

***A GATHERING OF EAGLES***

The sequel ***ON THE WINGS OF EAGLES***.

**Inspirational stories about faith and God's involvement in our lives. Stories that will encourage, bless and help direct our steps along the narrow way. I hope you will offer your story, a story of how God changed your life or how God was involved in your life. Enclosed you will find a few stories that have been offered for the book.**

**ON THE WINGS OF EAGLES.**

Brig Gen Dick & Ann Abel – SAGA OF THE SUNDAY SIEZURES

Gary Beikirch, MOH, Vietnam – FOR HIS HONOR

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Dave Roever – GOD, I STILL BELIEVE IN YOU!

Leo Thorsness – PEOPLE OR TRUCKS

**Brig Gen Dick and Ann Abel**  
**USAF, (Ret.)**

**SEIZURE SUNDAY**

Sometimes life can be predictable and routine. Sunday, February 16, 1997, began as usual...with preparations to leave for church. You know what I mean! Decide what to wear, eat a quick breakfast, put the dog out, turn down the thermostat, slug down the last swallow of coffee and race out to the car that is already running with husband behind the wheel. Can anyone relate? Such was the uneventful beginning of our now infamous "Seizure Sunday."

Dick drove down our lane and we picked up our granddaughters (who often like to drive to church with Grannie and Papa) and we went on our merry way. Sunday School is two flights up some concrete steps...good for the cardiovascular system! We were studying the Mind of Christ, which was a delight. As we walked back down the stairs enroute to the sanctuary, I asked Dick how he was feeling. We were both getting a cold. He responded that he was feeling much better.

We proceeded to take our usual place in the "family pew." Dick was seated to my left talking to our eight-year-old, Mary. Abruptly I heard a very strange sound...a sort of high-pitched wail. Instantly recognizing it was coming from Dick, I turned to him and saw that his face was bright red and distorted. His hands were raised to shoulder level and shaking. He then clasped his chest. Fearing he was having a heart attack, I pulled him over to me, and while holding him, realized he was having a seizure. ( I have since learned that the best position for someone having a seizure is to be on their side. I have no idea what caused me to pull Dick over into this position, except that God nudged me to do so.) It was then that I called for help. The service had not yet begun. People were milling about, greeting each other and visiting...a typical Baptist congregation! I knew I had to speak loudly in order to be heard and understood that there was a medical emergency.

This is not something that comes naturally to me; I do not even like to draw attention to myself...not even coming into church after the service has begun! (Must have been a bad childhood experience!) In spite of this, I heard my voice raise above the conversations, saying, "We need help. My husband needs a doctor!" Within seconds, a doctor and a nurse miraculously appeared. The doctor from our Sunday School class, the nurse of an Air Force Chaplain friend of Dick's. They are seldom, if ever, in that service. About the same time as these two angels of mercy began looking after Dick, the son of one of Dick's Wednesday a.m. Langley Air Force Base Bible Study ran across the street to the fire station. In less than five minutes, several EMTs were also rendering medical aid. As this was happening, I was aware of prayer being offered on Dick's behalf from the pulpit and the congregation. And then singing. The most beautiful sound orf a praise chorus filtered into my consciousness. All the while Dick lay stretched out on the pew that just minutes before had been "saved" for our family and friends. Though the situation was certainly overwhelming with many unknowns, the love and peace of God enfolded my spirit. I remember thanking God that He didn't allow this to happen while Dick was driving us to church, or walking up or down those stairs, or during his travels of the previous week.

Slowly Dick began to regain consciousness, though confused and frightened. I'll never forget the lost, disoriented and questioning look on his face, and recall thinking: "Is this how some Alzheimer's patients feel?" We had been in the front of the sanctuary, and as I followed the stretcher that carried Dick out of the church, the sweet expressions of concern on so many faces assured me that prayer would continue for us.

When the ambulance finally pulled away, I told the driver that I wanted to take Dick to Langley Air Force Base hospital, where we were seen as patients. The driver replied that he couldn't do that because we needed a shock trauma team, not found there. So I, the consummate military wife, suggested we go to Portsmouth Naval Medical Center in the Norfolk area. But no, that was too great a distance. He then told me that we were enroute to Riverside Hospital...a civilian hospital that was nearby with the appropriate medical assistance. There was no choice. All I could think of was that I didn't know anyone there and have never felt comfortable in a civilian medical setting.

