A Brief Autobiography of Kenneth R. Wiley Jr.

Sections of this story previously printed under the title of:
"Not On My Mother-In-Law's Birthday"

January 25, 2007
By Ken Wiley

Prologue

Here I sit on September 25, 2001 starting on this project and reflecting on the past 34 years since I was made into Swiss cheese in Vietnam by a booby trap. I normally don't think about having been in Nam that much, but recent events have caused me to stop and reflect on my life. During the past two weeks the World Trade Center buildings have been bombed to the ground. Bill Wolters has graced me with a preliminary release of his wonderful book, which contains remembrances of his time in Vietnam. I have just had my ump-teenth surgery on my legs, to cope with problems related to my Vietnam injuries. My son just got married, and I'm going to be a grandpa again this coming February. These events have triggered a lot of thoughts and feelings about my life, and like Bill Wolters I wonder, "why me"?

Then I remember what a blessed life I have lived. I have had two of the most wonderful wives that anyone could ever hope for (at different times, of course). I have been blessed with two wonderful kids, two great step kids, a marvelous son-in-law and daughter-in-law, and two grandkids (and one to be) who are the joy of my life. I have also had unbelievably wonderful support and love from my brother, sister and parents. I truly feel that it was a blessing in disguise that I got wounded. I did NOT have to experience the life-long mental scars of seeing my buddies killed or wounded, which would for me be far worse than any physical scars I now have. Also, I have had a comfortable life, due in part to the VA pension I have been given. Life has been on a VERY bumpy road for me, but what a wonderful, exciting trip it has been, and what wonderful people I have met along the way!

As Bill Wolters and I were talking about his book, he mentioned he thought it would be interesting for others who were there to write about several of the events, such as the day I was wounded, from different views. I thought it was a great idea because I always thought that I should document what happened to me in my life and in Vietnam as a gift to my children and grand children. I have talked to them some over the years about what happened in Nam, but I have never taken the time to bore them with details. In fact, I have not told anyone many of the events and emotions that I went through during and after being wounded. These were things with which I didn't want to burden even my wife Patty, with whom I shared most everything.

Since Bill Wolters went to such great lengths to provide us with a wonderful account of our duty in the Army and Vietnam, I thought the least I could do would be to write about my all-expense-paid tour of Vietnam, my wonderful tour of military hospitals, and my life after being discharged from the service. I've also included more on my life before Vietnam and the early days in the Army to provide a history of my life for my family. My story starts at the beginning.


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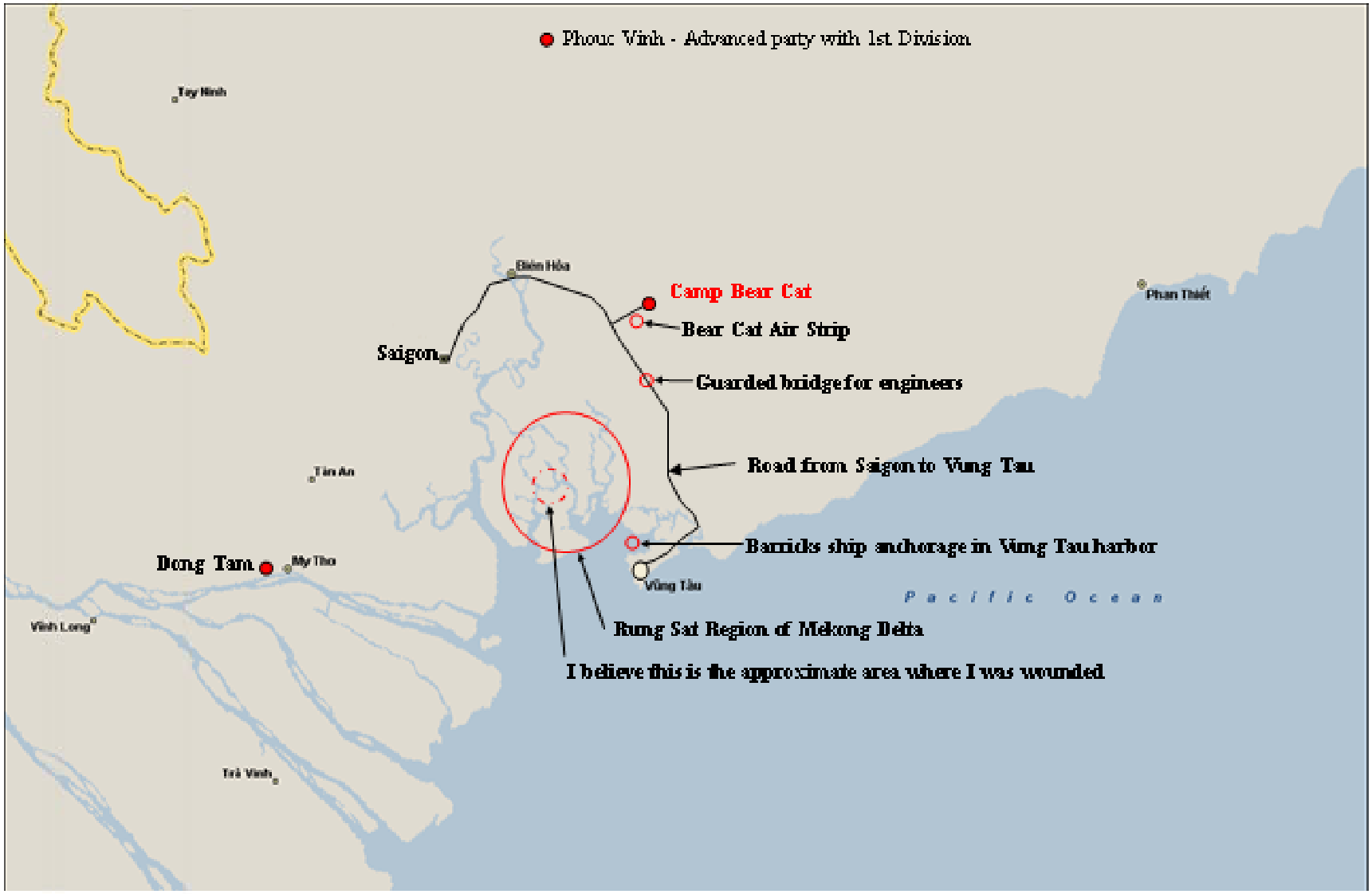
Louangphrabang
Ban Huai Luang
Haikou
HAINAN
Muang Vangviang
Chiang Mai
Nan
Vinh
Lampang
L A O S
Xincun
Sanya
Vientiane
Udon Thani
Nakhon Phanom
Đồng Hới
Pa-an
Tak
Moulmein
Khon Kaen
Kalasin
Savannakhét
Huế
Nakhon Sawan
Maha Sarakham
Roi Et
T H A I L A N D
Mường Khôngxédôn
Saravan
Ye
Ta Khli
Ubon Ratchathani
Pakxé
Quảng Ngai
Lop Buri
Buriram
Surin
Champasak
Sara Buri
VIETNAM
Tavoy
Ban Sang
Bangkok
Pleiku
Qui Nhon
Ratchaburi
Siĕmréab
Phet Buri
Bătdâmbâng
Tuy Hòa
CAMBODIA
Hua Hin
Rayong
Buôn Mê Thuột
Pouthĭsăt
Krachéh
Mergui
Nha Trang
Kâmpóng Cham
Đà Lạt
Phnom Penh
Krŏng Kaôh Kŏng
Ho Chi Minh City
Kâmpóng Saôm
Kâmpôt
Phan Thiết
Chumphon
Long Xuyên
Vũng Tàu
Rach Giá
Cần Thơ
Sóc Trăng
Phun Phin
Bạc Liêu
Cà Mau
Ban Na San
Area of map on next page. Ho Chi Minh City was Siagon before Vietnam fell to North Vietnam.



Map of places we were at in Vietnam.

A Very Brief History of Time

I was born and named Kenneth Raymond Wiley, Junior on June 20, 1944. I don't imagine there was a national holiday declared that day, but I at least hope my parents were happy. I was born at St. Joseph's hospital in Burbank California, right across from the Walt Disney Studios. In fact, Disney was remodeling the nursery for the hospital at the time I was born. That is probably why I feel such an affinity for Mickey Mouse even to this day. I had an older sister Diane, and at that time we lived in Burbank.

World War II was still in progress, since D-Day had just occurred a few weeks before I was born. My dad was deeply involved in the war effort, working for Lockheed Aircraft as a design engineer. I'm not exactly sure what he was doing during the war during the war, but when I was aware of what he was doing at Lockheed, he was always in wing design.

As soon as the war ended, my parents decided to move back to Maine where my mom could be closer to her family; so in 1945 we packed up in my parents' 1942 (1942 is the model year given in my dad's life story, but I thought car production was stopped for the war in 1941) Chevy, and headed for the chilly northeast of the United States. They had also purchased a green 4x8 trailer they used to haul all of their worldly possessions behind the car in.

When we first arrived back in Maine, we stayed at Green Lake in a small cabin that would later become known as "the small cabin" after my dad, Uncle Dick and Harry (My mom's dad) built the new cabin. After a short period of time, my parents rented a place at Jenkins landing on the lake, and then eventually rented a place at #33 3rd street in Brewer. After almost a year they moved to a house rental at 132 Union St. in Brewer.

The 132 Union St. house is the first place that I remember about day-to-day life. I remember things like getting my head stuck in the stair railing, and my head stuck in potty-chair. *I guess I was sticking my head where it didn't belong even at that time.* I actually remember a lot about that time, like going to the lake and staying there; using the outhouse (*a real strong odor is associated with that memory, and a cold backside during the winter);* fishing with Harry; Harry teaching me how to row a boat and paddle a canoe; going ice fishing'; going for hikes in the woods by myself; hiking three miles in the snow to get to the cabin; my dad bringing deer home that he shot; playing in the snow; and going to Harry's plumbing shop to visit him and my dad, who worked for him. I remember Bruce being born on October 1, 1947. There were a lot of good memories. This was a happy time for me, and for the whole family, but it was a hard way for my dad to make a living.

As I mentioned, my dad worked as a plumber at my grandfather's plumbing shop. He was the kind of person who could fix anything and create anything from nothing. All his life he was a hard worker and so very clever at what ever he did. The one thing that he got tired of, though, was plumbing in Maine during the winter months when it would be –25 degrees, and trying to fix a pipe that had burst. He wanted to get back to California and the warm weather. I also think he wanted to get back into the aircraft industry, which had been his life-long love.

During the winter of 1949-1950, my parents started to make plans for the trip to California to see if my dad could find a job. That precipitated one of my funny memories of Maine, and shows how a five-year-old thinks. We got a Christmas card from the Ayers, who were mom and dad's good friends who lived in Burbank, California. On the Christmas card they showed their kids, Dave and Marilyn playing in the snow, which we all know as grownups is a rare event in California. We hadn't had any snow in Maine that year so we could hardly wait to get to Southern California so we could play in the snow. It was a weird perception.

On the last day of kindergarten in 1950, I started to walk home as usual, when I heard my dad yell at me. I looked over and saw Mom & Dad sitting in their brand new Green Chevy. Man, was I excited about that: a new car for the trip to California!

At the beginning of summer we drove to California and stayed in Mentone, California for a short time with my dad's dad, Pearl Wiley. After a week or so, we went to visit Cyril and Bertha in the Sylmar area. While we were visiting there, my dad found out that there was an open house at Lockheed where he had worked during the war. I can remember quite clearly being at the open house with him, and him talking to one of his old friends from Lockheed. It turned out that the guy offered my dad a job, and he took it right away.

About this time Bruce and I came down with Chicken Pox, so we went back to Menton for a few days, and then made the long drive back to Maine to pick up our belongings.

It was only a matter of a few days in Maine and we packed up and moved to California, where we stayed with dad's cousin, Roger Holt and his family. This is where I was introduced to wrestling and roller derby. I was six, so that stuff was really exciting to me! We also went to watch a television show being broadcast in Burbank. It was some sort of weekly ice show, and was interesting.

Shortly after arriving back in California, my parents bought a house on Coldwater Canyon in North Hollywood. That was a scary time, with a lot of funny memories. I can remember my first grade teacher talking all about what we had to do if there was an earthquake. Well, I didn't know what an earthquake was, so I had this vision of bombers coming over and dropping bombs on us. That scared the heck out of me. I even cried my way home one day, just scared that we would get bombed.

Another thing that scared the heck out of me was that my mom learned to drive. She was a wonderful mom and person, but didn't have the slightest mechanical aptitude. Not only was she a bad driver, but she was also extremely nervous about driving. *I think I hid behind the front seat a lot of the time, even later when I was grown*.

There were also a lot of good memories of those times. We went to downtown Hollywood quite often, when it was still a safe place to go. We always went to the movies to see the newsreels. It was while living in North Hollywood that we had our first TV, a 10-inch, round monster. My sister and I sang, "There is no Business like Show Business" in a talent show at church. I learned to ride a bike in the ally behind our house, and watched a fire hydrant squirt way into the air after a car knocked it off. I flipped a quarter in the air that my sister and I were supposed to use to buy bread from the bread truck, and when I caught it in my mouth I swallowed it. My sister somehow got me to throw it up. *Those were the days!*

There were also some bad memories. My brother and I were fighting over who was going to use a tricycle, and when my mother told me to share with Bruce, I shoved it to him with my foot. The handlebars flipped around, and the round end hit him in the throat and severed his windpipe. He came pretty close to dying all because of a stupid argument. I have always felt guilty about that.

In 1951 my mom and dad bought an acre of property way out in the boonies for $5,000. This place was in Northridge, where there was still farm land and a lot of dirt roads. My dad designed and contracted the building of a house on that property. We moved into the partially completed house in February of 1953, and as a family, we slowly finished the inside and outside.

When we moved there I went to Northridge Elementary School on the Southeast corner of the Nordhoff and Reseda, beginning in the second semester of the third grade. Going to a new school and a totally new area was a tough transition. I had a wonderful teacher, but it was still hard adjusting to the new surroundings.

With all of the property we had, we started a farm. I decided I wanted to have chickens, so I started and developed quite a chick egg business with about 100 hens and roosters. We also had bantam chickens, three sheep, and thirty-two ducks (at the peak). We also had steers for three years or so. It was quite an education and a lot of work, as my mom and dad would have attested to.

After going to Northridge Elementary school, I went to Northridge Junior High School, where I was involved in a lot of the school activities. I played trombone in the school band, was into all sorts of sports, sang in the choir, and generally had fun. I even did fairly well in school at that point.

In the seventh grade a guy ran into me while we were playing baseball, and I tore my knee ligaments pretty good and spent six weeks in a cast. This was a part of an early trend that I had already set. I was always having accidents. My mother took me to the emergency hospital quite regularly.

In the night grade I scored a touch down in the A9/B9 annual football game (they started kids at school in September and again in February). Before the A9/B9 baseball game in the spring I broke my ankle, so I ended up as a cheerleader. With the cast on, I did run in the school track meet and came in third in the 50 yard dash, and won the high jump and the shot put. The doctor always wondered how I cracked the cast.

Between junior high school and senior high school I sang in the Los Angeles All City Choir and performed at the Hollywood Bowl the summer of 1959. This was an interesting time with Andy Stern, my friend from Junior High. The show we put on at the Hollywood Bowl was to celebrate the life of Meredith Wilson, who wrote many popular songs, plus the musical “76 Trombones.”

Then it was on to Grover Cleveland High School, where once again I was very active in sports and tried to be active with women, but was too shy and quiet to have much success (with women, not sports). During High school I played football for two years (I missed my junior year because of a head injury I received in an serious automobile accident in 1960). I was in gymnastics and track and field. The only sport I did well in during high school was football, where I started all the games as a defensive back and also played wingback on offense.

The automobile accident I mentioned was a major event in my life. I was going to the movies with three of my buddies, Steve MacMullin, Chuck Whiten and Jack Edwards. Steve was driving south on a street named Aqueduct, and he missed seeing a stop sign on the corner of Parthenia and collided with another car, which was traveling at a high rate of speed going west on Parthenia. One of the passengers in the other car was ejected from the car, and the car flipped up into the air and came down on the guy’s head. I was in the hospital for two weeks as a result, with a severe head injury. Steve was convicted of manslaughter, even though he was only partially at fault, which sent him on a downward spiral that ruined his life. He was still alive in about 1990, but still couldn’t deal with the whole thing. There were a lot of lawsuits and funny things going on after the accident for five years, but nothing ever came of it.

During all of my formative years I was always involved in church activities. My parents helped form the Congregational Church of Northridge and we were deeply involved in all aspects of church life to the point that we even had Sunday school at our house for several years while the church was purchasing property and building the facility. I was very active in all of the youth groups and was even the church janitor for several years while I was in high school.

The summer after I graduated from high school, I broke up with the girl I was going out with and felt real bad, so my mom and dad proposed that they send my brother and me to Florida for a vacation. Both of us were very much into skin diving, and had been through all the training. We ended up staying in a hotel on the Islamorada key off of Florida. We rented a 14-foot boat with an outboard motor and proceeded to have a ball, spending 8-10 hours in the water each day for

two weeks. We worked on a several wrecks on the Alligator Reef, recovering interesting tidbits but nothing of real value. It was quite an experience, and from what my brother says, the reefs are no longer as nice as they were back then.

During this time I was also involved in a singing group called the Nomads. The group was made up of Ron Bell, Jerry Kuzmick and his sister Christy Kuzmick. We sang professionally for several years and released a record under the same label as Johnny Mathis. It was a unique opportunity, since I got to rub elbows with the rich and famous, such as Glen Campbell, Bob Newhart, The Righteous Brothers, and Bob Eubanks.

After high school I went to Valley Junior College, where again I was involved in sports, with a minor in academics. I played football my first year in college and then wrestled for three years, where I won trophies for "Wrestler of the Year". I also got the Coach's trophy for hardest working. That was all fun and good, but the best thing about that time was dating and getting to know Patricia Louise Moore.

Courting Patricia Louise Moore

Patty and I met in high school on sort of a blind date set up through my friend Jerry Kuzmick, now Jerry Mathews. I ate lunch every day with Jerry and a friend of one of his friends named Patty; who was always there, but never said anything. She was a very slim, almost frail young girl of 14, and for some reason I was really attracted to her. She had dark olive-colored skin and a very soft voice and manner. She was a beautiful young lady who I was dying to go out with, but I was too much of a chicken to ask her out. After a lot of talking, I some how convinced Jerry to arrange a date for me to go out with Patty. Jerry was able to arrange a double date for himself with his girlfriend Sharon, and for me with Patty. We decided to have a picnic at Fern Dell in Griffith Park, and to go to a movie after that.

When I went to pick Patty up for the date, I rang the front door bell of her house, and as the door opened up my heart stopped beating. The guy who opened the door was someone who (along with his friends) had harassed me all during junior high school four years earlier and tried to get me into all sorts of fights. Being the chicken I was, I never did get in any fights with him or his friends, but he was always harassing me. Well, it turned out this was Patty's brother, and either he was willing to let things go or just forgot who I was. Most likely he just forgot who I was, since I was considerably taller by then and up to a muscular 135 pounds (*if there is such a thing*).

Our first date took place in March of 1961 over the school Easter break, and the date was a great success. True to form, neither one of us said much, if anything; but we did enjoy each other's company. After several more dates, we sort of drifted apart and went our separate ways. I can't tell you why, because I really liked her, but I think it was because I was just too shy and didn't know what to say or do. *After all, I talked a couple of times during the first four or five dates we went on, so I probably said everything there was to say. It had nothing to do with the fact that I was too immature and was not sure which direction was up. Couldn't be!*

During the remaining time I was going to Cleveland High School up until I graduated, we would smile as we passed in the halls and even said hi on occasion. That was about as demonstrative as I got with her during that time, but I was still intrigued by her looks and shy manner. After she walked by me, I would watch her walk away without her knowing I was watching (*probably not*). Interesting walk! It was different.

In my last semester of high school I had a sixth period study hall where she sat several rows in front of me. In one of my more daring moves as a high school "man on campus", I spent most of the period shooting spit wads at her through straws I had brought from lunch period. The guy who sat next to me would do the same to his girlfriend, who was sitting next to Patty. This actually brought Patty and me real close together; we talked once or twice after class, when she mentioned that her parents were building a cabin in Big Bear, which is in the mountains near Los Angeles. She mentioned that she had made a lot of friends up there, so I assumed that any hopes of another date were lost, and so it was back to my sports and studying hard. *Well, at least the sports*.

I then graduated in the summer of 1962, ranked number 347th out of approximately 700 students, so you can see how hard I studied. *Talk about an average person*. I was not dedicated to studying, which I regret to this day; but is one of those things that no matter how hard I tried, I couldn't change. My attention span was not great then and still isn't, except for attention to sports and my wife.

I then went off to a local two-year college, Valley Junior College, where I started to pursue my career as a person who didn't know what he wanted to do. The first semester I played football as

I had in high school, so of course I had to go back to a Cleveland High School football game to show how far I had gone with my career.

As I was walking along the bleachers on a Friday evening at Van Nuys High School, I noticed a beautiful, knock-you-off-your-feet young lady sitting in the front row. She had very long brown hair with her hair in a bun on top of her head, a beautiful smile, and dark brown eyes. It took a few seconds, but then I realized that it was Patty, and had she ever matured! She had filled out in all sorts of nice spots. Well, being the man around town and ladies man that I was, I smiled and didn't say anything. I sat up in the stands about 50 feet away the whole game, breathing hard and trying to figure out how to date her again.

"Of course," I said to myself, "Jerry will help me." Yes, Jerry got in touch with her friend Diane, who got it touch with Patty, who said she would love to go out with me. Diane told Jerry to have me meet Patty at the next football game, so Jerry told me, and I was ecstatic! *Talk about using the direct approach.*

Come the next week, I went to the Cleveland High School football game at Reseda High School and found Patty sitting with her friend Diane. I walked up and sat down next to her, and once again started using my wonderful conversational skills to say, "Hi," and "how are you?" At the game, this was about as far as it went.

After the game I asked her if she would like to have Pizza, and she said yes. During the evening we were all by ourselves, and slowly but surely I figured out how to talk. It turned out that night was the start of a wonderful loving courtship that lasted three and a half years until we got married.

Of course deciding to get married was not an easy deal. At the completion of the spring semester in 1965 I dropped out of college, since I had gone to a two-year college for three years. (The last year and a half, Patty was also going to school there). I had run out of wrestling eligibility and Patty had graduated with a degree in secretarial skills, so there wasn't any reason for me to hang around school any longer.

Soon after I dropped out of school, Patty got a job working as a secretary in a purchasing department for Lockheed Aircraft in Burbank. Later in life she was able to tell me she had worked on the SR-71 Black Bird in the Kelly Johnson Skunk Works, which was a highly classified project at the time she started to work there. She was highly successful in her job to the point where later on she was offered the job of secretary to Kelly Johnson who was the top corporate Vice President for Lockheed. (This is getting ahead of myself, but she didn't take the job, since she was quitting work to be a stay-at-home mom when Jennifer was born.)

After she started to work at Lockheed, she quickly realized that my working at the Zody's Dry Cleaners and singing part time professionally was what you might call a dead-end road. I was then given the edict that I was to either get a good job or we were through. Being the dedicated person that I was, I told her, "Let me think about it." It wasn't that I didn't love her, but I just didn't know what do to for my life work. I was lost. So I took off and drove up the California coast and to my sister's house in Livermore California, just outside of San Francisco.

While I was there, her husband at the time, Larry, told me about the exciting new field of computers which he was working in. He gave me a short course in computers and how they worked, and that started my love for computers. He then helped me write my resume and helped me research places to apply for a job. I was really excited that I might finally have a direction in life.

I drove the long way home by going camping up in Yosemite National Park. I had intended to stay a week or so in the park, but I was just too excited about the possibility of getting a job, a direction in life and getting married. I had to move on; and besides, I missed Patty.

After I got home I started to pound the pavement, and after a week and numerous interviews and tests, I found a job working as a computer operator at McDonald-Douglas in Santa Monica. I was ecstatic, since I was sure this would qualify me for a possible husband position. The job was even going to pay $1.65 an hour.

That evening, as soon as I thought Patty would be home from work, I called her with the good news about finding the job, and asked her to marry me. It wasn't the most romantic proposal ever given, but it did the job and I did get Patty.

Patty and I then set the date to get married on November 20th, 1965; and pressure was on to get everything done, since this was already the first week in September. Somehow we got it all together. I should say that Patty got it all together, since I did little or nothing except drive her around to buy things. In true Patty form, she insisted on paying for the wedding herself, except for the rings and minister, which I handled. She even made her own dress, which was really beautiful.

The night before our wedding I stayed at home and went to bed early. I never wanted a big bachelor party, since when a couple of my friends had gotten married we had wild bachelor parties where guys drank too much booze. I just didn't feel like that was "me", so the night before the wedding was a quiet one spent with my parents. *Ho hum, how boring. Things weren't much different back then.*

Wet Wedding Bells

It was a wet 20th of November, 1965 when I got married to Patricia Louise Moore. Sunny Southern California had let us down, but why not; no big problem except that the Northridge Congregational Church that we were getting married in had leaks in the roof. When I arrived for the wedding, an hour or so early, there were buckets in the aisle to catch the water. I was quite familiar with this technique, since I had been the janitor at the church for several years while I was in high school and had emptied many buckets of water in my day. The church still could not seem to get the roof fixed right.

Luckily, the rain stopped just before the wedding and the roof stopped dripping soon thereafter. *Whew, I really didn't want to get married in a raincoat.*

The service was performed by the minister at the church, Reverend Eaton. We had all rehearsed the ceremony on Thursday before the wedding, but I was still nervous that I would forget something. I stopped all my worrying when they started to play the wedding march on the organ, and Patty walked into the sanctuary through the rear entrance. What a beautiful sight she was, holding on to her dad's arm as they slowly walked down the aisle. At that point, the only thing I could think of was how beautiful she looked, and how lucky I was to be marrying a wonderful and intelligent woman. How did I deserve all of that, I'll never know.

The ceremony lasted about 20 minutes and it was on to the reception, which was in the fellowship hall attached to the sanctuary. There were about 170 people at the wedding and they all attended the reception, since it was so close. It was a simple reception put on by the women fellowship of the church, so the punch was non-alcoholic and we didn't even have any music. Not too cool by today's standard, but economical. After just a reception line and food, we were out of there. No chance for anyone to make a fool of himself or herself by drinking too much. It also helped keep the cost down. I think Patty spent about $650 on the entire wedding.

Leaving the reception was really a funny adventure for Patty and me. She had changed into other clothes to be more comfortable; and as we left the church, they threw tons of rice at us, which I assume made a mess since the cement around the church was still wet. I used to clean that up all the time as a janitor.

As we were getting into our car, which was a hot, two-door 59 Chevy that was as big as a barge and slow as a snail, our "friends" were still putting miscellaneous stuff all over the car. There was stuff attached to the rear bumper and writing on the windows. I had been smart enough to lock the car and not give the keys to anyone, so at least there was nothing inside the car.

Since our friends were still working on the car, I saw our big opportunity to make a clean get-away, since we didn't want anyone following us to find out where we were going. We were staying in our apartment that night, since we both had to go to work on Monday and we didn't want our "friends" to have any wise ideas about bothering us. As we got in the car, everyone dumped tons of rice inside the car, which took several months to get out; but I quickly fired up the old green Chevy and pressed the peddle to the metal. Guys were jumping out of the way and racing to get into their cars to follow us. Patty and I screamed down Balboa Blvd.; and as soon as I got to the bottom of the hill, I turned left onto the first side street, parked the car and we both ducked down partially out of sight. Our heads were up just enough to see a herd of cars racing down Balboa in search of us at 100 MPH.

You have to understand that a lot of my friends, including my brother, had some really hopped-up racing machines. I guess that is what they call today the "old muscle cars". They were loud and

extremely fast. I had worked on almost every one of them, and knew how fast they were. It was quite a sight, though, to be looking through the rear window of our car watching all of these cars tearing down the hill trying to find us. They never did find us that night.

After that, we waited a few minutes and then proceeded on side streets as far as I could go. The last couple of blocks we had to go out on Nordhoff, which was a main street with freeway on ramps. As we pulled up to the signal at Nordhoff and the freeway on-ramp, we were laughing about how we had lost everyone, and at that point I looked to our right. There in the car next to us were family friends waiting to get on the freeway. So much for those plans! Luckily, they turned onto the freeway as they gave us a cute wave, and didn't follow us. We then turned onto the next street (Orion) which was right past the freeway. This was the street we lived on, just one apartment north of Parthenia. We had made it to the apartment safely and without anyone following us. We parked the car down the street so know one would be the wiser, and luckily no one came over to bother us that night.

After we got to the apartment I remembered that I hadn't eaten anything, and there was nothing in the apartment, so I decided to make a run for some fast food. Patty wasn't hungry since she had some pizza earlier, so I got myself a couple of tacos from Jack in the Box for my wedding night dinner. Not real romantic or exciting, but I was just glad that the wedding was all over and we could start our life together.

Bend Over and Smile

Married life was good! I enjoyed my job working in Santa Monica at MacDonald Douglas, and even got a pay raise. Patty was enjoying her work, and she rode to work every day with my dad, who was still working at Lockheed at the time. Life was busy, but we had a lot of fun and spent a lot of our time at Patty's parents' house playing cards and games. It seems like we were over there more than we were at our apartment (thank goodness).

Neither one of us liked apartment living in the least, but when you are first married and don't have much money, you don't have much choice. The apartment was a one-bedroom place, with a kitchen that was part of the living room and dinning room area. It wasn't bad, but it was noisy. The newlyweds next to us were very active and had a noisy headboard on their bed, if you know what I mean.

If we weren't going over to Patty's or my parents to visit, we did crazy things like go to the Laundromat and market at 1:00 AM. They were next to each other and much less crowded at that time, so we could get everything done faster.

Things were just going along great, and then came February! I got this letter in the mail saying that I was to report for a draft physical in two weeks, down in the middle of downtown LA. Hum, I guess I should have expected that since I was not on a student draft deferment any more. Ah, this is no problem, they will never take me, I thought. I had torn the ligaments in my knee real bad and had numerous bouts of kidney infection. According to the reporting instructions, all I had to do was get doctors' notes, and I would be 4-F and not have to worry.

I made the doctor's appointment and went in to get a note about existing medical conditions. Of course the doctor said there was no way they would take me with my medical history, and he wrote a nice letter to the draft board explaining everything.

Then comes the big day, and nothing can prepare anyone for this day of degradation and humiliation! The draft board really knew how make a person feel like nothing. Cattle and pigs get treated better than they treated us. Filling out the papers on my medical history went pretty well and I had this little smile on my face, knowing I was going to be rejected as sure as anything. Of course I wasn't going to be rejected as easily as the guy who was 6' 8" tall with an allowable maximum height of 6' 6". I could tell he was upset when they told him he was excluded from the draft because he was too tall. Then there was the guy who was 100 pounds overweight. They told him to lose the weight before he got called in the next time. I'm sure he went right out and joined a gym to lose the weight. There was also a guy who was underweight. He was way too skinny, and they told him to beef up so he would have the honor of being drafted. What I couldn't see was the draft board telling these guys these things with a straight face!

After all of the medical forms were filled in, I went upstairs to have my physical. Here I stripped down to my underwear and proceeded through a series of degrading tests, most of which I don't even remember or want to remember. One I do remember is having to take a urine test. I dutifully filled the bottle and turned it in to the lucky guys doing the test. A couple minutes later I was waiting for the results, and they told me I would have to take it again after drinking water for a half an hour. I did that, and repeated the test with the same results, so they made me drink more water and repeat the test. As it turned out, I had a kidney infection at the time, and they didn't believe the test results, since you can fake them out by taking lots of aspirin a few hours before the test. (Whether you have a real kidney infection or have taken aspirin, if you drink a few gallons of water, the test clears up; even if just temporarily.) After the third or forth time my test cleared up, and even though I had a history of kidney infections and a doctor's note telling them so, it was all for naught. I passed that part of the test.

One of the next things they did was evaluate any unusual injuries on record to see if problems still exist. The doctor started to look at my left leg, gently bent it sideways, and saw that there was give in the knee. The doctor then tried to see how far it would go, and every time he did it I would tense up, since it hurt. The end results were that I passed. There wasn't any problem with my knee, according to the draft board doctor.

There were many other degrading tests, but the worst was the one where about 40 guys go into a room and a doctor makes everyone stand in a circle facing outward. They then have you pull your underwear down and spread your cheeks and bend over. This poor doctor then goes around and looks at everyone's posterior. I don't know what they were looking for or hoped to find, but I was just fuming inside by the time that was done!

Then came the final evaluation as to what the doctors found during the physical. They implied that I must have had the doctor's notes forged, and told me there was no medical reason why I couldn't be drafted. *You can imagine how excited I was at that point. I was going to be eligible for the draft. My life long dream had come true. What a nightmare!*

There sure were a lot of long faces leaving the draft board that day, and mine was one of them. I imagine a lot of guys who were there that day never lived to see more than another year of life. What a waste of young men!

You Have Got to Be Kidding!

Shortly after the humiliating experience at the draft board physical, I got a promotion at work, and they moved me temporarily to 3rd shift to run the whole computer operations by myself. I loved this with a passion. It gave me a chance to run all the machines and do all the jobs. I'd have computers and other sorts of equipment running jobs all over the building. I would go from one job to the next doing the next step. I would have 10-15 jobs going at once. The supervisors loved how all the work was finished by the end of my shift every day. I also really felt like I learned a lot and accomplished something.

