

Nicolas Ruddy and Gabriel Nelson
Period 4

Roy Nelson
Army
3 years
2018

Roy Nelson

Roy Nelson was born in Bakersfield, California on June 16th, 1950. In the 10th grade at the age of 16, Roy decided that school was not for him and made the choice to not pursue his education. After working at a car wash for some time he enlisted in the army voluntarily right after he turned 18 and was sent to bootcamp. This is only the beginning of Mr. Nelson's story.

Before becoming a part of the U.S. Army, Mr. Nelson had to complete bootcamp training. According to Mr. Nelson, "Bootcamp was hell." Bootcamp took two months and was located in San Francisco. This is where he was trained using an M16 rifle. Training consisted of A LOT of running for the soon to be soldiers. In bootcamp you really could not do anything. Mr. Nelson and the other trainees were supposed to stay in the camp and not do anything else. You had to do "50 pushups if you were caught talking in the mess hall." Unfortunately Mr. Nelson was one of the people who got caught talking in the mess hall, this was not his only time either. In bootcamp, "you did everything together" and there was absolutely "no questioning." The drill sergeant could rip the sheets off of a perfectly made bed just have that person make it up again. During all this the men, still found a way to play a prank on occasion, shaving cream under the pillow usually worked.

After bootcamp, Mr. Nelson was trained as a mechanic and stationed at Fort Greely in Alaska. This was the testing center for extremely cold weather conditions. The temperature

would get as low as -40 degrees fahrenheit with snow almost up to head height. He spent 10 months in Alaska where he received his GED diploma. After Alaska, he went home for 30 days where he met his girlfriend Terry Rodgers. After being given roller derby tickets, Mr. Nelson took Terry out for their first date. Eventually stationed in Camp Evans, Vietnam. Mr. Nelson was a part of the 101st airborne division of the 158th aviation, this was an infantry battalion, their name was the "The Screaming Eagles." They would support the ground troops and help them by picking them up and dropping them off at hot LZ's (Landing zones). For some time Mr. Nelson was assigned as a door gunner shooting an M50 on a Huey Helicopter, this mounted machine gun would shoot .50-Cal bullets. Mr. Nelson did not work on these helicopters. Instead he worked on Mules, Jeeps, and giant trucks with the nickname Deuce and a Half. Mules were flat vehicles that transport troops and equipment to the helicopters. A Deuce and a Half was almost a cargo carrier, it was a giant truck used to transport anything. Mr. Nelson and the other door gunners were the men that shot back after initial enemy fire. Since it was hard to see in the jungle they used tracer rounds to help the track their shots. Mr. Nelson described him and his fellow soldiers as "sitting ducks" most of the time, which is why they were "trained to always be on the lookout" and be on the offensive. This part of Vietnam has always stuck with Mr. Nelson. So did the experience of having to drop down into a bunker and yell out "INCOMING" after hearing the whistle of a mortar, casualties were inevitable. Not even the basecamps were completely safe. Natives were hired as compound workers and one turned out to be a Viet Cong spy sending coordinates of the helicopters back to his people for mortar attacks. The spy was taken care of as quick as possible. Fortunately this was only a one time event.

As if having a sense of awareness at all times was not hard enough, the living conditions in the basecamps were not fantastic. Mr. Nelson had to make the transition from -40 degree weather to a high of almost 125 degrees. If that was not bad enough, “the humidity was awful.” You would sweat through a shirt instantly, that is why most of the time on basecamp they were shirtless. To top things off they would have monsoons roll in and out. During these rolling rain storms, they would shower with the rain water coming off of the tin roofs of their 20 ft wide, 60 ft long wood housing units. Nature was a big obstacle, including mosquitos. Mr. Nelson and his fellow soldiers had to take malaria pills and use mosquito nets to reduce the risk of getting sick. Hydration played a key role in maintaining health due to the fact that they sweated so much. Since there was no plumbing on the basecamp, compound workers were hired to clean the outhouses and the “extremities” inside. They did this by lighting the 55 gallon container full of “extremities” on fire using diesel gas. To top it all off, Mr. Nelson had to deal with a kidney stone. He was given valium to help pass the kidney and accidently intensified it by drinking beer. By this time the pain had become unbearable and he was given the maximum amount of morphine possible before being flown to the U.S.S. Sanctuary. He had to stay on the ship for two weeks in order to fully recover.

After living in Vietnam you can probably imagine how glad Mr. Nelson was to return home. He may have been happy to be home but some people did not feel the same. When Mr. Nelson landed in Seattle, he was welcomed home by spitting protesters. Acclimating to civilian life was no easy task either. A lot of soldiers had what they called “Shellshock”, which was what PTSD is known as today. They were trained to always have a sense of awareness and Mr. Nelson still has that sense to this very day. Saying “pass the f*cking butter” at dinner was acceptable

with your fellow soldiers, but was considered a little rude when said to family at the dinner table. Since he had gotten his GED in Alaska, it made finding a job a bit easier. He worked for Pacific Telephone for 10 years running wire, installing telephones, and connecting telephones poles after the war. Then he chose to enter the world of real estate which he is currently in today. When he got back from the war he also married his girlfriend who he kept in touch with back in Vietnam. The best memory Mr. Nelson has of the Vietnam war was leaving, and for good reason. He also brought up an excellent point, "What if there was a war, and nobody showed up?"