The next evidence of God's obvious sovereignty in this entire scenario became abundantly evident when we arrived at the Emergency Room. Who should be waiting for us but Dr. Andrew Matthews, (Have you guessed it yet...?) an Air Force doctor, and another one of Dick's Wednesday a.m. guys! His exclamation of "General, Sir, I'm going to take care of you" was such a wonderful relief to me. I knew that Drew knew and loved Dick. Surely this was God's provision, for Dick and for me! Drew had been called into help that morning, never before having been at Riverside on a Sunday a.m. and probably never will be again! I knew that God had placed Air Force Doctor Andrew Matthews in that civilian hospital on this day for such a time as this! And Dr. Matthews DID take care of Dick, to include yet a second Grand Mal seizure, and other complications that accompanied it. Throughout the afternoon Drew labored very hard, as God used him as the vessel through which He saved Dick's life. Yes, there were some tense moments, but never without assurance that our great God and loving Lord was in full and complete control of the entire situation.

Only after Dick was stabilized did Dr. Drew show his emotions, when with tears he told Dick, "Sir, I was afraid I was going to lose you." Only then did I fully realize how hard this whole episode had been on him. A young doctor, praying as he worked feverishly and competently to apply his medical skills on a man he knew, respected and loved.

Throughout the ordeal, interspersed among these tense times, were moments of humor. Soon after arriving at the hospital, various medical personnel began asking Dick numerous questions, mostly pertaining to where he was, etc. Most of the time he answered accurately. However, try as he might, he couldn't come up with the date...day, month, and year. Finally with a look of frustration on his face, he replied to that inquiry: "Doesn't anybody around here have a calendar?!" Then there was the President. When asked over and over who the President was, Dick came back with, "I don't want to remember!" One other incident provided some levity. I had requested that Dick's CAT scan be sent from Langley Hospital. It quickly arrived, much to Dr. Drew's relief. He immediately pulled one out of the envelope, and with a smile told us that while a very good picture, it really didn't help him, as it was a study of Dick's kidney! Anyone who has heard Dick do much speaking, knows he tells a funny story about a test for residents of a mental ward that they had to pass in order to be released. The questions pertained to body parts and their location. The punch line has one fellow who passed the test, being

asked how he did it. He points at his head and say: "Kidneys!" Tammy, our daughter, and I had a good and needed laugh over that.

Finally, in the early evening, Dick was transferred to a Coronary Acute Care Unit. Up to that point I hadn't been alone for any length of time. The Chaplain, whose wife had attended Dick in the sanctuary, stayed by my side, only leaving to get me something to drink. Numerous others, friends from church, fellow Military Ministry staff, men from Wednesday Bible Study had gathered at the hospital. These dear ones were especially comforting and helpful to our daughter, Tammy. (Our son-in-law and grandsons were out of town at a state wrestling competition.)

As we were getting settled in the Coronary Unit, our attending nurse stepped into the room. You've got it! She was the wife of still another Wednesday Bible study guy! It was at this moment that the complete picture materialized of God's amazing sovereignty in this traumatic episode we were experiencing.

Dick spent several days in the hospital having many medical tests. He had no memory of Sunday or Monday, and only glimpses of Tuesday. The tests provided a diagnosis of epilepsy. After the shock subsided, we realized how extremely blessed we have been. Dick had lived for 63 plus years with no symptoms. He possibly could have had a seizure at any time. When we consider the potentially dangerous situations he has been in throughout his life, where having a seizure would have been quite serious to himself or to others, we were overwhelmed with God's protective grace. We have adjusted to his having to take medication, probably for the rest of his life..a small price to pay. We know many others who must do the same. The biggest adjustment at the moment is that Dick won't be able to drive for six months. So literally, whither he goest, I shall go! He has accepted this quite good-naturedly, and isn't even a back seat driver. In fact, he is a great navigator, in spite of his pilot training!

**Gary Beikirch**  
**Medal of Honor, Vietnam**

**FOR HIS HONOR**

April 1st, 1970...almost thirty years ago but I can still hear the screams, the explosions, the gunfire. April Fools day...if only it could have been a joke...but it was not. It was painfully real.

I was a member of a Green Beret Special Forces A team in Vietnam. Our peaceful Montagnard jungle camp was surrounded by 3 North Vietnamese regiments. Inside the camp of Dak Seang were 12 Americans and 2,300 Montagnard villagers, (mostly women and children.) It is still their screams and lifeless bodies that I remember even today.

Artillery and rockets began pounding the camp in the early morning and continued for hours. Then the "human wave" assault of ground troops began. Our jungle home had become a scene of horror, terror, and death.

