

November 16, 2000

Greetings:

Man, do I remember November 16, 1967. The day began crisp and cool as my Dad drove me to the Selective Service Office on Main Street in Flemington, New Jersey. Today was to become my first day in the Army. Several other young men were present at the office, each one with a different attitude, fear, or feeling of bewilderment as the bus arrived, and we climbed onboard for our ride to Newark. We stopped by Somerville on the way and picked up another bunch of bewildered recruits. We arrived in Newark and proceeded to be moved like cattle from room to room as we filled out forms and tried to maintain emotional control. After spending most of the day in Newark, we boarded another bus for the ride to Fort Dix. We did stop at a diner somewhere along the route to supposedly have our "last supper." We arrived at Fort Dix in the dark and, again, were herded like cattle into the old barracks that were probably built for World War II recruits. One bright spot: on one of our forms was the abbreviation E.T.S. Right beside it was the date November 15, 1969. Whoopee! We were to serve one day less than two years. I actually got out on July 25, 1969 to re-attend college, but that's another story. Plus, another story I wouldn't learn until many years after leaving the Army was that just two years previous to my entry into the Army was the next to last day of the Battle of LZ XRAY, in the Ia Drang Valley Campaign waged by our outfit, the First Cav. And, then on November 17, 1965, there occurred the grisly Battle of LZ ALBANY, but that, too, is another story best told by those who were there. My God, was it really 33 years ago? Was I really just 20 years old? Yes, I was! And, so were most of you who will read this newsletter. I truly believe that a majority of us turned 21 years old, sometime during our tours of duty, in a land far far away, a land that I can't help but think about often, too often, churning up good memories, bad memories, fears, miracles, tragedies, mistakes, and last but not least, spirituality. I hope that you enjoy this abbreviated newsletter, my first since November 22, 1998. To say the least, the last two years have been very tumultuous in my life, sort of like a "tour of duty," with good memories, bad memories, fears, miracles, tragedies, mistakes, and Thank God, Spirituality.

December 3, 2000

I've been meaning to sit down and finish this newsletter all weekend, and now, it is 7:30 pm on Sunday night, and I just looked at the date and thought that on this day in 1968, I was shamming somewhere after R&R, and the Company was getting mortared in Chicken Valley. And, the next day, December 4, we lost 3 good men from Whiteskull. Thinking about this, I feel remorse and guilt for being spared, while brave men died. Such is one of the symptoms of PTSD, or Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. There are many other symptoms, such as sleep problems, fear of crowded places, startle response, substance abuse, emotional numbness, flashbacks, nightmares, etc. I never would have known about PTSD if I hadn't listened to other men at the reunions when they related their feelings and problems. I filed for compensation for PTSD in 1999 and was awarded 30%. I guess the fact that I still work full time had a lot to do with the decision by the VA. I now take medication and see a therapist once a month. I seem to feel better about life in general, but that could also be the result of a completely new lifestyle, due to the satisfactory solution to a problem which has been brewing for the past two years. In August of 1998, I went to Ireland and had one helluva time! My Uncle Bob was the "designated driver," and I was the "designated drinker!" My Dad and Cousin were along for the ride too. Anyway, while drinking pure "Guinness," I noticed one day that my ear started to itch, and lotion wasn't working. The problem continued when I returned, and it expanded to my scalp. I went to a dermatologist, and he said it was winter dryness or stress and gave me some medicine to alleviate the problem. The medicine didn't work. I mentioned my situation to my barber, and he said I needed more oil on my scalp. His treatment didn't work. Then, he suggested that it might be something that I'm eating. I did some research into dermatitis and was referred to a

