

WINDS OF WAR

In my senior year my draft notice arrived. I was informed that in August 1967 my draft status would change from a 2D student deferment to 1A. This was a scary time for all young males between the ages of 18 to 25. What made it even scarier, I had abandoned the 4 year college plan years ago. It now became important for me to buckle down and get that degree. I changed draft boards from Washington D.C. to Houston. I also applied to Officers Candidate School (OCS) for the U.S Army and was accepted. These delaying tactics slowed everything down. I was not hassled for another year.

My last year at St. Thomas, 1969 was fulfilling and profitable. I had moved out of the hot dormitory and got an apartment in a prestigious area of Houston, Memorial Drive. Our apartment had white Mohair carpeting and I was now driving a red 1968 Chevrolet Impala. The cash flow I had was intoxicating. It was apparent that my future father in law was right. Learning to sell did provide me the tools to pave my way for the rest of my life.

No graduation ceremony for me. I walked to the Link-Lee Mansion that hot August day and was handed my graduation certificate. I received my BA degree in Liberal Arts from St. Thomas University. Margaret had already sent me my Dear John letter so I felt my stay in Houston had come to an agreeable end.

Fort Dix New Jersey

3 days later I was in Fort Dix New Jersey waiting in line to get a haircut so I could start Basic Training. What an experience that was. All my life I enjoyed the company of intelligent well rounded people. At this point in my life I was associating with fisherman, truck drivers, farmers and what not. It's not that they weren't intelligent. But their narrow points of view were bizarre. I had a bunk mate who was a third generation tow truck driver. He received a letter from his father about a new taillight they bought for the truck. That bunk mate spoke about that truck and light for 2 days.

Fort Polk Louisiana

After 6 weeks in basic training I was shipped off to Ft. Polk Louisiana to receive Advanced Infantry Training. This was the Vietnam War meat grinder course that lasted 9 weeks. Many of our instructors were returning veterans and they did a good job scaring the hell out of us. The myriad ways that the enemy can punish the human body seemed endless. Nine weeks of learning how to shoot machine guns, rifles and throw grenades cumulated in me getting the highest award the company offered. I got a 3 day pass because I was the best marksman out of a 150 man competition.

Fort Benning Georgia

It was now January and my carefully planned strategy to continue military training until the war would conclude was coming to fruition. I arrived at Ft. Benning Georgia to begin my OCS training only to be

advised that our class would not begin for another month. An idle soldier is not tolerated well by the military. We were given a choice, airborne training or KP duty (kitchen patrol). I was not that gung ho of a soldier, however I knew I wanted no part of KP, I elected jump school. What a great decision that was. As conditioned as I thought I was after 15 weeks of Army life I learned a valuable lesson. Airborne training separated the men from the boys. During those 3 weeks we ran to breakfast, lunch and dinner. We ran everywhere to toughen us up so when we landed, we wouldn't fall apart.

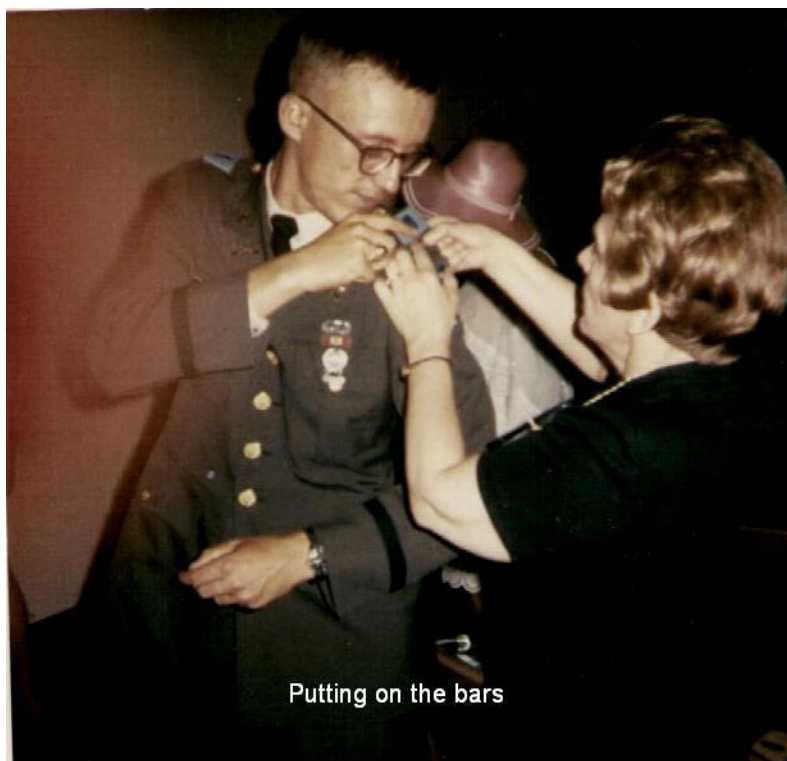
When they opened the door on the C-130 at 2000 feet the rush of air and noise was overwhelming. The green light went on and we stood up, buckled up and shuffled to the door. Inside that aircraft were 40 men that would make their first jump that afternoon and I was one of them. I felt no fear; the training had provided me the confidence I needed to face this challenge with gusto. I did not hesitate but leaped from that plane as I would a carnival ride. One second I was in a vortex of sound and rushing air the next second I was floating in a peaceful abyss. I made 5 jumps that winter out of perfectly good airplanes and I enjoyed every one of them. I was becoming a soldier.

I was assigned to OC20-69. This would be my home for another 23 weeks. Things were not as I expected. These TAC Officers were not messing around. This was a condensed course to not only instruct us but to eliminate us. They took their cue from the Military Academies. We were forced to stand at attention whenever an officer was in our presence. Eat our food in total silence. Any infractions led to long torturous pushup drills. We started our running at 5:30 AM and concluded it at 6 PM. They were adept and creative in discovering new ways to mess with our minds. They were simulating combat situations

to determine how we would react to battlefield stress. Attrition for all OCS classes in those days averaged 33 percent. I was concerned that I might wash out. I feared failure, so I became an academic. I applied myself, studied hard and began acing tests. I could read maps, call in artillery and perform night maneuvers with the best in my class. The military knows how to instruct. The noncommissioned and commissioned officers were the best instructors I have ever had. They had well prepared lesson plans and spoke in loud clear voices. Every class they taught had ranking observers grading their performances. I just wish my college professors were as articulate. Four and one half months went by in a flash. I gained a tremendous amount of confidence in my abilities to handle whatever came my way.

Lt. Tischer my TAC (tactical) Officer called me in a few days before I received my commission and informed me he was recommending me to be a TAC Officer for the next OCS class. This class was starting in a few weeks and I needed to be ready. This was shocking news. I now had the chance to “do unto others as they have done unto me”. This appointment bolstered my ego and self-esteem. It also meant that for another 23 weeks I would have to be at work at 5:30 in the morning.

I was a proud man in June of 1969 when my Mother pinned on me my 2nd Lieutenant bars. Even Erik, my Stepfather beamed with pride. It was a good day.