Running across an open area, I saw a wounded Montagnard (we affectionately called them "Yards") lying on the ground. As I was trying to bandage his wounds, I heard "IT" coming, like a diesel train...more artillery...maybe a 122mm rocket. As I threw my body over the wounded man to shield him from the explosion, I felt like I had been kicked in the back by a horse. Shrapnel from the blasts had slammed into my back and abdomen. The concussion from the blast had thrown me about 25 feet into a wall of sandbags by our mortar pit. I tried to get up but could not move my legs. I remember thinking, "Well, at least I'm alive...and hey! There's a Purple Heart." I looked back to see what had happened to the "Yard" I was helping and all that was left was pieces...the explosion had torn him apart. How? Why? I was lying on top of him. Why was I still alive? These questions would plague me for years, but at that moment, there was too much to do.

Two other "Yards" came by and picked me up. They wanted to take me to the medical bunker but I yelled, "No!! We've got things to do up here." For hours they carried me as we treated the wounded, dragged bodies, distributed ammo, directed fire, and fought for our lives. As I continued to lose blood, I was getting weaker. Also by this time I was wounded two more times. I finally lost consciousness. When I awoke I realized they had taken me to the underground medical bunker. Pat, a new medic who had been in camp less than a week said, "Man, you're hurt bad. We got to get you out of here." I screamed out to my "Yards"..."Get me out of here. If I am going to die, I am not going to die down here." A year of living with these "Yards" had developed a strong bond of love and trust between us. It was this bond that made them pick me up and carry me back out into the battle.

As the battle raged on, my two "Yard" friends carried me for hours, taking me where I directed them, helping me care for the wounded, shielding me, protecting me, holding me up as we continued to fight. Later, I would again be plagued by the questions of, "Why did they carry me all that time? Why did they stay with me?" They never left my side. What made their love for me so strong that they were willing to give their lives for me? One was killed as he saved my life.

At some point I finally collapsed and was unable to go on. From here on my personal memories are a swirling stream of sporadic events...watching med-evac helicopters being shot down as they tried to get me out...strong arms reaching down and pulling me into

the "warm belly" of a chopper, the face of the young medic shocked at seeing that I was still alive, but telling me I was going to be OK...being thrown onto a litter and rushed into an operating room, IV's in my arms and neck, catheters in every opening of my body, lights, shouting and then...darkness.

I awoke not knowing how long I had been unconscious. I did a quick self exam...unable to move from my waist down (I would learn later that it was only a temporary injury, a shock to my spine and spinal cord from the shrapnel injury.) "What is that on my stomach?" My large intestine was in a plastic bag, (shrapnel had torn through my large intestine and a colostomy had been done). More tubes were in my body...one through my nose and in the stomach...my stomach! Why did it hurt so? I looked down and realized it had been ripped open and was now sutured back together. Then darkness...I was once again unconscious. These periods of being "in and out of consciousness" continued...each time bringing new awareness. Once, I came to and watched as an Australian advisor fought for his last breath and lost. As they pulled the sheet over his head, I began drifting into unconsciousness and wondered if this was MY death.

I awoke once again but this time my waking moments were spent battling with the deaths of so many of my friends: the "Yard" I covered with my body, the one who carried me for hours...Why am I still alive and they are not? God, I feel so guilty, so helpless, so angry.

Days passed as I continued to come and go. One day I awoke and there was a chaplain standing by the next bed praying with a young dying soldier. He turned and saw my open eyes. "Glad to see you're awake. I've been praying for you for a couple of days. Would you like to pray?" My answer to his question was a pleading, "I don't know how." He simply replied, "That doesn't matter. God knows how to listen." My prayer was a simple prayer.. "God I don't know if you're real. I don't know if you're here, but I'm scared and I need you."

Right then something happened...no flashes of light, no miraculous physical healing, no visions on the wall or by my bed, but a peace, a comfort, a "knowing" that there was someone outside of my self who heard my prayer and wanted me to know that I was loved as I was never loved before.

The next two years were spent searching to find out more about this Presence, this God that had touched my life. I traveled around the country, through Canada, studied different philosophies, religions, searching for ways that might lead me once again to that Peace.

My search led me to a small town on the ocean just south of Boston. I was visiting a friend and told him about Vietnam, the lessons it had taught me, the questions it had left with me, and my efforts to find God. He told me that there is no mystery to finding God. He then asked me to do him a favor and read a book. He handed me a New Testament.

As I read what Jesus taught about life, the heart of man, our need for forgiveness, and God's love for us, I knew that He was the One who I had met in the hospital bed in Vietnam. He had seen my pain...my fear and had given me his Peace and Comfort. He also had been with me all those years as I was looking for more of that Peace. As I read more of His words I learned that He wanted me to know and have more than just what He could give me. He wanted to become a greater part of my life. He didn't want me to

know about Him, He wanted me to KNOW HIM, to walk with Him, to love Him and allow Him to love me.