Working this shift wasn't what you call hard on our marriage, but it did prove to be challenging. I left for work about 12:15 AM and got home at about 8:30 AM. I would eat breakfast and lay down to sleep shortly after getting home. I would try to sleep until around 2:00 p.m., but rarely made it all the way, and then I would get ready to drive into Burbank to pick Patty up from work. Most of the time, I felt like a zombie during the afternoon. I would then stay up until Patty went to bed around 10:30, and I'd sleep for an hour or so, and then the cycle would start over again. The weekends I would try to sleep normal hours and then just get up around 12:15 a.m. Sunday morning to go to work. This routine was to last three months, and I really did enjoy the freedom at work and was forced to learn a lot about computers.

I was still working 3rd shift when one morning the phone rang, waking me up from my morning sleep. It was my mom calling, and she said that she had just gotten the mail and there was a letter there from the draft board. I told my mom to open it, and she started to cry, so I knew it wasn't good news. She said that the letter started off with the normal "You have been selected. . ." I was in a daze, and didn't hear any more of the letter until my mom said I was to report to the Draft Board in downtown LA at 07:00 (we are now talking military time) on the 17th of May, 1966. *What a thrill! Well actually, I wasn't thrilled, but by the same token, all of the implications of this had not sunk in at that point.*

When I picked up Patty from work that afternoon, I waited to get all of the "how did your day go" things out of the way, and then I just fell silent, since I wasn't sure what to say. She finally asked what was wrong and I told her that I was to report for the draft on the 17th of May. It was a pretty quiet ride home from her work that day except for the crying and quiet questions about what this all meant.

We talked about different things we could do so I could avoid the draft, but the choices were slim. Getting Patty pregnant at that point would not help the situation, and would just leave her with more responsibilities when I left, and maybe not help me get out of the service. There was no acceptable solution, so we both felt trapped by our own feelings of responsibility.

The next day I went to work and let my supervisor know that as of the 17th of May I wouldn't be there any more. When I told him about being drafted, he said that it was funny, since another computer operator got drafted and he was reporting the same day. I wish I could remember his name, since we hit it off pretty good. I think his last name was Robertson or pretty close to that. (Maybe Jim Robertson.) We all stood around work and laughed and had a good time about the whole thing, while I was dying inside. I took little comfort in the fact that someone I barely knew was going to be drafted the same day I was, but everyone else thought it was neat. Our paths were to cross off and on during the first year in the Army, but I lost track of him after that.

Patty and I spent the next several weeks preparing for my departure, although there wasn't much to do. Patty decided that she would move back with her parents during the time period I was in the service, and would move everything after I had left. She was afraid to be alone in the apartment, and since she got along great with her parents, it seemed logical and the rent might

as well go to her parents. It turned out to be a very wise decision, except that she moved all of the furniture by herself. *Stubborn, just like her dad!*

We did manage to squeeze in a weekend trip to San Diego before I had to leave. This was really our honeymoon, since we didn't have one after we were married. We always liked the San Diego area, and had a real enjoyable few days together there before I had to leave. We had a fancy dinner at a Polynesian restaurant on Shelter Island, where Patty was rather shocked when they asked her what she wanted to drink, and she said some fancy drink with an umbrella. They never asked for her ID, even though she was only 19 at the time. That was one of the highlights of the trip.

My First Days as a Soldier

I remember the morning of May 17, 1966, just like it was yesterday. I hadn't slept much that night, and when the alarm went off it was like a knife being stuck into my chest. I was so scared of the unknowns that faced me that day I was almost paralyzed. Somehow I was able to get dressed and ready before Bruce, my brother, came to pick me up and take me to report to the draft board in downtown LA for the dreaded induction ceremony.

It was hard saying good-bye to Patty, but I didn't have much time, and even if I did have time it wasn't going to make it any easier. That moment is right up there in the top ten of low points in my life. I was able to say goodbye, and met my brother out in front of the apartment. It was a long quiet trip to downtown Los Angeles, and when we got there he dropped me off in front of the draft board a little before 0700 (military time now) with a solid handshake, and I was off to the big unknown.

A lot of the morning was a blur of confusion and feeling homesick. We filled out papers, and then about 40 of us draftees proceeded upstairs where we were herded into a rather small room and told politely to sit down. The door then opened, and a typical loud mouth officer got up in front of the group and started getting on our case about being a bunch of losers and all the other similar encouragement that he could muster. He told us we were going to be sworn in as members of the United States Army, and that we should be proud to be there. He told us if we didn't repeat our induction oath as he requested that we were still going to be in the Army, and we had better sound off like we had a pair. You have never heard so much mumbling in your life as we responded to him when he administered the oath. No one wanted to be there.

Before I reported for induction, I did a lot of thinking about how I could get out of having to go. The thing I was afraid of at that time was being alone and without Patty. I never thought about avoiding going to Vietnam, because I was a simple draftee and there was no way the Army would send me to Vietnam. Besides, what was Vietnam! I never would have illegally avoided being inducted, because I thought it was a duty and obligation that came with living in this wonderful free country. I would never embarrass my family or friends, and I never wanted to be considered a wimp. I was real short on answers on how I could stay out legally, and I would not make a change in my life that would forever destroy my life and tarnish my reputation, even if it killed me. So there I was, reciting the oath and becoming an official member of the United States of America Army. I never thought I would see that day.

As soon as the oath had been administered, we knew how much trouble we were in for, when they immediately started barking out orders: attention, at ease, on and on and on. After the oath was administered and the officers or NCOs yelled at us for a while, they gave us meal tickets so we could go to the hot little coffee shop around the corner and eat lunch. I don't know what took up all of the morning, but it was noontime and I was hungry. Of course, the meal ticket was to one of the fine Five Star restaurants near the induction center, featuring dry gravy on soggy biscuits. Actually, it was pretty good, compared to what I was going to have to get used to in the next two years.

After lunch we got exposed to one of the basic Army principles: hurry up and wait. We all had to eat a fast lunch and be back on time, or we were in trouble. When we got back, the NCO in charge had us sitting at tables for a couple of hours doing absolutely nothing, which is one of the two things the Army taught me how to do quite well. *Wait in lines and do nothing--two real valuable life skills!*

There was then something mumbled about dividing us up into two groups. The first group would go to Ft. Bliss Texas and the other group would go to Ft. Ord in Monterey, California. Well, of course I wanted to be on the California list. I would be close to home and near the beach. How ideal that would be! What more could one want? Well, when the NCO in charge called off the list

of inductees to go to Ft. Ord; lo and behold, I was on the list, so they herded us to the front of the induction center where there was a bus waiting to take us north. *At least this part was going to be all right.*

By the time we got on the bus and the Army had gotten everything organized, it was around 3:30 in the afternoon; so we headed out in a traffic jam on the Santa Monica Freeway, which had just opened. We transitioned to the San Diego and then the Ventura Freeway. I just sat back, lonely and sad, knowing where we were going, but not knowing what to expect.

After around three hours of traveling on the bus it pulled off the Freeway just north of Santa Barbara. I think they choose a lousy restaurant so there wouldn't be much of a crowd there. They did a fine job of picking one too. Every time I drive that section of the freeway these days I still look and see that the building is still there. It's boarded up, but the building is still there. I had a hot turkey sandwich with stale gravy and dried bread that day.

With full stomachs we again headed north towards Ft. Ord. I slept part of the way, but with all of the loud boastful chatter going on it was hard to get much shuteye. Most of the time I just sat there watching the world going by, knowing that I no longer had control on what my final destination was going to be.

When we got to Salinas the bus again stopped, this time at a hamburger stand. If we had money we could buy something, so most everyone bought a shake or something simple. No one seemed real hungry.

From Salinas the bus went on a small two-lane road that led over the hills to the back entrance of Ft. Ord. The minute we went through the gates, I had a sinking feeling that this was not going to be fun. The bus then got to groups of old white board barracks that were elevated up in the air about four feet. I assume this was to let the cold air from the ocean circulate under the barracks and freeze the troops inside. When the bus stopped, it was a classic scene straight out of a movie where the drill Sergeant jumps on the bus and yells to get your backside out of the bus and fall into formation. Everyone being totally scared at this point, they made dash to get out of the bus and get in formation of some sort. The drill sergeant then barked more orders, and finally dismissed us for the night.

Once inside the barracks, I wasn't disappointed in their quality. The were cold, damp and drafty buildings with about twenty military style bunk beds down both sides of the room. *At least they gave us one thin blanket to keep us warm.*

It was the middle of the night now, and we could care less about the barracks; and when the lights went out it was quiet, but I'm sure, like me, not everyone was sleeping. I just lay there, scared and lonely, not having the faintest idea what tomorrow was going to hold in store for us.

True to form, the officer in charge of our barracks came in and woke us up at the crack of dawn and told us to get dressed and be ready to "fall out" in 30 minutes. Everyone hurriedly got ready, and in the crudest bathrooms I had ever seen this side of an Andy Gump. They made a gas station bathroom look sparkling. Regardless, everyone was ready to fall out at the designated time and we were marched, after a fashion, to the mess hall. This is where I started to learn the fine art of standing in lines. The food actually wasn't too bad; but regardless, everyone was so hungry they would eat anything.

The next two days were full of fun things like getting clothes issued, getting shots, taking intelligence tests and the getting one of those famous Army hair cuts. The issuing of clothes the Army has down to a science. The young man at the desk asks, "What size shoe do you wear?" You answer, "Size 9 ½." He responds "We are out of those, so I'll give you a size 8. If you don't like it, go complain to your senator." Then it is, "What waist size pants do you wear?" You answer, "30 inch waist. The young man says that they are out of those, so you will have to make

do with a 34 waist." After you are issued a duffle bag full of clothes, you go back to the barracks and find out that the guy next to you needed a size 8 shoe but they gave him a 9 1/2. He wanted a waist size of 34, but they gave him a 30, and so on. It was a joke to see the guys falling out in their new uniforms for the first time. What a sloppy, rag tag mess of humanity. Within a few months, the guys who cared about their looks would have their fatigues altered and looking good. Others (like me) would still look sloppy.

I think the hair cut was the most traumatic part of whole process for many guys. I saw more than one guy sitting there having his long wavy hair cut, with tears running down his cheeks. This time period was during the early years of the long hair craze, so I saw many guys with shoulder length hair having it all disappear in about 10 passes of the hair clippers over their quivering head. My hair wasn't very long before I went in the service, but I sure felt cold after they trimmed it down to ¼ inch long.

The administering of shots was a real fun process, and one that no one should ever miss. The young Army personnel administering the shots stood in two lines facing towards each other. To get your shots you would pass down the middle of the two lines and stop in front of a pair of guys giving shots, one in each arm. They used these large air guns that shot the vaccine into you with a blast of air instead of a needle. You dared not flinch, because if you did they might not have the gun pressed hard enough to the skin and perpendicular to your skin. If they didn't have it set on your skin right, they could make some pretty nasty gashes on your arm. They would also have to give the shot to you again. There must have been around four pairs of guys administering the shots.

I made it through the line in fine shape without getting mutilated, but there were plenty of guys moaning and groaning about the pain and discomfort. They let us have the rest of the day off after the shots, and I soon found out why. Some of the shots make you sicker than a dog. I figured it was the typhoid shot that gave me a high temperature and massive head headache, according to what the platoon leader, who said it was common. I had the same symptoms several months later when I got a second typhoid shot.

When we took the intelligence test I was really trying, since I knew if I did well I could get into the computer training program. The brother of a friend of Patty's had gotten into that and done well, which also led to a nice job when he got out of the service. I did well enough to take the officer candidate training test and did well enough at that to be asked if I wanted to be an officer. I guess they take laughter as a NO, since they didn't ask again until after basic training.

It was about this time that the rumors started to float around that some of us were going to be shipped to Ft. Riley, Kansas, to form the 9th Division to go to Vietnam. Talk about getting hit right between the eyes with reality! They had to be kidding! Oh well, I did real well on the test, so I won't be going there; I will be going to special training, I thought. WRONG! They took the first 75 guys on the list and said, tag, you're it, and I was one of them. If I had only gotten in that other barracks or been number 77 on the list rather than number 74. I thought maybe the whole thing would blow over anyways, and since there wasn't anything I could do, I might as well as make the best of it. *So I went off and in the corner and cried. Not really, but I sure felt like screaming! I was trapped, and there was absolutely nothing that I could do to avoid it. Now with my short hair I was even branded. I couldn't get away.*

At the time I really didn't realize it, but if you are in the service you can be spotted a mile away, even if you are in civilian clothes. It isn't just the haircut; it is something about the way a person in the service carries themselves. I notice that today. I can pick out someone who is in the service almost every time.

During my stay at Ft. Ord, I was able to get out of the barracks on my own and find a pay phone to call Patty. The lines were always long and the calls just made me feel worse, but I had to talk to her. I had to stay connected.

I did learn one thing in the first few days at Ft. Ord: never play cards in the Army! I was pretty good at Black Jack, so I thought. I quickly got soaked for about ten dollars and decided that was not how I was going to make spending money, so that was the last time I played cards in the Army, other than Solitaire.

It was about my third day in the Army, when once again they packed us up in busses and we started the ride to the San Francisco airport, from where we would fly to beautiful Kansas City. The bus ride took several hours and then they loaded all 75 of us onto the airplane for the trip to Kansas City, Missouri, where we would get on another bus to travel west across Kansas to Ft. Riley, which is just outside Junction City, Kansas.

Fort Riley or Bust

The bus trip from the Kansas City airport to Ft. Riley seemed like it took forever. We got there somewhere around midnight, and we were herded into the mess hall of some barracks up at a place called Custer Hill, named after the famous loser General Custer. I don't remember much about the welcoming speech other than several officers telling us how lucky we were to be there. *Yeah, right, just where we wanted to be: miles from home training to go to Vietnam. It couldn't be better (sigh)!*

They finally let us go to our assigned barracks and allowed us to go to sleep for a few minutes. One thing in the Army is that you don't sleep, eat or do anything unless they tell you. I remember parts of the next morning very clearly, and other parts are just a blur. I remember a very short black Sergeant walking through the barracks yelling for us to get our rear in gear. Someone said that was Sgt. Jones, and by the tone of his voice I thought we were in for some big trouble in training. We were to fall out into formation at the North end of the barracks, and it better be fast!

When I went outside it was a beautiful spring day in Kansas. The air had an especially beautiful scent to it. I can still smell the grass and the wild flowers. Then it was back to reality and the United States Army, which really stunk.

We fell into something resembling a formation, and then Sgt. Jones introduced himself to us in his own inimitable fashion. He had a lot of the typical Army lines like, "Your ass is grass and I'm the lawn mower." I wish I could remember more of them, but he knew them all, and yelled them all at some time or other. But there was something special about Sgt. Jones. He was about 5' 6" tall and skinny as a rail, but looked as tough as they came. He was about 42 years old at the time and had been in the Army for many years. He later told me that at one time he tried to make it on the outside, but couldn't find a job that would pay very much and take care of him and his family like the Army, so he reenlisted. He was tough, but had compassion. He was crafty, but had integrity. I would guess that he didn't have much of an education, but yet was very intelligent and knew how to handle staggering dumb Army draftees like no other person I met in the Army. Sgt. Jones would be a person we would all remember the rest of our lives with fond memories and smiles on our faces.

During the early morning we had another briefing by Captain Engledinger, who was to be our company commander. This was enough to bring tears to a grown man's eyes, and I think it actually did. This guy was so gung-ho you knew you were in trouble. He had served in the Korean War in the Marines and was shot in the wrist. The Marines let him go, but the Army gladly took him at a time when they were desperate for warm bodies. He was quite a case. He nicknamed our Company B the "Bush Masters" after the killer snake. He always had this silly smile on his face. There are many stories about CPT. Engledinger's escapades during our service under him. Many are legendary in terms of stupidity, and I will try to bring some of them out as we go along in this story.

The next eight weeks were filled with our Army basic training. They taught us how to dress, walk, march, talk, fire different weapons, and most of all how to kill another human being. The killing part they continually beat into us and it really got me so depressed I was looking for any legal way out. The sad part is that after a number of weeks of being submersed in the kill, kill, kill, attitude you slowly began to accept it and just let it roll off you like water on a duck's back. They have done studies of why there were so many more mental problems with Veterans after the Vietnam War than after previous wars, and they found that it was related to the brainwashing they did about how it was all right to kill. Even though guys accepted it and went out and did it, they have life-long problems dealing with what they did. This technique of brainwashing the troops was instituted after World War II and the Korean war, where studies found that less than 15% of the

combat troops, actual line infantry men, ever fired any weapon in combat at the enemy. The number in Vietnam was over 95%. (Strange, but true.)

One other thing that the Army did a good job of was getting most of the troops in good shape. Every morning before we ate breakfast, Sgt. Jones would take us out for a run all around Custer Hill. We would run in formation with Sgt. Jones calling out cadence, and we would respond things like:

Sgt. Jones: "Give me your left!"
When each soldier's right foot hit the ground: "Your right!"
Sgt. Jones: "Give me your left!"
When each soldier's right foot hit the ground: "Your right!"
Sgt Jones: "Sound off!"
Troops in cadence: "1, 2"
Sgt Jones: "Sound off!"
Troops in cadence: "3, 4"
Sgt Jones: "Sound off!"
Troops in cadence: "1, 2 ---- 3, 4"

It went something like that. There were dozens of the calls and limericks he would use, and we were loud. That is why they banned us from running around the on-base housing project during training. None of them wanted to be up at 5:30 in the morning. The desk jockey officers wanted to sleep in. It was actually fun, and we got so we could run forever. I guess you would call it a jog, but we would go forever.

In the afternoon they would put us through an hour or more of calisthenics. So many sit ups, so many push ups, so much moaning and groaning! It took a while, but we did find out that the more we screwed up and moaned and groaned, the more they made us do the exercises. There was one sergeant in particular who was a machine when it came to exercises (Sgt. Royos, I'm not sure of the spelling). He was one tough Oriental fellow who was built like a brick; square and solid as a rock. When he led the exercise time, we knew we were in trouble. We couldn't always understand what he said, but we did it anyway, or else! Everyone complained, but the net result was that we really got in good shape.

In many ways, learning how to fire the weapons and take them apart in our sleep was a pain, because it moved at a snail's pace. In other ways in was fun. I had learned to fire weapons as a 4 or 5-year-old kid, so I felt comfortable shooting the weapons. We had to qualify with a rifle, pistol, machine gun, bazooka, and grenade tossing. There were all sorts of ways to kill people. I obtained an expert badge in rifle, which I was proud of; but I did it on the last shot, which was a pop-up target at 400 meters. The guy who was grading me was tired of the hot sun and his eyesight wasn't that good. I was never sure whether I hit the target or not, but he said, "Nice shot", and gave me credit as he was smiling. The funny thing is, my discharge paper, the DD-214, says I was expert at Rifle and Marksman at M-14. This was strange, because I was using an M-14 rifle when I qualified as Marksman. *Silly them!*

Early one morning we were out by the firing range and were getting ready to go onto the firing range, and it was extremely stormy looking all around. Off on the horizon, towards the east and Topeka, Kansas, we could see numerous funnel clouds touching down. It looked like a movie scene; it was so unreal and so scary. It turned out that day (June 8th, 1966), an F5 tornado, the biggest kind there is, hit Topeka, Kansas; killing 17 and injuring 550 people.

Apparently the Army brass got worried, so they sent us back to the barracks and told us to stay inside with the windows open, in the middle of the room. We had been there for a while, when all of a sudden the wind started to blow something terrible, and a couple of the trees outside bent right over to the ground. The color of the air turned greenish, and it felt weird. Just as quick as it

had started, it stopped. We all figured by reports we heard later that a tornado had passed directly overhead; not quite touching down, but coming awfully close.

They also were big in teaching us other ways to kill if we were out of ammunition or didn't have a weapon. They taught us how to use the bayonet and how to kill someone with our bare hands. These classes bothered me more than the firing ranges, since the concept was so up close and personal that we might have to kill someone with our own hands. Nasty stuff!

Around half way through the basic training, we had the privilege and honor of going through an obstacle course while live fire was going over our head, and explosions were being detonated in holes next to us. This all transpired late one night where they trucked us out to the course and gave us instructions on how to crawl under barbed wire and keep our rears low. Of course it had recently rained; so the course was total mud, which added an element of fun to the whole exercise. They made it seem like it was going to be a scary thing with the machine guns firing about two feet over our heads, but I thought it was rather boring and just got everything muddy. It is one of those things that all Army trainees get to go through, whether they want to or not.

In June we were out for several days camping by the rifle ranges so we could get plenty of practice from sun up to sun down. It was during this camp out that I turned 22, and was really in a funk, feeling so all alone. In our free time after dinner I went for a long walk in the trees, and managed to find every mosquito in Kansas. I had not made any real good friends yet, and I hated sleeping in those small tents; but late that night I sang happy birthday to myself, and fell asleep feeling like I'd never get out of this Army.

One day we had to take our turn at running the physical fitness obstacle course. We did three types of course while in basic training. This day was a course that included barriers, bridges and all sorts of good stuff. Riding over to the course in deuce-and-a-half Army trucks, our normal transportation vehicle, we noticed that the sky looked terribly ominous. There were pitch black clouds all around us, but we were to run the course anyway. Just as we were assembling back in the clearing after completing the course and waiting for the trucks to pick us up, it started to rain in buckets. Then the lighting started, and we were out in the middle of a field with our M-14 rifles in hand. Before we had any time to react, a bolt of lighting hit a gigantic oak tree about 75 feet away from us and split some of the major branches off. We could feel the electricity in the air, and it hurt our ears. The heck with clean rifles; I think every guy there dropped his rifle and got away from it, and got as low to the ground as he could. After it calmed down a bit, we picked up our rifles and got in the trucks.

The Platoon was filled with a lot of interesting characters from all over the US, although the guys I got to know first were Ron Hoy and Bill Fitzgerald. It turned out they both lived close to me in California; and in fact, Ron and I had gone to the same high school. Ron over the years became a very special friend, and was the kind of person who lived for today, since tomorrow we may be out of beer. The only time at Ft. Riley I ever went out on the town was with Ron. *Once was enough, being the party animal I am, but I really like Ron.*

Bill Fitzgerald was also a nice person, but he was the kind who always tried to get out of everything. We had a lot of funny times, but I never felt close to him. It turned out that somehow he got out of going to Vietnam, and I don't remember why. It might have had something to do with hernia surgery he had to have. He was proud of that.

Part way through basic training I met Bill Wolters. Now you talk about your different kind of guy. He was from Minnesota--which should explain a lot right there--and he loved cars. He had a Chevy convertible, if I remember right, and had worked at a gas station. I had built some altered cars for the drag strip with my brother, so we really hit it off to the point where he even wrote to Patty, and Patty sent him care packages of goodies and stuff. We hung out a lot together just writing letters and talking about when we got out we would…. He wasn't much of a party guy and I rarely ever went any place, so we had a lot of time to share things and get to know each other.

There were also a bunch of clowns in the platoon. One of them was a guy named Hopkins, a little skinny kid from the south with no respect for authority or for anything. The reason I remember him so much was that day after day we would march out on the exercise field. Day after day he would screw off, and march like a pimp strolling down the red light district. Sgt. Jones would yell that we were going to keep on doing marching until we got it right. (Sgt. Jones rarely picked on individuals; he let us take care of that.) After several hours one day in the hot sun, I was just getting so mad at Hopkins who was in formation right next to me. At some point he was doing the main street shuffle, so I cracked and let him have the butt end of my rifle on his butt about as hard as I could do it. It was amazing how we never had problems with marching after that, although I don't think I had a new best friend as a result.

The different personalities even showed up at night. There were those who snored in their sleep load enough to wake the dead. Good old Cob, I never heard another human snore that loud. There were numerous guys who talked almost continuously in their sleep. The nighttime in the barracks was interesting, but very lonely.

Of course, all through basic training we had classes on every imaginable topic. Oh, did they have classes! We were almost always made to sit in the hot sun, and then were expected to stay awake for several hours while some NCO talked about personal hygiene. There were first aid classes with gory pictures, classes on types of gas agents, classes on reading maps, making stretchers out of ponchos, swimming, compass, and on and on. We even had classes on the history and culture of Vietnam, which I'm sure most of the guys slept through. What a fight to stay awake! Later in Vietnam I wished I had paid better attention, but then it was just BORING!

After we had classes in compass reading, we were taken out to a remote area of Ft. Riley on a moonless night and paired up with another person. There we had to go through a compass obstacle course. I paired up with Bill Wolters, and did we ever have a wild time! It was so dark that you couldn't take a sighting on an object with the compass and then walk to it. We did it so Bill would go out about ten feet and open his shirt so I could see his white t-shirt, and I would position him and then walk to him. We did pretty good on the way out, and found the marker fairly fast and started back. Either the Army had a real sense of humor or we were way off base. We ended up going through some of the thickest underbrush I've ever been in. I'm sure there was poison ivy all over the place, but we keep on going, since we didn't have any choice. The surprise was that once we climbed a steep bank, we reached the road and were only about 50-75 feet away from the final marker. Someone was guiding us that night, but it wasn't us with the compass.

During basic training they kept all of us under tight control. There was no leave for 4-5 weeks, and we were not even allowed to go to the PX by ourselves. They would march us over in formation and make us wait until everyone was done shopping, and then march us back. After about the fifth week we were allowed to go to the PX, and even to the beer hall, which was all of 75 feet from our barracks. I played pinball there on several occasions, but only went over there to have a beer twice.

To impress all of us and put on a show, they had an exercise one night called something like the "minute of madness", where all of the troops were placed along the edge of the firing range with artillery to the rear. For a whole minute all of the rifles and artillery would fire during the nighttime. Man, what a show, and what waste of taxpayer's money! It was a spectacular event, and fun to be a part of. I know not many years after that, they stooped such activities as being wasteful and not providing any meaningful training.

During the last few weeks of training when I could get a pass, I got a note from the Captain's office to call a phone number in Manhattan, Kansas. I called the number, and the mother of one of my best friends, Ron Bell, was visiting relatives in Manhattan and wanted me to join them for dinner that weekend. I asked the Captain If I could get a pass, not expecting to be able to get

away, but he did let me go. I had a wonderful evening with them, and even cranked out some old fashioned ice cream on their machine. It was a nice relaxing evening, but too soon it was back to the barracks and reality.

Somehow I really lucked out, and all during basic training I only had to pull KP once, and never had to do push-ups for getting in trouble as they show in the movies. I was such a good boy! I think that part of the reason I didn't get more KP was several guys in the company were always volunteering to do KP so they didn't have to do other things like exercise and go to the field. I did it once, and wouldn't you know it, I got to peel potatoes--just like in the movies.

At the conclusion of basic training we had to parade in front of the brass to celebrate our graduating from basic training, with a band and everything. That was certainly a gigantic thrill for all of us, but at least it was over, and now we would be able to go home on leave.

After graduation we were all allowed to go on a two-week leave, if I remember right. Since there were so many guys from the Los Angeles area, we all chipped in and leased a plane to fly home. It wasn't bad, since we took off from the Manhattan, Kansas, airport a few miles away; and we landed at Burbank airport, where Patty and everyone met me. It was so good to be home, but the future weighed heavily on me during that time home.

I can't even remember much about what Patty and I did during that leave home. I do remember taking a trip out to the desert and shooting rifles at beer cans. To this day I can't imagine why I would want to go shoot rifles during my leave, but that is what we did one day. I even have pictures to prove it.

I do remember that the time went fast, and soon it was time to head back to Ft. Riley, Kansas. I flew out of Los Angeles International Airport and ran into several of the guys from my company as I was boarding the plane. One was good old Bob Good from Reseda. He was a nice quiet guy, and was built low to the ground and had a ton of muscles. We had a nice trip, visiting the whole time.

When we got to Kansas City, the next obstacle was to try to find out how to get to Ft. Riley, which was about 120 miles away. Someone had the brilliant idea of renting a car, so four or five of us tripped off to the car rental booth. There we quickly found out that I was the only one old enough to rent the car, and since we had military ID we didn't have to have a big deposit, so we rented a car. In true young, stupid Army troop fashion, we went up to the bar and had a few drinks before we headed out. I had the sense to only have one drink, but that was mainly because I knew I would fall asleep if I had any more.

We took off and had an uneventful trip back to the Manhattan, Kansas airport to return the car, and then took the bus from there to Custer Hill. We finally got to the fort about 7:30 in the morning, and then laid low for the day, since we weren't due back until the next day.

Advanced Infantry Training

Now that we were full-fledged infantry men, we were going to be put through five more months of advanced infantry training to prepare us for Vietnam. Of course, there was still denial by all the troops that we were really going to Nam. No way would they send this group of rag-tag draftees to Vietnam! Might as well just shoot them all right now and get it over with! Everyone kept hoping that the rumors would stop, and that we would end up getting other assignments or stay stateside; but all that aside, they were going to train us for the jungles of Vietnam, right here in Kansas.

All during Basic and Advanced training I would call Patty the same day every week and fairly late at night, Kansas time. I would usually have to wait in a line of one or two guys and then would get in a 10-15 minute phone call. The calls were expensive back then, so I couldn't call more often. After I called, I usually went outside and took a short walk to regain my composure. I don't mind admitting that I was a homeboy who was terribly homesick being away from Patty. I'm still that way, and can't stand to be away from the wife and home.

At the beginning of advanced training, Sgt. Jones assigned certain individuals to be acting squad leaders and also assigned machine gunner responsibility. I was assigned the position of leader of the third squad, which meant that I was responsible for nine other guys. One of the privileges of this was that I got to sleep in a room with three other guys instead of being in the bay with around 40 other guys.

At first I was assigned to a room with three black guys from the platoon. We got along pretty well, but I certainly did feel like the outsider. They had totally different interests and stayed off by themselves, and never included me in anything.

Two of my friends, Ron (Harold) Hoy and Russ (Roly) Roland, had been selected to be machine gunners, so they had the room next to me. They asked if I wanted to room with them, and I said sure. John (Alphabet Soup or just Alphabet) Feuerschwenger was a squad leader, and also shared the room. This turned out to be a great decision because all of us really got along. They were in their own way rabble-rousers, while I was the calm, married, mature one of the group.

I guess the term "rabble-rouser" is another way of saying troublemakers, or fun-lovers. They were always into something, and that something was usually beer or playing cards. Man, could they drink beer, and they were king of the mountain in cards! I never joined in on their card games, but after payday they often had one person after another coming in and taking on the three of them in poker. They played an honest game; but were just good, and lucky. They would clean out everyone. I would sleep up on my top bunk all weekend as they played and played until they ran out of competition. Then it would start all over the next month.

One thing I learned real soon living with these guys is when they went out together to go drinking, I always locked the door so they would have to knock to be let back in. I did this because their goal in life when they came back was to play practical jokes on everyone they could. One of their biggest ideas of a practical joke was to get a fire extinguisher from the hall and go around shooting everyone with foam. No one was ever sure what tricks they were going to play, so I never took a chance and left myself vulnerable.

One of the funnier episodes, at least to me, was the night that I was in charge of the barracks and down in the Captains office. I often volunteered for this job since I didn't go on leave, so it gave other guys a chance to go. Well, one night about 00:30 (12:30 AM) I heard all sorts of noise coming from the upstairs bay where our platoon slept. I knew right away that it must be Ron, Russ and John back from leave. After about five minutes, Dave Persson showed up in front of the office door with a towel wrapped around his waist. In true Dave fashion, he calmly told me

that Ron, Russ and John were back from leave and making trouble again. He then turned around, and there was a six-inch wide strip of yellow paint down his back. Ah, boys will be boys! I had trouble stopping from laughing. I still smile every time I think of that.

Not all of time was fun, that is for sure, but there was always something going on. We used to go out in the old fields around Ft. Riley and play Army. Hmm, I guess that is a good idea for training Army personnel. One time we were out, and it was the middle of summer and hotter than blazes with the prairie grass brown and flammable. Enter our leader, Captain Engledinger. For some unknown reason he decided to throw a smoke grenade into the dry brush. Anyone with a pea brain knows that smoke grenade plus dry brush equals fire. Sure enough, it lit up like a torch; and the fire was off and running. The Captain pretended he didn't know what happened and told everyone to put the fire out. It would have been hard enough, but there was about a 10-20 MPH wind blowing north at the time. We had experience in fighting prairie fires, but this one took off like a rocket and we couldn't catch up with the front of the fire even when running as fast as we could. There were all sorts of singed animals running out from the fire, but we didn't have a chance to stop the fire. We could just control it from the side. Luckily, after about 30-45 minutes it had traveled a couple of miles up to a road, where it was stopped dead in its tracks. We were all wiped out from the effort, and then the Captain was going around trying to find out who started the fire. He didn't have a clue.

When we got back to the barracks from being in the field, our room was sort of a place for everyone to congregate in their spare time. Guys would stop by to share cookies and share stories about the field. I remember once when Art Noteboom stopped in, which wasn't unusual. Art was probably the most unique individual I have ever met. Before his days in the Army he was in motorcycle gangs, and was one mean dude if he wanted to be. At other times he was a puppy dog. Regardless of what he acted like, he was the biggest guy in the platoon, at probably 6' 4" tall, and strong as heck. Since I had wrestled in college, there was an ongoing competition to see who could beat me, but most of the guys had no true wrestling experience, so they were at a big disadvantage even if they outweighed me by 100 pounds. Well, this one day Art decided to wrestle me, and I don't think I have ever been grabbed by another wrestler and feared for my life the way I did that day. I held my own for quite a while, but he just started to wear me down. I had to protect my interest, so I had this little knife in my locker that had a one-inch blade on it. Well, some how it found its way into my hand and into Art's leg. He howled, but didn't let go. I finally gave one all-out effort and managed to escape his grasp, and I was exhausted. Luckily, Art was so good-natured he had no hard feelings; in fact, he just laughed about it. Meanwhile, I felt like a louse and apologized. I'm glad I did, because later on in Vietnam he was a sniper, and thought of as quite a killer of VC.

