



Michael Walsh

Served in Vietnam, *April 1967 - April 1968*

Michael Walsh was drafted into the U.S. Army in 1966 and served as a Specialist E-4 a year after he graduated from Good Counsel High School in Wheaton. His assignment was working on a boat that ferried supplies up and down the Mekong River. Walsh says, "We received our fair share of fire from the shore. The Mekong River in places is very narrow and there are a lot of hair pin turns." But it's what happened to Walsh on the very day he went home that still haunts him. "There's a place where we used to go when we were off duty. And the day I left it was hit pretty hard. I don't know what the total number of guys killed was but four guys that I had lunch with that day were dead," says Walsh. Walsh says he received his orders a week early. Under normal circumstances he probably would have been in that bar with his buddies when they were killed. "That question has run through my mind a thousand times. Why did I get to go home early and these guys didn't? Might I have been sitting with them? You never forget those things. They are with you all the time. And there's no answer," says Walsh.

Walsh returned stateside to a nation in turmoil. To distance himself from what would turn out to be significant PTSD that he still struggles with Walsh made a decision he regrets. He threw away everything associated with the war: military uniforms, medals, dog tags, boots and the letters he sent home to his mother. Walsh says, "I just wanted to have nothing to do with it. I just wanted to put Vietnam behind me, forget about it, never think about it again and move on.

Though military service was not what he chose, it gave him an understanding of what he needed to do to take more control over his life and that was to know more. He had never planned to go college but now he knew he must. Within three weeks of getting out of the military he was enrolled at Montgomery College. He has his college degree from the University of Maryland and his master's degree from Trinity College in Special Education. Walsh worked as a teacher in Montgomery County for nearly 30 years. When he retired in 2009 he decided to embark on a photographic pilgrimage to Vietnam War memorials across the country. His goal was to snap a picture of a memorial in all 50 states. His blog, A Means to Heal, features nearly 800 memorials photographed in the last eight years: <http://michaelfwalsh.blogspot.com/>. Walsh says, "I know that it's helped me. And I hear from Vets all the time who say it's helped them." Additionally, he advocated with the Commission to establish a Vietnam Memorial in the County www.youtube.com/watch?v=s8dU3XPG-S8.

Walsh currently resides in Germantown, Maryland with his wife Mary Anne. He is the father of one son and two grandchildren.