

# 6<sup>TH</sup> BATTALION, 11<sup>TH</sup> ARTILLERY

Hawaii



Viet Nam

*On Time, Sir!*

## From Georgia to Viet Nam Section 15 On LZ San Juan "Almost Murder Part 1"

As explained in Section 14, I don't remember the name of the second person that had an altercation with Blivet Belly or "Sgt. BB". I'm going to call him Jeff, but before I tell you Jeff's story, I'll tell you mine. I don't remember if his was first or mine was. But, I'm going to assume mine was. I'm basing this on the fact that "Sgt. BB" was transferred to Chu Lai, where he was assigned to the barracks of the 6<sup>th</sup> 11<sup>th</sup> Artillery. This barracks was where those that were leaving country or had business to conduct in Chu Lai could spend the night or several days, depending on the need. He was there when I went to extend my tour in Viet Nam and also when I was going home. I kept my distance as much as possible and he did the same while I was there. His transfer came soon after the incident involving Jeff.

As a medic I was exempt from having to do certain duties, because I was on duty 24/7 as a medic. Lance came into our hooch just a fussing one day, Doc it ain't right, you're not supposed to pull guard duty. It just ain't right, they are wrong to require you to pull guard duty. I had no idea what was going on, because as the only medic on the Artillery hill, I was as Lance said, on duty 24/7 and was not required to pull guard duty because of my having to be free to respond to any emergency. Yet lance told me that the Captain had stopped him and informed him that he was to tell me, I would be pulling guard duty beginning that night, along with Lance. I told Lance, he was right that I didn't have to do guard duty according to what I had been told back in Duc Pho, and I would go and talk with the Captain.

When I reached the Captain's hooch "Sgt. BB" was also standing there. I told the Captain that Lance had informed me that I had guard duty starting tonight. To which he replied that we are a man short and I would have to fill in until the man returned. I then told him that it was my understanding that as a medic, I was on duty 24/7 and was exempt from guard duty. He again told me that they were a man short and I would have to fill in on guard duty. I then tried to explain to him that if we were hit and someone was injured that I would be bound to stay at the guard post until relieved. But neither he nor "Sgt. BB" wanted to hear that, because they both at the same time and with the same words told me, "**You will be on guard duty**". You might say I got a double direct order. We had been told that if we didn't agree with an order, we could complain about it to a higher rank, but until

then we were to follow the order. Plus the Captain was the highest rank on the hill. So I responded "Yes Sir". And hoped that everything would work out.

Around midnight Lance and I headed to the Guard Bunker. It was a small bunker as compared to the infantry bunker next to it. It was, not designed to be a 24 hr guard bunker, where one could guard while one slept. It was a half culvert covered with sand bags with the rear open. And on the front, it had a wall where we could lay inside the bunker and fire our weapons in safety. Most of the time we would sit on the wall and lean back against the sand bags on each side of the bunker. Somewhere around 2 AM, Lance thought he heard something on the other side of the wire. So we decided to throw a grenade, Lance told me to throw it while he would be ready to fire his M-16 if anything happened. First we let the infantry guards know that we were going to do this. This was so that they could also be prepared and to know that we were not under attack, yet.

So I pulled the pin and released the lever, I did not hold it for very long. I did throw it high so that it could eat up some time and explode maybe before it hit the ground. The hill dropped off sharply just past the wire. It went off and I had also retrieved my M-16 and was ready to go into action if needed. It wasn't, we either killed whatever was on the other side of the wire or there wasn't anything over there to kill. Whichever way, I wasn't complaining.

Several hours later around 5 AM, lance and I were sitting on the wall quietly talking when we heard a mortar come screaming over our heads, and exploded on the other side of the wire. We both rolled and dove into the bunker. Lance told me that he needed to call FDC and let them know that we were receiving incoming. He located the phone and tried calling them but the phone was not working, when we had dove into the bunker we had unplugged the wires to the phone. Lance was searching around in the dark trying to locate the wires and I was helping him. We could not find them, so I told Lance I had a flashlight if he needed it. He told me exactly what I could do with that light, he didn't want it to give away our position. I didn't remind him that it had come across the hill which meant that there was no way they could have seen it. And anyway, I was just kidding him about turning it on.

