

# **In Harms Way**

**Divine Intervention  
on the Battle Field**



**By Cordell Vail**



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## Acknowledgements

This book is dedicated to my dear friend Gary Mower who gave his life in Vietnam as his contribution to mankind to help preserve freedom for a people far away in a world unknown to him when he went.

This book would not be if it were not for the faith and prayers of my dear wife Janice. I consider her as much a war veteran as I am. She did not physically go to Vietnam with me, but she was there in spirit every step of the way with me and was very much a part of everything happened the whole time I was in the military. This is her story as much as it is mine. I also give her thanks for thinking of the name of this book. She is my eternal best friend. Truly she is "The wind beneath my wings".

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## FORWARD

## INTRODUCTION

History has proven that there are times when even members of the Church have to go to war. Even though Helaman was one of the leaders of the church and the Prophet in his time, he still had to go to war. He led his 2000 stripling warriors in battle. By exceeding faith they were protected by God and brought safely home to their parents.

No one can explain why some faithful Latter-day Saints are killed in wars while others are spared. No one can explain why in our daily lives some people have great trials and fall in harms way. All we can do is to be the best we can be and learn to follow the prompting we receive from the Holy Ghost. The rest is in the hands of the Lord and His divine purposes for each of our lives.

This is my journal. I was just one more, young Latter-day Saint, who not unlike the 2000 stripling warriors, was called to serve his country in Vietnam. These excerpts from my journal are evidence that in our time, if it is the Lord's will, we too can have the same blessings of protection as those in days gone by. We too can be protected as the 2000 sons of Helaman when they went into battle or as Samuel the Lamanite who stood on the wall as his enemies hurled rocks and shot arrows at him.

## CHAPTER 1

### MILITARY TRAINING WAS ANOTHER FULL TIME MISSION

Like other families, who have sons and daughters entering the military, my family also faced the fears of what might lie ahead for me. There is the ever-present threat of death or dismemberment, along with the moral challenges so prevalent in military life. Some of my family even thought that it was not possible for a young man to enter the military and not become a smoker. Not everyone in my family is a member of the LDS Church. One of them was so sure that the army would destroy my moral principles that she bet someone \$100 that I could not come home from the military without becoming a smoker. Thankfully she lost that bet.

The military became like a second full time mission for me rather than an experience of pulling me into the ways of the world. I actually was able to convert many more people in the military than I did on my first full time mission.

My mission for the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints to Finland in 1963 was a great disappointment to me because I only baptized one eight year old boy who was the son of an inactive family. Having only baptized Hannu Hakinnen, I felt like such a failure when I came home from my mission. He eventually went on a mission and has converted many people since I baptized him. Even with all the success that has come from that one young boy I was able to baptize, I still often feel the feeling of failure from my

mission to Finland. It has made me determined to be a missionary all the rest of my life to make up for what I felt I was unable to do in Finland. When my military assignment came I determined, in my heart, to make it another church mission too, no matter what.

I was a student at BYU in 1968, when I got drafted. My bride of one month, the former Janice Lavone Richmond, had to stay home when I went to Basic Training at Fort Bliss, which is near El Paso, Texas. It was a lonely place to start married life because I had to leave my new wife behind. Becoming involved in doing missionary work helped me to combat the loneliness of being away from Janice.

When I first arrived at Basic Training I discovered that most of the men in my unit were from the South. Many were African Americans. We were all apprehensive because we didn't know what to expect from the military or from each other. Most of the people from the South are very courteous and thoughtful so that made our platoon a much friendlier place than it would have been otherwise.

We were told that we would all be eating together in a large room called the mess hall. All my life I had been taught to say a blessing on my food even when eating in public. I was concerned about whether I should dare to say a blessing on my food with all those men around. I decided to go ahead and bless my food.

Our Platoon arrived at the mess hall as a group. It just took a few minutes for us all to go through the chow line and be seated. I bowed my head and said a silent blessing. To my great joy when I opened my eyes I observed that most

of the men sitting at the table with me were following my lead. Then I saw that most of the men in the whole mess hall were praying.

The family training and values of these “Southern Gentlemen” became immediately apparent. I was blessed to be with a whole platoon full of such men. Later, many of the men told me that they had been taught to say Grace on their food and they were glad that I had said a prayer so they would comfortable doing it also.

That was my introduction to military life. I knew it was going to be a challenging opportunity to serve my country and to do some missionary work. I also assumed that if I occupied my time finding fellow soldiers to teach that my military experience could actually be something to remember rather than to be feared.

The First Presidency of the Church had given those of us who had our temple endowments, permission to remove our garments if we felt like they might be mocked by the other soldiers. There was one LDS man in our platoon who chose to leave his garments home and wear regular underwear. I respected his decision but decided that I would see if the men would accept my wearing my garments.

The first day there were some comments made about my unusual looking underwear which soon became questions. Most of the men asked why I wore them. It gave me an opportunity to tell them that I was an ordained minister and that my undergarments were my robes of the priesthood. I assumed all of them were somewhat familiar

with the robes of the priest or minister at their church. I therefore compared the robes of the minister at their church to being like robes of the priesthood. After that it was easy for me to explain that we wear our Priesthood Robes under our clothes instead of on the outside. There were never any derogatory comments made about my Temple Garments in our Platoon. All of the men accepted the fact that I am an ordained minister.

Our barracks was one big open room with double bunk beds lined up on both sides of the walls the full length of the room. My bunk was the very first one inside the doors. One evening as we were all standing by our bunks getting undressed for bed, a soldier from the platoon upstairs came down into our room and saw me standing in my undergarments. He let out a hoot and started laughing about my funny underwear.

The young man who bunked straight across from me hurried over to him and said, "He is our minister and those are his Priesthood Robes and don't you make fun of them." The next thing I knew the two of them started fighting and the last time I saw them, they were outside fighting down the steps. I was really surprised that anyone would actually get into a fistfight defending my garments and 'his minister'.

Basic Training passed quickly. Talk of assignments was a constant subject. We had heard that some units were going to Germany or Korea instead of to Vietnam. As the end of the training drew near we discovered that our platoon was going to Vietnam which caused fear in the hearts of all of us. Several of them came to my bunk in the middle of the night, woke me up and asked me if I would

pray for them and bless them as they were afraid of dying in Vietnam. I was privileged to do that many times during the next few nights before we finished training and the ones who were going to Vietnam shipped out. Some of us went on to other training.

Also towards the end of our basic training, we had a big inspection by the Lieutenant in charge of our platoon. We were all apprehensive because we were all privates the lowest rank in the Army and he was a very important officer. The Lt. started his inspection going down the row of lockers, beds and footlockers, which were all in perfect order and spit shined. He started with me because I was the first one inside the doors. I passed inspection.

Then he moved from bed to bed, making comments and giving gigs (demerits) for things he found wrong. There were about 15 of the double-bunk beds on each side of the building. I can still hear his voice, in my mind, when he got clear down to the other end of the barracks and yelled out, "What is this Book of Mormon doing in every locker?" I could not help but laugh to my self as I realized that I had talked about the church to each man in my platoon. I gave every one of them a Book of Mormon which the men put away in their lockers and where the Lieutenant saw them.

We all laughed and the Lieutenant didn't say any more about it. He did not give any demerits for having an unauthorized book in the lockers because every man had one. I could not hear what the private, who was being inspected, told the Lieutenant in explanation. I can only assume he told him that their minister had given the books to them.

I spent many an hour discussing the Bible and it's doctrines with the men in my platoon as we waited in lines or sat under trees taking breaks from training. Many of them started carrying the little pocket size Army Bible with them which the Chaplain had passed out. I would see them reading their Bible while on breaks. Maybe because of the fear of dying they were starting to cram for the finals.

I have no way of knowing how many of those men died in Vietnam. I am sure some of them did. I have often wondered whether or not any of them ever joined the LDS church because of the talks we had. I hope and pray that some of them did. I know that none of them can ever look back and say that I did not give them the chance to know about the Gospel of Jesus Christ. I explained it the best way I knew how under the circumstances, every chance I got.

## CHAPTER 2

### LESSONS IN DOING WHAT IS RIGHT NO MATTER WHAT

Following Basic Training I was assigned to go to Advanced Infantry Training (AIT) in Ft. Dix, New Jersey. I had many similar missionary experiences at the AIT which I am not putting in this journal. While I was attending that school my wife was able to come to Philadelphia to stay near me and I could see her on week-ends. It was like a second honeymoon for us. We had a lot of fun together and learned to love Philadelphia and the good people there. One very kind couple even let my wife stay with them for free.

After I graduated from AIT, I applied to become an officer. I decided since I was going to go to Vietnam I wanted to be responsible for my own life and the lives of those around me rather than be dependent on someone else for that. My application was accepted. I was sent to Officer's Candidate School (OCS) at Ft. Benning, Georgia for 6 months of intense officers training.

In Officer Candidate School they teach the formality of life in the military as an officer. One of those formalities is to have a toast at the beginning of a formal dinner when dignitaries are there. We had several of those occasions when the General came to eat with us. Those dinners were important occasions in our training. When the meal begins, everyone stands up and raises their glass, filled with wine, while the General makes a toast.

When we were told what would happen at the dinners, I realized that toasting would include drinking the wine. Something had to be done about it so my wife and I would not be embarrassed in front of the General when we failed to drink the wine.

I decided to go to the dining hall after the tables had been set up and find the nameplates for my wife and myself. Nameplates were used so that the General would know the name of each person attending. I found our nameplates and turned our wineglasses upside down so the cooks would not fill them with wine. I had seen that done in a restaurant with coffee cups so I assumed it would work for wineglasses too.

When my wife and I arrived at the dinner we were surprised to discover our wineglasses were filled with milk. After that whenever we went to formal dinners our glasses were always filled with milk. We never did learn who did that for us but we were most grateful.

From that experience, I realized that people soon noticed that we did not drink and they respected our decision. I do not remember anyone ever pressuring us to drink, they in fact, expected us not to drink.

On the last night of Officers Candidate School we had a big party in the mess hall. Since we were still only cadets, we still had to do what the Tactical Training Officer (TAC Officer) in charge of us asked or ordered us to do.

Married men were allowed to bring their wives to this last social party. Everyone was laughing, having a good time and most of those in attendance were drinking beer.

Right in the middle of the party my TAC Officer signaled to me to come to his table. It was not a request, it was an order. I excused myself from my wife and friends and made my way through the tables and people to the back of the room where he was sitting. My TAC Officer, Lt. Strang handed me his empty beer mug and ordered me to go re-fill it for him.