My Tactical Officer days went by quickly. It was my first prolonged experience leading a group of men towards an identified goal. I learned that fear and pain were not good motivators. That respect earned is far better than demanded. I ran whenever they ran. I was there to wake them in the morning and I was there most evenings when they went to bed. The house I shared with 2 close friends, Tom Jones and Rick Fox did not see much of me.



Vietnam

My orders arrived in a large manila envelope. I was to report to my duty station in Viet Nam no later than March 22, 1970. I went home to Washington to get my personal effects in order. Mom was not taking this Vietnam thing well. I vowed to myself that all she would ever get from me was rosy information. Every night Walter Cronkite on The CBS Evening News offered 5 to 10 minutes of blood and gore on the

Vietnam War. All my planning and contriving to stall my departure date was not rewarded. This damn war was still going strong.

My first stop before I departed was a two week jungle course offered in the Panama Canal Zone. I was accustomed to hot weather in Houston but what I felt in Panama in early March was incredible. The Army wanted to indoctrinate their young officers to jungle life. We were offered bugs for breakfast and monkey brains for lunch. We learned there were 50 separate varieties of banana. We were introduced to over 100 banana recipes.

As the DC-8 approached Bien Hoa Air Base and our altitude was reduced the craters appeared. Everywhere you looked there were bomb craters. Some of these holes were as large as 100 feet across. They were all filled with creamy muddy water. Smoke was rising from fields and huts. Helicopters were crisscrossing, freighters were landing and departing. I had finally arrived at a destination that for 6 years I had been trying to avoid. Was this "Dante's Inferno"? My good friend and OCS buddy Rick Fox kept reminding me that "Charlie" was fashioning that one bullet, especially for me.

Cu Chi

The military has a sinister personality disorder exemplified by the "Wish List". Here the new arrival officer is given a form to fill out to identify the units he wishes to serve with. You are permitted to make three choices in chronological order. We were told that no effort would be spared to grant us our wish. I must admit my first choice was Saigon. I didn't feel like I was demonstrating that I was a coward. I was making sure no stone would go unturned to assure my safe return. The Commanding Officer issued me orders to report to the 25th Infantry

Division at Cu Chi. Although, this place was only 24 miles away, they put me on a four engine C-130 the "Flying Boxcar" and whisked me away to my war.

Upon my arrival I was assigned to the 22 Infantry Battalion Bravo Company. The unit was in the field and I was informed I would join them the next day. The Staff Sergeant took me to the supply room and issued me my M-16 rifle, steel helmet, canteen, backpack, ammunition, poncho, smoke grenades, hand grenades, C rations, bug repellent, toilet stuff and olive green towels. He then helped me carry this stuff to my hooch. I realized then, I was in a war zone. I was carrying enough weaponry and ammunition to kill 50 people that evening.

My new home was a steel container 6 feet wide by 10 feet long by 8 feet high. Sandbags were piled 3 to 4 layers deep on top and 2 rows wide on the side. The swing door was allowed to open outward and was protected by an 8 foot high wall of sandbags. This bunker was a necessary precaution because we received incoming high explosive rounds on a nightly basis. Inside my furnishings consisted of a cot and a small oscillating fan. That container had to be at least 100 degrees. Not a breath of air stirred in that oven. I thought to myself, how was a person supposed to sleep in this thing? Somehow I managed to doze off, only to be shaken by some nearby explosions. Was this incoming or outgoing? I did not know. I pulled my sweaty poncho over my head and rolled over. I knew this was going to be my environment for the next year. I told myself to suck it up.



Camp
"Leopard"
at the CP

The Bell Helicopter (HUEY) I boarded was a supply ship delivering ammunition, food stuff, water and mail to Bravo Company in the field. These birds were stripped of doors and safety equipment. It was stuffed ceiling high and the only place I could sit was next to the machine gunner. These craft carried a compliment of two machine guns, one on each side. Due to the large amount of supplies only a 12 inch seat existed from the cargo to the door. I took a deep breath and sat down next to the machine gunner. I then realized my backpack only

allowed my butt about six inches of the floor board. I looked in vain for a seatbelt. Then in a lurch the HUEY was airborne. I was committed.

The HUEY climbed effortlessly to 3000 feet. Everywhere I looked I saw the ravages of 6 years of war. These were not bombed out cities but bombed out rice paddies. The dikes built to contain water in the fields in many places were damaged. Despite the obstacles I could see farmers with their oxen working these fields. Why were these craters everywhere I looked? Were these old battlefields? I knew we had arrived at our outpost because the pilot banked the ship sharply to the left. I at that instant thought I was a goner. I grabbed the machine gunner and held on for dear life. He had the M-60 machine to hold on too, I had nothing. I visualized the amusement emanating from my future platoon mates as their replacement Lieutenant swan dives 3000 feet from the sky.



I learned later that the corkscrew maneuver the pilot performed was standard. It was not healthy to make gradual descents into base camps. Because the NVA enjoyed using low approaching aircraft for target practice.

I shook off my near death experience and disembarked the ship. My knees were wobbly but I needed to show composure. My commanding officer, Captain Gene Toyer, was a short Texan with a Clark Gable moustache. He was born in Pilot Point Texas and fancied himself a horseman. He wanted to know if I was a West Point, ROTC or an OCS guy. I never understood why this was important. I muttered that I was a paratrooper stationed to a leg unit. He was not impressed. We toured the base camp. It was a circular perimeter similar to what the wagon trains did to protect themselves from Indian attacks. It was set in a clearing surrounded by jungles at least 200 yards away. The perimeter did not have a wall. The troops dug 2 man foxholes at 10 to 15 foot intervals. About 90 men were bivouacked in that camp. What was the point of this place? Were we protecting a road, a village or a way of life? Captain Toyer informed me we were being used for bait. Our mission would be a success if we were attacked. This way the enemy would concentrate his forces which would allow us to inflict more casualties on him. It was obvious to me that the sword swung both ways. This was a strange way to fight a war.

William Westmoreland was the commanding General of all US forces in Vietnam from 1964 to 1968. He adopted a strategy of attrition that he believed would win the war. We were not interested in achieving objectives and holding them as we did in previous conflicts. Here we only were interested in body counts. Our missions were called "Search and Destroy". The role of the grunt in the Vietnam conflict was to kill as many bad guys as he could.

I was introduced to E3 Myers my platoon Sergeant. He was a red haired Irishman about 30 years old. He was a career soldier and had been in country for six months. I recognized his look of indifference when I gazed at his face. Here was this raw Lieutenant, in bright green army fatigues who he would now report to. I knew at this moment that every social instinct I possessed would be put to the test.

Later I got to meet the ragamuffin group of soldiers that I would go into battle with. They all had the fresh faces of High School kids. Scruffy faced mama's boys, everyone last one of them. They were now under my charge and I bore the responsibility to get them home alive.

