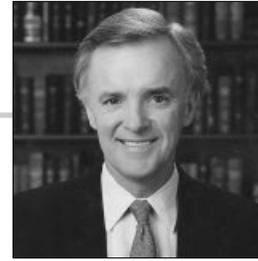




BIOGRAPHY

Bob Kerrey



Many American soldiers who survived the Vietnam War carried the scars of that conflict back home with them. Bob Kerrey was one of those soldiers. Kerrey's Vietnam experience stayed with him long after the fighting ended, even as he served in the United States Senate.

As you read the passage below, think about how the Vietnam War affected Bob Kerrey's life.

In 1965, when Bob Kerrey graduated from the University of Nebraska, American escalation of the Vietnam War had begun in earnest. Like many young American men, he was alarmed by the prospect of being drafted into the army and going directly to war. Hoping to avoid the front lines, Kerrey enlisted in the navy.

In 1967, fresh out of Naval Officer Candidate School, he volunteered to join the elite group of commandos known as Navy SEALs (for Sea, Air, and Land). Two years later, he was leading a SEAL team into battle in Vietnam. Kerrey's doubts about the war had vanished. "I was ready to go at Hanoi with a knife in my teeth," he said later.

On March 14, 1969, Kerrey became a war hero. That night, he led his team on a surprise attack against a Viet Cong encampment. From out of nowhere, a grenade exploded, knocking Kerrey to the ground and blowing off his right leg. Despite agonizing pain, Lieutenant Kerrey continued to command his team, which completed the mission. Kerrey did not feel like a hero when he returned to the United States. The government awarded him a Congressional Medal of Honor, but it otherwise treated him poorly. After spending nine miserable months recuperating in a shabby naval hospital, he went back to his home town of Lincoln, Nebraska, in 1970.

By now, opponents of the war had grown more vocal—and more persuasive. Kerrey, embittered by how the government had treated him, found himself agreeing with much of what he heard. His attitude about the war was shifting again. Soon he had joined the growing numbers of antiwar activists.

Despite his bitter feelings, Kerrey went on with his life. He opened a restaurant with a partner and in a few years had become a successful businessperson. His resentment subsided. "I went from an angry, frustrated young man hobbling along on an artificial leg . . . to become a great, happy, and wealthy citizen of this nation," he once said.

Kerrey took his citizenship responsibilities seriously. A Democrat, he ran successfully for governor of Nebraska in 1982 and for senator in 1988. Kerrey's Vietnam experience made him a respected voice in Congress on issues related to Southeast Asia. In 1994, the Senate debated whether or not to lift the 18-year-long trade embargo against Vietnam. Senator Kerrey favored ending the embargo, but he called for continuing to push Vietnam to respect its people's human rights. "It is not time for us to stop fighting for the Vietnamese," he said.

Questions to Think About

1. Why did Bob Kerrey decide to join the navy?
2. Why did Kerrey become an antiwar activist?
3. **Making Comparisons** Would you compare Kerrey's life to a long, flat highway or to a roller coaster? Explain your answer.