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JUSTINE PACKER

SENIOR

SILVER VALLEY HIGH

SCHOOL

My Vietnam Veteran

In May of 1968 there was a young scared 18 year old boy that had nowhere else to go, so he built up the courage to answer Uncle Sam's call. This scared young boy's name was Ernest Harold Packer and he was my grandfather. Uncle Sam inducted him into the U.S. Army where he then completed his eight weeks of basic training at Ft. Ord, California. After he finished basic training he was then selected for the Army Corp of Engineers and was sent to Advanced training at Ft. Leonard Wood, Missouri. Shortly after completing his Advanced training along came the Vietnam War. He spent one whole year of his life in Vietnam defending freedom for the United States all while trying to keep himself and his comrades alive. When he returned to the United States he was 20 years old and was no longer a scared little boy, but a grown man, scarred from all that he had experienced and witnessed. Ernest (Ernie) returned home to his wife, parents, great uncle, and siblings. Ernie and his wife Susan remained married for 48 years.

While in Vietnam, the United States government started a defoliation program in Vietnam. The idea was to kill some, or all, of the vegetation so the enemy could be better seen. Agent Orange blanketed one fourth of South Vietnam and about 34 percent of these areas were sprayed more than once. In May of 1964, my papa returned home to California to continue the life that he had put on hold for two whole years. Around 1970, Ernie started noticing that he was not feeling up to par. The eventual diagnosis was that he had diabetes. The diabetes managed to affect many other parts of his body. His eyes were getting to where he could barely see, his kidneys became weak, and his heart started to become overworked. VA Administration finally determined that his health was failing due to the complications of agent orange. My papa fought in Vietnam and continued to fight for many many years later.