

South Carolina museum vividly tells stories of Americans who fought in Vietnam

The soldiers, sailors, Marines and airmen of South Carolina who served have powerful stories to tell, and they are now on display in our groundbreaking exhibit.

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/EINPresswire.com/ -- In the middle of the 1960s, young men and boys from South Carolina found themselves on the other side of the world, more than 9,000 miles away. Many of them had never heard of Vietnam.

Some of them went because they wanted to. Others didn't want to go at all, but they did, when they were called.

Young women also went, to serve as nurses and in important support capacities. They all served honorably.

Some of the men weren't all that young. The gray-haired man with the chiseled face, in command of it all, General William Westmoreland, was also from South Carolina.

They found themselves in a place that was even hotter and more humid than home. It was a very dangerous place. Some never came home. Some brought home medals. All who came home brought stories.

They were not always treated like heroes when they returned – not the way their fathers had been after World War II. And not many folks back home wanted to hear the stories.

But they'll hear them now. That's the purpose of the [new exhibit](#) at the South Carolina Confederate Relic Room and Military Museum in Columbia. Years in the making, it's called "A War With No Front Lines: South Carolina and the Vietnam War, 1965-1973."



Vietnam veterans observing new exhibit, A War With No Front Lines: South Carolina and the Vietnam War, 1965-1973.

The 2,500-square-foot exhibit fills the brick-lined gallery that was once the cistern of the old Columbia Mill. It relates the stories through the veterans' own recorded words, it tells the history through a timeline of the Vietnam War, it shows the war through official U.S. film heretofore unseen by the public, and it exhibits [the uniforms they wore, the things they carried, and the weapons](#) they fought with.

You familiarize yourself with the environments in which they served – rice paddies, war-torn cities, the Central Highlands, the streams and swamps of the Mekong Delta, and the skies above.

You will encounter an overwhelming variety of artifacts, placed in the context of displays that explain historical significance. Ordinary things such as Zippo lighters, the metal bracelets that folks back home wore so as not to forget the POWs in Hanoi, and objects that show the ways men make do when they're at war in a jungle – such as a letter Sgt. Bud Ferillo wrote to his family on a dismantled carton that had contained C-rations.

Some of the items were worn or carried by famous historical figures, such as Gen. Westmoreland. Other belonged to men you may not know about although everyone should, such as Chief Boatswain's Mate James Elliott Williams, who received the Medal of Honor for his heroic actions.

It took several years to put this exhibit together. Long before it took physical form, the Relic Room had collected the stories. More than sixty interviews, many of them lasting hours, were recorded. Kiosks in the museum enable visitors to hear clips from the interviews and see film and photographs relating to each story.

The war in Vietnam radically changed America. This war in this one little country, far away, divided us. It changed Americans' very concept of themselves – not only our ideas of how we should interact with the rest of the world, but how we related to each other at home, and especially how we related to our government.

All that is reflected in this new exhibit. The context is given, the meaning is explained. But ultimately, the point of it all is the stories of these veterans, and the physical items that go with those stories. Recently, the Relic Room's executive director, Allen Roberson, told a newspaper reporter, "We don't do politics. We let the artifacts tell the story."

And this major new addition to the museum certainly does that. Learn more, and plan your visit, at SCinVietnam.com.

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