

Jared Graham, Desirae Ledesma

Period 2

Aaron Smith
Air Force
22 Years
2018

Aaron Smith

Following The Korean War, Vietnam was split up into the North and South. The North was controlled by communists, while the South was an unstable democracy. America became involved in the Vietnam War in 1960, with intentions to stop the spread of communism to the South. Aaron Smith served in Vietnam from 1966 to 1967. He spent twenty-two years in the military and moved between several bases. He, along with many others, made contributions to the war, which have gifted the freedoms Americans have today.

Aaron Smith was delivered by his grandmother on January 12, 1933, in Newville, Alabama. Later on, his family moved to Baton Rouge, Louisiana, and he went to high school at Southern University. After high school, he attended Tuskegee University, where he met his future wife who was interning as a nurse at the time. They decided to marry during their senior year. Upon graduation he received his Bachelor's degree and his ROTC commission as a second Lieutenant in the Air Force. So in 1955 Smith joined the Air Force, initially directing his attention towards piloting; but after a dispute with a superior, he switched over to radar control. Lackland Air Force base was where all new Air Force recruits went, and Smith was no exception. After Lackland Air Force Base he trained to be a weapons director at Tyndal Air Force Base. Meanwhile, the situation in Vietnam had continued to escalate which led to America's decision to send over troops.

In 1966 Smith spent four weeks in Washington, where he was preparing to be a military advisor to the Vietnamese. After the four weeks were up, he was sent to his base in Vietnam. When he arrived he never got the chance to actually do what he was sent there for. Even though he wasn't able to teach the Vietnamese, he enjoyed spending time with local orphans when he would leave the base. He had a way of connecting with the youth and became friends with many of them. On duty, his job was to control aircraft in and around Hanoi and North Vietnam. He would communicate with pilots to make sure they got to their location and back safely. His hours could be anytime depending on if there was a mission or not. There were several attacks in and around the base, some of which were from "civilians" who left hidden bombs around a groups of soldiers. They were able to get away with this because it was difficult to tell the difference between friendlies and enemies. While in Vietnam Smith managed to stay in contact with his wife through handwritten letters; and after a year of combat, he returned to the states.

Smith did not realize at first the social climate that America was in because of the war. While on a visit to his see his sister at Berkeley he got into a fight with someone over wearing his uniform. When the police showed up they had to explain to Smith what had been going on in the states. In 1967 he went to Duluth, Minnesota, for a year and then to Japan where he continued his previous work directing aircraft. A few years later Smith was taking a race relations course in America. He ended up getting a job as a race relations instructor which he actually enjoyed. His last three years in the military were spent as an instructor, and he then retired in 1976. After the military, he wasn't sure what to do and went through about six jobs which he didn't feel were good fits for him. He decided to work for himself and became a general contractor. His time as a contractor lasted until his full retirement.

Throughout his life, Smith has remained dedicated to his wife, of whom he has been married for sixty-three years. He is proud of his five children, Darrell, Tonia, Felicia, Michelle and Aileen for going to college and succeeding in life. He still enjoys playing golf and listening to music. Smith was diagnosed with PTSD but he doesn't let that affect his ability to communicate. He goes to three support groups, one of which is a writing group, and he continues to talk with war buddies about once every three months. His contributions to the war have not gone unnoticed, and he, along with others' choices to join the military is the reason this country has maintained the freedoms we enjoy today.