I knew, as soon as he handed his mug to me, what he was trying to do. He knew that if I walked all the way to the front of the room with an empty beer mug and then all the way back with the full beer mug most people would see me and think I had finally given in. They would think that I was going to have a beer on the last night to celebrate. I prayed, in my mind, and asked the Lord what I should do. Immediately I had an impression with the answer.

Sure enough, as I made my way through the tables to the front of the room where the beer kegs were, people all around were looking at me whispering to the person next to them. I filled the beer mug and then made my way back again to where my TAC Officer was waiting. As I walked to the back of the room even more people began watching me and the room began to get quiet

When I got to the TAC Officer's table I held the beer mug high in the air so everyone could see it and waved it around. Then I sat the mug down on the table in front of him, saluted him and walked back to my table. Everyone applauded. That was a riveting witness to me of the influence and respect others will have for you if you exercise the power of doing what is right, no matter what.

## CHAPTER 3

### LEARNING HOW TO LISTEN AND THEN TO OBEY

One of my favorite stories in the Book Of Mormon for as long as I can remember were the stories of Nephi and his being guided by the spirit to do things. I loved those stories because they depict how a person can be guided by the spirit if they will listen. I came to believe that every member of the church could receive similar guidance in their life if they would seek after the experience. Reading about Nephi gave me hope that I could learn to listen to the spirit just as he did.

As I tried to learn to do that, I soon came to realize that Nephi did not learn to do that in one day. I could see that he had spent his whole live trying to learn to listen and obey. It became obvious to me that when the Lord told Nephi to slay Laban, it was not the first time Nephi had ever had a prompting from the Spirit of the Lord. I could see that he had already learned to follow the promptings by trial and error just like I was trying to learn to do. He had practiced for years before that day.

When I had experiences where I failed to listen or would hear the prompting but would argue with the feeling I would sometimes then think about the point in that story where even Nephi still seemed to have the inclination, just like me, to sometimes argue with the feeling. He was trying to talk the Lord out of what he was being prompted to do even when he realized it was from the Lord.

It became evident to me very early in my life that there is a difference between feeling the prompting and learning to listen to the prompting and then to follow the prompting that I received. I am certain that every person who has ever felt the promptings of the spirit of the Lord telling them to do something has had the experience from time to time that they argued and wondered why the prompting came. Talking to others help me understand it was not just me that had trouble learning the lesson of listening and obeying.

I have cherished having the Gift of the Holy Ghost ever since I received it after my baptism. The main lesson that I finally learned by experience is that a prompting from the Holy Ghost is never wrong. How can we knowing that then still find it hard to listen and then obey? I cannot answer that. I like everyone else, after years of trying, am still am trying to learn the lesson. Thankfully, sometimes we obey anyway.

We do not often talk in terms of practicing when it comes to learning to listen to the promptings of the Holy Ghost. We often talk about listening, but not how. I learned very young that it does take practice.

The accounts that follow in this journal where I was able to follow the prompting of the Spirit did not start in Vietnam after I was in danger. The ability to hear and follow a prompting from the Holy Spirit came after years of deliberate practice on my part. Over the years, the more I tried to practice, the easier it was to listen and follow the promptings. No one is perfect but it is something that we can all learn to do.

I was trying to learn to listen and obey long before I went into the military or to Vietnam. As a teenager, I decided that I would make the whole focus of my life the attaining of the ability to listen to that sacred prompting voiced within me and to learn to obey the Spirit no matter what. Because I had practiced, it made it easier to listen in Vietnam.

We each have the same challenge to learn that we need to magnify this gift we have. It does not just come. Listening is hard to learn. It is usually contrary to what we would normally do. That is why we argue. The Lord can see what we are about to do and warns us because we have already made up our minds what we want to do. The hard part for us is to yield to His will and His warning when we want to do otherwise. To this day it is still hard for me to listen sometimes. It seems to be a lesson we have to continue to learn all our lives.

Have you ever asked yourself how you can practice feeling something? You do not hear a feeling; you feel it inside you. When you feel it, you know exactly what it is. After you feel it then you have to decide if you want to follow it. In the Book of Mormon, Nephi said to his brothers: "but ye were past feeling, that ye could not feel His words". (1<sup>st</sup> Nephi 17:45) Isn't that interesting he would say, "feel His words"?

Here is just one example of something I did one time to try to learn to listen and to follow that inner voice within me. I share this story only to help you see that I am

just like anyone else. I had to learn to listen and obey by practical experiences.

At one time, I had a little Ford Falcon. The engine was so simple that a person could almost take it apart with a pair of pliers and a screwdriver. However, many mechanics told me that I should never mess with the carburetor.

One day I decided to tear apart the carburetor of my car. I decided that I would pray and ask the Lord to teach me how to take it apart and put it back together. Why? Did I want to fix the carburetor? No, it was not broken. I did it to try to create an opportunity for me to do something that was very difficult and complex to do, thus forcing me to listen to the feeling inside of me. I knew it would give me an opportunity to practice. It was not for any other reason

The impressions of the Spirit came into my mind and showed me how to do it. The answer came so clear and simple. I felt the impression to just take it apart and then lay it all out on the sidewalk in the exact order that I took it apart even making note which way the washers or parts faced (up or down) when I took them off. I took the engine all apart. I laid all the tiny parts out on the sidewalk in front of our house where I was working on the car and then I put it all back together. The car started right up. It was a thrilling experience for me to feel that teaching voice inside me telling me what to do and how to do it. I know it is not a new lesson. Many other people have learned the technique of laying things out in order when you take something apart, so they know how what order to put it back together again. The importance of this story is not that I learned something new that I did not know, but rather how I learned it.

Learning to follow that feeling that day and many other times in my life was invaluable to me in Vietnam. It has continued to be on many other occasions in my life since then.

## CHAPTER 4

### SENDING A FEELING BY PRAYER

No one wants to go to war. Some times we have to do what we have to do. When we are required to do certain things, the Lord often blesses us to use the powers within us to be able to stand in holy places in times of danger. In Vietnam my life and the lives of all of the men in my platoon were spared, on many occasions, because I was blessed to hear promptings from the Holy Spirit. From time to time those promptings came to warn us of danger and even instructed us what to do to save our lives.

Most of us, who trained together in Basic Training at Fort Bliss, Texas, Advanced Infantry Training at Fort Dix, New Jersey, and Officers Candidate School at Fort Benning Georgia, ended up going to Vietnam. After I completed Officers Candidate School I became a 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant and stayed at Fort Benning for one year as an instructor in the Communications Department. I taught radio communications to other Officer Candidate School cadets and also to other officers on their way to Vietnam. The school was at the Ft. Benning Infantry School in Columbus, Georgia. They would not allow me to transfer from being an Infantry to the Signal Corps officer (and believe me I tried) where I should have been to be teaching such high level radio communications to other officers.. Little did I know what an effect being a “stand in “Communications Officer at Fort Benning would have on my assignments later in Vietnam. After the year of teaching at Fort Benning I received my orders to report for duty on January of 1970, in Vietnam.

My wife, Janice, and I decided we would go back to my home in Hyde Park, Utah to visit my parents for a few days before I was to leave for Vietnam. It was decided that Janice and our baby son would stay in Utah with my family while I was gone.

During my visit I asked my Bishop, Earl M. Daines, to give me a blessing. In my blessing, Bishop Daines gave me the same promise that King Mosiah gave to his sons in the Book of Mormon. Bishop Daines promised me that I would be like the sons of King Mosiah in that I could not be killed while I served in the military. That blessing is surely one of the reasons that I am able to write this journal now and my wife is not a widow. There were many times when I and all of my men could have been killed had we not been protected by divine intervention.

My wife, Janice, and I talked about how we were going to cope with the experience of being apart for a year. We decided that we would like to continue our practice of having family prayer together every day even though we were physically apart. It had already become our habit to get up every morning at 5 a.m. and take time to pray and study together. We had a great desire for our prayers together to continue. We did not need to be physically together to do that.

As we looked at a little world globe, which showed us the time zones around the world, we discovered that it would be night in Vietnam when it was morning in Utah. So we decided to continue to have our prayer time together at 5:00 A.M Utah time which would be 8:00 P.M. in Vietnam. I

had seen many movies of past wars where all the soldiers were in fox holes at night so that seemed like such an easy and wonderful plan.

When I got to Vietnam I was surprised to learn that this war was not like the other wars I had seen on TV and in movies. In Vietnam there was almost no war during the day, in most places. That is the time when we all slept.

As soon as darkness fell many of the people right in the villages we stayed in, would dress in black pajamas and go out into the fields or jungle and become our enemies. They were called the Vietcong. They were not North Vietnamese soldiers who were the regular enemy. They were local people who were sympathizers with the North Vietnam Army and would help them fight the war in the local area. They would return the next morning and turn back into our barber or shoe-shine lady again. This was just the opposite of what I had expected.

The first night, I totally forgot about the promise I had made to Janice about our praying together because the things I had expected to happen in the night were happening in the day and vice versa. This was the Vietnam War and by 8 o'clock at night I was in the process of leading my men out into the dark on an ambush patrol, which was very dangerous and where we could all be killed or injured at every turn.

That first night as I started to walk out into the darkness, Janice and my home in Utah were far from my mind. My only thoughts were about me walking out of the base camp into the dark with my men lined up behind me. I

had to be focused on staying alive and keeping all of my men alive. I can tell you I was praying but I was not thinking about home.

When we arrived at our assigned destination we would conceal ourselves in the dark usually behind a dry rice paddy dike. Then we would wait and listen and be ready to fight in case the enemy showed up.

That first night as I walked along in the dark, I started to notice that I had this sensation of peace come over me. It lasted for 10 or 15 minutes. I did not pay much attention to it because of the fear I had in what I was doing on the ambush patrol. But I distinctly remember that feeling coming the very first night I was there. Gradually I began to notice that when it got to be somewhere between 7:55 and 8:10 P.M. I would have that same peaceful sensation come over me. That feeling came to me every night without fail. It was a feeling so strong and so identifiable that I realized Janice was praying for me and for my men. I could feel it as clearly as if she was right beside me bringing me feelings of peace, love and safety.

After a couple of weeks of experiencing those wonderful feelings every night as we walked out on patrol, I had an unusual experience. One night, as I felt the sensation of my wife's prayers for us, I stopped to look at my watch to see what time she got up. As I stood there silently in the dark, looking at the fluorescent dials on my watch, I was startled by my platoon Sergeant, who walked over to me and asked, "Lieutenant Vail, why do you look at your watch every night at eight o'clock?" I was amazed that he had noticed because we never left the base camp at the same

time. You never do the same thing at the same time every day when you know the enemy is watching you. Because he had noticed and asked me about it, I shared with him the reason I knew it was somewhere around eight o'clock. He seemed to be very comforted to know that my wife was praying for us and that I could actually feel her prayers.

