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"I got hit directly with it. It blew off my hand, blew off the side of my face and I took shrapnel wounds to the chest and the stomach and back, shoulder and arm."

Within 20 minutes he was in the air, on his way to an aid station, but 20 minutes is a long time to be severely wounded and still conscious. He has a vivid recollection of how he felt nauseous and afraid while lying there waiting for a chopper. "I was real surprised. I never thought I would ever get hurt. I used to think things like that just couldn't happen to me, even though there were other people getting killed and wounded all the time. That's why they draft young people; they have a belief in their own immortality."

Tice confides that he was mortal, all right. He tells of the years of surgery and physical rehabilitation he had to go through. At the same time he considers himself lucky, in the sense that his girlfriend was at his side even during those rough times. They got married in 1970. They're still married and have three children.

"I'm a difference between Vietnam and World War II, because I had multiple fragment wounds. I would have never lived back then, I barely lived anyway. I was in a coma, had a heart attack and I just had a lot of physical problems over a long period of time," Tice says.

But his problems weren't limited to his physical condition, because he had emotional problems to deal with as well. "I had difficulty with anger and difficulty sleeping, as many Vietnam veterans did."

Not only was he angry at losing an arm and having to endure the physical torment, but he explains that he was angry at the war and the kind of reception he got when he came home.

"I can remember lying in a hospital bed and people running down the hallways yelling at us for having gone to war. And there we were, we were

bumped-out having gone to war, too. And they come through our ward and yell at us, and shit — that really pissed me off, and made me sad," recounts Tice. "The Vietnam war was unpopular in some sectors of the country, and often the warrior was confused with the war so the warrior became unpopular, too."

He says many veterans experienced, at best, apathy in their homecoming reception, "which made it difficult to reach a safe place to begin work on what happened and to talk about what happened, and to get through the experience and get some closure to that experience," Tice says.

Some people have developed a way of coping with their experience that works for a while then breaks down. Tice thinks that's especially true now, since most Vietnam veterans are approaching the age of 40. He says that the normal life process — mid-age crisis and mid-life kinds of issues or unresolved emotional problems about the death of friends in Vietnam — can be exacerbated by not having had their problems worked through years ago.

"We're seeing more people than we used to," says Tice. "It's two things. One, there's the delayed stress reaction, and the other one is it takes people having to give themselves permission to get help. To get safe. Because there are so many negative stereotypes about Vietnam veterans, many veterans who experienced problems didn't want to be associated with a negative stereotype."

It's easy to generalize about Vietnam veterans. Most prevailing notions about Vietnam vets are negative because of the focus which was placed on their problems during and after the war. However, Tice assures people he has seen a lot of veterans and that they are as diverse as any other segment of the population. But the stereotypes still remain.

"I'll tell you how insensitive people were when I got back from Vietnam. They actually asked me if I was stoned when I got wounded, and if that's why I got wounded," Tice says, with disbelief. "Vietnam vets have a lot of problems — that's another myth that isn't true."

The Congressional Record for Oct. 1, 1982, contains a fact sheet aimed at dispelling many of the myths and half-truths regarding Vietnam veterans. In brief summary, it reports Vietnam vets were the best-educated army America has ever sent to war, that Vietnam veterans and the American public believe vets were not accorded the same respect as soldiers returning from previous wars, enlistees outnumbered draftees in Vietnam 3-1 instead of the other way around, and they were not a bunch of deadbeats and drug users.

Another common misconception surrounds the Vietnam Veterans Memorial.

"What people have to understand about the memorial is that it was not a memorial given by the United States to the Vietnam veterans or to the people. It was given by the Vietnam veterans, for America," explains Gerry Kamp. "And I think the effect of seeing 59,000 names on a wall with nothing else, serves better than any other kind of memorial to show the price war extracts from society."

Steve Tice calls the memorial the greatest healing power there is for Vietnam vets and for America. Just looking into the massive black panels it's easy to see why.

The reflection of the stone seems to pull you into it and the names seem to cry out, each one of them. On a personal, human level it's hard not to feel something while standing there. It's hard not to cry for all the lives that have been affected by the war.

No tickertape parades, no cheering, only tears. That's another difference between Vietnam and other wars.

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