

6TH BATTALION, 11TH ARTILLERY

Hawaii



Viet Nam

On Time, Sir!

From Georgia to Viet Nam

Section One

Decatur to Fort Benning

by Clenton Thomas, B Btry, '68-'69

At some time in the first part of 1967 I received a letter from Uncle Sam. Basically it informed me that my Friends, Family and Neighbors had decided that I was to serve my Country and that at a certain time and place I was to report to the Selective Service Office. At that time the major conflict the US was engaged in was Viet Nam. I felt that this letter was a gross misstatement of facts. First of all, I did not have any friends, and if I did, they surely would not desire me to go to Viet Nam! What kind of friend would that be? Secondly, although I did consider myself to be the black sheep of the family, but there again, would they really want me to go to Viet Nam? I don't think so! We hadn't been long at the home on Amber Drive in Decatur Georgia so I only knew one of my neighbors. She was a widow who had a 15 or 16 year old daughter. The daughter was somewhat overweight and her Mom stated several times that it was only baby fat and that she would lose it. Sure enough, nine months later she did. Point of fact; "NOT MY BABY!", so there was no reason her Mom would want me to go to Viet Nam.

I came to the conclusion that it was all Uncle Sam's idea. But what could I do? So I went to the appointment as required. We were told to strip-down for a physical. They checked everything; eyes, nose, throat, feet, ears, heart, reflex, height, weight, temperature, etc. Then came the last test. We were told to face the wall, bend over and grab our cheeks. They were going to check-out our prostate. I didn't think it was back there, but what do I know. Out of the corner of my eye I saw this guy coming in putting on a surgical glove and another man with a tube of KY jelly and a box of gloves. I think the first one, name was Bob, had a big smile on his face. I'd never had this done before and was not sure what was to be done. The next thing I knew, Bob was standing behind me. I'm bent over and all I can see is his shoes. "OK, what now" I'm thinking, then WHOA! I never expected that. Seriously, that was my first. I now knew why he had a surgical glove on; I'd want them too if I'd stuck my finger where he stuck his. I'm glad I wasn't loose as a goose; I would have splattered the far wall. Then we were instructed to dress and wait in the next room until our name was called. My name was called and I came up to the doctor and sat down. He looked over my test. He said; "you're obese!"

OK, what's that mean? The way he said it, I think he thought he was bursting my bubble. Your overweight, I'm rejecting you for service, and he stamped the page with a big *rejected* stamp. I could go home. OK that's done and over with. I could get on with my life. I was *unfit for service*.

Six or seven months later I got another one of those letters. It said the same thing. I'm figuring, they thought I would go home and lose a bunch of weight so that I could be drafted. Wrong! I didn't, but they didn't know that, so another letter had come. I went to the appointment and it looked like they had a different crew this time. We were again told to strip-down for a physical. They checked everything, eyes, nose, throat, feet, ears, heart, reflex, height, weight, temperature, etc.. Then came the last test. Again we were told to face the wall, bend over and grab our cheeks. Out of the corner of my eye I saw Bob coming in wearing a surgical glove and his helper with a tube of KY jelly and a box of gloves. I remembered him from last time. I knew what he was fixing to do and it was hard to forget someone who did what he did to me. So I'm thinking, I remember him. Surely, when he gets to me he'll remember me and not have to do it again. Well, when he got to me I expected that at any moment he would say, "Hey, didn't I do you about six months ago?" He Didn't! WHOA! He did it again! Again we were instructed to dress and wait in the next room until our name was called. My name was called and I came up to the Doctor and sat down. He looked over my test. He said, "You're Obese!" So I go home, right? Yep! I figured OK, twice in a year, maybe I'm really finished this time. I mean because of my weight I've been rejected twice.

