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Stephen Girard

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Stephen Girard was born on February 21, 1948 in Glendale, California to a family of 4 sisters. He lived there until he graduated high school in 1966. After he graduated he enrolled in Los Angeles Valley College and wanted to major in history. During this time there was a draft for the Vietnam War Era. When he got the notice for the physical to be drafted his best friend of many years, Warren suggested that they join the Air Force before they were drafted into the Army. Stephen agreed because he knew that being in the Army required a lot of walking and he did not want to do that. To enter into the Air Force they had to take an entrance exam to determine their strong points and their weak points. He passed but his friend Warren did not and he entered into the Army a year later. Stephen wanted to be an Air Force photographer to take pictures of the ground while in flight to be studied.

In May of 1966 he started basic training in San Antonio, Texas for 8 weeks.. He was welcomed into San Antonio with pouring rain and he and his peers stood in the rain for 20 minutes until his DI arrived and showed them to their living quarters. While in basic training it was discovered that he was an expert marksman and his first assignment was as a security policeman on a Navy base in Key West, Florida since he scored expert in shooting. He was expecting to be a photographer so he was not excited about his assignment but grew to enjoy it after about 2 months in.

While there he received on the job training while guarding F-102s and was considered a "psychological deterrent". In August of 1966 he was moved to an Air Force base in Panama City where he guarded F-4s or "phantoms" for a year. In June of 1967 he lost his close friend Warren due to the war. He was not able to attend his funeral because he was on orders. He was then

assigned to a base in Thailand that directly supported the war, there he walked the perimeter which happened to be sprayed with agent orange. Agent Orange was a herbicide that the U.S. military used to kill the jungle around the base that can cause cancer and liver problems. He is currently suffering from prostate cancer due to his direct exposure to Agent Orange. After 10 months on the base he was selected to go to Bangkok and work for SEATO or Southeast Asia Treaty Organization, here he got to work with the Australian army. One of his best experiences he had at South East Asia Treaty Organization was an excursion with the Australians where they got to go to the River Kwai and was able to see the Australian World War II veteran cemetery and pay homage to their fallen.

He was reassigned again to a base in Warner Robins, Georgia where he guarded B-52s that carried nuclear weapons. The B-52s were apart of a formation called the "Christmas tree" which had 3 B-52s and 3KC-135s in a triangle with two of them constantly flying overhead. While on a break he and his roommates went into Alabama ut one of his African American friends refused to go into town because he knew about all the racial tension in the South. While in their service the men were completely isolated from the issues going on in their home country.

During his service racial tensions grew and hate for the war rose. He was honorably discharged on March 3, 1970 and when he got home in his full uniform the first thing he encountered was a woman at the airport calling him a "baby killer". After the war he was given a GI bill and then started his own landscaping company and eventually merged with a construction company which was owned by his future wife. He went on to lead a very full and productive life filled with many children and grandchildren.

Stephen reflects very positively on his time in the service, he says he always had good living conditions and very much enjoyed his service. He believes that his time in the service is the best thing that's ever happened to him. It gave him a place to go when he had relatively no money and made him mature very fast, it gave him a great sense of patriotism. He believes that his services really makes him respect today's military because of their volunteerism to serve.

Stephen is now retired and still married to his wife going on twenty-seven years. Stephen Girard may not feel like a hero but to many Americans he is . We appreciate all that he has done and gone through to serve our country.