

SECOND FRONT: VIETNAM

Introduction

*“When I came back from Vietnam,
I would wake up at stop signs with the motor running.
Sometimes people would knock on my car door.
Ask me if I was ‘okay.’
I would reply, ‘Yea,’ and drive away.
Drinking is easier than facing reality.
I drank and drove each day on my propane truck for 10 years.”
— Charles Clarence Hicks*

The following stories are told by Vietnam combat veterans for all combat veterans. Each shares one thing in common: the Second Front – the internal battle with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). This can manifest itself as impaired driving on American roads. Upon returning home, these soldiers suffered with the effects of combat trauma in a society where they no longer felt welcomed.

Many drank, like the veterans before them, to live day-to-day, for an adrenaline rush, and to quell their nightmares. Some also drove drunk, again and again, pushing the limits of safety, pitting themselves against anyone on the road. A few were stopped by police and found the system lenient. After years of living life in extremes, they sought help – and now give help in return.

As you tour the exhibit, get to know these veterans. They are sons, brothers, husbands and above all, comrades-in-arms. They have everything to live for and are committed to leaving no soldier behind in the Second Front.

— Introduction crafted with the assistance of Charles Clarence Hicks, U.S. Army, 82nd Airborne Division

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Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder



US 173rd Airborne Brigade patrol, A Chau Valley, South Vietnam, December 1967



US forces, Battle of Dak To, Hill 875, South Vietnam, November 1967

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) is the result of direct personal exposure to an extreme stressor, also known as combat stress or combat trauma, which develops into characteristic symptoms of re-experience, avoidance and increased arousal. For those combat veterans who suffer from PTSD, the need for safety and relief dominates their actions and choices. Too often self-medication with alcohol and/or drugs is seen as the only option, which can lead to dangerous decisions like driving under the influence. Even in the absence of alcohol and drugs, flashbacks can induce dangerous behaviors like aggressive or erratic driving on American roads.

Former Marine Jack Michel recounts what was a typical driving experience for him, to and from work, on the NYS Thruway: “Driving was so frustrating that I would take chances and pit myself and my ability against anything else on the road. I have run people off the road, especially 18-wheelers. I would lose control to the point of smashing my fist into the roof of my car and screaming at the top of my lungs, ‘If there’s a God out there, take me out! I don’t want to live anymore! Kill me!’ This was every day.”

— Email correspondence with Jack (J.J.) Michel, USMC, 5th Marine Division, 12.28.11

PTSD definition source: (DSM-IV-TR) American Psychiatric Association: Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fourth Edition, Text Revision. (Washington, D.C. APA, 2000). pp. 463-468.

