Imagine being 19 years old and receiving a letter saying you had been drafted for the Vietnam War. You do not completely agree with what the United States is fighting for. You have a well-paying job you like and you have a girlfriend who you don’t want to leave. My grandpa Roger was in this situation in January of 1966. He had to put his life on hold in order to go fight for our county. I was blessed with the opportunity to talk with him about his experiences and thoughts on the war. He recalled as much as he could, and I hope I can make him proud and recollect just a few of his memories here.

My grandpa served for two years total during the Vietnam War. He first served in Fort Hood, Texas, from January of 1966 to January of 1967. His original job was in the communications unit. He and the other men in his unit had to scope out an area for any signs of danger for the convoy who would then sit out in the field and wait for the enemy for about three days. While the other men sat in the field, he and the other communications men climbed up in the trees to keep watch. My grandpa noted that he had the “easy job” because once the perimeter was scoped out, he and the others in the trees played cards for hours upon ends. They did not have a lot to worry about while up in the trees.

Six months after being stationed in Fort Hood, my grandpa was assigned a new job. He said he could still picture the meeting area and all of the men filling up the area listening to the sergeant. My grandpa is about six feet two inches tall so he was standing in the back of the group. The sergeant explained they were going to be training 28 new military police officers and he was going to pick the new recruitments right there. He then pointed right at my grandpa. My grandpa said he turned around to see if there was anyone behind him and of course he saw no one, so he said, “But Sergeant, there is no one behind me.” The sergeant responded, “I know.
You will make a great military police officer.” My grandpa could not reject the command, but looking back on the experience, he is grateful he was picked for the job. He also jokingly said he was picked for the job because he was too tall to fit into any of the planes or tanks that were necessary for other jobs. After six months of working as a police officer in Fort Hood, Texas, my grandpa was given the news he was being moved to Vietnam for one year.

Getting to Vietnam was a difficult task for some as they had to take a boat for almost 30 days. My grandpa was lucky because he was able to take a plane in January of 1967 to get to Vietnam. When asked if he remembered anything about the plane ride, all he remembered was that it took 24 hours to get to Vietnam, and the plane was filled with smoke because at the time it was legal to smoke on an airplane. When he finally arrived in Vietnam, he was assigned to be a police officer again. While I was interviewing my grandpa, he hinted he was blessed to be given the job as a police officer and to be stationed in areas where live combat was almost unheard of. He explained some of the perks of being a police officer. One of the main perks was that the officers were given the extra food from each day because they were friends with the cooks. Having leftover steak many nights while in Vietnam was a common occurrence for him. My grandma, who was also present during my interview, said she was pretty sure my grandpa came home heavier than he was when he left for Texas and Vietnam!

The first six months in Vietnam were challenging for my grandpa. He remembered the excessive heat and rain. The temperature was above 100 degrees fahrenheit nearly everyday. The heat made it very difficult to want to move or do anything for that matter. My grandpa became friends with a man named Tom who lives in Seattle, Washington now. He remembered staying up until four in the morning many nights and talking with Tom because it was too hot to sleep.
The rainy season was also a whole new obstacle for my grandpa and the other men in his group. He said it often rained for about an hour each day. The rain was miserable, as it pelted him and his friends and caused flooding everywhere. He recalled setting up tents for the night and waking up in the morning with standing water one foot high in his tent! Not only was everything inside of his tent wet, but all of the field around him had turned into a large mud hole. After the rain stopped, the temperature would go back to being extremely hot. There was a vicious cycle of being hot, then wet, then hot again.

After the first six months in Vietnam, my grandpa was moved to Saigon. In Saigon, there was almost nothing to do. There was no live combat or any enemy activity. My grandpa was grateful to be placed in Saigon because he knew he had a much greater chance of survival there. He was able to keep in contact with his family and my grandma, his girlfriend at the time, while in Saigon. I had heard from other Vietnam veterans that sometimes they couldn’t write home for weeks because of security reasons. When I asked my grandpa if he ever had any restrictions about writing home he smiled and said, “Well, I don’t think so.” I thought this was interesting and noted if there were no restrictions of what he could write, then there really must have been no activity in Saigon. While we were talking about communicating with those back home and the limited activity in Saigon, my grandma mentioned a tape recorder. She said she received a few tape recordings from my grandpa and in one of the recordings she thought she could hear gunfire in the background. My grandpa didn’t believe her because he remembered very few guns being fired in Saigon. He then went on to say the only times he heard gunfire in Saigon was when he and the other men were given permission to shoot at something out in the distance just to make sure their guns worked.
When the time came for my grandpa to return home from Vietnam, he wrote his mother a letter. In the letter he asked her to keep up the Christmas tree for him as he would be returning around Christmastime. On January 15th, 1968, my grandpa safely returned home from Vietnam and his family’s Christmas tree was still up. Unfortunately, there wasn’t a single needle left on the tree, but to my grandpa, the lack of needles on the tree didn’t mean anything. Seeing the Christmas tree was enough to show him that he was home safe and sound.

The entire time I was interviewing my grandpa, I wondered how he felt about the war, so I finally asked him. “What was your biggest takeaway or life lesson from serving in the war?” He had to think a long time about his answer. When he finally came up with an answer, he said, “Just do what you need to do in order to make it home safely.” This answer struck me as bold because it showed how my grandpa felt about the war. For the two years he was serving, he served because he had to. He saw some things many people would never even dream of seeing, but he also made some friends he still talks to today. Tom is one of his closest friends from Vietnam. A few years ago, my grandpa was fortunate enough to speak with Tom and some of the other men he served with. When he was meeting with the men, one of them said he looked at the war as a good thing. This man saw the war as a way for the United States to show their power to the other countries. If the United States had not intervened in the Vietnam War, other countries may have seen the United States as weak and an easy target. When my grandpa heard this man’s perspective, he said his perspective changed a little bit. He no longer saw the war as a complete waste of time, and he was proud for what he had done for his country.

Interviewing my grandpa on his experiences from serving in the Vietnam War was a great experience. My grandpa is a very humble man and does not speak often of his time in the