

Vietnam 1967- 1968



Back row

Jerry Moorehead, Steve Scott (KIA),

Kjel (Joe) Johannessen, Thomas Kobayashi

Front Row

Joe Jinkins, Bill Myette, John Bolden,

James Turner



My Marine Corps Career

This is my story of my career in the Marine Corps as I remember it. I started writing this in 1997 after our 2nd reunion. At the 1997 reunion one of our Marines Steve Cone said he was going to write a book and he wanted everyone to write about their experiences in Vietnam and send it to him so he could use first hand experiences from our Marines in his book. Everyone has their own stories about Vietnam both good and bad. We started having reunions for our company Hotel 2/7 1st Marine Division in 1995 when Ralph Sirianni decided to try to get ahold as many former Hotel Company Marines as he could and see if they were interested in holding a reunion. I believe he had at least 40 Marines and Corpsmen at the first reunion and it has grown every reunion since. We hold the reunions every other year on the odd years and in different parts of the country. It seems after each reunion I am able to add a little more to my story because each time someone will bring up something that I had forgotten about. After all it has been over 50 years since this all took place and my memory is not the best anymore.

Growing up I always planned on joining the Army when I came of age. My grandfather and uncles had either been in the Army or Navy; I didn't know anything about the Marines or the difference between a Soldier and a Marine.

My first experience with the Marines was when East High School Des Moines held a senior assembly for the boys. All the different branches of the Military were present to give their presentations

Army, Navy, Air Force all sat rather relaxed in their chairs legs crossed or leaning forward with their elbows on their knees almost like they didn't care to be there and they made all kinds of promises during their part of their presentations.

The Marine who was there caught my attention from the time we entered, He was sitting there with perfect posture legs not crossed and gave the appearance he was in control of the situation the whole time and when he made his presentation the only promise he made that the Marines would be tough and if you wanted to be part of the best you should join the Marine Corps.



Shortly after I turned 18 in April I went down to the Marine Recruiters office and talked to the recruiter's they were interested but they wanted me to graduate from high school first. I graduated the first week of June and enlisted on the 120-delay entry program on June 13, 1967 - left for MCRD San Diego one month later on July 13, 1967.

On the day we were to leave we were to report to the Induction Ctr. at Fort Des Moines and wait for our plane to MCRD. Since I was the smallest one in the group leaving that day (I only weighted 122 lbs. at the time) the person in charge gave me the papers and told me I was in charge of the group and I was to make sure everyone made it to San Diego. They kept us at Ft. Des Moines until the last minute no family or friends could be there with us. When we arrived at the airport, we had to run to make the plane (I am sure that was on purpose also!), my girlfriend (Sandy Potts) was waiting at the airport and ran to the plane with me. Her dad hated me until I told him I had joined the Marines, from then until I left, we were great pals he was a Marine Veteran. Everyone made it to San Diego ok with no problems. I reported in to some Marines at a desk in the terminal when we arrived at the airport and we were told to go out on a small concrete island in front of the entrance and stand at attention until the bus came to pick us up. So far everything is calm and peaceful!

The bus arrives and we are told to get on every one is quiet on the way to MCRD; no one knows what we are getting into!

When the bus arrived at MCRD our Drill instructor got on the bus and

ALL HELL BRAKES LOOSE!!

It is nothing but chaos and confusion and of course the yellow footprints and our haircuts. Then in the early morning we are finally marched (and I say that loosely) to our Quonset Huts, are assigned our racks and are able to turn in for the night. By the way most of the night has already passed, we probably only had about an hour or two before it started all over again. By this time we are all wondering what the hell we have gotten into. Our Drill Instructors were SSgt Baker he was the easy going Drill Instructor, Sgt. Root was the Drill Instructor that was the good guy one day and the tough guy the next and Sgt. Foster he was the tough one all the time. In the next 8 weeks they shaped us into Marines. I will include one story of many about our training. When we were on the rifle range the day before qualification day I shot a 219 one point below expert. That evening Drill Instructor Foster sat in a chair in front of the Drill Instructors area. He had everyone get in line in front of him and tell him their score for the day. I was pretty proud of shooting 219. When I told him my score, he kicked me in the shin and said you will do better tomorrow won't you puqué! SIR EYE EYE SIR!! The next day I had a bad day at the range and shot 198 just barely making marksman. I was not happy about that, and not even looking forward to that night. Surprisingly to me nothing happened. We graduated on September 13th and were able to have on base liberty for the first time. We went to the Gedunk (PX), made phone calls; drank soda's and ate pokey bate (junk food). The next day we were transported to Camp Pendleton for ITR (infantry training regiment) and BITS. On October 31 we finished our training and on November 1, 1967 I flew home to start my leave.

I will only tell one story about my leave. I was still a small guy even though I had gained a few pounds and filled out to some degree but still small. I visited my old high school in civilian clothes at lunch hour; I was in Henrys Drive-in sitting talking to some of my friends from school when an old girlfriend Cheryl Mattix walked in. I asked the guy next to me if he would get up and let her sit next to me. He was a lot larger than I was and started to give me crap about who the hell did I think I was to have him give up his chair. A friend of his leaned over to tell him I was a Marine home on leave, he immediately got up and

started apologizing to me and gave her his chair. It is amazing the respect the word Marine will demand from a bully!!