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Newsday

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LBJ VISITS GIs IN VIET

Flies Secretly to War Zone Base

Story on Page 3

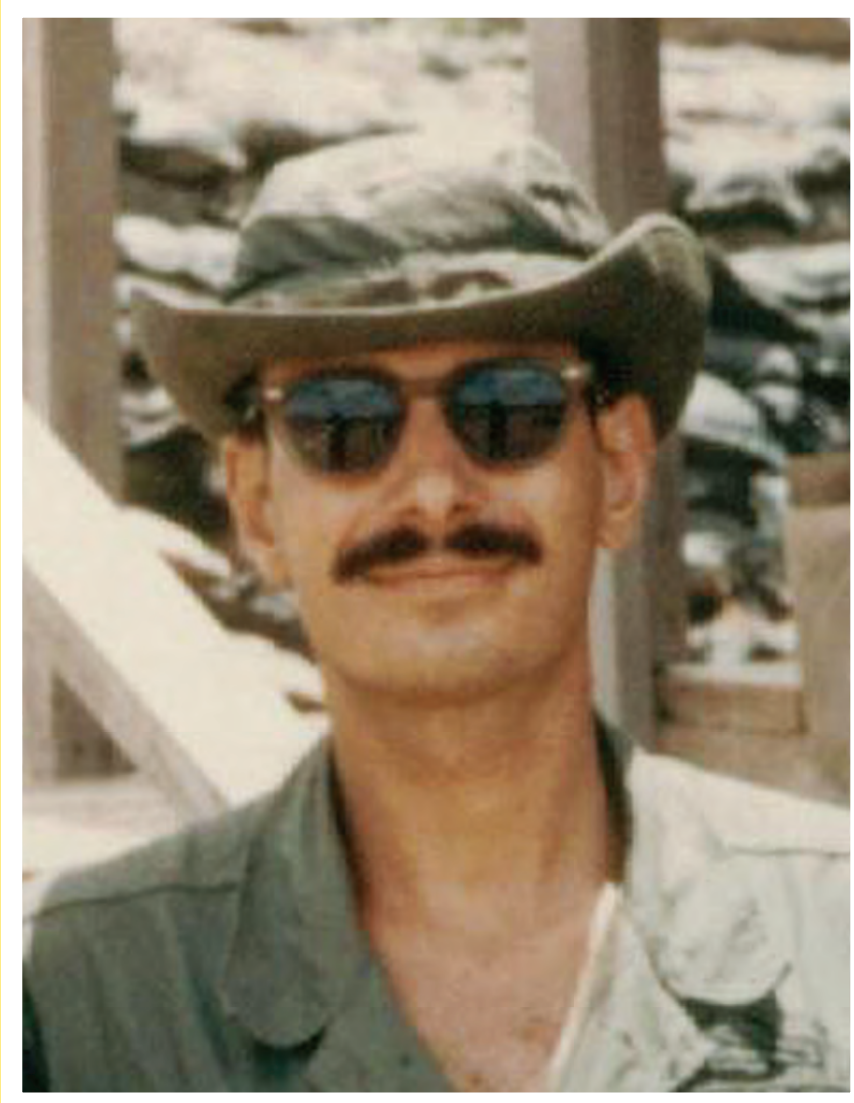
SURPRISE. Delighted U.S. soldiers flock around President Johnson at Cam Ranh Bay, Vietnam, today, as he paid an unannounced visit. Johnson had attended a conference of Asian heads of state in

Manila, flew to Corregidor before taking off for the big, new base 180 miles northeast of Saigon. He spent 2½ hours with U.S. forces before returning to Manila. (Story on Page 3, other photos on Back Page and Page 30.)



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In Harm's Way



Sergeant Michael Fernandes, at age 25

Delta Company 3/39 Infantry 9th Infantry Division

“War is chaotic, out of control. If you survive, it changes your life. You are not programmed for war. It is like you become a hoodlum and people start shooting at you. I think of Vietnam everyday.”

— Interview with Michael Fernandes, Delmar, New York, 06.05.12



Private First Class Charles Clarence Hicks, at age 19

B Company, 1st Battalion, 503rd Airborne Infantry, 173rd Airborne Brigade (SEP)

“I’m like on the edge of ‘No Man’s Land.’ This is a funny war, where at night ‘Charlie’ serves me drinks and in the day, he shoots at me.”

— Excerpt from a letter home to family, 173rd Headquarters, Vietnam, 11.66



Captain Michael McMahon, at age 22

Military Assistance Command Vietnam (MACV), Advisory Team 38, U.S. Army

“When I came home [to the US], I came home to Menands. Some of my in-laws were anti-military. I had to order one person out of the house. I was called a baby killer.”

