MILTON L. OLIVE III

THE FIRST AFRICAN AMERICAN AWARDED THE MEDAL OF HONOR IN THE VIETNAM WAR

★ Published by ★
Robert TOPOREK

For conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty.

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President Lyndon B. Johnson awards the Medal of Honor to Olive's parents.

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PFC. Milton L. Olive was a member of the Weapons Squad, 3rd Platoon of Company B, as it moved through the jungle to find the Viet Cong operating in the area. Although the platoon was subjected to a heavy volume of enemy gunfire and pinned down temporarily, it retaliated by assaulting the Viet Cong positions, causing the enemy to flee. As the platoon pursued the insurgents, Private First Class Olive and four other soldiers were moving through the jungle together when a grenade was thrown into their midst. Private First Class Olive saw the grenade, and then saved the lives of his fellow soldiers at the sacrifice of his own, by grabbing the grenade in his hand and falling on it to absorb the blast with his body.

Through his bravery, unhesitating actions, and complete disregard for his own safety, he prevented additional loss of life or injury to the members of his platoon. Private First Class Olive's extraordinary heroism, at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty, are in the highest traditions of the U.S. Army and reflect great credit upon himself and the Armed Forces of his country.

Rank and organization: Private First Class, U.S. Army, Company B, 2d Battalion (Airborne), 503d Infantry, 173d Airborne Brigade. Place and date: Phu Cuong, Republic of Vietnam, 22 October 1965. Entered service at: Chicago, IL. Born: 7 November 1946, Chicago, IL.

Note: *The President spoke at 12:15 p.m. in the Rose Garden at the White House. In his opening words, he referred to Mr. and Mrs. Milton B. Olive, Jr., of Chicago, IL, father and stepmother of Private Olive; Richard J. Daley, Mayor of Chicago; Stanley R. Resor, Secretary of the Army; and Gen. Earle G. Wheeler, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. During his remarks, he referred to Lt. James B. Stanford, Private Olive's platoon leader, and Specialist 4 John W. Foster, two of the four men whose lives were saved. April 21, 1966.*

AFTER THE FIGHT

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If not me, who? If not now, when?

I promised Olive's father and stepmother I would work on making his story national. They both gave me their blessings. Though some things have been done, it still has not made the difference. This chapter and the other chapters of my book are still to be finished, *The Path to Everywhere and Anything, Beyond Survivor's Guilt a Great Vietnam War Story*, will hopefully make a big difference in turning the tide on the persistence of racism in all its forms, and PTSD for anyone who has survived a traumatic event.

This is my version of the story, Milton grew up mostly in Lexington, Mississippi. He was raised primarily by his grandmother, with periodic stays with his father and stepmother in Chicago. Lexington, Mississippi was one of the poorest counties in Mississippi and continues to be to this day. During this time, Mississippi and the entire south was totally segregated. As the story goes, Milton had gotten involved in the Civil Rights Movement and voter registration. His father pulled him out of Mississippi because the black kids were getting killed for being involved. He did not do well in high school in Chicago, and his father gave him the same choice that my mother gave me during the holidays in 1964 and that was, get a job, go to a trade school or join the service. Olive and I both joined the service and we both became infantry paratroopers.

I grew up in **Charleston**, South Carolina. Charleston was the nation's capital of the **slave** trade, where many enslaved people first landed in the New World. The city was

Robert Toporek, Jump School 1965

built on **slave** labor and, for nearly 200 years, thrived under a **slave** economy. In Charleston, we were taught about the war of Northern Aggression, but others referred to it as the Civil War. We didn't view segregation as racism because it was just the accepted way of life. The subconscious and far too often conversation was a subtle idea that blacks were inferior and whites were superior and this was the conversation that I was born into.

This is how it had been and it seemed destined to continue. The summer before joining the Army, there was an attempt to integrate lunch counters.

One afternoon a number of black folks came over to our Hardee's restaurant and bought food. There was a black restaurant across the street, so a couple of us went over there to integrate it. I was raised mostly by black maids. It seemed like all of the families I knew also had black maids.

From left: unknown, Grimes, Short, Shave.

They were paid miserably, but because my parents gave them hand me down clothes and other things, that seemed to justify the poor wages. Growing up, both of my parents worked, so my brother, sister and I spent much of our time with our maid. I used to hate vegetables and would always convince the maid to let me put my vegetables in the garbage can. My mother would come home and ask if I ate all of my vegetables and I would lie and say, "Yes, Mama."

When I was little, my father became a peddler and would work in the rural black community where there were no stores and very few people had cars. My father had a van that he would load up with pots and pans, towels, sheets, food, dishes and whatever he could pack in and go into the rural sections outside of the city. It was kind of shocking, no paved roads, rudimentary electricity, and outhouses. It was quite different from the white middle-class neighborhood we lived in and felt like being in a foreign country. There was no such things as credit cards, so my father had a cardboard piece of paper for every customer with people's names, addresses, and for the ones lucky enough to have one, their phone numbers. People would pay something like $1.00 down and $0.25 a week and that was my father's credit card processing system.

When we were in our teens, my father bought a grocery store in a predominately black and somewhat poor neighborhood. I used to go there and work a lot alongside two Black employees. We got along great, but we couldn't walk down the street with them, or go out to eat or to a movie. We did not think of ourselves as racists. It just was the way it was.

A taxicab driver once told me, **"All kids are innocent until contaminated by the environment."**

The Battery from which Fort Sumter was fired upon still exists and maybe some day it will be taken down. The cannons and cannonballs still exist. We used to play on them pretending that we were killing the Yankees, and the South will rise again.

So the Army, in its infinite wisdom, put this white boy from Charleston, SC, in a tent with a Black kid who grew up on the other side of segregation. They made one huge mistake; they forgot to send a counselor.

Olive and I had similar temperaments. He had the Black version. I had the White version. We used to provoke each other constantly. One day we said, "OK, let's go behind the tent and see who the real man is." It was a good Ole Southern intense fistfight. He beat the White out of me and I beat the Black out of him; we gave each other a big hug. **We were then brothers and men whose lives depended on each other.**

More about racism in Vietnam in another chapter. The day Olive grabbed that hand grenade, he did not look around to check the race, creed or religion of the people he saved.

The Viet Cong and the regular North Vietnamese did not care about our race, creed, religion, education or social status. **They were out to kill us all.**

THE DAY OLIVE DIED

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After the fight he beat the white out of me, I beat the black out of him: the only thing left were brothers/men whose lives depended on one another.

The day Olive died, our platoon was on a search and destroy mission somewhere in the jungles of Vietnam. It was hot and eerie. If you can imagine, a marching band on the one-yard line marching in a line to the other end zone is kind of how I remember the way we were going through the jungle.

I was on the far right and Sergeant Fletcher was about 30–40 yards to my right. He was patrolling by himself in the thick jungle. He waved me over. Initially, I tried to wave him off, but since he outranked me, there was no other choice, so I joined him. We lost sight of the rest of the platoon, and it was just him and me gingerly going through the jungle. It seemed like a lifetime ago and was scarier than you can imagine.

Suddenly, all hell broke loose, and we hit the ground. Shrapnel bullets, explosions, machine-gun fire, and grenades were going off and people were screaming. After a few minutes, it died down. We crawled back to the rest of the platoon. This was my first real firefight. **There was Olive lying face down on his right side; his guts were hanging out and lots of blood on the ground.**

This moment became my first undistinguished feeling of survivor's guilt.