My first mission was to take my platoon of 20 men 300 yards into the jungle on a reconnaissance patrol. We needed to determine if the enemy was spying or preparing to attack us. The larger bait would become more attractive by getting smaller. I gathered together my Sergeant and both team leaders and issued my orders as I was taught to do in OCS. The stares I got back were priceless. These guys were never given marching orders before. They knew to grab their rifle ammo and water and start walking. I realized these soldiers were not as battle savvy as they led me to believe.

We set off for the tree line and looked like a herd of grazing water buffalo. One grenade could have inflicted 20 casualties. I took charge with demonstrative scowling and gesturing. Eventually a somewhat organized troop movement was underway. We worked our way into the jungle and the machetes came out to clear our paths. I recall our OCS instructors discussing triple canopy vegetation but what I saw took me back. That jungle was so dark it could have hidden 1000 men just

200 yards from our base camp. As we cut our way into the thick underbrush we made enough noise to alert them if they were a mile away. These guys we were fighting were not stupid. They chose when and where to fight. They chose to laugh at us and maintain their distance that day.

I realized early that one of the ways for me to survive this war was to get to know my platoon members. There were 4 noncommissioned officers and 16 privates. I also had 2 Kit Carson scouts. These were Montagnard tribesmen that came from the Central Highlands. They were fierce opponents of the North Vietnamese. They were helpful during interrogations and had a native understanding of the terrain.

My radio operator was a charming black kid from Georgia. He felt that the radio he carried on his back was a beacon for enemy snipers. The short range antenna was 3 feet long and the radio itself was quite large. It was larger than a New York telephone directory and weighed more. This soldier went through great lengths to camouflage it. He would run the antenna up the sleeve of his shirt and raise his arm every time he keyed his mike. These precautionary measures were fine with me. His orders were to always be by my side. Charlie, (Viet Cong -local guerrillas) was the nick name we gave our enemy. These guys were always looking for the radio man because the "Trung uy" (Lieutenant) was a juicy target.

Doc a PFC (Private First Class) was the platoon medic. He was a serious analytical type that only spoke when spoken to. He never let his medical kit out of his sight because of the morphine dispensers stored in it.

Most of these boys were fresh out of High School. As soon as they graduated their local draft boards filled their requirements by drafting them. They were sent to Basic Training for 6 weeks and Advanced Infantry School for 9 weeks. Soon after this training they were shipped to Viet Nam. The private and NCO normally spent their entire tour, one year in the bush. Officers were always rotated within their tour. I had 3 different positions while in Viet Nam and only had to spend 6 months in the field.

When we returned to Cu Chi after my first mission I had an opportunity to explore the base. The perimeter needed to be large enough to accommodate a squadron of HUEY helicopters and house approximately 6000 men. Bulldozers had pushed up 10 foot dirt walls that were reinforced with sandbags and concertina wire. Throughout the entire camp were hospitals, mess halls, canteens, bars and every convenience item that man required. The front gate every morning was teeming with the local Vietnamese population seeking work for the day. The petite Mama Sans would strut their charms to gather the attention of a serviceman to wash clothes, or clean hooch's. One dollar per day was a good wage.

We learn today that Cu chi had one of the most extensive tunnel systems throughout Vietnam. Troops would spend the day in the tunnel working or resting. They would leave only at night to scavenge for supplies or cause problems for US troops. These tunnels housed hospitals, barracks and R&R centers. They are popular tourist destinations today.

CAMBODIA

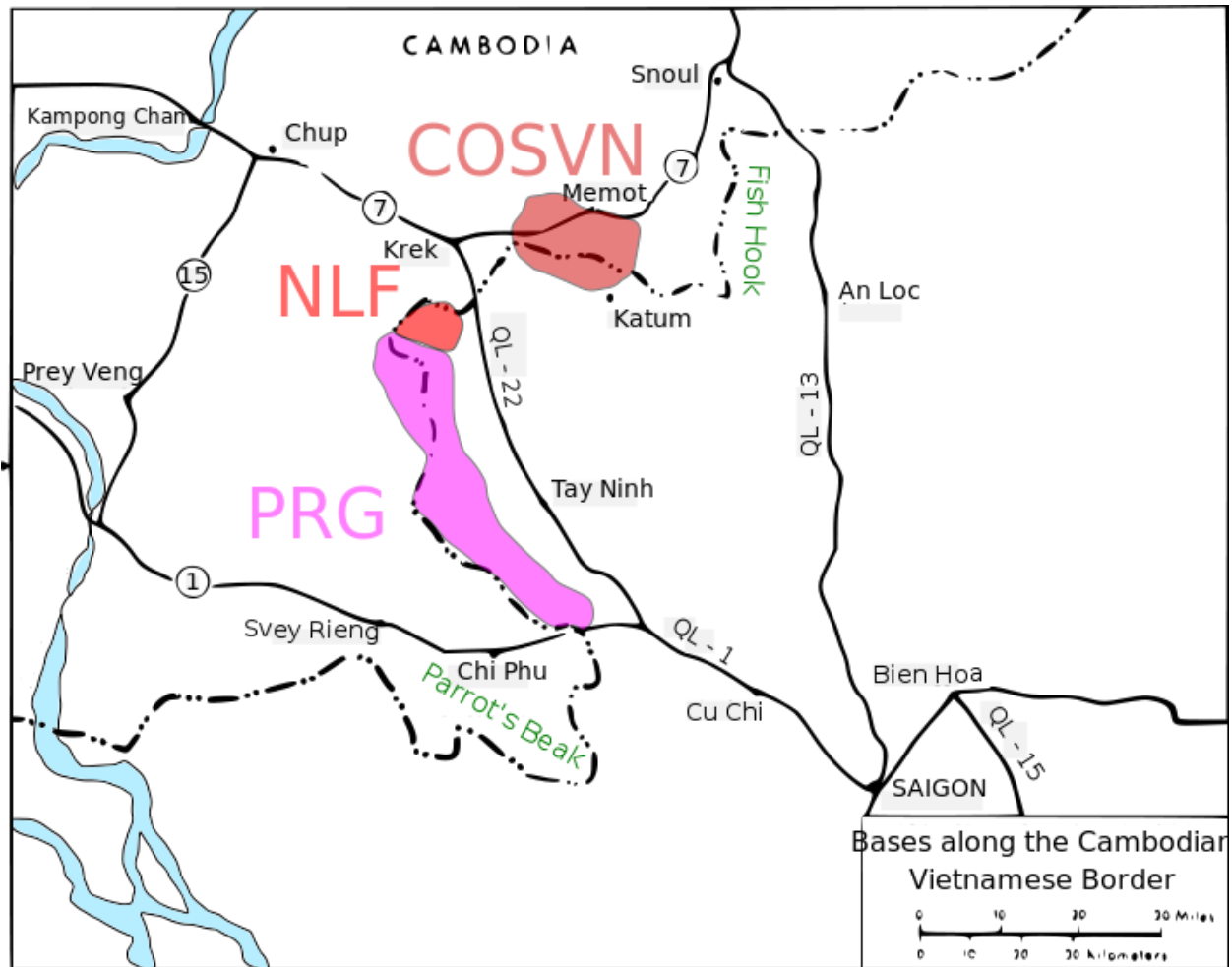
On April 28, 1970, Captain Toyer gathered all four platoon officers and his first Sergeant of Bravo Company into his hooch to prepare for an invasion of Cambodia. This was going to be an airborne assault into territory that for the past six years was off limits. The NVA and the Viet Cong used vast areas of Cambodia as staging areas, munitions depots, rest and recreation areas. From these sanctuaries they would strike at the US forces than retreat. We commencing at 6 AM tomorrow would put a stop to all that.