There was also the payday when Lt. Neely, our platoon leader at one point, stopped by our room and asked me to help him with the Company payroll. Lt. Neely was a real straight, neat young man. I doubt he was any older than I was. Why he chose me for the payroll guard I'll never know, but he seemed to think I was a responsible troop. For the job they issued us 45 caliber semi-automatic pistols with live ammunition, since we would be carrying around $15,000-$20,000. We went down to the main post and got the cash to pay everyone in our Company, which was around 200 guys. Everything went just fine while we handed out the payroll, and after we were done, we went down to the mess hall to have lunch before we finished the job and took the vouchers back to the main post. I sat down at the table across from Lt. Neely after we had gotten our meal, and he said I'd better make sure my weapon was clear of ammunition, now that we didn't have any money. The Army had trained us how to clear it, so I went about it and cleared the weapon. Lt. Neely had his weapon under the table clearing it. All of a sudden there was a thunderous roar and the table jumped up a bit and settled back down. I asked the Lt. what happened, and he said he just shot himself in the leg. Now, that wasn't part of the training!

I first made sure that he was all right, and then ran down to the Captain's office about 50 feet away, and told him what had just happened. Did he ever turn as red as a beet, and was ready to kill someone! He told the orderly to call the medics, and ran down to the mess hall. I don't know

how Lt. Neely did it, but he shot himself in his thigh in such a manner as the bullet just went through flesh and didn't touch the bone or any major veins or arteries. It went in the top inside of his left leg and came out the outside of his left leg. By the angle of the bullet hole, the round must have missed me by just a foot or so.

The medics patched him up and took him to the hospital, where he quickly recovered from the ordeal, but that was really just the start. The Army investigated the whole incident and I had to go down to headquarters to be interviewed for several hours. I quickly figured out that they were trying to hang a bum rap on him for supposedly a self-inflected wound to get out of going to Vietnam. He was one of the few people I knew who was actually looking forward to going, and would have never done that. Not only that, if he did do it on purpose it was sure a lousy job, and I know he could have done better. No, there was no way that he did it on purpose. It was just one of those stupid lapses of memory that we all have, but his was real dangerous. Some people just choose bad times to have them.

Shortly after that incident, Lt. Heller joined the platoon and took over the responsibility. Like Sgt. Jones, he was a gift to us as soldiers. He was tough, but fair. He was serious, but could laugh with the best of them. God was truly watching over us the day they assigned Lt. Heller to guide our platoon. In all my time in the military, all one year and ten months, I never ran into a more competent individual at commanding men.

One of the first times out to the field after Lt. Heller took over the platoon, he gave a bunch of the troops a chance to learn to rappel. Now this may not seem like much, but first of all, he did this on his own because he liked being a teacher of skills. The second amazing thing was that we could find a place in Kansas to rappel. The first day we rappelled, we did it off the side of an old compost pit cut into the side of a little hill on a farm. Stuff was dropped in from above the pit and taken out from below. The sides must have been all of about 12-15 feet high, but it was the best we could do in Kansas at the time. It was a blast, and we continued to find places to do it during the remainder of our training, even if it was only 5-10 foot sides of creek.

Lt. Heller really seemed to take a liking to the platoon, and the way he and Sgt. Jones trained the platoon, we got a reputation for being the best. Because of that, we were selected for some special duties off and on, which turned out to be a blast some of the time. *Later in Vietnam, the special duties became a burden.*

Part of the infantry training was a regimental operation in the latter part of August. The center of operations was a large perimeter about five miles north of the barracks, on top of a knoll. We moved into the area of operation and were instructed where to place our platoon and squads, and then we entrenched to prepare for the night. Early in the evening, Lt. Heller came around and picked out a number of us troops from the platoon, and told us we had been selected to play aggressors for the night. When you are an aggressor, you are essentially the bad guy and you get to do what ever you want to harass the troops (within reason).

Around 10 p.m. that evening, those of us who had been selected to be aggressors when out through the perimeter that our platoon was guarding, and huddled together to determine a strategy. There must have been around eight of us. Dave Persson and I decided to pair up and go out on our own and have some fun. Sgt. Befort led another group, and I'm not sure what the rest of the group, did but I know what Dave and I did.

Dave was a very quiet guy friend from the California area. I believe he came from Glendale, or near there. We got a long great, and I always loved his ever-so-dry sense of humor. I don't think a lot of the guys "got" his humor, but he always cracked me up. He was a member of my squad. No one knew much about Dave, other than that he loved motorcycles. He kept quiet about his life outside the Army, and was very vocal about not liking the life inside of the Army. He was not alone on that point!

Dave and I had no idea what to actually do, or where the exact boundaries of the parameter were--but hey, we were told to just go out and have fun. What could they do to us except take us prisoners, tie us up, throw us in the back of a truck and generally give us a rough time?

We moved slowly along the east edge of the perimeter, outside a wood line for about a half a mile. We then came to a little knoll where we could hear the activity in the regimental area. We stayed below the skyline of the knoll so we couldn't be seen. The perimeter was on the knoll opposite the one we were on, so we slowly crawled down side of the hill we were on and came to the dense brush in the dry streambed separating the two knolls. Sitting there for several minutes we were able to pick out voices and see several fox holes about 150 feet up the side of the hill. We continued to crawl up the hill on our stomachs very slowly expecting to have the ka ka scared out of us any second, when someone pounced on us. The next thing we knew, we were near the edge of a fox hole. Using hand signals, Dave and I moved in very slowly to inspect the foxhole. Much to our surprise we found it empty, so we just invited ourselves to get in for a few minutes to look over the situation.

Sitting there, we figured that the best way to continue into the regimental area was to simply get up out of the fox hole and walk in like we knew what we were doing. When we stopped giggling we did just that, and proceeded to walk straight up to Col. Fulton's tent. As we got to the door of the tent, we were challenged by some GI in a foxhole near the door of the tent. When he asked for the password, which we knew but weren't allowed to use, we gave him some sarcastic remark and shot up him and the tent with blanks. Now in real life the guy would have been dead as a doornail, but with blanks he was still very much alive and decided that he was going to fire back. He fired right at Dave at very close range, and hit Dave right in the eye with the wadding from a blank round. Dave was really lucky he didn't lose the eye, but it was sore for quite awhile.

At that point we decided we had done what we had been sent to do, and we headed out of the perimeter. We headed out at a dead run towards the foxhole area where we had entered the perimeter. With all the commotion caused by us firing at the tent, everyone on the perimeter around that area was firing outwards at anything. As Dave and I raced out, we yelled at them that they were firing in the wrong direction, and we kept on running. We didn't stop running until we were quite a ways from the area. Man, was my adrenaline pumping in high gear! We laughed and giggled all the way back to platoon area.

Sgt. Befort and his group, I believe, did a lot of the same. There are all sorts of rumors and legends about what he did that night, and any of it could be true, knowing Befort. Some say he swiped a tank and drove around the area. Another rumor says he stole a jeep and they drove up to the same tent as Dave and I attacked and walked into the tent and tried to arrest Col. Fulton. Whatever he exactly did only adds to the legend of Sgt. Befort, the only Renaissance man in the United States Army. I really could never figure out why a man with his extremely high IQ ever joined the Army of his own free will. He was a wonderful and unique part of our platoon, and I still enjoy times visiting with him.

After we got back and met up with Lt. Heller, he told us that we were to do more of the same the next day, but would be facing some armored vehicles. Oh goody! Get run over by a tank or Armored Personal Carrier (APC). *Tanks a lot, just what I wanted (a little armor humor).*

The next day of playing aggressor wasn't quite as much fun, but at least we didn't have to do work. We just sat around waiting for something to happen, which was more like Army life. We knew about when the "good guys" were supposed to get there, so we waited until a little bit before that time to get in position. We were supposed to be fairly passive in that we would let them take us prisoner, but Lt. Heller decided a little bit of a trap would keep them honest. As a result, I climbed up in a tree over where the guys were supposed to be waiting. After they came in and jumped out of their APC's to capture Lt. Heller and the other aggressors, I opened fire on them. Big deal! In real life I would have nabbed about a dozen of them; but they just looked up and said for us to come out of the tree, and we were all captured. They were taking us back to the base

area in a duce-and-a-half; and when they slowed down for a curve, Lt. Heller jumped out of the back of the truck and made his escape. I was too tired to do anything, so I just went back to sleep.

It was at the conclusion of those field operations that we were pulled together as a large group and Col. Fulton told us, "Yes, we are going to Vietnam." He said that he had been to a briefing on where we would be operating, and he saw a map of the area. I thought he was kidding when he said the whole area showed up blue on the map, which meant it was underwater. We were to find out later that he wasn't kidding, and the area was called the Mekong Delta. It was funny how it was such a downer, but as we marched as a platoon the 3-4 miles back to the barracks, we were shouting cadence all the way and really acting like straight soldiers. Weird!

Several weeks later, Dave Persson and I were again assigned by Lt. Heller to be aggressors in a company operation. We started out with a few more people and had a machine gun along. We would just probe at the line, firing at the troops, and then pull back. After a while, Dave and I went off on our own and circled to the other side to the encampment. We found a deep stream bed and slowly moved towards the perimeter to see if we could get in. When we got to the perimeter, we found a few trip wires, which we avoided; and then much to our surprise we found several outposts manned by sleeping troops, so we snuck in through the perimeter again without being detected. Once I was in the middle of the encampment, I pointed my rifle in the air; and with it on full automatic, I fired of a magazine of ammunition (blanks) to make a point that they were all dead. I saw Lt. Heller about 100 yards away, standing there smiling; but one person took the whole thing personally. The guy's name was Holt, and he approached me looking like he wanted to kill me. I don't know what his problem was, but he told me to drop my weapon and give up. I told him they were all dead, so it didn't matter. All of a sudden he hit me in the chin with the butt of his rifle as hard as he could. The next thing I knew, Lt. Heller was pulling me off from on top of the guy. I had taken him down and was wailing on him. He had a few bruises on his face, but he had opened a gash on my chin that I had to go to the hospital to have closed with ten stitches. I never did figure out what his problem was, but it was not the last run in I had with Holt.

A few weeks later, we were playing a little touch football on a weekend out on the exercise field, and Holt joined the game. There were about 10 of us, and the game quickly degraded from touch football to full contact, good-natured fun. I took a handoff once and crashed up field, until several guys dragged me down; and we were laughing and enjoying the release of frustration of being in the Army. As I lay on the ground with several guys still on top of me, Holt walked up and stomped on my head with the heel of his boot. Man did that hurt, and I was off the ground like a rocket! I started in at him, but Russ and Ron held me back. That was the end of that game.

Most of the time was not spent getting rid of anger. I think a good half of our energy went to figuring out practical jokes to play on people. One I regretted later (but it was funny when we did it) was when we got even with the guy who came around in the morning and opened our door and yelled for us to "GET UP, YOU LAZY BUMS!" We noticed he just opened the door a little, flipped on the lights and then stuck his head in to yell at us. We rigged the door so when it opened, it pulled a metal combat helmet (3-4 pounds) off the top of a storage locker next to the door opening. After we rigged it up, one of our "friends" popped into say hi. Good old George Ainsworth opened the door and got it square on the head. He was always mad anyway, so he walked away down the hall, yelling and cussing at us while we were rolling on the floor. The next morning, the wake-up guy opened the door and stuck in his head. Of course we were all awake waiting to see what happened, and it went just as planned. The guy opened the door and turned on the lights, just as the helmet scored a bulls-eye on top of his head. That must have hurt, but he never yelled at us again to wake us up. He would just knock on the door.

Not all of the time was spent having fun; in fact, as the training continued it got harder and harder, especially since the weather was getting colder and colder. Mind you, we were being trained to fight in tropical jungles and not the artic circle, but Kansas was the place.

We were out on platoon maneuvers for several days on the west side of Ft. Riley, where there were a lot of old abandoned farms. These maneuvers went on night and day at times. One day in early October, we were out at night and we were freezing cold, and the wind was howling across the prairie. You have to understand that the standard Army issue clothes were not what you call well-insulated. Lt. Heller finally led us to an abandon farmhouse complex where we found the barn open, so the entire platoon went inside and bedded down, so we were protected from the wind and cold. We were all so extremely tired that most of us passed out into a dead sleep. I woke up after a few minutes and there was enough light from flashlights in the barn so I could see the mice and rats running all over the place, including running up and down me! In these situations I did a mental trade off about my options. I was out of the cold and wind. I was dead tired and could barely move. The rats weren't eating too much, and so far they hadn't bitten me (that I could feel). Back to sleep! We were able to get a couple hours rest before the sun came up and we had to move out again, but at least the sun was warming us somewhat at that point.

It became standard fare at that point in training that we froze all the time. On one company size maneuver, Ron Hoy and I were sharing a foxhole. This had been a rough three-day company operation. We had been subjected to POW training and had to escape and sneak through aggressor lines to get to the recovery point 4-5 miles away. We got so tired at one point I fell asleep standing up, leaning on my rifle. Ron Hoy and I were out scouting the area for Lt. Heller at one point, and we found the cook's trailer; so we had a bright idea of sneaking up on them and scaring the heck out of them. We should have known that these were old-timers and they knew what could happen. As I was crawling through the open field slowly getting close to the trailer, I set off a trip flare. The only problem was that I tripped it with my face, and the flare went off right in front of my eyes. I couldn't see anything for hours after that! Then the final straw was the last night when we were manning our foxholes, since we expected an aggressor attack at any time (big deal). The only problem was that the foxhole that Ron and I had was filled with water from all of the rain we had gotten. At least they were serving hot coffee, so when it was my turn I went over to pick up some coffee in my canteen cup. That is when I found out how the Army cooks make the coffee in the field. The cooks tie several pounds of coffee grounds in a t-shirt and boil it in water for several hours. Man, was that stuff strong enough to straighten the hair in your nostrils! I took a full canteen cup back with me, and since it was too hot to drink, I sat on it to warm myself. *Strange what we do in those situations*!

I can clearly remember another company maneuver we were on, when it was so cold that every other company in the field that night was ordered to go back to the barracks--but oh no, not us! Engledinger had a nice hot tent set up and he was fine, so his troops would be okay. We were allowed to rotate into the tent for about two minutes, once during the night. At one point, some guys carried in a troop from another platoon who was stiff as a board and in hypothermia. They stuck him in front of the potbelly stove until Engledinger told someone to take the guy out. Engledinger strikes again! Man, was that a cold night, and a cold move by Engledinger. The next day we were sort of exhilarated after making it through the cold when we thought we were going to die. *Well, maybe not die, but close to it.*

During all this time I was writing to Patty, telling her how cold it was and how we were freezing to death; so when she came out to visit me the weekend of our anniversary, the 20th of November, I told her to bring plenty of warm clothes for herself. The Captain was actually pretty decent about the whole thing and gave me a three-day weekend pass, and he even gave Bill Wolters a pass to join us Saturday, since Patty brought her friend Diane Tollman along for the visit.

That Friday I got off early in the morning and took the bus to downtown Manhattan, Kansas--the home of the University of Kansas. I went into a jewelry store and bought Patty a pendent watch for an anniversary present. She must have sent me the money to buy the present, since they never did get my pay squared away, and usually I got nothing. After that, I went to the Manhattan Airport to rent a car and wait for her and Diane. After about an hour, I discovered that the plane

was behind schedule and would be a little late. They were supposed to be there about 4:30, and I waited and waited until they finally got in, around 11:30 that night. They had taken a puddle-jumper from Denver that stopped in every pasture in Kansas, and every time they landed in the DC-3, the brakes of the plane caught on fire. It was no different when they landed at Manhattan, when we were all treated to flames shooting up from the breaks. I didn't think she would ever fly again, but Patty said they served enough drinks to keep them relaxed.

The next day I took them for a trip around Ft. Riley and the surrounding area. Part of that was stopping by where our platoon was training in helicopter loading and unloading. She kept asking me where the cold weather I'd been talking about was. Wearing civilian clothes and not having to sleep in the cold or stay outside all day, it didn't feel nearly as bad. She always kidded me after that about being a wimp in the cold. But it was when I was out in the field. I'm sure glad we didn't have to fight in Norway, or some other place near the Arctic Circle.

It was a sad Sunday night when she boarded the DC-3 puddle-jumper to start the trip back to California. I later learned that they had more trouble on the way back, and had to layover in Denver for a number of hours to make connections. She made it home around 5:30 Monday morning, which was just in time for her to change up and head for work. It was a wonderful weekend, and good for a lot of funny memories.

As the time drew near for us to go to Vietnam, there were always rumors flying around about something. The Captain would then hold a meeting saying, "No, we aren't going to Germany." "No, we aren't going to Korea." The rumors were running rampant, so the guys in my room decided to start a rumor and see how long it took to get back. Of course, I would have nothing to do with such an activity (yeah, right)! We started the rumor that we had a change in orders, and we would be going to Sweden. The next day came the denial, "No, we weren't going to Sweden." *Anything for a little fun!*

There was also a constant battle between Companies in the Battalion as to who was the best. Captain Engledinger always wanted to come out on top. One weekend Ron Hoy and I were just sitting around doing nothing and decided things were too boring, so we would go steal (borrow) the Company C flag and banner. Their barracks were just 75 feet from ours, so we went over there and easily found the flag and banner, which were supposed to be guarded so dummies like us couldn't steal them. Giggling and running as fast as we could, we made it back to our barracks and set the flag and banner behind Captain Engledinger's desk. The next day he was strutting his stuff, and all smiles. Of course we couldn't tell anyone who did it; or else there was the potential for getting in some serious trouble. They might even send us to Vietnam! *It must have been getting close to the end of training if we had time to do things like that.*

As Christmas approached, a bunch of guys once again got together and leased a plane to fly to Burbank, and this time also leased it to fly back to Manhattan, Kansas. It was sure cheaper than buying our own ticket, plus we didn't have to worry about getting to Kansas City. We all got to Burbank and spent what was for me a real sad two weeks, knowing when I went back we were going to be leaving for Vietnam, no matter what the rumors said. I did have a nice Christmas with lots of good food, and a relaxing time with Patty. No matter how hard I tried to forget about returning, it eventually came to the day when we had to leave.

I think I saw more grown men cry that day at Burbank Airport than I have ever seen at one time in my whole life. Girlfriends, parents, brothers, sisters, grandparents and just friends were standing there hugging and crying, knowing that in the next year many of them would be dead or seriously wounded. My dad told me later he thought that day that it would be last time he saw me alive. He knew my enthusiasm would probably get me killed. That must have been a hard day for him. We were draftees just doing our duty, but we were going to be in harm's way, and there was no way to avoid it.

The word came that we had to get on the plane, and it was like ripping my heart out to say goodbye. We did get on the plane, and was it ever a quiet flight back to Kansas on the old Lockheed Constellation.

We got back to Kansas to find snow on the ground at the barracks. At least we wouldn't be spending nights out in the snow anymore. We would spend a few days in the snow, since right after we got back they issued us our M-16 rifles, which we were taking to Vietnam. We then went out on a firing range and tried them out. They weren't as accurate as the M-14 and didn't have the same kick, but it would have to do. It was definitely lighter.

The same day we were put in a trench; and like in basic training, someone fired over our heads so we would know what it sounded like when we were being shot at. Bullets sound like ripping cloth when they go over your head. The sound is really unique, and you never forget it.

About this time the morale was dipping pretty low with the end date almost there. There was a lot of drinking going on. Doñes came back one night after putting away a case of beer (he could really drink), and he passed out in his bed so sound asleep that when his bed caught fire from his cigarette, he didn't even wake up. Luckily there were guys awake to put the fire out, and they threw the mattress out the window into the snow. It was still there the next morning.

Sgt. Perry was also drinking a lot. I'll have to give him credit; he had never used the excuse of going to Vietnam as the reason for his drinking. He just always drank. He was a lifer with a serious drinking problem, and not too many brains to support it. One day Ron Hoy and Art Noteboom ditched training classes and went out (in Sgt. Perry's VW bug) bar hopping, and got stuck in the snow somewhere in the boonies. They were plowed, but some how got the VW out of the snow and back to the barracks. After that, Sgt. Perry decided he liked our room to drink in. I kept finding bottles of Apricot Brandy hidden behind or in my footlocker. On more than one occasion I returned to the room to find that someone had blown chunks in the corner of the room, and it looked like and smelled like Apricot Brandy. I couldn't imagine who'd done that! It was sad to me that someone was wasting his life like that.

Of course, I wasn't your perfect Saint when it came to drinking. I just didn't like drinking, and knew I couldn't hold my liquor. That notwithstanding; I found myself alone in the barracks that New Year's Eve, with nothing to do after I called Patty. Even Wolters was gone. For some strange reason, Russ showed up, and he talked me into going to the little Army NCO club right next to our barracks, where they served hard stuff. We got pretty plowed, and I did all right until Russ started us drinking straight whiskey. I lasted about two rounds of that before I pulled a Sgt. Perry and had to make my way to the bathroom, due to a sudden up-rush of slightly used booze. That was it for me, so I went back to the barracks and slept the New Year in.

It was about another week of packing and getting ready before the troops were to leave for Vietnam. During this time, my roommates and I spent a lot of time over at the gym playing handball and working out. I guess no one else wanted to do anything physically, because the guys from my room and I were the only ones going over there. At one point, good old Charlie Zies showed up. Now Charlie was this very nice, deeply Christian young fellow who wore thick glasses and just looked like a pudgy fun-loving kid. His only bad habit was that he loved ice cream by the gallons! He never drank or swore, which made him unique and special in the Army. He challenged me to wrestle one day when he showed up at the gym. I thought this would be some fun exercise, and easy opposition. I had handled a lot of guys his size, and many of them football players. I quickly found out how powerful Charlie was. *I can't remember who won that first day, which probably means he did. In all the years I wrestled, I rarely hooked up with someone that powerful!*

As part of the getting ready to leave for Vietnam, the captain said that everyone was to have a haircut. Well, I had been cutting hair all during training to earn spending money, since they had my payroll all screwed up. My devious cohorts in my room and I decided that Mohawk hair cuts

would be the order of the day, so they started lining up at the door for haircuts at 25 cents each. The word quickly got around, and even the Captain had me give him a Mohawk hair cut. The one that scared me the most was Singleton, who was the radio operator for the Captain. He was called Batman. He was a young black fellow about my height (and probably weight), in around 230 pounds of solid--and I do mean solid--muscle. He looked like the meanest person on the face of the earth, but as I got to know him, I found he was a gentle giant. I really liked the guy, but that day giving him a haircut all I could think about was, "What if he doesn't like his haircut?" *I guess he liked it.*

Around the 7th of January, the troops were off to Vietnam. I was so lucky; since I was a squad leader, I was chosen to fly over to Vietnam as advanced party to get trained before the rest of the guys got there. The troops left by busses that took them to the train depot. If I remember right, they left at night so no one could see them. You know; a highly secret operation! We in the advanced party stayed behind, and consolidated in one barracks.

The guys not in the advanced party traveled to Oakland, California, where they got on a boat and spent several weeks bobbing across the Pacific Ocean. From what I understand, that was an experience that none of them ever wanted to repeat. Most of them had trouble keeping food down the entire trip.

The advanced party was to leave the 17th of January, 1967; so we had about ten days to kill, and probably for the first time in the Army had nothing to do for days on end. One day though, Bob Good, a guy called Franklin, and I went for a long hike out into the boonies. One of the fellows had a pistol along and I brought some rope to rappel. The other guys were busy shooting rabbits, I guess getting ready for Vietnam, and I found a 10-foot wall on the side of a creek bed to practice rappelling on. All and all, it was a fun day of getting away from the thoughts about going to Vietnam.

I guess probably the most memorable event during the time we were waiting was the first occurrence of what was to later be called the Super Bowl. It was Green Bay playing Kansas City. I watched it in the day room of the movie house one Sunday afternoon. Green Bay won the game, and I had a milkshake. That is the extent of my memory concerning details of the day.

On the 17th of January, again late at night, we took a bus to the Air Force base in Topeka, Kansas. There we were fed a meal that was a far cry better than Army food; they then marched us out to the C-141 that was to take us to Vietnam by way of Alaska, Japan, and then setting down in Vietnam.

The C-141 was outfitted to maximize the amount of cargo that it could carry, which left very little room for the advanced party guys from Company B. There were two rows of nylon-like seats facing one another so that our knees interlocked with the guy across from us. We were really hard pressed to move; but if we talked to the guys real nice, they would let us up and we could walk to the back of the plane, where there was a porthole-like window in the rear door of the jet. The porthole was about 6-inches in diameter, but I spent a lot of my time watching out of there rather being stuck in those seats. There wasn't much to see at night or over the ocean, but I still preferred that, since I am claustrophobic.

After a number of hours in the air, we landed at Anchorage, Alaska; where we were let off the plane while it was being re-fueled. It was a beautiful morning, with just a glimpse of the sunrise behind the large peaks to the east. We were told that the temperature was about –25 degrees; and it felt like it, as we waited on the tarmac for the refueling to be completed. After that, we headed for Japan over the cold-looking Gulf of Alaska. I was at the rear window part of the time, but all there was to see was ocean or clouds, so I sat down some of the time and tried to sleep.

One other drawback of the way things were laid out in the plane was that the restrooms were in the front of the plane. When an emergency arrived and we had to use the bathroom, we had to

work our way through about 40 guys to find relief. After a number of hours in the air, all of a sudden I heard a loud scream; and here came a sergeant trying to hold in his cookies, which he was about to toss! He was literally running on top of the legs of everyone to make it to the restroom. Luckily, he made it without showering anyone with the meal he ate at the Air Force base in Topeka.

We arrived at Japan, and we were once again let out during the refueling process. It was a nice day in Japan, maybe 70 degrees, and there was a lot going on. There was a little snack bar in the hanger, but I didn't have any money to get anything. Befort and I decided to walk to the front of the hanger and see what was going on. There was a B-47 bomber in one of the bays with a guy up on a rig working on it. As we innocently approached, he yelled for us to get out of the area. I then noticed that signs were posted that it was a "Secret Area, Stay Clear"; so we headed back to the snack area. It was about this time that I noticed a U-2 spy plane landing on the runway. I guessed it was flying over Vietnam taking pictures. Then we had to go back into the plane, and off on the final leg to Vietnam.

As we descended into Vietnam, the nerves started twitching and the stomach started to sink. "What have I gotten myself into? Will the plane be shot down as we land?" A thousand things were going through my mind, but nothing really registered except for the fear of what was ahead. Then we touched down at the Bien Hoa airport, north of Saigon.

Ready or Not Vietnam, Here I Am

I think I was like everyone else when the plane finally came to a stop and the doors were opened. I sheepishly walked out of the plane, expecting the world to come crashing down on me. It did, but it came in the form of extremely oppressive heat and humidity. It was 8:30 at night and it was 85 degrees and probably 99 percent humidity; and boy, did it smell bad! It smelled like rotten vegetation, which is exactly where the smell came from. That and everything else there rotted in no time, including our clothes.

We were then herded to an office where the Air Force personnel checked us in and made sure we were supposed to be there. *They wouldn't want someone sneaking in to fight the war now, would they? That wouldn't be good form.*

We were herded onto duce-and-a-half trucks for a ride to beautiful tropical hotel near Bien Hoa Airport. We passed through several small towns on our way to where we would spend the night, and a lot of the local sounds and sights were all around us. It was dark, but the towns were alive with community entertainment. This was the first time I heard the sing-song sounds of the Vietnam language and music, and I can still pick it out today.

Our sleeping quarters consisted of a tent with no sides and standard issue Army cots. All of our worldly goods for the time we were in Vietnam were contained in our duffel bags, which we carried from place to place. Of course some guys had packed theirs with a little more care. For instance, one of the sergeants had several bottles of Old Grand Dad whiskey carefully packed in the middle of all his clothes. Since my duffel bag was full of all the standard issue stuff, I assume he left things behind just to carry the booze. *Of course, that booze didn't last too long.*

Sleeping that night was a little of a chore, since there were occasional firefights going on all around the perimeter of the base camp. I guess that was normal activity with nothing serious going on, but it did tend to keep me awake a lot, since I just wasn't used to weapons being fired all around me (or that being okay)!

The next morning we were treated to a wonderful in-country Army breakfast. My mouth just waters thinking of the partially cooked bacon, the green scrambled eggs made from powder, half-cooked bread, and funny-tasting milk! (This would actually sound good in a few months, after the C-rations in the field.)

Our destination after breakfast was Camp Bear Cat, which was some 20-30 miles southeast of where we spent the night and was the home base for the 9th Division at the time. The trip was interesting, and introduced me to some of the culture of the country. In every village we went through, the kids would line the streets yelling "GI number one." "Sister Boom-Boom" (slang for my sister is a prostitute). At the same time they were yelling this, they would slap one hand down on top of their fist in rapid succession making a popping noise. These were five-year-old kids pimping for their sisters, and begging for cigarettes or anything you would give them! The cars on the roads were really just large motor scooters with 1-10 people on them. Larger cars or trucks were for a whole village to ride on. It was amazing how many people could get on one car!

Of course there were the famous carwashes a few miles outside Bear Cat perimeter. Now follow me--there were hardly any cars in the country, and very few of them ever made it out near Bear Cat. No one to my knowledge ever washed his car in Vietnam. Yes, these establishments were houses of ill repute. *(It took me a while to figure that one out.)*

When we got to Bear Cat, the bus slowly drove us to our tent, which would be our sleeping quarters for a few nights before we went to join the First Division for training. I was really impressed when we pulled up to our tent and found out that we were just across a small road from two extremely large artillery pieces: a175 MM gun which could shoot 25+ miles, and an 8

Inch howitzer that could throw a 200 pound projectile out there around 12-15 miles. This was going to be cool to watch them in operation. It never dawned on me that first day what that meant, but as soon as it got dark and I tried to go to sleep, I found out the implications. When the first salvo of rounds was sent off, I was literally lifted two feet off the ground. What a noise! The guys firing the weapons all had gear to protect their ears, but we had nothing. The strange thing was that after several hours of constant firing, we got used to the noise and went to sleep.

In those first few days they issued us our jungle fatigues and jungle boots. They used the same basic principle of handing out clothes as the idiots at Ft. Ord did. I was fairly lucky though, and at least got boots the right size. It was sort of a strange thing. I had no desire to be there and didn't want to have anything to do with the war, but I was proud of the boots and fatigues. I really thought I looked cool. *See, brainwashing does work!*

On one of my trips back to the tent from the PX, I heard a guy yell out in a familiar voice, "Hey NFG, what are you doing in our area?" I looked over and it was the guy, Jim Robertson, who I worked with at MacDonald/Douglas. He had been in country for a few weeks, so I was the NFG in new clean fatigues. We had a nice talk, and that was the last time I saw him. I did ask him what NFG stood for and he proudly told me. *Since this story is meant for people of all ages, I'll just say that the N stands for new and the G stands for guy.*

After that encounter I clearly saw that I had to get my fatigues broken in, or I was going to get a lot of flak. When I got back to the tent, I started scuffing up my boots and rubbing dirt into my jungle fatigues. No matter what I did though, they still looked like new issue clothes. I gave up on the antiquing effort and just resigned myself to the fact that I was going to get a lot of kidding, and that I was an NFG.

I believe it was the second day at Bear Cat when the advanced party, with our nice new fatigues on, set off by Duce-and-a-half truck to join up with the First Division (known as "The Big Red One") for two weeks of training. They were a very proud outfit, and they let us know about their illustrious past. Their main base was located northwest of Bear Cat about 60 miles (just a guess, since I can't find any good maps of the area during that time). After we arrived at the main camp, we were immediately taken by a small cargo plane (I think it is called a Caribou) to the base of the second brigade of the First Division. *(I used to know the name of the town next to the base, but that has long since left my memory.)*

At that base camp, we were first given a welcoming speech by the brigade commander, who was explaining their area of operation and history of the unit. *As required by military code of conduct, we were duly impressed by the speech.*

After the speech, the person in charge of training took us to the booby trap training course. Here we were told about the different types of booby traps and weapons that the VC used. We were also told how to walk through areas where there may be mines or booby taps. After the class, we were sent one at a time through the booby trap obstacle course. That was enough to scare the "you-know-what" out of me. Many of the booby traps were impossible to see, and I think almost everyone in the advanced party tripped some of them. At that point and place, I truly thought I was never going to make it out alive. My mind wanders when I am walking along and become tired, so I thought I would be real susceptible to a booby trap.

Deep in thought after the scare on the booby trap course, we were assigned our tents. I was assigned a tent with only one guy there, since the rest of the platoon was in the field. I was assigned the same platoon as Lt. Heller, so I really felt comfortable about that, but that was about to change. The one guy left in the tent only had two weeks remaining on his tour of duty and they were letting him stay back in the rear unless they absolutely needed him. Contrary to popular belief, a lot of guys were spending almost all of their 12 months in the field. When he mentioned that he might have to go to the field for a day or two, I made the mistake of saying, "that can't be too bad." He started in about how no place is safe in Vietnam, saying that you can get it any time

and any place. He had seen a lot of combat, and he was scared to death to go back out in the field.