The unanswerable question of why him, and would I have done the same? This is a question that can never be answered. I was at a loss, angry, sad and everything in between. I experienced a myriad of emotions.

I looked at him for a few moments which felt like a lifetime. I was 18 years old; Olive was about 10 days short of his 19th birthday. Images like this are not something you get over. They are memories you learn to live with.

Assisting fellow injured soldiers.

Someone yelled, **"Stop looking at him! Let's get him on a poncho, and carry him out of the jungle."** So, I helped put him back together, rolled him over on a poncho, and helped carry him out of the jungle. I must have gone into an altered state of unconsciousness. For the life of me, I could not remember who else helped carry him out. Fifty years later, when I reconnected with Ken Grimes, a member of the Weapons Squad, he told me he was also one of the people helping to carry Olive out of the jungle. Neither of us can remember who the others were.

On this same mission, George Luis was killed by a sniper. He was no less a hero, but for the most part, never even mentioned. I do not know how many men were wounded that day, and we never talked about it for 50 years.

The more I can share this, the more liberated I become.

Upon my return home, I never talked about what had actually happened. Fortunately for me, I became involved in the human potential movement and became involved in gestalt and encounter groups, EST and Landmark Education, Massage and Rolfing. One day in a Landmark Education course, I realized that I had promised to call Olive's father. Somehow, we connected by phone and talked several times with both him and his wife, Olive's stepmother. I cannot remember much of the details but shared my story of Olive and me and some about our squad.

My promised to his parents was to make his contribution and the story public knowledge. They gave me their blessings. His father told me that our company had our own reunion group and I began to reconnect.

(No one can verify this version of this story except Sergeant Fletcher, who I finally got in touch with a few years ago. He lives in Columbia, Maryland. After a lot of phone calls, we finally had lunch together and have since bonded. He does not like talking about Vietnam.)

In the Vietnam War, approximately 261 men were awarded The Medal of Honor. Approximately 20 were African American. Olive was the first. Only two were from the 173rd. Lawrence Joel was the other on November 8th 1965. What I have discovered in sharing these stories is that no two people experience the same thing at the same time. This chapter is my self-expression of that day and the impact it has had on my life.

GRIME'S ACCOUNT

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A Fellow Squad Member's Account of 21–27 October 1965.

The 2/503rd and B/3/319th were sent to clear the area in preparation for the establishment of the 1st Infantry Division in that area.

On October 22, 1965, I was assistant Machine Gunner for Milton Olive III. I was wounded when my M16 was shot out of my hand and pieces of my rifle went into my arm. A bullet also went through my canteen on my belt and another went through my mess kit located in my backpack.

The Company formed a line to sweep the area. Olive and I were attached to the Weapons Squad. Olive and I were on the left of 3rd Platoon with only two rifleman to our left and the rest of the platoon to our right.

Olive's machine gun jammed; we were separated when he moved right to join up with platoon headquarters to work on his gun. This was when we were attacked on the left flank and from our front. The two riflemen, I do not remember their names, were hit and wounded pretty bad, my rifle was shot out of my hands. I was also wounded with pieces of my rifle in my arm.

The Viet Cong opened up on us with machine guns and small arms. They also were throwing a shit load of grenades at us. My M16 was disabled, so I could not return fire, and both of the guys to my left were hurt too bad to fight. I got as low as I could get in a depression behind some large roots. I threw back several grenades that landed close; they were old pineapple grenades. I believe most were duds, because none of them exploded. I tried to get one of my grenades off my belt to throw and did manage to throw one, but I was so scared that I mistakenly threw a white phosphorus grenade that did very little, if any, damage. The VC were very close. I could hear them laughing and talking; they seemed to be having a hell of a good time.

About this time air strikes were called in. The VC stopped their attack and withdrew.

When we regrouped, I found out Olive had been killed; I remember seeing him lying on the ground, he looked so pale. All the color had drained from his body. I will never forget the smell, the smell of death that day.

Four of us, Robert Toporek being one (I don't remember who the other two were), placed Olive on a poncho. Each grabbed a corner and carried him to a Medevac.

When we were lifted back to Di An, I found out that not only had pieces of my rifle gone into my arm, but a bullet had also gone through my canteen on my belt, and another went through my mess kit located in my backpack.

I was very lucky that day.

Milton Olive my friend will always be a part of me; not many days go by that I don't think about him.

Soldiers on patrol.

JOHNSON'S PRESENTATION

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Some may find the language offensive.

Mr. and Mrs. Olive, members of the Olive family, distinguished Mayor Daley, Secretary Resor, General Wheeler, members of the Senate, Members of the House, ladies and gentlemen…

There are occasions on which we take great pride, but little pleasure. This is one such occasion. Words can never enlarge upon acts of heroism and duty, but this nation will never forget Milton Lee Olive III.

President Harry Truman once said that he would rather have won the Medal of Honor than to have been President of the United States. I know what he meant. Those who have earned this decoration are very few in number. But true courage is very rare. This honor we reserve for the most courageous of our sons.

The Medal of Honor is awarded for acts of heroism above and beyond the call of duty. It is bestowed for courage demonstrated not in blindly overlooking danger, but meeting it with eyes clearly open.

And that is what Private Olive did. When the enemy's grenade landed on that jungle trail, it was not merely duty which drove this young man to throw himself upon it, sacrificing his own life so that his comrades might continue to live. He was compelled by something that's more than duty, by something greater than a blind reaction to forces that are beyond his control.

He was compelled, instead, by an instinct of loyalty which the brave always carry into conflict. And in that incredibly brief moment of decision in which he decided to die, he put others first and himself last. I have always believed that to be the hardest, but the highest, decision that any man is ever called to make.

So in dying, Private Milton Olive taught those of us who remain how we ought to live.

I have never understood how men can ever glorify war. "The rockets' red glare, the bombs bursting in air," has always been for me better poetry than philosophy. When war is foisted upon us as a cruel recourse by men who choose force to advance policy, and must, therefore, be resisted, only the irrational or the callous, and only those untouched by the suffering of war, can revel.

So let us never exult over war. Let us not for one moment disguise in the grandest justifications of policy the inescapable fact that war feeds on the lives of young men, good men like Milton Olive. And I can never forget it. I am reminded of it every moment of every day. And in a moment such as this, I am reminded all over again how brave the young are, and how great is our debt to

them, and how endless is the sacrifice that we call upon them to make for us.

And I realize, too, how highly we prize freedom—when we send our young to die for it.

There are times when Vietnam must seem to many a thousand contradictions and the pursuit of freedom there an almost unrealizable dream.

But there are also times—and for me this is one of them—when the mist of the confusion lifts and the basic principles emerge:

- That South Vietnam, however young and frail, has the right to develop as a nation, free from the interference of any other power, no matter how mighty or strong;
- That the normal processes of political action, if given time and freedom to work, will someday, some way create in South Vietnam a society that is responsible to the people and consistent with their traditions;
- That aggression by invading armies or ruthless insurgency must be denied the precedent of success in Vietnam, if the many other little nations in the world, and if, as a matter of fact, all Southeast Asia is to ever know genuine order and unexploited change;
- That the United States of America is in South Vietnam to resist that aggression and to permit that peaceful change to work its way, because we desire only to be a good and honorable ally, a dependable, trustworthy friend, and always a sincere and genuine servant of peace.

