

REACH OUT AND TOUCH SOMEONE

"And Saul also went home to Gibeah; and there went with him a band of men, whose hearts God had touched." 1 Samuel 10:26

The phrase, '**Reach Out and Touch Someone**' was used as a very common idiom in the 1980s by Bell Systems. Bell Systems coined the phrase in their commercials, that **reached out and touched** potential customers. Their marketing ploy successfully caught a hold of society, increasing their profits from long distance dialing.

During the 1980s I was still reeling from the effects of the Vietnam War and always 'jacked up' with the thousand-yard stare, causing extreme restlessness. This catchy slogan had a special connotation for me, accompanied by an array of emotions and a host of memories suggested by the phrase. When Bell's commercials were aired, their program interruptions always took me back to the battlefield.

The 26th Marines were on the move and so were the enemy forces. According to a global security website, the North Vietnamese Army and Viet Cong in Quang Nam Province had no less than eight infantry battalions, two rocket artillery battalions, three sapper battalions, and a recon battalion actively engaging American and ARVN Forces in the I Corps region. In the middle of January 1970, we ran into one of these battalions, or perhaps it is more accurate to say, they almost ran into us.

My last mission while serving with the 26th Marines was a two-day operation that took us to Hill 124. I'm not sure what our objective was, and our stay was very brief. It took two complete days to trek from Hill 190 to our destination. The events of the first day were very much like the experiences of a boy scout pack on a weekend adventure. We were alert but pretty much carefree as we humped through the elephant grass that inflicted razor cuts on our hands and arms, ringing the dinner bell for hungry mosquitos. We observed areas of vegetation that had been scorched from above by Rainbow Herbicides, and we were told by our Kit Carson Scout that the enormous spider we were all curious about, and whose very strong web stretched across the entire trail, was extremely poisonous. We took his word for it, avoided the eight-legged creature from hell, and moved on in the extreme heat of the day.

The plan was to bivouac halfway through the valley, set up several kill teams overnight, and make it to the hill before dark on the second day. Our squad set up our ambush on a grassy level plane an hour or two after darkness set in. The planning of our defensive positions was poorly orchestrated in my opinion. We were sitting ducks and at the mercy of anything stumbling upon us. In the middle of the night we got a call from Hill 190 saying that a very large movement of enemy troops was spotted by the starlight scope on the observation tower, and they were heading in our direction. Our orders were to hang tight and avoid contact because we were seriously outnumbered. NVA battalions were on the move that night, and I believe a large contingent from one of the main bodies ran into a squad from Mike Company inflicting several casualties. A main body or perhaps another large contingent was walking straight at us but split into two columns just before reaching our position in the grass, and these seasoned troops passed by us on both flanks. I thought that the beat of my heart would give our position away as I hugged the ground motionlessly while the two columns moved around our rifle squads. You literally could have **reached out and touched someone**, and that someone was wearing Ho Chi Minh sandals.

Minutes seemed like hours as these enemy troops went around our vulnerable grunts. The miraculous detail of our helpless predicament is that they filed past without us being detected. It was as though we were surrounded by a host of invisible angels brandishing flaming swords for our protection. More than likely there were others in our unit whose hearts were beating wildly also, but God just reached down to our **"...band of men, whose hearts God had touched..."** and delivered us from insurmountable odds.

We should all want a heart that God has touched. Saul didn't have to send out scouts or recruit a group of men to surround him as the new king of Israel. God just reached down and touched their hearts. This band of men, this band of brothers, these faithful men of valor, became Saul's bodyguards. These men were men of war. God touched their hearts, and this gave them a desire to attach themselves to Saul. At this point Saul was little in his own eyes and God used him to lead His people. 1 Samuel 10:24, *"And Samuel said to all the people, See ye him whom the LORD hath chosen, that there is none like him among all the people? And all the people shouted, and said, God save the king."*

Just as these men had a desire to serve with Saul, the man whom God touches has a desire to **reach out and touch someone** also. What a tremendous opportunity we have as a band of brothers, to touch others with their spiritual, financial, physical, and emotional needs, as members of the Marine Corps League.

Sometimes it is a **spiritual touch**. God touches our hearts with conviction and offers salvation by grace through faith to all who will receive His free gift of eternal life. Those who have influenced our lives the most are gung-ho Marines and virtuous men of faith, whose hearts God has touched. God, Country, and Corps. Help our brothers by reaching out to them spiritually.

Sometimes it is **touching our next generation**. We are influencing young people through our Young Marine Units, High School JROTC Units, USMC Toys for Tots, and college scholarships for Marine families. We have reaped the rewards of our investments and labors a hundred-fold and have witnessed these young people grow up and have successes as active-duty Marines and as commissioned officers for our beloved Marine Corps. Help our youth to succeed by instilling faith, character, courage, discipline, and integrity in these young tender hearts.

Sometimes it is a **compassionate touch**. We can assist and encourage our Marines and their families with financial help, get-well cards, phone calls, hospital visits, Mountain Home VA Hospital support, and visits to the Ben Atchley Veterans Home. We can render help through the Women Marines Association, American Red Cross Disaster Relief, and the Marine Corp League Women's Axillary. A heart touched by God is a heart full of compassion.

Sometimes it is a **touch of condolences**. We are sponsors for the East Tennessee Veterans Memorial Association, Wreaths Across America, ETMAC Medal of Honor Memorial, Alexander Bonnyman Honor Guard and Bonnyman Memorial. We provide pillars of support through our expressions of sympathy and Fallen Marine Programs. Reach out and sympathize with our hurting and bereaved families.

Sometimes it is a **numb touch**. If we sit on our hands long enough, they become numb. A numbskull with numb hands can't reach out and touch anyone. Their emotions are dull, their heart is untouched, and their hands are without feelings. The enemy of complacency is passing by you on both flanks. Don't do anything, just sit there. When idleness passes and your feelings return, get up, move around, and **reach out and touch someone**.

As a member of the Marine Corps League, you are a vital part of our organization. Your journey started when you stood on those yellow footprints, and like the song says, "I'm Still Standing." Stand with us, as we **reach out** to our Marine Corps families and **touch someone**.

Semper Fidelis

Chaplain Ron



Marines of 3rd Bn. 26th Marines.