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Tet :wounded – Bill Crabbe

January 30th, 1968 the Tet offensive, 3 AM ,Bien Hoa, Viet Nam. 190th Assault Helicopter company, 2nd flight platoon. A distant explosion woke me from my typical light, intermittent sleep.

I yelled the alarm “ incoming” which meant we were under 122MM rocket attack. I had been through these attacks many times before but this one was different. Many more explosions occurred than typical and they were getting closer. As I ran for the exit of the 2 story barracks (hooch) it exploded. I found myself across the street from the building when I came to consciousness. The last thing I remember was my entire body feeling as if I was hit by a frying pan in mid air. I was bleeding from my left shoulder, neck and back. I was covered in blood and could not move my right arm, my neck was on fire and I could barely speak.. In front of me the trench outside the barracks was littered with wounded and dead members of the 2 nd platoon. I found my crew chief he was also wounded in the side. I told SP/5 Thomas to see if he could help the wounded while I walked across the road to a ¾ ton truck. I started the truck easy enough but could not shift gears with my right arm since it was not functioning. Meanwhile the rockets were still exploding all around us. I managed to shift the gears with my left hand and drove the truck to the site of the wounded. I helped Thomas load some of the wounded but the loss of blood made me weak and I stumbled into a ditch. I knew there were other able body men around so I decided to go get them to help. I found the first Sergeant taking cover between 2 Conex’s and after a period of time they helped. I was driven to the med evac shed on the flight line where I was bandaged and given an injection of morphine. The rockets were still exploding off and on. The morphine made me immobile and I was placed on a stretcher. I was carried to the flight line where an assault chopper was waiting to evac the wounded to Long Binh hospital. As we approached the chopper the rocket attack intensified on the flight line. The men carrying me put me down at my request but I was not able to move so I lay there until the barrage lifted helpless to take cover. Finally I was placed on the chopper and we lifted off for Long Binh. I was carried into triage, given plasma and last rights by a priest after my dog tags gave away my catholic religious preference. After the operation I came out of the sodium pentethol haze to find a huge part of my right shoulder missing and not bandaged except for an internal piece of surgical gauze inside the wound and my neck covered with bandages. A couple of hours passed and to my disbelief the hospital was under 122MM rocket attack. I helped the nurse take all the wounded from their beds and place them underneath the bed for protection against shrapnel. The triage suffered a direct hit along with some other Quonset huts. The next day most of patients were flown to Cam Rahn Bay a more secure area. I was sedated for transfer and upon waking found that I was in a Malaria ward. The overcrowding of the Cam Rahn Bay hospital was evident. The next

day a medic changed my bandage. A few hours later a man in the next bed who had no legs woke me up. The only way he could wake me was to throw a glass of water at my face. He kept filling the glass and splashing me until I woke. I had lost a lot of blood .Another man across the aisle was a medic. He was also missing a leg. He reached inside my wound and found the open blood vessel. He took my thumb and forefinger and pressed them to clamp the vessel. I then walked more than a mile to find the aid station where my wound was cauterized. The only reason why I made that mile walk was pure rage.I remained in country for an additional 2 months with additional rocket attacks. Upon my return to the USA I was given an early release from my 3 year enlistment. So after 2 years, 10months I was returned to society. I was physically and mentally exhausted. I ignored the symptoms for months until I felt pain in the wounded shoulder. I went to the VA facility near the Brooklyn Navy Yard to find I still had 3 of the metal stitches in my shoulder. My shoulder was infected and the MD who treated me said I should feel better now that the source of the infection was removed. The infection was gone but I will never forget that night.