On November 20th 1967 I returned to Staging Company at Camp Pendleton waiting orders for Vietnam. Before going back to the Marines my mother gave me a St. Joseph Medal to wear around my neck with my dog tags. St. Joseph was her Patron Saint and she told me he would protect me while I was in Vietnam. I never told her but I lost that medal while we were training at Camp Pendleton. While I was at Camp Pendleton a close friend of mine Chris Hampton died in a home



fire. I asked my platoon commander for some leave so I could go home for his funeral. Of course I was refused because he was not family and our CO put a guard on me to make sure I would not go AWOL. Our orders finally came in on December 9th we were at El Toro waiting in a barracks for our flight out when a song came on the radio; Little Becky's Christmas Wish, it was a song about a little girl writing a letter to Santa Claus asking for her Brother Tommy to come home because mommy and daddy were crying. Her parents had just received a telegram from the Government informing them that Tommy had been killed in Vietnam. Everyone was very quiet while the song was playing till the end and someone yelled out shut off that fucking radio!! The song was band from the radio shortly after that.

The next day we flew out stopping in Hawaii after all the hula girls had gone for home for the evening on our way to Okinawa. We were on Okinawa for a few days, I had no money, we were told we would be paid when we arrived in Okinawa so I had sent the money I had home to my parents before I left. Can you imagine trying to borrow money from anyone who knows that you may never see them again? We didn't know how we would be split up when we arrived in DaNang or even when our pay records would catch up with us. We were going over as replacement troops and would not remain as our own unit.

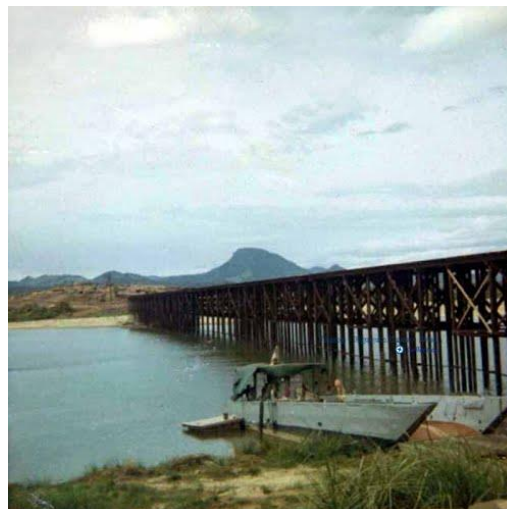
On the 18th of December we shipped out for DaNang. I was sent to the 1st Marine Division Headquarters at Hill 327 to be assigned to a company. I was there for 3 days before I was issued my rifle, 6 magazines, 3 bandoliers of ammo and assigned to Hotel 2/7 on hill 190. (when I was wounded and med-e-vac'd out of the field 11 1/2 months later I had 30 magazines fully loaded, 600 rounds of ammunition on me, I was not going to have to try to reload a magazine in the middle of a firefight) Dec 21 I was taken out to Hotel Co. on the way out we went thru a village where some ladies of the night were flashing their boobs at us as we went by. Never saw that in the States. Welcome to Vietnam!

When I reported in at Hotel Co I was assigned to 2nd platoon on the very top of the hill. I spent Christmas Eve on my first night ambush or that night an observation post. We were supposedly there to make sure the VC were not doing anything against the truce and to make sure they weren't building up their forces or trying to do a sneak attack on us, thankfully it was a quite night. We usually ran squad size patrols in that area. My

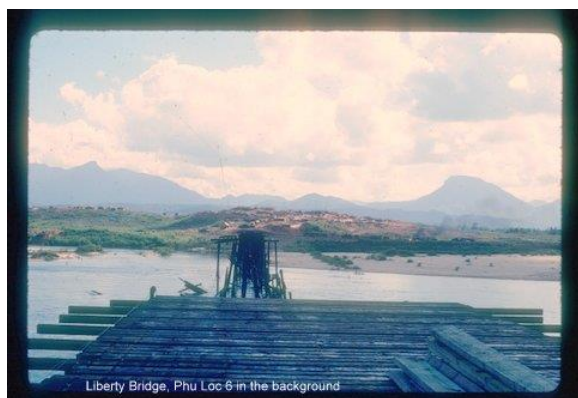


squad was on several patrols during my time in this area, we didn't run into any trouble during my stay there. Some of the other patrols did have a couple of firefights while I was there. On one patrol we were riding on the top of Amtrak's around a village. The Amtrak drove over the tail of a large boa constrictor trying to strangle and eat a pig, when the Amtrak ran over its tail boa constrictor let go of the pig and attacked the Amtrak. I had my first hair cut by a civilian barber on hill 190. The barber shop was at the bottom of hill 190 just inside the wire. Some of the guys came down with me and sat around shooting the bull while I was getting my hair cut. After the barber finished my haircut, he took me by the back of my head and my chin and started rolling my head around then made a quick jerk to pop my neck. It is supposed to relax you, I thought he was trying to kill me and the guys got a good laugh over it.

