

Who We Are

Speech by Gary B. Roush

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Since this is the last official function for me as your president, I would like to leave you with some thoughts.

We are the sons and daughters of the greatest generation. Our fathers and uncles and neighbors went off to war to fight the evil empires in World War II. Our mothers and aunts took their places in factories and kept the home fires burning while their men were off to war for two to five years at a time. It was shortly after the great depression. It was a time of rationing and shortages and great hardships for all. Many men did not return. Casualties were enormous and all families were affected directly or indirectly. But it was a time of unwavering patriotism.

We grew up in the aftermath of these life changing events. We were told of the sacrifice and heroics and honor of our elders. We were taught to be proud of our soldiers and our country. We learned that Communism like Nazism was the source of all evil. We dreamed of the day that we too could proudly serve our country and fight Communism like our fathers fought before us. So we all volunteered to fight in our war, the war in Vietnam.

Our war was the helicopter war and we were its pilots. We were the taxi drivers and the delivery men and the gun support. We carried the infantry into battle and we brought them out. We were their lifeline, their supply line, and their ambulance. Joe Galloway claims we were God's own lunatics. We were young and we were crazy and we came of age with rotor blades above us and bullets flying all around us. We were part of a generation of soldiers General Hal Moore claims to be every bit as brave and noble as those who stormed the beaches of Normandy. He thinks we were as great as the greatest generation.

As Vietnam helicopter pilots, we accumulated more true combat flight time than any other combat pilots before or since. Our main helicopter was the icon of the Vietnam War, the UH-1 Huey. Like us, the Huey, along with the Huey Cobra have more combat flight time than any other aircraft in the history of warfare. We paid the price for this unprecedented exposure. 14% of KIAs in Vietnam were officers and 28% of those officers were helicopter pilots. We will not forget our fallen.

The greatest generation, our parents generation, is credited with creating great wealth and prosperity in our country. We were credited by some with trying to destroy it.

World War II was the good war fought against evil. To many of our generation, our war was the immoral war filled with atrocities, hopelessness and victims. We were mis-portrayed as the biggest victims of all. We were not - and are not victims.

War is a messy business. Approximately 300 American soldiers were executed during and after World War II for crimes and atrocities while none were executed from the Vietnam War. Yet the vast majority of World War II veterans upon their return were rightly received as heroes, while all of us were unfairly vilified for unspeakable atrocities. The news media was heavily censored during the great war while we had television and totally uncontrolled and uncensored reporting. Unfortunately, too much of the media had - and has exercised a bias that greatly distorted what we did and how we did it.

Out of the 2,583 listed as missing in action in Vietnam, all but 55 have been accounted for. By contrast, there are still 78,000 unaccounted-for Americans from World War II. The accounting of our missing is unprecedented in warfare. This is in large part due to our helicopters and those of us who flew them into hot LZs and the teeth of enemy fire, to take out the wounded and dead who in earlier times would have been left on the battlefield.

There are many myths out there about us. Even today there is the perception that Vietnam veterans are homeless, drunken addicts, who have a high rate of suicide and incarceration. These are just not true.

The truth is that our service was basically no different than our fathers' service. We served our country just as honorably as they did. We have proven all of the Vietnam War critics wrong. Not only were they wrong about the morality of the Vietnam War, they were also wrong about us. Unlike our fathers, we came home from war to ridicule and scorn with no support network. Our fathers had welcome home parades and organizations like the VFW and the American Legion. We had no parades and although we qualified to belong to those organizations we were not initially welcomed. The ideals and respect we had for the greatest generation did not apply to us. Our treatment was unfair, unwarranted and unprecedented.

So what did we do? We got on with our lives. We became very productive members of society. We are more successful than our non-military peer group and we advanced America to even higher prosperity and greatness. Our parents had the wind at their backs after World War II which made it easier to prosper. We had to overcome unfair and unjustified stereotypes to succeed, but we did and we proved that we are as great as the greatest generation.

Our war was a major battle in the Cold War and it became its turning point. Up until the Vietnam War, more countries in the world were switching to Communism. That reversed

during the Vietnam War and more countries started moving toward democracy and finally the collapse of the Soviet Union. **So we helped win the cold war.**

The domino theory was correct. Our involvement in Vietnam provided time for countries like the Philippines, Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore and Thailand to stay free of Communism. Without the Vietnam War, that whole region would have been lost.

Finally, we did not lose the war in Vietnam. All of us can honestly say, “We were winning when I left!” because it is true. Our war was over in early 1973 following the peace settlement signed in Paris in January ‘73 and the final withdrawal of combat troops in March ‘73. The fall of Saigon happened two years later in April ‘75 because the U.S. Congress cut off funding to the South Vietnamese causing them to run out of fuel and ammunition.

We are rightly proud of our service and deserve the honor and respect that was bestowed on generations of warriors before us. Not only did we serve our country honorably, but we also have taught our children to honor and respect national service. Many of us have children who have served or are serving in our armed forces today.

It has been my honor to be your president over the past year. I am proud to know you and I am proud to have served with you. **You have achieved as much if not more than the greatest generation.** Thank you for your service to our great country and God bless the United States of America.

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