I had only been “in country” one week and did not initially understand the significance of these orders. As I looked around the room and saw the concerned faces of my fellow officers the seriousness of the situation began to unfold. The assault we were going to undertake was called the “Cambodian Incursion” We were attacking an area 40 miles north of Saigon called the Parrots Beak. We anticipated an enemy force in excess of 40,000 troops. These were seasoned soldiers from the Peoples’ Army of Viet Nam. For this combat team this war no longer was a series of remote outposts and ambushes. This war would now be a frontal assault to defeat the enemy where he lives.

Sergeant Myers and I left the briefing room and sought out a shade canopy so we could gather our thoughts. We jointly decided that each man would carry 10 grenades, 120 rounds of M-16 ammunition, one bandoleer of M-60 machine gun ammunition (about 100 rounds), 2 smoke grenades, 1 gallon of water and 3 days of C rations. In addition to this we carried extra batteries for the radio, several M203 grenade

launchers, an M-60 machine gun with tripod and 4 rocket propelled LAWS (light antitank weapon). We realized that if we engaged a large enemy force our ammunition supplies would keep us going for about 10 minutes.

At about 5 that morning we did a nose count and we were missing a couple of guys. Unfortunately this was a regular occurrence with some of the black enlisted men. A feeling among some of the black soldiers was that, this was a "White Man's War". A cohesive team spirit among my platoon had not developed yet. Cu Chi was a large base camp; they would be found eventually and sent out with a resupply chopper. I gathered my platoon and did my best Knut Rockne impersonation. I told them that we were part of a multi division attack force and we were performing an air assault into Cambodia. I advised them that our mission was to destroy as much of the enemy and his supplies that we could. I ordered the machine gunners to withhold fire during our assault. I wanted small arms fire to provide suppression as we moved forward. Our machine gunners would be our reserves in case the enemy counter attacked. The looks and comments I got back surprised me. There was little fear emanating from these young men. This gung ho attitude I was witnessing settled my own nerves.



Out of the sky came what seemed like hundreds of HUEY helicopters. One by one they landed and my platoon was sorted out to 3 choppers in the squadron. The bedlam that ensued was indescribable. Every choppers rotor wash, extended plumes of choking dust, dirt and debris. There was no verbal communication as we got on board. On this ride I sat dead center on the bird.

I think every man that goes into battle addresses his own mortality. "My reflections that morning centered on my religious beliefs". After all, I attended 17 years of Catholic schooling. "Thou shalt not kill" was not a slogan but an imbedded belief system. But here, I was going off to face an enemy that simply had a different political viewpoint. I was

ordered to kill these individuals and if I failed they may kill me. I tempered these inward contradictions when I looked at the men in my charge. This war was not about me alone; I had a responsibility far greater than self.

We started our decent and I gazed at a boiling cauldron of destruction. Adjacent to our large expansive landing zone was a jungle being pummeled by multiple explosions. Heavy 105 and 155 howitzer rounds were creating shock waves that we could actually see. This was my first time to see F4 Phantoms crisscross the sky and deliver their devastating ordinance. One cannot gaze at a fireworks display of that magnitude and not surmise that our enemy already had met his fate.

The pilot of our helicopter was hovering about two feet off the ground and was gesturing to me that it was time to get off his bird. I gestured back that he was too high and he needed to land his bird. I lost the argument when my guys started jumping off into the 3 foot tall Buffalo Grass. I followed their lead, jumped and felt the weight of my load force me into the soft earth. As we started our advance toward the jungle the door gunners were spraying the area so it was difficult to determine if we were taking enemy fire or not. As soon as the choppers left the area my question was answered. We all heard the unique crack of the AK47 rounds going over and by us. Our first instinct was to hit the ground and burrow under it if we could. We hit the dirt and laid there for what seemed like an eternity before I decided on a plan of action. Sergeant Myers who commanded half my platoon was closer to the jungle than I and was on my right flank. I ordered him to deliver suppressing fire at the tree line so my men could advance. His men began to fire and I reluctantly stood up and shouted, "Follow Me". I was comforted to see that they followed my orders and advanced. We approached the tree

line en mass and were relieved that Charlie had fled. The jungle allowed us to regain our composure. The security one feels next to a tree versus an open field is akin to a child clutching his Teddy Bear. We had survived the first hour of our mission.

Because we needed to coordinate our advance I was ordered to establish a perimeter and wait for further instructions. When we got our orders to advance, the many hours of map reading training I received came to fruition. My objective was a suspected enemy stronghold about one kilometer away. Map reading in a jungle environment was more of an art than a science. We had to observe the subtle undulations of the topography to determine our exact position. Once we knew where we were, it was simple to plot a direction and follow the topography to our destination. The topographical maps we had were very accurate. So it was necessary to be able to read topographical features and judge distances.

This jungle that we were in was not so thick that it required machetes. So I designated an impressive young man that had been in country for several months to be our point man. We needed someone who had the vision necessary to locate trip wires and the experience to avoid potential ambush sites. I ordered 3 columns and spaced my men at 10 foot intervals and we went off hunting Charlie.

As we approached the camp site it was obvious that this area had housed hundreds of troops and recently. A 3 foot deep by 3 foot wide ditch was excavated around the entire perimeter. It seemed that this defensive position was prepared for an anticipated invasion. Throughout the entire area we saw hundreds of hammocks tied to trees. We also found several dead NVA in the ditch that died of

flechette wounds. These are tiny 1 1/8" long darts that were delivered by an exploding canister round. These canisters were set to detonate at set altitudes. One of the dead men must have had 20 of these darts pierce his body. These were the first dead men I have ever seen. The grim reality of what we were doing and why we were here struck home. If there were 40,000 soldiers in the area they elected not to fight us today.

After a brief rest we were ordered to travel 3 kilometers and rendezvous with the rest of the company. These instructions suited me just fine. The thought of spending the night with a small unit in enemy infested territory was not appealing to me. After a slow 20 minute slog my point man gestured to me and indicated that he heard voices up ahead. I instructed Sergeant Myers to stay behind with his squad. I motioned for a scout to accompany my group and we silently came upon a small village. We counted about 10 bamboo huts with straw roofs. There was a water well and a large meeting area in the center of the village. We saw at least 10 men scurrying about and heading away from us. They were carrying rifles and baskets. We immediately laid down in the grass. I instructed my radio man to call Sergeant Myers and bring the rest of the platoon forward. As we were waiting for him a tall slender soldier donning a gray cap with red insignia came towards us speaking Vietnamese. The varying jungle shadows must have indicated to him that we were friendlies. He stopped 30 feet in front of me and began shouting in an authoritarian voice. I did what I was trained to do. I placed the cross hairs of my M16 on his chest and squeezed off one round. He dropped like a rock. My men immediately peppered the entire village with rifle fire until I ordered them to stop. I then instructed my scout to demand a surrender, which he attempted.