On January 5th we left hill 190 and were attached to 3/7 we were moved to Liberty Bridge. After we arrived at our new base and settled in myself and another FNG (F***ing New Guy) decided we wanted to check out our new combat base. As we were walking around, we spotted a pretty green snake slithering thru the grass. We decided to try to catch it. Luckily, we did not, we later found out that it was a Bamboo Viper otherwise known as the 10-step snake. After it bites



you, you will be able to take 10 steps and you will die. We were told Vietnam has 20 varieties of snakes 19 are poisons and the last one will strangle you. We found out the hard way our new area of operation was a very hostile area. There are a lot of stories that could go along with this area but I will only give a couple. The Seabees were rebuilding the bridge the whole time we were there that had been blown up before we got there. We had a combat base on each end of the bridge. On the north side was Dia Loc where the main part of the Company was stationed and on the south side was Phu Loc 6 where each platoon will would rotate in and out.



Phu Loc 6 area on January 11, 1968 would be my baptism under fire. When our turn to take over the Phu Loc 6 side of the Song Thu Bon River came up, we sent out a squad size patrol (Tom West the squad

leader) they were about 3 clicks out and were ambushed their point man (Fred Reed) was hit three times from the start. Toms radio man called in the ambush and called for a med-a-vac. We were told to saddle up we were going out to get them. We were loaded on a 6by (a truck with 6 sets of wheels) and taken out as far as we could go on the truck. When we disembarked, we started taking incoming fire, up to this time I have not been shot at. As we started thru the rice paddies, I heard a what I would describe as a crack, in my mind I was asking myself what the

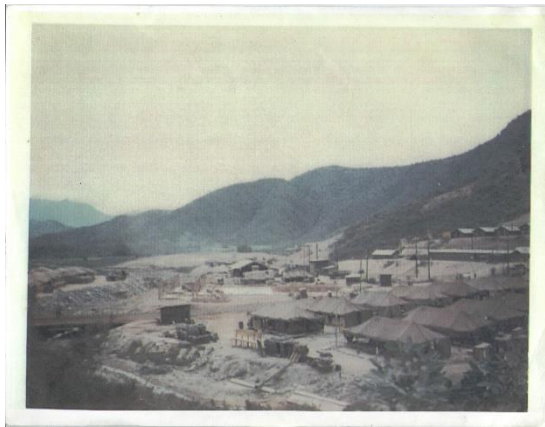
hell was that. Almost instantly I am seeing splashes in the rice paddy close to me and hearing the bullets whizzing by. Needless to say, I realized what the crack was and was thinking holy shit. We were going to have to fight the rest of the way out to our pinned down squad. Before we left the base my fireteam leader PJ Branyon told me to stick close to him because he knew it was going to be my first firefight. On our way to the pinned down squad PJ was talking to our Plt. Sgt. SSgt Byrd about how he wanted to set up when we were able to reach the squad. As we were kneeling next to SSgt Byrd a bullet hit him in his bug dope which was in his flak jacket chest pocket and ricochet into his arm, He just shook it off like it was a bee sting and proceeded with the advance, also as we were running thru the rice paddies PJ had a bullet go thru his canteen. His butt was stinging and all wet. At first, he thought he had been shot in the butt! Then realized it was the water from his canteen not blood. This was my first experience of hearing the bullets go zipping by me and seeing bullets hitting the water around me I only had a general idea of where the firing was coming from, I did not see the enemy as yet and I was unsure where the enemy was firing from. In this state of mind, I did something most people would consider not so smart including myself; PJ's rifle had jammed and I traded rifles with him. (Years later he asked me why I did that and I still don't have a good answer for why). All I can tell you is I was new, didn't know where the firing was coming from or what to shoot at, and really had no idea what the hell I was doing. I can tell you this it is a helpless feeling running thru a rice paddy with people shooting at you and knowing there is nothing you can do about it. When we finally reached the pinned down squad and set up a perimeter around them, I popped the pins on the M16 and slammed it down on the rice paddy dyke. The rifle flew apart and cleared the jam. I put the rifle back together and did not have any more problems with it the rest of the day. Yes, I did start firing then I still hadn't seen the enemy but knew what my field of fire was. We were still taking heavy fire when the Huey Gunship arrived, he flew over me at tree top level and opened up with his rockets and machineguns this startled the living shit out of me, wasn't sure what was happening. My first of many experiences with a Huey Gunship up close and personal! After the Med-a-Vac finally lifted off with our wounded men we had to fight our way back to the truck that

would take us back to our base. This was a long day the incident started in the morning and we returned to our base in late afternoon. I had survived my baptism under fire. Around January 12th we were on patrol just east of Phu Loc 6 on a trail that was lined with bamboo. The trail had narrowed to a path that we had to go thru one at a time Cpl. Glen was walking point and set off a booby trap as he went thru and was severely wounded, he later died of his wounds. The booby trap was marked with a brown piece of bamboo pointing down toward the booby trap surrounded by green bamboo. Cpl. Glen had been in country for quite a while; I don't know why he missed the marked booby trap. The Viet Cong usually marked their booby traps so the locals would not set them off. On another patrol January 14th we were again east of Phu Loc 6, this time we had tanks with us one of our men was following the tank in the tank track and stepped on a mine the tank had just driven over, Don't know why but the mine did not go off when the tank drove over it but was set off when the marine stepped on it. When we called in for a Med-a-Vac we were informed that we were in the middle of old French mine field that was not marked on our maps. We had to break out our bayonets and feel our way back out. It seemed like every day we were at Liberty Bridge one of our platoons was either getting into a fire fight, running into booby traps or being sniped at. One evening while I was on hole (perimeter) watch on the Dia Loc side of the river, the platoon that was on Phu Loc 6 was over run and had to evacuate the base. We were expecting to get hit also but were not. The next morning we watched as F4's strafed and bombed our base. Both sides of the river had tall towers on them. The Phantoms took out the tower on Phu Loc 6, After the phantoms were done we had to make a beach landing across the river and retake the base, the NVA had left the base, but they had booby trapped it before they left and we took sniper fire most of the day. In fact you could not get out of your bunker on Phu Loc 6 without drawing sniper fire for quite a while. On one of my very rare days off I was sitting on top of a bunker on the Dia Loc side taping a letter home (I had bought a



