

I bought the book at the "In the Shadow of the Blade" event in Austin, Texas. You autographed the book for me. I am sure you met many people that day but I can bet you a dime to a donut hole that I was the only one to salute you. I loved the book and I know that it is fiction, however it covers so many of the events that happened while I was at Chu-lai and Da Nang.

The reason your readership is mostly female, is because it is not the blood and guts type of most war novels. I find those books a bit too much to read. Your book is about the real world experience of one Marine.

The mail call you talk about, the Dear John letters guy's would get, eating C-rations for months, the make shift Clubs that were thrown together, sleeping in a tent with sand floors, and the beauty of the place were all true. I told my wife that if I had money I would built a Resort in Chu-lai, that it was the most beautiful beach I have ever seen. You have put together a great book that is not only informative, it gives the reader a sense of the real feelings we all had at that time in that place called Viet-Nam.

I got to tell you, it brought back many memories of my time in Chu-Lai. I was most surprised by the Air Base Defense segment. I was a Short Timer in July of '65 and was transferred to Danang to be part of the newly formed "First Provisional Air Defense Battalion".

All of the marines in the battalion came from support units in country. We pulled the same type of duty you talked about in that segment. Also while I was in Chu-Lai, the incident of the marines in the 6-by that got killed by a grenade happened.

However as a witness to the aftermath of that event, the story is a bit different. As I recall, It was late June or early July and I was walking back to my tent from the open air showers. A standard procedure at the time was to bring the Grunts in to take showers about every two days. As I was walking back I saw the 6-by making a turn from the beach and heading towards the showers. The walk was about 200 hundred yards from my GP 12 man tent. I had barely descended the sand dune when I heard a loud explosion in the direction of the showers. I hit the deck and took cover. I could see the smoke rising from the shower area, so I got up and cautiously eased up to the top of the dune to take a look. By this time everyone was running in the direction of the 6-by. I darted off to see what had happened. As I approached the truck, the screams and chaos told me it was not a good situation. As I got closer some of the wounded were being removed, the bed of the truck was crimson, I mean solid red with blood. The story we got was that a grunt sitting behind the driver was showing off his abilities to remove a pin from a grenade and replacing it, luckily the driver had already started undoing the tailgate and had just unhooked the last hook when it went off. The blast sent him rolling in the sand. He was not injured. As I remember the marine with the grenade got his legs blown off and the two guys next to him got killed, the two across from him were killed also. The rest were injured. What made it especially bad were the gas cans that exploded. I saw M-14's snapped in half, gun belts ripped to pieces and legs and arms lying in the bed of the truck. I was standing by the tailgate looking in with my mouth open. I was wearing nothing but my white skivvies and flip flops. Being out of uniform, I decided it was best for me to get out of the way and go back to camp.

One other incident you mentioned was the R&R plane that went down, I was almost on that plane. We lost about 30 of our guys from the battalion. The Gunny had us line up in formation and close ranks. He wanted us shoulder to shoulder. We were stacked 4 deep. He started from the left and walked down the line putting his extended hand on the shoulder of each marine as he counted, he was standing to my right as he had just placed his hand on the marine next to me. Then he shouted, "Everyone from here down will go to Hong Kong" " the rest of you will go to Okinawa. Boy was I pissed. I tried everything to get somebody to trade place with me. I went to Okinawa for R&R, We found out about it when we got back. It was then that I thanked my lucky stars.

I was also involved with the beer shipment. We were sent to the beach to pick up beer for 1/9. My job was to go to the beach and pick up beer for the grunts. I went and saw the LST loaded with beer. I picked up 300 cases and made my rounds to the line companies, my crew had beer for a long time. I even sold beer to the grunts when I took them to the beach to swim.

Jim I know this does not mean a hell of beans to you, but to have someone write a book about my time in Viet Nam means a lot to me. You brought back so many memories, and to tell you the truth some of the things we did were actually funny.

Thanks for a great book.

Franklin Mendez

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