

Vietnam Veterans of America Telling Their Story.

About this time of year, our high schools' history classes have reached WWII and the Cold War, soon to be talking about the Vietnam War. Local chapter 941 of the Vietnam Veterans of America (VVA), for the past five years, has been speaking to high school history classes about experience during the Vietnam War. VVA members are regularly scheduled with Fargo South, Fargo North and West Fargo high schools. Members present personal reflections on the war, their experiences in Vietnam and answer questions about the war. As with most combat Veterans some of the VVA members still have problems with their experiences, "some who checked out have never left". Watching my brothers give their talks told me that it was as much a healing experience as it was their story. Members want classes to understand war and combat. It reminds me of two instances from my past work with Veterans.

While working at MSUM, I was responsible for the GI Bill certifications. One of our Veterans who spent time in 'Nam was married to a friend of mine. He was an art major and used his art to help him control his war memories but it wasn't enough. He never talked about 'Nam. He had a Vietnam memories box stored in their spare bedroom. One day he opened it and started going through the stuff. He told his wife horror stories from his time in 'Nam. He showed her very graphic photos of the deal and dying and told her what he had done. She tried her best to help, but it wasn't enough. He refused counseling and eventually they were divorced. Help is difficult to obtain when you refuse to accept help. Our VA did not provide the care and services our Vietnam Veterans needed and deserved. I believed it had improved until last fall.

A young friend of mine who dated a Gulf War Veteran for four years, told me their story. He had similar combat experience and tried to find help. Here is a quote from her "he went to the psych guy at the VA in Minneapolis and then vowed to never go back (The Dr. there told him he always tries to get in a bad mood to come to work because it helps him relate to the vets better)". With her permission, I've forward the Veteran's story to several places including the VA and politicians. I'm not very hopeful that anything will be done, but we have to keep trying.

Back to the VVA presentations, VVA members will be going to the MN Veterans Home in Fergus Falls and to Eventide at Fairmount in late April to give presentations on the Cold War and Vietnam. Now that I've got you feeling ready to do something, please join us at the American Legion on Sunday April 17 from 11:30 am until 3:00 pm for a roast pork dinner and silent auction fund raiser for the Honor Flight.