

**“What Can Retired SFC Steven Gerald Smith’s Experience Teach Me About Being
A Better Citizen?”**

By: Brooklyn Banks

“The soldier is the Army.

No Army is better than its soldiers. The soldier is also a citizen. In fact, the highest obligation and privilege of citizenship is that of bearing arms for one’s country.” – General George S. Patton. My grandfather, Retired Sergeant First Class (SFC) Steven Gerald Smith is a citizen, who became a soldier, and fought for our country. SFC (RET) Smith was a chemical specialist for seven years and a supply sergeant for fifteen years. During his last 15 years, he had the pleasure of serving with the elite 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment (SOAR).

During his high school years, before joining JROTC, he played varsity football. After sustaining an injury during his freshman year in football, he decided it was time to try something new. Consequently, he joined JROTC for three years. Shortly after graduating high school, my grandfather enlisted in the army as a chemical specialist. My grandfather served in the army for 22 years. His fondness for the Army stemmed from his JROTC experience during high school. When asked, “Why the Army?” he replied, “...most of my family served in the Navy, but I could not swim... So, I joined the Army...”

He went to basic training in Fort Benning, Georgia and later attended Advanced Individual Training in Fort McClellan, Alabama for chemical school. During his time in the service, my grandfather was stationed at Fort Knox, Kentucky; Fort Ord, California; Fort Campbell, Kentucky; Fort Lee, Virginia; Fort Lewis, Washington; Fort McClellan, Alabama; Camp Casey, South Korea; and visited other places (given the special units he served within) throughout his career. He served in various positions during his service, but two assignments stood out, Fort Lee and South Korea, where he served as an instructor. My grandfather changed duty stations about every three years. Most soldiers receive an award or medal each time they relocated to a new duty station. SFC (RET) Smith is honored and most proud to have received the Meritorious Service Medal and being placed on the retirement scrolls.

What my grandfather enjoyed most while in the Army was flying. He loved being in a helicopter; the helicopter rides at carnivals often remind him of those times. His favorite place to live while he was in the military was Fort Ord, California because he loved the changing colors of the ocean. While talking about his favorite place he mentioned that Fort Campbell was his least favorite - but that he didn't have a choice in the matter. As a Chicago native, if he had not enlisted in the Army, he would have worked in the car manufacturing industry in Chicago. Therefore, never having the opportunity to visit the beaches in California or meeting my grandmother in South Korea. My grandfather closed his interview, by explaining to me how the Army helped him work with others – which made him a better citizen.

SFC (RET) Smith's military experience has made me a better citizen because he constantly demonstrates to me, that no matter how many times you get hurt or come up short, you must pick yourself back up. My grandfather did this by removing himself from poverty in Chicago and serving an honorable military career. Also, my grandfather's experience has taught me that certain disabilities (like his fight with Huntington's Disease) do not have to define who you are or who you will become. I have learned how to be a better citizen, work hard, and love others better each day from my grandfather's example.

It has been an honor and privilege to interview my grandfather, SFC (RET) Steven Gerald Smith. My grandfather has sacrificed so much to become the exemplary citizen he is today. Even though my grandfather has retired, for many years from the Army, he still finds ways to impart how to become a better citizen and fight for what's right – which I will do as well. My grandfather SFC (RET) Steven G. Smith will always be a soldier at heart!