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Corona

U.S. History - Period 1

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King High Remembers

John Bedford II was raised to be a patriot in every sense of the word. Born 1949 in Ann Arbor, Michigan, to a father who had served in the Battle of the Bulge, patriotism proved to be a core value in his childhood and all throughout his life. Bedford attended the University of Michigan where he earned his degree in biomedical engineering. He moved to California in 1966 and with overseas conflicts going on, his dedication to serve his beloved country led to his voluntary commitment to the United States Army.

When asked about the motivations behind his decision to join the war, he informed us that he believed it was “the right thing to do” at the time. His actions were driven by his unwavering sense of morality, and were focused more towards defending his country and its ideals of democracy. He became involved in the twenty year conflict against Vietnam, where he served in the army in crypto communications. His main purpose was to be the “eyes and ears” of the Tactical Operations Command, TOC for short. He was tasked with informing them of matters such as location of the enemy or where they kept their hidden supplies. With this information the TOC would then establish a mission plan that their forces could abide by. This operation forecast could have given the American army an advantage in what they planned to do.

Communications were not the only thing Mr. Bedford had to deal with. He too got his fair share of combat experience. In May of 1970, he was shipped off to Cambodia on a mission in hopes of weakening and hopefully stopping the flow of artillery to the enemy. We inquired

about his thoughts and emotions regarding the state of violence that surrounded him. His response was straightforward. He posed the analogy of a student, unprepared for class, being called on by the teacher. Upon acknowledging the student's confused state, the instructor would turn to a fellow classmate and ask them the question instead. "Your first reaction is 'whew, I dodged a bullet,' or 'glad, it wasn't me,'" Bedford explained, but the feeling of relief would soon be replaced by anger and pity for the "poor bastard" who fell victim to the fate he managed to avoid. The prospect of injury, or death, was a constant threat that became an inescapable part of Bedford's reality. When he first landed in Cambodia, the air possessed an indescribably foul stench. In Vietnam, he informed us, there are two types of weather you can expect: either hot and dry, or hot and wet. In the monsoon season it would downpour all night, but all evidence of such downpours would be dried up by the heat of the sun when day came around. By daybreak giant mud-pits were the only traces of the nightly down pours.

It was in one of these mud-pits that Bedford and his comrade unfortunately found themselves in. On a mission, they were ordered to be dropped off in enemy territory on top of a field of elephant grass. When he landed, he was up to his hips in mud, concealed by four feet of said elephant grass. It was during this time that Victor Charlie (code for the enemy Vietcong) began shooting through the tall stalks. He could feel the bullets whizzing past his head as he tried to take cover. After withstanding long periods of gunfire, help came in the form of Huey helicopter, and his biggest back up, an AC-47 named Puff the Magic Dragon, two notable gunships during the war, the latter being capable of clearing out an entire football field, and turning any obstacles into "swiss cheese." Once the coast was clear, a medavac chopper was brought to aid the soldiers out of their muddy situation.

When asked if there was ever a time that he felt completely helpless, he told us that as the helicopter pulled them out of the mud-pits, he sincerely thought his death was imminent. As the rescue team dropped ropes to hoist them out, he was consumed by the fear that the blades of the helicopter would swallow him up and slice him to pieces. Lucky for him, helicopters don't work that way. They were taken to "Mary Anne," a nearby fire base filled to the brim with artillery and firepower. "I've never dated a girl named Mary Anne since" he joked, but it was because of this firepower that the young John Bedford II wondered why the United States were not winning this war with ease.

Despite the position he had been forced into, Bedford experienced various other near-death encounters throughout his time in service. For example, there was a time where he was on patrol, still in Cambodia, in area filled with landmines, so he had to watch his step and tread lightly. It all proved futile when someone in his unit stepped on one causing it to explode. Bedford had got wrapped up in the explosion, and metal from the mine had found itself into his leg. When the medics came, they simply pulled the metal pieces out of him, and poured iodine into his wound which he described as one of the worst pains in the world. His troubles did not end here unfortunately, because there was a conflict where they were under heavy enemy fire. Suddenly they were informed that a napalm strike would be hitting their area so they had to retreat. In doing so, he was hit in the hip by an enemy bullet which caused him to land in a rice field. As he was lying there the strike came all around him, and all he could think of at this point was hoping the "bastard would burn."

If given the chance to go back and change the course of events during his time in Vietnam, would he? His answer a resounding "yes," and without hesitation, he expressed his disapproval of Jane Fonda, an American actress who opposed the war efforts, claiming that the

American people had no right to interfere. She even went as far as taking a picture beside a gun used exclusively for shooting down American air units. Her radical protests against the war earned her the privilege of having pictures of her face plastered onto urinals and dart boards throughout American bases. Bedford guaranteed that every Vietnam War veteran in the building absolutely “despised” her. During King High Remembers this theory was put to the test through an impromptu vote, and proven to be true.

War has proven itself to be crucial to the economy of a thriving nation. For this reason, a world without war may seem nearly impossible to some but, according to Bedford, this enticing utopia may not be as far fetched as one may think. Acceptance is key. The oncoming generation and those after must learn to be “open” to one another, Bedford explained. As a society, we have become accustomed to erecting boundaries between ourselves and even Bedford admitted to doing so himself. It took a significant amount of time for him to come to terms with the Vietnamese people that surrounded him but today he bears no ill-will to those of such descent. Out on the battlefield soldiers come face to face with people of all different colors and beliefs, all trying to survive the lethal conflict of war. Bedford was saying how through war, people learn to depend on one another and must have unwavering trust in one another and the racial divisions we impose in our society are unimportant in war. Violence is color blind and at the end of the day, we must all adopt the same mindset. We are all one race, one people, the human race and only through tolerance will we be capable of being at peace with one another. A step towards tolerance is a step towards a world in which people are judged not by the coloring of their skin but of the content of their character.