

On patrol in Vietnam: I went on many patrols in Vietnam but this one was different. It brought you and me together at this point in time.

It was just another very hot day in the jungle in Southeast Asia with temperatures well above 100. The date was mid-October 1966, less than a month before I was scheduled to rotate back to the States. I was a 20-year-old 1Lt in the US Army 5th Special Forces Gp (Airborne). My tour of duty was finally coming to an end and it looked like I would survive. While I was proud of my service, I knew a career in the Army was not for me. No way could I return to the horrors of war I saw in Vietnam for a second tour, which is what would have happened had I stayed on active duty. Heavy on my mind was what to do once back home. As a dropout after one semester, going back to college was the only ticket I saw to a better life. The problem was I had no idea what to study. All I knew was that I had to go back to college and work much harder than I had done before.

The patrol's objective was to search and destroy enemy troops passing through an area approximately 75 kilometers north of Saigon and 30 kilometers east of Cambodia, terrain that served as an entry point for North Vietnamese soldiers coming south from Hanoi. I was the officer in charge of a 150-man unit on the final day of a 6-day mission. Day 5 was not a good day. We had seen action that left several of my men killed or wounded. Physically exhausted and emotionally drained, the men and I were anxious to get back to the relative safety of the base camp, a hard 1-day forced march back along a dangerous route with plenty of ambush opportunities. Stress was high! Fortunately, no problems occurred on the trip back.

As we moved out of the thick jungle into a clearing in the early afternoon to begin our journey, I noticed a newspaper floating aimlessly in the elephant grass directly in front of me. That's strange, I thought. Without breaking formation, I reached down to pick up the weather-beaten newspaper. To my astonishment, it was a page of the Wall Street Journal. How, I wondered, did this happen? I had no idea. Must have been from another patrol. Oh well! Without much thought, I stuffed it inside my ammo belt and continued marching.

Once back in camp while unpacking my gear after a much-needed shower to remove the pungent body odor accumulated over several days, I looked more closely at the page. It was stock quotes. What the heck do these numbers mean? Greek to me! After a minute or two of staring dumbfounded at the numbers, it suddenly dawned on me exactly what they meant. I truly believe it was divine intervention. At that very moment, I realized my purpose was to study finance and economics upon my return home to uncover the meanings hiding behind those figures. Hopefully, I thought, studying the mysteries of finance and economics would give my life meaning after the senselessness of war. Yeah, that's what I'll do. I felt invigorated with a new direction. I returned home, enrolled in college, and pursued my dream. I was much more motivated to study this time.

As I remember that day on patrol so many years ago in a far-away land, I realize how important an unexplainable event was in having a huge impact on my life. Not only did it give me the direction I needed at the time, which ultimately brought you and me together,

but it also taught me that education is an alternative to violence for addressing differences between two people or two nations. While education may not completely solve all our problems, I see it as a step in a positive direction because it exposes a person to a way of thinking outside one's self. That process, I believe, increases the possibility of finding solutions to problems not otherwise evident. The difficulties we face today coming from the pandemic, civil unrest, and political differences can all be addressed via education. It would, at a minimum, promote dialogue and just may open some previously closed doors.

When I feel down or confused about life, I recall that hot day in the jungle and all the bloodshed I saw in Vietnam over the 12-months I was there. Relative to those experiences, the day-to-day problems I now face do not seem so big. Over the years, I have not lost sight of the feelings I had in my younger years: violence is not the way to address disagreements. My feeling was and remains strong that education has the potential of being a solution to many problems humanity faces. Everyone has the talent to excel in some profession, whether a truck driver or a rocket scientist. We each have the opportunity to develop that God-given talent to better one's own life as well as the lives of those around us (parents, spouse, children, friends, community). My goal is to use my education to better your life. Perhaps, my efforts will enhance peace in some small way and make this troubled world a little better place to live. REC

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