

## WELCOME HOME

**"The great use of life is to spend it for something that will outlast it." William James**

This article is very personal, and I am somewhat hesitant to publish it. However, some folks that I have great confidence in have suggested that it might help someone who has had similar experiences. You are not alone!

I was totally jacked up when I came home from my second tour of duty in Vietnam and have remained like that most of my adult life. Family and friends agreed that I was traveling in the fast lane on the road called self-destruction, and the signposts read, "substance abuse and frequent confrontations with douchebags straight ahead." If trouble didn't find me I would go cruising down the highways looking for her. Trouble doesn't hide her ugly head while on the streets and she will greet you at every bend and corner. The signpost was fast approaching, dead-end ahead! It was time to take a detour.

My best friend, a pharmacist and former hell-raising buddy, invited me to church following his conversion. It was here that I heard a clear presentation of the gospel. After a period of open rebellion against the message I eventually surrendered my stubborn will and responded to God's grace through faith in 1974. Regeneration changed my life forever; however it didn't solve all of my problems. Nevertheless, I was a very different person. Though I was able by God's grace to deal with my dependence on drugs and alcohol, I was still reeling from PTSD, the thousand-yard stare!

I was very uncomfortable around crowds. I felt claustrophobic, experienced panic attacks, was hot tempered and threatening, relived events on a daily basis; experienced nightmares and reoccurring dreams, and had emotional and physical reactions to reminders of events (e.g. war movies). I avoided places, people, and social activities, and saw a decline in former interests. I slept on the floor much of the time during the 70's and 80's and would have many out-of-body experiences, that would send me floating around in the room. I got off on these out-of-body moments while listening to Tchaikovsky, Wagner, and other classical composers, and often placed myself in a self-induced trance in order to repeat the thrill of the experience. There are many possibilities for this phenomenon, but it was more than likely post drug related, stress or trauma. I was always restless and wanted more than anything to withdrawal from society and be left alone. Still do at times.

I taught school for two years after completing a couple of years at a prominent university, followed by another two years at a small seminary, studying Presbyterian New Covenant Theology, as a Baptist. Dissatisfied with the dull routine of life in the USA, I was given an opportunity to pastor a military church in England. Much of the church consisted of families of young Air Force officers and enlisted who spoke Russian. The base was a non-flying listening station during the Cold War.

After being overseas for three years we realized that President Clinton would start closing the US Air Force Bases in the United Kingdom, and it was just a matter of time till he closed down Chicksands. I was beginning to get restless again, so decided to move my family to Southern Africa where we lived for the next thirty years. I had once again found my comfort zone in village life. We served in the villages of Bophuthatswana under the Kalahari, and in East Africa's Zululand during those rewarding but oftentimes dangerous years.

I once again felt that I was alive and was basking in the adrenalin rush of village life, similar to that I had known in Vietnam with CAP Units. Yes it was a call from God, but it was also a place where I could work independently of others, get occasional cortisol highs from the many dangerous situations that were experienced, and where I could conveniently hide out from people for many years to come. My brother-in-law, an FMF Corpsman, was convinced till the day he died that I was a CIA operative who kept going back to Africa to do my job, and the previous years in England were for my training. My nieces reinstated that belief to me recently. He could not be convinced otherwise!

I was so desperate to remain in Africa, that I spent a small fortune trying to secure forged documents from the Greek – Lebanese Mob. We came home in 2016 for a dreaded furlough, and immediately started preparation to return to Africa for another five-year term. It was not to be! We were not allowed to return due to internal strife in the home office of the overseas government. All doctors, medical support groups, charities, and missionaries were denied visas and barred from entering the country. Like the communists in our country, the African National Congress began their strategic blame game. Early Christian Missionaries and those of us who picked up their mantles, were blamed for apartheid. After spending two years in negotiations with their ambassador, five trips to the embassy in Washington DC, and after spending thousands of dollars, we gave up on the possibility of returning to Africa, in 2018.

What in the world was I going to do now? I was still a POW (prisoner of war) of my own making! I was being tossed out of my utopia of peaceful isolation, and insulation from the outside world! I was still trying to stay one step ahead of my past that continually dogged my trail. The pursuit of one's memories can oftentimes be more ruthless than all of the armies of the north. I recently saw a post on Facebook that said, "Vietnam, I was there; sometimes I still am."

We had been living in OZ, and me and Toto (Ginger) were having trouble finding our way back home! We had been on the yellow brick road for thirty-five years total. AK-47s, pith helmets, and Hồ Chí Minh sandals, OH MY!

Since we were unable to return to Africa to continue my deep need for isolation, I joined fourteen organizations with the determination to push myself to rejoin the human race and to become a social creature once again. It wasn't long till I quit going to most of these meetings due to the fact that I have little in common with the other branches of service (even the Navy), was very uncomfortable around these guys, and didn't feel welcome at all. The problem was not with them, it was no doubt me! I always sat in the loner section, gained very few friends, and felt that I had to escape from the Concertina wire of their company that enclosed me. I felt that I couldn't breathe!

There are a few exceptions to these disappointments, and that is my membership in the Marine Corps League, the Military Order of the Devil Dogs, the Marine Corps Association and Foundation, and the East Tennessee Marines. Here I find a common bond, camaraderie, and a close brotherhood. I'm recognized as an integral part of the family!

When growing up my brother and I were the personification of Cain and Abel. We fought constantly. Another kid and I caught my brother and his buddy and made them stand barefoot on a manhole cover in 104-degree temperatures during a hot Oklahoma July. He still has "Property of Tulsa City Sewers" branded on the bottom of his feet. He got even by hitting me in the head with a 2x4 plank with the skill of Babe Ruth. I saw a galaxy of stars and was temporarily knocked unconscious. The thing is, we are easy to forgive each other and forget because we are brothers.

Likewise, Marines are a band of brothers. As brothers there is an unbreakable bond. This bond runs deep in our DNA. Here, among my brothers, I am at ease. I find comfort, attachment, faithfulness, and kinship. We were born at Tun Tavern, Philadelphia, November 10, 1775. We embrace a set of principles and have a gung-ho allegiance to our fellow Marines and to the United States Marine Corps that lasts a lifetime. Like the siblings of our childhood, our squabbles are short lived. They are always forgiven and forgotten. We move forward as a team for the good of the Corps. This brotherhood is seldom understood by those who are not members of the few, the proud, the MARINES!

It has been a long journey from OZ! Though I still have issues, I believe that I have found my comfort zone again, and thanks to my supportive Marine brothers, this old Combat Corpsman has finally been **WELCOMED HOME**.

Semper Fi

*Chaplain Ron*



## **SOUTH VIETNAM**

**"I WAS THERE;  
SOMETIMES I STILL AM."**



Second Tour: Our squad, CAP 2-3-2 was engaged in a firefight after contact with the infamous Q82 Viet Cong Company that lasted from dusk to daybreak.

Several casualties, mostly among our Nghia Quan counterparts.  
Summer of 1970, Hoi An, Dien Ban District, Quang Nam Province.