It got to be about dinnertime, so I went over to the mess hall and had a so-so dinner by myself, and on my way out I met up with Lt. Heller. He told me we would be heading out the next day to join up with the unit we had been assigned to. *Oh goodie! After just talking to the veteran of many campaigns I'm dying to get out there (wrong choice of words)!*

It was about this time that I started to really figure out what my odds were of getting out of this thing in one piece. Before I got over to Vietnam I figured that there were 500,000 troops in country and about 50,000 troops were getting wounded or killed in a year. That is a one in ten chance that I would not make it without being wounded or killed. Besides, a lot of those wounded don't have serious injuries. After talking to the guy in the ten and reading The Stars and Stripes (the combat zone newspaper), I then figured out that of the 500,000 troops in country, there are between 60,000 and 70,000 actually fighting in the field. *Ummm! I'd just figured out that I probably wouldn't make it out of there in one piece!*

After dinner and my discouraging attempt at statistical analysis, I decided to take a shower, since I hadn't been given the chance since I left the states, and it was going to be a while before we got back. I went over to the showers and saw that there were 50-gallon drums painted black for hot water, and plain 50-gallon drums for cold water. The black ones are filled in the morning and the plain ones in the evening. There is a protocol for taking a shower under the drums. You turn on the water real fast to get wet, and then you turn the water off. You soap up and then wash off the soap. You hardly use any water that way. I found the shower rather pleasant, until some idiot started to tell stories about the guy who got shot the other day taking a shower. *Well, I never did like a long shower!*

The next day we got our free ride to the field on a chopper, and I found out that Vietnam is really a beautiful sight from the air, with all of that lush jungle growth and those rubber tree plantations. *Just don't smell anything, and it is a beautiful place to be!*

We landed and were met by a sergeant, who escorted Lt. Heller and me to our assigned platoon. I was immediately impressed with the platoon leader as being in command, with a good sense about him. The platoon sergeant was also impressive; a very quiet oriental person, slightly built, but carried himself like he knew what he was doing.

Right after we arrived, we were treated to our first air attack--not more than 400 meters in front of us. This attack was in preparation for the Company of troops we were with, to move out and up though the valley. The 750-pound bombs that the U.S. Air Force was dropping in the tree line made quite a noise, and trees and dirt flew everywhere.

After about an hour of this, we started to move out in formation up the valley to the top of the hill where we would spend the night, and then be picked up by helicopter to go on an operation near there. The valley didn't have much vegetation since the soil was very rocky, but there were wild hot peppers growing along the sides of the trail, so many of the troops cut them off and put them in their pockets to add some zest to their C-rations when they had dinner later.

When we got to the top of the hill, the various platoons in the company spread out to their assigned sector of the perimeter and started to dig fox holes. The first night I stayed back with the platoon leader and Lt. Heller. I knew I should have gone with the squad I was assigned with, but I thought I might get to see and hear more back there. *What the heck, I was scared!*

As the sun was setting, we heard a load explosion towards the center of the encampment. The word was quickly spread over the radio that one guy had been killed and another seriously injured while horsing around. One guy thought he was grabbing the other guy's smoke grenade pin, but it turned out it was a real grenade. Lt. Heller wanted to go over and see the causalities, but I

wasn't ready for that yet, plus I always believed in giving idiots plenty of room. You never know what their next move will be.

As it started to turn dark, the platoon leader said something about the oriental platoon sergeant always wearing pajamas at night. I turned around, and there he was, dressed in black pajamas just like the VC wear. Needless to say, my heart skipped a beat before I connected the dots and realized that was the platoon sergeant.

Later on in the middle of the night about two miles away, there was a terrible racket. Small arms fire and explosions were going off. About an hour later we heard a bunch of yelling on the north side of the perimeter, but couldn't figure out what was gong on. It turned out that a group of guys were out setting up an ambush when they were hit by some VC. I believe all but two guys were killed, and both of the survivors were wounded. One of the guys was Crawford, who was with our advanced party but from another platoon within our Company. He was another gigantic farm boy who, as we got the story, was wounded in the shoulder. He picked up the other guy, who was also wounded, and carried him back the several miles to the perimeter on his good shoulder. When he got back to the perimeter, he started yelling for them not to shoot, since mines were set up all over the place and could be blown off whenever necessary. *I never did hear if Crawford made it back to the States okay or what else happened to him. I sure hope he got a good medal for that one!*

The next day we closed up camp and got ready for the helicopters to take us to "Never, Never Land". All of a sudden they appeared on the horizon like a bunch of locusts coming in to eat everything in sight. The rotors beat a loud thumping into the morning air as my heart started to race.

We were kneeling in a formation we expected the helicopters to be in, and as soon as they hit the ground we jumped aboard. The co-pilot then turned to tell us that we were going into a potentially hot Landing Zone (hot LZ means rifle fire), and that when he says jump, we had better jump then, or we would need a parachute to safely get to the ground. I chose to sit on the door ledge, since there aren't any doors in the choppers and you could get a good view. I wanted to be ready to jump out as fast as possible. Then the pilot made the first 90-degree bank, and I was looking straight down at the ground with nothing to hold on to! "Thank goodness for centrifugal force", I thought, but still my heart raced even faster.

As the Pilot brought the chopper in with all the grace of a falling rock, I noticed all the experienced troops tensing up and getting ready to move. At about three feet off the ground, some of the guys started to jump. They knew something I didn't. By the time the co-pilot said to jump, the chopper was still in the air and was already headed up, so I just jumped out, and luckily hit a fairly soft spot, and rolled into a firing position. After we determined that it was not a hot LZ (yet), we raced out to secure the perimeter of the LZ for the rest of the choppers coming in.

We spent the next seven days in that position, preparing the area adjacent to the road for a convoy and then guarding the road as the convoy passed through. During this time I went out on a number of patrols and a couple of ambushes without any action, but plenty of nerves getting jangled. The first ambush that Lt. Heller and I went on was interesting, to say the least. It was a platoon sized ambush, and we set up on the edge of a small clearing with a well-worn path. The squad I was with was rear guard during the ambush, so we were way back in the undergrowth, hoping there was nothing evil there. During the night I kept hearing strange things. One strange thing I kept hearing was roosters crowing all night, out in the middle of nowhere.

In the morning the platoon leader sent a few of us over to explore what was there, over where the roosters seemed to be crowing, on a small rise about 150 feet from where we had set the ambush. We walked up a sharp incline and took one step, and found ourselves in the middle of a large base camp. We quickly retreated back to where the platoon was, and reported our findings. The platoon leader then proceeded to call in all the artillery he could muster on the base camp.

What a racket, as the artillery passed over our heads like freight trains! This went on for quite a while, and then the platoon leader ordered a cease-fire. Once again, we hiked up the incline and into the base camp area, this time ready to fight.

There weren't any visible signs of any VC, but the platoon slowly fanned out and checked out the whole area. First of all, it was obvious that the artillery had done a good job of topping the trees, but had not done any damage on the ground. There was a large kitchen area, and trenches for protection. Down on the side of the hill we found a tunnel in the hill that wasn't very deep, but it had to be cleared, so I volunteered to do that. I took a flashlight and some rope, and crawled the 10-15 feet to the back of the tunnel. There were several large bags of rice sitting in there. Since the VC were known for booby-trapping things like that, I tied a rope to the end of each bag, after carefully inspecting all around the bag with a knife. I then crawled out of the cave, and we pulled the bags of rice out of the tunnel using the rope. There was no explosion, so it had been safe; but you never know. The rice was then disposed of, and we continued to search the base camp area. We found another tunnel that went down about four feet and then teed off in two directions. I was lowered into the tunnel and couldn't see anything, so we tossed grenades into the side tunnels and left it at that.

The next day Lt. Heller asked if I wanted to go on a patrol with another platoon, and of course I said no. I was working with some of the guys in the platoon setting up new fire positions for the night, so I thought I should stay and help. Later in the day, the group Lt. Heller was with came into an opening and spotted several North Vietnam Army (NVA) troops moving down a trail towards them. The group with Lt. Heller with them saw the NVA first, so they quickly hid; and when the NVA got abreast of them, they opened fire and got several of the troops. One seemed by the documents he was carrying to be an account or tax collector, and it appeared that he was going around to the villages in the area and extracting taxes. Lt. Heller was in hog heaven when he got back! His adrenaline was going full bore.

About then it was time for the convoy to come through, so they were increasing security. As a result, a chopper showed up carrying the short-timer I had met in the tent. He said they talked him into one more ambush, and he was carrying his sawed-off shotgun with him, looking like he was ready for bear. Wouldn't you know it, they got hit that night; but luckily no one got hurt. He was out of there the first thing the next day. Two days later the advanced party was out of there and on its way to meet up with the rest of the troops at Bear Cat that had been traveling by ship to Vietnam.

Reunion at Bear Cat

The advanced party got back to Camp Bear Cat about the same time as the rest of the troops arrived from the ship. Those guys were a sorry looking group of pale new guys wearing their stateside fatigues. That ship ride had taken a lot out of them. At least I now looked like a combat veteran who had been there a while, and they no longer yelled out "NFG" when I walked by. It was great to see the other guys and hear their heroic stories about their travel by sea. At that point I was sure glad I had flown over to Vietnam, after hearing their horror stories!

They served lunch at the mess hall, and it was sure good to have our own lousy cooks back. At least it wasn't C-rations, although the First Division always got a hot dinner in the field unless they were in a fire fight. In the 9th Division we would occasionally get hot food when we were back in the base camp. Sometimes I preferred C-rations to the food at the base camp.

Part way through the lunch line, a jeep sped up and slammed on its brakes by a bunker just 40 feet from the mess hall. Word had it that someone had just gotten killed in that bunker by sniper fire from outside the base. I always thought it was just a little play-acting to impress the troops, but a lot of guys thought it was true. Of course everyone still stood in line for food, even though the chow line was on the side towards where the sniper would have been. No one wanted to lose his place in line.

After lunch we began the task of making our tents ready to stay in. That meant filling thousands of sand bags and building barriers around the tents. We also had to dig fox holes to jump in, just in case of a mortar attack. Every time we had a spare minute we were ordered to fill sand bags. We got so we were filling sand bags in our sleep.

We were only at Bear Cat a day when our platoon got scheduled to go out on ambush for the first time. Scary time; since only a couple of us had been out on real ambushes, and then not that many. I was hoping that all the Kansas training would pay off if we ran into any trouble, but the area around Bear Cat was considered very safe. Still, I always remembered what that short-timer said: "There is no safe place in Vietnam."

Before our first ambush patrol, we were given the rules we were supposed to operate under. One rule that I never understood was that we could not have a round in the chamber of our rifle until we made contact with the enemy. Okay. Why don't we just put a bulls-eye on our shirt and play like we are arcade targets. This was part of the politics of the war to reduce injuring fellow troops. They came down real hard, after one guy in "A" Company killed another guy accidentally while cleaning his rifle. A lot of causalities were due to friendly fire, which later included a number of our own platoon.

Over the next few weeks our platoon went out on many ambushes, and never had any contact with the VC. The concept of the ambushes around the base camp was to pick likely avenues of approach for the VC and wait for them at night, since that is when they moved. We would also fire "Harassing and Interdicting artillery fire" (H&I) to try to catch the VC off guard. With the lack of experience in combat ambushes, those first few ambushes were really nervous times, until we got a few miles under our belts and had been through several ambushes. This isn't to say we weren't scared any more. We were just more comfortable with what to expect. During these early ambushes we never saw any signs of VC, which I think was intentional. They didn't want us getting into too much combat until we at least knew a little bit about what we were doing.

Fairly early in the game though, we did have two guys in a listening post (a position out away from the main ambush position) get in a big fire fight one night. We heard burst of fire, and Lt. Heller and I went running out to their position to find Noteboom and Sizemore (surfer kid) standing there swearing at the dead rat which weighed about 35 pounds. They thought it was

someone creeping up on them, and I could see why! They were both shaking, and it sure got all of our hearts pumping!

One of the problems we ran into patrolling around Bear Cat (that I hadn't run into with the First Division) was the Fire Ants. They were on almost everything! We would hit a bush with a machete, and Fire Ants would fly through the air and land all over us. They would get up on their cute little rear ends and sting us until we killed the bugger. Their sting really did feel like someone was holding the hot end of a cigarette to our skin. When someone would get all covered with them, everyone would join in the effort to brush the suckers off. They were nasty pests!

The bugs there of course were all different--big and all over the place. As Sgt. Jones used to say, the mosquitoes were so big that if one of them landed at Saigon airport, they would refuel it with gas before they realized it wasn't a plane. You could sit on your helmet during a break and watch the giant black ants (one-inch long) march along, carrying your best friend away. There were scorpions and Green Vipers in the area, but the scorpion bites were like bee stings and didn't do any damage. (The ones up further North were nasty, but not these). We had all been told how deadly the Green Vipers were, but I only saw one of them while I was there. He was just a couple of feet long, and when I saw him he was going away from me as fast as he could. The Fire Ants were the big problem. *Boy, were they ever a problem!*

Some of the vegetation was as nasty as the bugs. There were trees that had 6-8 inch spikes on them that were like hypodermic needles. It seemed like everything in Vietnam was sharp or nasty!

One growing thing that came in handy I had learned about when I was with the First Division. This was a certain vine that wrapped around everything. We would just hack off a section of the vine, and water would pour out of the vine. It didn't taste bad, but the after-taste stuck with us for quite a while. We really didn't care about the taste though; when we were out of water we needed help, and these vines were everywhere in the jungle.

As usual, the Captain did a lot of lame-brained things like sending us to an ambush position, only to find out that the artillery was going to use that as the firing point for the H&I fire just as soon as it got dark. Since it was almost dark, we high-tailed it out of that area, breaking all the rules. We weren't supposed to move at night unless we scouted the area first. We tore about three miles in the pitch black night, with Gary Huntington walking point in front of me. That was a scary night, and I don't know how we all made it without losing someone!

When we did get to the finally ambush position, I had run out of water--about the only time that ever happened to me over there. It then started to rain like heck, so I took off my helmet and took out my helmet liner, and caught about two inches of rain in my steel pot. When it stopped raining I drank the water, and then remembered I hadn't washed it out since the last time I used it to shave in. Dang, did that taste bad; and there was no way to get the taste out of my mouth! Yuck!

It was also the same night that I was freezing, to the point where I was shivering. I sat there thinking about the family back in the states sitting in front of the fireplace keeping warm. Of course it was probably 85 degrees, but in comparison to the daytime temperatures of 110+, it was cold!

Then one day, Lt. Heller called the squad leaders together and explained that we were going to go on a two-week operation called Operation Greenleaf. (They always had catchy names for operations. I think the brass spent all their time thinking of names for operations, rather than winning the war.) He showed us where it was on the map, and pointed out all of the sink holes where we could get sucked into and disappear. *I bet you can tell I was really excited about this one!*

The helicopters dropped us off in a big open LZ late one afternoon. We moved into perimeter positions about the time the Captain told Lt. Heller we were going on an ambush, so off we went. We went out about 3-4 miles, and set up an ambush near a trail junction in an open filed. That night was the first time I got to use a night scope. Man, could you see everything in the pitch-black night, but that toy was an expensive one at that point! It was also sort of a secret, and we were told if we lost or damaged the scope, it would probably be the end of our family life.

When Lt. Heller called in supporting mortar fire for the night coverage in case we got hit by VC, we found out that the Captain had sent us beyond the reach of any mortars or Artillery, so we were out there with it all hanging out. I am sure glad nothing happened that night!

The next day we moved to a field near a village where there were a lot of rice patties for the next phase of the operation. Of course, I believe the operation was intended to be just as mundane as a training exercise in Kansas, only in Vietnam. I don't think they anticipated any interaction with the VC in this area, and I was just as glad we didn't run into any VC.

The first day we were in this position, the third platoon was sent out to scout out the village area. After they had been gone for about an hour, we heard the hammering sound of a machine gun fairly close by. We all picked up the radio headsets to listen to what was going on. It turned out that one of the guys in the platoon, Tom Thompson, was attacked by a water buffalo. Now Tom was a big fellow, but these domestic water buffalo were gigantic, and could be mean! The water buffalo had charged him, and he had emptied a bunch of rounds of machine gun ammunition into it; and it still gored him in the stomach. The water buffalo didn't make it, but Tom did. Later on, there was a big battle with the village over pay-back for killing the water buffalo.

It was about this time that Noteboom got stung by a scorpion. At that point we didn't know that they were mundane, so he was sent back to the base camp on the next chopper to get checked out. Art showed up a few days later with a big smile on his face, like he had really gotten away with something!

That first night near this village, I sent Wolf and Doñes out as a listening post about 150 meters away, out on a junction of dikes in an old rice patty area. They were fairly exposed, but that was the only place they could go. At around 10 that night we heard all sorts of noise out there, and then saw flash lights go on; and they started to yell and run towards the perimeter, screaming, "Don't shoot!" They were breathless when they got back, and told us that the leeches in the dikes were coming up out of the water and crawling on the dike towards them. Since these leeches were 3-6 inches long, there is no way they wanted one of them to get on them, and I don't blame them!

The next day, we moved out the entire company to surround the nearby village and then check to see if there were any VC there. This was really only a training Search and Destroy mission, but remembering that there is no safe place in Vietnam, we were all cautious. After we surrounded the village and had cleared it of all civilians, they called in an air strike to lay down bombs to the rear of the village. Over the radio we heard the FAC (Forward Air Control) telling the platoon leaders to throw the smoke grenades to mark our position. Lt. Heller yelled out, "Wiley, pop the smoke!" I reached down to my belt and grabbed what I thought was a smoke grenade. I pulled the pin and started to throw it, when I just happened to glance at it and thought it looked weird. I checked it, and it wasn't smoke. It was a tear gas grenade. Oh boy, I almost really messed up that one! We carried those to throw into tunnels, and I had forgotten I had it on my ammo belt. I reinserted the pin, and with Lt. Heller getting anxious for me to pop the smoke, I quickly grabbed the real smoke grenade from my belt and threw it to mark our position. I just sat there in a cold sweat as the jets dropped their bombs. *I never told anyone about that mistake.*

All during this operation, our platoon was almost always selected to go out on day patrol, and then again we were sent out on night ambush. It wasn't that the captain hated us, but instead it was because he trusted us. By the end of the operation, Lt. Heller was becoming very vocal

about it and telling the captain that we were doing far more than our share of patrols. Lt. Heller put his rear end on the line, with a net result that we got a much-needed day and night off.

After the bombing adventure, we moved the whole company to the north a few miles to position the troops to go check out another village. The first night in our new positions I was manning a fox hole in the middle of the night, and all of a sudden I felt this terrible, burning fire on my testicles! I knew immediately what it was, and the pain was beyond belief! I jumped up out of the foxhole and dropped my drawers, shining the flashlight on my privates in the middle of the night; finding the offending Fire Ant, and pulling him off and throwing him away. *I think I was fairly safe doing that, since if there were any VC out there, they would have been laughing so hard they couldn't have shot me.*

Early the next morning about 4:00 AM, we began a company march to surround the village, which was several miles away. It was so black once we got into the jungle area that I literally could not see my hand in front of my face, much less the troop in front of me. It was almost panic time! How could we get 200 men to end up in the same place, when they couldn't see the guy in front of them? Even worse, what if the VC attacked us while we were on this march? It would have been mass confusion. I'm not embarrassed to say, I held on to the shirt of the guy in front of me most of the way to the village, just like I used to hold onto my dad's belt when we went places where there was a crowd.

As usual, the Captain didn't do a real good job of leading us there, since all of a sudden we realized we were standing at the rear of several huts. We were in the middle of the village we were supposed to surround! At least it was getting light, and we were able to get to the area our platoon was supposed to guard, which was an emergency LZ. Our platoon was also considered as being in reserve if anything happened.

Nothing was found in the village; so it was off to the next phase of this mission, which was to provide protection for a village about ten miles from Bear Cat. At this village the 9th Division had set up a water treatment plant and ice-making facility on a small river. They moved us to the village in the back of duce-and-a-half (2 ½ ton) trucks. As we pulled in, all of the young kids from the village came running out to sell everything from cokes to their sisters. It always made me nervous to have all of the kids mingling amongst us, since there were a lot of tales of kids getting in crowds of GIs and pulling the pin on a grenade. The VC would convince the kids this was a game. Fun, huh!

We moved to the perimeter and took over positions that had been dug by the previous company that had been on guard duty. My position was to the east of the village, about 100 feet from the public squatting room/bathroom. These people didn't have too much modesty.

Once again our platoon was constantly on day patrol and on ambush. Sleep and rest was a rare commodity, and everyone was getting exhausted. We did run into a lot of interesting things while patrolling the area—such as pineapples in a pineapple field. I hacked off one of the pineapples, and it wasn't bad. At one point I went under one bridge over a jungle river to check to see if it was booby trapped. The cold water was so comforting, so I dunked my head under water to cool off, and without thinking, I took a drink of the water. Then I thought, "What have I done! This is how you can get some terrible diseases or intestinal bugs!" By the time my brain started to work, it was too late. In another area Lt. Heller sent Dave Persson and me out to explore an area. Out about half a mile, we found a strange area where there was a tiny fence constructed from twigs and branches in the forest. While I was standing there wondering if this was a communist plot to overthrow the world, I saw an old man in a long flowing gown come out of the woods. I don't know who was more scared, but I did pump a round into the chamber and we stood there staring at each other. Dave and I finally figured out this was just a simple hunting trap for catching rodents. We smiled and moved on with out telling anyone what we found. If we had reported it they would probably want us to destroy it, and it was not a threat to anything. Overall, the patrols--though very tiring--were also very interesting.

One day my squad was sent on a special mission to guard an Engineering Corp group repairing a bridge that had been blown up. This bridge was on the main road from Saigon to Vung Tau, which was a big resort and business area in South Vietnam. After we finally found the right bridge, the engineers were late showing up. We started to watch it with an eagle's eye to make sure no one stole the bridge or engineers. After several hours of intense guarding, we noticed a pickup truck coming down the road with the load of rice in the back of the pickup on fire. Not knowing what was going on, we stopped the truck short of the bridge and stopped traffic in both directions. The cars quickly backed up for miles, but I wasn't about to let the truck cross the bridge while it was on fire. We finally pushed it off the road into a rice paddy, much to the consternation of the owner. I can hear him yelling at me even now! As the traffic resumed, I noticed the car behind the truck had several young men in it, and they were laughing. Stupid me, it didn't dawn on me for a couple of minutes, but what were several young men doing in a car and not in uniform. They probably started the fire and were VC and were laughing at our stupidity as we let them go on. Oh well, we were still alive.

The next day was another patrol; and it was the closest I came to combat at that point in time, other than a mortar attack we had one night. We went out to a section of jungle several miles from the village we were guarding. There was a road down one side of the jungle area we were to patrol. On the other side of the road was a rubber tree grove. We set up one squad, including Bill Wolters, on the east side of the road in the rubber trees facing the jungle. Another squad went along the southern boundary of the jungle area to catch anyone trying to escape in that direction.

Lt. Heller and two squads, including mine, then went to the north end of the jungle area and started patrolling south. As we started south, Lt. Heller called in a wall of artillery fire on the east side of the jungle area. The area we were patrolling was some neat, beautiful jungle with lots of nasty bushes and trees, along with the ever present Fire Ants. About half way down the search area, we all of a sudden found ourselves in the middle of a rather large base camp. We took cover and looked around. When it seemed safe, we methodically explored the camp, but didn't find anything of interest.

It wasn't too much later that all of a sudden we heard a bunch of yelling, followed by automatic gun fire in the direction of the rubber trees. We got a report over the radio that several VCs came out of the jungle and attempted to cross the road. The squad along the road opened fire and they fired back as they ran back into the jungle. No one was hurt in the skirmish, but the VC were back in the jungle and headed our way. The artillery continued to fire on the east side as we patrolled southward expecting a fire fight at any second. Boy, was I relived when we exited the Jungle on the South side and joined up with the troops there! I don't know how we missed the VC, but we probably walked right by them and didn't even know it.

After about a week of guarding the village and patrolling the area we were sent back to Bear Cat, where we continued to go out and set up ambushes and find nothing. On one ambush we noticed that some of the claymore mines we were carrying were getting pretty beat up, so we decided to get rid of the worst one. In the morning after an ambush, we set one up, pointing into a patch of dense undergrowth. Now a claymore mine is a directional mine. It is shaped in a curve about 12 inches long and 6-8 inches high. You would set these out in front of your ambush position with the right side pointing outwards towards the direction you expect the VC to come from. The one side of the mine had hundreds of little metal balls imbedded in the plastic explosive that would fan out in front of the mine. You had a hand detonator attached to the claymore mine, and when you saw or heard something you would blow the mine. You could be as close as a couple of yards in back of it and it wouldn't hurt you, so they told us. We had never had an occasion to blow one, so we were interested in what it could do. We blew the mine just as a Vietnamese water buffalo cart came around the bend in the road, and that farmer was in for a wild ride down the road! The last I saw the farmer, he was bouncing high into the air as the water buffalo dragged the cart crazily down the road.. When we looked back to where the claymore

had been, and saw that the underbrush in front of the claymore was leveled for about 100 feet in front of where the mine had been, in a fan shape pattern. Man, that was quite a demonstration!

It was within a few days of that ambush that we got the orders we were going to be going to the Mekong Delta to start operating out of that area. To get ready we had a lot of packing, and I decided to get a hair cut to look good for the Navy. I went to the local barber in the base camp, who was a Vietnamese. Being in a combat position you really get paranoid, and this really made me nervous; but it was cheap, and what could the guy do to me while he was in the base camp? I kept telling myself that as he cut my hair and then shaved the back of my neck with a straight razor. I survived, and was ready to go to the Delta.

Mekong Delta

The day came to make the trip to the Mekong Delta, so we were trucked out to the landing strip about a half a mile outside of Bear Cat. The whole company waited there for the C-130 cargo planes to land and take us the few short miles to Vung Tau, where we would be taken to our barracks on a ship in Vung Tau Harbor. When the C-130 landed, we were herded into the plane like cattle; and we were left to stand up during the flight, since it was such a short flight. No FAA rules here! I don't know how many guys--at the time I guessed some where around 200--were in the plane, but it was totally crammed full as they took off and climbed steeply away from the landing strip. It doesn't take much imagination to figure out what happens when guys are standing inside a cargo plane and it makes steep climbs, dives and banks. We were tossed all around and falling down like idiots. Luckily it was a very short flight to Vung Tau. We landed there and then boarded small boats that ferried us to the mother ship.

The mother ship that we were first on was an old troop or cargo ship with large cargo holes for bunks. This was almost as scary as going into the jungles, since the bunks were stacked 11 high. I some how ended up near the top, and almost had a nosebleed from climbing up to my bunk. *Luckily we didn't have any problems with guys walking in their sleep.*

Right after we arrived at the ship it was dinner time, so we lined up for what we expected to be our normal grub. What a surprise! We could order what ever we wanted and they would make it up right there. The food was actually cooked all the way through, and tasted good. Fresh eggs! None of this powdered eggs stuff! The Navy guys were sitting there complaining about how lousy the food was, and we didn't stop eating long enough to tell them how great the food was to us. I don't know about the other guys, but I actually ate so much I felt sick.

The next day they took us down on the docks tied to the side of the ship, and gave us classes on what to expect while patrolling in the Delta region, and what our mission would be. I figured out that we should expect plenty of mud, and that our mission was to get muddy. That was basically it. Oh, they did mention that there were lots of booby traps, but that no one had been wounded yet by a booby trap. Of course, they always told stories like that, so it was hard to know what to believe.

Before dawn of the second day, the platoon loaded into the armored landing craft, and we slowly cruised across Vung Tau Harbor and start up into the Delta Region. The area we patrolled most often was called the Rung Sat area. *I think Rung Sat meant lousy, muddy place to be.*

The boats were cold steel landing craft from World War II, with armament on the side and all sorts of weapons mounted on the decks. The armament was mainly on the side of the ship, and consisted of horizontal bars that would explode the VC rockets before they hit the side of the ship. The weapons consisted of multiple 30 caliber machine guns, automatic grenade launchers and a 20 MM machine gun. These ships could really pour out the fire support. They also had escort vessels called monitor boats, which had even more fire power, including flame-throwers. Inside the boats we were cold and clammy, with water spraying over the bow while we were in the harbor area, and it took hours to get to our destination. It always amazed me how everyone could sleep on wet, steel decks while traveling in choppy seas headed into combat. I was right there with them, cutting the zees.

When we landed, the boats turned the blunt bow of the boat towards the shoreline and rammed ahead at full speed. The front end of the boat, which was a ramp, was then lowered; and we ran out onto shore. That sounds easy--and normally was--but there was always a chance that the VC would be in front of the boat when the ramp was lowered, and you would be the target in a turkey shoot. Luckily it never happened to us while I was there, but we always had that in our minds as we headed for shore.

The first patrol out was in a rather dry area, compared to areas we would go to. It was still muddy and a mess, but the first day no one sank up to his chest in mud. We did see a lot of things that we were strange to us, such as salamanders that crawled out of the water at night, and 14-foot tides that would come and go. The first night someone in one of the platoons slept on an air mattress that started to float down the river after the tide came in, and then started to go out. Luckily someone caught him.

We had to cross a lot of tidal rivers that were all over the place. At first we carefully took off all our gear, rigged a rope across the water and carefully transported our gear across on air mattresses. Later, we just charged through most of the shallower tidal rivers trying to hold everything above our heads. We did have a few problems with several guys who couldn't swim, which posed a definite health problem when we had to cross a river deeper than five or six feet. Russ and I both pulled guys up after they slipped and went under. I actually looked forward to the river crossings, because it was away to get the body cooled off; and it was always HOT and humid there during the day.

A lot of the areas we patrolled through had already been defoliated by Agent Orange. I personally don't see what good it did in the Delta region. It killed off the plant life all right, but the plants were still standing, so it hadn't reduced the amount of cover the VC could use. I often wonder if coming in contact with the bushes that had been sprayed by Agent Orange would do me any harm. Sgt. Jones attributes his stomach and intestinal cancer to being exposed to it. Who knows for sure. We sure went through a lot of defoliated areas.

We were only allowed to stay out on patrol for three days at a time, because our feet were constantly we, and fungus and rot were a constant problem with our feet. They would let us go back to the ship for 24 hours to dry out, and then out again. When we got back to the ship they would make us stand on the dock next to the ship, and they would spray us off with high pressure hoses. That did a pretty good job of getting the mud off us, but we then had to spend a lot of time getting mud and salt water off our weapons.

After a couple of days of patrolling we started to get pretty good at getting across muddy areas. We could run on our tiptoes very lightly and we would barely get out boots muddy. We didn't dare stop until we reached high ground or exposed roots of a tree or bush to stand on, or else we would quickly sink into the mud. It looked funny to see all these grown men tiptoeing across the mud like a ballet company, but it worked.

We were going across one big open strip in waves for protection, and I was in the first wave across the mud. The next wave included Charlie Zies. Right in the middle of the mud area, he stopped for some reason, and began to sink. He sank clear up to his chest, and he was really stuck. Another guy and I grabbed a shovel and some logs and branches, and headed back to where he was stuck. We worked and worked to get him out, lying down across the branches in the mud. Finally we cleared enough mud, and then placed a log in front of him so he could pull himself out. I really thought we might have to have a helicopter come in and pull him out!

One of the ambushes that we set up was on the main Saigon River where the big cargo boats would pass by all the time. We were placed in bushes right along the bank of the river, which wasn't bad; but these little Navy craft called Swift Boats would come patrolling by in front of us. The major problem with that was that they had twin 50-caliber machine guns mounted on the front of the boat, and they were pointed right at the shore where we were sitting (about 15-20 feet away). I don't think they knew we were there, so I had a big lump in my throat every time those guys went by that night. We didn't have any problems, but it wasn't a fun situation.

After several patrols, I came down with a terrible case of the Tijuana trots. I spend the whole night in the bathroom, and I wasn't cleaning it. In the morning I told Lt. Heller about my condition and he told me to report for sick call. They gave me some medicine, and about four hours later I

was doing pretty well, but I missed the patrol. Oh darn! That was both a relief and a lousy feeling that I let everyone down.

After that, it was back to patrolling and running in the mud. Also at some point along the way, we had switched to a new mother ship that was a lot better than the first. The bunks were only stacked four high, but there were about 80-some guys in a very small area, so it was claustrophobic and hot in there. We often stayed up on deck when we were back at the ship, to the extent that many guys slept on deck.

No matter what happened, the days were passing slowly and I could hardly wait for mail call when we were on ship. It was a mixed blessing in that it gave me a nice warm feeling inside to get a letter, but yet in made me so sad being that far away and all alone. It was only the end of March, which meant I had at least another nine months in country before they would let me go home. That would be nine months unless I went home feet first--which was a term for going home on a stretcher or in a body bag.

April 1, 1967
A Start to a Beautiful Day

As the sun slowly rose in the east, a slight ground fog settled in over the surrounding rivers and what little land there was. We were somewhere off the main Saigon River in the Mekong Delta and the 1st platoon had been set up in an ambush on the corner of two rivers the previous night. One fairly large river led into the main Saigon River, and one small little offshoot was really just a tidal river off the main river. Before the sun rose over the horizon it always seemed nippy, as the temperature had probably dipped to around 85 degrees, which was cool in comparison to the daytime temperatures. As soon as the sun started to rise it would quickly increase the temperature, so I always enjoyed this time of the morning, and the smell of rotten vegetation wasn't as strong as it was when the sun rose high in the sky.

During this time of the morning, members of the platoon were moving about, cleaning up their ambush positions and making breakfast from the wonderful C rations provided to us free by the US government. That night I had manned the rear west-most corner of the ambush along the tidal river with someone--I don't even remember who it was. Being the squad leader, I usually grouped people together for ambushes by who got along best with whom. I then manned an ambush position with any leftovers of the process. It did make for some interesting ambush buddies!

It had been an uneventful night, but the day would soon prove to be one for all of us to remember for the rest of our lives--especially me.

