

An Autobiography

By Alex Ingram

Pre-Service

I grew up in San Antonio, Texas, with my parents and two younger sisters. My father was a Sergeant Major in the Army who retired after twenty-four years on active duty. As far back as I could remember I was interested in a military career, but my high school didn't offer ROTC, so when I was fourteen I joined the Civil Air Patrol (CAP) instead. CAP was a civilian auxiliary of the US Air Force, charged with search and rescue of downed aircraft. When a commercial, private or military aircraft turned up missing in South Texas, the Patrol, along with federal, state and local authorities were called out to conduct an extensive air and ground search based upon the pilot's flight plan. During my four years with CAP, I participated in seven ground searches and assisted in the rescue of five individuals; along with recovering nineteen bodies. During my last year with CAP I was chosen as an aerial observer working with an Air Force pilot who had his own Cessna. I earned my instrument-rated single engine license shortly before my eighteenth birthday.

While in high school, I often found myself the target of bullies. In response, my dad taught me to box, but I found Taekwondo was more to my liking, and within a year I had earned my black belt. Needless to say, the bully problem was soon behind me. I was never into organized athletics; being more into individual sports like swimming and tennis. Also at an early age my dad taught me to shoot rifles and pistols. Growing up I was on several NRA-sponsored teams winning numerous individual and team honors.

At age 16, I spent much of my after-school time working at my uncle's French-Cajun restaurant. I started out as a bus boy on the weekends to earn extra spending money. I found that I loved to cook, and upon graduation, had to decide whether to go to college, cooking school or join the military. It was a tough decision.

Military Service

During the mid- to late-60's, Vietnam was "the" topic of the day with my generation, and like so many of my peers, I wasn't going to miss out on the 'only war in town'. Upon graduation in May of 1967, and after extensive discussion with my dad, who wanted me to go to college, I enlisted in the Army. After finishing basic training, I received orders to the Army's Intelligence School at Fort Holibird, Maryland, enrolled in an eight week training program, becoming a Military Intelligence Analyst (MOS 96B). Having graduated near the top of my class, and receiving a top secret crypto security clearance, I was selected to attend five additional weeks of training in Order-of-Battle (OB) Analysis. Upon graduation I was promoted to Private First Class (E-3). I ignored my dad's advice to "never volunteer" and requested Vietnam as my initial duty assignment; it was immediately approved. Prior to Vietnam, I was sent to the swamps of Fort Stewart, Georgia, where I underwent a week of jungle survival training.

I finally arrived in Saigon, South Vietnam, in mid-November of 1967, and was immediately assigned to the Ground Order of Battle / Strength Assessment Team (GOB/SAT) at the Combined Intelligence Center Vietnam (CICV). CICV was subordinate to the Military Assistance Command Vietnam (MACV) commanded by General William Westmoreland. MACV was the central headquarters for all American and allied military forces operating within the Southeast Asian Theatre of Operations (which included North and South Vietnam, Burma, Thailand, Cambodia and Laos). My forty-man joint-service team was charged with determining the organization,

strength, disposition, capability, location and intentions of any enemy ground forces operating within South Vietnam and the surrounding countries.

I didn't realize it at the time, but I had a front-row seat to the unfolding of a dramatic chapter in American military history. I was often within earshot of discussions that took place between General Westmoreland, and his senior intelligence staff. During my first few months the General made several statements to the media announcing that the enemy had been defeated on the battlefield, and he "could see the light at the end of the tunnel". There was always a sense of optimism at the top, in spite of the facts.

(Background Information: Before I arrived in country, there were problems in determining accurate enemy troop estimates. Prior to 1967, MACV had no in-house intelligence capabilities, and therefore relied upon strength figures provided by the South Vietnamese. Once the CICV was fully staffed, it began publishing its own monthly Order of Battle (OB) Summary. These figures were broken down into several major categories: (1) the regular forces (North Vietnam Army), (2) local hamlet militias and (3) logistical support troops. The OB Summary was pegged around 300,000. Debate within the intelligence community (including at MACV & CIA) was focused on the inclusion of (4) Irregular Forces (Viet Cong) of around 200,000, along with a (5) political cadre of over 88,000, thus the estimate to 588,000. The OB numbers are critical in war; you have to know your enemy's strength before going up against them. Not having this information gets people killed.

But even after the updated enemy figures were available the senior leadership was unwilling to include them in the monthly OB assessment. Both congress and the American people were unaware that enemy forces were increasingly infiltrating into the South. They'd been told that the US was winning the war. General Westmoreland believed that we were killing enemy troops quicker that they could recruit and train them. But, if released, the new statistics would contradict that assumption. The General felt that this data would produce a "political bombshell" both in Washington and the mainstream media. Such negative information would cause the public and the politicians to reconsider funding the war as well as future troop increases and at a critical time in an unpopular war. He therefore ordered that only figures that promoted the war effort would be released; in essence, holding back the real figures for political expediency. Contrary to all the evidence Westmoreland insisted that enemy strength was down. In January of 1968 many lower-level intelligence staffers knew that battalions of NVA and VC forces were moving into South Vietnam. We knew they were planning a major ground offensive which was likely to start on or around "Tet", the Chinese New Year, (January 31).

In the middle of January, approximately 20,000 (two divisions) of NVA surrounded and attacked Khe Sanh, a small isolated Marine base near the Cambodian border having a population of around 6,000 US Marines. Westmoreland, fearing that this could lead to an American "Dien Bien Phu" (the battle where the communist defeated the French in 1954), ordered troops into this region to counter the build-up. He continued to maintain that there was little real concern regarding the possibility of a nationwide attack. Therefore, most senior military commanders had no warning that an offensive was imminent.

Tet offensive began with large scale ground assaults throughout the country involving over 270,000 NVA regulars, including an estimated 55,000 Viet Cong (VC) guerrillas. The estimates put over 20,000 attackers within the Saigon Military Region alone. Khe Sanh was just a diversionary action meant to draw American and South Vietnam forces away from the cities. Within the first two days the enemy captured over a hundred cities and provincial capitals, killing thousands of South Vietnamese soldiers, government officials and civilians in the process. The

American military lost control of large regions of the country for several weeks and suffered over nearly a thousand casualties retaking these areas.