Men like Milton Olive die for honor. Nations that are without honor die too, but without purpose and without cause. And it must never be said that when the freedom and the independence of a new and a struggling people were at stake that this mighty, powerful nation of which we are so proud to be citizens would ever turn aside because we had the harassments that always go with conflict, and because some thought the outcome was uncertain, or the course too steep, or the cost too high.

In all of this there is irony, as there is when any young man dies. Who can say what words Private Olive might have chosen to explain what he did? Jimmy Stanford and John Foster, two of the men whose lives he saved that day on that lonely trail in that hostile jungle 10,000 miles from here are standing on the White House steps today because this man chose to die. I doubt that even they know what was on his mind as he jumped and fell across that grenade.

But I think I do know this: On the sacrifices of men who died for their country and their comrades, our freedom has been built. Whatever it is that we call civilization rests upon the merciless and seemingly irrational fact of history that some have died for others to live, and every one of us who enjoys freedom at this moment should be a witness to that fact.

So Milton Olive died in the service of a country that he loved, and he died that the men at his side might continue to live. For that sacrifice his Nation honors him today with its highest possible award.

He is the eighth Negro American to receive this Nation's highest award. Fortunately, it will be more difficult for future presidents to say how many Negroes have received the Medal of Honor. For unlike the other seven, Private Olive's military records have never carried the color of his skin or his racial origin, only the testimony that he was a good and loyal citizen of the United States of America.

THE LETTER OLIVE'S FATHER WROTE TO PRESIDENT JOHNSON

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Honorable Sir:

Chicago's Fifth Army Headquarters has informed us that the Congressional Medal of Honor is to be awarded posthumously to our son, P.F.C. Milton Lee Olive. This welcome news brought renewed encouragement to heavy hearts and somber spirits. It also overwhelmed us with the greatest pride and the deepest humility.

Many people and news reporters have asked why he did it. How do you feel? Across six thousand years of recorded history, man has pondered the inevitable. The conclusion is, it is too profound for mortal understanding. Perhaps, you too, Mr. President, and the American people would like to know how I feel. I have had to use strength, taken from the courage of a brave soldier to be able to bear a heavy cross. I suppose that Divine Providence willed it and that nothing could be more glorious than laying down your life for your fellowman in the defense of your country.

Our only child and only grandchild gave his last full measure of devotion on an international battle field 10,000 miles from home.

It is our dream and prayer that someday the Asiatics, the Europeans, the Israelites, the Africans, the Australians, the Latins, and the Americans can all live in One-World. It is our hope that in our own country the Klansmen, the Negroes, the Hebrews, and the Catholics will sit down together in the common purpose of good will and dedication; that the moral and creative intelligence of our united people will pick up the chalice of wisdom and place it upon the mountain top of human integrity; that all mankind, from all the earth, shall resolve, "to study war no more." That, Mr. President, is how I feel and that is my eternal hope for our Great American Society.

Your life of dedicated service is a reflection of Humanity at its best. May we wish for you longevity and civilization's greatest blessing.

Most respectfully,

MILTON B. OLIVE, JR.

OLIVE'S HISTORY

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Olive's mother, Clara Lee Olive, died four hours after giving birth to her son on November 7, 1946. The staff at the Chicago hospital did not expect her delicate, underweight baby to survive, either, but his heartbroken father named the boy anyway.

Milton Olive, Jr. named the child Milton Lee Olive III. He chose the middle name to honor his son's late mother, which technically made the numbering invalid, but it seemed unlikely to matter much.

Except that this skinny little baby beat the odds and survived. His health remained fragile for the first few years, but he had grown into a healthy—though still scrawny—little boy by first grade. His father adored his only child, but he needed help from relatives in the Mississippi Delta to raise him, so mostly, he was raised by his grandmother in Lexington, Mississippi. Occasionally, he would go to Chicago to live with his father and stepmother. Lexington was then and is still now a very impoverished small city. Throughout Olive's years before joining the Army, Lexington was segregated. The schools then and now are some of the worst in the nation.

Instead of enrolling in high school in Chicago, he stayed in Lexington to attend All Saints, an academy run by a black Pentecostal church.

In 1964, civil rights activists brought Freedom Summer to Mississippi. They registered voters and set up schools for children and adults. Seventeen-year-old Olive eagerly joined the movement.

His grandparents promptly banished him back north. Citing the lynching of Emmett Till, the recent shooting of three civil rights activists and countless

arson and bombings of black churches and houses, they explained, "He's going to get himself killed, and he's going to get us killed."

Olive's dad agreed. He gave his son three choices: Go back to school, get a job, or join the military. (It is sobering to note that Vietnam seemed a safer place for black youth than Mississippi in 1964.)

Olive tried enrolling in school but discovered to his horror that Chicago public schools refused to recognize the credits he earned as a freshman and sophomore at All Saints, an unaccredited private school.

Unwilling to start over as a 17-year-old freshman, Olive looked for work but quickly became discouraged at the meager opportunities.

Impulsively, he borrowed money from a cousin and hopped a train back to Mississippi to stay with friends and rejoin

From left: Yates, Lungarelli, unknown, Sgt. Foster, unknown, Olive (kneeling).

the Civil Rights Movement. However, within a few weeks, his grandparents tracked him down and sent him home to Chicago again.

Determined to do something useful, Olive enlisted in the U.S. Army. He applied for jump school and became a paratrooper in

the 173rd Airborne. In his first month in Vietnam, he got grazed in a firefight and won a Purple Heart but did not inform his family because he did not want them to worry. Private First-Class Olive wrote home, "We all do a man's job and wear a man's clothes and call ourselves men…but some of us are still little boys."

Led by Lieutenant Jimmy Stanford—his platoon, the third platoon, dropped into the jungle on a seek and destroy mission.

As they crept through the jungle, a shot rang out. Specialist George Luis took a bullet to the head and died instantly. He was no less a hero than Olive but his story is even more unknown.

Olive heard a bullet puncture an adjacent comrade's helmet. "How bad?" asked John Foster, a brother from Pittsburgh with blood running down his face.

Pfc. Olive saw that the shot had only grazed Foster's eyebrow.

"You'll live," he grinned laconically.

Olive turned to look at the lieutenant lying on the other side of him, their faces just eighteen inches apart.

Suddenly, a live hand grenade plopped onto the turf between their heads.

Lieutenant Stanford was a seasoned soldier, a former Green Beret who had worked eleven years to rise through the ranks from enlisted man to officer.

However, it was Pfc. Olive—the fresh recruit, the 18-year-old kid who had been in Vietnam less than four months—who acted faster. "Lookout! Grenade! I got it!" His hand shot out and scooped the grenade into his stomach. He curled his slender body around the charge and rolled away from his comrades to absorb the brunt of the blast. The explosive force shredded his torso and tossed him up in the air, but he saved the lives of his four remaining comrades, who caught only minor shrapnel.

As the Americans returned fire, the Viet Cong melted away into the jungle.

The four men Olive saved—two black, two white—revered his memory. They thought about him every day, knowing they owed their lives, jobs, homes, children, and grandchildren to his selflessness.

Olive's sacrifice made a powerful impact on his platoon leader. Lieutenant Stanford grew up in segregated east Texas. When he encountered blacks as a youth, "I'd give them hell… just normal racial harassment, nothing serious, practical jokes, name-calling, kid stuff."