As I was getting ready to move out of the ambush position, I remembered that this was my mother-in-law's birthday. Yes, April fools day! I reflected on the fact that I was blessed with such a wonderful mother-in-law, and didn't understand all of these horror stories about how bad mothers-in-law can be. I sure wished I was back with them in the good old USA to help celebrate her birthday. Oh well, that wasn't going to happen, so I decided I might as well get back to reality.

The word was then passed down the line that we were to receive a special guest that morning by way of chopper, so we had to clear a Landing Zone (LZ) for the helicopter, and then wait for his hind-end-ness to appear. As usual, they were late, and when the chopper did land, some people got out and shook hands with Lt. Heller, waved and jumped back on the chopper, which went back to the some safe place in Saigon.

These VIPs appeared often, but were never there for more than a minute or two, just enough time to take a couple of pictures so they could talk with authority about what the troops were doing in Nam. I never did understand that, but it was the way they operated back then, and I guess still do now. They become an "expert" on a subject or region if they have their picture taken there. I often think of that when they talk on the news about a politician visiting a disaster area. You can bet your bottom dollar he or she didn't spend much time there or get their feet wet--just enough time to take pictures. *Enough of the complaining, for now.*

After the chopper headed back to the comfort of an officers club in some secure area in Saigon, the platoon got back to the routine business of mucking around in the mud of the Mekong Delta. The day before, we had been inserted by landing craft into some nice (but muddy) mangrove forest. We had spent all day climbing over and under the gangly roots of those trees and sinking in the mud up to our armpits at times. I don't even think a four-year-old kid would enjoy playing in this mud!

Today the platoon, in coordination with other platoons of Company B, were going to cross the major river we had set up our ambush on, and proceed along the river looking for VC STUFF, which up to that time on operations in the Mekong Delta had not been very much. The most likely type of STUFF we were looking for was ammunition depots and rice caches.

I guess I should define the term STUFF. This is a technical term I derived to describe what ever it was that they wanted us to find. I use the term quite loosely, which was how our missions were usually defined. *Back to the story.*

Lt. Heller asked for a couple of stupid--I mean brave--troops to paddle a rubber boat about 150 feet to the other side of the river, secure the river bank and start the process of ferrying the troops across the river. Knowing no fear, along with having no brains, I volunteered to paddle across the river, and Wolters then volunteered to take a machine gun across and guard the landing spot, while the rest of the troops ferried across the river.

At first I thought of it as just a fun paddle in the water. I loved to row a boat and had done that as a young kid on Green Lake in Maine, but as I got ready and look across the river, I began to think the scheme was sort of dumb, since what would two troops do if they encountered more than a couple of VC on the other side? Offer them tickets to the next Bob Dylan concert? (Dylan was Wolters' favorite musical artist, if you can call him that.) I think Wolters and I would have had our names stamped on the outside of an OD body bag with the words, "Stupid soldiers inside, do not open"!

Even though it seemed harebrained, some idiot had to do it, and I couldn't think of two better idiots than Wolters and me. We were a pair.

While the process of selecting a paddler and paddler's guard was going on from the platoon's pool of idiots, the rubber boat that had been carried by Atwood was being inflated and the "sturdy" plastic paddles were being assembled. This raft was for sure an "Engledinger special", but it would have to do. O*ne can only appreciate this if they ever served under the illustrious command of Captain Engledinger.*

Sgt. Jones then attached a rope to the rear of the raft. I assumed this was there for one of two reasons. The first was to either haul the raft back if they lost the occupants, or else the other possibility was that the rope would actually be attached to the other side of the river and be used to guide the boat back and forth, so no further paddling would be required. I was hoping for the latter.

The trip paddling across the river was uneventful, but I did feel sort of vulnerable and exposed out in the middle of the river. Those feelings were due in part to trying to cross a very WIDE river in a rubber raft, which was built for two young children to use in a swimming pool. It was small, but probably standard military issue.

Wolters and I arrived on the other side of the river without being shot at, but the landing was much like those in the landing craft. We never knew if there would be a greeting party there to open fire as soon as we arrived, or if it would be peaceful and quiet. Our luck held true for the day, as it turned out to be peaceful and quiet as we landed on the North side of the River.

Being the well-trained soldier, Wolters immediately took up a position of strength to protect the landing area from the enemy, as I pulled myself back across the river to continue ferrying the platoon across the river. *When I first wrote this story I thought that I only made two trips across the river, but Bill Wolters sent me instamatic camera pictures that show me making numerous crossings. I know at some point they rigged a rope to the back of the rubber raft and hauled it back, so they could get two guys across every time, instead of one person at a time.*

The process of ferrying the platoon across the river took the better part of an hour, but finally the entire platoon was on the far side of the river. Of course, there were two last platoon members to cross the river who where also vulnerable; but no fear, the Artillery was near! Scary if we had to rely on that for protection! After having seen artillery in close action with the First Division while I was there as part of the advanced party, I wasn't too confident in the accuracy of the weapons. *Several members of the 1st platoon would also learn this fact the hard way in the months to come, when they were severely wounded by friendly artillery fire*.

After crossing the river, the platoon proceeded west along the river bank in a single line formation, with my squad bringing up the rear under the watchful eyes of Sgt. Jones. It goes without saying that we were careful to spread out, so if someone tripped a booby trap, it wouldn't take out so many troops; but we were at the rear of the formation, so we were unlikely to be the first ones to see a booby trap.

Lt. Heller had beaten the theory of spreading out into the heads of all the members of the platoon during training back in Kansas. I could never figure out if Lt. Heller just liked to pick on me or if I was that bad, but I was always being yelled at to spread my men out. "Wiley! Spread them out!" was the cry all across the plains of Kansas. Boy did I get yelled at a lot, but the training and yelling were finally paying off. We moved along like a well-oiled, spread-out, machine, with me now yelling at the squad to "spread out, guys." *Of course, I yelled quietly.*

At one point, one of us in the rear noticed that the rest of the platoon had walked through a booby trap. They had tripped the booby trap, but it had failed to go off. This was a Chi Com (Chinese communist) grenade, provided to the VC by the Chinese. The body of the grenade was much like the World II pineapple grenade with many segments, just a little longer. Each segment was about the size of the end of your pinky finger with the pineapple portion of the grenade being about six inches long and three inches in diameter.

On one end of the grenade was a piece of Bamboo about four inches long and about one and a half inches in diameter. The cap on the end of the piece of bamboo was removed to reveal a string that was used as a trip wire, which was about six feet long. The grenade was mounted on a tree or a stick stuck in the ground, and then the trip wire was pulled across a trail and attached to another tree, bush or stick. The one we found that day was on the end of a stick attached to some bushes and looked something like the made-up picture below:

When the troops had first started in finding these in Vietnam, they tried to use the grenade by throwing it with the string. Needless to say, several people were killed before some American officer decided it was for booby trap purposes only. At least that is what we were told in training with the 1st Division. *They wouldn't lie, would they?*

These were often referred to as "junk grenades" since the VC filled them with junk that the VC found in abandoned Army ambush positions or camps. I found out later on that they contained things like washers, pieces of wire, bolts, pieces of metal, injector razor blades and small rocks--anything they could get their hands on.

I broke out in a cold sweat at that point, thinking of all the guys who had walked right by the booby trap without seeing it, though it was right out in the open. Memories of the booby trap course I went through with the 1st Division flashed back into my mind. This was the real thing.

After walking for an hour or so, we stopped to cross a small tidal water offshoot to the river (remember, the tides are fourteen feet in this area). When we stopped, it was the responsibility of the trailing squad to pull up on the landside of the platoon to act as a guard. While we were in that position, I always checked out things while the rest of the platoon was crossing.

While we were in position guarding the platoon crossing, I walked up the tidal water offshoot about 50-100 feet, and started to notice that the tide was receding and exposing some footprints

in the mud. I contacted Lt. Heller by radio and he instructed me to take my squad out a couple hundred meters to look for STUFF.

After about 150 meters the squad came into a clearing and first noticed a large bomb crater about 30 feet across and ten feet deep. Amazing what a 750 pound bomb could do in that muddy ground!

About the same time we noticed the bomb crater, we also realized we were in a base camp. That was the way it normally happened, in that you came out of vegetation and all of a sudden would find yourself in the middle of a base camp. You then start praying there was no one else there at the time.

Luckily, this base camp did not have a greeting committee waiting at the edge to present us with a key to the camp. It wasn't a true base camp like I had seen with the 1st Division or the one we ran into several weeks before near a village we were guarding. This was simply an ammunition dump loaded with all sorts of STUFF.

I radioed to Lt. Heller, and the platoon moved in and secured the area so we could look around and find out what was there. On a raised platform was a stack of mortar rounds and rockets. There was also a (soon to become infamous) 75 MM recoilless rife laying on the platform with Russian writing on the side.

Lt. Heller used the radio to let the brass know what we had found, and back came the word that we were to blow the ammo dump, but bring back the recoilless rifle. The job of carrying the recoilless rifle was assigned to Roly (Russ) and Harold (Ron), the two big machine gunners. This recoilless rifle was no lightweight toy. It probably weighed two to three hundred pounds, so they strapped it under a heavy branch and carried it between them with the branch on their shoulder.

The Corp Engineer demolitions specialist, who just happened to be with us that day, then wired the ammo dump to be blown to pieces.

After the platoon had moved back to the edge of the river, we took a break for lunch while the explosives were being laid to blow the STUFF to kingdom come. The demolition specialist shortly rejoined, us and everyone waited for the fireworks. Man, was there a big boom! Parts of that old tree containing the ammo platform came raining down upon us. The Corp Engineer specialist was even surprised at how big the explosion had been! After the dust had settled, a small patrol went back to the site to verify that the STUFF had all been blown up, and it had.

With the 75 MM recoilless rifle in tow, we proceeded down along the large river to see if we could find more neat STUFF like another useless 75 MM recoilless rifle that they would make us carry back.

Our platoon was well trained on how to patrol, and we moved fairly quietly, for a body of around 40 or so goofs. Everyone had been taught what to do, and we did it very quietly most of the time, so the VC would not hear us coming and set up an ambush.

On the other hand, we could hear one of the other platoons on the other side of the river yelling instructions back and forth, letting everyone know that the US Army was on its way. It was aggravating, but part of going out in larger operations.

Checking For More Stuff

We proceeded along slowly that day looking for the good STUFF. Whenever we stopped to cross a tidal stream, or if we stopped to take a break, a small patrol would be sent out. These patrols only went about 200-300 meters from the river, since all ammo dumps were located near water for easy transportation. By around 4:00 on the afternoon of April 1st, 1967, the third squad was getting tired from all of the little patrol loops, but we knew that we were getting close to the day's objective, whatever that was.

After crossing a small tidal river (now a mud river with the tide out), Lt. Heller ordered me to take a patrol out and look for STUFF while everyone else rested. I turned to Doñes, who had been walking point for the squad all day, and quietly said, "you heard the lieutenant, let's move it out".

The facial expression that greeted me was that of a little puppy who just couldn't go any further. Oh, what the heck. I didn't mind walking point, and we had done a lot of these with no problem, so I decided I'd just do it this time. Doñes smiled and fell in at the end of the patrol.

Of course this was a poor leadership practice, but I wasn't trying to make General! I was just trying to be one of the guys.

It was around 4:30 and I still felt pretty good. In my naive simpleminded brain I liked the idea of walking point. Most of the time I never thought about the dangers involved. It was like when I was a 5-6 year old kid walking through the woods in Maine with my stick ready to "shoot" anything that moved. I was always the first to draw, and the bad guy never nailed me! I'm Super Soldier. *The big "I" for idiot was tattooed in the middle of my forehead.*

It was fairly solid mud to walk on, as mud goes in the Mekong Delta, so it was easy going out on the patrol loop. On the way back in, we came upon stands of Black Palm trees with a flattened area in the middle for storing STUFF, but there wasn't any STUFF this time. I reported what we found to Lt. Heller over the radio. We then headed back to the main platoon, which was waiting by the river about 100 meters away.

As we came out of a stand of Black Palm, I was aware that Paul Nitzel, who was my radio operator for the day, was right on my tail, as was the rest of the squad. I signaled for everyone to spread out, even though we were only about 50-75 meters away from the platoon.

As soon as they were spread out to a reasonable distance, I turned around and took one step, and something made me look down. As I did, I saw a ball of fire engulf my right knee, as the booby trap grenade went off 3-6 inches from my right knee. I can remember seeing the intact grenade just before it exploded, so there had to be a slight delay and a noise before it went off.

The next thing I realized was that I was tumbling through space in a surreal brown mixture of mud, rocks and whatever the grenade blew up. I literally felt like I was in the middle of a tornado. As I was flying through the air, which I assume was not for nearly as long or as far as I imagined, I honestly thought, "Is this what it feels like to be dead?"

With that thought passing through my mind, I hit the ground and quickly realized that, no, I was still alive and my sense of pain was very much alive and doing its job. Boy, did that hurt!

My very next thought was, "Shit, not on my mother-in-law's birthday!!" I was well aware of what had just happened, and even more aware of the intense pain that seemed to be coming from everywhere in my body.

I laid there for a second and tried to take stock of what was wrong with me. I knew someone was going to be asking where it hurt real soon, so I was getting prepared. I was on my left side braced up on my left elbow, which was lucky, since it turned out that was the only extremity that wasn't shattered. I first looked down to my throbbing left hand, where I noticed that something was wrong with my middle finger. Holding the end of it in my right hand, I noticed that the middle knuckle of the finger had been totally blown away, and the end of the finger was hanging on by a

thin piece of skin. I knew that was going to be a problem, but thought hey, they could fix it. It would be shorter, but what the heck. I could flip short birds.

As I was looking at the finger on my left hand, I noticed that both bones in my right forearm were protruding through the skin, just as nice and clean as you would see in a training film! Not bad, I thought. That can be fixed.

About that time the massive pain below my waist settled down, and I could feel my right hip was probably broken, and both legs felt like they were broken below the knee, along with my right foot. No problem, I thought. These things can be fixed.

I never for a second doubted that I was going to be all right. A little banged up with a few scars, but what the heck, I thought. That would make me some sort of war hero. *Hardly.*

The mental review of my "owies" must have taken just a couple of seconds when I heard Lt. Heller yelling at the top of his lungs, "What happened?" So much for all the training on being quiet!

Nitzel yelled back, "Wiley hit a booby trap!"

The next thing I knew, I saw Lt. Heller crawling on all fours, as fast as he could go, through the underbrush. I really knew then how he cared for his men. He was there by my side in a matter of seconds. It took the medic and Sgt. Jones a few more minutes to get to me, but they came carefully while looking for more booby traps. Of course Sgt. Jones politely informed Lt. Heller that what he just did was stupid, and he could have gotten hurt by another booby trap. He said to Lt. Heller, "Son, don't ever do that again!" I could tell by the look on Lt. Heller's face as he came through the brush on all fours that someone had hurt one of his platoon, and he was pissed! He only cared about getting there to help me, and would do it again if he was called upon to do so.

I could tell by their faces that it was not a pretty sight, as they started to wrap bandages around all of my wounds. I felt that the medic Anderson was having a rough time dealing with the wounds, since large sections of my legs and butt were sort of blown away. What a way to lose weight! I probably lost 20-30 pounds in a split second.

As the medic and Lt. Heller applied bandages to the multitude of wounds, Sgt. Jones put a splint on my finger where it was blown apart. I held the two parts of the finger together while he tightened the splint. He did a great job of creating a splint that held the finger together until they were able to work on it in the hospital. They were actually able to sew it back together.

During this time, Rock--the Platoon RTO--was on the radio calling for a dust off, which means that that they wanted a helicopter to take me back to the hospital. This was the first time I had heard that two others had been wounded when I was. Paul Nitzel had a wound on his arm and both legs, and Ron (Harold) Hoy had a piece of metal in his back. I didn't know exactly where in his backside, since I never asked to see the wound; but in March of 2002 I was visiting Ron and he showed me a scar about 6-8 inches long just above his waist line. It had come pretty close to his spinal cord. Paul had been right behind me, and Hoy had been with the platoon about 50-75 meters away. I thought to myself, "at least they were spread out, or Paul would have gotten hurt pretty bad!"

I asked to talk to Wolters, who wrote back and forth with my wife Patty. He had met her when she was out to visit me at Fort Riley, Kansas. Bill came and knelt down by my head, since I was still resting on my elbow. I didn't dare move, since every time I did, I had a muscle spasm in my broken hip, which yanked in the broken bones, and I tended to YELL. Sgt. Jones politely asked me to yell more quietly, but that was a tough one, and I wasn't always able to hold the yelp inside. As Wolters told me that I was going to be all right==though it had never crossed my mind that I

wasn't--I asked him not to write to Patty for a couple of weeks until she found out from me, and then could he please write and tell her more about what happened.

Of course Sgt. Jones said that no one would write to her, and not to worry. Bill tried a few jokes as he always did, but it seemed like it was hard for him to talk.

About that time the helicopter reported that they were about 15 minutes away, and if the platoon couldn't cut an LZ in the dense Mangrove forest, the helicopter crew would have to pull me out on a stretcher tied by one end to the chopper's winch. It was at that point I just about told them I would rather try to walk out. I couldn't imagine the pain that would cause me with my legs all broken up! Rock rogered the radio transmission, as everyone was sitting back thinking they were finished patching me up.

I then asked what they were going to do about the severe bleeding on the back of my upper right leg and butt. I partially rolled over to show them, and I could feel a massive amount of blood oozing from that whole area in time to the beat to my heart. By what they said, I guessed that at that point they were out of gauze pads, after using up all of them available in the platoon. I'm not sure what they did, but they some how did stop the bleeding.

About that time, I heard the distant noise of the chopper arriving, and started to wonder if they had got the LZ cut. I couldn't imagine that they even began to dent that heavy Mangrove forest surrounding us. The chopper pilot then asked for the platoon to pop a smoke grenade and then he asked "what color is the smoke?" to confirm that it was really us. He then said he was coming in. I figured they had cut the LZ.

Sgt. Jones, bless his heart, fashioned a stretcher out of a poncho to carry me to the chopper. The Army taught us how to do that during basic training, but only Sgt. Jones remembered what to do under pressure. With very little help from me, they somehow got me on the stretcher. I'm sure I gave one more yell, much to the chagrin of Sgt. Jones, as they rolled me onto the stretcher.

About that time I heard the helicopter overhead, and they began to carry the stretcher towards the LZ. I started to hear the ends of the helicopter blades hitting the tree tops as it settled into the LZ. That LZ was really a tight fit for the helicopter.

About the time the helicopter got to its lowest point--the blades still whacking the trees--they carried me into the opening, and I could see that through some miracle, the platoon had managed to level a large enough area of mangrove trees for the helicopter to just barely settle down and hover four or five feet in the air. I would like to meet that pilot some day and thank him for his effort, but I doubt if that will ever happen. In fact, I wonder if he made it out of Vietnam alive?

Several members of the platoon then held me over their heads on the stretcher, and the guys in the helicopter pulled me into the helicopter, drawing my shattered legs across the edge of the helicopter. That moment in time would become a recurring nightmare for several years. I must admit at that point I let out another yell, but I don't suppose Sgt. Jones was too worried about that with all of the helicopter noise going on.

Despite the pain I was suffering, I do apologize to Sgt. Jones for all the noise. I know that when he was severely wounded several months later, he never whimpered, despite the massive wounds he had. He was and still is a great man, and someone that truly led by example!

I then noticed Nitzel and Harold being lifted into the helicopter, since it was so high in the air. The medic kneeling next to me told the pilot that everyone was on board, and we lifted off for the nearest hospital, which was in Vung Tau.

Not knowing what the job of the medic kneeling next to me was, when he asked how I was doing, I told him which bones where broken and that I had lost a lot of blood. I don't really think he was

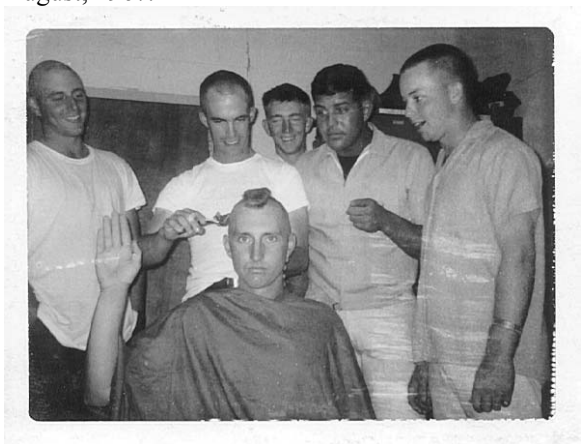
a medic, and he didn't really seem to care, but I was later to find out that he had forwarded the information via radio about my wounds to the Vung Tau hospital.

PFC Kenneth R.Wiley--July, 1966.

My roommates: Feuerschwenger, me, Poly and Harold--September, 1966.

Ron "Harold", Russ "Poly", and me showing our stuff—August, 1967.

Ron, me and Russ at Russ' Automotive shop in Chatsworth California--March, 2002 (no stuff).



Me giving Ron a Mohawk hair cut, prior to heading for Vietnam. (L to R) Russ, me, Ron, Doran, Gros and Rose.

Bill Wolters sitting in the lower bunk, while I'm in the upper bunk doing some heavy thinking.

C-141- Jet that I flew from Kansas to Vietnam, Vietnam to Japan, and Japan back to the USA.

Caribou like I flew in twice when I was with the advanced party, and once on the flight from Vung Tau to Saigon hospital.

A C-130, which I flew from Camp Bear Cat to Vung Tau.

Troops getting out of Huey helicopter. I flew in these a number of times.

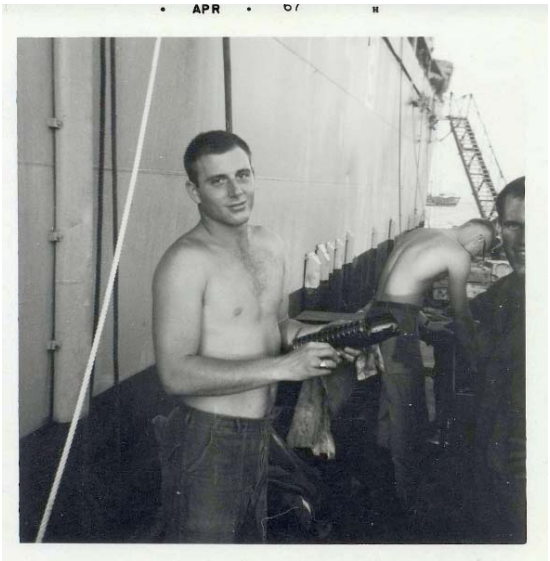
Water buffalo alongside a river in the Mekong Delta

Medivac helicopter like the one that carried me, but this one is landing on the Benewah.

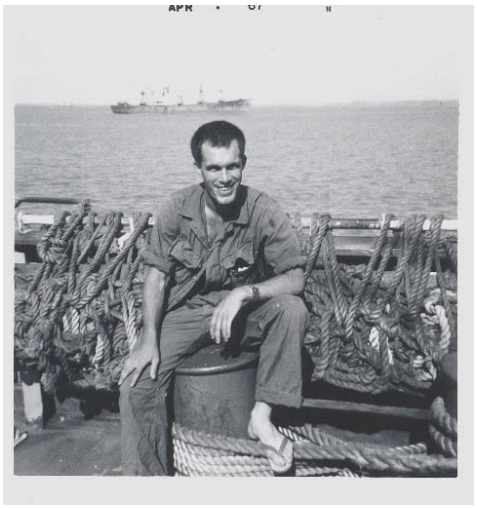
Me watching Ron clean his machine gun on the dock next to the Benewah after a patrol.

Wolf and Doñes getting ready to do one of their ritual machete war fights.

A re-supply helicopter coming in to drop off food, water and ammo.



Russ cleaning his machine-gun on the dock next to the Benewah (I am just to the right).



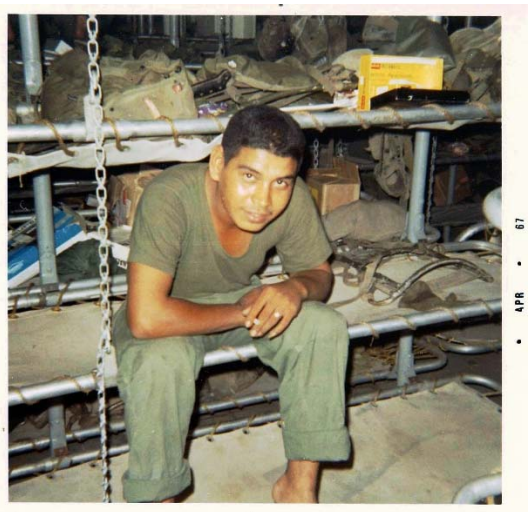
Me on the deck of the USS Benewah in Vung Tau harbor, drying out between patrols—March, 1966.

USS Benewah in Vung Tau harbor, with the dock next to it.

Armored Troop Carriers (ATC) tied together and to the USS Benewah dock.

ATC chugging along near the USS Benewah.

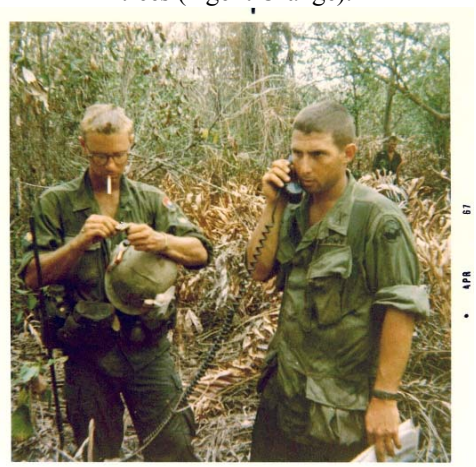
Troops boarding an ATC after a patrol for the ride back to the USS Benewah.



Doñes sitting in his bunk shipboard between patrols. .

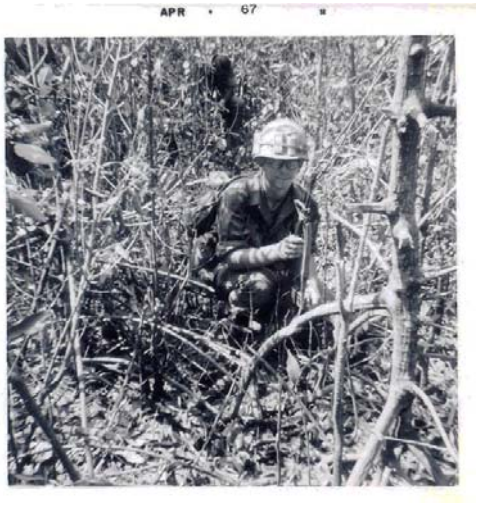
Platoon on patrol in Rung Sat region of the Mekong Delta—Feb., 1967. Notice the defoliated trees (Agent Orange).

Sgt. Jones making a shelter out of bamboo using a machete



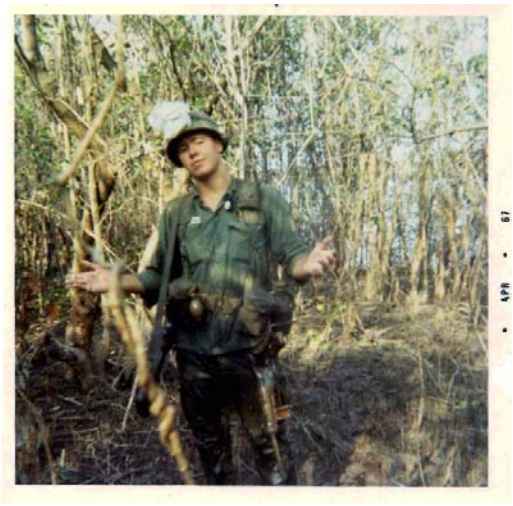
Lt. Heller on the radio with his radio operator Rock at his side.

Bill Wolters taking a break while on patrol (or he fell down from all the heavy gear).



John "Hogman" Houck blending into the background while on patrol.

"Doc" Anderson relaxing on a break.

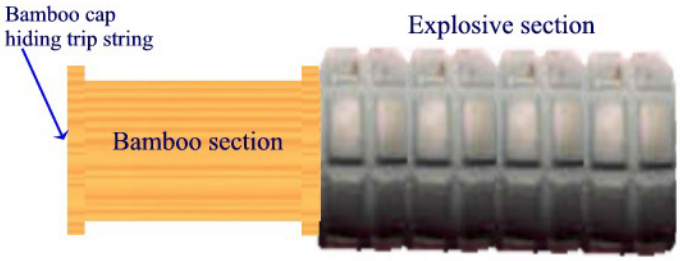


Art Noteboom out on patrol, looking for his Harley.

Dave Persson on the mother ship reading the Stars and Stripes (Combat zone paper).

Above: L-R Dave Persson, me, Heller and Russ. This was the second night of our first patrol in the Mekong Delta (Feb-March 1967). You can see how nice and dry the ambush positions are. We tried to find a dry mound, and sat in the mud watching for enemy boats going by.

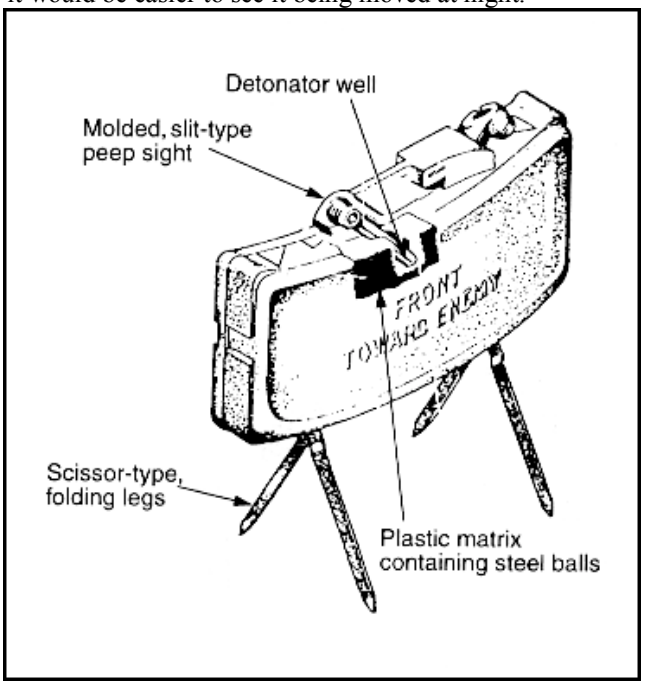
Right: I am standing in a potential ambush position with a machine gun. We faked it to make it look good for the people back home. Most of the time we found some mud mound to sit on or tree to crawl in. We were still always wet, and had to go back to the mother ship every three days to dry our feet out. Still guys got foot rot and fungus.



Made up picture of Chi Com junk grenade

This is my attempt at making up a picture of what the booby trap that got me looked like. The trip string is pulled out of the bamboo section and tied across a trail. When it goes off, it goes BOOM, and hurts!

These are pictures of the claymore mines that we often used in ambush positions. They would explode out to the front when you detonated them, and you could be within a few yards to the rear and not get hurt. In the picture above you see the detonating wire going off to the left. The VC loved to sneak up on ambush positions and turn the claymore around (pointing back at you), and then make a lot of noise so that when you set off the mine, it would hurt or kill friendly troops. We put white camouflage makeup stick on the back of the claymore so it would be easier to see it being moved at night.



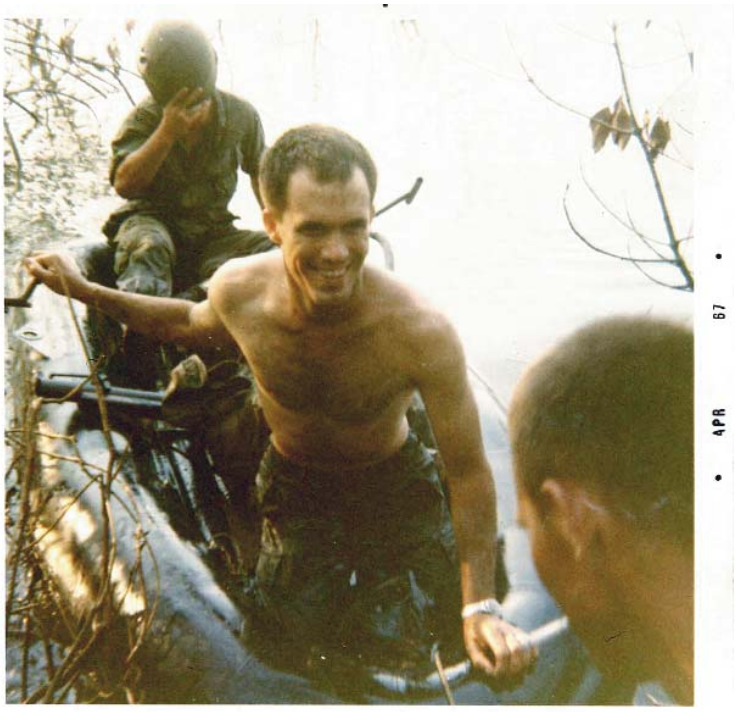
Getting off the boat in low tide was sometimes a sticky matter. This was one of the first missions we went on before we learned to dance across the mud.

Above is a river crossing at high tide (Noteboom to the right and Dones to the left). The picture to the left is a river crossing at low tide. We would be stuck in the mud, with no place to get dry. Rose is the one on the left who is stuck in the mud trying to get up the bank. I'm sure a bunch of us were up there laughing at the whole thing, and Rose was probably swearing at us in his Texas accent.

Like everyone, I had my moments of getting stuck in the mud. You can see the two socks full of C-rations hanging off my back.