In the weeks that followed, the communist suffered the destruction of over seventy percent of their force hoping for a South Vietnamese uprising against the American-backed regime; this didn't happen. It was clearly a military disaster for the North, but also became a major firestorm for General Westmoreland and President Lyndon Johnson, who had authorized increased American involvement in the war.

Tet triggered a major political controversy, both within and around the Johnson White House. The media continually aired devastating images of the American embassy in Saigon being overrun by VC guerrillas, with US soldiers lying dead in the background. Once the fighting in and around Saigon was over, Walter Cronkite, at the time considered to be the most trusted man in America, and the anchorman for the CBS Evening News, commented that "the war was at a stalemate and unwinnable". President Johnson reportedly remarked "If I've lost Cronkite, I've lost middle America." It was a sign of the times.

Congress demanded accountability, asking how the military, with over half-a-million men in-country at the time, could have been so unprepared for the attack. What happened to our intelligence? After all, weren't we winning? Westmoreland was called back to Washington to testify before Congress. While there, Johnson promoted him to Chief of Staff of the Army, a diplomatic way of removing him from command, and the media spotlight. Another general took over the war effort and little in the way of explanation was made public at the time; the war continued without skipping a beat.

But, Tet was clearly the beginning-of-the-end for America's involvement in Southeast Asia. This single event turned the majority of Americans against the war. President Johnson was so concerned with the divisiveness it created within the country that he refused to run for re-election. The Anti-war movement was at its zenith, but Vietnam continued for another five years. When Richard Nixon took over as President in January of 1969, he initiated back-channel talks with the leaders of the North to end the two decade conflict. In 1973, the US signed a negotiated "Peace with Honor" agreement with the North Vietnamese. The bulk of American forces were gradually brought home. By April of 1975, the last remnants of American troops were evacuated from Vietnam when the North made a successful dash southward, taking Saigon and the rest of the country. The war was finally over; and we had lost!

I remember the morning of Tet; we'd received sporadic reports that VC units were operating within the outskirts of Saigon. Around 3 am we started getting messages that Tan Son Nhat airbase, a quarter of a mile from the MACV compound, was under attack. Within the hour we heard muffled, sporadic automatic weapons fire with occasional explosions coming from outside the compound. I was at my desk assessing reports of engagements from around Vietnam; I never saw combat. A few weeks later I received an Army Commendation Medal for my efforts. After an additional six months with CICV, I received the Joint Service Commendation Medal and was promoted to Specialist Fourth Class (E-4). Being stationed within a combat zone accelerated both decorations and promotions.

In July of 1968, I requested reassignment. I wanted to see the war more up close and personal. Within a month I arrived at the 4th Infantry Division (4th ID) headquarters at Pleiku working as a tactical analyst supporting division intelligence (G2). I found myself sorting through numerous enemy contact reports, plotting enemy unit movements and preparing daily intelligence briefings presented to the division commander and his staff.

Life became pretty boring for a while; but all that changed on the 21st of October, at approximately three-thirty in the morning. A five-man VC assault team, carrying both AK-47 rifles along with numerous high explosive satchel charges, managed to infiltrate the base defenses. The sappers gained access into the inner perimeter of the division's service support area. Within a short time they managed to damage several buildings and destroy two scout helicopters. In the process they also wounded several American soldiers. These guys expected to die in the process, and wanted to take out as many Americans as they could prior to that.

I was on guard duty that morning and upon hearing the explosions moved to intercept. I confronted the intruders as they entered my patrol area. When they finally came into the sparsely lit footpath between several Quonset huts I saw three men in the center of the group carrying a number of small bags over their shoulders (explosive satchel-charges), with two outriders carrying AK-47 rifles at the ready. I yelled out for them to halt and they instantly opened fire on me. While firing my M-16 in their direction I ran towards a sandbag emplacement several feet away. Another sentry, a few yards to my left, simultaneously opened up on the intruders with his weapon. I kept firing until I reached cover. It took two or three seconds to get behind the prepared barrier, but it seemed like a minute or more. One of the enemy's satchel-charges exploded, causing a chain-reaction detonation. Each charge produced an enormous ear-shattering explosion along with massive white flashes. Within a second six to eight charges went off. I found myself behind the emplacement covered in sandbags and loose sand. Once I made it to my feet, all I could see was thick black smoke in the darkness, with limited intermittent light provided by several small fires. I was deaf for the first fifteen minutes and still remember the overwhelming smell of gunpowder and burnt flesh. After others arrived, I moved in to survey where the sappers first appeared, finding only a large crater thirty feet wide and around two feet deep. The VCs in the center of the formation had been blown apart by the blasts, with only bits of flesh scattered over the landscape for a hundred feet. The bodies of the two outrider VCs were lying motionless on the ground twenty feet from the center. One had been killed outright and the other was severely wounded and carried off by the medics. Neither the other sentry, nor I, had been injured. We later received a Bronze Star Medal with "V" (valor) device. I read somewhere, that war was an exercise in tedious boredom punctuated by moments of sheer terror; that was a fair assessment. From that day forward, my perspective on war and life in general changed. I no longer viewed it as glorious or exciting. Unfortunately, I hadn't seen the last of it.

Three months later, on January 18, 1969, at approximately 5 pm, I was a rear passenger in a jeep returning to Pleiku from an early morning briefing in An Khe. My operations officer, First Lieutenant Stevens, was driving. My platoon sergeant, Sergeant First Class Clark, rode shotgun. Along for the ride was PFC Perez, who had arrived in-country just a week earlier. We were in the last vehicle allowed to pass through the Highway 19 checkpoint prior to the MPs shutting the route down for the night. It was well known that the Viet Cong controlled the roads and countryside after dark.

