What Has a Veteran Taught Me

Based on the Census Bureau's report, there are an estimated 15.7 million veterans that make up America. I'm sure, one way or another, most people have some sort of connection to a Veteran. My pappy is one of those 15.7 million people who served in the military. He's taught me resilience, unity, and service to the country.

My pappy was freshly entering adulthood when the Vietnam war started. Imagine hearing about this conflict half a world away, and then later receiving a letter that you were selected to serve in the military. You have to be resilient and find personal reasons to keep pushing, despite being unable to control the situation. When I was interviewing my pappy and asked "What got you through the experience?", he answered, "I met a lot of good, nice people. I recognized they were going through the same experience as me. On some level we were defending America and our way of life." By the time my pappy was drafted, he had already formed strong opinions about the morality of the Vietnam war. He knew staying informed with what was happening at the time was important. However, he realized he had to put his own thoughts aside. He had a responsibility to serve his country for his friends and family.

Throughout times of war, many soldiers find themselves supporting and relating to each other. My pappy taught me unity. When I asked my pappy what he was most proud of, he didn't hesitate to say that it was the friendships he made. "I lost 10 of my friends in the Vietnam war,

one of which was a close friend who served in the national guard with me." When talking about his experiences and the friends that he lost, he became tearful and shared many of the good times he had with them. Years later, he was a support to local Veterans in the community. He visited and talked to them about their experiences. He gained more friendships through this and used it as a way to find people he related to. Wars bring many people together as part of a shared experience.

Despite being drafted into a war he did not agree with, he always complied and served his country to earn multiple honors and awards. My pappy stated as I interviewed him, "When I initially got drafted (1967), I ran. I ended up realizing I needed to serve my country, so I returned to honor my obligations. I never protested against the war and was always respectful when I was in the military." My pappy was designated as a flight risk, so he was not deployed to fight in Vietnam. In 1968, he was activated in response to the race riots that broke out all throughout the nation following Martin Luther King's assassination. He served honorably for 6 years in the National Guard.

To conclude, Veterans have a lot to teach everyone. Speaking to my grandfather about his experience being drafted, opened my eyes about what it would be if I had to support an effort that I was opposed to. He showed me that you need to be resilient, taught me about unity, and how service to our country is important. My pappy was drafted in a war where they used the lottery system. 2.2 million men were drafted for the Vietnam war. Many people believed the process was unfair. Fifty years after the Vietnam war, resilience is still needed all throughout

America today to overcome issues like health or economic problems. Other major events have unified the country, like COVID-19 and 9-11. Service to our country connects us to a cause greater than ourselves. Veterans have shown me how these three American values were just as important in their time in the military, as they are today.