after patrol at Dia Loc

tape recorder from the 327 PX the main PX in I Corps area on hill 327). A fire fight broke out about a ½ click to one click (1000 meters) outside the wire with a jet (I think it was an F4 Phantom) flying overhead strafing and firing his rockets. The firefights had become so common that I didn't notice what was happening until I played back the tape and heard the action on the tape. I went back to the tape and explained to my family what was happening in the background then continued on with my letter. I actually sent the tape home. Needless to say they were upset when they listened to it. I never really talked about how hot our area was in my letters until that tape. We remained in this area until March 31 when we were transferred back to 2/7 and moved to Dia La Pass. This area was fairly secure area in a



small canyon, in fact we couldn't even lock and load our rifle (put a magazine in our rifle and a round in the chamber) while we were on gate guard until we called in for permission. The base was on the back side of 327 our main px and Division Headquarters. What a change from the free fire zone we just came from. While at this area the platoons would rotate out to

patrol areas called Elephant Valley, Leach Valley and Hill 10. All these areas were places had their own obstacles that we had to overcome. Elephant Valley had tall (over our heads) grass that was sharp and cut you as you passed thru, we always had to wear a long sleeve shirt in this area no matter how hot it was. Leach Valley lived up to its name you had to continually check yourself for leaches. On one patrol when we were setting up for the night one of our Marines felt something on his inner thy, He took down his trousers and had a leach on his leg that had been there all day long. The leach was about 6 inches long and about 1 inch in diameter. Needless to say he was not happy about that, the rest of us just laughed at him. Told him he looked as if he had grown a second penis. Usually if you just squirt the leach with our bug dope (insect repellent) they would just fall off. Hill 10 was probably the easiest to navigate of the three we were working. One time while we were on hill 10 we were caught in a typhoon. There was an old catholic church and a cemetery

just outside of hill 10. While at Dia La Pass we had some senators, who decided they wanted to come to Vietnam and see first-hand what was happening. Of course, they came to a fairly secure area. We had to set up a secure perimeter all around there for them to make sure there was no VC or NVA in the area. Dia La Pass was a low-lying combat base surrounded on three sides by very high hills. Looked as if it had been a quarry at one time. Another time our CO decided we needed to go thru gas training again so we had to go out to the helicopter pad, just outside the gate and the officers would set off teargas grenades on us. That was fun!! Another time we had to go to a rifle range outside the gate and across the road to fire our weapons,. I think our officers had too much idle time on their hands. In May we were assigned to an area for another company while they were on an operation I believe it was Mike 3/7. On May 20th we were given the mission to set up a night ambush. Cpl. PJ Branyon was leading the squad, as we were setting up for the night ambush he moved an empty c-rat can that was booby trapped with a grenade. The grenade took out PJ Branyon, Doc Fulkerson, our radioman Bob Havrilla and the radio. We set up a defensive parameter while Cpl. Wilborn and Bill Myette made their way over to the CAP Unit to call in a Med-a-Vac for our wounded. When the chopper arrived Cpl. Wilborn stood in the open and guided the chopper in with the glow of a cigarette in his mouth to let them know where to land. It was a very dark night and the cigarette gave the chopper pilot a sense of direction and how far he was off the ground. On May 26, 1968 we were on a patrol in the same area we lost PJ we just went thru a village and were going thru a rocky area. There was a place in the trail that looked like some kids had been playing in the dirt, a twig was stuck in the ground with a string tied to it and an empty cartridge hanging from it pointing to the area the kids were playing in the dirt. LCpl Jenkins was walking point; he looked at the trail where the kids had been playing with their hand prints and walked around it. I was next in line when I saw it, I remembered Cpl. Glenn and passed word back that there was a possible booby trap here. For some reason either word did not get back to Jerry Brown a new guy from Topeka Kansas or he was distracted because he was walking tail end charley (last man in the patrol, had to watch our rear to make sure nobody snuck up on us from behind), He stepped on the booby trap there was a loud explosion, I turned

around in time to see a large black cloud and Jerry flying thru the air. We called in a Med-a-vac; he lost his leg but survived. We were at Dia La Pass from March 31 till June 16 when we were reassigned from the 1st Marine Division to the 9th Marine Amphibious Brigade and went on a float phase. We boarded the USS



Photo # NH 96947 USS Valley Forge (LPH-8), circa 1968

Valley Forge LPH 8 on 16 June and sailed to Subic Bay Philippines for regrouping and training. While there we had to play war up in the mountains, supposedly to get us familiar with our new men. We received several replacements to try to bring us up to a full Battalion. We also had to climb a net to get on and off a ship as part of our training. While at

Subic Bay most of the time we were staying in barracks instead of on the ship, it was really nice to have a real bed, be able to take a hot shower whenever we wanted; We were able to get some on base and off base liberty while we were there. Warm bed, hot showers, alcohol, decent food, and women what more could a Marine want. On 29 June we were transferred to the Tripoli LPH 10 and were on our way back to Vietnam on 3 July 1968.