About halfway through the sixty-mile trip, our jeep hit a land mine and was disabled. The private and I were okay, but our sergeant received massive chest, head and neck wounds from shrapnel forced through the jeep's floor plate. He was bleeding profusely and died within minutes, in spite of our best efforts at first aid. The lieutenant had taken shrapnel to the base of his skull and was in and out of consciousness. We were stranded, without a radio, poorly armed (three M-16 rifles and two .45 pistols with limited ammo), in the middle of "Indian Country" with darkness coming on, and with a man who couldn't be moved or carried.

We provided the lieutenant with what medical care we could, found a defensible position thirty feet from the jeep and dug in to wait for rescue, or for the arrival of the enemy, whichever came first. As time went on, all I could think about was ending up as a prisoner of the North

Vietnamese. My father had been captured by the Japanese and held for over four years during World War II. He'd participated in the initial defense of the Philippines, and after the American Army was ordered to surrender, he took part in the infamous Bataan Death March. He was shipped to Japan in the cargo hold of one of the Japanese "Hell Ships" and worked for years as a laborer in the mines and factories of Japan. Just before I left for Vietnam he spoke to me of his experiences for the first and only time. He told me of the poor living conditions and disease, of the hunger and lack of health care, of the torture and firing squads; it was something I'll never forget. I decided then and there that I wasn't going to be taken alive; I would go down fighting!

Once nightfall fell there was a half-moon in the sky allowing us to see about thirty feet in all directions. But we were surrounded on three sides by dense jungle with the road forming the fourth perimeter thirty feet away. There was a twenty foot open zone between our position and the jungle. I remember that the air was alive with the calls of wild animals and insects. The lieutenant was in and out of conscious, but he was stable. Perez and I were gripping our M-16s, alert for any movement or noise. Around 3 am everything suddenly went silent. A small band of VC had arrived and taken up positions around us. We could occasionally hear them moving around and talking low in Vietnamese. After about twenty minutes one of them yelled out in English for us to surrender. I remember answering with "go f**k yourself". A few minutes later all hell broke loose. It was the first of many on-again, off-again fire-fights. We received dozens of incoming rounds streaking past our heads, some landing on the ground next to us. Within minutes several hand grenades landed and exploded nearby without drawing blood. After each explosion I lost my hearing for several minutes. A second series of grenades ultimately found their mark; I took shrapnel to my upper legs and lower back. I was in some pain, but was still able to fight. My Adeline was at maximum, and I did everything I could think of to overcome my sense of panic. At some point I remember feeling my backside; it was soaked with my blood and I worried that I'd pass out.

I was within arms length of Perez, who had my back and who had also been peppered with shrapnel; we would reassure each other that we'd get out of this. When the enemy would fire on us, we'd return short bursts in their direction to let them know we were still alive and kicking. On one of our un-aimed volleys I heard a VC scream out in pain; one of my rounds had found its mark. Around 4:30 am they opened up on us once again, this time Perez took two rounds to the right chest. He was screaming out in pain for several minutes before he passed out. At first I thought he was dead. During a lull in the fighting I managed to find him; he was still breathing and I applied a pressure bandage to his wounds, but there was little else I could do at the time. It was difficult to see just how badly he was really hurt; I couldn't risk using a flashlight. I turned all of my attention to the enemy. By 5 am and several more volleys of gunfire I'd used all of our 20-round rifle magazines and pulled out the two .45 pistols, each with an 8-round magazine. I only had four extra loaded magazines available. These pistols were in poor condition probably issued before World War II. They'd rattle if you shook them hard. I'd fired many of these older .45s and knew that if they hit the proverbial side of a barn I'd be lucky. They're only effective up to around 25 feet. But they were all I had.

Around 5:30 am there was a hint of morning light in the sky when the enemy made their assault. I heard several commands uttered loudly in Vietnamese then saw a silhouette of a small man carrying a rifle moving out of the jungle twenty feet away. He began running straight towards me. I sat up and while partially crouched fired both pistols more than a few times while aiming for the center of his chest. He suddenly dropped to the ground. I was out of ammo. I dropped one pistol and quickly reloaded the other. I turned around just in time to witness two other VC charging from the other side, both were firing their AK-47s on full auto. I couldn't see their faces but watched their muzzle flashes light up their advance. I don't know how they missed me; the distance was less than twenty feet. They both quickly emptied their rifles. I remember aiming and

firing my pistol several times, hitting the lead man. He fell backwards and went to the ground. I was out of ammo again. Panicking, I attempted to get a new magazine from my belt pouch, but accidentally dropped it to the ground. The last VC was only five feet away by now and still running at me. I knew I didn't have enough time to find the clip and reload, so I threw the heavy pistols at him. I was going to pick up the other .45 and somehow quickly reload. But the pistol I threw hit him in the chest. I don't know if it actually hurt him, but he suddenly stopped and dropped to one knee about four feet in front of me attempting to reload his rifle. I decided my only chance was a running tackle. I tackled him, throwing both of us to the ground.

We wrestled for what seemed to be several minutes, but in reality it was more like twenty seconds. I remember punched him in the face and head several times. We were both yelling loudly at each other, but neither understood what the other said. I couldn't get a firm grip on him since blood was everywhere (mostly mine); making holding on very difficult. I finally managed to get him into a head lock and applied as much pressure as I could muster; I heard his neck snap. I could feel the life drain from his body. I was afraid that there were still several VCs out there. I was in full panic mode by now expecting to be dead within seconds. I found and picked up his AK-47, and frantically searched his body for a new magazine. What seemed like thirty seconds I found and inserted the clip into the rifle, chambered a round and brought it to the ready. I pointed it in multiple directions, but saw no other movement. My heartbeat was pounding out of my chest. After another thirty seconds or so I realized it was over; the enemy was either dead or in retreat. I'd somehow survived the ordeal. The first VC that I shot was still alive laying on the ground moaning in pain. I sat down and watched him for twenty minutes as he died. I was shaking and exhausted, but didn't help him; I was too tired. I've always regretted that I should have helped him, not that it would have made any difference; he would have most probably died. Killing someone is an extremely overwhelming and personal experience and I carry that burden with me everyday, although I felt that I had no choice at the time, it was "him or me"; "kill or be killed".