When we got no reply, we threw over several grenades. We entered the encampment slowly, carefully and at full alert. The havoc I had created was in full view. The bullet pierced his forehead and exploded out the back of his head. He wore Officer's insignias on his lapels and he had a black and white picture of his wife and child in his billfold. I refused to accept the fact that I was directly responsible for his death. I comforted myself by congratulating others for the demise of this Vietnamese soldier.

We were the only platoon out of Bravo Company that saw action that day. Captain Toyer changed his orders and the other 3 platoons joined us at the village. We threw some dead pigs down the well and uncovered a considerable cache of AK47's, ammunition, rocket propelled grenades and food stocks. We took photos of our prizes than destroyed what we safely could. What we were fearful of detonating we threw down the well.

Throughout the next 5 days we heard artillery in the distance and small arms skirmishes. We encountered small groups of combatants and evidence that this area recently housed many troops. There were 14 major incursions into Cambodia until July of that year, with mixed results.

A change in the Cambodian government allowed a window of opportunity for the destruction of the base areas in 1970 when Prince Norodom Sihanouk was deposed and replaced by pro-American General Lon Nol. Allied military operations failed to eliminate many communist troops or to capture their elusive headquarters, known as the Central Office for South Vietnam (COSVN), but the haul of captured

material in Cambodia prompted claims of success and victory which remain controversial to this day

After 5 days in the bush we returned to base camp for a few days of R&R (rest and relaxation). The jungle fatigues we wore were caked white with body salt and rendered an aroma of decaying fish. The cold showers were a pleasant relief from the heat and humidity. The cold beer ran plentiful and was shared by officers and enlisted men alike.

The Army did a good job feeding us. They grilled our steaks to order, fried up potatoes and placed some greens on our plates. Here we were 10,000 miles from home and the Army acted like neighborly hosts throwing a block party.

We would stay in base camp for at least two days than we would get Another mission. These missions usually lasted about 4 days. The Choppers would take us into remote LZ (landing zones). Sometimes we Were in company strength and other times just my platoon.

On one mission we received orders to seek out a suspected transmission center. Attached to my unit for the day were two soldiers from a Signal unit. One was a Lieutenant the other a private. Their job was to tap into an enemy transmission line and gather military intelligence. During our pre mission briefing this officer approached me and confessed this was his first foray into the bush. He had been in country for 8 months and had never left the safe confines of our base camp. He confided that he volunteered for this mission because he wanted to experience the bush. By this time I had been in country for 3 months and felt like a gristly veteran. I recall reassuring him that hostile action was not the norm and I expected a milk run. I also seriously doubted that we could find this wire in a haystack.

My platoon mustered that morning at the embarkation pad and I briefed the squadron leader on the coordinates for our mission. The 3 choppers took off into the muggy morning air and The Signal Officer was next to me clutching his M-16 assault weapon. An air of apprehension always surrounded me on these 18 man missions. Our chances for survival rested on intelligence reports of sporadic enemy activity. If intelligence was right, our platoon could easily handle an engagement with a force equal to ours. It was the unknown factor that was of concern. If we encountered an unexpected larger force the only safety line we had was the PRC 25 our portable radio that was affectionately referred to as the "Prick". With battery, this unit weighed 23 lbs. and was practically indestructible. It could sustain a 50 foot fall or be submerged for 1 hour in water and still operate. This unit came with 2 antennas, the short flex that could receive a message from 3 to 4 miles or the long antenna that had an 18 mile range. The only contact we had with the outside world was this radio, it was our life line.

We landed in a small LZ (landing zone) and began our movement to our objective. I always planned for a 2 click (2 kilometers) march from landing site to objective. The noise generated by 3 helicopters can be heard for miles. However in a jungle environment it is difficult to gauge distance and direction. Therefore I felt more comfortable taking 2 hours to reach my objective than landing on it and announcing where I was.

My objective was a small valley triangulated by 3 small hills not more than 40 feet high each. The area we were in had seen quite a bit of enemy activity. The debris generated by the American soldier was in sharp contrast to what the NVA soldier discarded. We saw remnants of straw mats, some chop sticks, damaged leather goods and a few shiny tin cans. We entered the area cautiously and I sent out several recon

teams to see if they could find this wire we were looking for. To my surprise they found the wire, it was not buried but strung above the ground.

I quickly established a perimeter and my men began opening their C ration containers. Lt. Brandt was thrilled with our find. All morning long he shared with me his apprehensions of experiencing a live mission in enemy territory. Now he had his opportunity to complete this mission and return to base camp a hero. He was no more than 10 feet away from me when the sharp crack of the AK47 rang out. Within an instant bullets were flying through the air and we all ducked for cover.

Whoever was firing at us was invisible. We were shooting at green tropical foliage with no shape or definition. At that moment I heard the Signal Officer yell out, "I'm hit" and I saw his blood. I called for Doc, despite the fire fight; he rushed over with his medical bag in tow. My main focus now was to ascertain the danger and how do I address it. The AK-47 cracks were coming from one position so I ordered the machine gun crew that was behind the action to relocate and impose suppressive fire. We had 2 grenade launchers and they began to lob 40 millimeter rounds on Charlie. After a few moments of terror and anxiety peace returned to the battlefield.

Charlie's nature was to hit and run. So I anticipated he was moving away from us instead of attacking us. I called out our coordinates and requested a fire mission. The artillery boys were not occupied that morning and they obliged my request. The first spotter round was the most important. If the round landed where you asked for it, it meant you and the Artillery guys were in sync. If I had screwed up my coordinates or the artillery was one degree off, the first round could land in our lap. I heard my heart beat in my head and I held my breath

when the first round was fired. I saw the flash, smoke and then heard the thud of the 105 Howitzer round. It landed about 500 meters ahead and to the right of where I requested the round to drop. I adjusted my coordinates and walked the artillery in 50 meter increments until the rounds began dropping where I wanted them. I called, "fire for effect" and the jungle ahead of us exploded in a cacophony of fire and smoke.

After 3 or 4 salvos, peace again came to our small part of the world. I then returned my focus to our perimeter and inquired on how many casualties we took. Not more than 10 feet from me lay the Signal Officer. Doc had ripped his fatigue shirt off and I saw the bullet damage. It entered his right arm 6 inches below his shoulder; it carried across his chest and ripped his right nipple off. He was in pain and vocal about it. I think back, that the kill shot generated by that marksman could not have been aimed at a narrow silhouette of a soldier, he must have turned instinctively to avoid being shot flush in the chest.

Doc gave him a shot of morphine to shut him up and I got on the radio to call for a medevac. The military in combat situations were careful harboring their resources. They prioritized dust offs depending on the severity of the wounds. I provided the dispatcher the nature of the wound and my assessment of its severity. I then proceeded to scout for a suitable landing zone so we could extract our damaged Lieutenant to a field hospital.

