**H and the Vietnam War**

I met H in college; we were both Chemistry majors. After graduation, H became a Lieutenant in the Army. It was during the time of the Vietnam War. He was always the leader type and was selected to lead a platoon and was sent to Vietnam. During the conflict there, he was injured. He was then given injury retirement and collected disability pay for his rank. At the time, he said that since he was not much of a jock anyway, the injury did not have a significant effect on his lifestyle. As it turned out, he was the only person I knew that was physically injured in Vietnam. The mental toll of that war was something else.

After H was discharged from the military, he went to graduate school and got a Ph.D. in Chemistry. When he got a job in the aerospace industry, he was still an efficient leader. He said the company needed software to process the data and worked hard on that software effort. Later, the company moved locations and he filled in the role of making the move happen. He was always willing to assist his co-workers and other people he knew when necessary. At some point, he retired from the company, perhaps early due to the effects of the injury. Many years later, I found that he had developed trouble sitting in a cramped airplane for hours due to his leg injury, and needed to fly first class to be comfortable. The Army should have increased his disability pay for that, but I will presume that did not happen.

I never heard him complain about his service to the country. My opinion is that H was a Hero, but he commented: “I would, however, point out that Hero implies some form of extraordinary action. Serving is not heroic. Being in the path of a blast wave of metal fragments is not a heroic act. Depending upon your point of view, it is either duty, happenstance, or stupidity. That war changed all of our lives, as will this current pandemic. Our response to either is to carry on with life as best we can.”

One Saturday night, I watched the made for TV movie from 1990 called "Decoration Day".

The main themes in the movie are the Medal of Honor and the racist environment of World War II.  My question for H after the movie was the following: “Considering the length of time that it took you to recover from the service and ongoing injuries, did you get awarded the Purple Heart Medal?”

His response was the following: “Yes I do have that least desirable of military medals. With that and $2.50, I can get a cup of coffee almost everywhere. My DD214 is actually more useful.” The Department of Defense Form 214 is commonly used by various government agencies, chief among them the [Department of Veterans Affairs](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_States_Department_of_Veterans_Affairs), to secure veteran benefits, and may be requested by employers should a person indicate he or she has served in the military. It also shows that the holder is entitled to the veteran benefits available.