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Richard DeLaHoya
Army - 101st Airborne Division
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Richard DeLaHoya

The man himself, Richard DeLaHoya was born on October 3rd 1945. He grew up in Riverside, California and to this day he still lives locally in Riverside. He attended Ramona high school and then went to Riverside Community College and that is when he received a letter that he was being drafted into the military.

His unforgettable journey started on July 5th 1967. He was 22 years old and Richard could easily recall the day he left, “there were over 1,000 guys joining the military.” He said that “we all didn’t know what the hell we were getting ourselves into,” and pretty much they were clueless on where the busses were taking them. He landed in El Paso, Texas and that is where he attended boot camp for eight consecutive months. After boot camp, Richard DeLaHoya was stationed in Denver, Colorado and he would become an operating room technician. About 15 days later, from being home in Riverside, got a call saying he was going to Vietnam.

The journey began on a 707 jet plane where him and the others would be boarded and they would eventually be headed off to Vietnam. They landed at the Delta River where he recalls that it was very “hot and humid” and he remembers the bus driver’s words when he said “when you come home that is when you will be in air conditioning again.” He was in the 101st Airborne Division with a total of 16 jumps. He traveled to Saigon in Vietnam and when he was handed his first gun, a M16, he said “how does this thing operate?” Since he had no idea how to use the weapon someone had taught him and he also was told to bring the bare minimum that he needed.

With only basic training, Richard was assigned as the jungle combat medic. He said “a lot of people got hurt and killed” and seeing the hurt in his eyes was heartbreaking. The commanding officer was a mentor to him, he said to stay with him at all times. After three months in Vietnam DeLaHoya was promoted to Sergeant.

Sometime during battle, Richard’s friend Jimmy Salona was wounded severely and while bringing him to safety, Richard himself was shot in both the arm and the leg. He was sent to recovery where he got stronger everyday by continuing to walk. After recovering he went to A Chau Valley which was a trail from North to South Vietnam. The next battle he was involved with was the battle of Hamburger Hill in North Vietnam which took place on May 10th through the 20th in 1969. This battle hit badly when 118 men were sent out and only 14 returned, Richard DeLaHoya as one of those returning men. These men who survived were stranded there for 4-5 days, shaking and scared and they had to cut through the valley to safety. Finally helicopters came in and found the men taking them to safety.

Later Richard was reassigned to a company as a ranger. These rangers were specially trained so he had to be taught for four months. It was around July 25th when it was almost his time to go home. He waited expecting a call but there was no call ordering him to come home. He was headed out and was already a half a mile away from the base came when he got a call from his commander saying a chopper is coming for him in about 10 minutes. Richard had all of his stuff and there was no way he was going to make it there in 10 minutes with two 30 pound mortars, seven days worth of food, nine quarts of water, and his M16. This was a 120 pound pack. His gun was the only thing he took, he dropped everything and started running down the ridge where the company commander was. He got in and remembered “telling the pilot to go over all of the other men and his friends” so he could say good luck to them.

On his arrival to home, he is told he is being promoted. Confused by this because he just got back, Richard goes along with it. He was told the commanding officer wanted to talk to him and that he was leaving tonight to the replacement center. He was promoted to Staff Sergeant.

He had a GI inspection and his tent out of all the others was the only inspection that was passed. He was asked how long he had been at the base and he responded "5 hours sir." Everyone got showed up, clearly Richard was one of the best.

As he was driving through town in a Jeep, he was very nervous. The man driving him around even noticed he had his finger on the trigger of his gun. He stated how "as you look back at it, it was very emotional." To try and celebrate his coming home, he and his friends went to the beach and then there were firecrackers that went off and he said they "scared the crap out of me and I hit the ground." That was only a week after being back home so he still needed time to recover.

Richard DeLaHoya said "you can recover but it's always in your head mentally." He applied for the PTSD but at the time there was nothing that the military could really do for him. He reapplied to see what the benefits were and he ended up talking to a psychiatrist. As he said "it's very emotional, you can't get it out, it's all up here."

After he had returned home he got married and started his life. He also is a retired Captain from the Riverside Fire Department and for the past eleven years he has been apart of the honor guard at the Riverside National Cemetery. His post has adopted a unit and they send things out to the troops and even hold a welcome home lunch for them. With around 1,000 meals, they are able to feed the returning. He did not receive this kind of treatment when he came home so it is important for him to be able to provide this for others because he knows how hard it can be from experience.

Now Richard De La Hoya travels very often especially to see his friends. He goes with one of his friends to Canada every five years to a ski resort. He also enjoys traveling with his wife and loves to go out to the desert with his brother. They go riding at Ocotillo Wells and him and his wife stay at a friends property in Wyoming. They own a luxurious trailer so now he can continue to travel with no cares in the world. Richard DeLaHoya, thank you for your service.