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## What Dan Quayle Missed

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The controversy over Dan Quayle's military record is an amusing one to those of us who served in Vietnam. Though we were reviled and spat upon as killers of women and children when we returned from the war, service in Vietnam now seems to be regarded as a red badge of courage, if not a prerequisite for an aspiring political candidate from our generation.

My, how the worm has turned in 20 years!

My guess is that Mr. Quayle enlisted in the National Guard as a means of continuing his education, with little risk of being sent to Vietnam. For many men in our age group, enlistment in the Guard in the late 1960s was seen as a better alternative than being drafted or fleeing to Canada. Indeed, the standard refrain on college campuses across the nation at that time was "National Guard means Not Going."

I really can't fault Mr. Quayle for his decision. There weren't many of us who wanted to leave family and friends, go half way around the globe, and fight in a war that many believe was misguided and misunderstood, with the good possibility of being killed or wounded in the process.

Over the years, as the nation has come to better understand the Vietnam War and the men and women who were in it, a certain ironic sentiment about those turbulent times has been expressed by many of my contemporaries who did not serve in Vietnam, for whatever reason. These friends have said to me, in unguarded moments, often in private and whispered tones, that they believe they "missed something" by not being in the war-and they don't mean being killed or wounded.

At first blush, I thought what they meant is that they missed the Main Event in what will mark us as "the Vietnam War generation" for all time. But now, I think the meaning of their words goes deeper than that. I believe when people say they "missed" something by not being in the Vietnam War, they mean that they missed-what for us who were fortunate enough to return home-was an experience that provided a brutal test of character and self-revelation at a very young age.

Young people in their teens and 20s found out who they were, what they stood for and what they were made of in Vietnam in a way that no civilian experience (and certainly no business experience) could provide. All of us who fought in Vietnam have been forever changed by the war, some positively, a good deal negatively, but no one remained as he was before he went "in-country," as we used to say in the Army.

As a veteran of the Vietnam War, I am not sure that those who did not fight in the war really missed out on much of anything,

except the chance to get killed or wounded. I can assure you that the experience wasn't worth the Seiko watch and Pentax camera that I bought cheaply at the PX. I can also assure you that nobody hated the war more than those of us who were reserve junior officers.

All that being said, however, there were some important lessons learned, some critical tests of character and self-revelation and some experiences gleaned from the war that I will never forget and that have served me well in my business career in Chicago. Let me enumerate just a few:

**Command:** Otherwise known as leadership; there is no experience in the civilian world like having the responsibility for the lives of 17-to-19-year-olds who are relying on you to accomplish the mission and keep them alive! The war taught the junior officer to get his troops to follow him because they believed him— that he had their best interest in mind—even though you carried the stick of that good, old Uniform Code of Military Justice.

A good officer took care of his men first—because, by God, lieutenant, when you took your sword from its scabbard to lead the charge, you wanted to be sure that you had somebody following you; and, if they were behind you, you wanted to make certain that they weren't shooting you in the back.

**Courage:** The Army called it "hearing the sound of cannon." I called it being damned scared but just trying to do the job, anyway. Even for those who did not experience combat in Vietnam, I believe that it took courage to leave your loved ones, live in a dangerous place and do your part in a very difficult war. After you'd fought in Vietnam, you could face any trials and tribulations in life that follow.

**Compassion:** Only the most hardened souls could not be deeply moved by what they saw and experienced in Vietnam. The broken bodies of your buddies, the body bags stacked alongside the airstrip, the abject poverty and hopelessness of the Vietnamese people—a people who have been ravaged by war for thousands of years—all took their toll. What a graphic, stark counterpoint to the life-long lessons learned by this Jesuit-educated Irish Catholic who has been steeped in the philosophy of the absolute sanctity of all human life and the theology of all mankind doing works for the Greater Glory of God.

Command, courage, compassion—not bad lessons to be learned by a vice-presidential candidate, or by anyone who aspires to political office for that matter. And they certainly weren't had lessons to be learned by a future Chicago businessman, either.

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