Once I recognized my feelings came from Janice's prayers for me and for my men, when I felt that feeling come then I would just started praying with her, as best I could, under the circumstances, while leading my men along in the dark.

When I returned home from Vietnam my father told me that he had made a covenant with the Lord when I left. He told the Lord that if He would bring me back home safely, while I was gone he would attend the temple every day. My father was faithful to his promise to the Lord. My mother and several of my friends have told me that from time to time while I was in Vietnam, they would have 'feelings' that I was in great danger so they would immediately go somewhere alone and offer special prayers for my safety and the safety of my men. I am grateful that the Lord was willing to hear and answer the prayers of the faith and prayers of my family and friends. I assume that is a part of the reason that I was privileged to come back home and also to have had the experiences I have recorded here.

I know that there are many righteous men and women who went to Vietnam and did not come back alive. Many of them had parents, spouses, family and friends who fervently who prayed for them. Many of them received priesthood blessings before they went. I cannot tell you why

some of us were spared and some of were not. I can tell you that I will be eternally grateful to the Lord that He did allow me to return home. I am also very grateful for the faith of my wife, family and friends who did pray for me and give me comfort and courage to go on while I was there. My coming home was only by divine intervention. For some, that was not to be their divine destiny. We can only trust the Lord and in His infinite wisdom as to the reasons why. As one of our hymns states, "Someday we'll understand."

## CHAPTER 5

### ALMOST KILLED BY FRIENDLY FIRE

I had too many experiences, in Vietnam to relate them all in this journal; however I will record some of the most significant ones in hope that they will help to build the faith of my wife, children, family and friends in the dark times to come. These experiences have helped me realize that it was only by divine intervention that I was allowed to come back home. I feel that I was greatly blessed to have had the blessing I received from my Bishop and all the prayers on my behalf. If it were not for them, things might have been different for me. It is possible that I would not have come back home alive like so many of my friends.

One of my most vivid memories of Vietnam is about one of the very few times we were ever engaged in a battle during the daytime. I was assigned to the 25<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division and we were stationed on the border of Cambodia at Cu Chi. Our job, as a part of that Division, was to keep the North Vietnamese from bringing food down the Ho Chi Min Trail into Vietnam. Cu Chi is a place along the Cambodian border where a part of Cambodia protrudes way out into Vietnam for 10 or 12 miles. It is called the Parrot's Beak because it is shaped like a huge parrot's beak. If the enemy could come down the trail and up into the Parrot's Beak it would allow them stay in Cambodia for several miles before crossing over into South Vietnam where they would be confronted by us as their enemy.

These food-carrying activities, by the enemy, took place under the cover of darkness so that we could not see

them crossing into Vietnam. From time to time, however, we had a few patrols on the border during the day just to make sure the enemy knew we were there and also for our own safety.

During the day the enemy would hide in the bamboo hedgerows along the way. Bamboo hedgerows are as much as 100 feet wide and some times as much as a mile long. They run in long rows down through the open rice paddies to create a windbreak for the farmers. Some of them are large enough for a small army of men to hide in. They were very useful to us as well. We slept in them during the day because they protected us from being seen.

For political reasons, we were not allowed to get closer than one mile to the Cambodian border. One day our sister platoon got too close to the border during a rare day time patrol. Because they had crossed over the no trespass zone, the enemy started to shoot mortars at them. Since the entire platoon was under fire no one could move even to get away from the mortar fire. Any movement across the open ground would have been sure death.

My company commander called me on the radio and told me to wake up all of my men and get them into battle gear. He ordered me to move out to the border to help defend our sister platoon. The fire-fight that was raging was a couple of miles away from us across open rice paddies and through several rows of bamboo hedgerow trees that were so long we could not see around them.

My men and I stood up in the bamboo hedgerow where we had been sleeping and began to look around. We

couldn't see where our sister platoon had come under fire because of the hedgerows between us and. We could only see the smoke rising from the mortars shells that were being fired at them. We didn't even know whether or not any of the men were still alive.

We quickly put on our heavy battle gear and started marching in a long horizontal column over the dry rice paddy toward and then along side the first bamboo hedgerow that was about a half mile in front of us. I told my men to spread out about 20 feet apart, shoulder to shoulder, so if we took fire ourselves we would not all be hit at the same time.

We walked for about 15 or 20 minutes and could hear the mortar fire picking up out in front of us. We were about half way to the hedgerow walking across open rice paddies when my company commander called me on the radio and ordered me to get my men to start running. He wanted us to move on the double to where the fire fight was.

The Army had devised a small radio speaker that fit into each helmet so that all the soldiers in the platoon could hear what was being said to their platoon leader. That way they knew what they were supposed to do without my having to shout new orders to them in the middle of a battle. Each man in the platoon knew exactly what the company commander had just ordered me to do.

It was not easy to run carrying all our battle gear. We each had a heavy steel helmet, lots of gear plus a weapon. In addition each man had to help carry some of the machine gun ammunition so we had enough to last. We looked like

Poncho Villa with the belts of machine gun ammo across our chests. Everyone heard what the company commander's orders so when I gave them the move out signal they started a dog trot (running similar to a slow jog) picking up their pace.

At that very moment I had a very clear impression, in my mind, to stop. I knew that if we stopped I could be court marshaled. The company commander had just ordered me to run not walk and all my men heard the order as it was given. However I recognized the source of that impression. It was not a loud voice. It was just an impression in my mind instructing me to stop my platoon.

In obedience to the impression I immediately gave the signal to all my men to hit the dirt. Having been with me for a few weeks already I can assure you that when I told them to get down they had learned to get down no matter what they heard on their radios from the company commander.

We all hit the dirt causing a huge cloud of dust as we literally dove into the ground. As we landed we heard the loud booming sound of artillery being fired from our own fire base which was far behind us. We all knew that sound very well. It was our own men firing 155 artillery shells from the Jackson fire base. Within seconds the rice patty, about 100 feet in front of us, went up in a brilliant plumb of white phosphorus smoke and fire.

When the military fires artillery from a new location they always fire one white phosphorus marker-round first to see where the gun is aimed. Because it gives off a huge plume of white smoke that can be seen for miles, which

allows them to see where the gun is actually aimed. Then they make adjustments from where the smoke goes up to where they want the actual rounds of ammunition to land on the enemy target. The white phosphorus round is not intended to hit anyone. It is just a marker round. However if white phosphorus gets on the human body, it doesn't just burn the skin, it will burn a hole right through the whole body.

If we had kept jogging ahead as ordered we would have been exactly at the location of the marker round when it went off. Because we stopped when we did, all of the white phosphorus went up into the air and came down about 20 or 30 feet in front of us. No one was hurt.

We all laid there in the dirt stunned at what had just happened. We were almost killed by friendly fire. Then I heard this little emotionally shaky voice on the radio. It was my company commander's voice. Everyone could tell that he was terrified. He asked, "Lt. Vail, Lt. Vail, where are you"? I stood up, took my radio headset in hand, and answered, "I am here. We are OK ". The company commander then explained that they had a new artillery officer and he had just put that first marker round 1000 yards too close to us and because of his mistake, it should have landed right on top of us." I told him that we had stopped moving and that we were all OK. Then he said to me in a relieved voice, "Well then get going again".

Hearing our orders we stood up ready to start moving again. All my men stared at me. My platoon sergeant came walking over to me and asked, "Lt. Vail, how did you know that?" I replied, "God told me." He then

smiled and said, "Well keep it up." I knew what he meant and I knew that all my men felt the same way. We started moving out with gratitude in our hearts. No more was said about it but everyone knew that only by the grace of God and the 'impression' that He sent to us by way of the Holy Spirit, we were all still alive.

## CHAPTER 6

### Protected even as Samuel the Laminare

Nightly ambush patrols were our way of life in Vietnam. They were dangerous operations and we had to be very careful. There were things that we did to help protect ourselves from the enemy. One of them was splitting up our patrol into two parts. Before we left the fire-base in the dark, my sergeant would position himself in the middle of the platoon and then when we were about half way to our destination he would break off with half of the men behind him and go in another direction. That way we had two patrols out at the same time but any one from the village following us would not know where the first patrol was. It allowed us to protect each other in the dark.

The enemy often sent children, from the village, to follow us at night. It was harder to tell if the children were out there because they were even smaller than the adults and as usual it was very dark. The children would try to discover where our ambush patrol was hiding and then run back to the village to tell their leaders where we were. The children did not realize that they had only followed the last half of the platoon so they only knew where half of us were. This tactic worked to our advantage in case one or the other patrol got into trouble with the enemy.

When we got into our location for the night we would just get down behind a rice paddy dike and lay there all night waiting to make sure no enemy got past us. Luckily for us the rice paddies were dry in the area where we were.

We thought Vietnam would be warm at night but when we got wet we were very cold.

One night my half of the platoon was laying in the dark in front of a very long bamboo hedgerow. My platoon sergeant was way down at the other end of the hedgerow where he could see on both sides of it, probably 800 yards or more away from where I was with my men.

After we were in position we would radio back to the base camp and tell the company commander we were in position. Then all night long helicopters with night seeing devices would fly over head looking at the trails around us to see if there was any enemy movement in our area. When they saw something they would tell us so that we would be prepared to ambush whoever showed up.

As a protection for us, we had night seeing devices so we could see almost as good as if we were looking through field glasses in the day time. The more the moon was out the better the device worked. Very dark moonless nights were very frightening because we could not see anything at all.

Every night we hoped the enemy would go a different way so that we would not have to deal with them. We were willing to fight if we needed to but none of us wanted to fight with them. Also we didn't like the helicopters flying above us because if they were there for a long time we knew they had spotted something. They were like owls after mice in the night. When they saw enemy troops they would swoop down after them.

Once they had fired on something we would have to get up in the dark and go investigate. Going out into the dark to see what they had shot at was very dangerous so naturally we did not like having them around.

On one such night we were laying in our hidden position about 300 yards in front of a long hedgerow. My sergeant and his half of the platoon had filed off from us and they were clear down at the other end of the hedge row where they could see on both sides of it.

As we lay there, I was praying no one would show up (I did that every night). To our great disappointment, the helicopters did fly over and started shooting out in front of us on the other side of the hedgerow. They even brought in a fixed wing aircraft that had mini guns mounted in the side windows. A mini gun is round with six rotating barrels that turn so fast that they can fire 1800 rounds of ammunition a minute. That puts one bullet in every square foot of a foot ball field with each burst. As we listened to the wining sound of the mini guns shooting their bursts of ammunition over and over for about 5 minutes, it looked like the fourth of July at BYU Stadium when all those tracer laced bullets came streaming down from the aircraft in a blaze of red streamers.

