

MY LIFE IN VIETNAM

BY SFC B. E. "Skypilot" Donaldson RET

I spent twenty years of my life as a Professional Soldier, trained to take another person's life and to never leave a BROTHER behind. I am Honored to have been given the chance to serve my Country.

When I came home from all my training, all decked out with my uniform just right, boots bloused, beret set perfect on my head, with a high and tight haircut. I remembered how proud Mom and Dad were of me. Then I felt the feeling of pride in myself. You see I grew up when there was a War going on far away in a place called Vietnam and it was a very unpopular War. People from all walks of life were protesting this War.

Well one day my Platoon Leader came up during our training and said he had been given the order to call the platoon together and had some news for us that would change our lives. I remember him pausing, and then called off a bunch of names saying "You have been selected to go to Vietnam".

I know this really had sadden him because he had never went to Vietnam and never would. You see his brother went off to Vietnam and was killed in action there and he was "The Sole Surviving Son" in his family.

Upon my arrival in Southeast Asia due to being a young Buck Sargaent, I was attached to 173rd Airborne Brigade (probably because I was a Ranger) and made a non commissioned officer (NCO) LRP (Long Range Patrol) Team Leader. We had pulled several patrols together and getting close to one another and learning about each other and one patrol it happened. We were ambushed by a couple squads of NVA, the hard core enemy when J. J. went down after he jumped in front of me taking several hits to his chest and I was hit in my side. We called in for a Med A VAC chopper and headed to the extraction point. When we got there 2 Huey Gun Ships were laying fire, so we could get on the Med A Vac. When I have night mares or think about it, everything seems to be in slow motion and I remember Doc telling me "to pump his heart to keep him going. Hell his rib cage was not even there. When I was talking to him "you're going to be okay", he died right there.

A few minutes had passed and I was hurting, but I remember taking head count and asking how everyone was, they had taken J.J. out and I remember them putting him in a body bag. I didn't even have time to say goodbye, cry or anything that day. I just felt numb and couldn't believe it had happen and I had lost eight more men through the two tours I spent there. It got to the point when the replacements came in I didn't want to get to know them.

I put J.J. in for a Silver Star and they downgraded it to a bronze star with valor.

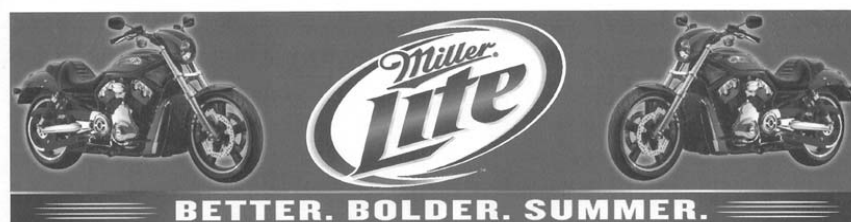
The hardest thing that I had to do, harder than loosing nine of the bravest men I have ever known was one patrol we were coming upon a village and this little girl come running out. She just didn't look right, her clothing and everything about her. I had to shoot her and she blew up like a balloon popping. Come to find out she had a twenty pound explosive charge under her clothes. I had been numb for months, but this made me snap and just started to cry, hell I had murdered a child. When I went to confession I explain to the father, I had commented murder and he explain no you were just doing your job. I still have nightmares.

It came time for me to relocate to the states and I remember when the aircraft lifted off the ground all the guys were cheering and the stewardess broke out cold beer for everyone and having a great time of relief. When we landed stateside it was dark very early morning. As we walked from the plane to a building there were college kids there yelling at us and I realized the shouts were not that of welcome home, but that of hate towards us. Yelling baby killers and throwing eggs at us and I was so confused, why? Even when Dad wanted to take me to the American Legion they looked at us and told Dad we don't serve Vietnam Veterans, never been in a Legion since and never will.

Thanks to a doctor at the VA Hospital working with me on a weekly basis and finally to a month, month and a half I am finally able to talk about it. THANK YOU Dr. Beverly Miller for all that you helped me with. She has since passed over but she helped a lot of Veterans out, and at times I can feel her spirit there roaming the halls.

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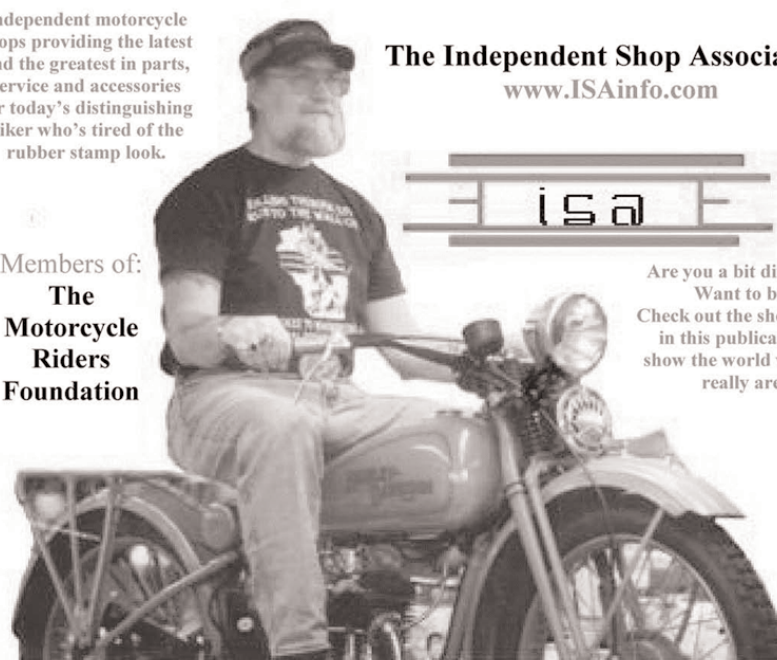
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