"Milton Olive changed me," he said. "I made a vow never to forget him…His act definitely changed me…But it didn't happen overnight. I was a real redneck. I didn't just wake up one morning and say, 'I'm going to quit feeling negative about blacks.' It took several years."

Men at war.

And it changed the course of his military career. In 1970, Stanford helped the Army develop and deliver a racial sensitivity program. “I lost some friends when I got into that field of work,” he remembers.

Olive’s death also had a profound impact on his brother from a different mother Robert Toporek, William Yates, and other members of the Weapons Squad, Short and Grimes who, until they got together in 2015, never talked to anyone about the war.

During our first year in Vietnam, about 50 men from Company B lost their lives, many more were wounded, and we have no real idea how it affected other members of our squad/platoon and company.

At left, the Milton Olive Chapel in Bien Hoa, Vietnam.

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GEORGE GREGORIO LUIS

Specialist Four

B CO, 2ND BN, 503RD INFANTRY, 173RD ABN BOE, USARV

Army of the United States
Pahoa, Hawaii

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Length of service: 2 years.
His tour began on May 5, 1965.
Casualty was on Oct 22, 1965 in South Vietnam.
Hostile, Ground Casualty, Gun, Small Arms Fire.
Body was recovered.

MY SECOND TOUR

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After my first tour in Vietnam, I volunteered for another, and at 19 years old, I was appointed the noncommissioned officer in charge of our battalion's Civil Affairs program. My team was a group of men who had been wounded, not badly enough to be sent home, but they could no longer go out in the field. I cannot remember any of their names. With no manual or budget, we built a couple of schools, a Boy Scout lodge, and a health clinic where two army doctors and a nurse came once a week; we taught English to local children, built a playground, and brought weekly food to an orphanage.

My interpreter.

I left the Civil Affairs program abruptly, never saying goodbye, even to my interpreter. Fifty years later, we reconnected in Bethesda, Maryland, through the work of Russ Katz, who wrote a book, called *The Principal's Daughter,* in which a chapter talks about me and the work we did that year.

I was disturbed by obsessive barking out front. Layta, our dog, a small Vietnamese mutt of brown and white patterned fur, lived outside in a small burrow she dug out with her small paws. She was barking away, *ruff, ruff, ruff*, at something that must have agitated her. Then there was an odd bark back. A less dog-like bark. Me Toi opened the front door and there was Toporek hunched over with his hands on his bent knees looking down at Layta barking back at her as if they were talking back and forth. When one stopped, the other started. When the door opened poor little Thien Chinh, our youngest brother, was frightened by this man barking at our dog. He had never seen such a sight. A man barking. He grabbed for Me's leg hugging her thigh, "Bo yek?" he cried to Me.

Toporek stood up straight and smiled. "Don't worry little soldier, we were just talking to one another. Having a nice friendly conversation. Good afternoon, Miss Thranh BA. I hope I'm not disturbing you."

Me looked to me for translation. I walked over to Toporek. "Come in," I said. Waiting for Miss Thranh BA, I looked out the door. His matte green jeep was parked out front, empty. He was alone. She was not with him today. "Where is Miss Loan?" I asked.

"I don't know, she got mad at me for some reason and just up and left. Thranh BA, I am in need of a translator for today's stops and thought you might be able to help," he explained.

"I don't know," I replied nervously, " I can't speak much English. How could I translate?"

"It's easy, don't worry. All you have to do is tell the doctor what they tell you and then tell the doctor what the patient says. He'll keep it short and simple," he explained, trying to convince me to go with him to interpret for them on today's medical run.

I told Me what he was asking and looked to her for advice and approval. "Yes, go, go, it will be good; you will learn more English and medicine. Good for the future. Just be home for dinner."

"How long will we be away? My mother says I should go, but I have to be home before dinner," I said to him.

"Oh, don't worry about that. It's what, about 1:30 in the afternoon now?" Toporek replied looking at his watch. "We will only be gone for a couple of hours, two at the most."

Kim Tuyen began to ask, "Where you going with *mat meo* [mut meow]?"

"Kim Tuyen," I scolded back at her, cutting off her sentence. "Don't call him that, it's not nice."

"But he has eyes like a cat, so blue. That's what I call him cat eyes, mat meo. Mat Meo - Mat Meo - Mat Meo-," she teased like a nine year old girl.

"Uhhh," I grunted in frustration at her childish teasing. "Come on, let's go," I said to Toporek leading him out the doorway.

I climbed into the passenger side front seat of his Army Jeep. The doors and roof were open to the air as we drove. I fell silent as I watched out the side as everything passed me by. The warm wind felt refreshing as it blew over my skin and through my hair, cooling me from the humid heat.

"Today we are going to do something simple for your first time working with me. The doctor is not available so we will hand out food and supplies at a nearby village," he told me. "You can help translate for me so I can speak with the elders.

I nodded in reply without saying a word, a little reserved, and enjoying the ride. I did not get to travel by car very often. Usually we got around by motorbike or we walked. This was a treat and all new to me. Yet, here I was with a strange man I could barely understand or communicate with heading off to a village where I did not know anyone. I was a bit nervous, yet it was all very exciting at the same time.

I watched out the window as we passed the garbage dump. People swarmed the garbage like gulls picking at scraps of discarded food. Anything they could use or sell, they would scavenge. Something as simple as a bent spoon or fork could be bent back in place and sold at market for a few dong, maybe enough to buy a portion of rice for

one person's evening dinner. A chipped cup, an old tee shirt, books, and empty jars: it all went to the market.

We stopped at the village, along the northern outskirts of Bien Hoa. All the little boys and girls came running up to our jeep, their hands extended over their heads, reaching in for what looked like desperation for supplies, food, and toys.

Toporek reached in the back seat and opened a box. He pulled out a soccer ball and tossed it into the crowd of children. The smile on his face helping the children was only matched by the children's joy and excitement. Then another soccer ball was tossed into the crowd of children, and another.

A little girl caught my attention, standing at my side of the jeep, right up next to the missing door. She looked very sad. Her jet-black hair was ungroomed, her clothes like dirty rags. She just stood there hands at her side not saying a word. I felt in my heart sadness.

Toporek edged my arm, "Here, give her this," he said, handing me a doll and a clean dress. As I handed her the doll, her big black eyes looked up at me, and she gave me a huge smile before running off. After that moment, I understood the fulfillment that helping children brought to one's soul.

"Come, let's get these boxes of food and supplies to the parents," he told me, stepping out of the jeep and lifting a heavy box of canned foods, the same types the captain first brought us when he first came to our home. There was canned fruit, canned vegetables, canned soups, but most common was condensed canned milk, and baby formula. We handed out Dove soap, Tide wash, and other household supplies. There were tee shirts, pants, dresses and all sorts of clothes to be given out.

After we handed out the last item in the box, Robert asked me to tell them, "All gone, no more. *Khong tat ca sa bein mat* [kun tut cah dah be-en mut]." A simple translation for my first task.

"Come, I will take you home now," he said to me as we returned to the jeep. As we drove off, the whole village seemed to be waving goodbye to us showing their gratitude. Some of the youngest boys and girls chased after the jeep for a short distance and soon everything was behind us.

"So, that wasn't hard, was it?" I shook my head, "No, not hard."