My body shook for the better part of an hour as I slowly regained my thoughts and composure. When daylight finally appeared there were four dead bodies within several feet of me, three VC and the body of my sergeant. I attended to the lieutenant and to Perez; both were still alive. If other VC survived, they decided they had enough or had ran out of ammo and retreated. We were rescued by an American road patrol around 6:45 am. I was later told that the wounded men recovered, but never saw nor heard from either again. I was patched up at the base hospital and given a week of medical leave. A few weeks later I was awarded the Silver Star Medal, a Purple Heart Medal and promoted to Specialist Fifth Class (E-5). This event was a defining moment in my life; I found out that I had what it took to survive.

Two months later, I was selected to attend the US Pacific Command's week long Joint Armed Forces Courier School held at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii. The training mostly consisted of hand-to-hand combat training, intensive pistol marksmanship, courier procedures and control of classified materials. The training was over before I had time to really see the islands. While there I tried my hand at surfing (I wasn't very good) and scuba diving (which I loved), along with some serious partying. During my thirteen months in Vietnam, I later received two week-long R&R's (rest & recreation), both in Australia. The first spent in Sydney (mostly partying), and the second in a small town a few miles South of the Great Barrier Reef, where I scuba dived daily. Seeing the Great Barrier Reef underwater was a remarkable sight. At the end of my first tour of duty in Vietnam I received another Army Commendation Medal, just for doing my job. Medals were a dime a dozen in Vietnam; everyone got them, including the Sergeant Majors' dog.

In July of 1969, after taking a month's leave with my family back in San Antonio, I reported to the Office of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) at the Pentagon, in Washington, D.C. I was assigned

to the Army's Deputy Chief of Staff for Intelligence (J2). My duties included searching through and compiling data for various reports and briefings. But, once it became known that I held courier credentials, I found myself transporting classified documents around the massive building. This was always preferable to riding a desk. I would often encounter General Westmoreland, who was now the Army's Chief of Staff, while strolling the hallways of the Pentagon's E-Ring. He actually remembered me from our days at MACV, and after one encounter I found myself reassigned to the Joint Wargame Agency (JWA) in the basement. This was a primo assignment for an OB guy, courtesy of the General.

While at JWA, I worked as a scenario analyst, part of a 30-man joint military and civilian team that researched, developed and conducted classified operational- and strategic-level wargame simulations for the JCS. These games were usually attended by officers of the joint staff and the individual services, along with invited Department of Defense (DOD) officials and NATO military observers. While most games were two or three day simulations of NATO/Warsaw Pact engagements, we ran scenarios covering every geo-political hotspot on the globe. Once completed, the results of the games were summarized into top secret contingency plans and filed away for further study or future use. This was also my first experience working with a computer; at the time a room-sized IBM-360 mainframe.

In February of 1970, I received orders returning me to Vietnam, assigned again to the 4th ID headquarters G2, which had been relocated to An Khe. In April, the division was ordered into Cambodia to interdict the Ho Chi Minh Trail, hoping to cripple the Vietcong's supply network. This was the catalyst for nationwide anti-war protests which ended with the shootings at Jackson and Kent State. Several days into the campaign my 32-man detachment was encamped a few miles behind the imaginary frontline, near the division's forward command post. At approximately 1 am my unit was hit by several friendly artillery rounds. As best that we could determine, a volley of 155-mm beehive rounds, each carrying hundreds of one-inch-long aerodynamically-shaped black steel darts, dropped short of their intended target peppering our location. When it was over, five of my fellow soldiers lay dead with thirteen others wounded, some seriously. At the time I was on duty at the division HQ a mile away. I rushed back to assist in treating and evacuating the casualties. Several months later, I received another Army Commendation Medal.

In June of 1970, I was detached to the 313th Radio Research Battalion, an element of the 509th Radio Research Group (Army Security Agency), an electronic intelligence and surveillance unit, supporting the 1st Field Force (I Corps) Headquarters at Nha Trang. I performed as a surveillance systems analyst helping to identify the best locations for deployment of remote unattended air-dropped field surveillance devices such as "people-snuffers", magnetic, seismic and acoustics sensors and other detection systems along known enemy travel routes.

Nha Trang was a picturesque coastal city and an in-country R&R destination for both friendly and enemy forces; therefore it was one of the safer areas to be stationed. On one side of my unit was the headquarters compound of the 5th Special Forces Group, which we provided with intelligence product. Over time I made friends with several Green Berets who invited me to scuba dive in the crystal-clear bay. They were one of the few units equipped with such gear and we would take advantage of it as often as possible. I also attended numerous live-fire exercises where I was able to shoot everything in their arsenal, ranging from crossbows and silenced weapons to recoilless rifles and shoulder-launched anti-tank missiles. I had a blast (sic)!

The unit on the other side of us was a battalion of ROK (Republic of Korea) Marines. They had the reputation of being the most feared combat unit in Vietnam. Over a number of months I learned enough Korean to become moderately fluent and developed some friendships. Many of

the green berets and I would participate in their early morning and afternoon karate workouts. Before leaving Nha Trang I earned my second degree black belt.

Since I still held my courier credentials, my name would occasionally appear at the top of the roster for helicopter flights to Saigon. On the morning of October 28th, while escorting a captured North Vietnamese Lieutenant Colonel to Saigon for interrogation, the "Huey" UH-1 helicopter I was flying in lost hydraulic pressure at around 500 feet. I was later told it was due to enemy ground fire. I awoke in a military hospital in Saigon having received several broken bones, along with some internal injuries. I was taken into surgery and several days later flown back to the states where I spent the next two months undergoing additional surgeries and extensive physical therapy routine at the US Army Hospital at Fort Sam Houston, Texas. At least it was my hometown and my family was quite attentive. I do not remember much about that event and I never found out what happened to the others onboard the helicopter. Several months later I was awarded my second Purple Heart Medal.

