



# Stars and Stripes and Shadows: How I Remember Vietnam

*Tim Haslam*

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1968 for me was not simply the year I found myself away from home for the first time. It was not just the year I donned the uniform of a soldier and took up arms against communist aggression, traveling to the jungles of Southeast Asia to do my patriotic duty. To characterize that year merely as my coming of age fails to recognize the significance of the year itself. Few intervals of similar duration in the history of our nation have been as important as those twelve months. Perhaps only 1776 surpasses 1968 in its impact on who and what we as a nation will become thereafter. The eras of the Civil War and the two World Wars, although of equal or greater significance unfolded over longer spans of time, each more gradually evolving the beliefs and practices of American citizens. 1968 seems to have struck with impatient tenacity, delivering to the United States of America a wake up call from our cultural complacency and the natural acceptance of our assumed righteousness. 1968 began the polarization of America. Neutrality of belief or philosophy was no longer to be valued or even tolerated. The lines were being drawn; lines between left and right; between the old and the new, between generations and perhaps even between clarity and confusion. What we were as a people, who we were and what we stood for was cast in 1968 under the unflattering spotlight of war and internal conflict as a reaction to that war. College students, the children of World War II veterans, raised their voices in opposition to the edicts of the American Government. Extremists took matters into their own hands and murdered Martin Luther King Junior and Robert Kennedy. American soldiers committed atrocities at My Lai that shocked a citizenry unable to accept this dissonant view of Americans in uniform and our military and governmental leaders threw up their hands behind closed doors, coming to the same conclusion; we can't win this war. On the home f

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