"I kept your first visit easy. There is much more we can do. Next time we will bring the doctor and see to the sick and give out vaccinations and medicines. I have a big project in the works, too.

Pictured left and above, children from a Vietnamese orphanage.

Plans for playgrounds at the schools we built, but most importantly we are going to help an orphanage. There are so many children left parentless from the war, babies crying with no mother to hold them, toddlers being taken care of by their pre-teen brothers or sisters, young teenagers living on the street. It's so sad. This will give them extra food place to live "Here we are, back home. Only about two hours like I promised. So what did you think? Can I pick you up tomorrow to go to another village?" he asked.

I shook my head in agreement. "Okay, tomorrow at 1:30," he confirmed.

After that, we started going out a few times a week, Robert picked me up after school, around 1:30 in the afternoon and we spent about two hours making rounds to different villages. Sometimes it was food and supplies like today. We handed out so much food. Other times we would pick up Doctor Havercorft, another doctor and nurse whose names escape me, and they would treat people who were sick or injured.

The patient would tell me what was wrong and I would tell the doctor. He gave them medicines or stitched up wounds, vaccinated the children for hepatitis, tetanus, measles, and other diseases. He treated a lot of people with malaria: it was easy to spot the shivering, infected patients lying in the portable beds of the makeshift medical center, cold in the hundred degree temperature, vomiting, and in pain. It was a sure sign.

The villages were small and out of the way. Some were buried deep in the forest, some right at the outskirts of town. The unpaved packed dirt and gravel roads made for some rough rides and dusty air in the open jeep. A fine layer of sand covered the jeep inside and out like a film of dust. When we arrived at the villages, the people were always happy to see us; they knew it meant more supplies, toys, and help with the sick. The people had very little and life in poverty was a struggle. Their homes were made of thatched tree branches with dried leaf or tin roofs. The floors were hardened earth. Each was a single room inside with just enough space to put a small bed or two and a table to sit around.

"Today we are going to do some vaccinations for the children," Robert told me as I got in his jeep. We'd been doing this for several months now, and I was accustomed to the routine. My English was also very much improved. I could now understand most of what Toporek and the Doctor would tell me and translate with ease back to them what was needed. "First we have to pick up the volunteer doctors and nurse. They will be joining us in the village to treat the sick and vaccinate the children," Toporek let me know with his voice elevated over the sounds of tires against the dirt road.

We picked up our doctors and continued to a small village about a thirty minute drive to the north along the main highway of Route 1. The villages became far and few between separated by dense forest.

The forest, or jungle as Robert called it, brought back recent memories for him. He talked of the time he spent out here, getting it off his chest, finally telling someone of his horrors. This brought a kind of relief to his mind.

"The last time I was in the jungle was my worst nightmare," he began to tell us. I could see the sadness in his eyes and hear his tone of voice was changing solemnly. "I lost one of my good friends. His name was John Beauchamp, Jr.; he was killed in

action on March 16th (1966). My Company B, 2/503 Infantry of the 173rd Airborne, was sent on a mission to Quan Loi [Quan Lee] about 100 kilometers due north. There was intelligence several large VC base camps and a buildup of troops. Being so close to Saigon, it was urgent to neutralize the threat and take back territory immediately. It was my turn to be point man."

My right-hand man and me during my 2nd tour.

Toporek paused, his throat choking up. It was clear that this was not easy for him. I just sat quietly and listened. "It was my turn, it should have been me," he repeated. LOOKING BACK NOW, I REALIZED EVEN THEN SURVIVORS GUILT HAD SET IN. Beauchamp argued with me to take lead. He insisted however Zoints who I do not remember ultimately pulled rank and said he was going first. We started up the trail along the tree line, right along the trail. "It was eerily quiet in the jungle. We knew they were close. There was fresh rice still warm to the touch at the abandoned camp we passed. They were watching us; we all felt it. Zoints in front, Short behind him, Beauchamp was right in front of me. As we moved, I looked down at his boots lightly crunching the ground beneath them. We were trying to move as silently as we could. With each step my heart pounded in my chest; it took all my bravery to overcome the fear that we were being watched, and it was only a matter of time.

Zoints paused about 40 yards before a turn in the trail. He held his rifle at the ready, crouched down, and slowly made his way to look around the bend. Just as he turned there was a loud pop of an AK 47, a single shot. Zoints yelled out just before he died. At that moment, the jungle had erupted into July 4th on steroids. We all instantly took cover. Beauchamp jumped up and said, "I am going to get him!" By the time Short said, "No!" Beauchamp was instantly killed. I yelled for them, but it was too late. Our brothers were gone. All hell broke loose. Popopopopopopop popopopopopopop popopopopopopopop we heard in every direction. A round flew right past my head, so close I could feel the air pressure change as it whooshed by. A bullet hit the tree behind me, and I realized had I been kneeling differently, I would be dead. Grenades and mortars were exploding all around us. My ears were ringing; my face was blackened from the ground and soot exploding into the air. I felt as if I were in a haze, a dream. The fear just washes over you; it takes everything to fight it back. Shoot the enemy before he shoots you, that's all I could think.

"We were surrounded by a regiment of North Vietnamese regular soldiers. There was nothing any of us could do but fight back, and we fought like hell. My fellow soldiers, my friends, were being shot and wounded all around me. Bodies littered the landscape, burning, missing limbs, the ground splattered with blood and internal organs. It was the most horrific battle I had been in until that point. In those hours, we lost a number of good friends and brave fellow soldiers. Many more were wounded, but we

survived and claimed the victory of War Zone D. Words can't explain what it is like burning bodies and thick white smoke like fog on the ground burning our throats and choking our lungs. The jungle was reduced to burnt branchless tree hulks and the ground pockmarked from grenades and mortars.

"This could not last for long. Forty-three dead VC two for every one of ours. We were killing them in hoards. We all feel it will be over soon. These victories will shatter the North's resolve. It just can't come soon enough."

I hadn't heard any stories like this from the Americans. It was so sad. I didn't know what to say to him to make him feel better. I simply put my hand on his shoulder as he kept driving.

"That wasn't the only time someone saved my life. Your sister might be right calling me a cat. I seem to have nine lives. I just hope I don't run out of them before I go home," he said with a chuckle playing off the emotions running through him.

"Oh!" I said with a gasp, shocked he understood my little sister, Kim Tuyen's teasing. "You understood that?" I asked.

"I hear a few words," he said with a smile.

"She calls you Cat Eyes, because of your bright blue eyes. We've never seen anyone with blue eyes before," I said.

***

We arrived at a small village with a makeshift medical tent setup and a crowd of people hovering around by the time we got there. The doctor got right to work seeing his patients. First we attended to the sick in need of medications, aspirin, penicillin, that sort of thing. We weren't stocked for much more than that.

A woman ran up to us shouting, "*Hay guio toi, hay guio toi* [hay goop toy], (please help, and please help). My boy, he got very hurt this morning," She was hysterical, in a panic, pleading for us.

"What is she saying?" the doctor asked me.

"She wants our help," I paused listening to her yelling, trying to hear what she was trying to tell me between her cries. "I think something happened to her son."

She tugged on the doctor's clothes. "Okay, tell her to show us," he said.