In January of 1971, I was released from the hospital, and after spending a month on medical leave, received orders to report to the Defense Language Institute at Monterey, California. During the next thirty-two weeks I attempted to master the Russian language. I didn't request this course and had no ideal why I was assigned to it, but I had my orders and followed them. In spite of the difficulty, I some how managed to pass the course.

In October of 1971, I reported for my second tour of duty in Washington, this time assigned to the technical staff of the National Security Council (NSC). They wanted an analyst with Russian language qualifications and I fit the bill. While there, I never actually used my language skills. Once they found out that I was courier qualified they immediately assigned me as a member of a courier team. I would transport classified materials to and from the Pentagon, DIA, CIA, NRO and the White House. I reported directly to John Leland (later to become President Reagan's Secretary of the Navy and the architect of the 600-ship Navy), and his boss, General Alexander Haig (destined to become Nixon's Chief of Staff, and many years later, Reagan's Secretary of State). Because I could type 60-wpm, when I wasn't escorting brief cases, I would often help prepare the NSC daily intelligence briefing. This was an "eyes only" document presented every morning to the National Security Advisor, Henry Kissinger.

While at the NSC, General Haig took me, and a few other younger soldiers, under his wing. He once suggested that I apply for an officer's commission via Officer Candidate School (OCS). At the time a reserved commission didn't require a bachelor's degree. I had CLEP'ed out for two years of college credit through the local Army Education Center. He stated that he would pull strings and get me into the OCS program. But, I knew from my Vietnam experience that that was a guaranteed path to duty as an infantry platoon leader. I also knew that the lifespan of an infantry second lieutenant was approximately two months. They couldn't find enough people to keep those positions filled and OCS was running at double capacity. This time I heeded my dad's advice and politely declined his offer. Besides, I'd seen enough combat for a lifetime.

In February of 1972, General Haig arranged for me to attend the four-week Soviet Strategic Course. This was a prestigious series of lectures presented four times a year at Georgetown University sponsored by the Defense Intelligence Agency. It was taught by the movers and shakers within the intelligence community and was limited to only sixty individuals per class. Most were mid-level military and civilian intelligence officers with the DIA and CIA, people being groomed for top positions. I was the only non-commissioned officer attending the course and they didn't know what to make of me at first; but once they discovered that General Haig was my sponsor the issue became moot, and I held my own in class discussions due to my diverse background. The course was an in-depth study of the Soviet leadership, organizational structure,

strategy and war-fighting capabilities. Much of what was taught at this course was also being presented at the Army's Command & General Staff School at Ft. Leavenworth.

In spite of having an interesting job, I really hated Washington. I was sharing a room with another NCO at the DIA headquarters barracks in Arlington, Virginia. The cost of living in Washington was outrageous, especially for someone at my pay-grade. And to add insult to injury, trying to find a date was near impossible; women living and working in D.C. were there to land a husband, preferably one with status and wealth. They had little use for guys like me. Even worst, I would occasionally be on the roster to attend some of Washington's elite social events, not as a guest, but as a military attendant, in formal dress blues, getting drinks and running errands for congressional wives and political aides. I saw the elite at their grandest: as prime examples of social snobbery and out of control egos. I also had to put up with the antics of a number of game-playing NSC staffers who treated anyone below them as their personal flunkies. Even the National Security Advisor, Henry Kissinger, was often abusive towards the staff, screaming and throwing temper tantrums when displeased, which was quite often. Washington was full of pompous type-A personalities and I didn't enjoy working in this hostile environment. General Haig was one of the few exceptions, generally being the calmest guy in the room. He would often protect the enlisted personnel and junior officers from much of the abuse. Of course, he was a four-star general. After nine months at the NSC, I received my second Joint Service Commendation Medal and was promoted to Staff Sergeant (E-6), both through the efforts of General Haig.

While flying home on Christmas leave I met Belinda Drawhorn. She worked as a stewardess with Braniff Airlines on the Atlanta to San Antonio run. After bumping into each other on three separate flights in six months (my mom was undergoing several surgeries during this time), we discovered that we were both from San Antonio and she actually knew my sister. We started dating, and after a year long courtship, married in January of 1972.

Just prior to getting married, I reenlisted, changing my career field. I knew that staying in the intelligence area would get me reassigned to Washington time and again. Also, my job prevented me from really talking about some of my life experiences; since everything I dealt with was classified. Finally, a few months before making this decision, I found out that a close high school friend had committed suicide and another was addicted to heroin. I decided that I wanted to make a personal difference with my life, so in June of 1972, I reported to the 11-week Combat Medical Corpsman Course. This was a prerequisite for my real goal, the seventeen-week Behavioral Science Specialist School (also known as the 91G Program), both being conducted at Fort Sam Houston, Texas.

***(Background Information:** The 91G program originated during Vietnam to provide assistance to Army psychiatrist, psychologist and social workers, which were often overwhelmed by psychiatric casualties. Post Traumatic Stress Disorder started showing up in mass during the early 1970s. The Army decided to train a selected group of highly-qualified and experienced enlisted para-professional counselors to take up the slack, allowing the pros to address the needs of the most serious patients.*

91G's were given extensive training in a variety of areas and by the end of the decade this program became the main stay of the Army's community mental health system worldwide. They were trained to identify psychiatric illnesses as well as personality disorders. Given extensive instruction in interviewing and assessment, suicide prevention and crisis intervention, psychometric testing and interpretation, domestic violence, family abuse/neglect intervention and drug and alcohol counseling and rehabilitation; they would be supervised by mental health

professionals. In many overseas military communities 91G's were often the only diagnostic and counseling resource available.)

I graduated at the top of my class at the Army's Academy of Health Science, and was asked to stay on as an instructor after graduating. I attended a two-week Instructor's Course and moved into the classroom. Over the next eight months I taught courses in psycho-pathology, interviewing techniques, individual and group dynamics, crisis intervention, drug and alcohol counseling and psychological testing to hundreds of enlisted trainee-counselors.

