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Period 6

Manuel (Manny) Duran
United States Navy
1957-1975
2018



Manuel (Manny) Duran

Manuel Duran was born in Los Angeles in 1941, along with his 8 other siblings. Duran loved his parents and his siblings, and would often go to Disneyland when there came a chance. By the age of 17, Mr. Duran attended high school, in which he and his friends called “the rock” because of its closed off halls campus, and its gray building. Manny felt a very strong appreciation and pride for his freedom, so he had decided to become one of the many heroes who have fought for our country's freedom.

After saying goodbye to his family, he was on his way to bootcamp. Manny was only allowed to bring a few pairs of clothing, a toothbrush, hair comb, and a few family memorabilia. They picked him and the other brave soldiers in Covina, California and drove to San Diego where the intense training began. Duran recalls when everyone was instructed to get all of their hair shaved off. After, the instructors helped put uniforms on the young men, but never had time to see if it properly fit them; they would secretly trade garments that would fit each other. Training started at four in the morning every day. They would insult and yell at the young men, and would “tear you down to build you up again.” There at bootcamp, Manny was taught how to shoot different weapons at a shooting range and how to work with different positions. Manny says that no matter what happens, “you don't speak out unless you are given permission.” They had multiple tasks they had to do such as: Making their beds, washing their clothes, putting on

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their uniform properly, remembering commands, and much more. Manny would even join marching competitions with his friends, and had won first place many times. Mr. Duran felt very discouraged at first because the instructors told him he could never be a part of the navy, but each day, that only motivated him even more. And soon enough, Manny was officially enlisted into the navy. At the end of his training, he went to his chief excited saying, "Cheif I made it! I made it!"

Manny became a First Class Gunner's Mate (A person who works with weapons) and was aboard onto the DD 217-BUCK. He and his other shipmates called is "The Tin Can." Mr. Duran unfortunately lost many friends. He says he would never forget the time when he had to witness his friend, Leroy James, get shot and killed in front of him. Manny says, "if you are told to do something, then you'd better do it. You'll never know if you're going to end up getting shot and killed." Mr. Duran even remembered, during a Vietnamese invasion, that the Vietnamese soldiers had lined up innocent and defenceless women and children, and shot at the boat and it's shipmates. They used this terrified "*body wall*" for defence and protection. Fortunately, he never got hurt, not even a scratch! He was very sad at this time, and fell into drugs and alcohol to keep the stress and anxiety down to a minimum. He kept a necklace of a cross and a bible verse as a lucky charm from his grandmother. After the hard times passed, Manny would often pull pranks and joke around with his shipmates to bring a little joy and occupation back on the ship when they weren't working. He and his friends would take tools and belongings and hide it around the ship. He and his other shipmates would play around with the ship's signals in hope not to get caught. They would also go to Vietnamese bars and strip-clubs for entertainment. Manny remembers when they would have time off of the boat, they would through potatoes across the

beach to see which monkey would run the fastest. Even though he had lost many of his friends, he still will always remember the bond he had with his shipmates.

During his time in the navy, Manny was only able to see his family about five times. When he was able to visit, they would go to Disneyland, play games and sports, or stayed home to answer questions all of his family members were curious about. When he was back on duty, he would write letters to his family. Before sending it out, commanders would have to proof read it just in case secret information was being sent out. Manny says it bothered him because it felt as if he had lost a sense of privacy, but what was most important to him was he was still alive and able to communicate to his family members. He said he would often write to his Godmother- he was very close to her.

When Manny was officially done with the Navy, he went from Vietnam all the way back to Los Angeles to surprise his friends and family. Instead of a huge celebration and parade for these heroic soldiers, they were welcomed with stuff being thrown at them, threats, and horrific name calling, for example, "baby killers." Mr. Duran was very confused at why people were treating him and his friends like this, in fact, he felt a little ashamed on the inside. There were instances where people would pour drinks over his head when sitting on the bus, or throw garbage when he was walking along the street. After the war, Manny was diagnosed with PTSD (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder) because of all of the things he had to endure and witness. From the years of 1955 to 1975, the Vietnam war took over 58,000 American lives, and fortunately Manny wasn't part of this statistic. Mr. Duran was married three times. He didn't tell his first two wives he served in the military; he was afraid he would be judged. By the time he married his third wife, he decided to tell his wife he was in the navy. He felt ashamed at this time because of

the negative feedback America protruded. However, she was very proud of him, and understood because her previous spouse was in war at that time too.

Manny wears several badges on his jacket that represent his service such as: POW*MIA (Prisoners of War, Military in Action), US Navy patch, USA (United States Air Force), B1B: Air Force, and Vietnam Veteran 1959-1975. He said someone he would never forget was his drill instructor because he was 5'6 and tough as a brick.

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