote "Vietnam" where the stamp would have been. They were allowed two phone calls, but their family had to know when to answer for them. For entertainment, he said that they had cassette tapes, television when someone had one, and the occasional movie, but the bulb in their projector burned out and they didn't have movies (even though they weren't great to begin with) for eight months.

He told us that there were four stages of being in Vietnam. "The first was the thought that you wouldn't last the first day, then after a while, you were okay. After a few months, you got this Superman feeling; 'They haven't got me yet!' but at the end there was still fear that you wouldn't make it home." When we asked him about his favorite memory, he responded easily: "The day I got out."

At 12:02 A.M. on July 10, 1970, Kelly was sent home to the states. Many Americans were so angry about the war that they took it out on anyone in a uniform so, "the first chance I got, I bought civilian clothes." Later, he told us that he took his uniform, put it all in a duffel bag, and dumped it somewhere where nobody would find it; He did not tell anyone for six years. For four years he was on the Army's reserve. When he returned to Riverside, he was rehired at a grocery store while he continued college. Eventually, he worked for Riverside County as a Police officer and retired in 2006.

These days, Kelly enjoys tracing his family tree and helps out at the Riverside National Cemetery. He is pro Military and believes his experience has helped shape him and help him connect with others. He will soon go to his 50th High School Reunion and meet up with other Vietnam Vets from his Division.