It was then that we heard Sgt. BB just a cussing and calling out to me. Doc where the hell are you and why are you not where you're supposed to be. You've got several wounded and the Captain is hit and I had to risk my life to come out here to get you. With each word he spoke he was also cussing me for everything imaginable. He even brought my mother into the conversation in an effort to describe what I was and what I had caused him to risk to find me. He made it sound like the Captain was half dead. The very thing that I had tried to explain to them was happening. It put me in a tough spot, I was where they had told me to be and yet he made it sound like I was out there for visit and should not be out there. I had wounded and I didn't want to leave my post. Lance understood my dilemma,

and told me to go, it wasn't but an hour from the end of our shift. He said he would be alright, and that I need to go.

Of course all the time Lance and I were discussing this, Sgt. BB was cursing me as hard as he could. In between the guard bunker and the command area was an 8 foot wire fence and I would have to go all the way around it until I came to the opening close to FDC, where the wounded was located. Don't remember if I had my aid bag with me, if not then I would have had to go retrieve it from our hooch and come back to FDC to care for the wounded. FDC consisted of two rooms, one a Conex, where all the equipment was at and the other one was a lean-to attached to it. The wounded was in the lean-to, or at least six of them were, the Captain was inside the main Conex building. He was to be the first one I would attend too, because Sgt. BB had expressed that he was to most seriously wounded. I opened the door and he was on the radio and I noticed that his right arm was covered with blood. *"Sir, I need you to come out and let me tend to your wound."* To which he told me he could not, he had to conduct the fire mission. And told me to take care of the other wounded first. O.K. it didn't take this Georgia boy long to figure out what was going on. (Here was a Captain, conducting a fire mission while wounded and in great pain.) Probably would be some kind of award when the report was turned in or at least that was what he was shooting for.

I'd let him play his little game, while I took care of the other wounded. The first person I saw when I turned around was Sam. Sam are you wounded, he had his eyes downcast and nodded that he was. The other guys were snickering, and I didn't have time for any foolish games. Sam told me to go ahead and look at the other wounded his wasn't hit that bad. Burt was one of them so I attended to him, he had taken shrapnel close to his right shoulder blade, wasn't a major wound so I cleaned it and put a band aid on it. All the time while I was tending to the wounded Sgt. BB was still ranting and raving about how sorry I was, still cursing. I attended to the other four men and none of them was seriously wounded. Then I went back to Sam, and he told me to go ahead and look at the Captain's wound, he could still wait. I told him that I needed to see to his wound, so that I could get the Captain out of FDC to see about his wound. Sam where are you hit at, again the others started snickering, and told Sam tell Doc where you were hit at. Sam was really humble as he turned slightly and pointed at his butt.

Every one of us in the lean-to, burst out laughing that is except Sam. With a big grin on my face I told Sam: *"Alright Sam drop your pants and let us have a look!"* It wasn't a serious wound, just another band aid type wound, but I was going to play it to the hilt. Sam I'm going to fill out a toe tag on you, your wound is worth a Purple Heart. Sam very solemn said *"I don't want no Purple Heart"*. But, Sam you were wounded in action and you deserve to get a Purple Heart, of course all the other guy was encouraging him to get his Purple Heart. Game time was over when Sam said very forcefully, *I don't want no Purple Heart, don't you dare turn in no request on me for a Purple Heart.* As I'm writing this story I'm almost hoping that

Sam never reads this, remember he was the one that could stick a machete in a one by six a majority of the time. And he was also the one, who was going to scalp the Sargent Major with a trench shovel. I can't run as fast as I use to.

All six of the outside men had been taken care of that left only the Captain. I opened the door and told him I was ready to look at his wound. He was still playing his war game, so I told him Sir if you want me to look at your wound, then you need to get your butt out here. I'm sure these other guys can handle it for a few minutes. There were three or four men in the FDC with him. Now you may think I was being disrespectful to him, and maybe I was, but I had about all the crap I could take from this situation. Sgt. BB and the BC had put me in a bind, if the wounded had been critical then it was possible I would have lost some of them because I had been ordered to do guard duty. And if Charlie had hit our hill around where Lance was doing guard duty, while I was gone, he could have been killed. And it would have been my fault. As far as I knew Lance was the only one that could prove that I had been ordered to pull guard duty. And these two yo-yo's would probably lie about sending me out on guard duty. And you need to remember that all during this time Sgt. BB was ranting and cussing me, pinning the blame on me for being at the guard bunker.

