

## IT'S A SMALL WORLD

**"Like as a father pitieth his children, so the LORD pitieth them that fear (reverence) Him. For He knoweth our frame; He remembereth that we are dust. As for man, his days are as grass: as a flower of the field, so he flourisheth. For the wind passeth over it, and it is gone; and the place thereof shall know it no more. But the mercy of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear Him, and His righteousness unto children's children; Lo, children are an heritage of the LORD: and the fruit of the womb is His reward. As arrows are in the hand of a mighty man; so are children of the youth. Happy is the man that hath his quiver full of them: they shall not be ashamed, but they shall speak with the enemies in the gate."** Psalm 103:13-17; Psalm 127:3-5

The phrase '**It's a small world**' can be defined as, "Words used to express surprise at meeting an acquaintance or discovering a personal connection in a distant place or an unexpected context." When we think of this idiom, we sometimes think of the vastness of earth made smaller through Divine interventions and providential circumstances.

This idea became a reality to me in Vietnam as I trekked solo in a southern direction toward Hoi An, on what we called US Highway 1. I just happened to look up as a mine sweeping unit passed by on the same road going north from Chu Lai. Suddenly, with great surprise my eyes lit upon a good friend. We went to boot camp at San Diego together, and A-School at Balboa. We were roommates while serving in the emergency room at the U. S. Naval Hospital, Key West, and went for Fleet Marine Force training at Camp Pendleton, ending up in the same class. He went FMF Atlantic, and I went FMF Pacific. We embraced each other and that was the last time he was heard from until recently. He survived Vietnam, made a career of the military, and retired as a Major. Jay contacted me many years after that embrace in 'the Nam,' saying that he had heard from a Marine that was passing through the Oakland Naval Hospital, that the Corpsman he inquired of was reported to have done some "heroic feats among a number of Vietnamese children." Therefore, for me the meaning of '**it's a small world**' is expanded to include the consciousness that children are caught up in the wars of this world, and oftentimes become collateral damage of the violence. We have seen it in every war, and now we see children suffering and dying in Ukraine. There is also a war of ideals taking place in America, and the outcome will determine whether or not generations of children will be given a chance to live and make their contribution to society. The narrative of my story goes like this...

A runner appeared on the hill sounding a desperate plea for help from a Corpsman. A Doc was needed to meet a reactionary team at the bottom of the hill to treat some kids that had ignited an M72 round. Nobody moved, so I quickly saddled up and met an armored unit at the wire ready to move out. I climbed on top of an amtrac as the diesel engines began to whine and the sudden jolts of the tracks underneath made us hug steel or be thrown off. We moved out and made a left turn heading for some rice paddies off on the distant horizon. When we arrived, I scrambled from my perch and was ordered to accompany a radioman and a couple of grunts to the sight, while the other men set up a secure perimeter. As I began to run through a fallow rice paddy one of the Marines shouted saying, "Careful Doc, this area is mined!" Land mines were not my major concern at that point. The mud was so soft in the paddy that my boots sank deep in the sludge, and it was all I could do to pull those boots up with the suction created by their extraction. I was completely exhausted when I reached the children, but work was just beginning.

Five kids had detonated an M72 LAW rocket trying to extricate it from a paddy dike to collect the monetary reward of MPC payment for turning it in to the Marines at the bottom of our hill. We implemented this policy to keep unexploded ammo out of the hands of the enemy and to prevent them from using this ordinance for making booby traps. One of the children was dead and one severely injured child was hanging onto the back of a water buffalo. We couldn't treat that child until we found a kid who could approach the animal. They wouldn't allow an American near them, and they could be quite dangerous. I was familiar with the various types of combat injuries, but I was not prepared for someone to have them all. One child had textbook examples of multiple and serious combat wounds of the head, torso, and limbs.

I quickly started to work unpacking my kit as I evaluated the patient who was unconscious with shallow breathing. He had some of his face missing as well as one arm, a gaping hole in his thigh, a sucking chest wound, and eviscerated bowels. I went to work on the chest first placing the plastic from a battle dressing over the bubbling hole after checking for an exit wound. I then placed an M-16 magazine over the plastic before wrapping it securely with the battle dressing. I tied off his arm, did a tracheotomy to provide an airway and started an intravenous drip. I then poured canteen water over a battle dressing and wrapped up the kid's exposed bowels. Finally I bound up the thigh. The radioman reported that an ETA, or estimated time of arrival for a Boeing CH-46 Sea Knight was twenty minutes. I told him we needed it quicker than that if the kid was to live.

A Bell OH-58 Kiowa helicopter was on our frequency and volunteered to make our pickup. These small helicopters are unarmed except for the smoke they release on targets for the Bell AH-1 Cobra Gunships that are flying overhead.

When the helicopter landed, we were surprised when the two-man crew set a .30 caliber machine gun on the ground and asked us to baby sit their weapon until they could pick it up later. These two pilots were determined to fight back if their helicopter was ever shot down.

I instructed one Marine to hold the trach devise in place and another Marine to hold the I.V. bottle above his head, as I carried the kid in my arms to the awaiting pilots. The observer had climbed into the confined area behind the seats and had to look away as I put the kid in his arms. A Huey soon followed picking up the remaining casualties. The Marines were mesmerized with my performance, and I quickly became the company's newest best friend and the talk of the hill that night. I sat down when I got back to the unit and totally freaked out when I saw that human flesh was embedded in the treads of my jungle boots. I began to shake a little and eased the pain of the day's events by writing a letter home.

I received a well done by our Commanding Officer on the next morning and word that the four children that I treated would live. The surgeons at 1st Medical Battalion had commended my lifesaving procedures to the CO, and I found out later that I had been recommended for the Bronze Star, but the motion was rejected on grounds that we were not under enemy fire. The CO's corporal said that if I had been recommended for the Navy Marine Corps Medal, I would have received it. The citation for the Navy Marine Corps Medal reads as follows, "Distinguishing oneself by heroism not involving actual conflict with an enemy. For acts of lifesaving, or attempted lifesaving, it is required that the action be performed at the risk of one's own life." Hence, this is where the mined field came in, or the possibilities of other unexploded ordinances in the rice paddy. It's unclear as to why the corporal did not resubmit the recommendation. I didn't receive any medal, and to be perfectly honest I'm not sure it was warranted. I was simply doing the job I was trained for and sent there to do. However, I did get a well done, a pat on the back, and the satisfaction of knowing that my contribution helped these children have a chance to live. **'It's a small world,'** and eternity will reveal the casualties of the ongoing ideological war. The children of future generations should be given every chance to live and pick up the mantle of service, citizenship, and leadership. I was contacted by the radio operator who knelt beside me on that day thirty-five years later from Maryland, while we were working in the African villages; once again reinforcing the sentiment that **'it's a small world.'**

Semper Fidelis

## *Chaplain Ron*



Above: Marines of Lima Co., 3<sup>rd</sup> Bn., 26<sup>th</sup> Marines, 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Division

Below: Lima's Company Corpsmen, Chaplain Ron is sitting