She led us to her home where her poor boy about my age was lying in a blood soaked bed. He was out walking in the fields and accidentally came upon a land mine. His legs were shredded. There was nothing the doctor could do for him here; he needed a hospital, but that was too far and too late for the boy's condition. All the doctor could do was give him some morphine for the pain and wrap his legs. "Tell them I will make him comfortable; he won't feel any pain," he said to me. I looked up at his family as Doctor Havercroft injected him with the needle. His mother and father were holding each other. This was the hardest thing I ever had to do. My heart raced and I felt shivers inside; we all knew his fate, but no one was saying it. I just had to tell them he would be comfortable, no pain. They shook their heads and knelt down next to their

boy. The doctor put a cool cloth on the boy's forehead and we quietly left.

At the medical tent, the children were lined up to receive their vaccinations. One by one I'd tell them to put their arm out, or lift their shirt sleeve. "Look at me. You won't feel a thing," I said to each of them as the doctor got ready to inject them with a needle.

My interpreter and her sister 50 years later.

We finished the last child and Doctor Havercroft looked up at me and asked, "Will you marry at me?" I don't know if it was translation or his accent but what I heard was, "Are you mad at me?"

I didn't know why he asked that, I just said "no." No emotion, just a simple no, shaking my head, I could see he was a bit thrown back, I didn't understand. He turned green like I had just ripped out his heart. *Why would I be mad at him?*

He looked up at me again, "Will you marry at me?"

"No," I replied again with no overtone of emotion, just a simple no.

He looked so sad, I didn't understand. I looked up at Toporek, "I think he's asking if you will m-a-r-r-y him."

"Ohhhh, I'm so sorry!" I reached my hand out to his wrist. "I thought you said, 'Are you mad at me?' I'm sorry I cannot." The answer was still the same, but at least not as cold as before.

Then one day when the Jeep arrived, I ran outside to get in, but Toporek wasn't in there. It was a new driver with a new doctor. I stopped at the jeep door and asked, "Where is Toporek?" The driver had no answer. He just shrugged unknowingly. I got in and we made our rounds to the villages, figuring he was just not feeling well today. The next day, no Toporek again. I wondered what had happened. He was just gone, no goodbye, no nothing. I hoped nothing bad had happened. Did he get sent back to the forest? Was he okay? I went to the base one day with Thanh Luu, where she had been working, but still no word. He had just vanished. There was no way for me to get a hold of him, no way to know what happened or where he went. He was just gone.

Robert Toporek was just 19 serving in his second tour of Vietnam at this time. He was awarded the Bronze star with V for Valor, a Purple Heart, and The Vietnamese Cross of Gallantry with Palm Leaf. Later returning home to continue his work helping children as the founder of www.teamchildren.org in 1978.

AFTER VIETNAM

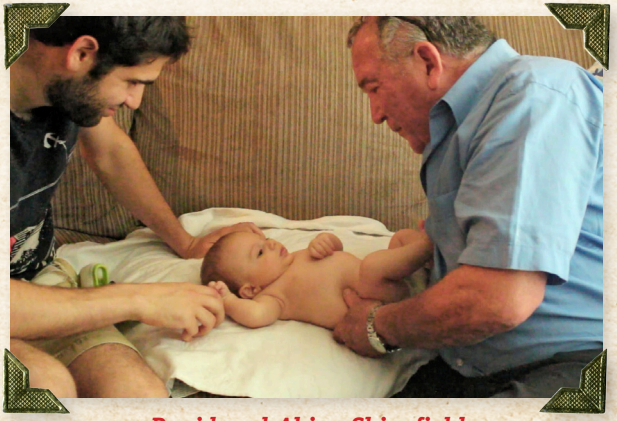
★ ★ ★

I fought side-by-side with Milton in Vietnam. The day he so selflessly gave his life to protect the lives of four members of our platoon forever changed my life. From the moment we put his body down, from that day on, I vowed to call his father. It took over 20 years to do that. After several other men in our squad were killed and I missed being killed on March 16 in operation Silver City by a thin hair (a later chapter to come), I promised myself that if I got out of Vietnam alive, I would devote my life to making a positive difference in the lives of others.

Founder Dr. Rolf (far right) and Robert Toporek (left) assisting a toddler.

Upon returning home, my first job was working in anti-poverty programs in Charleston, SC, teaching adult illiterates job skillsets, reading, and math. The next year I worked for Jim Clyburn, who is now the majority whip in the US House.

Before he fired me for being too radical for African American rural ministers, I applied for and eventually was awarded a one-year Leadership Development Fellowship from the Ford Foundation to study methods and techniques of personal growth and its relationship to public education. (This, too, is another chapter.)



David and Akiva Shinefield Rolfing babies by Robert Toporek

I ran for public office in Charleston, SC, four times, twice for the South Carolina House of Representatives (once against Clyburn), once for City Council and once for the State Senate.

From Killer to Healer

In 1975, ten years after Vietnam, I trained as a Rolf Practitioner. During the last four years of her life, I constantly worked directly with Dr. Rolf, the founder of The Rolf Method of Structural Integration.

In 1978, Dr. Rolf chose me to implement and manage a project to demonstrate, document, and promote the benefits of Rolfing for babies and children at my house in Philadelphia, PA. Initially, this was called The Children's Project, but it eventually evolved into www.TeamChildren.com, an IRS-approved nonprofit organization dedicated to transforming how we as parents, schools, communities, states, and a nation relate to and raise babies and children through the power and importance of touch.

My book *www.handsonparenting.org* is now being read worldwide and someone in Saigon downloaded some of the chapters. People throughout the world are discovering the value of Rolfing babies, children, and families.

Transforming the Badlands at 9th and Indiana

One day after talking to Olive's parents, the question arose, "What I was doing that was actually beyond the call of duty?" The answer was nothing. I tried for one year to find a hospital or agency that would let me Rolf their babies born addicted to alcohol and/or drugs to no avail. My friend, Chuck Bentham, was a homicide detective and took me to ride around the more dangerous neighborhoods in Philadelphia. We got to the corner of 9th and Indiana, where more drug dealers and addicts walked the streets than people living there. I thought I could make a difference.

In 1997 in one of Philadelphia's most challenged neighborhoods, we brought Rolfing and my expertise to kids living in constant fear and danger. We brought other massage therapists and lined up our tables on the sidewalk and offered free sessions to everyone. We cleaned up the neighborhood, distributed books, art supplies, and musical equipment (donated by my cousin Eddie Toporek). We cleaned up a graveyard that was a block long and wide and so overgrown drug addicts were actually living there in tents. Lucretia Mott, who was instrumental in the Underground Railroad, was buried there. We chased the addicts and dealers out. We cut down weeds and cleaned up the graveyard. The Quakers that owned it then took over and have kept it clean. **However, it was supposed to be a place for kids to play, but that has not yet been fully realized.**

We also built and then distributed more than 50 refurbished computers to every family. By that time my efforts had to stop because my ex-wife and the mother of my son, Bryan, began a yearlong battle with cancer. The first family to receive a computer had a son that eventually graduated from Millersville University, the first person in his family of six to graduate college.

Closing the Digital Divide

In life, sometimes, one thing leads to another. Our digital initiative that began at 9th and Indiana has now provided over 20,000 low-cost, high-quality refurbished computers loaded with amazing learning tools to families in the tri-state region. Team Children has had well over 500 teens volunteer and positively impacted the academic, economic, physical, and social development of over 50,000 children in our area.

The fun is just beginning!

