

# Vietnam Vet Vincent Kucinkas

Vincent Kucinkas has had ancestors in United States since 1846. All of which have been active participants in the United States military. Basically every generation went into the military because as Vincent said, "people have to die to defend a nation."

Before joining the military Vincent was planning on being a history teacher, but his dad looked him in the eye and said, "Are you going to teach history or make it?" This ultimately helped Vincent decide to join the military. When he told his parents his mom would not stop crying, and his father just pat him on the back.

Vincent served in Vietnam from 1968 through 1969. He is a survivor of the TET Offensive and one of the volunteers to go help the marines during this time. His father base was Eagle in Thu Bai, in a jungle between two cities right off the Ashau valley, in the Hue area. The biggest and closest city was Danang. His contingency fought from the Hue area through Ashau valley to Thu Bai, Vietnam. In Weigh it was house to house fighting because of the way that the city was set up. It was harder to fight in the city, from doorway to doorway versus fighting in the jungle. In the jungle there was more freedom, not a lot of physical obstacles like lamp posts, fences, cars and the like. It was also easier to track in the jungle.

After the TET Offensive was under control, Vincent was scheduled to go home in about three weeks. Every tour of duty is twelve months, but he decided not to go home after a horrific experience with his best friend. His best friend got his head shot off while standing right next to Vincent, so Vincent picked up an M-16 gun, took the initiative, and shot the sniper. He then proceeded to eat the snipers heart in order to gain the power of his enemy. In the heat of the battle everyone was Viet Cong, the Cong, or Charlie, which are different terms for the same enemy.

After this situation Vincent volunteered to re-op. He would stay in only if the military would send him to sniper school, which they did. He was made into a Staff Sergeant, an E5. A Staff Sergeant is a specialist rank that flows into an E5. He became a sniper throughout the year of 1969 and had over 200 kills through this time. It was necessary then to prove a kill. In order to do this a person had to have a witness or bring an ear back, which then got them credit for the kill and a case of beer.

The first person that Vincent killed, he had to kill by hand because his M16

was jammed, so it was necessary to use his air-borne knife. Even now he can still feel the warm blood on his arm. At home he was always brought up to respect life and after his first kill he threw up. However, after a while of seeing horrific and inhumane things happen to friends and fellow troops, he then become numb to it. Although it becomes necessary to kill, it is something one can never get over.

Vincent still sees psychiatrists every month and has night mares every night. As a Sergeant Vincent had to write letters to family members saying that children weren't coming home and that they had died as heroes. Technically, officers were supposed to send the letters home to the family but nine out of ten times the authority went to the sergeants. It

was also necessary to have something to send home. According to Vincent, "People need something to bury and in a lot of cases there wasn't much left, so in the end anything goes into a body bag to send home. All mothers weep." Also because of the inability to always find someone's complete body and identify it, there were dog tags. Dog tags served two purposes. The first dog tag was put between

teeth of a dead person so that the military would know who the body belonged to and the other dog tag was sent to head quarters.

After a while in this situation Vincent learned not to make friends. He would help the new grunts, make sure that they could be counted on, but would not get attached. When he got home he was spit on, cursed, called a baby killer, and so in response he ripped the insignias off of his uniform. Even his own family would tell him to get over what had happened, but it is something that can not be gotten over. His father was proud of him and wanted to show him off, but they were scorned when they went into a local pub. It has taken Vincent decades to acknowledge anything of what has happened, but he said that he would do it all over again because he loves his country.

One thing that Vincent would say to the public is that veterans don't want huge parades, or a pat on the back; they want understanding of what they go through because they are changed forever and can never be the same man or woman again do to the trauma. "It is a necessary evil, for freedom." Vincent stated.

Vincent has been in Lake County now for about three years and has been married four times. He currently has seven kids; five sons and two daughters. Out of his five sons two are currently in the military.