When we were told we were going on a float phase, we were told that whenever the ship would leave the country, we would be going with it guess what! That didn't happen. Whenever the ship left it was usually when we were on an operation or they would set us off on a combat base and leave us there. We were on a float phase for 5 months and we were only on the ship a total of 24 day's during those 5 months. The rest of the time were living out of our backpacks and sleeping on the ground under a poncho if we were lucky and waiting for the next resupply chopper to come in with food and ammo. On July 13, 1968 we were on Operation Eager Yankee. We had



LPH-10 / USS Tripoli (1968)

On July 13, 1968 we were on Operation Eager Yankee. We had

been on the move all day dealing with small harassing fire fights and snipers. When we finally decided to set in for the night after dark our lines were be probed most of the night I heard a noise in front of my fighting position, I lifted my head over my berm and looked out when a grenade went off (it was kind of pretty like having my own 4th of July then it started burning) I received my first purple heart. A piece of shrapnel hit me on the right side of my nose. I call this Purple Heart my John Kerry Purple Heart because it was only a minor wound I just swore a lot and pulled the piece of shrapnel out. The next morning I went to my platoon Sgt. SSgt. McCall to find out what was going to be the mission for the day, I still had some blood on my nose and SSgt. McCall asked me what had happened. I told him, he had the corpsman clean me up and McCall gave me my orders for the morning. I didn't know he was going to write me up for a Purple Heart but he did. I later found out that the Marine Corps had gone to my parents' home to deliver the telegram about me being wounded. My mother came home from work and saw the military car in front of our house with two Marines inside it. She drove around the block three times and then went up to get my step-father to go home with her. (My mother had a brother killed in combat in WWII)When they finally got home the Marines were still there and were able to deliver to her the telegram and let her know I had been wounded but I was ok!

Another incident that happened that night was the Marine that was in the fighting position next to me (John Bolden)had used his rifle butt to help him make his fighting position we were in a very sandy area, after I had been wounded his position was being probed and he tried to fire his rifle, it had some sand in it and it exploded in his face. I called corpsman-up for him then he hollered to me that he was ok. The next morning when I was talking to SSgt McCall the corpsman (Don Kluemper/Doc Flipper) asked me who had hollered for a corpsman last night. I told him I called for the corpsman for Cpl. Bolden whose rifle had exploded in his face but he was not hurt. The Corpsman then proceeded to chew my ass, he said he had run out to help and didn't know where he was supposed to go I had left him standing out in the open with his dick in his hand. He was not a happy camper that morning! The next day July 14th LCpl Stephen Scott our platoon radioman (a Canadian) stepped on a mine while we

were taking a break, SSgt McCall was with him, SSgt McCall had a piece of shrapnel go thru his heart and killed him, LCpl Scott was Med-a-vac'd and lived until he was back at the ship where died of his wounds. LCpl Scott was getting ready to ship out back to the states.

The next 3 months all seem to run together I can remember incidences that happened to us but I am not able to put a date on them and I am not sure if they are even in order. We did not see the ship again for 3 1/2 months we would be flown from one operation to the next by helicopter. During this time we were on 10 different operations.

On one operation it had been raining very heavily (Monsoons), we were walking thru rice paddies where the water was over our knees trying to get to a Green Berets base. They had been told by intelligence they were going to be over run and they could not get air support because of the rain. We were moving in rice patties that had water in them above our knees. When we finally got to their base they would not even let us inside the wire we had to set up around their base, outside the wire in the rain. Really nice inter-military support wouldn't you say. We were with them for a couple of days eating, drinking, and sleeping in the rain. We finally pulled out; nothing happened other than the lousy rainy weather.



On another operation in the mountains we ran off the tail of our chopper into a mortar barrage; what fun that was. Later on that operation Doc Tam had gotten into an argument with one of the other Marines in our squad. We were taking a break in the mountain trail when this Marine came running at Doc Tam with a machete and took a swing toward Doc Tam before anyone could stop him. Lucky, we didn't stop him because he cut the head off of a Bamboo Viper that was slithering down a branch toward Doc Tam. On that operation I had my only experience with heat exhaustion. We also discovered a NVA camp that could have been as a training area or a base camp in the mountains and spent a day searching it. It was fairly

large and looked well used, could not be seen from the air because of the jungle canopy. The next day we were able to observe an Arc-lite strike on the ridge across from us, we could feel the concussion from the bombs from where we were by the time the bombs started going off the plane is just a silver speck in the sky a long way in the distance.

