

11 October 2014

Hi Marc,

I saw your story on the Counterpunch website late last week when I was telling some friends and colleagues about Gen. Forrester and his medals. I told them the story, and then Googled his name to show them what I thought would be a Wiki entry and maybe some old clips reproduced on some blog site. I was pleased to see someone breathing new life into the medal story.

My interest is that I was one of the six enlisted men who signed the letter exposing the fraud. I'm still in touch with some of the others, including Jim Olstad, who you quote in the story. S.L.A. Marshall referred to Olstad at the time as "the Joker in the Army's medal deck," which we all thought was funny. Jim was and is a brilliant guy. He lives up in Palo Alto these days.

My own role was minor. I was not among those asked or ordered to make up the phony paperwork or write up the citations. I wrote citations for people up to the rank of colonel, which put Forrester beyond my pay grade. Also, I didn't even know what had happened until the next morning, when it was over. Olstad told me and said some of the guys wanted to report it. He asked if I'd sign. Oh, yeah, no problem, I said.

We sent the letter off to the House Armed Services Committee, but cc'd it to The New York Times. I'm sure you can guess who got back to us first. That's when I met Gloria Emerson, who wrote the story for the Times and later recounted it in her book, "Winners and Losers." More than anything else, that Vietnam experience and meeting Gloria is what put me on the track to journalism.

Also, I see you have a Silver Star, two Bronze Stars with V and other awards. Since I was there from March 1970 to February 1971 there's a pretty good chance I typed up one or more of them. Let me ask -- are the Bronze Star citations accurate? We got so many in that they created a template -- a pre-typed matt that included generic "combat action" language -- so that we could move the orders through more quickly. Regardless of what the soldier did, it usually read that he "moved forward under a hail of enemy fire" and "silenced enemy positions," et cetera. Always hated doing that, but that's what happens when awards and decorations are turned out like sausages.

Bryant

Hi Bryant,

It's very good to hear from you. You and the men who signed the petition have my deep admiration and respect. A CounterPunch reader pointed out (from Wikipedia) that after the war Gen. Forrester headed the amnesty program for draft dodgers. Was it fate, or someone with a wonderful sense of irony?

Your right, we've crossed paths. I visited the National Archives about fifteen years ago. Archivist Richard Boylan gave a friend and me a tour of the stacks. In the Cav section he found the original paperwork for two of my decorations. The BSM was boiler plated. The SSM was handwritten. Later that day I went through all the awards given to 1/7 in '70, hoping to find SSN's of friends who'd made it back, and locate them. I found one, boiler plated, as were many of the others. I had no idea about those things.

I met Gloria Emerson at the William Joiner Center in Boston in 2000. Not long afterward I read her book. We met again in New York a few years later. She was a remarkable (and cantankerous) woman. She cared for vets. Everyone who knew her has a story.

Before I forget, I'd like to quote or incorporate what you emailed me into the Forrester story, which is also on my site. Are you OK with that?

Lastly, I read your bio. You've had a great and rewarding career.

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Hi, Marc;

Yes, feel free to use whatever I sent to you. I thought the world of Gloria. You're right, she could be so incredibly cantankerous. Never met anybody so blunt. I was in touch with her periodically over the years. She advised me on where to stay in Gaza back in 1999.

Bryant