The bullets can be seen as they are being fired in the dark because the military puts what is called a phosphorus tracer on every 5th bullet. So when a gun is fired at night the bullets leave a stream of red tracing phosphorus that can be seen burning as the bullet goes flying through the air. That way the soldiers can see where they are shooting in the dark.

Allied forces use red tracers, the Soviet supported forces use green tracers. I guess it is something like what happened in the Civil War where they had a gentleman's agreement using different colored tracers on the ammunition. At least that way everyone knows who is shooting at whom in the dark. The intention, of course, is so that you don't shoot your own men.

It was a spectacular sight to see all the bullets coming down from those mini guns. Thousands of bullets per minute shoot from each gun. It was also very frightening as we realized where those bullets were going and what they were doing. With all that firing going on in front of us, we knew we were going to have to eventually get up in the dark and go over to where all that firepower was aimed. All the tracers we saw were red. We did not see any green ones going back up towards the helicopters like we normally would have seen in a fire fight at night. We could only hope that the guns had done their job and there would be no one left to shoot back at us when we moved through to the enemy side of the hedgerow.

When the helicopter gun ships were done with their work the company commander called me on the radio and told me to take my men and go through the hedgerow to see what was out there on the other side where the helicopters had been shooting.

Being a very green lieutenant, at that time, I made a very serious mistake. I did not want to walk in the total darkness and it was too dark to use our night seeing devices. I made the decision to call back to the fire base on the radio and ask them to put a flare up so we could see where we

were going. There had not been any return enemy fire at the helicopters. I figured this was going to be a routine walk around and back. I wanted to be able to see what was on the other side once we got there.

The artillery people did what I asked and shot up a huge flare that lit up the whole area like a mall parking lot at night. These flares are like the flares you see out on the highway at night when the police are at accidents. The only difference is that they are fired off way up into the air and come back down on a little parachute. That makes the light last a long time and everything within a large surrounding area is so light that it is almost like standing under a set of huge street-lights in the dark.

My platoon sergeant told me, the next day, he could not believe I would put up flare and then take all my men and walk right into the light so we were standing up like a bunch of sitting ducks waiting to be shot. He did not realize that I thought there was no one over there because there was no return fire at the helicopters. However he knew there were enemy troops over there because he had seen things we had not seen.

As we started forward I asked all my men to come up in a straight line along side of me. Instead they all stayed in a V shaped line behind me. The reason they did this is because of all the experiences we had together by that time. They had come to believe that if they stayed behind me they would not get hurt.

I kept signaling to them with my arm to come up along side me in a straight line. Because of the flare above

us they could clearly see my signals but I could not get them to do anything but stay in a V behind me like a flock of geese flying along. They were only willing to come out just far enough so each man could fire his gun straight ahead and not hit me but still feel like he was behind me. That night I certainly learned why the infantry has the motto "Follow Me".

As we started walking towards the hedgerow, I asked each of them to fire all the weapons they had including our 90 MM shoulder held artillery piece. I decided that if there was anyone over on the other side of the hedgerow I wanted to scare them bad enough with our fire power that they would get up and run away before we saw them. I could not hear anything because I was out in front of all the guns. Normally I would be beside the guns that were going off. That is the night that I lost most of my hearing because I was in front of all of those guns going off, especially the 90 mm. To this day I can still hear the ringing in my ears from that night.

We walked for about 50 yards straight towards the hedgerow and firing all our weapons through hedgerow over into the rice paddy on the other side where the helicopters had been firing. When we finally got close to the hedgerow we started to go into it to pass through. Suddenly I had a very strong impression to turn left and not go through it, as I had been ordered to do by the company commander. He wanted us to see what was on the other side where the helicopters had been shooting and report back to him.

By failing to obey that order it was very apparent to all of us that I was putting myself in a potential court marshal situation again. (That is the fate of lieutenants who

do not obey a direct order during a battle.) I knew that if I did not obey the order and some of my men got hurt because of my decision, I could even go to jail.

The impression to 'not go through the hedgerow' was very strong. When we arrived in front of the hedgerow I signaled for all the men to stop shooting their guns and I then I signaled for them to turn left and go up the hedgerow not into it. They immediately obeyed my orders.

The flare went out and we walked up alongside the hedgerow about 500 yards but did not go through it. We found a new place to hide, called in our new position to the company commander and stayed there until daylight. There was no further action. The company commander did not say anything to me on the radio about not obeying his orders and I was relieved.

The danger we had been in did not become evident to us until the next morning when my platoon sergeant came back into our base camp with his half of the platoon. He arrived a little later than we did because his group was further down the hedgerow all night. The sergeant came right up to me in the base camp and told me that what he had witnessed the night before was the most amazing thing that he had ever seen in his life.

I said that I didn't know what he meant. He explained that because he was clear down to the end of the hedgerow he could see on both sides of it. He saw what the helicopters were shooting at. When he watched as the flare went up he thought I was crazy. I asked him why. He told me that when I put up the flare and made all my men get up and start walking right towards the hedgerow he thought we

were all dead men for sure and he was too far away to be able to help us. He said that as soon as we started shooting our guns through the hedgerow all those red tracers from our bullets started going from our guns right through the hedgerow out into the field where the helicopters had been firing. He added that the enemy soldiers, who were there were still very much alive. When we started shooting at them they put their 50 caliber machine gun up on the rice paddy brume and started shooting back at us.

He continued that he was horrified when he saw them start to shoot at us as we were all standing up walking right into the fire of their machine gun. The green tracers from the enemy bullets coming out of the machine gun started streaming into the hedgerow right towards us.

He went on to say that he fully expected to see every one of us fall. However to his amazement every bullet from their machine gun hit a tree in the hedgerow. He said that not one green tracer passed through the bamboo. He told us he could see all of the red tracers coming from our guns going right through the trees and landing all around the machine gun. He said he just could not understand how the machine gun bullets were all hitting the trees.

To understand the significance of this story you would need to know what a 50 caliber machine gun is. It is the kind of machine gun you see mounted on top of a tank. Or it has a little cart with wheels on it so it can be moved around by 2 or 3 men. It is not something one man can just carry around. It is a very large gun. Each bullet is about the size of a man's thumb and when fired it could go right through a normal one-foot thick tree and keep on going.

The second thing that you would need to know to understand the significance of this story is that the hedgerows there are not made up of trees. They are made up of bamboo. Bamboo is not a tree. Bamboo is like a broom stick in size and about 10 to 20 feet tall. A narrow hedgerow of bamboo like that one was could not stop the bullet from any gun let alone a stream of 50 caliber machine gun bullets that could cut their way through a house. By divine intervention every 50 caliber bullet was stopped before it could pass through the hedgerow and hit us. By divine intervention we were shielded from its fire. None of our bullets were stopped. They all passed right through to the other side where my platoon sergeant could see them flying all around in the field on the other side of the hedgerow.

If I had not followed my impression to turn left instead of going through the hedgerow, I do not know what would have become of us. I do not know if the Lord would have continued to protect us if I had not listened to and obeyed the promptings that I felt.

The next day, during day light hours, the company commander sent us back down to the area to investigate what had happened and what was left there. The only things we found of interest were empty shell casings from the ammunition that had been fired out in the dry rice paddy and inside the hedge row we found it to be totally filled with butterfly bombs.

Butterfly bombs are little cluster bombs that the military shoots out of artillery shells or drops from B52

bombers. They are like little hand grenades. However because they are dropped from the air and are not supposed to go off until someone touches them they have what looks like butterfly wings attached. As hundreds of them fall down from the sky into a hedgerow they do not explode, instead they fall to the ground in the bushes and hedgerows where they just sit waiting for someone or something to come along and touch or bump them. Then they go off. That is what they are supposed to do. They are intended to be like a booby trap waiting for its prey. Once in place, anything that bumps them (including us) causes a huge explosion. Each one is just as powerful as a normal hand grenade and will kill everyone and everything around it when it goes off.

If we had crossed through the hedgerow that night, even with the flare light, we would not have seen the butterfly bombs in the darkened bushes. Had we gone on into the hedgerow even if the machine gun had not harmed us, the butterfly bombs would have. The hedgerow was full of them. It is such a miracle that none of the bullets flying into that hedgerow the night before hit any of them and set them off. Even by the flying shrapnel of one of them going off near us, we would have been at least seriously wounded if not killed.

After my platoon sergeant told me what he had witnessed, I was humbled to realize that I and my men had received the exact same kind of protection as Samuel the Lamanite had received in the Book Of Mormon when he stood on the wall while the men below tried to shoot arrows and sling rocks at him. I was more grateful than I had ever been before that we had been shielded from the fire of the

enemy. I was so grateful that I had been prompted to not go through the hedgerow as I had been commanded to do, even though it was against the orders of my company commander. I was so relieved to know that I had made a correct decision and decided to obey the feelings that came to me the night before.

## CHAPTER 7

### MY GREATEST FEAR, BEING A PRISONER OF WAR

One of my greatest fears when going to Vietnam was not that I would be killed. Because of my bishop's blessing I was confident that I would not be killed if I would continue to follow the promptings of the Holy Spirit and live a righteous life.

My greatest fear was that of being captured by the enemy. I had seen a lot of movies about war and prisoners of war and the torture and hardships they went through. I was very afraid that I might be captured and have to live in a prison camp.

The prison camps are still a constant nightmare even today. They live on in my mind because I have talked to people from Vietnam who have seen prisoners still being held by the Vietnamese Army as late as in the 1990's. I have worked with Vietnamese people who had come to the United States in 1995 and they talked of having seen tall white prisoners with their own eyes. They told me they were certain that those men were prisoners of war from the Vietnam War. I am horrified to think that we left some of our men behind and that they are still there today!

There were a few times that I came very close to becoming a prisoner of war. One of those times was during a daytime assignment. Normally we slept during the day because we had to fight at night. One of the few duties we had during the day was burning the hedgerows, which was

a nice break in routine. We got to light those huge bamboo hedgerows on fire and watch them burn. We felt a lot safer once they were gone because the enemy used them to hide from us and our radar at night. Without the hedgerows in the way our radar could see their movements out across the rice paddies for miles and miles.

On that particular occasion I had a long bamboo pole, with, an oil soaked sack on the end of it, which I set on fire to use as a torch. I walked along the hedgerow sticking the torch into it, every so often, to get the fires started. That day I was so focused on what I was doing that I was not paying any attention to where my men were. We always stayed very close together for everyone's safety.

