

Injuries

A lot of time has passed since I was in Vietnam. Now that I am retired I might have more time to write about some of the times and things that transpired during those days. I recall a time I spent in a small field hospital at the firebase Phu Loi.

I did not suffer an injury due to enemy action as many of my fellow soldiers had. The injury I received was due to my own carelessness. It was dark and the patrol was about to leave the perimeter for its night operation. I wanted to get on top of the twelve-foot high bunker to view the surrounding area for any activity before we ventured into the field.

As I was turning around to climb down, my foot became entangled in a phone line that ran to the top of a perimeter bunker, I lost my balance and made the jump to the ground. My landing was just as smooth as my turning around before I departed the platform some twelve feet above my head. I must have twisted my ankle when I landed with my eighty pounds of gear on my back.

When I hit the ground, I heard something crack, and I felt a pain as I had never felt before; it was as my foot had caught on fire.

I do not know why the first question people ask after something like this happens is, "Can you walk on it"? I suppose they need to know so they can find someone to carry you. Needless to say, I was not able to stand upright, let alone walk on it.

Someone called for our jeep and I was taken to the field hospital where a medic got me into a bed. I do not remember if they gave me anything for the pain in my foot, but they elevated it and put ice on it to keep the swelling down. That hurt nearly as bad as the ankle being twisted in the first place.

In 1969, they did not have all the fancy cold packs for injuries as they do today. In fact, the best contraption they could devise is fill two surgical gloves with water tie them together by the fingers than freeze them to tie around my ankle.

It must have worked, because just as it was becoming bearable and the ice was nearly melted someone would casually stop by and exchange it for a new cold one. I tell you I never got this kind of service in a bar if my beer was getting warm.

The time passed until the pale light of a new day began to create new shadows in the ward where I was residing. About 7:00 AM, a medic stopped by my bed and for once was not presenting me the two frozen rubber gloves. He had a wheel chair and they told me they wanted to take x-rays of my foot.

The pictures were developed and the doctor came into the room where I was waiting. He asked me how I hurt my foot. I told him, then he said, I had not broke my ankle, but it was one of the worst sprains he had ever seen, and it might have been easier on me if I had broke it. I asked should I feel good or bad about that. He went on to tell me I had strong bones and what had happened was that some of the bone fibers were pulled from the bones when I landed. He said once the swelling goes down, they will need to put a cast on my leg to keep me from moving it. In the mean time, they will keep ice on it.

The next few days, passed into what seemed like weeks. I was flat on my back with my left leg elevated so I could not turn over and someone was always tying those damned frozen rubber gloves around my foot.

One morning I awoke to find a wheel chair by my bed and the watery rubber gloves were hanging from my ankle and not being replaced with the frozen kind. Thing were looking up. The medic said the swelling is down and the doctor wants to put a cast on my leg. He said soon that I would be able to get around some. The day I was looking forward to had finely arrived.

The cast was in place and I was given some crutches to aid in getting around. I found my way back to bed and later I was allowed to go to the mess hall. I was about fifty feet out the door when a horrible burning erupted in my foot and ankle. The medic who was walking with me to the mess hall ask, "What's wrong"

I told him, "It felt like someone had placed hot coals on my ankle." Later I could see my leg was swelling up over the top of the cast. It was later removed; the cast that is, and the ice treatment began again.

One of many nights, I spent in the field hospital the time passed slowly and no one came to visit. There was only one other patient in the ward and he was at the far end of the building. He had malaria and needed rest. I was so bored I began reading a book. The medic on duty was also bored and ask if I wanted to get up for awhile. I agreed and soon we were at his desk talking and drinking screwdrivers. He made them with orange juice and 100 proof grain alcohol, the kind that all hospitals use to clean instruments.

He then began to tell me a few weeks ago he was in the local village and brought back a communicative disease or something like that. I was not too clear at this point. He asked me if I had ever given anyone an injection before. I told him no. He then ask if I thought I could if he explained how to do it. I said I could.

He fixed two more drinks. I think he needed it more than I did at the time. He said he was scheduled to go to Australia soon and needed one more shot of penicillin to clear his condition. He asked me, "how steady are your hands?" I told him, "I am fine". He explained where and how to administer the shot, and late that night I was given the opportunity most guys in the service could only speculate of ever doing; I the patient gave a medic a shot.

Some say, "Truth is stranger than fiction"; this true story would probable not appear in the television series M*A*S*H.