

A Different Point of View--- A Viet Nam Veteran Speaks Out

Mike Frangadakis

Santa Clara County Veterans Affairs Commissioner

November 11, 2017

Since I returned from Vietnam in 1969, I have been hearing from my fellow Americans about how we shouldn't have been involved in that horrible war, and why did 58,318 Americans have to perish? I served in that conflict from October 1968 to October 1969. Even though I was attached to the 101st Airborne as a medic technician at a god-forsaken location near the DMZ, I did not see what the American Public was watching every night on their local TV news stations. I did not see burning villages, or the killing of Vietnamese Civilians, or atrocities of war that did happen on rare occasions. It made me realize that maybe the Russians might have influenced our media, even in the '60's.

Recently, Ken Burns, known as America's Story Teller, produced a documentary shown on PBS stations around the country which portrayed more of the same. I attended the preview screening, about six months before the release of the Vietnam series. I asked the producer "if the nation building aspect of the war would be disclosed. Her answer was yes." I was totally disappointed after watching the premier.

Less than 20 percent of all the military that served in Vietnam were in combat. I was in the 44th Medical Brigade dedicated to provide all military and civilian medical support, as needed. It was very rewarding duty and opened my eyes at that time on how other people live. As a young 21 year-old Californian, just out of tech college, it made me proud to be from this wonderful country where we are protected by the constitution and educated people who for the most part respect one another.

My unit was mobile, which means we would go wherever our troops needed medical and dental support. After treating our troops using doctors, dentists and tech's, like me, we would proceed to Vietnamese remote villages to help civilians with their medical and dental issues. We had security forces to protect us since the enemy hated what we did and would have executed us on the spot.

We were winning the hearts and minds of the villagers with food and medicine. Interpreters would let the people know we were there to support and assist them for a better way of life. Every single Vietnamese person I came in contact with wanted what we had to offer in the states. They called our team MEDCAP, Missions-Medical Civil Action Patrol.

I also saw nation building first hand and have the pictures to prove it. We built roads, hospitals, schools, orphanages and infrastructure in a country begging to be free of communism. I witnessed how horrible the communists were to their own people. It made me proud to be in the military and protect and serve those innocent helpless civilians. We won every major battle including 3 major offenses the communists launched. *No engagement with the enemy was reported as victory back home*, only how many people were killed or wounded. I agree that every casualty is horrible. As a military litter carrier and ambulance driver I witnessed young men in peril. My point is that by turning the American public against the military objective, the one sided news media prolonged the carnage on both sides.

Ho Chi Minh, the enemy's leader was ready to have peace talks after our huge victory over the North Vietnamese, during the Tet Offensive, in 1968. When he heard about the rioting going on in the US because of horrible one-sided news coverage depicting terrible casualties, Ho Chi Minh realized the US would cave in if he prolonged the war. He rightly surmised that we would pull out and act defeated. His strategy worked. Even though we won militarily, we lost the war. Did we really? Viet Nam would look like Japan today if we could have finished our mission.

The main objective for our leader's involvement in that war starting with President Truman was not disclosed to the US citizen in my humble opinion. The objective was a proxy conflict with the Russians and Chinese who provided the enemy's war machine. Vietnam avoided a direct confrontation and mutual mass destruction of us all. That war may have been the most important war in history to preserve the human race.



Currently serving California State Military Reserve as Command Sergeant Major Mike Frangadakis



Mike the Greek on guard duty in Nah Trang, Vietnam, 1969



MEDCAP mission Montagnard village, 1969



Robert M. Johnson, DDS, MPH

Colonel, US Army Retired

Former Commander

934th MED DET, Viet Nam

February 20, 2012

Anna G. Eshoo

14th Congressional District

698 Emerson Street

Palo Alto, CA 94301

Dear Congresswomen Eshoo:

My name is Robert M. Johnson, DDS, MPH, Colonel, US Army, Retired. From December 1968 until October 1969, Specialist Five Michael Frangadakis was assigned to the 934th MED DET (DS), a specialty unit of the 44th Medical Brigade in Viet Nam. I was the Commanding Officer.

The names of many members of the unit have faded with time. Outstanding dedicated members that were always ready, willing and able to do more can never be forgotten. Specialist Michael Frangadakis was one of those Soldiers. Our area of responsibility was II Corps South Viet Nam, with many outlying and mobile services provided to military and local civilians. Medical Civic Actions Patrols were conducted, which were often difficult and dangerous.

The first Soldier to step forward and volunteer was always Specialist Frangadakis. The actual number of missions Frangadakis participated in is beyond recall, but it was a dozen or more than any other member of our Unit. Before transferring to the 934th he was a member of the 56th MED DET in I Corps where it was reported he served as technician and litter carrier for the MED EVAC Hospital at Phu Bai.

I recall three "beyond the call" actions by Specialist Frangadakis. He assisted in repelling enemy forces when one of the highland bases (Giania-10 day fire base MEDCAP) we served supporting combat troops came under rocket and small arms attack by North Vietnamese Regulars. After participating in the firefight The Specialist assisted in transporting wounded soldiers to a field hospital. In another memorable action, he remained for many hours on a remote jungle road at his personal risk until half of his diverted convoy arrived. Then he guided them to a difficult to locate jungle village to complete a medical support mission for Vietnamese Civilians.

During transport on a Naval Swift Boat in our local delta an enemy unit opened fire. SPC Frangadakis manned a 50 caliber machine gun turret and helped repel hostile forces resulting in no friendly casualties.

Specialist Frangadakis was the main technician for clinical services and the non commissioned officer in charge of all company vehicles. He was in charge of ambulance duty transporting wounded or injured soldiers on base. He was the leader and morale spark of our unit. No one was ever more dedicated or skilled in required functions, as well as duties above and beyond the call of duty. He is a graduate of the Army's elite Medical Field Service School as technician/combat medic.

Respectfully,

Robert M Johnson, DDS MPH

Colonel, US Army, Retired