After my discharge from the Army, I had planned on going to medical school. However, once I started walking with my new "Friend," I felt like He wanted me to do something different. I packed my bags, headed for Florida with a Bible, and stayed there for a couple of months praying and asking God what He wanted me to do. His answer to me was to go into the ministry.

In September of 1973, I entered seminary, dedicating my life to serving the God who had given me life. One night a few weeks later I received a phone call from Washington, D.C. asking me to come to Washington and be presented the Congressional Medal of Honor by President Nixon. Coincidence? I do not believe in coincidences any more...not when you are walking with God. However, among many other emotions I was also very confused. I knew I was not worthy of such an honor. God knew I wasn't worthy. But as I looked to Him for the reason, I believe He presented the honor to me so that it might "open doors" and allow others to hear about His desire to have a personal relationship with us through His Son, Jesus Christ.

God does have a plan and a purpose for our lives, and although there is no mystery to finding Him, at times it is a mystery to walk with him. It wasn't easy for me at first. Even now there are times when I fail to trust His love completely, but then I remember my two "Yard" friends who loved me, protected me, carried me when I couldn't walk. If I could trust them with my life, why shouldn't I be able to trust Jesus?

So each day I trust and walk humbly with Him...and I wear the Medal of Honor for Him and my two "Yard" friends.

## **COL Jim Coy MC FS**

### **HAPPY BIRTHDAY LADY**

I awoke early and made my way to the bow of the small Peruvian Naval vessel. It was the fifth day of a three week military humanitarian medical mission. We were seeing patients in villages along the Amazon River. We left San Palo, Peru, very early that morning. It was Sunday, December 10th, 1989, my wife's birthday. Another birthday away from home and family. Birthdays are important, especially to my wife. It seemed the Army frequently arranged for me to be away from home on her birthday.

I was "blue" as I thought about her and of my family. To lift my spirits, I decided to have my own Sunday church service. Opening my Bible, I turned to one of my favorite passages, the seventh chapter of Luke. I read once again the story of the centurion who asked Christ to heal his servant. Christ spoke of the centurion's faith, saying, "I have not found such great faith, no, not in Israel." Once again I was encouraged by the story of a soldier with great faith. As we traveled along the Amazon River, I read the remainder of the chapter and reflected on the story of the widow of Nain and how Christ raised her son from the dead returning him alive to his mother. I had no idea that a similar story would evolve that same day.

The trip from San Palo was long, and we arrived at dusk at the small village of Triumfo. A family rushed up with their young boy who was extremely sick. He had been vomiting and had diarrhea for many days. As I pinched the skin on his abdomen, the skin remained raised in an elevated mound. In the normal individual, the elasticity of the skin will allow it to rebound and quickly flatten. My suspicion of profound dehydration was confirmed.

There were 4 military physicians in our group, one other American and two Peruvian. As we looked at the small boy, we realized he was extremely sick and that the prognosis was grave. We discussed the problem and the possible solutions with the family. We knew the child would not survive without intensive medical intervention but no local care was available.

The medical supplies we had on board the vessel were very limited, so we decided to take the sick child and his family to a small, but primitive, Peruvian hospital about four hours down river. We only had a few IV solutions, some IV tubing and needles. The youngster was so sick, and his dehydration so severe, that he was almost unresponsive. As we started down the river the two Peruvian physicians tried to start an IV on the child. After many unsuccessful attempts, they asked the other American physician to try. Despite numerous attempts, he too was unable to start an IV.

We discussed other options, but we were limited by our lack of more appropriate medical supplies. The atmosphere was extremely tense in the crowded cabin room on the small Naval vessel. The room was dimly lit, hot and muggy. The smell of diesel fuel, sweaty uniforms, and body odor was thick in the air. The child's family, his mother, father and two siblings watched with wide eyes as we tried to start IV fluids without success. As each minute passed, the child seemed less responsive even to the painful needle sticks. He was moving closer to death.

As his pulse weakened and his rapid heart rate became faint, I lifted his eyelids and saw his eyes were rolled back in his head and his pupils appeared dilated. We were

wearily from the long day but there would be no rest. We knew if we did not get fluid into the child that he would die.

The two Peruvian physicians re-examined the child and agreed with us that death was imminent and proceeded to inform the family that we were unable to save the child. The mother began to quietly sob as did the boy's siblings as they surrounded the dying child. The father sat quietly watching. Just looking at his face, you could see the pain and tell that his heart was breaking. The other American physician headed for the door, trying to hide his tears and silence his own grief.