Suddenly I realized that I was a very long way from my men and in spot where they could not see me. As I was standing alone at the end of the hedgerow I had a distinct feeling that I should stop. I felt I was being watched by enemy soldiers inside the thicket I was about to burn. I dropped the torch and backed up very slowly with my weapon in my hands pointing into the hedgerow. I knew I had to get back to where my men were. This was one of the strongest promptings I ever had. I felt that if I went any further I would be captured.

I was surprised; as I dropped the torch pulled my gun up and started to step backwards, to hear my platoon sergeant yelling my name. He was a long way down the hedgerow running towards the area where I was. He kept calling out, "Lt. Vail, Lt Vail". His action and the noises he was making were probably the reason why the enemy soldiers decided to stay hidden and not come after me.

After all they had no idea how many men I had with me ready to fight.

This is another of those occasions when we all realized that the Lord had mercy on us and allowed two of us to receive impressions to get one of us out of a very dangerous spot.

I grew to really appreciate and depend on that young platoon sergeant. This was only one of many times when he proved himself to be valiant and loyal in protecting his fellow soldiers. We became very good friends. Although not members of the same church we certainly were of the same Heavenly Kingdom. I am very sorry that I did not keep track of him after the War. I do not even remember his name now. I have often wished I could search him out to see how he is doing. I'd like to know if he has a family. I would like to find him again if for no other reason than to just thank him.

## CHAPTER 8

### BLOWING UP HEDGEROWS AND TUNNELS

The enemy soldiers were very clever they would hide in the thick hedgerows at night where we could not see them with our radar. They also used them to support tunnels that they would dig under the hedgerows. The roots of the plants would keep the tunnels from caving in on them. It also made a very convenient place for them to enter and exit the tunnels without our being able to see them even in the daytime. We burned the hedgerows so they could not use them to hide from us.

My men and I had no experience with explosives so we were assigned an Explosive Ordinance Specialist to work with us. We learned a lot about blasting caps and C-4 detonation chords that are used as fuses to set off the explosives. It was very dangerous work and there were a few times we almost blew ourselves up along with the enemy soldiers.

Usually we used what were called Bangalore Torpedoes. One kind of Bangalore Torpedo was simply a tube about 2 inches in diameter and several feet long. They were originally developed during World War II to clear mine fields or to push under barbed wire entanglements to clear the battlefield so that the soldiers could go on through. In Vietnam we used them the same way to blow up thick hedgerows and tunnels. They would link together like a snake and could be pushed into the hedgerow or thick brush like a long stick. Next we put a blasting cap in one end and

when it went off it would blow up 50 or 60 feet of hedgerow and sometimes a hidden tunnel under it at the same time.

The second type of Bangalore Torpedo was the one that we called "Super Torpedo". It was 5 or 6 times as big around and about 6 feet long. They were very powerful explosives and even the ordinance specialist was very nervous working with them. They were so powerful that we were not supposed to link them together because it would create too big of an explosion.

My men and I found a long tunnel under a hedgerow that was too big to be blown up with just a normal Bangalore Torpedo. Being impatient and wanting to get our work done we went back to the base camp and brought a whole jeep pickup truck load of the "Super Torpedo's" to the site. We put about 20 of them end to end. We did not connect them together, but we did link them together with C-4 detonation chord so they would all go off at the same time and blow up the entire hedgerow and the tunnel underneath in one giant blast. We were kind of excited to set it off just to see how big of an explosion it would create. We created one long chain about 40 feet long. I knew it was going to be a really big explosion so I took my men way back away from the explosive site for safety. Then we set it off.

As we stood there to watch the explosion --- all of the sudden it was like we were seeing one of those movies from the 1950's where they showed the explosion of an atomic bomb. When it went off there was a series of shock waves came all the way to us and past us. The ground had what looked like little waves of dust just like they showed in the atomic bomb blasts. When I saw those dust shock waves

going past us and felt our pant legs flapping from the concussion I knew we were way too close to the explosion. I yelled to my men to run. We all ran as fast as we could away from the explosion but there were boulders coming down around us as big as our head. That day we were almost killed by our inexperience and foolishness. Our lives were spared but not because we were impressed of the danger. We were only spared by the mercy of the Lord in not allowing any of the boulders coming down around us to hit any of us and crush us. After that I tried to be more careful and not do things that were against regulations.

Later that same day we were burning more of the hedgerows that had not already been blown up. I was about 50 feet from my men and had them spread out along the hedgerow for about one hundred yards so we could get as much of it burning at one time as we could.

I looked over towards where my men were and noticed that there was a little gully or trail between us. It looked something like a Jeep path. I began to walk down through it to get back over to my men.

As I started down the path I had a very strong impression to not walk there. Because of that impression I stopped and turned my long bamboo pole fire torch over the grass right there and started setting the fire.

As the grass and weeds started to burn I quickly backed away. The grasses burned with an intense heat over where the little tire tracks were and an anti-tank land mine exploded right in the tire track path. It was in the very site of the jeep path that I had been walking on. If I had not

listened to the prompting, I would most surely have stepped on the mine and been severely wounded.

There ending of these two stories is the same. The reason for our protection was the same, divine intervention. The reason the incidents happened were not the same. One was foolishness on my part and the Lord had to intervene to protect us from ourselves. The other was His intervention when I could not have known of the danger any other way. I am grateful for whatever reason for the protection that came in both instances.

## CHAPTER 9

### ALMOST SHOT OUT OF THE AIR BY FRIENDLY FIRE

There were many times and so many experiences where my men and I nearly died. Another time was when we were coming back into the base camp from an ambush patrol in a helicopter. We had been out on one of those rare daytime patrols.

As the helicopter came near the base camp the standard procedure was to stop all artillery fire going out until the helicopters had landed. That day as we got near the base camp, still about 1000 feet up, we heard a horrible loud thundering squealing noise that was louder than a freight train. We could tell that something had gone right over the top of us very close to our helicopter.

We were shocked to realize that it was the sound of an outgoing artillery shell. We had almost been hit by "friendly fire" from our own artillery guns in the base camp.

The sound of artillery fire has a very distinctive sound and we had heard it many times before. Normally it was a sound coming from a long way off and very high in the air as it went over us.

This time it was different. The sound was so close that we could not hear anything else. This time the artillery shell sounded like it went right through our helicopter. It came so close to the blades that it caused us to lose the lift from the blades. The helicopter dipped sharply down to the right and

started to fall out of the sky from the concussion caused by the artillery shell as it passed over us.

We all thought we had been hit. Thankfully the pilot got control of the helicopter again and landed it safely. Later on we learned that someone in the base camp did not get the message that we were coming in to land and they fired the 155 artillery shell right over the top of us because they did not know we were there.

During wartime there are many friendly fire accidents cause by communications errors between troops. One group does not know the other group is there or assumes them to be the enemy. It is a very tragic thing for us to lose soldiers from our own fire. This day my men and I almost became a statistic in the annals of the military, a platoon of soldiers who died from friendly fire. Once again we were very grateful for the divine intervention on our behalf.

## CHAPTER 10

### FRIENDLY KIT CARSON SCOUTS FROM NORTH VIETNAM

When the enemy soldiers surrendered they were retrained and used as guides for us. Each of the platoons in our area had a North Vietnamese defector with us as a guide. They had been in that area just a few months before so they knew where mines were planted and they would avoid those areas as we walked along. They also knew where the tunnels were that the enemy soldiers were hiding in and would show us those places too.

The men who had surrendered and willingly came over to our side were called "Kit Carson Scouts" after the old Pioneer and Indian days. Most of them could not speak English. However even though my "Kit Carson Scout" could not speak English we were able to communicate quite well, especially when we were starting to go somewhere that was very dangerous. He had no trouble at all communicating to us not to go there.

From time to time we would be near another platoon that had a "Kit Carson Scout" who did speak English. When that happened, I would have their scout interpret for me which allowed me to actually talk to my guide. I got to know him quite well that way. He told me about his family who were still in North Vietnam. He told me he was married and had several children and that he had been gone to war for almost seven years. He had never visited his home in all that time. His seven years made my one year tour of duty seem

short. He even showed me the picture of his family that he carried with him.

The emotional part of the war became even more difficult for me once I got to know him that well because I soon realized that he was just like me. He did not want to be there. He went to war because his Government sent him, just as my government sent me to war. He did not want to kill any one anymore than I did. He did not want to be away from his family anymore than I did.

When we went out on patrols at night, I realized that the people we were looking for and we were potentially going to shoot, were his friends who had not defected yet. They too, most surely, were just like him. How could I shoot at one of them if they were just like him and just like me? That made decisions so hard for me and I had to remember that I was a soldier in the United States army and that is where my duty was. After that my thinking was more self defense than it was of aggressive warfare.

My scout had never seen any modern conveniences, so in the day-time when we were allowed to go to the big base camp's commissary he went with us and was astounded at all the things he saw to buy. He very quickly learned to love red twister licorice. He had never tasted it before and he thought it was very good. Every time we went there, we bought some for him and he would store it in his back pack.

Of course it was very noisy to open a package of licorice at night when we were out on patrol where it is so

quiet you can hear a pin drop for a mile. I told him that he could not take licorice out on ambush patrols with him. He understood that he had to leave it at the base camp.

One night when we were all sitting there very quietly in the dark on an ambush patrol watching; and listening for every sound in the dark I suddenly heard a paper rattling. I knew right away what it was but before I could say anything to him about opening the licorice package out there in the silent darkness he started tapping me on the hand and trying to give me some of his licorice. I knew that he felt that if he shared some of it with me I would not be mad at him for bringing it with him. It was amazing to me to think that he was so child-like and innocent.

My scout had never owned a wrist watch. Many times when we were just sitting around he would lift my arm up, look at my watch and pet it and admire it. It was so funny to watch him gloat over the fact that I had a watch.

Finally the day came when I got my new orders to report to the rear. I was no longer going to have to be on the front lines. I was to be sent back to the rear away from the battle front and I knew that I would not be with my platoon any more.

They had new orders and were all heading into battle across the border into Cambodia. I assumed I would never see that North Vietnamese scout again so I called him over to me. Since he did not speak English, I had to use hand signs and body language to help him understand that they were all going ahead into Cambodia , across the border in front of us and that I was going back to the rear and would not going with them. When I was sure he understood that, I

took off my watch, put it on his arm and motioned to him that it was his now. He held it tightly in his other hand and put it against his chest like it was the greatest treasure he had ever had and then he started to cry. I understood that he was crying because he was so touched that I would give him something so precious, my watch.