Anyway the Captain get's up and comes out into the lean-to, for me to see to his wound. I cleaned the blood off his arm and doused it real good with alcohol and put a band aid on it and told him he could go back to what he was doing. I cleaned up the area of items I had used to take care of the wounded. Picking up my M-16 and aid bag, I headed out the door. My coming out set Sgt. BB off again, I didn't say a word, because I knew that he wasn't going to let it go and would be following me to my hooch later. And I was going to be prepared for him when he did.

Upon arriving in the hooch, I took my M-16 and removed the clip from it. I then checked to be sure I had 20 rounds in it. Then I also pulled out another clip and made sure it contained a full load. Lance had some electric tape on a shelf. Taking it and the two clips, turning one of them upside down, I taped them together. They were turned, where I could release one clip, turn it 180 degrees and it could be reinserted into the M-16. Chamber a round and be ready to fire again. We were trained in Basic Training to do this. This would give us the ability to have 40 rounds that could be fired quickly. What could be done, was when we started firing, and emptied one clip. Ejecting it and catching it and rotating it, insert the other loaded clip, chamber a round and continuing firing. A person could fire, rotate and fire, 40 rounds in around three to five seconds.

There are two ways that we make decisions. The first way is with our mind, that which is in-between our ears. The problem with it is that, it can change with the wind. Example how many times do we make New Years commitments, lose weight, stop smoking or drinking, or whatever. Only to give it up a few days or

weeks later. Then there is making a decision from the heart. Now I'm not talking about your blood pumper. This heart is the center of who you are, when it makes a decision it will act on it to get it accomplished and does not turn around 99% of the time. When a man asks a woman to marry him, that decision comes from the heart, and the woman when she answers Yes, it comes from her heart.

That night, I made the decision from the heart, that I was going to kill Sgt. BB, when he came into the hooch. The M-16 when fired had a up-ward pull to it. When he came into the hooch, I was going to start firing between his feet. and with the up-ward pull I would split him in half. My rifle would be on automatic fire and I figured that in three seconds and 40 rounds later, he would be in two halves. I was going to give him a fare chance though, I would wait until he entered the hooch completely and had started his spill, before I opened fire. I had turned off the lights so that he could not see that I had my M-16 in my hands, and turn around and flee.

I reasoned it out, that I would explain my actions to the review Officers. That when he came in ranting and raving at me. That I thought that this was an attack by the VC. And I was just defending myself, when I killed him. And if that didn't work, I just flat didn't give a damn, he was going to die that night. I sat on the end of Lances bunk, the door into the hooch was on the left wall some six feet from where I sat. Above my head was a small window and I would hear him when he came, either by his cussing me or by his footsteps, as he approached our hooch.

Some five or more minutes later it was his footsteps that told me he was coming. I flipped the safety around to the fully automatic selection. And I waited, I could hear him when he opened the outer door. When he stepped down the steps and the outer door closed behind him. My eyes were adjusted to the semi darkness within the hooch, but when the curtain was pulled to the side it was a darker background and all I could make out was a shadow of a man. I waited for him to step on into the hooch and start cursing me. And he was waiting, I reckon for his eyes to adjust to the interior of the hooch. Then Lance spoke "**Doc, are you alright?**" He was returning from guard duty. I don't know what he thought when he heard the audible clicks of that M-16 going from fully automatic down to safety. I answered him: "**Yeah, I am now**"! That 1% kicked in and my heart's decision cooled.

I didn't explain to Lance, what was going on and he never pressed it. He was a Friend. One good thing, that came out of this event, was that I promised myself that I would never let my anger control me to this extent again. In the past 47 years, I've come close, but I've kept that promise. There is a lot of "what if's" in this story, that could have spelled disaster for a number of people. I'm just glad that it was no worse than it was. There was no need for a "Dust-off" that night, where there could have been. Oh Yeah, I was never told too pull guard duty again. Some lessons are learned the hard way.

I'm trying to hold down the length of these stories. So I'll tell the other story of "Almost Murder" in the next Section # 16.