The youngster's vascular system was collapsing. There seemed to be no vein that we could use. The thought came to me that if I could just get a needle into the faint and barely palpable femoral artery, near the groin, that maybe there might be a slim chance of saving him.

As I felt for the pulse of the femoral artery, I began to recite to myself Psalm 91, the soldier's psalm: "He that dwelleth in the secret place of the most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty. I will say of the Lord, He is my refuge and my fortress: my God; in Him will I trust." As I finished the verse, I stuck the needle once again into the almost lifeless child. Arterial flow, it worked; praise God!

We compressed the IV bag and began administering fluids. It was a tiny victory, but the situation remained extremely grave. As we continued down the river, we realized that without a miracle we would not arrive at the small hospital in time to save the child. Even if we did get there in time, there was a good chance he still might not survive.

After an hour passed the arterial line stopped flowing; it wasn't working. Once again I searched for a vein to use. I noticed a small one above the child's ear. Again I prayed the words in Psalm 91 and was able to start an IV. I was relieved, but still very concerned. By this time the family, the physicians and medics were all physically and emotionally exhausted.

After midnight we finally reached the small village and began our trip carrying the small child on winding, narrow paths through the dark jungle to the hospital. On the way, the IV line was accidentally pulled out, and our hopes dashed once again. When we arrived, the caretaker told us that a part-time physician and a nurse staffed the hospital, but they would not return until the morning.

We gently placed the child on one of the few beds. With another prayer, I was able to start the final IV by the light of a flashlight one of the others held. At that point there was nothing more that we could do for the boy. We left him in the hospital and headed back through the hot sticky darkness of the jungle.

When I climbed into my bunk I thought about home, my wife and her birthday, and my young son who was about the same age as the child we so desperately tried to save. Exhausted, I finally fell asleep.

When I awoke, the other American physician came by and told me the news. He had returned to the hospital early in the morning to check on the boy before we headed down the river again. He told me that not only was the child alive, he was awake in his mother's arms, talking, and drinking fluids! HE WAS ALIVE!

God does indeed work in mysterious ways. He brought four physicians together, two from Peru, and two from America to meet a family with a sick child on the Amazon river, where medical care was not normally available. The group traveled down the Amazon River as the physicians worked all night to save the child, finally reaching a small

hospital that the family would have never been able to get to since they had no boat. When it still seemed hopeless, God intervened to accomplish what seemed impossible. Miracles do indeed happen today even on the Amazon river.

When I arrived home I greeted my wife and son. I sat down with my wife and I told her, "I'm sorry I was away on your birthday, but I need to tell you a Happy Birthday story," I explained. "Because I was away from home on your birthday, a little boy is alive in Peru." Obviously God had a plan. He set up the time and the place for those people to all come together so the life of one child would be saved. I don't know what plan God has for this child, but it must be special!

**Desmond T. Doss**  
**Medal of Honor, WWII**

**MIRACLE DAY**

On the island of Okinawa in the Pacific is a big hill called the Maeda Escarpment. It is a hill that goes up gradually on one side, levels off on top and then drops off 400 feet to the valley below. During World War II, the American army was in the valley below the 400 foot drop off. It wasn't easy to get up the cliff the first 365 feet, but it was possible. But the last 35 feet was straight up and jutted out about five feet at the top.

I was a medic in B company attached to the 307th regiment of the 77th infantry division, the Statue of Liberty Division. We had fought on top of the escarpment for a number of days without much progress being made. The escarpment was honeycombed with caves and tunnels. The Japanese put ladders from one cave or tunnel to another on the inside of the escarpment. On top were foxholes that looked like natural terrain, making it easy for them to shoot Americans who didn't even know they were there.

As we prepared to go up on top of the escarpment again this particular day, I went to Lieutenant Gornto and suggested, "I believe prayer is the best life-saver there is." Immediately he called our group together and said, "Gather round, fellows. Doss wants to pray for us."

Now that was not what I had in mind. I just wanted to remind the men that none of us was sure of a return down the escarpment because we knew how fierce the fighting was, and that each man should pray for himself. But after the lieutenant said that, I did pray. I prayed that God would be with the lieutenant and help him to give us the correct orders as our lives were in his hands, and help each one of us to take all the safety precautions necessary so that we could all come back alive.

With that we started up the escarpment and immediately got pinned down and thought we couldn't move. Shortly a message came through headquarters asking what our losses were. I answered, "None so far."

