

Three veterans share their experiences in the Vietnam War

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Left to right: First Lieutenant Ken Pitetti, Retired Colonel Bob Seitz, and Retired First Lieutenant Rick Lombard shared with USAWC students about their experiences and lessons learned during the Vietnam War, Sept. 7.

Three veterans engaged with students about their experiences and the lessons they learned while leading platoons through combat operations in the Vietnam War, Sept. 7. The three panelists served together in the Charlie Company, 2nd Battalion of the 506 Infantry in the 101st Airborne Division from 1970-1971.

Retired Colonel Bob Seitz served in Vietnam as a rifle and recon platoon leader and then rifle company commander. Retired First Lieutenant Ken Pitetti was the Platoon Leader, 3rd Platoon. Retired First Lieutenant Rick Lombard served in Vietnam as a rifle platoon leader and XO of Charlie Company.

“There are a lot of lessons to be learned from Vietnam I think it is important that [these students] learn something from every conflict, and

that's why we are here, to talk about what we learned," said Lombard.

The men began by outlining the operational objectives and the challenges they faced when executing them. The terrain was difficult to navigate, presenting challenges in tracking troop movements. The heat and moisture were physically taxing, forcing the men to deal with illnesses due to the tropical environment.

Lombard recalled how he and his men were out in the field for 101 consecutive days engaging in a fight every day in the war of attrition. They focused on the task at hand—force protection—to make it through each day.

The men talked about how the anti-war sentiment of the era affected them. At the time, the Army was a hybrid Army made up of soldiers who were drafted and those who volunteered. Pitetti recalled witnessing protests while living in San Francisco. He was not deterred. During his tour, Pitetti stepped on a landmine, suffering a traumatic amputation of his right leg.

On the battlefield, there was no distinction between those drafted and those who volunteered. Although there was moral ambiguity surrounding the war, there was no ambiguity of loyalty among the soldiers said Pitetti.

Seitz synthesized the strategic lessons he learned in Vietnam. Soldiers and their leaders must have stamina, stamina to keep going and step up and do hard things. Seitz explained that he and his men had no choice because there were no soldiers to replace them.

Leaders must listen to their subordinates. Those who are engaging in the fight and navigating the terrain are field experts who can provide critical insight to the leaders making the strategic decisions said Seitz

Although the high-intensity environment in which USAWC students fought over the last two decades differs from the high-intensity environment these veterans fought in 50 years ago, students can still learn something from them, said Seitz.