In January of 1973, I was a frequent guest instructor at the Air Force's newly formed Social Action School at Lackland Air Force Base. Their program was the equivalent of the Army's 91G School. In June, I was selected to attend Johns Hopkins University's School of Public Health in Baltimore, Maryland, for a three-month Army-sponsored Alcoholism Counselor Training Program, which included a six-week internship with the State of Maryland's Department of Child Protective Services.

After Johns Hopkins, I received further orders to report to an inpatient alcoholism treatment facility located at Fort Meade, Maryland, where I would work as a counselor and group facilitator. It went by the innocuous moniker of "Joint Behavioral Studies Group", but was in actuality an "off-the-record" alcohol treatment program for the highest ranking military officers, senior NCOs' and top-level DOD officials, many in high visibility positions. Most were stationed in the Washington D.C. area, not far from Fort Meade. Everyone wore civilian clothing and the patients and staff addressed each other by their first names only. It was a strange experience addressing a three-star admiral by his first name and supervising him while he performed housekeeping chores. I was picked for the assignment due to my training in alcohol counseling and my prior experience dealing with ranking personnel at the Pentagon and NSC.

While at Fort Meade, Belinda found work as a "Bunny" at the Baltimore Playboy Club. She also did some modeling for Playboy and participated in many of their marketing events (which I wasn't allowed to attend). We were once invited as a couple to the Playboy Mansion in Chicago (the one in Los Angeles was still under construction). We were flown to Chicago on a chartered private jet with a few dozen other couples. While at the party, we met Hugh Hefner, and mingled with dozens of celebrities including Sammy Davis Jr., Tony Orlando, Sony & Cher, O. J. Simpson, Joe Nameth, Stella Stevens and Jack Lemmon to name a few. While I've never been impressed by celebrities, it was still a fascinating experience which neither of us will ever forget.

In April of 1974, I received papers to report to the U.S. Army Hospital in Nuremberg, Germany. While there, I joined, and later supervised, an inpatient alcoholism treatment team; this time working with lower ranking soldiers and their families. In May 1975, I was appointed as the hospital's Nuclear, Biological & Chemical (NBC) Warfare & Defense NCO, one of several additional duties. Later that year I attended a five-week NBC Warfare Course given at Fort McClellan, Alabama. This program trained key hospital personnel in the event of a nuclear, chemical or biological accident or attack. I was also appointed as the senior enlisted Hazardous Materials NCO, which I received no formalize training; not quite adequate for the task. I had to learn this job on my own time, which I did. In essence, I received extensive training on weapons of mass destruction (WMD) many years before Americans would become familiar with this term.

During much of this period, I carried a full counseling caseload working out of the hospital's Department of Psychiatry. I volunteered one night a week with the hospital's ambulance crew to keep my medical skills current and taught first aid at the local Red Cross chapter every Saturday morning. I eventually earned the Army's Expert Field Medical Badge, the military equivalent of an emergency medical technician (EMT). Additionally, I organized and captained the hospitals'

pistol and rifle teams which won honors at several European military competitions two years in a row, along with teaching karate at the base gym two nights a week.

In April of 1976, I attended the 7th Army's NCO Academy (aka Primary Leadership Course) for four-weeks in Hohenfels, Germany, a required career move. In November, I reported to the Army's Race Relations School in Bremerhaven, Germany. Upon my return to the hospital, I was assigned, for the next six months, as a part-time instructor on a two-person team conducting four half-day race relation seminars given to the hospital staff, including the nurses and doctor. In the late 60s and early 70s racial incidents were a reoccurring issue within the armed forces. These seminars were part of an Army-mandated racial awareness effort to calm the climate and change attitudes. While I didn't volunteer for this training, I learned a great deal about other cultures as a result. This course allowed me to examine and modify some of my own pre-conceptions and prejudices, while providing some important insight into counseling soldiers from other racial, ethnic and religious backgrounds.

While living in Germany, Belinda worked as a photographic model for a German agency out of Munich. She appeared in numerous European magazines and dozens of product catalogues. She traveled to numerous locations around Europe and North Africa, and occasionally, when my military duties permitted, I'd accompany her. I developed an interest in photography and purchased a motorized Nikon F2 developing friendships with several European photographers. Over a two year period, I took part in numerous studio and location shoots while developing my skills. I sold some of my work to a photo agency out of New York, (the money was poor but being published counted) and later operated a small successful side-line photography business taking pictures of the hospital staff and their families.

As her modeling career took off, we found ourselves on the "A-List" for many social events, with expenses paid for by either the modeling agency or their wealthy clients. This included staying at some of Europe's finest resorts and private mansions, dining in four-star restaurants, partying at exclusive night clubs, skiing the Alps, scuba diving the Med, traveling aboard private jets and luxury yachts, along with shopping in the fashion and cultural centers of Europe.

Christina, one of the co-owners of Belinda's modeling agency, was the daughter of a wealthy Swiss industrialist. She had a trust fund, as well as access to daddy's Lear Jet, his 110-foot luxury yacht anchored in Monte Carlo, and to a collection of extravagant homes and penthouse apartments throughout Europe. Several weekends a month, Christina would call us up, along with half-a-dozen other models and their significant others, and fly the entire group to one of the party cities of Europe: Paris, Rome, London, Amsterdam, Monte Carlo, Brussels, Stockholm, Athens, Luxembourg, Copenhagen, Madrid, Venice, Florence, Milan, Naples and Istanbul. During these two and three day junkets we were instructed not to bring anything with us, as she would outfitted everyone in the latest in designer clothing and accessories. She'd spend over a hundred thousand dollars per trip on the group's wardrobe, transportation, dining and entertainment. She'd order only the best and provided each couple with abundant amounts of local currency as spending money. Over the two years that we ran with her, we accumulated over a hundred thousands dollars worth of designer clothing. At one point I had four custom-tailored tuxedos in my closet. We probably gave away a dozen sets of expensive luggage to our friends. At one point, when our 1971 Ford Pinto kept having mechanical problems, Christina bought Belinda a brand new cherry-red Porsche 914 roadster, and we didn't have to pay a single Deutsche Mark. The experience was quite a ride, both literally and figuratively!

