The Vietnam War is a very interesting topic to me. It was a political war and many people were against it, citizens took sides and veterans laid low. I decided to interview my grandfather, Darrell Basham, to hear about his experiences in the war and why he went to Vietnam.

My grandpa was 19 years old at the time when the US Army started a draft for the Korean War. He told me he was very close to being drafted but he decided to join the US Navy so he could avoid being in the Army, he had heard from his uncle that the Navy had better schooling and education. He came to the conclusion that he would rather be aboard a ship than in a foxhole or underground. After he signed up, he went through training in San Diego where he was taught military drills and marching, learned how to use and clean a weapon, and how to “take care” of themselves, as he told me. He scored well in boot camp so he was sent to electronic repair school for 9 months where he learned how to repair and maintain communication equipment. He ended up being sent to Korea, Turkey, and Japan before getting the orders in 1967 that he was being sent to Vietnam.

When he first got there, they were going to land in Da Nang, but there was a rocket attack going on so they had to circle around before they were cleared to land safely. That was my grandpa’s first experience with Vietnam, he said his first impression was that he was afraid, but the country was beautiful and the people were friendly. His impression change a bit though while he was there. They were sent there to do a job and they had to make sure they did the job well, but it was taking a long time and many of them started to wonder how long it would take and how long they would be there.
My grandpa was the Electronic Repairs Officer for Naval Support. He would be in charge of about 40 technicians at any given time and they all had to work together to repair and maintain equipment. They had to use radios there instead of landlines because the Vietnamese would go around and cut the lines. The situations would change everyday and his team would have to do a lot of repairing equipment along with adding or removing pieces. Some of the people that worked for him were Vietnamese and Korean technicians. They would help with local work because they were more accustomed to the equipment that they used.

My grandma, Sharron, would help organize clothing drives to send clothes to the orphanages in Da Nang where my grandpa was stationed so they could help distribute it all. He got to interact with some of the children and the nuns from the orphanage when the clothes were delivered. I guess my grandma donated some of her sons’ clothes as well because later on, my uncle Mark saw a picture of my grandpa with a Vietnamese boy wearing his shirt!

My grandpa was mostly stationed on Monkey Mountain and a few times he had to order new equipment that they needed because the Army and Marines worked on a different frequency than the Navy so it was more difficult for them to communicate. At another time, he was in a Marine helicopter, flying up the Cua Viet River when the saw tracer bullets coming at them. The pilot dove down, straight towards the river and pulled up before hitting the water, staying low though to be in between the trees so they couldn’t be shot at anymore.

My grandpa earned multiple recognitions throughout his service, some of which being The Bronze Star Medal, The Korean Service Medal, The Vietnam Service Medal, The Navy Achievement Medal, and The Vietnam Gallantry Cross. He described that he
was awarded some of these medals because he was in charge, but what really counts is that he earned these recognitions with his team because they all worked together.

Coming home was a relieving moment for him and many of the soldiers. Once they touched the ground in San Bernardino, they all cheered, for they were back on US soil. Finally, they were home. They got to see their families and loved ones and feel safe once again. My grandpa, along with other Vietnam veterans, didn’t wear their uniforms around though, they wanted to keep a low profile. They knew that there were people against the war and that people took sides. It wasn’t the popular war and people didn’t necessarily welcome them home.

I found this interview very interesting and enjoyable because I learned so much about the Vietnam War and what it was like to be there. Military experiences have always interested me and I like seeking out ways to find out more. Students, like me, hear a lot about how the Vietnam War was hard for the veterans because it was the first time the US had “lost” and they had to follow after the Korean War which was very popular. It was the South Vietnamese and Washington’s policies that had failed, not the US Military, according to some veterans and articles. The Vietnam Veterans were shamed when they returned home, they were called “baby killers” and were disrespected because they were the face of the most unpopular war.

I feel like a major aspect I have learned about and feel very aware of is a one-sided perspective. In the time period of this war, I feel like this was very common. Civilians didn’t understand what the soldiers went through in Vietnam and the soldiers just felt like they were doing their job. I am looking forward to expanding my knowledge further on military history and the Vietnam War in particular and have grown as a student and a civilian to learn more about this topic.