— Interview with Michael McMahon, Menands, New York, 04.16.12

SECOND FRONT: VIETNAM

In Harm's Way

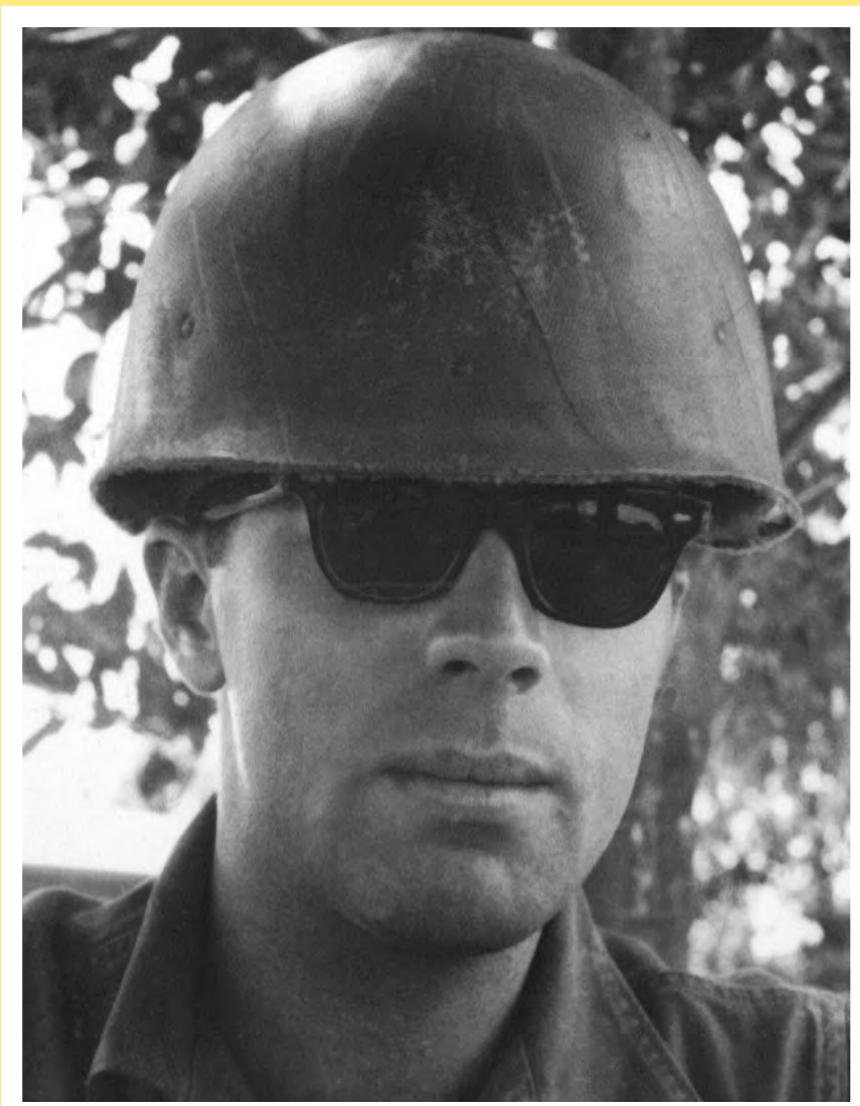


Corporal Jack Michel, at age 22

Mike Company, 3rd Battalion, 7th Marines, 1st Marine Division

"They take a child civilian at the age of 17 or 18 and they put them through almost a mind changing experience. You're taught to obey orders, to do exactly as you're told, when you're told, and you don't think about it. You really don't deal with the things that you do or you didn't at the time, during the time you're in combat."

— Interview with Jack Michel, Utica, New York, 12.22.11



Specialist E4 George Story, at age 23

1st Security Platoon, 3rd Brigade, 1st Infantry Division

"It all starts, in the beginning, in training, you know where you get it hammered into your head constantly, if you don't learn this shit you're going to die... You're going to Vietnam... The worse thing was the anticipation."