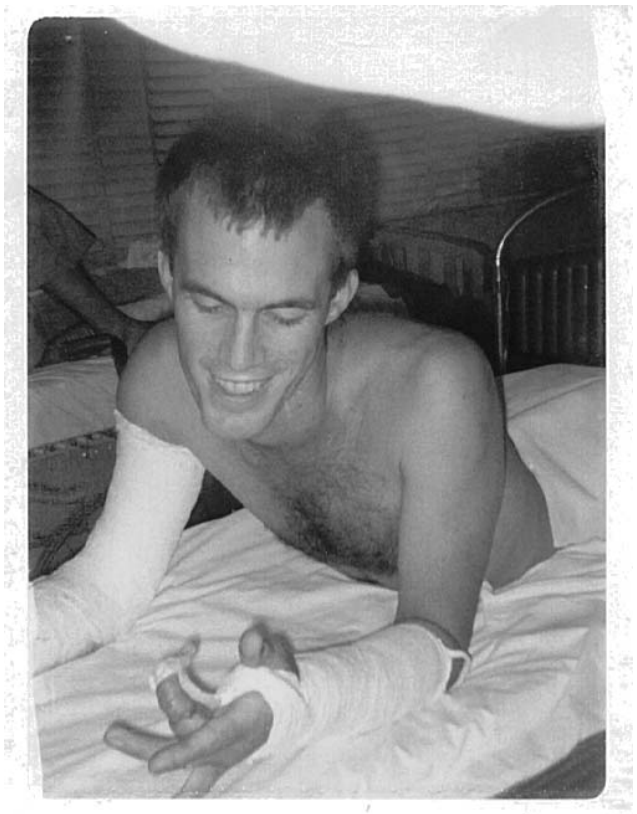
Above is a picture of the ammunition dump we found and blew up just before I got made into Swiss Cheese. You can see mortar rounds lying out on the tree braches that kept the ammunition up off the ground.

Below, according to Lt. Heller who provided a number of these pictures, is one of me just before I got it.



This is a picture of the river crossing the morning of April 1st, 1967. I'm arriving on the far shore with a passenger while a person (looks like Dave Persson) helps pull the boat to shore. Bill Wolters took this picture. The guy in the back of the boat is unidentified.

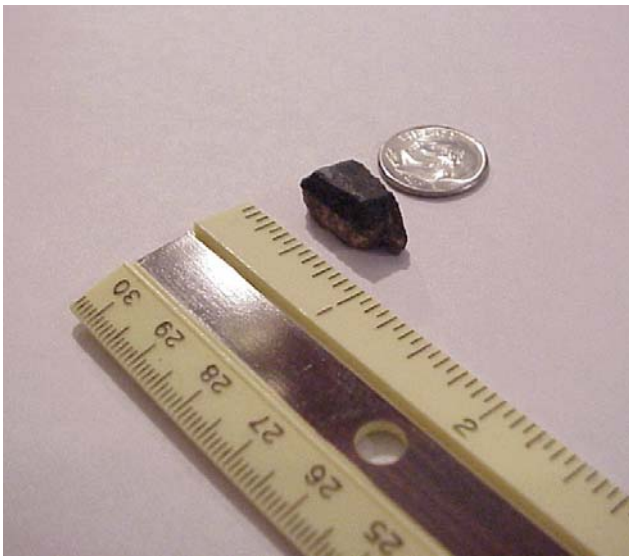
This is also a picture of me crossing the river that morning, almost to the shore where the picture above was taken. You can tell the width of the river and see how the trees were defoliated. Picture again by Bill Wolters.



Picture of me in the hospital in Camp Zama Japan, last part of April 1967. My broken right arm is in a full arm cast. The cast on my left arm is to support the rejoined middle finger shown in a splint.

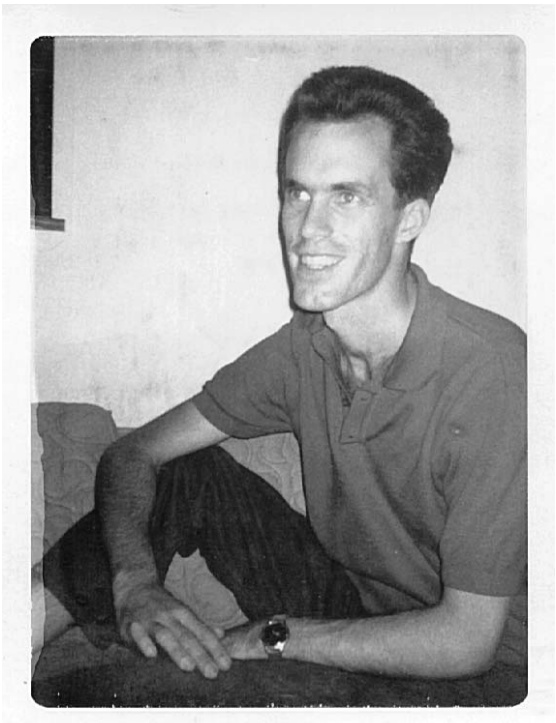
This is about week 5 or mid-May at Camp Zama, Japan. The cast has been removed from my left hand, and they pulled the rod from the middle finger. The cast has been removed from my right leg, so this was shortly before returning to the states. My wheelchair is in the right foreground of the picture, and the trapeze over my bed allowed me to get in and out of bed by myself.

Now does this look like a normal hand? I think the middle finger is missing something. The picture was taken April 2002.



This is the grenade segment that the doctor removed from my groin area while I was in my hospital bed in Camp Zama, Japan.

This picture was taken at my sister's house in Livermore, California, on my first time out of the hospital (June 1967). When I got home, I found out that I weighed 98 pounds, including cast.



This picture was taken at Bob and Betty Moore's house during the summer of 1967. I still have the cast on my left leg, but I don't have the brace on the right leg (airing out the leg). Still skinny as a rail, but on the mend.

Picture taken November of 2002; Left to Right is Ron “Harold” Hoy, John “Hogman” Houck, Ron Sizemore and Bill Wolters.

Picture taken by Bill Wolters in September 2002 for left to right is Bill Befort, Becky Lowe (Heller’s significant other), the infamous Art Noteboom, Jim “Lt.” Heller and Art’s wife Renee.

The Vung Tau Hospital

After what seemed like an eternal flight, the helicopter started to settle down onto the landing pad at Vung Tau Army Hospital near where we were stationed on the Navy ships. When the helicopter landed, it was a little closer to the ground than out in the field, and the medics hurriedly pulled me out on the stretcher and placed me on a gurney. Once again it hurt, but it wasn't as bad as when they yanked me into the helicopter.

Much to my surprise, a doctor jumped up on the gurney, straddling me with instruments in his hand. Over the noise of the helicopter he bent over and asked me if I was allergic to Novocain, to which I answered, "I am allergic to dentist Novocain." He said this was different, and that he was going to numb my shoulder so they could put a tee in the blood vein to give me blood and other medicines. Before I had a chance to say anything, the shot was in. He had sliced my right shoulder and inserted the tee in the blood vessel. I guess the doctor wasn't too worried about infection and sterile equipment at that point, with me being covered with mud and caked blood. Mind you, he was doing this while the medics were rolling the gurney on a run towards the emergency room about 100 feet away. What a ride! Another E-Ticket.

As the medics slammed me through the emergency room doors, the doctor finished up on my shoulder and jumped off the gurney. A whole herd of nurses and doctors began to cut every stitch of clothing from my body, and I could feel the cold table on my backside.

Another doctor leaned over and asked again what was injured, and I told him:

- My left middle finger was blown away.
- My right forearm was busted, and there was a nasty gash up near my armpit.
- My left lower leg was broken.
- My right lower leg was broken.
- My right hip was broken and there were a lot of gashes on my right rear leg.
- And my right foot was broken.

At that time I didn't know how accurate I was, but I had hit it right on the head. My legs were actually shattered rather than broken, but I was close enough. *I knew all of those trips where my mother had taken me to the emergency room would finally pay off.*

I then looked up and noticed a LADY nurse standing next to the table, and there I was in my birthday suit. I said, "Sir. I'm sorry for being so naked." I then corrected myself and said "ma'am." I also asked her what they were going to do next, and she said they were going to take me to X-ray now they had all of my clothes cut off. I said, "But you forgot to take off my right boot." She looked at the doctor, since apparently my right boot was already off. He immediately tested the reflexes and sensations in my right leg, and determined there was a severed nerve in the leg, and that I couldn't feel anything at that time below the right knee.

The doctors then tested further and determined that I had also severed my right ulna nerve, which meant I only had partial use of my right hand. In that deep gash near my right armpit I remembered I could see the bone in there, and a white fibrous stuff like string was cut in the middle. So I showed them--and yup, that is where the nerve was severed. No problem, I don't need those things; and back then they didn't have any knowledge of how to fix severed nerves anyway.

All during this process there was an Army guy moving around me taking pictures. I knew right away that I would be a center fold in some first aid class in the future. Maybe even make it to the

big time, and have my naked body shown on a big projection screen at a doctors' conference. I do wonder what happened to those pictures, but I was in no position to complain at that time.

They had stopped the bleeding, so it was then was off to X-ray, where I encountered the cruelest person on the face of this earth. He smiled, and that damn guy was just doing his duty, but it was like I was posing for a beauty contest and not for a broken body display. He had me move from one position to another as I slipped all over in my own blood, and could feel bones grinding on one another and touching the table. For one picture he even had me lay on my broken hip. I was so pissed at that point I didn't even scream at him. I thought it might give him too much joy.

After the X-rays, I was taken to the pre-operating area where they placed my gurney down at the end of the room, a long way from the operating room. I then met the first of several angels that I was to encounter, or someone pretty close to being an angel. He was a very soft-spoken young man around 18 years of age. He was a pastor's assistant at the hospital, and his job was to visit with the patients as they came in. I could tell right away from his accent he was from Maine, and found out that he was from Bangor, Maine, near where I had lived for a number of years as a young kid. He was so kind and kept on giving me words of encouragement and asking about my family and everything.

During this time he slowly cleaned the wounds the best he could by removing the caked blood and mud, and burned skin, and he was always smiling. He was so wonderful to me that night! Luckily I was able to thank him, and did see him after the operation, but later discovered that he had helped save my life.

As I found out later, I had been triaged to the back of the bus--so to speak--and left there to die. I found this out from Harold and Nitzel. They were taken in and fixed up, and when they complained that I should be first, they were told the reality of war. If the doctors thought I was going to die they would only work on me if they have time. Up until that time they will handle the ones they can get back to the field first. The doctors also told Harold and Nitzel that my legs would probably have to be amputated if they did operate. *I guess the doctors decided that the glue worked better than they thought, since my legs were left intact, or what was left of them.*

Well, apparently the doctors found the time, after having patched up the drunk Australian who had been stabbed in a bar fight. I was the only one in the pre-op area around midnight, and the guy from Maine told me I would be next. I know now he should have qualified that with "as long as no one else comes in." As I remember it, Nitzel and Hoy were still sitting over in a corner watching over me.

I remember being wheeled into the operating room, down a row of about seven operating tables, and I got the last operating table in the line. Doctors and nurses moved me from the gurney to the operating table and, it was good night for me for about seven hours. At least during that time, nothing hurt.

When I woke up after the surgery, the same guardian angel from Maine was there, but this time he was more upbeat. I assume now that it was because he finally thought I had a chance of living. He told me I had to breathe into a lung machine, since both of my lungs had collapsed during the surgery, and they had almost lost me. The guardian angel from Maine seemed relieved that I didn't have to die just because of some stupid war rules. Apparently my number just wasn't up yet. I guess this was my fate!

Mid-morning, I was moved to a bed in a Quonset hut, which housed about 30-40 beds. After I was settled in, I was given the first of many "good time" shots that would help with the pain and let me sleep.

After I woke up several hours later, Ron and Paul came walking in and started to talk to me. I asked if they would write a letter to my parents and Patty for me. They agreed, and as I

proceeded to dictate, Ron wrote a letter to my parents and Paul then wrote the first letter to Patty. *I originally thought Ron wrote both of them, but he corrected me after he read an early draft of this story.* Before I had gone overseas I had also requested that the Army not notify Patty so she would hear of my injuries from me first. I was so relieved to get the letter off to let her know that I was all right, and would be coming home.

That afternoon I was moved from a normal Army cot to one of two nice hospital beds next to the nurses' station. The nurses told me that the move was to make me more comfortable and to allow the nurses to keep an eye on me, since at that time I required more attention than the other patients.

It was at this time I noticed some discomfort in my vital parts, so I reached down and found everything intact, but the left testicle was about three times normal size. I then felt a hole on the inside of my left leg, where a piece of shrapnel had entered my leg after careening off my left testicle. That was too close for comfort, if you ask me!!!!

Right after the move to the nice bed, I heard a voice in the bed next to me saying, "How are you doing, soldier?" I turned my head, which was the only thing that moved, and started to talk with a pepper gray-haired black fellow in the bed next to me.

His name was Sgt. Major Price, and he had been shot in the knee and was on his way home. Little did I know at that point that he and I would be linked for a long time at the various hospitals, and then through Christmas cards for many years. He was my new angel to help me through the next couple of months.

When he first met my parents in the hospital in San Francisco, he told them the only way he knew I was still alive for the first 12 days was that my beard grew and nurses kept giving me shots. Of course, there was more to that than he would admit. He held sodas and water for me to drink and fed me meals, since I had a cast on everything, and I do mean everything! He would also help me smoke a cigarette, even though he didn't smoke himself. He was quite a man, and I will always remember his soft voice asking, "Can I help you?" The only thing he ever asked for in return was for someone to listen to his stories, which I was glad to do, since he was an extremely interesting person.

After several days I had all sorts of visitors show up. The first was the Brigade commander Col. Fulton (now retired Maj. Gen. Fulton) and his staff who awarded me my purple heart. Boy, you can imagine how impressed I was with that, laying there all the time thinking, "I'm going home, sucker!"

A few hours later, a lot of the platoon came barging in, including Lt. Heller and Doñes. They had a party going in Vung Tau, since the Captain let them have a few days off for mental health after what happened to me. They didn't stay very long, and poor Doñes blamed himself for the whole thing, crying the whole time. A few cases of beer didn't help his composure much, but 25 years later when I met him in Colorado at a reunion, he was still apologetic for not having taken point, and still had tears in his eyes. He was a really good friend, and was so pleased in later life when I got to meet his sons, and that he had more gray hair than I did. *Ha!*

Lt. Heller told me that one of the guys on the hospital ward with me was the platoon sergeant from the platoon we were assigned to when we were part of the advanced party training with the 1st Division. Later he came down and talked to me for a few minutes, but my conversational skills were lacking at that point. As with Sgt. Major Price, I would see him again in the hospital in San Francisco.

After a week, doctors performed the second surgery on me and removed most of the nasty metal out of the wounds. I had seen the x-rays of my right hip, showing several washers and an injector razor blade, plus lots of pieces of dirt and metal. What a bunch of junk, a lot of which is still in

there today. The wounds were left open for a week to let the pieces of metal seep to the surface of the wounds, but not all made it. Doctors don't dig for the shrapnel unless it is in a critical location, since that could do more damage than good.

Now that I was all sown up, I was ready to be flown to Japan by way of Saigon.

Several days after the surgery, the nurses took us out on the tarmac at the Vung Tau airport, where we laid on the stretchers in the sun for the longest time behind sand bags while waiting for the plane. I was climbing the walls with pain and I couldn't get anyone's attention due to the lack of ability to stand up, move, or talk very loudly; so Sgt. Major Price made sure somebody took care of me. It was just a matter of a few minutes, and I had a "feel better" shot; and I was ready to fly anywhere, even without the plane!

On the afternoon of April 12th I was loaded into a Caribou transport, which was big enough for about 10 people on stretchers. It was a fairly short flight to Saigon Airport, but I always wondered in the back of my mind, "could those VC shoot this plane down?"

From Saigon Airport we were transported to a nearby hospital, which was conveniently located next door to the morgue. The shipping dock of the morgue was filled with coffins, which let me know how lucky I was. The hospital was an Air Force Hospital. *I grew to like Air Force hospitals during the four times I stayed at them during my trip back to the states*.

When the doctors did rounds that night in the hospital, all of them came to me shaking their collective heads, saying "poor guy, he has a rough life ahead of him!" (That was really what they said). They didn't seem too interested in any of my injuries, except for where my left middle finger had been sewn back on. They all wanted to look at my finger and at the X-rays. I guess at that point in time, sewing a limb or appendage back on was a major thing. I was more concerned with my other major problems, such as my severed nerves, but they didn't seem interested in that at all.

After a nice relaxing night in a beautiful Air Force hospital with edible food, several hundred of us were loaded into a C-141 Medivac transport for the trip to Japan. We were stacked about eight high, with barely enough room between stretchers to breath. It was a rough trip where I felt claustrophobic, but a "feel good" shot helped me tolerate the pain and the tight fit. At least I was out of Vietnam and starting my journey home!

Japan

I was never sure why I was first taken to Japan for six weeks and then later to San Francisco, but the Army had a reason. I just can't imagine it being a good reason. I always thought maybe I was in too bad of shape to fly all the way to the States. There were those like Sgt. Major Price, who were just shot in the leg; and when they rolled me into the hospital in Japan he was in the bed next to me, so I don't know why they didn't send me all the way to the States.

The first night we were in Japan, we were again at an Air Force hospital, so the food and care were wonderful. It was a little depressing to be laying in a bed right across from a guy who had been burned with Napalm over most of his body. That was tough to see, but it put some of my self pity in the right place.

From the Air Force hospital we were flown by helicopter to an Army hospital at Camp Zama, Japan. We didn't get to do any sight-seeing, but we did feel weird with all of those Oriental workers being around us night and day when we were just so leery of anyone with slanted eyes. It took a week or so to get over that, and the jumping out of our skin every time the jackhammer started up in the construction outside of the hospital.

In Japan, Sgt. Major Price was still watching over me to make sure I got the right treatment and had what I needed. At one point he even loaned me some money so I could buy milkshakes and get a hair cut.

At Camp Zama the nurses let me know right up front that there were no more "feel good" shots going to be given unless I really needed them. I think their definition of "really needed a shot" was if you were almost dead. At that time I thought that was real cruel of the Army medical people to give me a pain shot every four hours for 13 days, and then just nothing. That was a real problem for me all the time I was in Japan. I wasn't physically addicted to the "feel good shot" of Demerol, but I was mentally addicted. I kept trying to figure out how to get one of those shots. Whenever the nurse would go by with a needle with a blue cap, I knew that was Demerol and my mouth would actually water. No matter how hard I tried, I couldn't get a shot unless I had surgery, and then only one or two.

In addition to the normal hospital ward rounds where all the doctors looked me over, I was sent to the doctors' office at the hospital almost daily for them to fix something or run some more test. I did this so often, I got so that even with casts on both arms and both legs I could make it to the doctors' office in the wheelchair by myself. I could even get out of bed without any help. The 100-foot roll up a hill was tough, but the ride back was a blast, and I almost turned over more than once.

The first day I was in Japan, all of the casts were removed for inspection of the wounds, and the doctors found my left leg was a sorry sight of puss and crap. I had a nasty case of bone infection. The next day I was taken into surgery and operated on again to clean out the mess and reset the left leg. The doctors cut a window in the cast on the left leg so they could treat the infected wound. I was also given pills of every antibiotic known to man at that time. From that point until I went off the antibiotics several months later, when I was down under a hundred pounds, I barely ate. The only thing I could keep down on a regular basis was a strawberry milkshake. That wasn't even that great, but it probably kept me alive for that period of time.

After that surgery, every day, four times a day nurses would come down to my bed with sterile swabs and take off the window in the cast and clean the infected area of the leg down to the bone. This actually didn't hurt in the least bit, and after a while I would do it myself when they let me. The purpose of this was to allow the wound to heal from the inside out, which helped cure

the infection, but as a result, the scar healed so it was stuck down to the bone. *Oh well, it just added more "character" to the leg. I still contend that not even a chicken would be proud of my legs.*

I was down to the doctors' office a few days after the surgery, and the doctor in charge of my case decided to take out all of the wire stitches that were in me, which took the doctor and his assistant over an hour. Luckily it wasn't too painful, but I did lose count at around 300 stitches. I'll never know how many there were, but those suckers were spaced about ¾ of an inch apart, so they covered quite an area. No wonder my backside was so sore!

After another week in Japan, my doctor decided my left leg was still crooked and he would straighten it out during a visit to his office. There was one problem with this. I had been given so much Demerol in the past that even after he had given me three shots, it had no effect on me. In fact, my arms were so leathery from all the shots, the fluid just came back out other holes in my arm. They tried morphine and I still didn't feel any effects. It was then that the doctor decided to go ahead and set the leg anyway. I was fully conscious when the doctor had a male nurse hang on my leg as the doctor pushed the pieces back into place. On one X-ray, I had counted that my left tibia had been shattered into 15 different pieces.

Sgt. Jones would have been proud of me that day, because there wasn't a peep out of me--just a lot of cold sweat.

I was always sneaking a peak at my records and X-rays to see how my injuries were doing. The doctors would get upset if they saw me doing that; but hey, I knew I was hurt, and at that point there was nothing that would shock me. I did notice in the records during one sneak reading that over the course of the first week in the hospital in Vung Tau, I had received 27 units of blood. I'm not sure what was meant by a unit of blood, but I assume all of my blood was basically changed out a couple of times. That is truly a good 100,000-mile check up.

One morning I was giving myself a sponge bath, and I noticed a lump in my lower left groin area. It felt like an object under the skin about the size of the end of your pinky finger. During the next doctor rounds I pointed out the lump to the dozen or so doctors who were there. Later that day, one of the doctors came back with a surgical kit, and thought he would take it out right there in my bed, since it was right below the skin. Well, I sat there and watched him trying to get the metal out of me for about 30 minutes and it was much more involved than he thought. About the time he was getting ready to call for a gurney to take me to the operating room, out popped the grenade segment (which I saved, and still have today). That sucker had gone from my backside, through my stomach cavity and lodged just short of coming out the other side, and apparently did no damage to the internal organs. How lucky can a person be? *I guess fate was on my side again, even though it was my backside.*

On another trip to the doctor, he decided to take the metal rod out of my middle left finger. That rod was holding it in position for the two bones to heal together where the joint had been. This doctor thought that if he removed the rod and they started me on physical therapy, I would be able to use that finger just like it had a real joint in it. *I think he also believed in the tooth fairy.* Well, he removed the pin and they worked on it in physical therapy, but that is as far as it got.

That brings up another interesting event that happened at physical therapy. I wasn't sure why the doctors were sending me there with four casts on, but they did. The therapist was also trying to get me to exercise my right hip. I kept telling her it wasn't ready for that, but she insisted. I found out later that it was still broken at the time. Dang Army!!!!

Despite the fact that I was healing up quite fast, I was in tremendous pain all the time due to the severed nerves and the multitude of holes that had been randomly placed in my body. Little did I know at that time that this was just a sample of what I would have to deal with the rest of my life, until I learned how to control the pain. The doctors tried using nerve blocks to stop the pain,

which only worked for about six hours and the pain returned. The doctors then told me they could make the pain permanently go away if they severed those same nerves, and I told them, "over my dead body, Sir!" *At least I was polite about it.*

My first lesson in how to control pain was to stay busy doing something. The guy in the bed next to me in a ward of 75 guys taught me how to play Chess. I was never any good, but we did have a lot of laughs, and for short bursts of time the pain would subside.

One day I watched from my bed as a helicopter landed and a USO group got out to come through the hospital. I heard low mumblings in the ward, but didn't know who it was or what they did. All of a sudden, a beautiful lady poked her head around the corner and said, "Hi, how are you doing?" and all of the other standard questions. I was the only one in the bay of the ward at the time, so she came over and talked to me a little, just busy talk but nice. After she left, I asked the nurse who that was. The nurse told me that was Jane Russell. She was a movie star, and one of Howard Hughes' many wives. I wasn't impressed, but it was interesting.

One thing I would really like to say is that the men and women who did the USO tours of the Army hospitals had one heck of a lot of courage. I just started in thinking about this as I have been writing this story. They would go on these medical wards where guys were shot to pieces and had raw stumps of arms and legs showing. Badly burned guys would be lying with their burns exposed. Men would be moaning and yelling and not know what they were doing. These people from the USO--major super stars--would go into these wards and talk to the guys, and try to encourage them. To me, that took a lot of guts and caring. That was unlike those stars that only had bad things to say about guys that fought in Nam, and who provided comfort to the VC and NVA.

About this time a package caught up with me that Patty had sent to Vietnam. When I opened it, the head nurse was there and confiscated the yellow plastic baseball bat that Patty had sent me. The nurse was a very typical heavy set, heavy-handed Army nurse. She would walk up and down the ward, and if any one was sleeping during the day, she would hit the bed as hard as she could with the yellow plastic bat to wake them up. Of course, I got my share of wake-up calls. She was mean, and she was from Maine. Can you believe that? I had gone from the angel from Maine in the Vung Tau hospital to the monster of Maine at Camp Zama. It was fun for a while, but did get old, since I couldn't sleep for more than a few minutes at a time, so I had relied on my day time cat naps to survive unless she was around.

I finally got so sleepy, that one night the nurse left me alone while they were taking my temperature—orally--and I fell asleep. I suddenly woke up to a crunch, as I bit down on the thermometer. I felt the mercury in my mouth and spat it out as fast as I could. *I still wonder today if some of my weirdness wasn't caused by swallowing Mercury*.

The there was also the night I fell asleep smoking a cigarette and woke up to the smell of the hair burning on my chest. I really had a bonfire going.

During my stay in Japan, I called both Patty and my parents. Of course I didn't always get the time difference right, so I often called in the middle of the night for them, which I'm sure made them real happy. The phone calls cost around $142 each and were only about ten minutes long. *Times have changed.*

The most emotional thing that occurred while I was in Japan was when Patty sent me a tape she had recorded with her parents, my parents and some family friends, Walt and Bernice. A ward mate who was in pretty good shape took me down to the Red Cross center, which had a tape player. It was one of those old tape-to-tape things. I cried and cried when I heard their voices. That was hard, but I knew that I would be home pretty soon.

After I had been in Japan for about four weeks I was an old-timer, and a fresh batch of messed up bodies was brought in. The nurse told me of one guy who was injured just about like me and was having a lot of trouble dealing with the pain, asking if I would talk to him. I was thinking to myself, "What makes her think I'm dealing with this miserable pain so well that I can help some one else?" I went and talked to him, and found that he was about like me except that he had both Achilles tendons ruptured, and even more holes in his legs; which was a lot, since I had somewhere around 75 holes in me from the booby trap exploding. After I talked to him for a while, I was headed back to my bed; and my doctor came over and talked to me about the guy. He said that he was the only guy he had ever seen in the hospital who was worse than me and still had his legs. I smiled and took that as a compliment; after all, being one of the worst was noteworthy!

Toward the end of my stay in Japan, I was put in a ward that didn't require much nursing, even though I still had three casts on. I was having trouble getting around, so I finally talked the doctor into taking off the casts on my right arm and right leg so I could get around in the wheelchair easier.

There was even a TV on that ward of about 80 beds, but there were only three of us there at the time. I got a kick out of watching Andy Williams singing in Japanese, and I really got into the Sumo Wrestling, which I watch even today.

About every other day, until I ran out of money, I would have a strawberry milkshake and get a hair cut. This was no ordinary hair cut. For 75 cents you got a shampoo, haircut, shave, and a neck and back message. It was heaven. Those oriental women had strong hands and really knew how to relax your neck and back. *By the way, don't worry--this was all on the up-and-up, since it was done in the Army PX.*

The doctors finally told me it was time to go back to the States, which meant I was flown by Helicopter down to the Air Force hospital at the Air Force base. Once again, the food was great; but this time, they had a really nice looking nurse there who was going around giving the guys alcohol back rubs in the evening time. She knew what she was doing, and as a result I couldn't turn over for an hour after the alcohol rub. So embarrassing!

The next day the nurses weren't sure if I was going to get on the plane, or if it would be a couple of days. I had told everyone I was going to be home by a certain date, and hoped they wouldn't change it on me now. I was really getting nervous, so for once the dice rolled my way, and I left on a Medivac flight from Japan on the 26th of May at 7:30 PM, arriving in the states at 3:30 PM on the 26th of May. It was the old international time zone trick. I left the Air Force hospital so fast, though, the nurses forgot to cut my cast loose to allow for altitude swelling in the plane. Man, did I regret that by the time we landed!

Since I was still one of the more critically wounded patients, I was placed on the bottom stretcher of the eight-high stack. I was right next to the jump door on the left rear side of the C-141 jet, and apparently there was a very small air leak in the door seal. It was freezing back there, and ice was forming by the rear door. By the time we got to California there was a lot of ice there, but luckily nurses had taken good care of me by giving me a "feel good" shot, and I slept most of the way home.

As we touched down at Travis Air Force Base, which is about 75 miles East of San Francisco, all of the guys in the plane let out with a chee, since we were back on US soil. The pilot even opened the tailgates while we were taxiing and told us to smell that good US of A air. It did smell good, but it felt even better to be on the ground!

Letterman Hospital, San Francisco

We were first taken to a little hospital at the Air Force base to be checked out to make sure we were still alive. As I mentioned, they had forgotten to cut the cast on my left leg before we left, so the leg had swollen and I was in terrible pain. They quickly cut the cast and wrapped it back on with an elastic bandage, and got me on a helicopter headed for Letterman Hospital in San Francisco.

We landed about a half-mile from the Golden Gate Bridge, and there was a stiff breeze blowing across the bay; but oh, what a wonderful day! As we landed, my mom and sister had somehow figured out where we were coming in, and were there to greet us. The Army personnel didn't have time to waste, so we were loaded onto ambulance/bus and taken to the main entrance of the hospital. True to form, my mom was again standing there. She and my sister had run all the way from the place where they put me on the bus, to the main entrance. *I wish I could have seen that!* The minute they opened the door of the bus, my mom was in there like a jackrabbit. Oh, was it good to see her! We both cried and hugged, and she told me Patty couldn't get off work until Friday night, so I wouldn't see her until Saturday.

My sister lived at the time in Livermore California, which was about 50 miles from the hospital; so Larry, who was my brother-in-law at the time, was there at the hospital early on in the game. When he first saw me, he turned white as a sheet and had to sit down and compose himself for a few minutes before he could talk. *And I thought I was starting to look pretty good by then!* Both my sister and Larry were so wonderful to me while I was in the hospital. I could never thank them enough for all the times they visited me and picked me up for weekends. This really meant a lot to my recovery.

After the arrival, we were taken to our wards, where we would be for a number of months to come. As the gurney was being wheeled down the middle of the ward of about 40 soldiers, I heard a familiar voice say, "How you doing, soldier?" It was Sgt. Major Price with a big smile on his face. He had left a week before I had, and was already a fixture in the ward.

At the end of the day, the ward doctor removed the cast on my left leg, cleaned the infected area, and made sure I was still breathing. When one doctor asked how I was doing, I said as soon as my left leg healed I was ready to get out of there. He said I first had to let my hip heal, and he pulled my right leg up, twisting it, which sent pain through my entire leg. He said, "See, it is still broken." I would have taken his word--he didn't have to torture me--but I guess that was the Army way of convincing me to be careful.

I then got to spend my first night back in the USA. What a joy, even without a "feel good" shot! I had lain awake most of the night with the normal pain, but I had a big smile on my face the whole time, and I knew everything was going to be okay.

The next morning I was given X-rays and all sorts of tests, but all I could care about was that Patty would be there the next day.

The next morning the nurse told me that someone was waiting out in the hall for me, so I climbed into my wheelchair and rolled out to the main hallway. Patty was sitting on a bench across from the entrance to the ward, and she couldn't move. I rolled over to her, and we just hugged and cried for the longest time. Man, was it good to be back, and just in time for her birthday, May 28th.

It turned out that the guys she worked with had taken up a collection and paid for her to fly up to see me. I was so glad that about a year later I had a chance to thank those people in person. She would have been there regardless, but that was a great gift to both of us.

After we had been hugging for a while, the nurse came out and said I had to go down to physical therapy. So Patty walked down with me and waited out front while a doctor did what I thought was physical therapy. I was taken into a wire mesh cage, where a doctor began to insert two inch long needles way into the muscles of my hand and leg which had the severed nerves. Man, was that painful stuff! He would wiggle the needle around, and when he thought he was in the right spot he would use electric stimulus to activate the deadened muscles to see if there was a response from the nerve.

This test went on once a day, five times a week, for over two weeks. One day I said to the doctor, "I don't know what this is doing for my problems, but I can't take it any more." He sort of smiled and put the needles away, telling me the test was over and that I had lasted about twice as long as anyone else had to that time. Hmmm, did I feel used!

The first week I was back, I was fitted with a metal brace for my right foot, which was now a drop foot from the severed nerve. Lifts were put on the new shoe to even out my legs with the walking cast on the left leg. Now here is the rub: when I walked with crutches, I had to put my weight only on the left leg with the cast, since my right hip was still broken, but my broken left leg was protected by the cast. This really looked strange, but I had to play the game.

After the second week, I was told that I was being let go on a two-week pass, and that I could do anything I wanted. Well, my mom and dad were up there with Patty and the camper the next morning, and I was out of there with a big bag of medicine and a lot of pain.

The first night we stayed over at my sister's house in Livermore, and the next day traveled in my folks' camper to Northridge, where Patty was staying with her mom and dad. I just couldn't believe I was home and alive. What a feeling of relief!

During the next two weeks I wasn't supposed to do much, and I was supposed to have constant care, so shortly after Patty went to work in the morning, my mom would stop by and pick me up to spend the whole day over at her house. My mom was at times like a drill sergeant, and at other times a softy. I talked her into letting me try driving with my left leg in a long cast, my right hip broken, and the metal brace on. I really felt like I was back, as I launched the car down the road. I just wanted to drive that one time, and never did drive after that until I had the cast off my leg and the hip was healed.