We were fortunate, there was a clearing about 50 yards away. I instructed the platoon to secure the LZ and waited for the choppers arrival. Within 10 minutes I heard the rotor chop of the HUEY. The pilot asked if I heard him and I replied that I had. He then asked me to pop a

smoke grenade to establish my exact position. I threw out a red grenade and waited for the pilot's recognition. If he had told me he saw green I would have waived him off. Charlie was nasty at times and we had to be careful. I gave our Lieutenant a few words of encouragement as we carried him to the bird. He was so happy to be leaving the bush that he was singing songs along the way. I know that he today wears his Purple Heart with pride. He was a non-combat officer who faced combat, survived and could share war stories with his grandchildren.

I received my Bronze Star for valor that day and I recommended 4 of my platoon members for the same citation for their courage under enemy fire.

The weeks and the missions took on a repetitious drone of boredom and moments of sheer terror. On one expedition we were inserted into an area and I was instructed to establish a large ambush. We were going to an area that was suspected of being a major infiltration and supply route. We were dropped off in a spooky LZ where the Buffalo grass exceeded 6 feet. A man standing 3 feet away from you would be invisible. It is very unsettling to gaze out into enemy territory and see nothing but waving grass. On that mission I ignored one of my basic precepts. I set up my ambush site very close to where we were dropped off.

It was an especially hot day so we found what we thought was an ideal spot. We decided to smoke some cigarettes, hang out and wait for night fall. I had a strange feeling all day about what lurked behind the waving grasses. At dusk we began to establish our ambush site. I chose a well-worn trail and set up our typical "L" shaped formation. The L shape was the best; because once the enemy entered the trap he

would receive fire from the side and front. Also the L shape prevented friendly fire casualties. We set out our M-18 Claymore mines. These were antipersonnel direction mines. They were inserted into the ground with a scissor prong and had an aiming device. They contained 700 - 1/8" balls that had a 60 degree spread. These balls were hand detonated by a C-4 charge that could cause severe damage at 100 meters.

Night time was now our friend. We were not moving but laying there like a spider waiting for its prey. The Star Scope had just been developed and it was in its primitive stages. This device was as large as a rolled up Sunday newspaper and weighed about 10 lbs. It was capable of enhancing ambient light and projecting images in the darkest circumstances. One used it as you would a telescope. I had one of these devices in my platoon and seldom used it because it was cumbersome and fatiguing.

Bush silence was difficult to enforce. There were guys that could not and would not shut up. You would think that in perilous combat situations men would rely on their protective instincts to modify their behavior but they did not. Some of them lacked discipline to the extent they would cover up with a poncho and fire up a cigarette. In that thick jungle air that smoke could drift for 100 yards. We lay in guard and alternated our sleep pattern so one man out of 4 was awake for 2 hours while the others slept.

My sleep was abruptly disturbed by a crescendo of explosions 50 meters to my rear. The projectiles Charlie was shooting were skimming above our heads and landing to our rear. My men instinctively at this moment did not return fire. They knew to the man, that return fire

would only give their positions away. We could see the origin of the tracer fire and recognized Charlie was very close and determined. Charlie to our good fortune had overestimated our location and had given away his. I immediately established radio contact and requested a fire mission. Here we were in the middle of a jungle late at night and we had friends to call on for support. The artillery guys refused to help because we exceeded their safety margin. However a Cobra was in the vicinity and offered his services. I placed my strobe light in my steel pot and turned it on. Within a few minutes he was hovering above and I heard the crackle of his voice when he said "I see you". At this point all I needed to do was to provide a compass direction and distance from my strobe light. With this information the good guy in the Cobra could be our heroes. I placed the compass in my helmet and did not understand why the needle was swinging back and forth. He kept asking for a direction and I could not furnish him one. A fifth grade student understands how metal influences magnetism. I that evening, was completely clueless on why my compass was not working. To this day I know he thinks back to the knuckle head lieutenant that could not establish north or south but was running a combat team.

Despite my stupidity that night Charlie showed his intelligence. As soon as the Cobra got on station they took off. In the morning we checked out the area and found nothing other than spent shells.

S-1 Battalion Adjutant

Almost 6 months had passed since I first arrived in country and I recognized my good fortune. I had led and participated in approximately 20 search and destroy missions. I had inflicted damage on the enemy. I had called in 3 airstrikes and 4 artillery barrages, I had engaged Charlie as ordered and had survived. Best of all, my entire platoon did not sustain a KIA (killed in action). We had several wounded but none severally enough to impact them physically for the rest of their lives.

A courier came to my hooch and advised me that Colonel Hayward our Battalion Commander wanted to see me at Headquarters. I had been expecting a promotion to 1st Lt. It was customary to award that promotion after serving one year as a 2nd Lt. I went to his office and offered my sharpest salute. He commended me on my combat record and told me to stand at ease. He acknowledged my promotion, than he surprised me. I was expecting a low level staff or MACV (Military Assistance Command Vietnam) position. Instead Colonel Hayward offered me the job of Battalion Adjutant. This was a position normally filled by Captains or above. He informed me that a Captain was not available and that he wanted me to take the job. I didn't stutter or show apprehension. I think I told him he got the right man and I walked out on a cloud to return to my area.

My farewell was bitter sweet when I approached my platoon mates. Of the original 18 men, 7 had DEROS (Date Estimated Return Overseas). Another words, their tour was over and they returned home. Sergeant

Myers had been replaced as had DOC. Some of the men that arrived with me expressed their gratitude for having me as their platoon leader, I was touched.



I was not prepared to handle this job and I was overwhelmed by it. I reported to the Battalion Executive Officer or Chief of Staff. He was a detail oriented picky Major with a personality disorder. It was hate at first sight for both of us. I was provided a dyslectic clerk typist and a stack of manuals a show dog would have difficulty jumping over. My responsibilities focused on all Battalion manpower initiatives. I was assigning guard and fatigue duties. Preparing morning reports that

identified men in the field, in sick bay, in the stockade. I was responsible for coordinating projected departures with replacements. This was a bean counters job and I was ill suited to perform it. Somehow I muddled through and tolerated several chewing outs per day.

One of my responsibilities was the disposition of wounded soldiers. I undertook a task that has lived with me to this day. I was handed a dossier on a wounded Sergeant that was in Long Binh Hospital a few miles away. When I arrived I was shocked to see that I had met this man. He arrived in country about 3 months after I and we spent some time together. He was from Texas so we shared that commonality. This soldier had sustained very severe wounds. One bullet severed his spinal cord another grazed and destroyed his eye. He had been in intensive care for about a week and they were attempting to stabilize him so he could be transported to the Philippines. The minute we saw each other we recognized each other. He feebly smiled at me and attempted to raise his hand from his bed. He was happy to see a familiar face. I was at a loss on what I could do to comfort him. We visited briefly and I have never felt as inadequate as I did that morning. I later asked the nurse in charge what his prognosis was and her terse reply was "not for me to make". I realized that she was distancing herself emotionally from this soldier. He sustained some very severe wounds that would cripple him for the rest of his life. I later learned when I returned to Headquarters that he had sustained these injuries from friendly fire. His platoon mates had mistook him for Charlie and unleashed a torrent of machine gun fire at him.