— Interview with George Story, New Bern, North Carolina, 04.02.12



Corporal Willy Wilson, at age 17

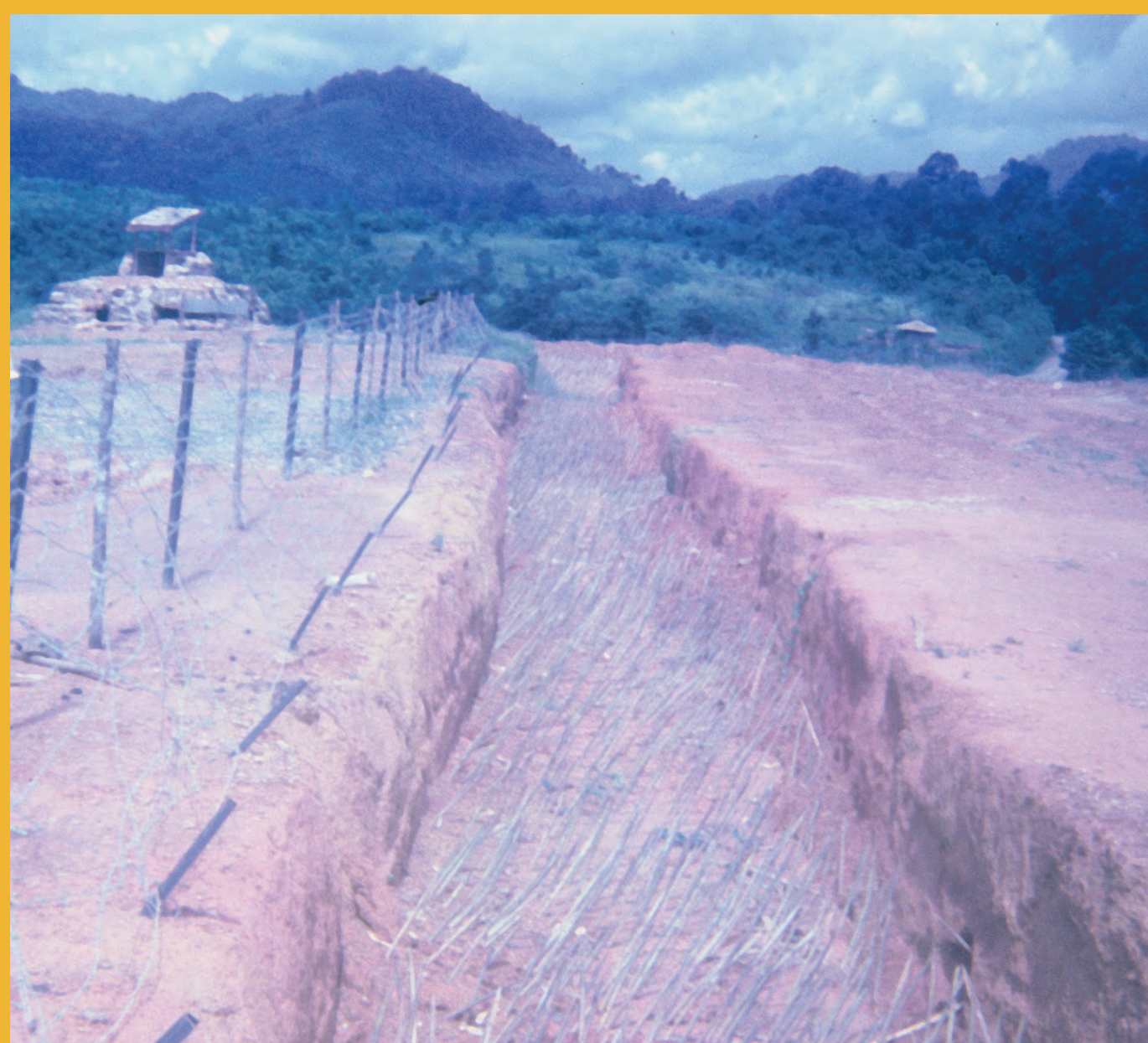
Kilo Company, 3rd Battalion, 5th Marines, 1st Marine Division

"In Vietnam you had a kid killing you. To be successful, you had to become part of their environment. You would say to yourself, 'Let me get through the day.' You would see someone wounded, you would patch them up and send them off and you would say, 'Better him than me.'"

— Interview with Willy Wilson, Utica, New York, 04.11.12

SECOND FRONT: VIETNAM

Cpt. Michael McMahon On Nightmares, Flashbacks, and Drinking to Oblivion



Mote at Dai Quay



View from within Bell UH-1 helicopter



Dai Quay Compound

“I would wake up with nightmares and flashbacks, like going through Captain Gary Arnold’s personal effects. ...I also dreamed of horrors. There was one American sergeant in the Special Forces who would collect ears [for a body count]. It created a backlash. He was bats. I told him I didn’t want him in my compound. The Viet Cong retaliated, not on him, but they got an American Major. They hung him upside down, with bamboo poles throughout his body. They got him in a downed helicopter. I would have dreams of someone sticking me with bamboo.

Another dream was I would walk into a compound and there were body parts all over. I would be in a metal container and there would be body parts scattered in the container from mortar rounds. Then I would come back into my conscious memory. With alcohol I was able to sleep. I had to drink to oblivion.”

— Interview with Michael McMahon, Menands, New York, 04.16.12



SECOND FRONT: VIETNAM

Cpt. Michael McMahon Timeline 1965-1968



Saying goodbye to Father Stark



M48A2C Tank at Camp Kaiser



ARVN outpost



Ready for action, Bao Loc

“[The Siena College ROTC Program] told me I could pick where I wanted to go and to pick three places, so I picked Hawaii, France and Germany, and they said, ‘You’re going to Korea.’ ” – Interview with Michael McMahon, Menands, New York, 04.16.12

“I got my orders to go to Korea. I left in December.
I spent two tours, thirteen months each,
in the demilitarized zone with the 10th Armored Calvary.
After my second year in Korea,
I volunteered to go to Vietnam in 1967.”

