

FIVE PEAS IN A POD

"Make me to hear joy and gladness; that the bones which thou hast broken may rejoice." Psalm 51:8

PURPLE HEART Following a short period of unconsciousness, I awoke to the sound of a Marine shouting, "Doc, you're on fire!" We had been moving about the hill without shirts, while preparing for an assault by a battalion of NVA that had been working in our area of operation for several days. My boots and trousers were ablaze, and the hide on my back and left shoulder had melted away. Minutes before, a grenade went off near our position, wounding a Marine. It is still unclear in my thinking if we received a direct hit or the blast was a secondary explosion triggered by hot shrapnel from the grenade. We had gasoline stored in our bunker and the flames created by its presence and the force of the ignition blew me a tremendous distance from its origin. The sun beating down on my raw flesh caused great pain until I was bandaged and placed on a waiting CH-46 along with the grenade casualty and another guy with burns. In my absence, a high-ranking officer flew to the hill on a chopper and ordered our Commanding Officer to abandon our position since the hill had little strategic value and amid growing concerns about our ability to hold the ground. This event was followed by the rotation of the 26th Marines back to stateside.

PRETTY NURSES I was ambulatory from the helipad to the waiting staff at the emergency entrance of First Medical Battalion in Danang. Nurses ordered me to remove my clothes and go to the showers. I was surprised that four of the pretty, young nurses volunteered to follow me to the shower room and clean me up. They seemed to be having a good time at my expense, and I thought that I was on R&R in Hawaii until they laid me prone on a table and started scrubbing my back with PhisoHex and nylon brushes. I was really starting to bleed when a doctor came by and asked if I had been given pain killer. Everyone felt stupid that I was bearing up without an injection of Demerol or Morphine, but it worked to my advantage and the nurses really started to baby me after that.

PITY PARTY The policy of First Medical Battalion was to send all burn patients to hospital ships, Germany, or Japan due to the likelihood of infection. During my stay at 101st Army General Hospital Burn Center, Yokohama, Japan, I was visited by a Marine Corps Colonel who was giving medals to the troops. He was accompanied by football players Dick Butkus and a man named Webster of the Chicago Bears. They signed a picture for me, and the Colonel said he would return with a purple heart. I think he was distracted by the company that he kept or got too busy to return, and I never saw him again. My old unit left Vietnam and had no recourse for making it right. **Haven't given that a great deal of thought over the years and I'm good with all of that, because the real medal winners were maimed or didn't even come home. They are the ones who should be decorated.**

POST-TRAUMATIC STRESS I came home, an angry young man. More than fifty years down the road **I'm not sure that I'm** completely over it. There was more than one encounter with the police for clocking punks upside the head. There were no felony assault charges in those days. The police were usually sympathetic to a returning grunt and wanted to punch my victims again on my behalf. Delirium tremors were part of my life from excessive drinking, smoking Tijuana cigarettes was a daily activity, and cocaine and methaqualone use was also a big part of the equation. When my stash was depleted, I would try to get high through the generosity of my friends. **If that played out, I would steal other people's liquor and dope.** Getting high was always preferred to reporting to my job. My siblings said that I was on the road of self-destruction, and I am convinced that I would not be around today if I had continued down that dangerous road that always results in a dead-end.

PERSONAL TESTIMONY **I'm not a country boy and wasn't raised on a farm, but I believe it is necessary to break the pod in order** to get to the peas. A pod temporarily houses the peas, similar to our bodies temporarily housing the soul. God will sometimes break the body as a means for Him to get to a rebellious spirit. I contacted my ole' biker buddy and got the number of his cousin who had just been released from the Marine Corps. He was a handsome dude who always increased your chances with the ladies but was extremely tough and violent while under the influence. We took some methaqualone along with a generous quantity of booze to wash it down. We were definitely messed up as we cruised up and down the strip at the beach. We had a carload of sailors pull up next to us at a traffic light and my Marine friend began to mouth off at the squids. Immediately the car doors flung open and we started brawling in the middle of the intersection. There were six of them to be precise, because my friend grabbed three while the **other three grabbed me. I'm not at all sure that we were outmatched; the problem was that we just couldn't stand up. My dance** group wrestled me to the edge of the road, where I began to lose my balance. I held on tightly to all three sailors, bringing them down with the fall. They landed on my lower right leg breaking both bones, dislocating my ankle, and rearranging a few bones in my foot. When they realized that I had a broken leg the fight ended as abruptly as it had begun, and for fear of the Shore Patrol we all fled the scene. We continued to bar-hop, but when the drugs wore off, I began to feel the excruciating pain from my injuries. Unknown to me, my best friend, a pharmacist, **was at home praying, "God, please help Ron to get straightened out even if you have to break his leg."** During my hospital stay, the pharmacist phoned to let me know that a pastor was going to visit me in a few hours. **I knew the pastor wasn't coming to sign my cast.** God not only broke my leg, but He broke my rebellious spirit. I became a new creature in Christ long before the preacher arrived, and **I haven't been the same since that afternoon in 1974. I still have** issues, probably not what I should be, definitely not what I used to be, but like the song says, "God's still working on me." Ooh-rah!

Chaplain Ron