COMING HOME

★ ★ ★

The Unfinished Mission. The Untold Story.

When I went to Vietnam, little did I know how the experience would shape the course of my life.

"I pledge allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America, and to the Republic for which it stands, one Nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all."

In 1965, some of us quit high school and volunteered to serve our country; some of us were drafted believing in this pledge. After Vietnam, it took me many years to say the pledge again. Today, we are further from its meaning than when we headed into Vietnam. Racial injustice is rampant, and though there has been some progress, it is not a match for our sacrifice. During the war, over 58,000 men and a few women sacrificed their lives—they never came back. Thousands and thousands of others brought home physical and mental scars. It was not until 1991 that The Agent Orange Act was established. PTSD, as a significant mental health condition, was not recognized until the mid-to-late 80s; its long-term effects are still misunderstood and poorly treated.

Toporek at Olive Park, Chicago, IL, 2015.

The Weapons Squad's first reunion in 50 years, Chicago 2015.

For Veterans, the rate of suicide and homelessness is unconscionable; suicide among veterans is 1.5 times the rate for non—veterans and vets are at much higher risk for homelessness.

Despite years of policy interventions, and millions of dollars spent, the vast majority of kids in elementary schools in the US are below 50% proficiency in reading and math. We can do better for our country.

At www.TeamChildren.org we have the tools and technology to turn the tide. We just need to get from common sense to common practices. Our book www.handsonparenting.org is chock full of information that is helping parents worldwide raise happier, healthier, and smarter kids and parents.

When I initially came home from Vietnam, I was sent to Fort Jackson in Columbia, South Carolina. My job was to train other troops to go to war. It killed me to know many I trained would not come home. My schedule was Monday through Thursday, and off around noon. Many of my high school friends were in college at The University of South Carolina. So, on Thursday afternoons, I'd meet up with them, buy a gallon of rum or Rebel Yell whiskey, go to their fraternity house, and spend the next couple of days drinking, partying, and having sex. It was a way of going unconscious. **I did not talk about the Army or Vietnam.**

It was obvious to me after two tours we would not win and that anyone else sent there would lead to more wasted lives. Soon, I became an anti-war protester and lent my experience in Vietnam to that effort. **I was not anti-veteran like most, just anti-war.**

A lifetime working for racial and social justice

Back in the US, had Olive lived, he would have returned to the same racist country he left. Since I returned, most of my adult life has been at the forefront of fighting for academic, economic, racial and social justice. I got my GED in Vietnam; we were the first company to be offered an opportunity to get the GED certificate. How many other men passed their GED in Vietnam, came home, attended college, and went on to have great, impactful lives? Possibly mentioning this here will help us tell their stories, too. With my GED in hand, I attended The Citadel, a Military College in Charleston, and one of the first to accept Veterans.

Toporek with Colton.

What a disaster! Sitting in a classroom turned out not to be my cup of tea. I can recall few, if any, of my classmates and only one teacher. I can't recall exactly what the professor said in class one day, but it infuriated me. I stood up, told him he had no idea what the hell he was talking about,

Rolfing practitioner Robert Toporek with founder Dr. Rolf (seated in back).

and walked out. I did try to attend college again, later taking courses at the college of Charleston and classes at community college. After Vietnam, college was a struggle.

Unlike prior wars, Vietnam Vets came home to a nation hostile toward Veterans. Many of us had to pretend we did not go so we could fit in. There were no parades or welcome home ceremonies celebrating our service.

Initially, living at home with my parents was a disaster. It was a disaster before the war—now even more so. My mother wanted me home early, to know where I was going and what I was doing. I said, "Mom, I just spent three years in the Army and two years in Vietnam, give me a break." So, I got an apartment, a roommate, and a job—the GI bill was just not cutting it.

My Ford Foundation Fellowship research was to study methods and techniques of personal growth and its relationship to public education. During my Fellowship year, most of my time was at Easlen Institute in Big Sur, California, at 23 years old the powers that be at Easlen deemed me qualified to co-lead three, two-week open gestalt/encounter resident programs.

Milton L. Olive III Park in Chicago, IL.

Tivia and Hector Colon with their first computer.

I met California Representative John Violoncellos and was inspired by his humanistic approach to politics. At Easlen, I took many, many personal development workshops, got my first massage (naked overlooking the Pacific Ocean!), was introduced to marijuana, LSD, and Psilocybin, had my first ten Rolfing sessions, and many other liberating experiences.

It was then that Dr. Rolf and I indirectly crossed paths. My goal was to study directly with her. Unfortunately, Rosemary Fietas her gate keeper at the time, told me staring directly in my eyes and heart, "Never have that thought again in this lifetime or any other."

THE MISSION IS STILL UNFINISHED

To buy the book or contribute, visit **www.miltonolive.org**, **www.teamchildren.org**. To discover more about Rolfing by Robert Toporek **www.rolfingtoporek.com**

THE REUNIONS

As I mentioned earlier, I joined the antiwar movement, not the anti-veteran movement. One day at a rally, I gave a powerful speech about how there was no plan or strategy to win the war and to send more boys/men to their deaths was criminal. As best I could tell, politicians were not sending their sons and daughters.

For 20 or more years, my thoughts and feelings remained bottled up and festering. Talking to Olive's parents was the first breakthrough. While talking to Olive's father, he told me about the 173rd Airborne Brigade reunions and that our Company B - Bravo Bulls had their own reunions. He gave me a contact number and name and I contacted them, and one thing led to another.

My first reunion was in New Jersey at a beach house of one of the members of Company B. At that time, I never really met any other Vietnam veterans, certainly nobody from our brigade, battalion, company platoon. So, it was a bit eerie to start off with. When I got there, most of the guys, if not all, had either been officers or non-commissioned officers. I was initially, for the first year in Vietnam, a private first class, which is lowest on the totem pole. Towards the end of my first tour, I excelled to acting sergeant and subsequently to full sergeant at age 19.

During this reunion, the guys were all together, drinking beer, having a good time and telling War Stories. After about 30 minutes, I had to walk out of the room and be alone. Then suddenly, a fear that I did not know was within me lifted off of my shoulders.

The B Company Reunion in Chicago.

Looking back 50 years ago and remembering the moment we landed at the airport with tanks, jets, helicopters, and military people scurrying around realized Vietnam was no longer a good idea. At that time, there was never a day, even at base camp, that we would be free of fear.

It was a cathartic reunion: however, nobody from my squad was there and these were the people that I really wanted to find and reunite with. I went on a number of other reunions with the Bravos

led by Captain Lombardo, who had been my company Commander. My first job at B Company was as Captain Lombardo's Jeep driver and radio operator. I knew less than you could imagine about either of these positions. Because I screwed up so badly the first time going into the field, he sent me down to the third platoon and I ended up in the weapons squad. That probably saved my life because during the first year, we must have gone through approximately four company commanders. Each one of them got wounded and so did the radio operators.

My relationship with these guys became rocky from the start. I told them that, I helped carry Olive's body out of the jungle and did not ever remember him carrying around a bible and preaching. They pretty much soured on me. This did not hinder me and I went with them on a number of other reunions. One was to Olive Park in Chicago, another to The Valley Forge Freedom Foundation where there is a memorial to The Medal of Honor recipients. When we went to the Arlington National Cemetery for the first time, it was unnerving to see all those tombstones of all those men who had given their lives to protect democracy in all of those wars.