– Interview with Michael McMahon, Menands, New York, 04.16.12

1965, Korea

“I went to the Two Core Headquarters of the ARVN in Nha Trang.
The VC had attacked that compound.
Pieces of people were inside the Connex containers that the ARVN had used as bunkers.
The RPG-7 wiped them out; it went right through the metal.
They had put doors in the containers. They were all body parts inside.

When I went to visit the PF (Provincial Forces) Platoons, the Montagnards, and ARVN,
we owned the camp; Charlie owned the surrounding area.
I spent most of my time going from camp to camp. I could have been killed in any camp.
I extended my tour in Vietnam for three additional months for a total of 16 months.
I did this because my job was critical and I knew it. I had to train the new people.”

– Interview with Michael McMahon, Menands, New York, 04.16.12

1968, Mortar Attacks

1967, Vietnam

“I went to Advisory Team 38. We were advising the Montagnards and Vietnamese.
The Montagnards were black-faced tribesmen and great soldiers,
not like the ARVN (Army of the Republic of Vietnam)...
I had to go in and out of Lam Dong province to the outpost.

We got mortared a few times. It was in the outskirts of Bao Loc... in a safe zone.
Parts of people were all over the place. The North Vietnamese used RP67 rockets.
They went through the wooden bunkers. I had to rebuild the supposedly defensible area.”

– Interview with Michael McMahon, Menands, New York, 04.16.12

SECOND FRONT: VIETNAM

Cpt. Michael McMahon Timeline 1968-1969



Blao Pass



Dark containers that were thought to contain Agent Orange at Bao Loc



Chaplain prepares for Captain Sawyer’s funeral



General Westmorland after the Tet Offensive, at Bao Loc

“For most of my tour the Highlands were beautiful. You could forget you were in a combat zone and you got careless. Carelessness got you, then Charlie got you.” – Interview with Michael McMahon, Menands, New York, 04.16.12

“The North Vietnamese and the Viet Cong attacked all the major cities, especially Saigon. They thought there would be a popular uprising and the war would swiftly end.
In reality the people did not want them, and in every city they were defeated.

I was at the Bao Loc outpost, in the radio room.
I listened to my commander, Colonel Paul Mueller.
He was talking from his helicopter. He was over Di Linh.
There was an ambush in downtown.
There was a young lieutenant in a jeep wounded.
The Viet Cong were swarming around him and then they dragged him into the jungle.
Mueller couldn’t do anything and he began to weep.”

– Interview with Michael McMahon, Menands, New York, 06.25.12

“The Bao Loc Compound is where we stored the Agent Orange.
They would use it in Blao Pass...
They did not spray when we did operations, but the Vietnamese hamlets got hit.
We had the 55 gallon metal drums of Agent Orange stored between two buildings, and soldiers would sit on the containers to watch make-shift basketball games.”

– Interview with Michael McMahon, Menands, New York, 04.16.12

“We had a convoy coming from Da Lat and that was going to Bao Loc. We got hit by the VC. They blew up our trucks with two howitzers. They stole our ammunition. I was in a M8 armored car; a mini French tank with a 37mm gun on it. We engaged the VC so the rest of our guys, or what was left of them, could retreat. We got out of it with 54 men out of approximately 125.”

– Interview with Michael McMahon, Menands, New York, 04.16.12

January 30, 1968 Tet Offensive Begins	Fall 1968, Bao Loc Compound	Spring 1969, The Convoy That Got Hit
April 11, 1968, Captain Gary Arnold is killed “I was in the Highlands. My roommate was Captain Gary Arnold. One of our scouts was a VC (Viet Cong) and he led Captain Arnold to Dia Quay in the VC controlled area. The guide led him into a trap and he was blown to bits by a bomb. The trap was wired to a 105-howitzer round that was detonated. I had to identify what was left of his body and pick up his belongings to ship home. His wife had just given birth to a baby girl.” – Interview with Michael McMahon, Menands, New York, 04.16.12	February 12, 1969, Helicopter Down “It was a helicopter down. The Chinook could not land, so we had to drop down over the jungle and pick up the dead pilots. We went into Charlie’s teeth. The pilot was shot in the head and the gunner, Sawyer, his legs were amputated. Sawyer was in the back and the impact jammed up the seat and cut his legs off. We went out armed to the teeth. The helicopters dropped some chainsaws in and we landed and cleared an area so they could drop body bags and ropes. It was gruesome to see a guy shot in the head. It was terrible to see the guy in the back with his legs cut off. The pilot was shot in the head and died instantly, it was a lucky shot. The guy in the back never had a chance.” – Interview with Michael McMahon, Menands, New York, 04.16.12	June 1969, From Vietnam to NYC “I did not drink in Vietnam. It was a rare thing. It picked up when I got back home, when I got back to the U.S. It picked up when I was coming home. It was weird coming home. I went to New York City for three years at ROTC at Fordham University in the Bronx. I got along with the kids although they had long hair and were in the SDS (Students for Democratic Society). My drinking picked up in New York City and then it really took off when I went to Germany.” – Interview with Michael McMahon, Menands, New York, 04.16.12

