

Hi, my name is Ashley Durham and I had the privilege of being a student in the Veterans Heritage Project for my 4 years of high school, as well as President for 1 year. I was also the fortunate recipient of several college scholarships thanks to VHP.

Everyone has their personal takeaways and experiences with the project, and I think that right there is the heart of VHP – sharing of the individual personal experience in a place of non-judgement, which leads to a greater community of compassion, understanding, and respect across generations, political affiliations, and so many other groups we consider polarized today. The importance of offering this to young high school students cannot be measured.

I started out in Barbara Hatch's history class, unable to give a presentation without acute panic every time I spoke – hands shaking, adrenaline rush, the whole deal. Barbara didn't see the weaknesses in students however, she saw their potential strengths, and trusted me, along with hundreds of other students, to come into a veterans home, and ask them about some of their deepest personal memories. Furthermore, *veterans* trusted me, a high school student, practically a blank slate, to speak to about these memories, and invest in me as a student, and a young person. And after a period of time, as you can see today, my hands stopped shaking (mostly), and I gained confidence to speak in front of an audience.

In VHP I remember it being discussed that the final product our project produces is not the book, *Since You Asked*. Although the book holds priceless memories and lessons, it's the interpersonal relationship and investment of knowledge that builds between the veteran and student within the few hours the veteran allows the student into their home. Over the years, my development as a student and as a young adult benefited thanks to this investment. I'll tell you a little bit more about that as I introduce you to Frank Lambert.

I interviewed many veterans in high school, Frank Lambert being one of them, and wrote essays for 11. Each veteran taught me a slightly different lesson, but with Frank I'll never forget the austere reverence with which he spoke about his service. Frank spoke with definite awareness of the impact of war on people, on his comrades, and on the individual psyche. I know one of the initial motivations of VHP was to bring history to life, and Frank's account made it clear to a high school student in 2011 that war is not simply something that happened and was done x number of presidents ago, it *is* something very real, something very human, and something every single civilian and soldier has a part in today. A little background on Frank:

After graduation from West Point in 1964 with a degree in Engineering, he attended Airborne and Ranger School at Ft. Benning and Jungle Survival School in Panama until assigned Company Commander of Co. D, 5/7, 1st Cavalry Division in Vietnam.

While in Vietnam, Frank and his men came under attack in the middle of a rice paddy. Five men were killed before they were ordered to retreat into nearby trenches. However, Frank's platoon sergeant had been shot in the legs, and therefore couldn't retreat. Frank called for volunteers to help rescue Sgt. Hernandez, but the 18 and 19-year old soldiers were not up for the task. On his own, he crawled into the rice to rescue Sgt. Hernandez. Frank earned the Silver Star for this act of valor.

Pausing a moment here, in this brief summary I offered, Frank and his comrades are just kids in this story, not far off from the age of the kids who interview veterans in VHP. Students hearing these accounts, like Frank's, are kids who just received their drivers license, just started their first job, are

planning for college and trying to decide if they want to be a teacher, doctor, lawyer, or maybe go into marketing. When students hear these stories, they hear a testimony of courage and service from another young adult, whom they can admire and aspire to model, as I did with Frank. Students sit face to face with veterans who chose loyalty over fear, and know what it really means to make a hard decision. There aren't words for how important veterans like Frank have been in setting that example for my life ever since high school, and I'm just one student compared to the growing hundreds of VHP students and graduates.

It doesn't take much for me to say I believe that the lessons and human connection I gained from VHP hold a major part of what young people today are missing. There are young people at Cactus Shadows High School, in Cave Creek, Arizona, and across the country, enduring hurt and hardship in their homes and communities, thinking that they're alone in all of it. If you'll forgive me for being somewhat morbid, suicide rates among adolescents are hitting record highs, up over 50% in the past decade; and, unfortunately, numbers for seniors are rising as well. The moments of humanity shared between veteran and student are the moments of human connection we all need as reminders that we're not alone in our hardships, and there are men and women out there who choose bravery when faced with their fear, as well as hope on their darkest days. Not only does the sacrifice of these veterans deserve to be recognized now and forever in these books, the relationships this project produces set lifelong examples for students, and may even be saving lives.

Stepping down from my soapbox and returning to Frank's story, while in Vietnam, Frank also earned the Soldier's Medal. Infrequently awarded, the Soldier's medal is the highest non-combat award for valor. Frank received this on yet another occasion of courage, when his radio operator, who couldn't swim, got caught in a fast-moving current while crossing a river. Frank swam after him and pulled him to shore before he drowned.

During his nine years in the Army, Frank also earned 3 Bronze Stars, an Air Medal, 2 Purple Hearts, and the Combat Infantryman's Badge. His story is shared in the documentary DVD, *The MIAs on Tiger Mountain*, in the books *Gray Horse Troop: Forever Soldiers*, and *Fire in the Streets: The Battle for Hue*, and in the 7th Volume of *Since You Asked*, of which I was privileged to participate. A printout of his story from the VHP publication is provided to you tonight.

In his civilian life, Frank earned a Master of Education from the University of Illinois. He was a jack of many trades, running an HVAC company, owning a carpet store, and eventually becoming a financial adviser at the age of 40 in Silicon Valley in California. During his 22 years in the industry, the DOW went from 640 to 12,500. In 2004 he retired in Arizona full time. He lives currently in Scottsdale, and spends his summers in Flagstaff. He is an avid golfer, a member of Pinnacle Peak Country Club and on the Board of the Aspen Golf Club in Flagstaff.

And this is about where I met Frank, in retirement in Scottsdale, in 2011. Frank is an incredible individual, and of course, no one could tell you his story better than himself. It is my honor to introduce him today, please welcome, Frank Lambert.