In April of 1977, we finally returned to the US, where I was assigned to Fort Stewart, Georgia; more appropriately known as "Camp Swampy". It was located on the edge of a massive marsh, forty miles South of Savannah. I'd been there years earlier while attending a jungle survival

course, but this time I was a 91G assigned to a mobile field hospital (a MASH-type unit) supporting a combat brigade of the 24th Mechanized Infantry Division. Ft Stewart was a World War II base that was being rebuilt from the ground up and this year was a difficult transition for us, since I was in the field half of the time. Eventually, I managed to arrange a transfer to Hunter Army Air Field, just outside of Savannah, where I took over as the Non-Commissioned-Officer-In-Charge (NCOIC) of a six-person outpatient mental health clinic. Belinda found work as a model working out of Atlanta while we resided in Savannah.

Two months later, I attended a four-week Army-sponsored "Families-In-Crisis" Counseling Course given at the University of Colorado in Denver. It dealt with issues of domestic violence and child abuse and neglect. I captained the Medical Battalion's pistol team, eventually earning the Army's Distinguished International Pistol Marksmanship Badge, something that I'd been working on for years. While off-duty I volunteered at a local suicide prevention hotline and taught Karate at the base gym two nights a week. My unit was called out when a category-3 hurricane came ashore on the Georgia-Florida coast. In one night several soldiers and I rescued over twenty people from the storm.

In November of 1977, shortly after being promoted to Sergeant First Class (E-7), I received orders to report to a small medical dispensary in Karlsruhe, Germany. During my first year there, I single-handedly provided mental health coverage to an American military and DOD civilian population of over 12,000. After fighting personnel and budget battles, I managed to expand the clinic from just one interview room located within the local medical dispensary, to a suite offices staffed with five counselors, a secretary, and a PhD clinical psychologist. Once I recruited the psychologist, the Karlsruhe Community Mental Health Service (KCMHS) found its legs. Along with supervising the enlisted and clerical staff and managing the day-to-day operations of the clinic, I also carried a full counseling caseload, specializing mostly in marriage counseling.

Belinda resumed her relationship with Christina's modeling agency, but due to the scope of my duties, I was unable to accompany her on all of her out-of-town photo shoots. I did, however, continue my involvement with photography when time permitted. We would receive invites for weekend trips, but weren't into "the party scene" like we had been on our previous tour.

While at the KCMHS, I led the effort to establish a variety of outpatient counseling services supporting military personnel and their families. My duties, and those of the staff, included conducting psychiatric assessments; proctoring, grading and evaluating standardized psychological tests; counseling military personnel who were unit disciplinary problems and facilitating administrative discharges when necessary; outpatient counseling of soldiers and family members who were having a variety of social, psychological and psychiatric problems; coordinating with community chaplains, base finance and housing officers, the Army Community Service and the American Red Cross to aid families in crisis.

I was on-call 24/7/365 to the military police (in domestic violence) and the medical dispensary (for psychiatric emergencies). I facilitated several weekly therapy groups including a couples' counseling session and a "tough love" teen counseling group. I also met regularly with the community commander and his staff along with numerous unit commanders on an as needed basis. I conducted periodic career counseling, staff evaluations and in-service training to the clinic enlisted staff and advised the commander of the medical dispensary on matters related to mental health issues.

***(Background Information:** In the late 1970's, child abuse and neglect had become a major public concern in many overseas military communities. With several high profile incidents hitting the national media, the Army, along with the other services, finally addressed the problem by*

appointing Family Advocacy Teams in each overseas community. These teams were charged with identifying and providing treatment to families in crisis. Overseas assignments are especially difficult on younger service families. They find themselves in a strange cultural environment without the financial resources and support of their extended family and network of friends, along with the deployment of their spouse for sometimes weeks or months at a time. Families living within a military community not knowing the ins and outs of the local economy and the military system can be easily overwhelmed.)

Over fifty percent of my caseload was geared towards helping the wives of soldiers who were isolated, many with young children. I worked to create a wives' self-help group providing them with a community support network bringing in lecturers on various topics that were relevant to the women. This group helped them find the needed resources to make their lives easier. Belinda and several other experienced service wives actually ran the group. The concept was later implemented in other overseas communities with some success.

In February of 1978, the Army sent me to a sixteen-week Family Counseling Program given at the University of Boston's School of Social Work, which included an eight-week internship at Boston General Hospital's Department of Family Services. In July, I attended a four-week Child Advocacy Investigator's Training Program, also funded by the Army and conducted by the Houston Police Department's sex crimes unit given at Rice University.

Shortly after returning to Karlsruhe, and due largely to my recent training, I was appointed by the community commander as the primary person of contact for all incidents of child abuse and neglect. I was also selected as the lead investigator and senior case manager for the Karlsruhe Community Family Advocacy Team (KCFAT). Between 1978 and 1980, I investigated and provided counseling to families in crisis, and at the same time, trained numerous 91G's and dozens of military police personnel in domestic violence and child abuse/neglect investigative and intervention techniques.

In 1980, KCFAT was judged, by the Department of the Army in Washington, and 7th Army in Europe, as "the" program to emulate. As one of its' principal architects, I was asked to speak at two Army conferences on family advocacy issues. Furthermore, I served as the American liaison to the Karlsruhe German court system regarding American military child custody matters, was the primary case coordinator for the community's foster care program, performed as the mental health consultant to the local American DOD school system (representing over 2,600 children and 400 teachers and administrators), and finally, was a standing member on all family disciplinary review boards (having the authority to stateside families that required follow-up services that were beyond our resources).

I was the clinics' NCOIC for four years, but we lost our psychologist after one year and for three out of the four, I performed as the acting clinical director, with minimal supervision from my superiors at the Department of Psychiatry at the US Army Hospital in Heidelberg. During my thirteen years in the military, this assignment was the most rewarding to me, both personally and professionally. I took on duties and responsibilities that would normally be accorded a senior commissioned officer. Upon my departure from Karlsruhe in August of 1980, I was awarded a Meritorious Service Medal for my overall contributions.