On another operation we were choppered into a flat sandy area, our company was on line sweeping thru a village when we came across three VC squatting on the trail, they weren't very observant because we surprised them. One took off straight back away from us, one went to the left end of the company and the third ran to the right across the front of the whole company, everybody opened up on all three of them. The one who went straight and the one who went to the left were wounded but got away the one that went right was shot several times he kept getting back up and running until we finally killed him. I went over to his body after it was over to make sure he was dead he didn't look too bad from the back side just bloody. When I turned him over, his forehead was caved in and his brains fell out and lay beside him. They looked just like they did in the biology text books I had in high school. I know this sounds ridiculous and callus but all I could think of the rest of the day was if his brain was still working he would be thinking they blew my brains out!!

On another day we had been on the move all day without many breaks not even for lunch it was a hot day and we had been taking sniper fire thru out the day. We had finally decided to set up for the night; I decided I was going to eat before I prepared my position. As I started to eat, we started taking small arms fire I just sat there and ate my ham and eggs, I was tired and hungry; wasn't going to let anything get in the way of my meal after I finished, I joined in the fun. (Just being sarcastic)

This next instance was a teachable moment for us. August 22nd Operation Swift Play. I remember the area was mostly flat and open and it was hot weather. It was midafternoon and we came across an area that we wanted to do a thorough search. Our platoon was to set up a defensive perimeter while the rest of the company would search the area. I saw a Lieutenant from one

of the other platoons running across a large open area, This Lieutenant was very heavy into hand to hand combat whenever we were in a secure area, he would have his men practicing hand to hand combat (which is actually in my opinion a good thing). He had spotted a spider trap. When he got to the spider trap he flipped open the trap door and the VC inside shot him in the side, he reached inside and pulled the VC out gave him a Crotty chop to the neck his body went limp and the Lieutenant dropped the body; he started back toward his men, The VC got up and ran up to the Lieutenant from the back and stabbed him with a knife in his chest. The lieutenant picked him up by his neck and broke the VC's neck killing him this time. While being shot and stabbed, he taught us a very good lesson that day never use hand to hand combat unless it is absolutely necessary.

Another incident that took place between operations when the ship had dropped us off at hill 55 Regimental Headquarters while they went to Japan. Sgt Turner, another Marine and myself decided to go to 1st Med and visit some of our men in the hospital while we were there. I do not remember who the other Marine was or who we were visiting. After we went to the hospital, we went to the beer gardens at hill 327 the big PX and we stayed a little longer than we should have. We were trying to hitch a ride back to hill 55 but could only get as far as a tank base before dark set in. Sgt Turner called our CO and told him we were not going to be back before morning we were hold up at the Tank Base down the road. He told us to get our asses down there right now. Hill 55 had some tanks on the upper part of the hill and he thought that was where we were at. We spent the night at the tank base. The next morning, we had to wait for the mine sweep to come thru before any trucks could go down the road. The first truck inline was going to hill 55 and it had a lot of girls from the Vietnamese shops that worked on the hill and some ARVN soldiers in the back. We asked the driver for a ride and he refused he did not want us to try to make time with any of "his" girls, so we had to take the next truck. That was lucky for us, as we were following him down the road approximately $\frac{1}{4}$ to $\frac{1}{2}$ mile behind, his truck set off a huge mine and blew up. It turned the truck completely over and blew a large hole across the road. Our truck called in the incident and we tried to give aid to those injured. What I remember most

about that is the ARVN who had been killed and was laying under the bed of the truck burning the human body burning is the worst smell I have ever smelt in my life. The truck driver survived, and most of the girls survived but some were hurt and scared very badly.

On November 9th we were onboard ship between operations I went to our Company 1st Sgt. and extended my tour of duty for 6 months with the stipulation that I would be able to take my leave at Christmas time I had already been in Vietnam for one Christmas and didn't want to be there for a 2nd. The next day we left for Operation Daring Endeavor until Nov. 17 when we returned to the ship.

On the morning of 20-November-1968 before dawn we were preparing to board the Helicopters and be flown in to an area we called Dodge City for operation Meade River. Our 1st Sgt came up to me and told me I would not be able to go home for Christmas and asked if I still wanted to extend. I told him I would let him know when we got back to the ship (it is in my records that I had extended my tour of duty). I would not make it back to the ship! This Operation was to be one of the biggest



Operations I had been on. There were seven Battalions of U.S. Marines along with Vietnamese Marines and Korean Marines. We were to form a large circle and slowly close it trapping the enemy within. Our Company flew off the USS Tripoli just after dawn to set into our part of the perimeter. I don't know why, if there were some logistical problems

or just because of the magnitude of the Operation, but we had set up on the road most of the day before we moved out to start closing the circle. To pass the time we played some poker, it had been a rather lucky day for me in cards. Towards late afternoon we started on the move. We were told to get on line and start sweeping thru the area. At first it was calm I figured