I never knew what happened to him. He did not stay with my platoon very long after they moved on because they went out of the area that he was familiar with. When I saw my men some time later they told me he was with another unit back in the same area he had serve with us.

I do not even know his name now, but as long as I live I will never forget him and the humanitarian lesson he taught me. I clearly learned from him that we are all God's children and we are very much alike even when we are born into totally different cultures.

## CHAPTER 11

### CHILDREN IN THE WAR

The whole time that I was in Vietnam I carried a vial of consecrated oil with me. Before I left home I cut the finger out of an old leather glove, put it on a nylon string and wore it around my neck. I had many occasions to use it.

The occasion that I remember more than any other was the time some children were playing too near our base camp garbage dump. We always placed booby trap explosives in the dump so the enemy could not sneak in the dump at night and take the empty cans to make bombs out of them. The explosives we placed there were called Claymore Mines. They were about the size of a library book which we impregnated with buck shot so that the mines acted something like a shot gun.

The day I remember so well one of the children stepped on the hidden trip wire that set off the explosives which killed most of them. One child was still living but wounded very severely with buck shot in the back of his neck. He was brought into our compound on stretcher to wait for the helicopter to take him to the hospital. His mother was there with him crying desperately.

I felt so sorry for her and for her boy. As I stood there looking at them I had a very strong impression to take out my oil and bless him. I was amazed to feel that impression. It looked like the boy had a broken neck from a buck shot pellet in the back of his neck. Some of the soldiers had even lifted his head up and moved it, to look at the wound, so I

assumed that if he did have a broken neck he would be paralyzed from having been moved.

I resisted the thought of giving him a blessing but the impression persisted. So I turned away where no one could see me, took the vile out of the leather glove tip and put some oil on my finger. Then I went over to the boy and pretended to be looking at the wound like the others had. I put my hands on his head, anointed him and then blessed him.

In the blessing I felt impressed to tell him that he would live and that some day he would become a member of the church and become a leader among his people. A few minutes later he was whisked away to the helicopter.

I have often wondered if I will ever see him again. I don't know his name. But I have many times looked at the Vietnamese men, who are here in the United States, to see if one of the men might have a large scar on the back of his neck.

Maybe some day I will have the privilege of going back to Vietnam where I might find a man with such a scar, who has become a member of the church and who is now a leader of his people. If not, I know that the Lord will allow me to meet him in the next life so we can talk about how the fulfillment of that blessing came about.

On another occasion we were out on night patrol just outside a Vietnamese village. As it started to get light, we saw little lights coming toward us from the direction of the Cambodian border. We suspected it was enemy troops

because the lights were coming in a single file. It was just getting light and we could see the images of the men. They looked very small to me. Vietnamese people are very short, probably an average height of around five feet tall. These were really short soldiers. I also was surprised they would have lights on them at night.

I told my men to hold their fire. We let them come a lot closer and then we could see they were children. They each had a little basket in their hand called a cricket basket. The lights on their heads were miner's lamps. We knew that they were not actually out in the night hunting for crickets (even though they do catch them and eat them in Vietnam). We knew the people of the village had used the children to carry food to the enemy assuming we would not shoot the children. The children were only pretending to catch crickets on their way back so we would not know what they were actually doing.

When they got right up to where they could see us we fired grenade launcher rounds (hand grenades shot with a gun) way over their heads behind where it could not hurt them. I did that so they would be afraid to run away from us but would rather run towards us to get away from the explosions. It worked. They came right on up to us. We captured them without hurting them. We then took their cricket baskets away from them and also their head lamps. We tried to scare them as much as we could without hurting them so they would never try doing that again and then sent them home.

The next night as we were lying in a similar place near the village, we saw the more of the same little lamps

coming toward us again. I was astonished that the adults would have watched us fire over their heads, then watched us capture them, take away their head lamps, baskets and then scold them. I knew the people in the village behind us had been witching us. They were their children. Now the next night here the same children came again. They did not have more of the miners head lamps because we destroyed them. They instead had poked holes in a C-ration can (a military food can about the size of a small tuna fish can), and tied it to their head with a string. Then they put a little candle in the front of it so they could still see as they walked along. It was ingenious how they had improvised and used cans from our garbage to make new miners caps with a light in them.

This time we just let them come up close to us then we surrounded them and held them as prisoners of war. We were all laughing about it. We were the big brave Americans and had captured 20 or 30 children. But we also had heard about incidents like May Lay and Lt. Calley where the older people and children had walked past the U.S. soldiers and then dropped hand grenades and ran away killing the soldiers. It was funny to be doing it but to us it was a very serious matter. We knew they were feeding the enemy troops and we were not certain that they would not also have hand grenades in their cricket baskets.

This time we held them there with us until the sun came up. Then we marched them with their hands on top of their heads back into the village. They looked just like real prisoners of war except they were seven and eight year old children. All the people of the village came out along the street to watch us. They were laughing and pointing at us

and I assume ridiculing us because we had captured their children.

I marched them at gun point up the front door of the Village Chief. We knocked on his door and when he came out he was very surprised to see all these children standing at gun point with their hands on top of their heads like prisoners of war. I helped my North Vietnamese Kit Carson Scout, who spoke Vietnamese understand that if the children came out in the night again I would kill them. He had been with us the night before when we shot over their heads and I assumed he himself thought I really would do it if they came again.

He then started to talk to the Village Chief. I could see from the terror on his face as the Kit Carson Scout spoke to him that he believed I really was going to kill the children if they came out in the dark again with their cricket baskets. After the Kit Carson Scout got done, none of the village people were laughing any more. The children all went home to their parents and we went back out to the hedgerows to sleep.

I was very glad as we stood there in the street in front of the village chiefs dwelling, holding the children captive, that I was able to hide my true feelings. I did not want the people to know that I would never kill their children no matter what they did to us. If they knew that they would keep sending them into harms way. The Village Chief could not tell that I felt that way. The parents of the children did not know it either. They believed what the Kit Carson Scout told them. The children never came out of the village in the dark again. For that I was very grateful. I only wished that

there could have been some way to let the children know that I would never have harmed them in any way. The children are always the ones who seem to suffer the most in a war like that. They are so innocent and yet sometimes used and abused by the adults using them for shields or protection.

## CHAPTER 12

### NEEDED STRENGTH FROM MY GRANDFATHER

One night we were on patrol all laying in a straight line formation behind a dry rice paddy dike. It was very dark and we heard enemy movement right in front of us. It sounded like it was only about 50 yards away. We could hear the enemy talking as they walked along. It was too dark for our night seeing devices called "Starlight Scopes" to work so we could not tell who it was or where they were going.

I quickly crawled down to end of our platoon in the opposite direction that I could tell the enemy was heading. I asked the last man in the line if he knew for sure had put out one of the Claymore Mines like he was told to do. We put them out all around us every night to protect us. He said he had. I then quickly crawled past 17 men to the other end of the line to see if the point man on that end where the enemy was going had put out his Claymore Mines? He told me been too scared to crawl out in the dark and place his mine.

The men who placed the mines had to crawl alone out into the pitch black darkness about 20 yards away from the platoon to place them. Without the mines out there we had no way to protect ourselves if the enemy came at us from that direction. If the enemy came at us from that direction we could just set off the explosions and it was like a huge shot gun blast of buckshot going towards them to protect us.

I gave him an order to crawl out now and put the mine where it belonged. With the sound of the enemy in

front of us he became even more frightened. I ordered him again to do it but he simply could not comply. He was so afraid that he was visibly trembling.

I knew that the mine had to be put out or we would all be in very grave danger. I had no other choice. It became my responsibility to do it myself or order someone else to do it.

At that time as sat there in the dark watching this young man tremble with fear, I began to think of my grandfather who was a professional guide over in Star Valley Wyoming back around the turn of the century. I never met him. He died before I was born. My uncles and father however had told me many stories about him as we sat around camp fires on fishing trips there in Star Valley when I was young. They had told me stories of how my grandfather had helped tourists hunt for bear and lions. Many of those hair rising stories were almost unbelievable as I listened to his courage and bravery in the face of danger. As I laid there in the dark thinking about him and feeling the fear in me, I thought about him and my being his grandson. I felt if he had that much courage in times of extreme danger when all others around him were frozen in fear, then some where inside me there must be that same courage.

I picked up the mine and crawled out into the dark. I was scared too. I knew the enemy was out there. I could still hear them. The enemy soldiers did not know that we were aware of them and that is why they were talking in tones that could be heard.

As I was crawling out to place the mine I remembered needing heavenly protection and prayed, asking the Lord to guide and protect me as I fulfilled the necessary task. A peaceful feeling came over me and I knew I would be all right. I placed the mine and returned to my men without incident. The next few hours were quiet. We did not see or hear any more from the enemy in our area that night.

## CHAPTER 13

### EVERY MAN IN MY PLATOON WAS WOUNDED AFTER I LEFT

It was our 25<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division that went into Cambodia in 1970. Not many people will remember that event now unless they were there. Cambodia was one of the turning-point of the Vietnam War.

It was even more significant for me however; because that was the day I was called out of the field to go back to the base camp at the rear. I would not be on the front lines any more.

The men in my platoon all went into Cambodia to fight while I became the Company Signal Officer at the Cu Chi Base Camp. The position was supposed to be filled by an officer of at least the rank of Captain. At the time I was only a First Lieutenant but a radio communications signal officer with the rank of captain could not be found. Because I had been an instructor at Fort Benning, teaching that very thing for one year, after completing Officers Candidate School, they took gave the job to me. That got me off the front lines back to the rear where my daily job would be an office job now in a base camp.

After a few weeks working at the Company level, as the officer in charge of all communications, I received another opportunity for advancement. The Brigade Signal Officer was going home. It was a position that was to be filled by a field grade officer of at least the rank of Major. Again I was the only officer available who knew the radios

so they gave me his position. At that time I also received top secret security clearance. It seemed very strange to me as a first Lieutenant, to be meeting and giving advice every day with a one star Brigadier General who was the Brigade Commander. It was a very stressful and challenging job when I knew that hundreds of men's lives depended on my ability to help the General communicate with them during critical operations.

Every day we heard from the troops passing through our base camp how fierce the fighting was in Cambodia where my men had gone. I was really worried about them. They had become like brothers to me. I was amazed that I actually wanted to be back out in the field with them, in the fighting, rather than back in the safety of the base camp. I wanted to be back with my men so I could help them and protect them. Every day I wondered how they were and where they were.

A few weeks after my men all went into Cambodia; I heard that they were back in our base camp. I ran to where I was told they would be. When I came upon my Platoon Sergeant, who had taken over for me, along with my men, I was horrified. Every man in my platoon had been wounded! Every single one of them! Luckily none of the wounds was life threatening.