My new position required me to welcome replacements. Sergeant James E. Duckworth was arriving to join my old platoon. The chopper

landed and I saw this tall gangly young man get out of the chopper with an exaggerated stoop to avoid the chopper blades. He was at least 6 foot 4 inches tall with a charming pock marked smile. He spoke with a southern drawl that reinforced his charm. I welcomed him aboard and showed him to his new quarters. We visited briefly about his new platoon and I gave him as much advice as I dared. It was easy to overwhelm new arrivals with do's and don'ts. It was best to generalize and allow them to adjust on their own time schedule.

Sergeant Duckworth was shot and killed on 8/31/70 during an enemy engagement. He was attempting to position his platoon during a fire fight. He rose up and was killed instantly by enemy fire. I prepared the letter that was sent to his parents and signed by the company commander to describe the circumstances of his death. I have seen his name etched into the Vietnam Memorial in Washington D.C. and I have shed tears in his honor.

R&R (Rest and Relaxation)

For several months before I left for Vietnam Margaret Francis Martin and I were repairing our relationship. She had come to Ft. Benning to participate in a Military Ball that was hosted by the company of OCS candidates that I was a TAC Officer for. It was a gala event where I got to wear my dress blues. Margaret always loved travel and adventure. I asked if she would like to see Georgia up close and personal and she was eager to accommodate me. I mailed her a round trip ticket and anticipated a great Thanksgiving. At that time I was sharing a rent

house with Tom Jones, Rick Fox and Dufus Dog. Dufus was a hound we picked up at a shelter or he was given to us. Nonetheless he had lots of personality and spent most of the time in our spacious back yard. When Margaret arrived we assigned her a bedroom overlooking the backyard. I failed to advise her that she needed to keep her window closed. As she was unpacking Dufus leapt from the backyard and on to her bed and cloths with his muddy feet. Her affection for that dog waned further when I offered him the first slice of breast meat during Thanksgiving dinner. She has reminded me of that incident every Thanksgiving for the past 48 years.

A year later I was in Vietnam and my R&R opportunity was coming up. Usually midway through a soldier's tour we were offered free transportation for a 7 day excursion to places like Hawaii, Hong Kong, Taipei, or Australia.

I was in contact with Margaret; she was my pen pal for my entire tour. Mail calls were always tough on the guys that did not get mail. It broke my heart when I saw them saunter off with my promise that tomorrow would bring a different result. My spirits were always lifted when I got my own letters. It brought me to a better place and a simpler time. Hearing from Mom was nice but getting a letter from Margaret was terrific. Margaret accepted my offer to meet me in Hawaii and our arrangements were made.

My khakis were folded up in my duffel bag for six months and quite wrinkled. I cleaned and pressed them than rushed off to the PX to freshen up my wardrobe. I needed some slacks, a few shirts and a new pair of shoes. The 10 hour flight was magnified with the unsettling anticipation of seeing Margaret again. I contemplated horrible thoughts

that this may have been a mercy trip for her. I visualized her telling me that she enjoyed our visit but after 8 long years of on and off courtship she found someone else. These harrowing thoughts fed my insecurities until I walked down the airplane stairs.

Somehow, I managed to be the first man off the stairs. There in all her beauty was Margaret; she was first in line to greet me as I got off the plane. She placed a big beautiful Lay around my neck and gave me a fabulous wet kiss. All of my pre conceived fears immediately evaporated. What a Hawaiian holiday that was. We were not going to stay in Waikiki for seven days, no sir! We were going to spend 2 days touring the island, take in Pearl Harbor then jet off to the islands of Kauai and then Maui. After spending 6 months in a war zone I decide this itinerary was exactly what I needed. We ate in the best restaurants' and drank at the finest bars. On several occasions we found it difficult to buy our own drinks. Many of the tourists and locals knew what we were celebrating and bought our drinks. We were touched by these gestures. We danced to "Tiny Bubbles" walked the moonlit beaches and rededicated ourselves to one another.



S-4 Supply and Logistics

Upon my return I was greeted with good news. My services were no longer needed as a battalion Adjutant. A Captain was rotating off the line and he was given my job. For the first time since I arrived at headquarters the Major and I dropped our swords. I actually found him to be friendly and affable.

My new job as a logistics Officer suited me much better. I was now in charge of supplying the troops in the field and at base camp. I controlled some portion of our battalions Motor Pool activities. I was assigned a driver and he and I logged many miles together as he whisked me back and forth between Long Binh and Cu Chi. However there was an inherent danger in my new duties that I did not anticipate. In December of 1971 several of the combat divisions and Air Squadrons began to stand down. Another words, they were packing up and going home. The problem that this created was we were slowly losing our air lift capabilities. The men in the field would be supplied by truck whenever possible. This meant that I would be now a convoy leader leading 4 or 5 trucks, jeeps and on occasion Abram Battle Tanks. These supply sorties traveled very dangerous roads and scared me to death.

The M606 Jeep built by a host of companies including Kaiser Motors in the U.S. was a rugged and versatile vehicle. This was my primary mode of transportation during my remaining 4 months in country. I had one assigned to me so I was keen to modify it to meet my needs. The fear we all had as we traversed the Vietnamese roads was the concealed

road mine. So I packed the floor board of my jeep with sand bags and curled my legs under me as we travelled the back roads. I embraced the notion that if an explosion jettisoned me from the cab, my legs would travel with me. On many occasions my jeep was the point vehicle in these convoys because the other drivers refused to take the point. There was a fine line I had to navigate between acting as a coward or a commander. On one occasion I had an Abrams Battle Tank Sergeant refuse to take the point even though he was assigned to provide our convoy protection. I knew if I ordered him to take the lead it would create a standoff between my superiors and his. So in many cases I would don my flak jacket, put on my steel pot, curl my legs beneath me and off we'd go.

Along these routes the locals saw opportunities to sell their wares. We saw everything from cokes, sandals, straw baskets, marijuana, sexual favors and cocaine. They must have been earning a good living because there were so many of them. One of my main responsibilities was to keep the convoy moving despite pleas from the drivers to complete their shopping lists.

The French in Indo China for many years were involved in cultivating rubber tree plantations. On one occasion we were traveling through a Michelin Plantation and were awestruck by the beautiful planning and symmetry of the trees. Every tree planted was exactly equidistant from an adjacent tree. This planting procedure created straight lines of trees and alleys between trees that disappeared into the horizon.

