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#### AN INTERVIEW WITH TEACHER AND VETERAN GARY HUBER

Nearly 30 years ago, a young volunteer name Gary Huber went to Vietnam to command an Army rifle platoon. During his tour with Company A, First Battalion, 27<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment, 25<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division, Huber saw a considerable amount of action. He was shot through the neck and the right shoulder during the TET Offensive in early 1968. After 15 months in Vietnam, he left the service as a first lieutenant and the holder of two Purple Hearts, a Bronze Star, an Air Medal, and a Combats Infantryman's Badge.

Huber, who turns 48 this month, teaches business at Kearsley High School, a Channel One school just outside of Flint, Michigan. This conversation with him took place a few weeks before his journey back to Vietnam.

**Teachers' Guide:** *What's the main benefit that you'd like teachers and students to get from your trip to Vietnam with Channel One?*

**Huber:** I hope they learn that no matter how traumatic an experience is, you can come through it. You can overcome it. All teachers see kids who come from abusive families—and that's like being in a war—but teachers must help students learn to say to themselves, "Yes, that's my background. But I'm in charge now, and I'm going to make the best of myself."

*Do you have any reservations about making the trip?*

**Huber:** Not really, except that I do have a few feelings of trepidation, especially about returning to the area where I was shot. A total of 10 of us were wounded and five were killed. So, seeing that area may not be pleasant, but I realize it's something like going to the funeral of a loved one: you might not feel good about it, but you do have to face it.

*What are your memories of day-to-day life during the war?*

**Huber:** Long periods of boredom, punctuated by short moments of hell. You could go for days on end and nothing would happen. Then suddenly you'd make contact in a firefight, and there would be these intense, brief periods of only a few minutes that seemed like hours.

*Overall, what do you think teachers should communicate to students about this chapter of American history.*

**Huber:** To some people what I'm about to say may sound as if I'm trying to rewrite history, but I believe it to be true. Based on current geopolitical reality, what we tried to do in Vietnam was just and good. Communism has fallen apart: Vietnam, China, Cuba, and North Korea are the last four countries that identify themselves as Communist anymore. So, looking at the war from today's perspective shows we were trying to do the right thing, though maybe we didn't go about it in the right way.

*And as citizens of a democracy, what should students today learn from that war?*

**Huber:** They need to learn to question their government. And being skeptical doesn't mean throwing the country away. It means kids have got to realize that the people who make up the government are just the same as they are. They're human beings, and they don't always know or do the right thing. If

your representative for Congress comes home and you don't agree with what's happening in Washington, you should let him or her know.

*Students might wonder why they've heard so much about Vietnam veterans who suffered psychological effects from the war. What should they be told?*

**Huber:** The post-traumatic stress disorder that we hear about was real, though at the time many people tried to deny it. My father's generation had it in World War II, only they called it battle fatigue. Many who fought in World War I had it too, and they called it shell shock. In Vietnam, not only was there a denial of this problem but we came differently, more precipitously. The guys in World War II came home in a boat, traveling for 30 days with their units and with nobody shooting at them. I was lucky, because I had some time in Vietnam after combat to talk with other veterans who had been shot. It gave us a chance to decompress. But other people had no debriefing. They were sent home alone on a jet and were at the dinner table waiting for supper with red Vietnamese clay still under their fingernails. Just two days before, they'd been in the field getting shot at.

*The reception they received made matters more difficult.*

**Huber:** A lot of people came back and soon learned that their families didn't want to talk about the war and their friends didn't want to talk about it either. So some, in fact, denied they had been in Vietnam. I never denied that I was a vet. I even wore my fatigue jacket all the time. But a lot of guys just couldn't do it. I was lucky, because it's Central Michigan University where I was a student after I came back, we had a very strong veteran's group on campus and we all gave each other support.

*What's the most important lesson that young people especially can learn from Vietnam?*

**Huber:** You've got to separate the war from the warrior. When guys got home from Vietnam, there were stories about their being spat on and called baby killers. It didn't happen all of us, but it did happen. Even if you don't support a war, you should support the troops. That didn't happen with Vietnam, though I hope we learn to do it again in desert storm. And when warriors—both women and men, nowadays—come home, they have got to have someone to talk to. All the isolation the Vietnam veterans felt goes into the makeup of the ones who didn't adjust well to coming back. But I do think that the majority of his came home and got on with our lives, keeping things pretty much under control.