In January of 1980, eight months prior to my scheduled reenlistment, I was involved in a serious car accident on the German Autobahn. I broke several vertebrae in my lower spine, and shattered my right hip, along with having internal injuries. It took four months for me to recover enough to walk again. One of the requirements of reenlistment was to pass the Army's physical fitness test. After several attempts, I was unable to accomplish this, which in effect, ended my military career.

I received a medical retirement in August of 1980. But more important to me, I lost my ability to do many things physical; I had to give up my karate since it was too painful to pursue.

Post Service

Belinda and I returned to San Antonio and set up an apartment. Her dad passed away several months later, leaving her with a small inheritance, which we put to good use by attending college full-time. We put the bulk of the money away for a rainy day. During the next few years, I used my GI bill to attend San Antonio College majoring in computer technology. After two years Belinda received an associate degree while working as a secretary at Datapoint, a national computer manufacturer.

In December 1980, I found work as a third-shift customer service supervisor with Datapoint Corporation, the same company my wife worked at. This wasn't my ideal job but it produced an income and allowed me time to study while attending school. During my last three years with the company, I was moved to days and was promoted into the position of call center trainer.

In August of 1988, Datapoint went into bankruptcy and closed its doors. I'd been with the company for eight years, and Belinda nine. After looking unsuccessfully for work in San Antonio, Belinda and I moved to Dallas knowing that its economy was much stronger. After being there for just six months I found a position with the marketing communications department of Life of the Southwest (LSW), a life insurance and annuities company. I was hired as a typographer but had little real knowledge of how to use their dedicated typesetting system. After just a few weeks I had mastered it enough to produce a variety of print products. During the next year, I attended numerous computer-related continuing education classes at the local community college. Belinda worked with several temporary agencies before finding a permanent position as a senior staff secretary in the defense electronics division of Texas Instruments.

At LSW, I was responsible for creating marketing brochures, rate sheets, policy contracts, sales convention materials and trade advertisements, along with producing a monthly newsletter. This position allowed me to develop my skills in copy-writing, along with perfecting my knowledge of typography and graphic design.

After four-and-a-half years with the company, LSW decided to outsource its creative department, laying off most of the marketing team. In May of 1994, I found a new position as the catalog manager at Winzer Corporation, an automotive and industrial parts distributor. I ran a five-person creative team along with establishing quality standards and re-designing the corporate identity. I was also responsible for creating, and keeping current, a 600-page, 32,000-item product catalog, published twice a year. I worked closely with the marketing manager to create and publish product brochures, trade magazine advertisements, specification sheets, in-house forms, tradeshow displays, collateral materials and the occasional slide presentation. Finally, I was responsible for selecting, purchasing and integrating new computer equipment into the marketing department. During my last six months the company hired a products manager who oversaw my department's operation; the long and short of it, we didn't get along, and after six additional months I found myself in the unemployment line again.

In June of 1995, I was hired as an electronic prepress supervisor with Moore Graphic Services, a division of Moore Business Forms. I was primarily responsible for working with representatives of four of the largest accounting firms in the country: Arthur Anderson, Deloitte-Touche, KPMG and Ernst & Young. I would often create work based upon company specifications, as well as, correct font, format and image problems with their consultant designed projects. Moore had purchased the first "digital press" in the Dallas/Fort Worth area. This allowed the company to

print small quantities of high-quality four-color corporate literature; mostly for high-end annual reports, client presentation materials and personalized sales literature, the kind of stuff companies love to show to their prospective customers, while keeping their per-unit cost low.

After two years at Moore, I was contacted by the owner of Phoenix Graphics, a small publishing-printing firm in Dallas, who asked me to head-up their electronic prepress department. I'd worked with the company's owner on a contract basis when I first arrived in Dallas years earlier, and over time developed a friendship with him and his family. During this same period, I continued attending evening college courses, keeping my skills current, while earning a 240-hour certificate in Advanced Electronic Publishing. Belinda also took a number of graphic-related courses and when Texas Instrument laid her off in August of 1995, she found a new position as a desktop publishing specialist with Taylor Publishing, a national yearbook publisher.

In May of 1997, I took over the prepress department at Phoenix Graphics. The company had developed business relationships with American and Southwest Airlines, Embassy Suites, AT&T, MCI-Worldcom, Texas Instruments, Northern Telecom, Erickson, EDS, National Semiconductor, Motorola, Verizon and Sprint. The next few years the company grew three fold.

By early 2001, the "dot.com" bubble started to collapse and hi-tech and telecom stocks started to tank. Later that year the World Trade Center attack severely under cut the revenues of the national airlines and that affected the local hotel industry, then came the scandals at MCI-Worldcom and Enron. As a result, many of Dallas' technology firms were hit hard which resulted in massive layoffs during the last half of 2001 and early 2002. Those companies put their advertising and print projects on hold or canceled them altogether in order to save money. A year earlier, we had spent over a million dollars on a high-end direct-to-plate printing press along with a state-of-the-art electronic prepress system, expecting the economy to take off. When the market went in the other direction the company eventually found itself in a massive cash short-fall. In February of 2002, the owner reluctantly decided to declare bankruptcy. I went through the next year looking for work in a depressed labor market performing intermittent freelance jobs out of my home studio. Later that year, Belinda lost her job when her company automated the prepress process and laid off half of its production staff.

In March of 2003, we put our household belongings in long-term storage and moved to Phoenix, hoping for a new start. We quickly found a place to live and within a few weeks had temp jobs. In January of 2004, I decided to return to college full-time. I attended a two year program in paralegal studies at a local community college funded by the VA. In May of 2007, I graduated from Arizona State University with a bachelor's degree in History, something I'd wanted to achieve for many years. I worked as a paralegal for a year, but had some health issues and I'm currently taking it easy and working on several personal projects.

It's been said that life is not a destination but a journey. Well, I've had a great one. While I've make many mistakes along the way, in the final analysis I believe that I've given more than I taken. The journey continues...

Thanks for listening!