condition known as Celiac Sprue, or gluten intolerance. Gluten is a protein contained in Wheat, Rye, Barley, and Oats. I reasoned that beer was made from Barley, so I laid off the beer for a couple of weeks, didn't eat bread or pasta, and the problem seemed to go away. Then, I had a six-pack of beer, and my head started to itch within 20 minutes. So there it was; I was Gluten intolerant. Apparently, this condition can crop up in life anytime between age 0 and age 80, and the Irish have the highest incidence in the world. I had, apparently, self-diagnosed the problem. But, give up beer? As I now know, I've had an "addictive personality" my whole life, from a craving for sugar in early childhood, replacing sugar with cigarettes in my teens, discovering in Vietnam "another" form of intoxicant, which upon my discharge from the Army in 1969 was an after work "cocktail" every day for 8 years, mostly ALONE, to be replaced by a few after work beers every day for 21 years, mostly ALONE. But, give up beer? I felt that I was in control with beer. I worked every day, got mellow after work, ate supper, took a nap in my chair, woke up to Johnny Carson or Jay Leno, read for a while, went to bed, got up, went to work, etc. I was in complete control, or so I thought. I've never been a hard liquor drinker, so I started drinking something that didn't contain Gluten, wine. But, where I was in control with a few beers a day and an occasional "blitz" during reunions, a few glasses of wine a day turned into several glasses of wine a day, until January 14, 2000. That was my first day in San Juan, Puerto Rico, for a reunion. After unpacking, I went out looking for some wine and found the selection not very good. Hey! I'm in Puerto Rico! I'll try rum! Bad idea. When I returned to my room that night, all I could do was get on my knees and say: "God help me." I drank lightly the rest of the reunion. I stopped drinking for several days upon my return, only to pick up again, by "controlling" the amount that I drank on any given day, only to be "blitzed" on the weekends, starting earlier and earlier each day. Then came February 12, 2000.

I was off from work on Friday, the 11th. That was the "holiday" for Lincoln's Birthday. I drove down to my Moms in Ringoes, NJ and stopped in Flemington at the package store for some supplies. I picked up a couple of magnums of wine and opened the first as soon as I got in the door at the old homestead. By late evening, I had polished off one and a half of the magnums and went to sleep. I woke up at 9 the next morning and proceeded to polish off the half that was left from the night before. I then drove back to Flemington for some more, came back, took a nap, and woke up at 2 in the afternoon and opened another magnum. I lost track of time around 5pm and around midnight, found myself standing in pitch blackness, not knowing where I was. For a moment, I thought I was back in Vietnam repeating a nightmare I had in the mountains of I Corps during the Summer of 1968, when I walked in my sleep outside the night location perimeter. Back then, I recall waking up in a standing position in pitch blackness, not knowing where I was. I slowly felt around and felt a tree. I gently felt down the tree, feeling for a trip wire. Not feeling any, I got down on all fours and felt the ground. Fortunately, we were on a mountain, and I could feel the slope of the terrain to my rear. I slowly turned around and crept uphill and found my sleeping position. I had "walked" about 20 feet! Thank God I didn't hit a flare! In the present, I was standing in pitch blackness, and I slowly felt around and felt a sofa, end table, lamp, and I suddenly realized I was safe. I turned on the light and looked at my watch. Midnight! Where had the time gone? I saw the empty magnum on the coffee table. I couldn't remember finishing it! What were these scratches on my arm? Did I really dream picking the cat up by its tail and laughing? My God! I've had my first blackout in my drinking career! But, thank God, I've had it in the safest place on Earth, in my Mothers house, not in my car, not in a strange city, but Home! My prayer for help had been answered, in the form of a nightmare, one that I still fear to this day. I lost the fear of death in Vietnam, but I'll never lose the fear of insanity, and inducing a blackout again is INSANE! Blessed be the Miracle of Fear! I haven't had a drink since.

