

Harless Belcher

Arthur Ashe once said, “True heroism is remarkably sober, very undramatic. It is not the urge to surpass all others at whatever cost, but the urge to serve others at whatever cost.”

Veterans and military members are the most inspirational people imaginable. They are constantly defending our country and freedoms with no self-interest in sight. Harless Belcher, the most inspirational individual I know, was drafted into the military on April 3, 1968, at 19 years old. He had basic training in Fort Bragg, North Carolina, and infantry training in Fort Polk, Louisiana. After training, he went home for 20 days before being sent to Vietnam. Harless served in the 2nd Platoon, Charlie Company, 1st Squadron, 2nd Battalion, 22nd Infantry Regiment, and 25th Division Triple Deuce. Harless is incredibly inspirational because of his ongoing examples of courage, his ability to utilize simple virtues while in some of the most dangerous times of his life, and his selflessness and involvement with other veterans after service.

Courage and determination were integral to Harless’s experience during and after the Vietnam War. From the trip over to Vietnam, when the plane he was in was dodging artillery, to the heat of battle when he lost his arm and many friends, it is undeniable that he has witnessed some of the most horrific things conceivable. On one battle on January 14, 1969, Harless witnessed an accident in which four men were blown up and killed while trying to load a mortar. Harless recalled the memory, concluding it with, “It was the most tragic thing I’ve ever seen.” During his final battle on June 11, 1969, the shrapnel of an RPG hit his arm. He went flying into the air, and when he landed, he realized his arm was gone. “I wasn’t denying it,” he admitted, “There was no need to cry over it.” His leg was also severely injured in the accident. It takes a lot

of bravery to be able to face the horrors of war. It takes even more bravery to face those horrors, live through them, and be able to tell the tale.

Harless' story shows how the most simple virtues can make such a tremendous impact on any life situation. Positivity, patience, and determination, in particular, played large roles in Harless's experiences. One example of his optimism was during his recovery when he met a "pretty nurse" in Japan who saw his discomfort while receiving four units of blood and, in her kindness, stopped the blood after the third unit. His patience is exemplified throughout his time in the war and throughout his entire recovery. On his 21st birthday, he decided to get out of bed, despite not being cleared by doctors, showing his determination. In addition, when he was finally sent home, he returned to work after just 17 days.

Harless's most admirable traits are his selflessness, which is evident in all his actions, and his dedication to recognizing other veterans. Throughout his stories, he was never negligent to mention the men he served with and the men who couldn't make it home. He lost some of his best friends in the war, including Thomas Palladino and Robert "Augie" Sekva. Harless made sure Charles Peree was mentioned, the man who saved his life when he lost his arm. Today, he has a book of all the men he served with and he's contacted since. He is a member of the Meadows of Dan VFW Post, the American Legion, the Vietnam Triple Deuce, the 22nd Infantry Regiment Society, and the Patrick County Veterans Post Honor Guard. He is fully committed to meeting the people he served alongside and honoring other veterans. Harless confessed, "I feel like I just want to help somebody else more."

Harless Belcher inspires me to no end. He is no doubt the most courageous, virtuous, and selfless person I know. No matter what he has been through, he is able to tell the stories of, not just himself, but all of the people he served alongside with a considerate heart and an occasional

smile. He has taught me many valuable lessons and reminded me of the importance of the people who serve this country. While Harless earned two bronze stars for his time in the war, the debt we owe him and all veterans can never be truly repaid. The only thing we can give them is our thanks, and the only thing we can do is listen and learn from their stories.

Bibliography

Belcher, Harless. Interview. Conducted by Maria Turner. 19 September 2022.