Again a message came through. "Company A who is fighting on your left, has been so badly shot up, they can't do any more. Company B will have to take the whole escarpment by yourselves." How would you like to get orders like that? Uncle Sam has to sacrifice lives to take important objectives, and the Maeda Escarpment was a very important objective.

So we started to move forward. As I remember, Company B started to take enemy positions one at a time until we had taken eight or nine Japanese positions. The amazing part of it was that not a single man from Company B was killed and only one man was slightly wounded by a rock that hit his hand. That was one day that I, as a medic, didn't have much to do.

It was such an amazing happening that word began to get around to various companies, to headquarters and even back to the States. The men of Company B were asked, "How did you manage to do that?" Their answer, "Due to Doss' prayer." They recognized that God had cared for them in a very special way because of the prayer of protection.

The next day we were to go up on the escarpment again. We figured the work was done and this was just a mop-up job. I didn't pray and I doubt if anyone else did either.

That day everything went wrong. The men would throw grenades and other high explosives and the Japanese would pull the fuses before they went off. A number of my men were wounded and needed help. Four men were together in a forward position. One of them tried to throw a grenade. It went off prematurely and he lost his hand. The other three were also wounded. I went to them, did a little first aid and then carried them back one-by-one to the edge of the escarpment.

There was one Japanese foxhole that was giving us trouble. In spite of all the ammunition our men directed into the foxhole, it was still active and in Japanese hands. Finally several of the men opened cans of high octane gasoline and literally threw the cans and the gas into the foxhole. I understand a lieutenant threw a white phosphorous grenade into the gasoline. The resulting explosion was much more than expected. All of the ammunition the men had thrown into the foxhole exploded, probably the Japanese ammunition dump down below went off, too.

What happened next was also unexpected. The Japanese evidently figured it was now or never, and they came at us from all sides. The command was given to retreat. Many of our men were wounded and remained on top of the escarpment. They were my men and I felt I could not leave them. I started to pull them to the edge, and one-by-one I began to let them down using a double bowline knot that I had worked with one time while still in the states. It made two loops that could be pulled over the feet and up the legs of the wounded soldiers. Then I would tie another bowline knot around their chest and let them down the first 35 feet to where they could be carried to the aid station. The Lord even provided a tree stump that I could wind rope around and let them down easy.

I kept praying, "Lord, help me get one more." The Lord answered my prayer. I was able to get all the men down that day. The army said it was 100, but I told them it couldn't be more than 50. So my citation for the Medal of Honor says 75.

On October 12th, 1945, President Truman presented me with the Congressional Medal of Honor. I believe that I received the Medal of Honor because I remembered to keep the Golden Rule as stated in Matthew 7:12, "Whatsoever ye would that me should do to you, do ye even so to them."

**Col Leo Thorsness  
Medal of Honor, Vietnam  
Ex-POW, Vietnam**

**PEOPLE OR TRUCKS**

I taxied with two F-105s fighters to the end of the runway at Takhli, Thailand in January 1967. I had about 50 Wild Weasel missions over North Vietnam in my assigned mission to seek out and destroy Surface to Air Missile Sites, (SAMs).

We had the standard wait at the end of the runway while the ground crews armed our guns, bombs, and air-to-ground missiles. The wait was especially long as several aircraft were landing.

As we waited to take the runway, my backseater and I talked about the Thai peasants who were working at the end of the runway. It seemed the women were doing most of the work while the men were hunkering and smoking cigarettes. We couldn't hear the conversation of course, but it was obvious that none were working too hard, and were having a good time as they laughed, pointed and exchanged lots of banter. Harry, my backseater and I commented that it was nice they were enjoying life.

Normally all North Vietnamese SAMs were kept in within a hundred miles of Hanoi or so. Occasionally they would sneak one down by the DMZ to get a shot at a B-52 or refueling tanker. There were overnight reports from electronic intelligence aircraft that the North Vietnamese may have sneaked a SAM just north of the DMZ. Our early morning mission was to see if it was there – and destroy it.

My wingman and I made the 40 minute flight to the southern part of North Vietnam. We crisscrossed several times the narrow span of North Vietnam between the Laos and the Gulf of Tonkin without picking up any electric signals of the SAM's radar.