Then in 1968 I received the third letter telling me to report again in April. Now, this was the same letter as before but its feel was different than the other two. I did something I had not done on the other two, I packed me a travel kit, tooth paste and brush, hair comb, shaving stuff, etc. We followed the same routine as before, even up to the point with Bob again. I'd given up on him recognizing me although he had already seen me twice before. I knew he would not remember me. Some people just naturally have short memories. Bob was one of them. I wonder if he retired from that job. Can you imagine "Daddy, what did you do in the Army?" At this stage in my life I get one of these prostate exams once a year. Again I sat before the doctor and he's looking over my test results. You've got a weight problem. He paused for a while, looked up at me and said, "We'll get that weight off you." and stamps it *approved!* He instructed me to go into another room where I'd be assigned to a Branch of Service.

After all those who were approved for service gathered into the room they started calling out names. We would then tell them what branch we choose to serve in. I really didn't want to serve in any of them. I got to figuring that if I go into the Navy I'd have to be a good swimmer. I knew how to swim but was not a strong swimmer. Then there was the Air Force. I knew I wasn't smart enough to fly a

plane and I sure didn't want to jump out of one. In the Army I'd see all those movies where they were charging a beach head. Sure was a lot of dead bodies afterwards! Then there was the Marine Corps. I'd heard about Parris Island and knew I could not handle that for sure. I gave thought to letting them choose for me.

A few minutes later one of the men did just that, "it doesn't matter, one's as good as another" he states. The Sergeant in charge said, "send him to the Marine Corps, Parris Island will adjust his attitude!" Several names later my name was called: **Army!** And that is why I served in the Army.

From there, we were bussed to Fort Benning; I was to do my Basic Training there. A little over half way they took several trainees to a sand pit on the back side of the base. I was one of them. We were told to line up side by side, do a dress right dress, and then do a dress left dress. We were to lay down on our backs with our shoulders level with each other. Arms to our sides, curl our hands towards our face. Three sergeants went over to a 40 foot light pole, picked it up and brought it over to us and placed it on our chest. Sergeant Best told us we were going to do sit-ups with that light pole. We each had to lift our load together. It would take team work so that no one would overexert themselves. He would call out when we were to lift together. They had us do around twelve sit-ups. We all worked together and did them in unison. I think we did them good. We only did them one time. It reminded me of what that doctor told me at the draft board physical that day: "***We'll get that weight off you!***"

Also at basic training we were instructed in basic first aid; it wasn't a very long course, maybe half a day. I never dreamed that I would do my A.I.T. as a Medic. We did mouth-to-mouth resuscitation on a dummy they had. I don't think I could do this on a real guy! There was a guy in our unit that was a graduate from Harvard University. Our Top Training Sergeant renamed him Annie Oakley and instructed him that every time he hollered "Annie Oakley" he was to come running to where ever he was, galloping like he was riding a horse. He was also to give the cowgirl *Yee-Hi* while with his hand in a gun shape. He was also to shoot, Bang! Bang! All this because he had called his Rifle a Gun.

Then there was the day we were to throw a live grenade. We were instructed in the proper way to throw a grenade. We were told that it had a ten second time delay from when we released the handle. We were to pull the pin while holding the handle down, cock our right arm and extend our left hand to point in the direction we would throw. When ready, release the handle, count to three and throw. Two men went into a sandbagged pit, the trainee and the instructor. I went into the pit with one knee on the ground the other leg extended. I pulled the pin, cocked my right arm back, released the pin and in my mind I started my count. At "one" the Sergeant yells ***Throw it! Throw it!*** So, I threw it! We both ducked down and we waited and waited and waited, I'm thinking I got a dud. I'm not going to raise my

head to look though and I'm not going down there to retrieve it, *not my job*.
Finally it goes off. I must have done good 'cause he didn't ask me to do it again.
All he said was, Next!

I graduated from Basic and was sent directly to Fort Sam Huston in San Antonio Texas. I was to become a Medic.

[Return To Soldiers' Stories](#)

[Return To Contents](#)