

Vietnam Memorial Scholarship Essay

History intrigues me, especially past wars like the Revolutionary War, World War I and II, and especially the Vietnam War. I excel in these topics because I truly understand the significance of our world's battles, hardships, and moments of peace and diplomacy. I believe that learning from history is essential for future generations to appreciate and understand.

What I find particularly ironic is that my grandfather, Henry Rossi, was a Vietnam veteran, yet he never shared his experiences with me despite his first hand connection to one of the most pivotal conflicts in U.S. history. My love for history is entirely self-developed, shaped by books, movies, music, and the news. Of all the wars I have studied, I find the Vietnam War remarkably fascinating, and I often wonder why my grandfather never shared his knowledge with me.

I never truly understood the impact my grandfather had at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial until I visited it myself. I had always heard bits and pieces growing up about how proud he was to be a veteran, and how involved he was in supporting others who served. However, being at the memorial and hearing the stories first hand was something completely different. Every time my mom or I mentioned his name, the faces of the people working there would light up. Each person seemed to have a memory or story about him, and it made me realize just how many lives he touched.

One story that left a lasting impression on me was The Last Patrol. My grandfather, along with other veterans, etched the names of New Jersey residents who were killed in the war at the Vietnam Memorial in Washington, D.C. Then, in an act of pure dedication, they carried all those names in a wooden box from D.C. back to New Jersey. My grandfather, in a wheelchair, made

that entire journey to raise awareness and advocate to build a memorial center in New Jersey to honor the fallen. The strength and determination it took to do something so powerful and symbolic still gives me chills. Knowing that he did that not for himself, but for his fellow soldiers, makes me incredibly proud to be his granddaughter.

Besides learning stories about my grandfather, I was also impressed by the symbolism built into the memorial itself. One part that stood out to me was the wall filled with images of what was happening in the U.S. during major moments of the Vietnam War. There were photos of cultural icons like Elvis performing, and even moments in space and the first man landing on the moon. It was shocking to see how out of touch it felt. While soldiers were experiencing trauma and loss overseas, everyday life in America was continuing as if nothing was happening. People were focused on entertainment and pop culture instead of the war. That hit me hard. It made me feel uneasy because I see similar patterns today. Even though the U.S. is not directly involved in the war in Ukraine, most people my age barely talk about it, and it is hardly shown in the media. Tragic, life-changing events are happening right now, yet stories about celebrities like Taylor Swift still get more attention. It made me reflect on how easy it is to turn away from harsh realities when they do not directly impact our own lives.

Another moment that really affected me while touring the memorial was seeing the dates etched into the 365 stones. The birth years and the dates when these men died were hard to visually see since many soldiers were so young. My grandfather's name could have been there. So many of them were only nineteen or in their early twenties. They were just starting their lives, and yet they were already sacrificing so much for their country. It was heartbreaking to think about how much they never got to experience, such as graduating college, getting married, or starting families. The most painful part was realizing that all these names were just from New

Jersey. That was when it shifted my outlook on how difficult it must have been to live during the sixties and to be drafted to serve in a conflict on a continent so very far from home. It made everything feel realistic in a way that textbooks and documentaries never could. I left that memorial with a heavy heart, but also a deep sense of gratitude and responsibility to remember, to learn, and to never take for granted the sacrifices made by those who came before us.

Visiting the Vietnam Veterans Memorial changed how I understand history. It made it personal. It made it human. I will never forget the stories I heard, the images I saw, and the emotions I felt walking through that space. My grandfather may never have told me about his time in the war, but through that experience, I finally understood him. I understood the pain, the pride, and the purpose behind everything he did. And now, more than ever, I feel a responsibility to carry his story—and the stories of so many others—forward with me. This visit did not just deepen my appreciation for history; it reminded me why remembering it matters.