

Joshua Bryde

Dennis Townsend

Marine Corps

1969-1971

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September 11, 1951, future Marine Dennis Townsend was born in Riverside, California at Riverside Community Hospital. Though born in Riverside, Mr. Townsend was raised in Blythe, California. After 11 years of schooling, Mr. Townsend finally decided school was not for him. So, at the age of 17, Mr. Townsend dropped out of high school to pursue his path as a Marine. He chose the Marine Corps because his uncle, also nearly his best friend, had served in that branch.

Mr. Townsend attended Marine Corps Recruit Depot, San Diego, MCRDSD for short, for bootcamp. Mr. Townsend was not sure of his MOS, Military Occupational Status, when attending boot camp, almost like he went in blind. One of Mr. Townsend's most memorable moments was just getting through it and marching across the parade deck one last time, while his family watched close by. Soon after his graduation, Mr. Townsend was on his way to Vietnam.

Before reaching Vietnam, Mr. Townsend said he had spent a week in Okinawa, Japan to drop off uniforms and other unnecessary gear. After that week, he was in Vietnam as a 1345, heavy equipment operator. Mr. Townsend's main job was clearing jungles, building roads, and driving construction vehicles. Clearing jungles means that Mr. Townsend was part of the first people to step foot into new territory. This means all mines, traps, and anything else was a possibility for him to find or stumble upon. One of Mr. Townsend's major operations was

Operation Pipestone Canyon. This operation led him on a 56 day journey of clearing jungle and building roads through the Ho Chi Minh Trail, a direct supply line from North to South Vietnam. During this 56 day operation, Mr. Townsend had no electricity, no bath, no shower, and no place to sleep. The closest he got to bathing was jumping into bomb craters filled with rain water. The only other water source there was their “water buffalo”, a vehicle used to transport large amounts of water to troops. This water was only used for brushing teeth and hydrating.

Although Mr. Townsend found little peace during his time, he found stress relief in drinking. “I never really got into hard drugs. A lot of guys around me were doing it but I didn't really like it. I wouldn't say I was a pothead either, but I did a bit.” Mr. Townsend also attended USO, United Service Organization, shows. These included famous musicians, comedians, and etc. for troops overseas. His favorite memory was attending the Bob Hope USO show, that he helped set up. Mr. Townsend also found joy in listening to radio broadcasts from the Northern Vietnamese. In these broadcasts, he enjoyed listening to their propaganda and how ‘terrible’ the American people were.

Mr. Townsend's unit was highly recognized, but also had very high death rates. His unit had the number one highest death rate of any non-service unit. His unit was also awarded the Navy Commendation Medal for their service in Vietnam. During Mr. Townsend's single year in Vietnam, 125 of members of his unit were killed in action. Two of Mr. Townsend's closest friends in his unit were killed in action, and the other injured so bad he had to be medevaced out.

Dennis Townsend's last night in Vietnam was his scariest. That night, there was a lot of gun fire all through the night. Townsend said that your last night is the one you really want to survive because you go home the next day.

When asked how Mr. Townsend felt after leaving, he said he felt disappointed. He believes he did not finish his job. After leaving Vietnam, he returned to Japan for one more week to pick up all things he had dropped off. Mr. Townsend then was stationed in North Carolina for his final year. He did not like it, polishing shoes and inspections and marching around. Mr. Townsend wanted to go back to Vietnam, where his job was still not done. Mr. Townsend tried to live day by day at the camp, mostly out in the field like in Vietnam.

After returning to California, Mr. Townsend received his GED and then attended college for many different courses for future jobs. Mr. Townsend attended Riverside Community College. In the year 2002, Dennis Townsend was considered a disabled veteran by the VA, putting him out of work.

Mr. Townsend is a strong believer in “Once a Marine, always a Marine.” To this day, he still attends reunions for his unit and also met his platoon commander at once such reunion. However, Mr. Townsend believes he was a different person when he came back compared to when he left for Vietnam. Although Mr. Townsend has changed, he still would go back to Vietnam in a heartbeat if they had asked him.

Mr. Townsend’s final advice for anyone trying to join the military was short, simple, and to the point. He said that you need to pay attention to all training given to you and to never give less than 100% effort. Mr. Townsend then left us with this sentence: “Even if you don't agree with the war, support your troops. They didn't do that for us.”