The next several months were spent traveling back and forth between the hospital, Northridge and my sister's place in Livermore. When the doctors wanted me to be at the hospital for a week or two, I would spend the weekends out visiting my sister and her family. Those were relaxing times, and my sister and her family really made me feel at home. I was blessed that they were there for me at that time in my life. The first few times they would come and pick me up, but as time went on I made some friends who had cars and they would drive me out there.

I had also graduated to the point where I could handle flying in the airplane from Burbank to San Francisco. That made for some interesting conversations and nasty looks as I went through the airports. I wore my uniform the first time I did that, but learned that wasn't a good idea. Most people treated disabled vets like they had leprosy. If I didn't have my uniform on and I didn't say I was in the Army, people treated me almost like a human being.

I shouldn't say everyone was bad to me. On one trip I sat with a very nice lady who had a son in Nam, so we talked about it all the way on the flight to San Francisco. She bought me several drinks and I was a little tipsy when we got there. Instead of doing my normal "ride the bus into San Francisco" thing, she was kind enough to drive me right to the door of the hospital. That was a wonderful gesture. She invited me to visit her and her husband's home some weekend, but I never did.

I do feel that I have to apologize to the sergeant from the 1st Division, even if I don't remember his name, for something that happened in Letterman Hospital. He was standing in a ward with another sergeant, and he invited me to join in the telling of war stories. I just had to tell the story about the first night I saw him in his black pajamas in the field, and how he scared the heck out of me. I said, "I thought he was one of the gooks." Bad form, and not like me. There was a lot of silence, and I quietly left the room. *That was truly an embarrassing moment in life.*

About seven months after I was wounded came the big Thursday when the cast was removed from my left leg for good. What a relief! I was now in a rehabilitation ward that had a king-sized cast iron bathtub with legs on it. I got back to the ward after having the cast taken off, and soaked in the tub for several hours, rolling dead layer after dead layer of skin off my leg. I must have filled that tub five or six times. I was really alive again!

After the bath, I went into the TV room and sat down with a great big smile on my face, and watched some TV for a while. After a few minutes I touched the inside of my left leg in the middle of the calf muscle, and man, was it sore! I rolled up the hospital blue pants I had on, and there was what looked like a big zit on my calf, so I squeezed it. Much to my surprise, out popped--and I do mean popped--a long piece of what was either bamboo or a long bone sliver. I pulled the piece out, and discovered it was two to three inches long. I thought that was so neat, I squeezed again, and another sliver came popping out. I worked on it some more, but that was all I got out of my leg.

That afternoon I showed the slivers to the doctor, who was pretty sure, without sending them to the lab, that they where bamboo slivers. Regardless, I tossed them in the trash and said, "Okay".

The next day Patty came to town with her parents, and that weekend we proceeded to see the sights of San Francisco together, with me walking with a cane after only being out of the cast one full day. Of course I thought I was tough, and had a cane; so I could do anything, even though my left leg had been in a cast for seven months and my right hip had just healed. We walked all over the San Francisco Zoo, the Golden Gate Park and Fisherman's Warf that Saturday. After they left me at the hospital on Sunday, I was one sore and hurting puppy! *Doing that was so stupid, but I would probably do it again since it was so much fun and I got to get out!*

Letterman Hospital was really unique in that it was very wide open. If it was foggy outside, it was also foggy inside. Did it ever get cold and damp at times!

The physical therapy area was interesting since it overlooked the San Francisco Bay and the Golden Gate Bridge. What a sight that was! I was in physical therapy one day riding a stationary bike, and looked up and thought the whole mountain range across the bay was moving. I then noticed that a person was climbing a mast on the top of the moving mountain. I then realized that it was the gigantic aircraft carrier the USS Enterprise going out to sea. The sailor was lowering the mast so the ship could get under the Golden Gate Bridge. Interesting memory!

The ward that I was now on was a rehabilitation ward made up mainly of amputees. Since Sgt. Major Price had been discharged, I branched out and found a new friend after closely watching the guys and seeing how they were handling their injuries. There were those who drank themselves into a stupor almost every night, and there were those who sat in the corner and felt sorry for themselves. There was one guy, Mike-something, who I really took a liking to. He was a wiry Hispanic kid from Fresno who had lost an arm and a leg in Nam, and was bound and determined to make a go of it. He walked everywhere, and we did almost everything together when I was in the rehabilitation ward.

One night we went down to the slot car races on the hospital grounds and had a ball racing slot cars with him. We then went and had a few beers at the bowling ally, which was way too much for me. He had trouble getting back to the ward on his artificial leg, so he got in a wheelchair and I pushed him back to the ward with his leg over my shoulder. I did this several times, but the

other times it was because his amputated leg just got too sore. It did look funny, me pushing the wheel chair with a leg over my shoulder. Only in an Army hospital!

Mike and I used to go over and play pool on occasion at the Red Cross center across the street from the hospital. Since he only had the one arm, I used my deformed left hand as a bridge for the cue stick, and he hopped around the table on one leg. It made for a lot of interesting conversations at the Red Cross center.

Mike had a black 57' Chevy. It was cool, and he used to drop me off at my sister's on the way to Fresno for weekend leaves to be with his wife.

When I was discharged from the Army we were going to keep in touch. We were buddies for life. I'm sad to say I never heard from him, and I only wrote to him once. We came from totally different lifestyles, but for several months we were the best of friends.

Some of the guys on the Rehab ward were real hot dogs when it came to riding in the wheelchairs. Some of them got so good that they went around only on the rear tires. This would include going up and down stairs. Boy, did we get yelled at a lot for doing those tricks, but the guys kept on doing them. They had no respect for authority at that point in the game. What were they going to do to them, send them to Nam?

Also part of being on the rehab ward was being given duties to perform. At first, I was assigned duties sterilizing surgical equipment and other mundane jobs like sorting needles for eight hours.

I finally got assigned as the assistant to the ward's secretary. She was a wonderful black lady whose husband was also a patient at the hospital. I worked hard for her filing and typing stuff with my two good fingers. I got to the point where I sort of ran the office, and she was free to do other stuff.

It was a fun relationship, and she was so nice. I then got another guy assigned to the job with me, and we ended up with a lot of spare time, so this lady paid this other guy and me to paint the inside of the home she and her husband had just bought. That was an interesting project, since it was one of those extremely narrow houses that are about twelve feet wide and three or four stories high. We got it all painted in a couple of days, and she gave us about $20 each and we were happy. I'm not sure how legal that was, but it was actually good rehab.

There were a couple of guys I kept trying to make friends with who didn't want any part of life. They were Army lifers who lost both legs and could not deal with it. Both of the guys were real nice, but they didn't want to live any more. One tried to take his life by storing up pain pills and taking a bunch of them at once. The doctors pumped his stomach, leaving him miserable and still alive. One of the guys' names was Sgt. Pennington. He was drunk more than he was sober, but drinking didn't help either. *I often wonder what ever happened to those two.*

On the other hand, there were guys who dealt with the rotten mess they found themselves in and were an inspiration to many people. I remember one in particular. The word got around that there was a new guy just in from Nam who was really in bad shape, and that we should stop by to give him encouragement, since he lost both arms and both legs. A few days later, several of us went over to his ward just in time to see him up on artificial legs with special crutches, walking all over the place! We cheered him on for a while and figured out quickly that he was doing better than most of us. *What ever happened to him? I hope he did well.*

During one of my many leaves home, Patty and I bought a house (in September, 1967) in Granada Hills, at 10345 Gaynor. During my time on leave after that point, I started to remodel the hous--including getting up on the roof and fixing the flashing and other things. I was on the roof one day when my mom stopped by with the minister's wife, and she just about laid an egg when she saw me on the roof. I climbed down to make her happy, but I was happiest when I could do

things that normal people could do. Some of them took me a little longer, but I still tried, and always succeeded.

We had a wonderful neighbor in Granada Hills. His name was Art Head, who was a fireman--and was therefore home quite often. He helped me with a lot of projects, and then he and I worked a lot in his garage building a dune buggy and fixing cars. He was quite a guy and a good friend. He thought me how to drink coffee by the barrels.

During this time I was also trying to gain back some of the skills I had lost. Because of the nerve damage to my right hand I could no longer hold a pencil, so needless to say I couldn't write. For a while I tried to use my left hand; but that was hopeless, so Patty spent a lot of time when I was home on leave teaching me how to hold a pencil, and at least slowly printing big letters. After a while I found that if I curled my left thumb just a little, I could apply enough pressure to hold the pencil. After months of practices, I got back to where I was before I was injured. *This doesn't mean I can write any better than before I was wounded, but it isn't any worse.*

It was about at this time, ten months after the big bang day in Nam, that the doctors called me into a conference and said I was doing quite well, but gave me a long list of surgeries they could do to help me. I listened politely, and when they were finished, I said, "NOT INTERESTED, let me out of here." They sent me home for 30 days while they processed my discharge/retirement papers.

After I came back from the leave of absence, the Army put me through a medical check up to see how bad I still was, and to determine my VA disability. The test showed that I was 120% disabled, according to the VA handbook, with special awards for severed nerves, loss of part of a finger and the massive amount of scars I had. I said okay, but just let me out of here! I finally went down for my discharge meeting with the Major in charge of retirement on the 14th of March, 1968, at 10:00. He went over all of the papers, and had me signing stuff until I forgot how to spell my own name. *It was still hard to write, but I could have cared less!*

He then showed me my fancy retirement paper, which I could hang on the wall. It said, "Specialist 4th class Kenneth R. Wiley Jr. is retired from the United States Army". He then asked me if there was anything he could do for me. For once in my life I "had a pair" and said, "Sir, during training I was given Sergeant E-5 stripes, and over in Nam I had all of the responsibilities of that rank. I thought I should at least be retired at that rank." Much to my surprise, he told me it was no problem, and my new certificate would be mailed within a week or two. He was good to his word, and I thank him from the bottom of my heart. It has never made any difference in the actual retirement pay I get, since the VA pays that; but it gave me great peace of mind.

And with that, I went back to the ward, changed into civilian clothes, and was out of there by 11:30--a free man! Well, not exactly. I was still a pretty pathetic excuse for a man or a human. I still probably didn't weigh 100 pounds. I had left for Nam a muscular 170 pounds, and now could hardly even lift my arms. I knew then it was going to be a life-long struggle to always get better, always having to deal with the ever-present pain. *Boy was I right!*

Life After the Army

After I got out of the Army I went back to school, first at Valley Junior College and then to CSUN. I wasn't ready to go back to work at that point, and I thought I needed more education to have a better career. I was too weak physically, and mentally beat down to the point where I wasn't ready for a job.

After several semesters at CSUN, I got fed up with the constant protesting in the classrooms over black rights and ending the war in Vietnam. I gave them the right to sound off and complain, but when they blocked school doors so I could not attend classes, and when I spoke out in classroom discussions, only to be told I was full of you-know-what, and that I was probably one of those baby killers, I decided my full-time college days were over. I didn't want to, and couldn't, deal with "do-gooders" any more.

Shortly after deciding to quit school, I was in the college cafeteria having lunch one day talking to Patty's cousin, Cheri Ringold, about how I felt. She said she would talk to her dad about my situation. A few days later, I got a call saying that I had a job interview at Litton Data Systems if I wanted it. Well, I guess from what I was told later, the job was a lock, and I was very happy to be starting on a career on Feb. 3rd, 1969. I was still wearing a big metal brace, which kept my drop foot from falling down, but I quickly got tired of that and hung it up in the garage.

I spent a lot of time walking in front of mirrors trying to figure out how to walk without a serious limp and always looking like I needed help. I did figure that out, and the brace stayed in my garage until 1998 when I moved to Idaho, and that was one of the first things in the trash.

Over the years since the Army, I have had a very successful career as a software system designer and system integrator. Ironically, the most successful systems I work on were automated Artillery systems for the Army.

The first year or so after the Army, I wished so many times that they had taken my legs, which hurt so bad all the time and were useless. At night I couldn't sleep because of the pain. I couldn't sleep on my right hip for more than a few minutes because of where it was broken. I couldn't sleep on my back or stomach because my drop foot couldn't take the pressure. I could only really sleep on my left side, and after I lay down for a while, my legs started to ache and throb from all of the injured tissue and bad blood circulation.

I also had a lot of problems with my fingers and hands. I'd catch my shortened left finger on something and break it where the joint had been. I did that so many times it stopped healing back together again. The nerve damage to my right hand caused me to get my little finger caught on things, since I could not feel where it was. I burned it good several times, and I used to get it caught on my pants pocket when I tried to get the keys out of my pocket. I solved the latter problem by making a fist with my hand every time I put my right hand into my pocket.

Slowly but surely, I just learned to live with the problems; and once a week for many years, Patty would remove pieces of shrapnel that came to the surface. I kept very active at work and home, because an active mind doesn't have time to hurt.

At night I still hurt like heck, but I have learned to take it in stride 99% of the time. I do get ticked off on occasion, but I normally use my time awake in the middle of the night to put everything in perspective and reflect on what excitement tomorrow holds for me.

Patty and I decided to start a family shortly after I started work at Litton; and August 24, 1970, Jennifer Lee Wiley was born at the Granada Hills hospital. As expected, she was a beautiful child and such a joy. Here biggest problem was she always wanted to be read to. 2 PM or 2 AM--she

didn't care--she just wanted to be read to! Luckily she got over that, and quickly learned to read herself.

In July of 1972, we moved to Northridge California about three blocks from where I grew up. It was a wonderful house with all sorts of space to do things. The house had a pool, a large room for a pool table, badminton court, basketball court and all sorts of yard. Patty and I decided to put our money into the house rather than other forms of entertainment; so as the kids got older, they would bring kids home and entertain them there rather than run around. The plan actually worked, as later in life the kids always had friends over.

In the early part of 1972 we decided that the time was right to have a second child. As a result on January 25, 1973, Robert Kenneth Wiley was born at Granada Hills Hospital. He was a fairly big boy, and because of a blood mismatch between Patty and me, Bobby was quite jaundiced. To help his little body get rid of the poison, they placed him under florescent lights in a tiny little bed. He was there for three days, and it was so sad to watch and not be able to hold him. Patty was even discharged from the hospital, and we had to leave Bobby in there an extra day. He got over that, and has never slowed down since then.

Despite all of my medical problems, what was important came into focus through my wonderful and full life with Patty and my two great kids. But in November of 1985, fate took another bad turn. Patty was diagnosed with breast cancer. The night the phone call came saying it was cancer, my son Bobby, then 12, said something that proved to be very insightful. He said, "The fun is over, life will never be the same again." It was so true in many ways.

Her battle with cancer made my problems seem pretty trivial. About six months later she was given a clean bill of health, and sent on her way; but cancer always hangs over a survivor's head, and it was a constant worry and concern.

During this time we were jogging together with Bobby and Jennifer until my legs just couldn't take any more pounding. And then in 1990 she said that she had another lump, but that this was only a cyst. I really started to worry, but she was stubborn and didn't want to do anything about it. Well, the "cyst" grew to be about the size of a lemon before she would go do anything--in May of 1991--and then it was really too late. She did have Chemo and a mastectomy, and again was give a clean bill of health, but as I was getting ready to go to the 25th year reunion of the 1st platoon, she told me it was back. She just knew, and she would never do anything to fight it again. She just wanted to die with grace and dignity.

At her request I still went to the reunion, knowing that she was dying. A month later she started to really slip fast. By the middle of November, she was confined to her recliner in the family room.

As she was failing, one memorable evening occurred on November 20th, 1992. That was our 27th wedding anniversary; and despite her failing health, she wanted to celebrate it as a family. She had not been eating much at all, but for some reason requested that we go get BBQ ribs and chicken at Rosie's BBQ and bring them home. While Jennifer and I were at Rosie's getting dinner to take home, I asked Jennifer to run over to the flower shop, in the same mall area, and get a corsage for Patty to wear. When I got the food, I met Jennifer over at the flower shop. The ladies working in the shop did a beautiful job of creating the corsage on short notice. When we got home, I pinned it on the tan zip-up sweatshirt that Patty was wearing, and we proceeded to pig out on Rosie's BBQ. It was a night of constantly trying to keep my composure, but I wasn't always successful. I'm not even successful today when I think about that night, but it is a wonderful memory of our last anniversary together--one that I will never forget!

Patty died January 17th, 1993 at 7:30 in the evening, at home where the kids and I had taken care of her. Her mom and dad had just gotten back from having dinner, and I was on the phone talking to my sister Diane, when I felt I had to go check on Patty. When I walked into the room, I could see she was going. The kids and I were by her side, along with her mom and dad, when

she slipped away. I had my hand on her chest and felt the last beat of her heart. All the pain and suffering was over for her. She was free.

To deal with my loss I got involved with kayaking in the ocean near the beach house that we had bought in Ventura. First long-distance kayaking (20 miles a day) and later on, surfing the waves in white-water kayaks. I chose this sport because my legs were useless at trying to do any sport, although I have done quite a bit of rock climbing since then. The kayaking turned out to be a wonderful tonic to cure my aching heart and even help my pain. I also met a wonderful friend, Greg Fate, who was a great support to me.

Shortly after Patty died, I found out that my left knee was pretty torn up from all the walking on a misaligned left leg, plus my drop foot had slipped on the stairs at the beach house and I had fallen down the stairs just before Patty got real bad. Not only did the knee need to be fixed with a scope, but they also wanted to straighten my left leg so they could eventually put in an artificial knee in a few years, since it was almost worn out.

I had the knee fixed, and that was a snap, so I decided to go ahead and have the leg straightened, which was a disaster. The surgery reactivated the bone infection in my leg that I had fought while in the Army hospitals. Once you have bone infection it never goes away. It just lies there dormant, waiting for exposure to air to once again trigger the fight to save the leg.

I told the doctor before the surgery he should remove these two large pieces of shrapnel when he straightened my leg; but oh no, he knew better. Well, about two months after the leg was straightened, I went to the doctor to ask about the lump on my knee just above the cast. He drew fluid out of the lump, and I saw the puss come oozing out into the syringe. The doctor's face turned as white as a sheet. I knew what it meant, and so did he. The doctor was extremely upset; and I had tears in my eyes, because we knew the battle had just begun.

Another seven months and eight or nine related surgeries later, doctors felt the infection was gone, but I was to stay on the antibiotics another six months. The month before I was to get off of the antibiotics, I broke my leg kayaking on some big waves and had to be hauled to the hospital by ambulance. You see, the bone never really healed because of the surgery and subsequent infection. The doctor had just told me to take it easy and it will heal with time. "Take it easy" and I have never gotten along, so I was out there enjoying life to the fullest when my kayak (full of water) was bounced off the back of my leg by a wave as I was getting out of the water. Now that smarted!

It was funny in some ways when I broke my leg with the kayak. After the kayak hit my leg I crawled up onto the rocky beach right in front of a house where there were three guys sitting there drinking beer. I sat down on the beach looking out towards the ocean trying to figure out what to do, and one of them yelled, "Are you all right?" I turned and said I had broken my leg. The guy said, "Right now?" and I responded "Yes." He came over and sat down next to me, and looked at my pitiful looking leg that has more scars then I care to think about. The guy said in a very calm voice, "Man, it looks like you have done this before." Dang, I laughed hard at that one! He and his friends then called the ambulance and got my kayak out of the water.

I ran into him out in the water months later while he was surfing. I didn't recognize him; but he yelled at me, "Hey, are you the guy who broke your leg out here?" (I was in the same kayak.) We talked and laughed for quite a while. *Well at least until the next wave came in.*

There was now more surgery on the pathetic left leg, which probably should have been amputated 28 years earlier. The first surgery was just to set the leg. The second surgery was to set the leg again and put in a bone graft. My doctor then put me on home IV antibiotics for six weeks, so I had to give myself antibiotics four times a day, including when I was at work. A couple of months later I was back in the kayaks, and then the leg held up pretty well for a while.

Another year on oral antibiotics and the doctor said he thought the bone infection was in remission, but wanted me to continue to take antibiotics for the rest of my life. I looked at him and said, "I doubt that," and told him that was enough!

During the time period of the leg ordeal came the earthquake of 1994. As strange as it may seem, it occurred one year to the day after Patty died. It hit at 4:35 in the morning on January 17th, 1994. The first thing I knew I was being tossed out of bed and onto the floor, where a TV fell into my lap. Since I still had a cast on my leg and was on crutches, I just sat there until the earthquake stopped, and then started to extract myself from underneath the TV. About that time, Bobby came running into the bedroom to see if I was all right; but he had not heard my warning to put on shoes, and he had walked in the glass from all of the broken picture frames that fell in the hall. We worked our way out to the kitchen, where the refrigerator was blocking the door and the cabinets were emptied all over the floor. In the play room, the 1200-pound pool table had shifted to one side of the room and the key to the locked security door had been shaken off its hook and was nowhere to be found, so Bobby helped me out through the garage.

Bobby and I went around to the neighbors who were standing in the street, telling them to go shut off their water and gas. If they didn't know how to do it, we did it for them. There were a lot of scared people around, and there was a lot of destruction. We could see fires going in the distances, but none in our area.

As soon as Bobby knew I was out and all right, he took off and went to Bob and Betty's to see if they were all right. They had some damage--but nothing serious, and they were not hurt.

An hour or so after the earthquake, Jennifer and George showed up at the house in Northridge to see if we were all right. It was good to be together as a family and sit back and see what was going to happen next.

Late that afternoon, we decided to go up to the house in Ventura and see how that faired; and try to get some bottled water and batteries, since our area was all sold out. It was sort of a spooky trip, in that we were still having good aftershocks; plus when it turned dark, there were no lights on anywhere. There was so much damage all around; and when we got to the beach house we could turn on the TV there, and for the first time found out how wide-spread and serious the damage was. The trip back to Northridge that night was very quiet, since it was around 7:30--which was the time Patty had died one year earlier. There were a lot of tears in the car, but no one said much.

Jennifer and George stayed with us for a few days, until services had been restored and it was safe to go back into their apartment. During that time, Jennifer, George and I slept in the family room. I was taking some strong pain medication at the time, so I was enjoying the whole experience. We could hear a rumble in the distance, and I would gleefully yell out, "Here comes another one!" We would then all hold our breath to see if it was a big one or a little one. We actually did a lot of laughing those nights, but not much sleeping.

The bottom line was that no one in the family was hurt--but the Northridge house did take a serious hit. There was $70,000 in damage. Bobby and I fixed a lot of the damage ourselves, but we also had about $45,000 of work done by a company that was really a rip off. We ended up having to redo a lot of their work, but they had already dissolved as a company before I could get anything fixed. Live and learn!

After that time, I continued to be active in kayaking and rock climbing until 1997; when through some weird circumstances I met this lady named Dianne Nicholas through my brother over the Internet. They met in a Graves' Disease support group on-line and had become good friends, so I started to write to her as a friend sending jokes and stuff (this is a different kind of "stuff"). Then one day I found out this lady was not married. I immediately wrote her a letter with a completely different tone and sparks started to fly. About a month later I traveled to Idaho on my way to a

business trip in Indiana, and at that time decided she was the one I wanted to spend my life with. I stopped to visit her on my way back from Indiana, and we later decided we would be married July 4, 1998.

I had worked at Litton for over 29 years and thoroughly enjoyed almost every minute. Of course, a job wouldn't be a job without some frustrating times, but there weren't many. I rose through the ranks from a paper pusher to a computer programmer, to a systems designer, to a technical manager and then back to a system software designer and integrator. Actually I had a lot of different titles depending on the time of day since I worked on many projects at the same time. I was considered one of the best at what I did and in my eyes was treated very handsomely by Litton for my effort. I worked on the design of numerous Artillery systems for the Army, Marines and many foreign governments. I was a system integration person on the communications system now used by NATO. I basically had a lot of fun things to do and worked with a lot of great people.

I loved my work, but after almost 30 years of it, I just walked away from it in on May 1, 1998; and moved to Idaho and got married. That was one the best moves I ever made. I hate to be away from the kids and grandkids, but it is a whole different life for me here--one that I love and cherish. I have such a loving and caring wife who lets me still feel the emotions of the past while we enjoy our life together today. I'm a lucky guy.

The physical pain hasn't stopped with the change in location and I still can't sleep at night, but I am at peace with the Lord and my past because I have found another angel, Dianne, to help me through life.

Back in 1993 when I had my knee and leg fixed, the doctor happened to glance down at the X-ray, which also showed my left ankle, and he said at that time there wasn't much left of the ankle joint. Well, eight years and several snowboard accidents later, I finally decided to have it looked at since I was barely able to walk anymore. It turned out that all of the years of walking on the bum left leg had worn all of the cartilage away in my ankle, and that all of the pain I had trying to walk wasn't in my head, it was indeed in my ankle.

So here I sit now having had my ankle fused together. At least the bone infection boogie didn't visit again after this surgery. I did have a lot of prayers going for me. I also know at this point in my life that I will continue to have to have surgeries like this the rest of my life. And the pain goes on! Wasn't there a song like that?

We have lived an active life since I moved here, in between her four surgeries for Graves' eye disease, her five foot surgeries, and my hernia and ankle fusion surgeries. We rock climb, ride bikes, do snow sports and paddle kayaks. I even do some whitewater kayaking, although it is not the same thrill to me as ocean kayaking. I have been up to some pretty nasty Class IV whitewater (well nasty for a man my age) with the help of my good friend Greg Fate. *This is the same Greg Fate from Ventura. By some quirk of fate (ha), he got a job in Idaho a year and a half after I moved here. Isn't that strange, that at this point in life with all that has happened to me, the last name of my best friend here is Fate.*

I didn't write this story for someone to say how tough I am or to feel sorry for me. I have had a wonderful life compared to most, and through the pain have learned to really appreciate what is important in life. Just imagine, though, all of the other veterans out there who returned home a physical mess like me because they did what they thought was right, or what they thought was required of them. Most never ask for anything and don't expect anything. Most never talk about it because people either badmouth them for having fought in Vietnam or give a trite answer like, "you should have known better". I've heard a lot of stories that try to ease other peoples' guilty minds for the way they have treated the Vietnam vets, but the fact remains that we are thought of by many in a very bad light, even though we have never been able to stop fighting. Stop fighting to just get out of bed in the morning because of the pain. Just fighting during the day to walk 100

feet before the pain gets too great to continue. Just fighting to sleep at night, because of the constant pain and suffering, both physically and mentally.

This story is also not to make me look like a hero, because I was not in any sense of the word. I was a typical young man for most of my tour in Vietnam, thinking it will never happen to me. In fact, I spent most of my tour not even thinking, period. The real heroes are the Lt. Hellers and Sgt. Joneses who dedicated their life for that period of time to make us the best soldiers they could make us, and to try to keep us alive. The heroes are those young men who didn't return home. Those heroes are the guys who some how cleared an LZ so that the helicopter could land to get me to the hospital before I died. The heroes are the helicopter pilots who routinely risked their lives to save others while putting their life in jeopardy. There were a lot of heroes, but I was just a soldier. A lucky one, who has been able to live a very full life, with wonderful support from some very special angels. I often think about those who haven't been able to live such a good life.

Concluding Remarks

I have been asked numerous times over the years what I felt about the war and the protestors. Most of my life I shrugged my shoulders and said I don't know. In some ways I really didn't know and did not want to share with others since on the few occasions I did I got verbally slapped up side the head so I was very guarded about saying anything. Dianne has encouraged me to talk about Vietnam emotions and writing this story helped place a lot of my feelings in prospective.

I do think that the Vietnam War was a huge mistake, but I can't change the fact that it happened. I can't fight facts of history that point to bad decisions, although I think the facts over the years have been distorted greatly in both directions. The one fact that does remain is that a lot of plain, ordinary, everyday, garden variety young men like me died or were severely wounded and too many people blame them rather than the North Vietnamese, the U.S. politicians, the Chinese, the Russians and so on. It is easier to place the blame on the men that fought and tried to do what they thought was right when the true responsibility is difficult to isolate. They say that World War II was a "Just War," but the guys who died in Vietnam doing what was asked of them are just as dead as those who died in WW II. The public or historians will never set a Vietnam Veteran free from guilt.

What do I feel about all those who protested the war? Most of them were no different than the guys who fought the war. Most of them were only separated by a very fine line from being in the service. The fine line was defined by age, sex, intellect, upbringing and time. Many of those in the Army were protesting the war in their own way. Many of the protestors were protesting because they didn't want to have to make the decision about going to Vietnam at some point in the future, or have a loved one put in that position. Who knows, under slightly different circumstances, I might have been one of those protestors myself. I certainly don't hold anything at all against most of the protestors, since one of the things I believe we have the right to here in America is free speech. My wife and most of the people I associate with these days wereprotestors of the war, and I hold no grudges against any of them. I know what most of them would have done if they had been placed in my shoes. They would now be writing a story about their experiences in Vietnam.

I'm not saying that the protestors were more intelligent than those that were in the Army. Some of the most intelligent men I have ever met were in the Army. Not only were they of the same intellectual level as the protestors, they knew more about life and what a gift it is. Some protestors were blessed with the means to go to college and had the desire to stay with it as long as the war lasted. I'll bet some of them are still going to school. *I just had to throw that in.*

I also have to say that there was a core of protestors I can forgive, but will never forget, for the thoughts and deeds that they did during the Vietnam War. They actively did things to cause guys in Vietnam death, pain and heartache. These were overt actions of siding with the North Viennese and condemning US solders directly. Enough said!

Special Mention of Special People

It is really hard to put into words how much Jennifer and Bobby have added to my life, and how much they meant to Patty. Patty and I debated for a long time whether we wanted to bring kids into the nasty world back in the early 70s and finally decided that we wanted to, since we had such a marvelous relationship with our parents. Our parents were also our best friends. When we got old, we also wanted someone to take care of us (ha!). Having Jennifer and Bobby was the best decision we could have ever made.

Jennifer was born August 24, 1970. I sure appreciate her being born on a nice decade boundary so it easier for me to calculate how old she is. At the time of her birth, Patty and I lived on Gaynor Street in Granada Hills, California. Patty and I had just gone to bed late the evening of August 23, when all of a sudden I heard Patty say, "Whoa"! I then heard a whoosh, and I was all wet. Her water had broken, and the final phase of an event that would change our lives forever was put into motion. Before we went to the hospital we sat around for several hours until the labor pains started to get closer together and the doctor said it was time to go. Jennifer was born the following morning around 9:30; and she came out breach, which scared the heck out of the doctors, since they detected it too late to do anything about it. She did make it all right, but as a result Patty was sure sore for quite a while, and Jennifer was bent with her legs at a 90-degree angle from her body, which is where they stayed for the first few months of her life. You would put a blanket over her, and it would stick up like a pup tent. She was a joy from the beginning, and obviously took after her mom, since she was just so smart and so cute.

While growing up, Jennifer was such a blessing! She was always at the top of her classes academically, and was so artistically creative in so many ways. She was valedictorian of her high school class and graduated from college with high honors. People today talk about all of the problems they have raising teenage kids and how awful it is, and I have to be honest and say I never considered it a problem with either kid. I was so lucky in that my job allowed me to be there with Patty at most of Jennifer's school activities that were open to parents. That was always very important to both Patty and me, and I believe that helped make those years fun and memorable. I'm so glad I don't have to say, "I wish I would have taken the time when they were young." I did take the time--thanks to Patty's coaxing--and it has made my life so much fuller!

Jennifer was also a gifted athlete; and was involved in volleyball, soccer, and track & field. Volleyball was her primary sport, and was she good! She got started playing volleyball in Junior High and continued through high school and college. Jennifer was an extremely strong outside hitter, and always surprised everyone with her leaping ability and the power of her kills. She made "All League" all three years in high school, and made the Los Angeles High School all-city team her senior year. As with the academic activities, Patty and I tried to always be there for all of her sports activities, which at times meant traveling all over Southern California. It was so much fun to watch her and enjoy watching the kids she played with and against. We saw so many kids grow up over the years, and I still know some of them and their parents. For many of the events, Patty was the unofficial team mother; and she prepared drinks and snacks for the members of the team to have after the game. It was like one big family.

Jennifer met George Kovacs through volleyball, since he "called lines" and help set up for games. George automatically fitted into the family, and right from the beginning could trade barbs with Patty--which Patty enjoyed to no end. Jennifer and George got married on November 20th, 1993. If you have been taking notes while reading this story, you have already noted that George and Jennifer were married on the same date as Patty and I were married. They were also married in the same church. That day was one of the happiest and also one of the saddest I have ever experienced. I was so happy that Jennifer and George had found each other and were heading down the path of life together. At the same time, it was extremely hard emotionally; since Patty had talked on several occasions while she was dying about how sad it was for her that she was not going to be there to see her kids get married and see them have kids. That was always a big

dream of hers to see that happen. Bobby and I both had to leave the reception for a while to compose ourselves, but it was a beautiful wedding that Jennifer did a wonderful job of organizing.

Since I originally wrote this story, things have changed in Jennifer's life. Jennifer is expecting another child in a few months, which we can hardly wait for. Dianne and I have already planned the trip down to see the new arrival right after it is born. What a joy that will be!

Jennifer and her husband George already have two wonderful boys named Geordan and Jeremy. Geordan is my oldest grandson and he, like his mother, is a very gifted child at both sports and school. He is a ball of energy to be around, and Dianne and I love to do things with him and go watch him compete in various sports and participate in his school activities. It is a job, though, keeping up with him! We also love Jeremy, who is the next grandson, and who is also very special. Like his brother he is athletic and intelligent. He is a real special kid and has a wonderful twinkle in his eye that makes you just want to hug him. Like Geordan, he also has a great sense of humor, which must have been inherited from both George and Patty. Jeremy and Geordan together are a joy, and are constantly on the go. Jennifer and George have their hands full raising these boys, but do a wonderful job of teaching and guiding them.