we had been there so long that maybe the enemy that had been there had moved out or at least to another location. I was wrong! What we did by being there so long was to give them time to dig in and get ready for us. We hadn't gone too far off the road when we started taking incoming. My first close call of the day was when my squad and I were getting ready to search a small hamlet and had gotten too grouped together (which we all-knew was not a good idea) and a rpg landed between us luckily nobody was hurt by it. My platoon Commander (Lt. Gabriel) had sent word that he wanted to see me. I went back to talk to him, He told me he wanted my squad to get on line and sweep thru to our left flank to Golf Co, who was taking heavy fire, I suggested we do in fire team rushes instead of getting on line because Golf Co was getting hit pretty hard. He told me he didn't give a damn how I got there just get there. When I returned to my squad to tell them what we were going to do, they told me that there were bullets hitting the ground following me over and back. We then started doing our fire team rushes to our left flank where Golf Company was taking heavy incoming. When we got to the Golf Co. I saw a marine with a dog on point taking cover behind a dike. As I was asking him about the enemy location, I saw another bullet ricochet off a broken brick at my foot and firing was coming from directly in front of me. I took cover behind a berm and fired toward where I thought the enemy was located. Later I saw some movement out of the corner of my eye and saw smoke coming from the ground; I thought it might be a spider trap hiding the enemy. I never really got a chance to check it out. As things calmed down for a short time I moved my position to get behind some bamboo. Again someone opened up on me with an automatic weapon. The bamboo that was in front of me had deflected the bullets and sprayed my face with pieces of bamboo, I didn't know it at the time but another bullet went through my c rations in my back pack and spun me around and knocked me to the ground. At the time I didn't think much of it, I just thought I had hit the deck as a normal reaction. I felt my face because it was stinging from the bamboo and there was no blood. We had advanced about as far as we could on our own. About this time the rest of the platoon had caught up with us. I was on my way back to see my platoon commander when I heard someone yell "I'm Hit" I turned around and saw one of my men (a new man who had just been assigned to me for this operation) laying in the middle of the

rice paddy. I started to run for him under fire and was joined by another of my men Ronn Frye. When we got to him and as we picked him up, he told us he could make it. The three of us ran for cover behind a berm separated by a large open area several yards from the rest of our platoon. Just as the three of us were approaching the berm the new marine was shot thru the lower abdomen. Ronn and I immediately called for a corpsman and started working on the wounded man. This was when I found out the enemy round had gone through my c-rations. As I was pulling out some battle dressings from my pack, I pulled out the can of c-rats with the bullet hole through it (I think it was crackers because no liquid was running out of it). My back was to the enemy location and Ronn was in front of me at his head. As I moved to one side to work on the wounded man Ronn was shot in the arm. About this time the corpsman arrived to help us with our wounded man. Also about this time a green pop flare went up behind the supposed enemy location indicating friendlies (which as it turned out was not the case). All was quiet for a short time the Corpsman and Ronn took advantage of this to take the wounded man back to where the rest of the platoon was. I was the last one to come across the rice paddy with the extra equipment and weapons. I had gotten about half way across when all hell broke loose again. An enemy round had hit a bandoleer of magazines across my chest (I had three bandoleers of magazines plus some magazines in pouches on my web belt most of the time I was in Vietnam, I carried 30 magazines-600 rounds of ammo, I was not going to be caught short or have to try to reload a magazine in the middle of a fire fight). The enemy bullet ricochet into my left arm off one of my magazines, the bullets in my magazine exploded sending two of my own rounds into my arm and the spring twisting into the muscle of my upper left arm. When I close my eyes I can still see the bamboo spinning around as I fell to the ground like it was yesterday. I looked at my arm and saw the spring sticking out of my arm and to me my arm was bleeding very badly. To me it looked like a slow running faucet of blood.

I tried to get up but my lieutenant Lt. Gabriel told me to stay down. I felt I was a sitting duck in the middle of that rice paddy because I had an ARVN pack (like an Alice pack today) on and it was holding me in an upright sitting position. Then Lieutenant Gabriel hollered and asked if I could see where he

was. I looked over my shoulder and couldn't see anything because of the way I was sitting. I replied to him that I could see him anyway. I could hear the direction his voice was coming from and I knew I didn't want to stay in the middle of that paddy. He told me if I was able to get up and run over to him. When I got up and turned around I could see where he wanted me to come to. I ran along the dikes instead of straight across the paddy because it was easier running and I felt I could go faster. When I got back to him and the rest of the platoon the Corpsmen (Doc Tam and Doc Flipper) started working on me and getting me ready for med-a-vac. I remember several of my men coming over to me while we were waiting for the med-a-vac chopper and wishing me luck, they knew I would not be back some called it a million-dollar wound. There were several med-a-vac choppers that day. It had turned out to be a very hard day on everyone. It was getting dusk at this time. The first chopper that came in that I would



be getting on I thought was shot down. The after action reports said its rotors had hit some bamboo trees when it landed and couldn't fly out. I guess I thought it had been shot down because there was still sporadic firing going on all around our area, and I was pretty well out of it from the morphine the corpsman had given me to ease the pain. When the second

chopper came in and all the wounded were loaded we lifted off. I was ambulatory but weak and Wally Farrington helped me walk on the chopper. As we lifted off the door gunner opened up and I thought oh shit we were going back down. When we arrived at DaNang hospital (1st Med) Wally Farrington helped me walk into the hospital. The way I remember it is the corpsmen put me on a table and started cutting off my cloths. I told them not to cut off my trousers and boots, they were a new issue and I had been wounded in the arm. They cut them off anyway!! After they finished cutting off my uniform a corpsman was looking at my wounds and was tugging at the spring sticking out of my arm. I guess it must have been a pretty unusual wound to have a man with a spring sticking out of his arm. The corpsman then put a needle into my armpit and told me to let me know when I felt an electrical shock down to fingertips. This indicated they had

