

Interview conducted over Skype on April 23
Currently lives in Mitchell, SD
Questions about experience with media in Korea during Vietnam War 1967-1968

STORIES FROM THE 38TH PARALLEL: A LOOK INTO MEDIA FROM THE KOREAN DMZ DURING THE VIETNAM WAR

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Background

My grandpa served in the demilitarized zone of North and South Korea during the Vietnam War. He was drafted and was on the 38th parallel from January 1967 to February 1968. I chose to conduct an interview with him to learn about his time overseas and ask him questions about how he saw media play a part in his day-to-day life in Korea, and how it impacted people of the time period.

Propaganda

When I asked if he thought propaganda played a big role in recruiting people, he responded with "Absolutely. The army had you brainwashed." One of his friends who he met on the 38th parallel, and originally wanted to do his two years and get out. However, he ended up being so well conditioned by the army that he ended up reenlisting and transferring to Vietnam. He reasoned that the army was a good place for him, as he was originally from Chicago and if he returned, he believed he would end up on a street corner robbing an old lady's purse, whereas in the army he was happy with a tent, cooking, money, food, and an occasional beer. He said that the well-known Uncle Sam "I WANT YOU" poster was everywhere back in the United States. When I asked him if he was exposed to any anti-Vietnam propaganda while serving, he said that the army did not allow it. They wanted to make sure nobody was as to not desert morale or make soldiers question their motives.

Music

When I asked what their main source of media entertainment was, he immediately responded with "Music. Everybody was extremely into music." He and his war buddies would go into the downtown area to purchase records to play on a turntable. He recalls buying a "Greatest Hits" record that he would listen to whenever he had a chance. In addition to records, they would buy reel-to-reel tapes that would hold about 6-8 hours of music. Those would cost about \$8 at the PX. A lot of them would have music taped off of the radio, or they would put their albums on turntables and then record those onto their reels. They would then play the music off of speakers for everyone to hear. He recalled listening to country, rock and roll, and soul music. Specifically, he named Creedence Clearwater Revival and The Beatles.



Rodney Goodwin
72 years old
Grandfather



Television

This war was especially prevalent and inspired more protests and anti-war sentiment than ever before due to the coverage of war atrocities that had never before been seen by the American people. My grandpa remarked on footage of the Saigon execution, which depicted Vietcong being shot point-blank in the head by a Saigon police chief in 1968. This was shown on TV back in the United States that made waves and disturbed many people. This shows how television started to become a source of information that was able to communicate much more effectively what people to question the behavior of the United States.



Radio

My grandpa said that their main source of information and news was via radio. Soldiers would listen mostly during evenings and on weekends. When I asked about the waiting period between when something would happen at home and when they would find out about it, I was surprised to hear him say that it was pretty much immediate, as the military had a station that they could tune into and catch up on current events and important information. He told me a story about when he was posted up on guard duty of an ammo dump. He sat by a fence and kept watch, and was listening to a transistor radio he had borrowed from a friend. All of a sudden, the radio switched to a Korean station. My grandpa turned around and on the other side of the fence, there was a "silly boy" - young South Korean boys that were notoriously sneaky and good at stealing from US soldiers. He was holding the radio, and my grandpa pulled out his .45 pistol and told him to give the radio back, to which the boy said "No bullets" and simply turned around and walked away. There was a saying that "they can steal the radio and leave the music playing".

Sound Communication

My grandpa would record himself talking and send reels to his parents back in the United States, who would then do the same. They would describe their everyday life and share how much they missed one another. He told me that being able to hear his mom and dad talking was neat while being overseas. This was the only option he had at the time, since there were no cell phones during this time.

Newspaper

The newspaper that they received was a military commissioned paper that operated from inside the Department of Defense, titled "Stars and Stripes." He said this was a major source of information and that it was created for armymen to read and be informed. They relied heavily on this paper to learn what was going on, as it was one of the only ways they were able to learn of what was happening back home and in war proceedings.

Technology Now

When I asked him about how he thinks media has developed since his time in Korea, he remarked on how much faster everything is, and traveled over faster phones and the internet. He is very active on Facebook and likes to use it to keep in contact with friends from high school and from his time in the army.

What I learned from this interview was that media has changed a lot since the Vietnam War. It's not just about newspapers and radio anymore. Now we have the internet, smartphones, and social media. It's amazing how much faster we can communicate now. I also learned that my grandfather was a brave man who served his country during a difficult time. His story is a reminder of the sacrifices made during the Vietnam War.