Jennifer hasn't surprised me (as Bobby has) in her parenting skills, since she was always destined to be a good mother; but she continuously amazes me with all she does for everyone, always leaving herself to last. When I ask her why she does so much she often replies, "Because that is what mom did." She quit her job as a third grade teacher so that she could be a full-time mom and devote herself to teaching and raising her kids, and taking care of George. This meant a number of lean years for them, but Jennifer and George have dedicated their lives to their kids. Jennifer also freely gives of her time at school, church and other activities that the kids are involved in. She never stops, and is always thinking of other people and what they need. George is also deeply involved with the kids through his coaching and just being there for the kids' activities. I am blessed to have their whole family in my life.

Patty was several months pregnant with Bobby when we moved to Northridge, California on July 4th weekend of 1972. The house on Paso Robles was about three blocks from where I had grown up, and where my parents still lived when we moved to the Paso Robles house. They moved to Yucca Valley a year later, and we always kidded about how they moved to get away from us.

Around 2 AM in the morning of January 25, 1973, Patty woke me up and said she had been having contractions for a while and thought it was time to get ready to go to the hospital. I called my parents--who were going to stay with Jennifer when Patty went to the hospital--and they were to our house inside a half an hour. In typical Patty style, she wanted to take a shower and get all dressed up to go to the hospital to have a baby, so I sat around with my parents for awhile, trying not to be to nervous.

Her labor was even shorter than with Jennifer, and he was born around 8:30 in the morning of the 25th of January. They called me in to see Bobby just as they were bringing him out of the delivery room; and I got to see this cute, blue, bloody and hairy little baby boy! The memory of that still brings a tear of joy to my eyes. Patty was so happy, and felt so much better than after Jennifer, since Bobby came out the right way; although the doctors had great concerns prior to the delivery about possible complications. There weren't any complications, except that the first time they brought the baby to Patty, it wasn't Bobby. Close call!

Bobby developed a good case of jaundice, which required that he stay in the hospital a day longer than Patty. That was really hard to leave the hospital without him, knowing that he was being kept in a small glass enclosure and was being exposed to special lights to leach the jaundice out of his system. The jaundice was caused by a miss-match in Patty's and my blood types, but was never life-threatening to Bobby. He was just born with a lot of hair, and a strong yellow complexion.

I think Bobby was running from the moment he came out of the hospital. I have never seen a much more active--in a good way--baby. He didn't take naps after a few months, and started walking/running at nine months of age. Patty truly had her hands full; but he was a joy, and loved to do chores around the yard all of his life. *His bedroom was never clean, but the yard was*!

In school, Bobby did extremely well. All through school he received good grades; although it was a battle at times, since that wasn't his priority and he, like his dad, had a big problem with his attention span. His schooling was also hurt by the same bussing that Jennifer went through. He was in second grade at the time, and was quite advanced for that grade. When he was bussed, he was put into a class of 1st and 2nd graders where the teacher catered to the 1st graders and to the kids who could not speak much English. As a result, he was left on his own to learn, and was even required to help the 1st graders. No matter how much we helped, we couldn't make up for the time lost at school. That was a critical time in his education, and we felt he never recovered from losing that period of time in his education.

Bobby did graduate from High School with about a 3.8 grade point average, and many of the classes were Advanced Placement classes. Bobby getting through high school on time, and with all the classes that were required, was due in large part to Bobby himself. The counselors kept giving him the wrong classes and bad guidance, to the point where several semesters he even had to go around and beg teachers to let him into their class, because the counselors weren't doing anything to help him.

Bobby attended California Lutheran University for a year and a half. His last semester there was at the time when Patty was dying, so his thoughts were not on school. Like Jennifer, he preferred to be home helping me take care of Patty and being with her during her final days, since we didn't know how long she would live. At times, Bobby would sit there all night long rubbing Patty's hand talking to her, just trying to get her to say something just one more time. Then for a number of nights, he and Jennifer would sleep on a bed next to Patty's with me in a bed on the opposite side from the kids. That is the way we spent the nights--finally weeks. I remember one night she woke up just enough to grab the kid's hands and tell them she loved them, and that she was going to be all right. Tough memories, but ones that I cherish!

Bobby started playing soccer at around 6 years old, and I was almost always involved with coaching his teams. He was a great soccer player, and one year scored a high of 35 goals. He was invited to play on club teams, which he did one summer; but soccer wasn't his passion. He just had fun playing, but didn't like when it got too serious.

At the age of 12, Jennifer's teacher Mr. Burk asked Jennifer if she wanted to run the Father's Day 10K in Manhattan Beach. Jennifer asked Bobby if he wanted to run in the race, and they both decided to do it. They trained a few times, but really didn't have any experience in distance running. Both of them did real well with Bobby coming in second in his age group, and Bobby was hooked on endurance sports. After that he would disappear on his bike at the age of 12, and he would ride all over the valley and into the hills. I was concerned with him riding alone, so through a friend at work, I got him hooked up with the San Fernando Bicycle club. There he learned to ride with a group, and started his love for riding and made some wonderful friendships. For most of his teenage years he rode his bike further than I drove my car. He had an opportunity to do track riding, and on many occasions was approached about joining racing teams (and later in life about riding professionally); but to him it was a fun sport, not a lifestyle. A number of guys he rode with are still competing in the Tour De France.

Bobby was also a great distance runner during his teenage years. He was not only good, but developed some wonderful friendships. This was due in great part to his habit of always treating other runners with respect. He always went around before a race shaking hands with everyone in the race. He normally won every race, and then he stayed at the finish line and congratulated every runner as they crossed the finish line. We were always so proud of that. His races were the 800-meter, the 1600-meter (almost a mile), and the 3200 meter. In most dual meet

competitions he ran and won all three events. He was also the two-time West Valley champion in the 1600-meter (he held the record for a number of years) and won the 3200-meter in his senior year. In his senior year he came in third in the city 1600-meter; and qualified for the state meet, where he just ran out of gas after a long season of racing, and didn't make the finals. He was equally as successful in Cross country racing, but he preferred the track racing.

As with Jennifer's teams, Patty almost always showed up with snacks for all of the athletes. Patty was always there to cheer on every last runner, no matter what their level of capability. When each kid came to get their snack she talked to them about how they did in their race, and told them how proud she was of them for being out there trying their hardest. This had a major impact on many of the young kids on Jennifer and Bobby's teams. During the spring of 1991 when she was going through all of her Chemo therapy, all of the kids on Bobby's Track and Field team signed and gave her a mother's day card, thanking her for the years of support and snacks. That was real emotional for us when they all walked over to present her with the card; and none of them knew what Patty was going through, but they just wanted to show their love and give her their thanks for everything she had done.

As with Jennifer, a major event has transpired in Bobby's life that should be added to this story. Bobby and his wife Arlene had a beautiful baby girl that they named Brielle Patricia Wiley. Of course she is intelligent and beautiful, as well as being so very special to Dianne and me. I couldn't be prouder of her, as well as being proud of Bobby and Arlene.

When Bobby was growing up I thought it would be a miracle if he ever got married. He was a free sprit and didn't like to be tied down; and furthermore, outwardly said that he hated kids and would never have any. His mother always said he would do fine. She was so right! Since Bobby bought his first house in 1998 he has changed so much, and has become such a wonderful young man. After Patty died, he spent a good portion of his spare time taking care of her parents and doing things for them. He would have them over and make breakfast for them. He would mow their lawn and do any chores that they needed done. Betty, Patty's mom, always asked me why he does all of those things for us. She said young men his age usually don't take the time to care about older people; but Bobby did care, and Bobby added so much to their final days--and was with both of them when they died.

After he got married to Arlene and Brielle was born, I saw another transformation that I still marvel at to this day. Bobby is so very active in taking care of Brielle and doing things with her. Bobby takes Brielle and their dog Taz on their nightly walks. Bobby takes Brielle along with him to the bike shop. Bobby and Arlene taking Brielle shopping everywhere they go. Bobby feeds Brielle, bathes her, dresses her, combs her hair, plays with her and is always there for both Arlene and Brielle. Patty was so right. He has become a wonderful man, husband and father. I still marvel at this metamorphosis of Bobby, but smile and just say what a good job Patty did raising him.

I have never asked how Bobby and Arlene met, but I do remember the first time I met Arlene. Bobby and I were working underneath his truck fixing the roll pan. This young gal drove up and Bobby started to talk to her, and that was the last I saw of him for a number of hours. Arlene has been such a blessed addition to our family, and is a wonderful mother. She is trying so hard to do everything right and give Brielle all the love she never got growing up. She does this despite being constantly in a lot of pain due to arthritis. She always welcomes Dianne and me to stay in her house when we are down there visiting. We have two wonderful places to stay down there, and everyone makes us feel so much at home.

Jennifer and Bobby's mom would be so proud of both of them, but I am negligent in that I hardly ever tell them that. After taking an emotional beating in their young adult life with their mother dying and them helping take care of her while she was dying, they have matured way beyond my wildest dreams. Bobby, Arlene, Jennifer and George certainly were there for me after Patty's death, and helped me through some pretty dark days. I can never thank them enough, and of

course I will never stop worrying about them. Even with them all grown up and doing so well, they are still my little kids.

I could write so much on all of the wonderful times I have had with Bobby and Jennifer, but that would take so many books. I will have to leave that for another time. I just thank God that I have had a wonderful life of enjoying them and look forward to many more years being a part of their lives. I especially want to thank them for accepting Dianne into their lives and opening their doors to us whenever we are in town. They are special kids that I love dearly.

I could also write volumes of what my mom, dad, sister and brother have meant to me over the years; but I don't have enough tears to shed while I'm writing thanking them for everything. Thankfully, my parents got to live a full and long life, and I was able to tell them in person how much they meant to me. We don't always get an opportunity to do that.

My brother and sister, during a lot of my life, were off trying to make their lives work (as was I), which is a full time effort; so I lost close contact with them for many years. During the period of time when Patty was dying, my sister reached out to me and was a tremendous support to Patty and me. She would be there on a constant basis on the phone, just to say hi and see if I wanted to talk. This meant a lot and was of such a great help. She also arranged to get herself, my brother, and me together for several unforgettable vacation trips together to Canada.

My brother was a major support while I was trying to recover from Patty's death, and thanks to the new wonderful world of e-mail, I became very close to him. We have exchanged thousands of letters over the last 8 years. He also showed me that being there for our parents was extremely important; and I am so glad he did, because we didn't really have that much more time with them. When he and I got together it was just like the time we went skin diving in the Florida Keys for two weeks. We were crazy and wild doing things like rock climbing and kayaking--acting just like teenagers. He was instrumental in me redefining myself and once again becoming a part of the living. Of course, I can never thank him enough for introducing me to Dianne.

Patty's parents, Bob and Betty Moore, were also a major part of my life even after Patty died. When I got remarried to Dianne they accepted her with open arms, and we were able to spend a lot of time visiting with them on our trips to California. They were wonderful people who I have shared so much of my life with. They were probably the best friends that Patty and I had for most of our married life. When they died, it was as if my own parents had died. Betty died on a Friday after Bobby had helped her get ready for bed. He was over there helping them, since Betty had not been feeling well. I flew down to be with the family the morning after she died, and Bob told me he was ready to go now that she had died. He had liver cancer, and had been holding on so as not to leave her alone. The Monday following her death, Bob started having tremendous pain; so Jennifer arranged for a Hospice care to come out and control his pain. They came out; and Bobby, Jennifer and I were with him when he died the following morning. I really felt that was the end of an era for me that I always thought would go on forever.

Dianne has been such a wonderful and caring wife. She has helped me find all sorts of new things in life and experience many things for the first time. I can't begin to thank her for all of her understanding, love and editing of this story. I plan to have many more good years with her riding our bikes across new areas of the United States and visiting with family and friends all over the United States. She has been keeping me young and active despite all of the surgeries and tragedies that have beset both of us in the last four years. She has been with me helping to take care of my parents when they had Alzheimer's and many other old age infirmities. We were there together taking care of her dad when he slowly passed away, after living five years after they said he wouldn't live more then a few months after his heart attack. That was a real special time to be there, and to be able to help ease his pain while he was dying.

As I said at the beginning of this story, I have lived a wonderful life and look forward to facing many more challenges and joys with Dianne at my side.

The Platoon and Friends Before Vietnam

I include this list of members of the first platoon and what happened to them for completeness. This list came basically from Bill Wolters' book, but I thought it was needed to complete my history of being in the service. There are also names of people who were not in the 1st Platoon, but are a part of my memories of that experience.

Ainsworth, first name George.

George was from Wisconsin and was the original bad attitude. Although a likeable and funny guy, George was always mad at something or someone. Man, could he yell and turn red as a beet!

Aden, first name Larry; a.k.a. "Chandler."

Aden was a bull of a kid. Short and muscular, wide-chested, built like a bull, and strong; he was a pack mule and could carry anything. He usually walked point while on patrol. Out in front of everyone else, he was in the most dangerous position, but Larry never seemed to mind.

Anderson, first name unknown; a.k.a. "Doc."

Doc was the medic attached to the 1st Platoon who patched me up when I was wounded. He was proficient, he was caring – he had a tough job and I think it probably affected him quite a bit.

Atwood, first name Donald; a.k.a. "Don."

Don was more "worldly" than the others and always had an angle. He knew the best Scotch whiskey; he knew how to bet the horses; he had an interest in photography. He knew something about everything and could entertain people for hours. Don was a "talker" – a genuinely interesting, lovable character.

Basset, first name Jim

Jim was a quiet Georgia boy who was good friends with Burroughs during our training. He was older than your normal draftee at 26 years old. He was a nice, friendly, hard-working guy who had older parents trying to work a farm back home without him. He got out before the end of training to go home and help his parents.

Befort, first name William; a.k.a. "Sgt. B"; a.k.a. "Bill."

Bill was from Red Wing, MN. He was an enlistee–a volunteer with a three-year term and an "RA" (Regular Army) serial number. He was very intelligent, very opinionated, very likeable, very "Gung Ho."

Brooks, first name Benjamin; a.k.a. "Brooks."

Brooks hailed from rural Virginia – as close to a "Hill Billy" kid as you could find. All he wanted was to get out of the army and be a tree surgeon. He wouldn't volunteer, but he would do anything he was told.

Burroughs, first name James; a.k.a. "Jim."

Burroughs was a slight, young, southern kid from Georgia. He was a draftee, like most of them, and didn't really say too much. He was a friend of Wheeler and Go Go. Jim's father was a career Army man, and Jim was trying to live up to his Dad's expectations, to merit his praise.

Doñes, first name Nicolas; a.k.a. "Nick."

Doñes was from Harlingen, Texas – way down south by Brownsville. Nick was a short, stocky Hispanic who was pretty quiet and just did what he was told. Everyone liked Doñes.

Engeldinger, first name James; a.k.a. "Captain"; a.k.a. "Bravo 6."

Engeldinger was the company commander. He was a career army officer and he had been in Korea during the "police" action of the '50s as a Marine and liked to brag about it. He was let go by the Marines and enlisted in the Army. He was eager to prove to the recruits and his contemporaries how "tough" he was. He was not very well liked, not very well respected by the men – maybe unfairly so, but that's the way things were.

Feuerschwenger (pronounced "Fear-swinger"), first name John; a.k.a. "Alphabet."

John was another Chicago kid, a draftee, just trying to get by, like everyone else. John and Noteboom would frequent the beer hall after training hours.

Fitzgerald, first name William; a.k.a. "Fitz"; a.k.a. "Bill"

Another of the California kids from "the Valley." Bill was into drag racing and cars. He had worked at the drag strip where Brian Wilson (one of the Beach Boys) raced his car – or so he said.

Franklin, first name James.

Franklin wasn't a member of the 1st Platoon – he was in the 3rd platoon. He was from Liberal, Kansas (the original oxymoron), and was very "Gung Ho."

Gershan, first name Steve.

Gerchan was from Moline, Illinois, a friend of Nitzel and a close associate of Noteboom. When in a bar, he would spout off, "We'll fight them, won't we Art" – but it was always Art who would catch the first punch.

Gros, first name Mario; a.k.a. "Go Go."

Go Go was a Cuban-American from New York City. He was older than the rest of the platoon and had been in the army for about a year longer than those who had been drafted in the spring of 1966. When they were in training, Go Go was one of their "cadre," a training leader. Once they got "in country," Go Go was just one of the guys, although a "short-timer" compared to the rest of them. Sometimes Go Go would be on patrol with them, sometimes not.

Harris, first name Russell; a.k.a. "Russ."

A southern kid from Texas, Harris was the epitome of Texan. This is good, this is better, and Texas is the best. Harris was an oil field worker in his previous life.

Heller, first name James; a.k.a. "Lt."; a.k.a. "Akron 6."

Heller was the platoon leader when they went overseas. He was from Bethlehem, Pennsylvania. Heller was the replacement for the original platoon leader, Lt. Neely who accidentally shot himself through the leg while we were in training in Kansas. The incident was reviewed at a military hearing, as the army thought the wound was self-inflicted to keep himself out of Vietnam, but he was found not guilty. I really liked Neely, but he seemed so young and uncomfortable in his position. Neely was shipped over with the unit, but not in the role of a platoon leader.

Henke, first name Vernon; a.k.a. "Vern."

Henke was from Wisconsin and was assigned to the unit during the close of AIT training. He was quiet, and when he was off duty, he seemed to go back to his previous unit, rather than hang out with anyone in the platoon.

Hilgart, first name Richard; a.k.a. "Hilgart."

He was assigned to 1st Platoon in Vietnam as punishment for something. Somehow he had "crossed" someone, and he was going to be shown a thing or two. "Let's assign him to a line infantry unit – that will teach him." Hilgart was married and hailed from Chicago, IL, "Chi-town."

Hopkins, first name Andrew.

Hopkins was a young black man with a high disregard for authority. When the drill sergeant said "March," you could pretty well bet that Hopkins would be "loping" along. His helmet was always askew, sort of like an ill-fitting turtle shell over his head. He took a lot of heat, and the drill instructor was usually singling him out, yelling, "Hopkins! …"

Houck, first name John; a.k.a. – "Hogman."

Hogman was another of the California kids – a couple years out of high school, maybe with some college. Who knew? School wasn't something they really sat down and discussed. He came from a family that ran a trucking business.

Hoy, first name Ronald; a.k.a. "Harold."

A hippie before his time; Ron was from California; down to earth, non-adversarial, a pacifist by nature, but with a deep sense of responsibility. He was drafted; he didn't like it, but he was going to do what was asked of him. One of the platoon's original machine-gunners, you could always count on "Harold." He got his nick name when by mistake his named was called out as Harold Hoy rather that Ronald Hoy.

Huntington, first name Gary.

Gary was from Shawano, Wisconsin, and was the first to introduce Weber to Pabst Blue Ribbon beer while in a "go go" joint on a weekend pass in Manhattan, Kansas.

Johnson, first name Steven; a.k.a. "Steve."

Ah, Johnson – a rich kid from Hawaii. A super nice kid; all he wanted to do was to go home, marry the family maid, and be a minister. Money didn't faze him (I think he had all he could use); position didn't faze him; he was just a first class guy.

Jones, first name Johnnie; a.k.a. "Sarge"; a.k.a. "Jonesy."

Sergeant Jones was a career army NCO (non-commissioned officer). He joined the army in his teens and saw the end of World War II, Korea, and the "peacetime" army of the late '50s and early '60s. The Platoon was assigned to him in May of 1967, when they reported for training at Fort Riley, Kansas, and he became their mother, father, confessor, leader, and main cheerleader.

Keefe & Tomlinson.

These two were so joined at the hip that it is difficult to refer to one without the other. They were from San Francisco area, and according to them their fathers were "rich," and because of that: I spent many nights in fox holes on ambush with Keefe since he was a loner and often took the odd man out. He was from Belvedere Island in the San Francisco Bay, according to him. This is an extremely wealthy area near Tiburon. "There is no way we should be in the infantry; there has to be a mistake" was their motto.

Kreitlow, first name William; a.k.a. "Bill."

A native of Las Vegas – a diver in high school, athletic looking, and some would say better looking than most of the guys.

Loftheim, first name Dennis; a.k.a. "Lt. Loftheim."

Lt. Loftheim was a West Point graduate, a 2nd lieutenant. He was assigned to a weapons platoon but dearly wanted to lead an infantry platoon in combat. He was young, like they all were; probably 21 or 22, and rather small – maybe 5'7" – with blonde hair and glasses. Always starched uniforms – must have been the "West Point" in him.

Martin, first name Richard; a.k.a. "Martin."

Another southern kid from the Carolinas or Georgia. Usually smiling and good natured, smart in a foxy, sly way. A little "stand-offish" from the main group, not one of the main members – he would make a comment and smile.

Nitzel, first name Paul.

Paul was from Moline, IL. Very smart, quite, real down to earth – a nice guy. Someone you wouldn't mind having your daughter date. A deeper thinker than the rest of the platoon, Paul could talk about things like the gross national product or the upcoming election. This was when everyone else was talking about the horsepower of the cars they'd left behind or what they would do with their girlfriends when they got home on leave.

Noteboom, first name Arthur; a.k.a. "A.J."; a.k.a. "Boomer"; a.k.a. "Boom Boom"; a.k.a. "Art."

Art was from Minnesota – "Grey Cloud Island" – a southern suburb of the Twin Cities. He had been thrown out of high school a week or so short of graduation for riding his Harley Davidson through the hallway. The school administration had no sense of humor. If anyone would get into trouble accidentally – it was Art. Throw a chisel up in the air and try to catch it – the wrong way? That was Art. You get the picture.

Pellum, first name unknown.

Pelham, another draftee, from the mid south – Oklahoma, maybe? A likeable guy with blondish hair and a nice smile. His mom was legally blind so he was discharged after basic to go take care of his mom, according to him.

Perry, first name Eugene; a.k.a. "Sgt. Perry"; a.k.a. "Perry."

What could you say about Sgt. Eugene Perry? One of the stereotypical army NCO "regulars." Maybe not a complete alcoholic, but he surely loved to indulge. No apparent advanced education, a "southern boy," somewhat soft spoken with a drawl and slow demeanor. But he had sparkling eyes, a quick, gentle smile, and he loved to cuss the army under his breath.

Persson, first name David; a.k.a. "Dave."

Persson was another of the California kids. While others had pictures of their girlfriends in their lockers, Persson caught hell during inspections for having pictures of his old Triumph motorcycle. Not much was known about Dave's home life or family, and he never seemed to get any mail. No one wrote – no girlfriend, no mother, father, sister, brother – no one. Well, Dave, "You're in the Army now;" that's all the family you will need.

Prejean, first name Melvin.

Prejean was from Louisiana and was an assistant machine gunner. Small and slight, he was usually smiling. Rather than use a razor and shaving cream like most everyone else, Melvin would shave using a regular table knife and something called "Blue Ointment." God, did that stuff smell!

Reed, first name Kenneth.

Another native of Las Vegas – sandy red hair, freckled face, a bit of a wise guy. "I'll do it, but you're going to know that I don't like doing it, and I'm going to bitch about it all the time we are doing it." That was his normal demeanor.

Reese, first name unknown.

Reese was a smart aleck who came from Cincinnati, Ohio. He was definitely a draftee, didn't like the army, and would do whatever it took to avoid doing anything strenuous or difficult.

Rock, first name Charles; a.k.a. "Chuck"; a.k.a. "Charlie."

Rock was the RTO – radiotelephone operator. He hailed from California – Pasadena, maybe. Chuck was an OK guy. He went home on leave before they shipped out and met some chick named Denise. Christ – after that it was "Denise" this and "Denise" that.

Rose, first name Robert; a.k.a. "Rosie."

Rose was from Texas and spoke with a slow, Texan drawl except when he got mad. Then he just turned red and nothing came out of his mouth. He was an assistant machine gunner and a pretty quiet guy. Round faced, with light blue eyes.

Russ, first name Roland; a.k.a. "Poly" a.k.a. "Roly" (as in "roly poly").

A California kid, very likeable, the original nudist. Why wear anything if you're going down the hall to take a shower? Just throw a towel over your shoulder, put on a pair of sandals and swagger on down the hall. Poly wasn't a bad poker player, either. Wasn't his dad an executive at RCA or some such company? Russ didn't talk about his family much.

Saiz, first name Ronald; a.k.a. "Chili."

Ron had a twin, a brother who was in the Navy and serving on a ship off the coast of Vietnam. Chili was always smiling, always happy. He was from Denver, Colorado.

Shireman, first name Nolan; a.k.a. "The General."

Shireman was another draftee. Smaller, maybe 5'6," from Missouri, so there was an accent. He may have been a farm kid, because he knew how a "power take off" worked on a tractor. Shireman got to be a squad leader, and he would volunteer his squad for anything. He had some sort of "death wish," and every day they were on patrol in Vietnam it was, "I'm going to get killed today. I had a dream last night, and I'm going to get killed today." "Shireman, goddammit, shut up, or I'll shoot you myself," – they used to hear that a lot.

Sizemore, first name Ronald; a.k.a. "Ron."

Sizemore was another of the California kids, a real, live surfer. He had a skateboard with him during training and would do tricks going down the hall outside the platoon bay at Fort Riley. Ron had a little fold-up pipe that he smoked. He could be relied upon to do what was asked of him, but otherwise pretty much kept to himself. One thing that I remember about Sizemore is that he loved kids. At one village they talked him into trying one of the local delicacies. He ate it, much to our surprise. He sucked an egg embryo out of an egg. Raw!

Thompson, first name Thomas; a.k.a. "Tom Tom."

Thompson was from Kansas City – either Missouri or Kansas – it doesn't make any difference. He was a big kid with dark hair, kind of chubby. He was "not quite" – that's the only way to describe him – "just about, but not quite." There's nothing else to say. Over in Nam he was with the 3rd platoon.

Tucker, first name Luther; a.k.a. "Tuck."

Tucker was a black kid from Stamford, Connecticut. He was thin and smart and kept to himself, but he was a nice guy – one of the types you like to meet in life. Tuck had a pretty good handle on what he was and what made him go. As far as religion was concerned, he had tried Lutheran, Catholic, Judaism, Black Muslim, and Seventh Day Adventist – but on Sunday he would set some time aside to read his bible. He finally came down to the fact that "that's what did it" for him.

Tutwiler, first name Guy; a.k.a. "Colonel"; a.k.a. "Crooner 6."

Tutwiler was Battalion commander – in charge of four companies. The troops didn't see too much of him, unless it was the view of the bottom of his "command helicopter" as it flew overhead. His place in history would come several years after the war.

Vieth, first name Randall, a.k.a. "Lightning"; a.k.a. "Randy."

Lightning was from Wisconsin. Likeable, Midwestern, slow moving and talking – real slow moving and talking – hence the nickname "Lightning." Lightning liked to sip Southern Comfort back in the States when he had a three-day pass.

Wheeler, first name William.

Wheeler was a thin, effeminate individual from Minneapolis. His whole goal in life was to be a hair dresser, and he went on for hours, describing how his closet was perfectly arranged with his shirts, trousers, etc., all hanging on the same-color hangers and equally spaced. Wheeler definitely did not belong in the infantry – as a matter of fact, he probably didn't belong in the Army at all.

Wolf, first name George; a.k.a. "Wolfie."

George was from Russell, Kansas. He was a couple years older than the rest, married, and drove a red Pontiac convertible. George got to be a friend of Doñes.

Wolters, first name William, a.k.a. "Bill"

Bill was an easy-going Minnesota boy who loved cars and motorcycles. A good friend for life.

Zies, first name Charles; a.k.a. "Charlie."

Another California kid, Zies was the proverbial nice guy. He was well built, a little heavier than the rest, and probably a little too nice, usually with his glasses taped together and a smile on his face. He had a higher-pitched voice than the rest, especially when he got excited. Charlie had an innocent view of the world. Charlie was something else.

The Platoon and Friends - Where Are They Now?

Ainsworth:
No information is available about George. Oh to hear him yell again.

Aden:
Larry lived in the San Francisco, California, area and operated a business of rebuilding and remodeling mobile homes.

Anderson:
No information is available about "Doc" Anderson after he transferred out of the unit.

Atwood:
Don is living in Edison, New Jersey, working for a heating and air conditioning contractor.

Befort:
Wounded once. Bill Befort went on to earn a Ph.D. in Resource Management and is currently employed by the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, living and working in Grand Rapids, Minnesota.

Brooks:
Wounded once. Brooks returned home to his home in Virginia and has no desire to be contacted or to discuss any part of his military service.

Burroughs:
Killed in action. Jim Burroughs was wounded in action on May 19, 1967 and died the next day as a result of his wounds.

Doñes:
Nick lives in Harlington, Texas, where he is a driver for U.P.S.

Engeldinger:
No information is available on the whereabouts of Captain Engeldinger.

Feuerschwenger:
John finished his enlistment and joined the Chicago police force. He is currently retired and lives in the Fort Meyers, Florida, area.

Fitzgerald:
Fitzgerald was sent to Korea, and when his tour was over he returned home to California, where he lives today.

Franklin:
Jim Franklin currently lives in Liberal, Kansas.

Gershan:
The last information on Steve Gershan is that he lives in St. Petersburg, Florida.

Gros:
Go Go returned to the States in May of 1967 and was rumored to have become a TV soap opera star on Puerto Rican television.

Harris:
Last known location, San Angelo, Texas.

Heller:
Wounded twice. Heller recovered from his wounds and is currently managing a park for the Maryland Department of Natural Resources.

Henke:
Killed in action. Vernon Henke was killed in action May 19, 1967.

Hilgart:
Killed in action. Richard Hilgart was killed in action May 19, 1967.

Hopkins:
Hopkins was sent to Korea. No further information is known.

Houck:
John Houck lives in Mission Viejo, California, and is employed as a truck driver.

Hoy:
Wounded twice. Ron finished his entire tour in Vietnam. Ron is a self-employed excavating contractor in the San Fernando Valley, California.

Huntington:
Gary was discharged from the service at Fort Benning, Georgia, married a local Georgia girl and never moved back to Wisconsin. He became an elder in his church.

Johnson:
Since the time in Vietnam, Steve is deceased, cause unknown.

Jones:
Wounded once. Johnnie Jones lost an arm as a result of his injuries and was discharged from the Army. He finished his career with the United States Post Office and is currently retired and lives in Mt. Holly, New Jersey.

Keefe & Tomlinson
No information is known about Keefe & Tomlinson.

Kreitlow:

Wounded once. Bill currently lives in Las Vegas, Nevada.

Loftheim:
Killed in action. Lieutenant Loftheim was killed in action in September of 1967 while leading an infantry combat patrol.

Martin:
No further information on Martin since he returned from patrol as a Conscientious Objector.

Nitzel:
Wounded once. Paul returned to the States and had a career with John Deere Tractor Company as a labor relation negotiator. Paul currently lives in Burlington, Iowa.

Noteboom:
Art was sent to Japan in the fall of 1967 to have surgery on a bad knee and, was eventually sent back to the States. After being discharged, Art went back to riding with his outlaw motorcycle gang "The Fossils," does some mechanical work and car trading; and currently lives in Cook, Minnesota.

Pellum:
No further information is available.

Perry:
Rumor has it that Sgt. Perry is since deceased, cause of death unknown.

Persson:
Wounded once. Persson was transferred to the 3rd of the 39th in the infusion program, where he did "that booby trap thing" and ended up being sent to Japan for treatment of his wounds. Persson is active in a career in aircraft design. He currently lives in Atlanta, Georgia.

Prejean:
Melvin returned to New Orleans, where he became a policeman. After retiring from the police force, he started a second career as a bail-bondsman.

Reed:
No further information on Reed after he joined the Military Police.

Reese:
Reese wasn't seen again after being sent to the hospital when his weapon exploded.

Rock:
Wounded once. Rock returned to California, married Denise, and works for a manufacturing company. He lives in Moorpark California.

Rose:
Rose lives in Graham, Texas.

Russ:

Wounded once. Russ recovered from his wound and finished his tour in Vietnam. He owns and operates an automotive repair shop in the San Fernando Valley, California.

Saiz:

Killed in action. Ron Saiz was killed in action June 19, 1967.

Shireman:

No information is known about Shireman, other than the fact that his name does not appear on "the wall," so his re-occurring dream of being killed in Vietnam must not have come true.

Sizemore:

Ron eventually transferred out of the infantry, but re-enlisted for a 2nd tour in Vietnam, although, not with the infantry. He currently lives in Southern California, still surfing and working with experimental automobiles.

Thompson:

Gored by a water buffalo. Tommy Thompson currently lives in the Kansas City, Missouri, area.

Tucker:

Wounded once. No information is available on the whereabouts of Tucker.

Tutwiler:

Colonel Tutwiler went on to become the commander of a Reserve unit in Arkansas. Rumor has it he was the one who was eventually conned into dispensing William Jefferson Clinton from military service.

Vieth:

Randy Vieth returned to Beloit, Wisconsin, and went back to his old job with Bendix Company, manufacturing replacement parts for cars.

Weber:

Wounded once. Weber moved back to Minnesota and broke up with his fiancée. He eventually married, adopted a daughter and had a career in the general construction business in the Minneapolis/St. Paul area.

Wheeler:

Wheeler was sent to Korea. No further information is known.

Wolf:

Wounded once. George returned to Russell, Kansas, and works as a truck dispatcher for an over-the-road trucking company.

Wolters:

Wounded once. Bill lives in Eagan Minnesota just South of Minneapolis with his wife Mary Pat. He owns a very successful construction estimating business.

Zies:

Zies became a teacher in a Christian school in Miami, Florida.