

Dr. Philip E. Ayers: An Inspiring Story

My name is Mason Bibby. I currently reside in Blue Ridge, although I am a native of Roanoke. I attend North Cross School, where I have grown fond of all things geographical and historical. I chose Dr. Philip Eugene Ayers as a person who inspires me. Ayers is a United States Marine, just as my grandmother and maternal grandfather are. Although neither of them saw active combat, they both showed me what it means to serve and take pride in our country. I became enamored with Ayers because of his unmatched resolve, selfless attitude, and his genuine faith in God.

Ayers is a native of Salem, Virginia, and was an attendee of Andrew Lewis High School. Ayers demonstrated exceptional courage and patriotism with his service during the Battle of Hickory in May of 1967. In his book *Marine*, he details his harrowing experience as a soldier in Vietnam. For example, in an exercise near what was known as Highway 1 in the Vietnamese countryside, Ayers, at the time a Corporal, and his squad of soldiers found themselves lost in the area near Highway 1. Worst of all, their radio was out, so there was no hope for rescue. Instead of waiting to be attacked by the Viet Cong, Ayers ordered a grueling six-mile forced march to base camp.

Even then, Ayers was not exclusively known for brute determination. Whilst serving in Vietnam, he repeatedly steeled himself to deal with issues of morality. Ayers found a reason to fight, not just for *his* country, but for the citizens of another as well. On page 137 of his memoir he remarks: "Freedom became a big issue for me personally. They deserved to be free. I always rebelled against the thought of anyone trying to take *my* freedom away." The fact that he would fight for someone else's freedom, readily knowing the ramifications of the situation, warrants far more than a medal or accolades. He went above and beyond the call of duty to protect the

freedom of others. Ayers truly embodies the comradery between human beings. He never hated the Vietnamese citizens, or the Vietnamese soldiers, for that matter. He simply considered himself on one side of a conflict. In the words of the literary great, Mark Twain: "All war must be just the killing of strangers against whom you feel no personal animosity; strangers whom, in other circumstances, you would help if you found them in trouble, and who would help you if you needed it." In other words, had he not been fighting in the conflict, Ayers would have supported the Vietnamese populace in their search for safety and security.

Lastly, Ayer's journey of faith is encouraging. My paternal grandfather (a retired Naval serviceman) and father are both pastors, and as such have taught me to rely on my Christian faith. Similarly, Ayers has also served as senior pastor of Glade Creek Baptist Church for nearly 40 years. He is a living, breathing example that no matter how far away you stray, and no matter what you've done, you always have a friend in God. That was never more true than when he first came home from the war. His Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, PTSD, scared his family, and ruined his marriage. Debbie, Ayer's oldest daughter, kept praying for him. She knew that God would prevail in his life, and that He would heal her father. One Sunday, Debbie convinced Ayers to visit church. During the service, memories of God and scriptures came flooding back to him. Months later, he chose to reaffirm Jesus Christ as his Lord and Savior. His life was back on track, and he received treatment for his PTSD. He was no longer suffering.

Dr. Philip Eugene Ayers truly inspires me because of his determination, courage to fight for his country and the freedoms of others, and his commitment to his faith.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Ayers, Philip Eugene. *Marine, Featuring: The Battle of Hickory, May 1967*. United States of America, Xulon Press, October 18, 2012.