I have re-discovered a Spirituality that I had forgotten a long time ago, when I miraculously made it back from Vietnam and proceeded to turn my back on my Higher Power and live life my way. Sure, I had all the answers. But, I had forgotten the Power of Prayer. I had forgotten the feeling that I had after the Miracle that occurred on January 3, 1969. On that day, so long ago,

we were on patrol North of LZ Rita, along the Cambodian border. We, Range Platoon, were on the left flank. Suddenly, Lloyd Jackson yelled out "Ambush," and started firing his M-60! My team of John Lee, Rudy Nuncio, and Joe Villa were right behind Jackson's gun team. I froze! John Lee got up with his duper, and in a standing position in front of me, started firing rounds to the front right of me. His grenades weren't arming. He said: "I need a rifle!" As he bent down to pick up another round and my head came up over the log with my rifle, John recalls that out of the corner of his eye to his left, he thought he saw Marty Martinez. How could this be? But, Marty had the resemblance of a Vietnamese, and all John and I can figure out is that the gook to John's left front fired as John bent down to pick up a round, the bullet went through a tree, broke up, and a piece then went through John's arm and hit me in the upper lip, knocked out a tooth, and deflected into the soft tissue under my tongue. "I'm hit!" I said after a momentary flash of "whiteness" appeared! Then, I started to bleed.....and bleed.....and, oh my God, help me! I could see the puddle of blood on the ground below me, as I closed my eyes and asked God for help. And, all of a sudden, a feeling of serenity and peace came over me, as I opened my eyes and felt so calm and peaceful. The bleeding had stopped. Somehow, I had clotted. The wound had sealed itself. I was alive! Until very recently, I had never appreciated the Magnanimous Miracle that saved my life that day. I always remember the Surgeon in Long Binh telling me that the piece was too small to be removed, and that he had probed trying to find it but couldn't. I've had dental work recently with a new dentist, and he first wanted an xray of my mouth, so I stood on this machine I had never seen before, one that does a complete scan of your head. I jokingly said to the dentist that he might see a very small piece of shrapnel turn up. When he came back into the room, he said: "here it is!" My eyes opened wide, and I said: "My God, is that actual size?" "Yes," he replied. Now, since it was a two-dimensional shot, I don't know how thick it is, but the two sides I could measure with a ruler read 1/4 inch by 3/8 inch! That's a big chunk of metal in my mouth! It had to have put a big hole in the soft tissue under my tongue, you know the area, the one with all the blood vessels? And, it's still there! It's rectangular in shape, with the two opposing longer sides slightly rounded. I think it's a bullet fragment. I can remember walking away from that ambush on cloud 9. I was totally overwhelmed by the spirituality of the moment. I haven't been the same since, but I managed to cloud that feeling of goodness with more than 30 years of "my will be done" instead of "Thy Will Be Done." But, I have reached a fork in the road of life, and I have chosen a path of living life by keeping it simple, one day at a time. Even being served with divorce papers, after nearly 30 years of marriage, 2 months into sobriety, has failed to change my bearing. I can see a lot clearer now. I question why I have been spared. Have I been spared to fulfill a destiny? Perhaps, working on and inspiring the Resurrection of Angry Skipper is part of that destiny. I don't know. All I do know is that I feel rejuvenated in spirit, energetic in mind, and getting stronger in body, one day at a time.

December 9, 2000

Another week has gone by. On Monday, the 11th, I'll be able to fill in another month on my "short-timers calendar." As of Monday, I will have 20 months to go until my 55th birthday, at which time, I can retire from my job and collect a partial pension. That pension, combined with my disability compensation from the VA and miscellaneous investments will enable me to live anywhere I desire. With the first significant snowfall of the season this week, I like to think of moving to someplace warm. South Carolina is high on my list of places to move to. Last month, I spent Veterans Day with Jim Nix and his family. On the way out on Sunday to visit my Dad in Halifax, NC, I passed by the Cowpens Battlefield site. It was just after 9 o'clock in the morning, and the park was open, so I went in and walked the field where on January 17, 1781, Continental troops under General Daniel Morgan, soundly defeated a British force. This battle, combined with others, such as Guilford Court House in North Carolina, hastened General Cornwallis to seek resupply in Wilmington, North Carolina before his march north to Yorktown, and we all know "the rest of the story." I am fascinated by military history, in fact, my undergraduate degree was in History, from Heidelberg College in Tiffin, Ohio, which leads me to another thought.....