We stayed at least 10,000 feet above a low solid cloud cover so if they quickly launched a SAM, we would have time to see and out maneuver it. We saw no SAMs and heard no signals and were getting close to our low fuel depart time. Just then, faster than I'd seen, the solid but thin low cloud layer quickly burn off from the early morning sun. I dropped down to about 5,000 feet for a better visual inspection of the suspected SAM site. What I saw instead were hundreds of North Vietnamese working to repair the previous day's bomb damage to highway 1, the North Vietnamese main route for supplies from Hanoi to the South. The workers were out in the open; a perfect target for my CBU bombs. CBUs are mother bombs that, when dropped, have a shell that opens and about a thousand hand grenade sized bomblets spew out and explode when hitting the ground. CBUs are perfect weapons for thin-skinned things like missiles, and people.

It was nearly time to head home and we found a perfectly legitimate target – North Vietnamese helping get supplies to their troops in South Vietnam to fight and kill Americans. I looked over the area and about a mile north of the peasants were several trucks and busses – obviously transport for the workers.

I made a radio call, "Cadillac two, afterburner NOW; go bomb mode." I pulled my nose up and climbed for 18,000 feet to roll on a bomb run. In the few seconds it took to climb, my wingman called, "Cadillac lead, what's the target?"

We had two legitimate targets - people or trucks – and we had the right weapons for either. While reaching for 18,000 feet the image of happy Thai workers we had watched

just an hour ago flashed in my mind. Here were similar people, living under communism, forced to work in an open area filling bomb craters and fearing they were about to be bombed. My mind said the best target was the peasants; my heart said it was the trucks. The Thai peasants image stayed in my mind. The entire thought process lasted the few seconds I had before deciding the target: people of trucks.

As vividly as if it were yesterday, I recall turning my head and looking at my left shoulder. There sat Jesus Christ. I asked, "people or trucks?" As quickly as I asked, He answered, "trucks."

As we rolled over inverted and started pulling our nose earthward into a bomb run, I called, "Cadillac two, we hit the trucks!"

**Dave Roever**  
**Dave Roever Evangelistic Association**

**GOD, I STILL BELIEVE IN YOU!**

We were traversing the Vam Co Tay river headed generally in a west bound direction toward Cambodia, passing through village after village. The 25th of July, 1969, was a beautiful evening. I sat on the bow of my river patrol boat strumming my old Stella guitar. It was a cheap little guitar and a little bit difficult to fret. As I sat on the gunnel of the twin .50 caliber machine gun turret, I enjoyed the solace of playing the guitar and letting my memory cross the waters to home.

Inches above my head a B-40 rocket ripped apart the immediate atmosphere. My heart pounded with excitement as I realized we had now entered into an enemy attack. To this day, I don't know where the guitar went, but I do know where I went. I dropped into the forward gun tub and with my right hand, grabbed the firing mechanism that had a small red button. I knew that as soon as I turned my guns on the target, all I had to do was push that button to deliver a living hell to those on the bank of the river.

The coxswain slammed the throttles to the fire wall and both engines roared into action. The boats immediately went into high speed. The Jacuzzi pumps fired out the water in huge streams of power. The boats leaped on step and I leveled my guns on the bank of the river at the source of the trail of smoke, the obvious traces from AK-47s and whatever else they may have been firing.

I returned fire with a tremendous velocity: 500 rounds a minute per gun. I was pumping 1,000 rounds a minute into the bank of the river with a projectile that was capable of shooting down aircraft. As the guns fired and the intensity of the firefight increased, I had to remind myself to let go of the trigger occasionally to let the barrels cool just a little because they were beginning to glow cherry red. It was an awesome sight to see. As I was firing the guns the barrels seemed to come alive.

When we finished our last firing run there was no one left to shoot at us. If anyone was alive, they had run for their lives. I realized that I was bleeding from my right cheek with a wound that required immediate attention. I could blow air out my cheek and it would squeak. I enjoyed the laughter that came with it. But the right side of my face was swelling and my eye felt like it had a foreign object in it. I felt no pain, I think simply because of the excessive flow of adrenaline that made me feel high.

Rather than returning on the boat, I was picked up by a dust-off helicopter and flown to an Army MASH unit where I received some stitches. I also completed paperwork for a citation for my first purple heart which I never saw. From the MASH, I took a jeep and drove down to the Navy pier where our base camp was located. It was not like a camp, though; there were no tents. It was a barge with fixed buildings, our housing, welded to it.

Then the most unique thing happened. I still have a perfect recall and image of the whole moment. It is so bizarre it's hard today to understand how it could have happened without some divine intervention. After I parked the jeep, I walked to the pier and the gangplank was set for me to approach Mobile Base 2.

I started walking across the gangplank to get onto the barge. I looked over my shoulder and my commanding officer, Lt. Vince Rambo, was standing on the side

walkway of the barge. He recognized me as I passed under a light and yelled out, "Rover, what are you doing here.?" I asked, "Sir, what do you mean, what are you doing here?"