We had an early start that day, so I, with some coaxing decided to stop our caravan and take advantage of some roadside shopping. As we were cooling off, a pickup truck passed us loaded with 10 to 15 male

and female workers, they waved and smiled at us. The Vietnamese were very small people and it was not unusual to see large numbers of them packed on to small vehicles. After 10 minutes we resumed our journey than we saw the flash, smoke, and heard the explosion up ahead. I had a decision to make. I knew our unit was not a combat unit but I felt we could render some assistance to whoever was impacted by the explosion. I was bolstered by the fact that I did not hear rifle fire. As we approached the wreckage it became obvious what had happened. The truck carrying the workers tripped a wire that blew off the front hood and tire of the truck. All about I could see bodies on the ground and startled victims staggering about. Clothes were flung up in the air and hanging on tree branches. Most of them did not display physical wounds other than shock and bewilderment. Two of the injured had sustained wounds sufficient for me to call in for a Medevac. After all we were trying to win the hearts and minds of these people. As we returned on the same route after making our deliveries one could not tell what had recently transpired on that site. The truck had been removed and the bomb crater had been filled in.

War is a 7 day a week job. We did not take Saturdays or Sundays off. Every day of the week was treated the same. The only exception may have been the Christmas Bob Hope Tours. These were ballyhooed events that the press was keen to exploit as "Troop Moral Builders". Unfortunately Bob Hope and his entourage seldom performed for the guys that needed their moral boosted the most. These large gatherings of troops enjoying the performances were rear echelon guys like cooks, payroll administrators, motor pool or freight guys. I am not suggesting that these guys were not making sacrifices for their country. I am

suggesting that the guys that needed morale boosting the most was the poor grunt sleeping in a fox hole during the monsoon season. For the most part they were not in attendance for those shows.

The evening hours in a base camp like Long Binh offered a few diversions. There were Officer Clubs, movie houses and even pizza joints. The enlisted men would sneak off to their hovels and fire up their marijuana or cocaine cigarettes. The Officers tended to spend their free time doing a lot of drinking. Tuesday nights I was the designated bartender and I always served my specialty the "Gus-Gus Bloody Mary". This concoction was well received by my fellow peers. The secret ingredient was Nuoc Mam. This intensely flavored fish oil sauce was made from anchovies and salt, pressed in wooden boxes than allowed to ferment in the tropical sun. It provided a nutritional boost to the Vietnamese and a flavor boost to many drunken officers on Tuesday nights.

The grind of this war took on a rhythm that will remain with all who served for the rest of our lives. Some of us lost good friends. Some lost our souls and sense of direction. Some lost their lives.

" There are 58,267 names now listed on that polished black wall.

The names are arranged in the order in which they were taken from us by date and within each date the names are alphabetized.

The first known casualty was Richard B. Fitzgibbon, of North Weymouth, Mass. Listed by the U.S. Department of Defense as having been killed on June 8, 1956. His name is listed on the Wall with that of his son, Marine Corps Lance Cpl. Richard B. Fitzgibbon III, who was killed on Sept. 7, 1965.

There are three sets of fathers and sons on the Wall.

39,996 on the Wall were just 22 or younger.

8,283 were just 19 years old.

The largest age group, 33,103 were 18 years old.

12 soldiers on the Wall were 17 years old.

5 soldiers on the Wall were 16 years old.

One soldier, PFC Dan Bullock was 15 years old.

997 soldiers were killed on their first day in Vietnam...

1,448 soldiers were killed on their last day in Vietnam...

31 sets of brothers are on the Wall.

Thirty one sets of parents lost two of their sons.

54 soldiers attended Thomas Edison High School in Philadelphia. I wonder why so many from one school?

8 Women are on the Wall. Nursing the wounded.

244 soldiers were awarded the Medal of Honor during the Vietnam War; 153 of them are on the Wall.

Beallsville, Ohio with a population of 475 lost 6 of her sons.

West Virginia had the highest casualty rate per capita in the nation. There are 711 West Virginians on the Wall.

The Marines of Morenci - They led some of the scrappiest high school football and basketball teams that the little Arizona copper town

of Morenci (pop. 5,058) had ever known and cheered. They enjoyed roaring beer busts. In quieter moments, they rode horses along the Coronado Trail, stalked deer in the Apache National Forest. And in the patriotic camaraderie typical of Morenci's mining families, the nine graduates of Morenci High enlisted as a group in the Marine Corps. Their service began on Independence Day, 1966. Only 3 returned home.

The Buddies of Midvale - Leroy Tafoya, Jimmy Martinez, Tom Gonzales were all boyhood friends and lived on three consecutive streets in Midvale, Utah on Fifth, Sixth and Seventh avenues. They lived only a few yards apart. They played ball at the adjacent sandlot ball field. And they all went to Vietnam. In a span of 16 dark days in late 1967, all three would be killed. Leroy was killed on Wednesday, Nov. 22, the fourth anniversary of John F. Kennedy's assassination. Jimmy died less than 24 hours later on Thanksgiving Day. Tom was shot dead assaulting the enemy on Dec. 7, Pearl Harbor Remembrance Day.

The most casualty deaths for a single day was on January 31, 1968 ~ 245 deaths.

The most casualty deaths for a single month was May 1968 - 2,415 casualties were incurred."

* "For most Americans who read this they will only see the numbers that the Vietnam War created. To those of us who survived the war, and to the families of those who did not, we see the faces, we feel the pain that these numbers created. We are, until we too pass away, haunted with these numbers, because they were our friends, fathers, husbands, wives, sons and daughters. There are no noble wars, just noble warriors."

*Dennis Carney, Windham, Me

We felt the push back in our seat and our eardrums vibrated with the screams and woops as the huge DC8 lifted off of the runway at Bien Hoa Vietnam. Seated next to me was Lt. Rick Fox my old OCS buddy and roommate at Ft. Benning. We had arrived in Vietnam at the same time and we were departing at the same time. Rick was stationed further north and served with the 173 Airborne Brigades. This outfit took over 1800 KIA casualties during the war and was one of the most decorated units of the war. Our war had finally ended. Our DEROS date had arrived. That marvelous military vernacular that initially sounds so strange but quickly becomes part of one's vocabulary. "DATE ESTIMATED RETURN OVERSEAS".

Before I could settle in and enjoy our 8 hour hop to Guam for a refueling I reflected on the past 4 days leading to our departure. I received my orders to report to Bien Hoa's holding station prior to my departure and enlisted my driver to take me there in our trusty jeep. This was a short trip and he made it interesting by divulging some information that I was not aware of. I knew that this Private was in his second consecutive tour and had spent 20 months in country. I also knew he had been promoted and demoted an equal number of times. What I didn't know was he was hooked on cocaine. This white powdery substance that was so expensive in the States could be purchased here for as little as \$2.00 a vile. With a sheepish grin he confided that he took a hit earlier in the day and was smoking this stuff the entire time we served together. I realized that drugs were a way of life for many of

the soldiers serving in Vietnam but this revelation hit close to home. He was an addict and needed help.

The out processing we had to undertake before we left country was very thorough. Our gear was methodically checked for illegal contraband. They were seeking illegal souvenirs or drugs. They purposefully quarantined us for several days prior to our departure to identify who may be experiencing withdrawal symptoms. As we refueled in Guam several men were experiencing withdrawal to such an extent that they were escorted off the plane. Vietnam had created a class of casualty that was not measured by bloodshed alone.

Written by Konrad (Gus) Goldau