found the nerve and could deaden the arm so they could work on it. There was someone there who was taking pictures of my wound. I think I asked if I could get a copy for myself. He said I could but we never exchanged names or I was so drugged up that I have forgotten his name so I have no idea who he was or how I could ever get in touch with him. I suppose he was there taking pictures of anything unusual for their records. They kept me awake the whole time they operated on me always talking to me even though I was in a very sedated state at this time. After the operation they took me to the ward. The corpsman on duty asked me if I would like anything to eat, I realized I hadn't had anything to eat for since breakfast and was hungry. They brought me a tray of food and set it down for me to eat. It was a pretty hard task considering my left arm was all bandaged up and my right had an IV stuck in the inner part of my elbow. I tried to eat and spilt some milk all over my bed and me. The corpsmen came over to clean me up. They stood me up and asked if I could stand on my own. I told them I could! As soon as he let go of me I fell to the floor. I guess I wasn't as strong as I thought I was. The day and being wounded had drained me of all my strength. I think I stayed in the DaNang Hospital for three or four days before being med-a-vac'd to the Army Hospital 106th General Hospital in Japan. When I arrived in the Japan Hospital they put on a bed and wheeled me up to my ward. On the way to the ward they put a real scare in to me. The nurses station was in the middle of the amputee ward where they wheeled me and let me sit for several minutes. I was thinking that they had decided to take my arm after all. After they finished their paper work they wheeled me down to my part of the ward for men with open wounds, and I felt secure about keeping my arm again. I still had an open wound, because I had so many wounds in my left arm that they couldn't close them all due to the skin being stretched so tight. I had three entry bullet wounds, two exit bullet wounds and a long area where the skin had been cut out of my upper left arm. I would be there for approximately two weeks before being sent to Great Lakes Naval Hospital. While in Japan I spent most of the money I had won in those poker games that morning while we were waiting to move out on the men I had won it from. They too had been wounded! I spent the next nine months at Great Lakes where they discovered that my median nerve had been severed causing more surgeries and physical

therapy. During my recovery and rehabilitation period I had the privilege of being the guest of the Cook County Sheriff's department. One of my friends in the hospital who just happened to be in the Navy asked me to take him off base so he could buy some beer. He did not have a car of his own and I did. Him another marine and I went into North Chicago and he bought a 12 pack of beer. On the way back my two friends decided to pop the top on one of the beers. Actually, I did not have one because I did not like beer at the time. A cop pulled me over for a burned out tail light. When he came up to the car, he flashed his flash light into my back seat which happened to be full of empty beer cans. I had gone home the weekend before and had dropped off the other marine with us Mike Stalkfleet at his home in Iowa City. On the way back to Great Lakes Mike always brought some beer with him, and I hadn't cleaned out the car since we got back. The cop took us in and we got out on bail that night. When it came time to go to court it was payday so I stuck around long enough to get paid and went to the court. I was late!! The navy guy (Don't remember his name) was 21 so he had no problem, Mike had gotten discharged and had gone home to Iowa, and I was late!!! The judge fined me my whole paycheck and I spent 4 days over Memorial Day weekend 1969 in Cook County jail. I don't think the judge liked marines.

In August of 1969 I was placed on the temporally retired list and sent home to wait my being discharged from the Marine Corps with a Medical Discharge under Honorable Conditions. I still have the bullet that the enemy fired at me (I know it's the one that I was shot with because it has rifling on it)and the spring they took out of my arm(for years they both had my dried blood and muscle on them which now has disintegrated). My wounds consisted of three entry wounds and two exit wounds and a magazine spring being twisted in my bicep muscle. The small bone in my forearm was broken in three pieces where one of the bullets had gone thru (x-rays show there is still a hole in the bone from the wound) and my motor nerve had been severed.

I will say the Military had some very good doctors. To this day I have almost full use of my left arm. Still have some pain once in a while, a tingling sensation most of the time and I have never gotten completely up to full strength. There are somethings I have trouble doing with my left arm and hand but

over the years I have been able to figure out ways to work around it.

One other piece of information about my tour in Vietnam. My last Platoon Commander Lt Gabriel was wounded and lost his leg 4 days after I had been med-a-vac'd. He was on the airplane that flew into the pentagon on 9/11/2001.

There were 35 men wounded and 7 men killed from my company on Operation Meade River 5 of the men wounded were from my squad, and two men Tom Peterson and Larry Sirois that were killed were very close friends. I know that Tom Peterson came over to see me before I was med-a-vac'd because I gave him my watch that I had recently purchased from the ships store a Bulova with luminous dial.

I have been asked by sever people over the years if I would do in again if I knew what was going to happen. My answer always is Yes, I Would!!!

From the time I arrived in Vietnam like all Marines I was counting the days until I could wake up to a bowl of corn flakes, do the duffel bag drag and get on that big bird back to the world. But after I was wounded and laying in a nice warm bed with three hot meals a day with no one shooting at me I wanted to go back. I felt I had let my men down and should be out there in the mud and rain getting shot at with them. The guilt I was feeling at that time was worse than being in the middle of a firefight.