I felt like I had to give him the full details because he needed to know where I had been. "Sir, I've just been flown in by dust-off. A helicopter just returned me from the Cambodian border where I received a minor injury to my face." And, of course, the bandage was evidence.

"I know where you've been. What are you doing here?" "Well, sir, I've just come from the Army medical tent. I was hurt during the last firefight." He responded, "I know you were hurt, but how can you be here?" "I heard on the radio that the right side of your face had been blown off, your fingers had suffered terrible blast damage, and the trunk of your body was nearly half burned."

I looked at him in complete disbelief, not comprehending one thing he was saying. I said, "No, sir. That is not correct. I was injured by a piece of shrapnel or a bullet or something that penetrated my right cheek. I'm fine."

The next day, the 26th of July, we were again enroute to the Cambodian border, without an exact destination in mind, when the radio message came over in what was called the KAC, a form of secret transmission that had to be decoded in alphabetical arrangement. We were told to go back to the site of the firefight and confirm the absence of the enemy.

We continued up the river for a considerable distance. It seemed like we went for hours at high speed. We moved to the coordinates on the map where we had been in contact with the enemy the night before. I beached the boat up on the bank of the river and hastened forward into the gun tub.

I felt my heart pounding and I knew something wasn't right. But in the heat of so many things going on around me and so many things happening that day, I couldn't interpret my feelings. I knew I was five days from R&R, (rest and relaxation). In just five short days, the Navy would send me to Hawaii, all expenses paid, where I would meet my wife. I would have to buy her ticket, but I had plenty of money to do that because I had saved it all.

As I stood up in the gun tub, I did not want to see what I was about to see. I did not want to face what I would face that day. I wanted no problems. I just wanted to get out of the war alive. I was five days from my first exit and all of this chaos.

As my eyes pierce the crowded underbrush, I stood slowly and looked across the bow of the deck trying to find the bunkers from which we had received enemy fire the night before. Feeling uncomfortable, I reached over to pick up a white phosphorus hand grenade. It burns white hot; it burns underwater. It cannot be extinguished once it starts burning.

I chose the grenade because it would burn some of the brush down. It also would create smoke so I would have some protection from easy visibility if the enemy was present. Lastly, it would detonate booby traps, which were commonly used by the enemy.

It was Sunday morning, just past midnight in Fort Worth, Texas. That Saturday, my mother was uncomfortable in her mind. Suddenly, after several hours of sleep, the discomfort came to a head. She sat straight up in bed and shook my father awake to the very minute. (We have confirmed the time.) Though separated by 14,000 miles, clear on

the other side of the earth. . . Mom knew. "Daddy" she said, "Davey's been hurt." They prayed all night.

Before I could throw the grenade, it exploded in my hand. Suddenly my life took an entirely new direction. I looked down and my chest was ripped open. Through a hole, I could see my heart beating. My right hand was severed almost completely in half with fingers dangling by tendons. My right thumb was hanging by a tendon, doing little twists forward and backward. Blood was pumping from an artery in my right hand.

My left thumb had turned into a large chunk of charcoal. The inside of my left arm was on fire. Flames leaped up against my fingers and melted the crystal in my watch, which I wore upside down under my wrist so it would not reflect in the moonlight. That watch may well have saved my left wrist from damage that would have taken many months and possibly years to correct.

I went blind in my right eye and deaf in my right ear as the entire right side of my head was stripped down to the skull. Any pieces of skin that were left were nothing more than dead tissue. My right cheek was blown back so far that my tongue almost fell out of my mouth. This all took place instantly. I couldn't believe that the damage was so quick.

I jumped into the water. My back was on fire. My chest was burning. My skin was dripping off of me. Thinking the water might extinguish the flames, I went deep into the water only to hear with my left ear the sound I recall with horror today, the sound of bubbling as my skin burned and came off in the water. When my head surfaced I inhaled and sucked fire down into my lungs, bronchial tubes, and throat, scorching the inside of my mouth and vocal cords which to this day are still weak from the scar tissue. After surfacing, my first words were, "God, I still believe in you!"

Only God knew what was being held for me in the future, as He knew on the night of the 25th of July, 1969, when my commanding officer would unknowingly prophecy, as it were, a detailed description of my injuries.

I believe now what I could only have imagined then. Every day of our lives is foreseen by God. Through my commanding officer, God prepared my heart for what was ultimately to come true. This made those days that would have been intolerable, tolerable. It took some of the edge of the surprise away and he gave me a sense of destiny that still holds me today!