I wondered if I could have protected them if I could have stayed with them. I felt very strongly that even if I had been wounded myself, at least I could have been there with them in the worst of it. That was not my choice or theirs. I deeply regretted that I was not permitted to continue

leading my platoon and fighting on the front lines with them.

Within a few hours my dear friends, my wounded men, were all gone again. I never saw any of them again. I wish I had written their names and addresses down so I could have kept in contact with them. I will always remember their faces. Our experiences together are etched forever in my memory. All of the men in my former platoon got a purple heart for being wounded and each of us received the Army Commendation Metal and the Bronze Star for bravery as well. It is not the metals that are of value to me hanging on my wall, it is the experiences we had together to earn them.

## CHAPTER 14

### DANGER WORKING WITH YOUR OWN MEN IN THE BASE CAMP

My life was very different in Vietnam after I was pulled back to the rear into the base camp. I was inside every night and slept in a bed rather than on the ground. I ate regular food rather than the C-rations the fighting men had. My life was more like being on a job in an office except for the ever present dangers of many of the men who were taking drugs and the problems that they caused for those of us who did not.

I had read the studies done on 'officer casualties' in the other wars. The studies found that more 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenants were shot in the back than those who were killed on the front lines---in every war. That means they were most likely shot by their own men who were taking drugs or being forced to go into the battle when they did not want to go. I became aware of that problem when I was in the field and now being in the rear it became even more apparent that the studies were true.

The danger in the rear was much greater from our own men who were taking drugs and killing the officers who opposed their using them than it ever was out in the field on ambush patrols. At least out there we all stuck together and protected each other. In the rear, it was every man for himself. Almost all of the men in my new Radio Communications Platoon, in the base camp, took drugs and did other things that most of them would not have done at home.

We often heard stories of our fellow officers who were killed in the base camps by their own men when the officers tried to stop the men from taking drugs. If a man wanted to get rid of another soldier, he would just throw a Fragmentation Hand Grenade into the man's sleeping place at night . (It was called it being "FRAGGED"). The time spent in base camp was a time to be careful in a decidedly different way than was necessary while we were out in the field.

## CHAPTER 15

### CARELESS ADVICE

After I had been in the rear for some time there were two new Lieutenants who came into the base camp on their way out into the field. It was their first night in Vietnam and they were both to become platoon leaders.

Neither man was a member of the LDS church. They were men who were; of course, very anxious to talk to me because I had been where they were going. I remember so well that night standing there on a little foot-bridge over a small stream in the base camp talking with them and answering their questions. I remember telling them that it really was not that hard and that the war was pretty much over so they would not likely even see any action.

The next morning, when we woke up, we were told that on their first day, one of those two officers was killed in an ambush and another one had stepped on a mine and was so severely wounded he had to be flown back to the hospital in Japan. I have often wondered if I made the officers careless with my words. I have wondered if they might not have been hurt if I had warned them rather than just tell them the situation was not that bad. I have regretted the conversation I had with them so many times. Why did I not realize the seriousness of the situation and warn them to be careful in every move they made? I will always wonder if I had warned them rather than try to ease their fears, if they would have been more careful and maybe not have been hurt.

## CHAPTER 16

### HOME TEACHING AT WAR

After being in the base camp at Cu Chi for a few months, I became a member of the LDS Group Leadership. Peter Cookson was the group leader. Don Glover and I were his counselors. Peter was merely a Private First Class, E4 but he was chosen as the Group Leader. That is the same thing as being a Branch President. We had many officers including a couple of senior field grade officers in our group. The Protestant Chaplain, who was over us, was puzzled as to why the LDS church would choose a lowly enlisted man to be the leader of our group when there were several high ranking officers available. He would often twist his long Texas style mustache and say, "Peter I just don't understand how you can be the leader of these men. You are just an enlisted man, why doesn't your church pick one of the field grade officers to be the leader?" He never got an answer that satisfied him.

Peter's job was like that of a Bishop. With the calling came many gifts and he had those gifts of discernment very strong. He blessed the lives of every man in our group with his spiritual leadership. As we worked with Peter it was easy to see that by his prayer and inspiration we were able to set up programs and call many men to calling that either brought them back into activity or kept them from going there.

There were lots of memorable activities our group participated in but too trivial to write about in this journal.

One humorous thing I'll mention--- is how we would all laugh during the opening song when we sang, "We are all enlisted".

Another experience that I remember well is the day we were all at an LDS Area Conference in Saigon. The Church News reporter was there and took pictures of us. Our Group picture came out on the front page of the Church News, which was quite a thrill for many members of our family and our friends back home. The photographer also wrote an article about our home teaching program that appeared in the Church News a few weeks later.

While serving in the group leadership position, I started a publication called "The Soldier Saint" and became its editor. It was a monthly publication that we used to send out to every LDS soldier who was in our area. We tried to give our brothers something of a spiritual uplift and guidance during these trying times. Thankfully the Army was willing to send our publication to our men by army mail so long as we did the publishing. The army also made available the records of all the men in the Division so we could find those who were LDS.

We felt somewhat helpless to know how to strengthen the men who were under such severe temptations in that particular environment so prayer was a big part of the work done for our publication. We did all we could to reach the brethren and felt that eventually much good came from it. Some of the men even sent their copy home to their wives and their wives wrote back to us with letters for us to publish.

Our LDS group leadership started a home teaching program. It was interesting to go home teaching to the inactive men there in the base camp. When we would go in their hooch (that is what we called the places where we slept) there would almost always be *Playboy* fold-out pictures all over the walls.

When we would go home teaching to those men, we would sit down and teach the man about the gospel and there facing us were 8 or 10 naked women hanging on the walls. All we could do was look at the floor while we talked so we did not have to look at them. When we stood up at the end of the meeting to give a prayer and shake hands, we had to try really hard to not look around to keep from seeing the pictures without trying to do so. It made it hard to keep our visit on a spiritual level. However many of those men were reconverted. It was a thrill each time we went back to one to find he had taken the pictures down without our asking him to.

At times it was impossible to not see the pictures. I did not have them in my hooch and I did not allow the men who worked for me to hang them in the radio repair shop where we worked. I had the advantage there because I was an officer and they were obligated to follow my orders. However from time to time you just walked into a picture and saw it before you realized it was there. Some of those pictures were indelibly imprinted on my mind by no choice of my own. I don't see them in my mind any more unless I start talking about Vietnam and those experiences. Then the pictures come back and I have to start singing songs and quote poems again to switch my mind to other topics and make the images go away again. That was just one of the

things that we LDS men had to deal with while serving in the armed forces.

Through our church activities, we were able to bring many of the men back into the church. We will never know the spread of good that came from the conversion of those 20 to 30 men who started to come back to church with us. If each one of them went home and only converted one person who converted one person who converted one person the effect would soon grow into thousands of converts as Ammon prophetically promised us in the Book Of Mormon (Alma 26:22).

I have kept in touch with a few of those men and have learned that doing missionary work after they went home for some of them has been more than converting just one person. The kingdom of God truly is like a stone cut out of a mountain and it is rolling forth to fill the whole earth one individual at a time.

## CHAPTER 17

### DREAMS OF A FUTURE WAR

One night, as Peter Cookson, Don Glover and I were in a Group Presidency meeting, we started to talk about our past lives at home before we arrived in Vietnam. One of us mentioned that he had had a dream reoccur throughout his life. We soon realized that all three of us had had that same type of dream all of our lives. The dreams were about a war that we would be involved in --- some day in the future.

We talked at great length about our dreams. As we compared them we realized that we had each dreamed about the same kind of actions during the war where we were hiding and running to protect our families. The one difference was that my dream and Don's dream took place in a large city full of buildings while Peter's dream took place in the mountains where he was hiding his family in caves rather than in city.

Until that night, I had always assumed, when I got drafted into the Army, that my dream was to prepare me mentally to be able to go to Vietnam. However, as we talked, we all realized that Vietnam was not the right war. By comparing actions in each dream we concluded that the war in our dreams was a war in the United States not there in the jungles and rice paddies of Vietnam and that it was still in the future. I know that this is not a dream given to anyone but me. Peter's dream was only for his own information. Don's dream was only for his own information. These dreams were not given to us as public information and I only mention them here because it was a

life changing event for me. We were just astonished to discover that we had all had the same type of dream and none of the dreams were about Vietnam.

I have thought a lot about those three dreams many times since that night. The interesting thing is that at the time Peter was from a very large city and I lived in the country. Now I live in a very large city and he lives in Costa Rica where there are mountains and rural villages. Someday we will see if those dreams were just dreams or if we had a preview of some of what Orson Pratt, Heber C. Kimball and others saw and wrote about---happening in the future of our country and to our families.

## CHAPTER 18

### SOME THINGS ON THE BATTLE FIELD WERE GOOD

There were some US Navy riverboats stationed on the Mekong river by Cu Chi Base Camp where we were. They were small boats that patrolled the river to keep it safe for travel for the US Armed Forces personnel.

The Navy had great food, brought up the river to them from the ships in the seaports. Since the sailors were not allowed to leave their boats, they had no way to buy liquor. They were anxious to get to know us because they knew we could go to the PX commissary store and buy liquor. Their idea was to get us to trade their food (which they had too much of and we had very little of) for liquor (which we could get at the PX commissary store and they could not get at all). Therefore, we often went to the PX, bought bottles of Scotch, and took them down to the river to trade for steaks and lobster. What a "Life Of Riley" we lived there by those boats. If you are ever going to join the military, join the Navy. The food is great.

Though it may sound strange, there were times in Vietnam when we could not get re-supply parts for our equipment. The local people were stealing much of it when it came in off the ships or off the convoy trucks. Many things we needed were taken before it was every moved out to the troops. We learned that in Saigon you could actually buy those spare parts right on the street from venders on the black market.

There were some critical spare parts that we were desperate to get and we could not get them through regular supply channels. Our base camp was about 2 hours from Saigon and the commander knew those parts were available on the black market in Saigon. He therefore allowed me to take a jeep and some men and actually travel to Saigon on business. When we got there, it was astonishing to see blankets laid out along the sidewalks along the streets for blocks and blocks. On those blankets was every type of military supply item you could imagine, even gun parts and ammunition. You could buy every part of a Jeep that could be taken apart except the frame (and that may have been further on down the street). The black market was an amazing sight to see. There were no police trying to stop them. Local people had stolen the parts and now they were selling them. We found exactly what we wanted and went back home. That was not the only such trip for us to get critical parts.