Heidelberg College currently has a program called the Center for Military History Archaeology. Two Anthropology Professors are currently conducting research on military sites in Ohio, which have had an impact on the regional history. One project is in Maumee, Ohio, the site of the Battle of Fallen Timbers in 1794, where General "Mad" Anthony Wayne defeated the Indians and ensured the entrance of Ohio into the Union in 1803. Heidelberg has accurately located the site of the battle, which for many years has been mistakenly mislocated. Other historical sites currently under study include the Civil War Union prison on Johnson Island in Sandusky, Ohio and the Battle of Buffington Island site in the Ohio river downstream from Parkersburg, West Virginia. In 1862, Confederate General Bragg authorized a cavalry officer by the name of General Morgan to conduct a raid with his 3000 mounted troops into Kentucky, Indiana, and Ohio. Morgan was captured just South of Youngstown, Ohio in 1863, but a contingent of his unit fought a battle on Buffington Island in an attempt to cross the Ohio River and re-enter Virginia (Note: West Virginia did not become a State of the Union until 1863).

What is the point of my rambling, you might ask. I'm just thinking out loud about how to spend the rest of my life. With retirement on the horizon, I can be anybody I want to be, go anywhere I want to go, and not have to worry about working for a living. I would like to contribute something which benefits others, such as volunteering on archaeological digs, researching and identifying other historical sites, joining the Peace Corps (naw, if I were to venture into this sort of volunteerism, I could contribute right here in our nation, perhaps on an Indian Reservation). In essence, it really feels good to have choices. I've been thinking of making this my last newsletter, but perhaps in retirement, I can do a better job in getting the word out to you and even re-investigate the location of others from Angry Skipper, who have not been found yet.

Returning to Vietnam is another option, although I would only care to return to Quang Tri, since I spent the bulk of my field tour in that Province. However, I have heard that the Cathedral and Shrine in Lang Vei (sp?) was completely leveled and destroyed during the Easter Offensive in 1972 and is off limits to returning Vietnam Vets. I have discovered, though, that there is a group of people who are working toward removing minefields from the Province and is also involved in a major project of re-foresting the entire area. It seems that Quang Tri is pretty much deforested and defoliated. That's hard to believe, since from my memory, I recall those jungled mountains and lush flatlands. Add another option to my list of possibilities.

(Editors Note: While out on the porch a few minutes ago smoking a cigarette...I'm not smoking inside anymore...I'm cleaning the interior walls and woodwork of 23 years of smoke stains...I thought about recent discussions in Angry Skipper about organizing into a non-profit association. Bill Neal, I recall, mentioned the possibility of organizing around an educational foundation and presenting educational material wherever we choose to hold a reunion. Wouldn't it be nice if we could assemble a team of explorers to discover and identify for posterity military historical sites around our nation and holding a reunion to commemorate the occasion? Perhaps our Website at www.angriskypper.org could be included in the plan. There must be dozens of sites around our nation just begging to be identified and having a permanent (affordable) monument and plaque placed for the unborn generations to see and learn from.)

I really should sit down and write a story that should be told. Perhaps, after I strengthen my body, mind, and soul by hiking the Appalachian Trail in 2003, I will temporarily retire to Cedar Key, Florida and just DO IT!

On that note, I will end this newsletter, but not before I say that if anybody wants a current roster, let me know, and I'll send one to you. Also, our next reunion will be in San Antonio, TX from May 17, 2001 to May 20, 2001. It will be hosted by Ken "Little Dick" Patek. To make your reservation, call 1-800-445-8475 before April 17, 2001. Mention Angry Skipper 6. The reunion will be held at the Holiday Inn Downtown Market Square, 318 West Durango, San Antonio, TX.

Thanks for bearing with me. Remember the bad times once; remember the good times forever.

Range One India

