

Josh Sehnert and Duwan Franklin  
Period 2

Richard Garza  
U.S Infantry  
Served 1968-1975  
Interviewed March 16th, 2018

Richard Garza

America started to support South Vietnam after Vietnam split into two separate nations. Mainly so in 1964, due to the Gulf of Tonkin incident. North Vietnam torpedo ships had aggressively approached a U.S destroyer and a conflict ensued. This event encouraged America to start going against the North on a new level. The North and South had differing viewpoints on how to run the country. The North was leaning towards communism while the South leaned towards democracy. America supported South Vietnam and eventually went to war against the North. The United States of America wanted to help democracy prevail in the South and contain the communism that existed in the North. There were 648,500 soldiers drafted in the United States and Richard Garza was one among them.

Prior to the war Richard Garza was an athlete. Throughout schooling he ran track. He was fast and even for college. This came to help Garza later in life more than he would know. Garza got eloped to a woman during college behind his mother's back. She wasn't happy with him, but he was happy with his wife. Five months after he got married, he was drafted for the Vietnam War in 1968. Not wanting to go to war. All Garza wanted was to spend time with his wife and build a family. After being forced to join the army, he bought a camera. He would later use this camera to capture many memories and tell many stories.

Garza was drafted into the U.S Army, 31st infantry regiment, 9th division in August of 1968. Garza excelled in his training and was awarded the prestigious expert rifle medal along

with many other medals. He would often take point in his squad and was very exposed to conflict. The first time being exposed to conflict Garza spotted three Viet Cong and opened fire, being the only one to down a VC(Viet Cong). His squad gave the downed VC one last cigarette before he passed away, an act of kindness in a time of hate. Another time he was taking point for his squad when he noticed the barrel of an AK-47 poking out of a bush. Garza was fast from running track and far ahead of the others in his squad. Eventually a man popped out of the bush. Garza decided that was about time to open fire, hitting the VC in the bush three times. Then received returning fire from what sounded like eight VC's. He decided his trusted M16 wouldn't be enough and reached for one of the two grenades he always made sure to carry. After diving for cover, he tried to throw one of his grenades, however it landed fairly close, so he braced for the explosion. Recovered quickly, and prepared for his second grenade throw. It hit a banana branch and landed even closer to him. He braced yet again, and the VC's that remained were scared off by the sporadic explosions. His squad thought he'd stepped on a booby trap, twice. Garza grew to be glad to of been apart of the military. He even said "If I was younger, I would join the military today."

Garza returned home after the war had ended. He grew from his time in Vietnam and had captured many memories through his camera. In most of the photos, he made sure to smile so he wouldn't worry his mom. He said that would be the last thing he wanted. Sadly, he returned to an unwelcoming nation that he said would cast out Vietnam veterans and ignore them as members of society. He was happy he arrived back home at night so he didn't get the treatment some of the others did. He actually wanted to surprise his wife upon his return, but no one was willing to give a Vietnam veteran a ride home. Garza did however return to his family and the love of his

life, his wife. They were only able to spend about five months together as a married couple before Garza was drafted. They had lost time to make up for and eventually started their own family. Found a job as a UPS driver and was content. Garza carried around an anger after the Vietnam war that he explained as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. There wasn't the support for soldiers we have today, so he had to power through everyday life. Hadn't caught his break there, he was diagnosed with throat cancer. Yet again, Garza pushed through his obstacles and survived the cancer. His service led him to respect the military.

Richard Garza may have been dragged into the war, but he left with a love for the military. If he was younger he would join the military again. Garza now enjoys the retired life with his wife. He attends veteran get togethers and King High Remembers every year. Sharing the stories behind his many photos. He celebrated his fiftieth anniversary with his wife the day before the interview, March 15th.