

## MSUM Vets Club

As our military personnel were being discharged during and immediately following the Vietnam War, there were several difficulties they faced when going back to college under the GI Bill. Anti-war protests started as early as 1964. The War was one of the major reasons why LBJ did not seek reelection in 1968 and serious discussions were being held on college campuses. Protestors met returning soldiers at airports as they returned from overseas. Several Veterans organizations did not want Vietnam Veterans as members, although they were fully eligible. On many college campuses Veterans organized Vets Club as a support group, MSUM had a very active Vets Club. The University of Minnesota – Twin Cities, U of M Duluth, Mankato State University and Southwest State University had strong Vets Clubs. Southwest was designed as a handicap accessible campus and had a strong Vets Club with physical disabilities as a result of the War. Here are some personal remembrances of the MSUM Vets Club.

The MSUM Vets Club was both a support group and a social group. About once per month, we held a Saturday night ‘kegger’ and to make sure we did it right, we held a practice ‘kegger’ on Friday night. The American Legion in Moorhead offered us space for meetings and parties. The Moorhead Legion was more accepting of Vietnam era Veterans than was the Fargo Legion. For example, one of our female Navy Veterans applied to join the Fargo Legion and was turned down and told she could become an auxiliary member because her father served during WWII. She let them know in no uncertain terms what they could do with their club. The Vets Club was open to all US Veterans but not to National Guard members. There was more of a difference between the two back then. One year an International student and Veteran of the Norwegian Navy asked if he could join the Vets Club, so we changed our by-laws to accept any country’s Veteran. He was an active member during his year at MSUM. MSUM, under President Roland Dille was very accepting of all views and opinions ranging from the Vets Club to the Students for a Democratic Society (SDS). However, during some of the stronger anti-war movements in 1970, some students decided to replace the campus US Flag with a peace flag. Vets Club members, while at Mick’s Office heard about it, came to campus and surrounded the flag pole, daring anyone to remove the US Flag. The US Flag stayed in place. It appeared that no one in the crowd was willing to take on combat Veterans. Director of Admissions, Floyd Brown, a Navy Veteran and I were the club advisors. Annually, the Minnesota Vets Clubs held a state-wide meeting. At a state meeting at Southwest in Marshall, our local chapter came to my room about 2:00 am, carried me to the pool and dumped me into the water. So I swam a couple laps dressed only in my skivvies and returned to my room. The Vets Clubs provided much needed support to our returning Veterans.

The Campus clubs gradually formed a national organization committed to helping other Veterans. This, in part, led to the formation of the Vietnam Veterans of America. We have a local chapter that is very active volunteering at various locations; the VA hospital, parades, 4<sup>th</sup> of July, Veterans Day celebrations, MSUM athletic events, speaking to high school classes and welcoming home current Guard and service members.