

Blaise Flamio

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William Fletcher: A True American Hero

Born in 1950, William Fletcher, a native of South Carolina, hails from the small town of Monks Corner. Being a small-town country boy, Mr. Fletcher states that: “there was not much to do after high school,” so he joined the Air Force in 1970. In the interview, he explains that the Air Force “basic training wasn’t very hard compared to the Army and the Marines, but the MOS or specialized job training was very difficult.” Mr. Fletcher specialized in Military security, which is also known as the Military Police. He worked mainly as a force protection officer for the bases in Vietnam, guarding the perimeters from pending attacks.

Even though his MOS did not require him to leave the confines of the base’s perimeter, the situations Mr. Fletcher found himself were anything but safe. The first night he was in Vietnam he remembers being nervous and confused “as most anyone would be.” That same night, the American base to which he was assigned was mortared by enemy units from the jungle. To this day he remembers what that bunker smelled like, felt like, and how nervous he was in the darkness. There were a few times he actually did go into the jungles with the Army Infantry to retrieve downed helicopters. There were other retrieval missions, too. He noted that “the Army guys and the Air Force guys used to mess around all the time, steal each other’s equipment, and hide it—all in good fun, though.” He tells of the danger involved in going out to retrieve the downed helicopters, describing the mission as “a race against the enemy.” If the Americans

wouldn't get there fast enough the locals would strip the equipment down to nothing so quickly that there wouldn't even be a bolt left lying there. Of course that equipment would be sold for funding necessary supplies for the campaign of the Vietnamese enemy.

Mr. Fletcher describes the smells of Vietnam as very distinct. He will never forget the smell of the food they ate, seasoned with fish. He explained to me that the Vietnamese would bury a fish for more than five months then dig it back up and make a sauce out of it. That sauce they ate on everything, and it was so pungent that even if the smallest bit would get on your clothes you would have to throw them away. "There was no getting that smell out," he explains. The movies made about Vietnam, in Fletcher's opinion, were pretty realistic, but "you can't get the full effect without the smell and the heat."

Remaining in the Air Force, Mr. Fletcher was deployed to yet another conflict only a few years after Vietnam had ended. In 1977 he was sent over to Panama to train with the Green Berets. This is where he learned covert stalking skills and was taught how to use explosives. He states that it was the best training he ever had in his life, and the most fun. The first night he touched down in Panama, he had to throw on a gas mask and sprint up a hill with no clothes on, just for safety measures. He laughed and I wondered what kind of safety they were trying to practice by this. Though Panama was a good experience for Fletcher, he still thinks Vietnam was a better theater to have been in. The culture, his friends, and memories from that part of the world stuck with him more so than those from Panama.

Mr. Fletcher retired from the military as a Master Sergeant in 1990 and immediately joined The Citadel's Campus Police. Now, with more than 20 years as an employed veteran at the school, he has reached the rank of Colonel and serves as a leader and chief of his department.

When asked how he likes the civilian job force, he says, “It’s fun, but there’s nothing like the excitement of the military. There’s always something to do... Always.”

Mr. Fletcher would do it all again and would recommend the military for any able-bodied man or woman who is willing to give it all for our country. Though he thinks the military is very different than when he joined, he realizes it’s a completely different war—and generation. The World War II veterans probably said the same thing about him, and so on. If there were any other branch he might have joined, it would have been the Army. But Mr. Fletcher is 100 percent satisfied with his career and would suggest his job to anyone who wants to have a good time as well as “get out there and serve.” All in all, Police Colonel Fletcher is an amazing man and the model of a true American Hero.