On one such trip we found out the military had a place for servicemen to make phone calls back to the United States. It was not really a telephone hook up; rather it was an AM Radio hook up that looked like a telephone. Because it was a radio not a telephone when you finished talking we had to say "OVER" so the other person would know it was time for them to talk. Only one person on the line could talk at a time or you cut the other person out. It was hard to have a conversation that way but it was a thrill to have the privilege to call my wife and hear her voice. Talking to her was like a gift from heaven.

Another thing that really surprised me about service in Vietnam was R & R (Rest and Recuperation) leave. Every soldier in Vietnam was able to take a two-week R & R from

Vietnam during his or her one-year tour of duty. It seemed odd to me that they would give you a two-week vacation during the war, but I was not going to turn it down. We could go almost anywhere in the Pacific area we wanted to, at the Army's expense, including Australia and Japan. I chose to go to Hawaii.

My wife and I saved our money so she could fly over and meet me there. We also paid the way for my parents to join us so they would be able to visit Hawaii before they died. I thought it would be wonderful to be with Janice again but it would also be hard to see her and then have to leave her again so I waited to take my R&R until right at the end of my tour.

I knew it would be hard to go back after seeing her. For that reason, we waited until I only had one month left in my one-year tour of duty in Vietnam when I went on R & R. Words cannot describe the feelings that I had when I got back on that airplane to go back to Vietnam. I almost would rather not have had that little time we had together than to have to leave her again so soon. We had only been married one year before I left and then we had been apart for a year. However we did have a wonderful time in Hawaii as best we could under the circumstances.

## CHAPTER 19

### OUR TICKER TAPE PARADE: BEING SPIT ON WHEN WE CAME HOME

Finally my year was up and I was able to go back home. I remember as I flew on the long flight home, that I began to review all these experiences in my mind. One of my memories was of the airplane trip on the way over to Vietnam. I remembered sitting there thinking about how hard it was to be going into "the unknown", not knowing what would happen to us. I knew that some of the men on that plane were going to die. I remembered how I was praying for the Lord to protect me and let me might have the privilege of being able to use the powers of the Priesthood to control the elements in an effort to protect me and my men.

As I was remembering those prayers from the plane ride just one year earlier, I realized that they had truly been fulfilled. That was the one thing, more than anything else, I had experienced in Vietnam. I had been given the power to control the elements on many occasions, even to the saving of my own life and the lives of all of my men

It should have been a thrilling experience to arrive back home in the Untied States. Growing up I had seen ticker tape parades, in the movies, of the solders coming home from previous wars. I remember soldiers marching and riding up the streets of New York with people cheering and the air filled with confetti. Excitement and joy filled the air.

What a shock it was to us when we arrived at the Los Angeles Airport. There were no ticker tape parades for us. Instead there were protesters standing on both sides of the aisle inside the airport. They were not cheering, throwing confetti or waving flags. Instead there were war protesters there and they booed us and spit on us. They yelled vile names at us. They called us traitors. That was our thanks and welcome home.

We simply ignored them realizing that they knew nothing about freedom and the price that had been paid to purchase it, with the blood of our fellow soldiers, our friends and patriots in this war and wars past. We knew they had no way to understand the price of freedom that had been purchased with the blood of patriots of the past.

The war protesters appeared to us to be people who were wallowing in their prosperity never giving a thought to the price that was paid in the past and in Vietnam to keep the people of the world. They seemed to have forgotten what it took to make us free ourselves in this great land of opportunity. They stood before us as a symbol of people who take no responsibility for helping other countries gain freedom too.

Before I went to Vietnam many of my peers went to Canada rather than to go to war. Some of them are still there. These young men along with those people who were booing us, at the airport, were not to my mind, loyal American citizens. They were the sad result of misguided teaching in our society mostly by college professors who were against the war. They appeared to us to be people who enjoyed what they were not willing to pay for.

As soldiers, we went to Vietnam because we were asked to, not because we wanted to. We supported our government and showed that we were willing to pay the price of freedom for other people in the world, even with our lives if necessary. We were just grateful to be home, alive and now here they were booing us as we came into the airport. How could they know of our pain that we felt knowing that many of our comrades were not there with us? They had given up their lives to preserve freedom for people of another nation so they could have what we have. We knew who we were and what we represented. We just ignored them and waked on through the airport, though our ticker tape parade of booing. We just went home.

The worse blow to us as soldiers came when we saw on the news that many people including some who were very famous were calling us criminals and actually we were traders.

There is noting that can be done about these anti war protests. They are sad events of the history of our country. We cannot stop war protestors. We have no right to. Each person has the free agency to believe what they want to believe and within reason treat others as they want to treat them. All we can do now as Vietnam Veterans is to just forgive, forget and go on.

## CHAPTER 20

### NOT EVERYONE CAME BACK HOME

My close friends and family asked me to write down these spiritual experiences many times but I have not wanted to start thinking about these things again especially when I remember a dear friend who went through training with me but who did not come home.

His name was Gary Rule Mower , a farm boy from Fairview, Utah. I was a farm boy from Hyde Park, Utah. We were alike in almost every way and we became very close friends. We both served missions, attended BYU and had been married in the temple. He loved his wife and was faithful to her just as I had tried with all my heart to be faithful to Janice. Both our wives had given birth to a son shortly before we were sent to Vietnam.

Gary loved to do missionary work in the military and I did too. So far as I could tell he lived every commandment with exactness and he constantly encouraged me to do the same. During most of the advanced training we went through together, he was right by my side. We were even at the airport together, with our wives, when we left for Vietnam.

Four months after we arrived in Vietnam, Gary was killed by a land mine. It has been one of the great sorrows of my life. Even to this day I often ask why he had to die. I feel almost guilty that I was warned so many times and had my life and the life of all my men spared by listening to the promptings and obeying them. There is no question in my

mind that -- if it had not been the will of the Lord to allow him to die, Gary would have had the same protection and promptings that I did. I do not know why he had to die and leave his wife and child alone for the rest of their lives.

I still often remember his wife Ruth Ann and their son Gary in my prayers. Without husband and father their lives have been very hard. Oh that there were more that I could do than just pray for them. It was too painful for me to even contact them for many years. Finally I did contact Gary's family again and talked to them. They of course did not know me but I certainly knew them. I hope that I can, in some way over the years, be able to do something to help ease the pain of Gary's earthly loss to his family.

Gary's loss of life has embedded into every fiber of my being the reality of the protection that the Lord blessed me with. It reminds me constantly of the importance of listening to the promptings of the Holy Ghost and if the importance of following those promptings. I know of a certainty that the words of the famous poem "except for the Grace of God, there go I" is true of me and Gary. However, I am also reminded that the will of the Lord is always right and we are not to judge when things don't turn out like we think they should or the way we want them to.

I know that I will see GARY again, where we will shout for joy as we share our many missionary experiences, on the other side of the veil. I am sure he has had just as many missionary experiences over there --- where he labors in the spirit world as I have had here. Maybe that is why the millennium is 1000 years long; it will take us that long just to

get caught up on sharing our experiences with friends and loved ones.

I sometimes wonder if maybe he is watching me, as a ministering angel, already aware of my activities and the fulfillment of those dreams we so often talked about such as our being like the sons of Mosiah in our missionary work. It was the life long dream and hop of us both that we could fulfill the promise of Ammon in the Book of Mormon to literally convert 1000's to the gospel in our life time. I hope that when I meet Gary again I can report back to him that I have kept my part of that promise as I know he will have done himself.

## CHAPTER 21

### COMING OF AGE AT WAR

Getting home and returning to our lives was not the end of the war for us. Most of us still think about the war a lot and have to try to block it from our minds. It is a part of us. We lived it night and day; we just have to learn to get past it and try to live normal lives again.

After a few months of being back home, we watched the nightly news on TV as the South Vietnamese Army crumbled and North Vietnam took back the land some of our friends had given their lives to help keep free for the South Vietnamese. For some of us it was a year of our lives fighting for them. Many others paid the ultimate price and gave their lives.

I remember, so well, standing in front of the TV in our apartment at the University of Utah watching on that day when the very place I had been fighting, fell back into the hands of the North Vietnamese Army. They showed our base camp being over run. I watched on TV as Cu Chi fell back into enemy hands.

I can tell you that my emotions were so strong--- thinking about what we gave to take that place ---I think I would have gone back that very day if I was called back to duty. What a helpless feeling to have! What a price we paid for that place and then to have the South Vietnamese just give it back without a fight.

The war was over and all we fought for was lost and given back to North Vietnam. You would think that would be the end of the war for us. But it was not the end of the war for us. The worst was yet to come. Years later in 1995, I was working as one of the managers for a sewing factory in Logan , Utah. We had a lot of Vietnamese boat people working for us. Many of them had come to America from Vietnam just a year or two before.

The war had been over for more than 20 years when they had finally escaped and come to America. As they worked for us they learned to speak English. I was the one to teach them English so I got to know some of them very well.

As we talked, they told me that just before they left, they had seen American soldiers there who where still prisoners of war. They said they were slaves to the North Vietnamese Army. I listened to them describe the scene with horror. How often I thought of the saying, "Except for the grace of God, there go I". It could have just as easy been me. I could have been captured. I could still be there alive as a slave.

I lived in constant fear while I was there that I would be captured. I had seen prisoner of war movies all my life. That was my greatest fear, and now to have them tell me that some of my fellow servicemen were still there 10, 15, 20 and maybe even 30 years later. How can I not think about the fact that one of them could just as easily been me. The war is not over yet for me. I constantly wonder how the North Vietnamese could have been so clever in their negotiations after the war that we could have just forgotten the MIA's and not have any way that we could go after

them. How could we have just left them there alive. How? There is no answer to that question. It is a tragedy of war.

If I were given the opportunity to go back to try to free them even today, I would go! How can I think that the war is over for me as long as I feel some of them are still alive over there as slaves? The war is still not over for me. Not in my head. I never watch army movies about Vietnam. It always starts the flashbacks. Sometimes I still have flashbacks about being captured in my dreams. I often thank the God of heaven that my life was spared and that he gave me the privilege to have the power to protect myself and my men while I was with them. For that I will be ever grateful. I only regret that others had to die. I pray for their families and for their grief to be turned to peace.

Truly my dear friend Gary Mower and I both came of age while at war but in a very different way. I lost much of my hearing. Every day of my life that hearing loss reminds me of Vietnam. Gary lost his life. Surely almost daily, Gary's family still thinks about the ultimate sacrifice he made for his country. That makes my hearing loss seem like such a little thing compared to him. We both went willingly because we were asked to go. We both gave all that we knew how to give in a way we knew how to give it. For neither of us is that war over yet, not for us or for our families.