MEETING MARK MITCHELL

One day while reading the magazine from the 173rd, there was a picture and it said that the picture was taken by Mitchell. Was that the Mark Mitchell I fought beside? Mitchell was a machine gunner in our Squad, and he had a temperament. He was constantly saying f…. this and f…. that, "What are you going to do, send me back to America?" This was the beginning of us distinguishing that we were American fighting men, not American soldiers. In the fields, we had each other's backs.

He actually visited me at my office and saw all of the computers that I was working on and distributing. It was amazing seeing him and we had a great time together.

WILLIAM YATES

Somehow, I found William Yates and talked to him a number of times but somehow can't remember what we talked about. We stayed in touch off and on and after coming up with another of my brilliant ideas, a reunion in Chicago to honor the 50th anniversary of Olive dying, we were back in touch.

Grimes got in touch with me somehow through Google.

After making a number of phone calls and finding out that nothing was being planned, we finally created that reunion of our squad. The goal was to get as many people from our squad as possible. We had Yates, Grimes, Mitchel, but no SHORT.

WHERE IS WAYNE SHORT?

Short and I had a bond beyond words, and we still do. We both came as close to getting killed as you can get. Together, we had broken a cardinal rule of war—**never leave anyone behind**. Zoints and Beauchamp had been killed and we were in the middle of War Zone D being attacked by a regiment of North Vietnamese regulars. We could not reach them and if we stayed where we were, we both would have been killed. Later he was partially responsible for my 2nd tour.

For years and years, I would say to myself and sometime to others, if you can help me find Short, I will give you a million dollars. One night in the beginning phases of planning our Chicago reunion, a ton of bricks fell on me. It's harness horse racing. I had been searching for him as a trotter horse racer. I called a stable in North Carolina, and inquired about Wayne. They stated that they knew him and provided me with his phone number. They said he was in his 70s, but did not know if he was in Vietnam. They gave me his phone number. While driving on a beautiful late spring day with the driver's side window down, the phone rang. His voice was unmistakable, my arm was resting on the windows and another exorcism happened. Being pissed off for so many years shot right out my left arm and hand. He was on his way to the Pocono's to racehorses.

A week later, I drove up and it was like being home for both of us. He had been searching for me for just as long.

GOING TO CHICAGO

After finding out no one was planning anything in Chicago to honor the 50th anniversary of Olive dying, another one of my brilliant ideas formed. A reunion in Chicago at the Olive Park with our squad.

I knew there was a Community College in Chicago called Olive-Harvey College and there was a park in Chicago called Olive Park. After making some phone calls, the action began. We got help from an ex-city councilman. He helped us get the permits for the event. Several city councilmen helped with chairs, a speaker and lectern. A Hilton Hotel gave us free rooms and lots more.

When we met at the hotel, it was amazing magic: my son and sister were there and were a bit overwhelmed. It was like we had never been apart. The next day we had a number of speakers, including us, the fire department had a boat in the lake firing off water cannons, the police had a helicopter fly over and a young woman I Rolfed when she was a baby came and sang a beautiful rendition of "Don't Sit Under the Apple Tree."

That night we had been given a free meal at the Union League in Chicago. It was all of us, my sister, my son and one other veteran. After a couple of glasses of wine, the stories started, do you remember when, do you remember this and that. That night we found out that Yates was not in the field when Olive died and was back at base camp doing kitchen patrol. He had felt guilty for 50 years and we were the first people he could tell.

MISSISSIPPI PUBLIC TV

About a year later, I was contacted by Tara Wren from a Mississippi Public Broadcasting organization. She asked if I could bring our squad to an event they were doing in Mississippi to honor Vietnam veterans from

Mississippi. There was only one catch, would we be willing to be on a panel talking about Olive? That was a stretch for all of us. They paid for our airfare, hotel, and food. Grimes, Short, and Yates came. Mitchell's wife was ill, and he could not make it. There we were. The guys for the first time in over 50 years spoke publicly, eloquently and brilliantly. I was so proud of my guys it, almost made me want to cry.

From left: Yates, Toporek, Short, Grims, and Mitchell. The Weapons Squad first reunion in 50 years.

Earlier on, I had somehow been invited to a memorial service at Olive's gravesite in Lexington. I took my son. The ceremony was solemn but powerful.

OLIVE MIDDLE SCHOOL, LONG ISLAND

One day a guy came into my computer shop, and he saw the signs that I had about Milton Olive. He said, "What the hell?" We got to chat, and he was a former librarian at the Milton Olive Library somewhere at The Olive Middle School on Long Island and asked me if I'd like to give a talk. So one day, drove to Long Island and went to this Middle School. I looked up the test scores on a site called GreatSchools.org and realized that if Olive knew that school was named after him, he would be turning over in his grave with their dismal math and reading proficiency scores.

MEETING SERGEANT FLETCHER

Sergeant Fletcher lives in Columbia, MD. I often drove to DC to visit my son. After many unanswered calls, one day he answered. We met shortly after that and have had a few drinks, lunches and dinners.

Sergeant Fletcher also has not talked much about his experiences in Vietnam. He is the only person that knew where I was the moment Olive died.

I don't think that the VA or any people who treat veterans really understand the importance of reunions and how it closes a chapter to get reconnected to the people you were in battle with. I hope this brochure will help the VA see the light and do more to help veterans find one another. Part of my goal and the book I will write is to personalize the war and to hopefully find other people in our Squad that are still alive and encourage them to talk. Also, to find the families of those we lost so they can have some closure about who their sons were that never came home, never had an opportunity to have a family, never had an opportunity to go to college, and never had an opportunity to live the American dream they so valiantly fought for.

To contribute financially to help print and distribute this chapter, go to **www.teamchildren.org** or **www.miltonolive.org** or call **Robert Toporek 484-744-1868**.

BEYOND THE CALL OF DUTY!

★ ★ ★

Doing more than one is required or expected to do.

Survivor's guilt is when a person has feelings of guilt because he or she has survived a life-threatening situation when others did not. It is a common reaction to traumatic events and a symptom of post-traumatic stress disorder.

HELP MAKE A WORLD-WIDE DIFFERENCE in the way we as families, schools, communities, and nations relate to and raise babies and children.

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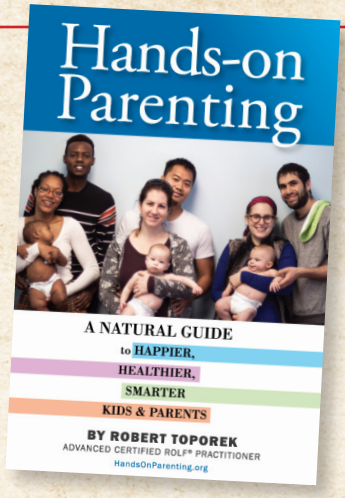
This child is only one of the many thousands affected by the Vietnam War. Viet Cong soldiers, the North Vietnamese regular army, and the civilians on both sides were victims of war. These numbers do not include the other countries that lost so many of their men.

Today, one nation, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all, is still too far out of reach for far too many people.



This book is dedicated to all survivors of traumatic events. You can make the difference in the lives of so many.

Please join our mission!

★ ★ ★

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If you would like more information, preorder my next work, volunteer, contribute financially, or some other way, feel free to email **ROBERT** at **teamchildren@teamchildren.com** or call

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