SECOND FRONT: VIETNAM

Cpt. Michael McMahon Timeline 1971-Present



McMahon, center, at Fordham University



Menands Police Car



Congressman Michael McNulty, left, McMahon, right, and Father Peter Young, seated left, at McMahon's VA retirement, September 1, 2004



McMahon with Father Young, 2005

“If I had stayed in the military any longer, I would have ended up in jail. Like all good GIs, when I got home, all I could do was live in the past... I went to ten detoxes in the ‘70s and four rehabs.” – Interview with Michael McMahon, Menands, New York, 04.16.12

“I was the Inspector General (G1) Personnel Administrator for the Eleventh Calvary Regiment.
I was working with the troops, the dependent housing, and the school system. I never had a day off.
I had to do all the work myself.
I survived because I had a good mind...
I had a few nightmares in Germany, but there was a progression in my alcoholism, as I needed more and more.
The drinking took off in Germany because I was working 12 hours a day.”

– Interview with Michael McMahon, Menands, New York, 04.16.12

Spring 1971, Germany

November 1972 End of Military Service

“The first night I was home from Germany, I had a six pack at home and then drove past Bill Jones’ house on Menands Road. I destroyed a fire hydrant.
I was working for the city at the time so the boys fixed it.
I had great enablers.”

– Interview with Michael McMahon, Menands, New York, 04.16.12

“The Menands police knew me. They would sometimes drive me home if I had been drinking and driving.

[My first DWI happened because] I was bar hopping on my way to North Albany and I got stopped.”

– Interview with Michael McMahon, Menands, New York, 04.16.12

December 1974, First DWI

1975 “I was worthless when I came home.”

“I got a job at OTB (Off Track Betting) because of the hours and I could drink even on the job.
I also worked for the Village. They were good jobs to go out drinking.
I needed money, so I tried to work two shifts a day and the only thing that that did was get me twice as drunk.
I drove home drunk from Ralph’s on Fuller Road and Central Avenue in Colonie to Menands everyday.
In the morning I would go to probation, then go to Ralph’s Bar.”

– Interview with Michael McMahon, Menands, New York, 04.16.12

“In 1987 I went to treatment in Altamont.
I had no choice; the judge in Albany was going to send me to either jail or rehab for DWI.
I received a conditional discharge and went to Father Peter Young’s program.
I got sober and haven’t drunk since.”

– Interview with Michael McMahon, Menands, New York, 04.16.12

February 13, 1987 Second DWI and Getting Sober

Spring of 1988 Becoming a Wounded Healer

“In the spring of 1988 I became a counselor trainee at the Peter G Young Program in Altamont, NY.
After that I went back to school at Russell Sage and took courses in alcoholism counseling and addictions.
Then I went to work in the VA, February 23, 1993, and I worked there until 8 years ago, which was 2004, in the Chemical Dependency Rehabilitation Program as a counselor... There was a lot of empathy [at the VA] because I could understand where the hell they were coming from. I’d been there myself”

– Interview with Michael McMahon, Menands, New York, 04.16.12 and 06.25.12

SECOND FRONT: VIETNAM

Cpt. Michael McMahon On Drinking to Sleep “The Only Reason I Drank Was To Get Intoxicated.”



At the officer's club in Camp Kaiser



A party at Camp Kaiser



Full Dress at the Officer's Club in Camp Kaiser

“When I came home, I joined the Menands VFW #5989. I went to the meetings, but most of the guys were veterans from WWII. They were nice older people. Most would go home. I stayed at the VFW and drank. I was living in a flophouse in the back of the VFW; my parents had thrown me out of the house — they caught me stealing. There was a hole in the fence [at the VFW] and I could walk home. I would come home, sit in the living room chair and piss in it. I joined organizations like the VFW and then a firehouse softball league so I could drink. We would drink after the games. It was a free drunk every Friday night.

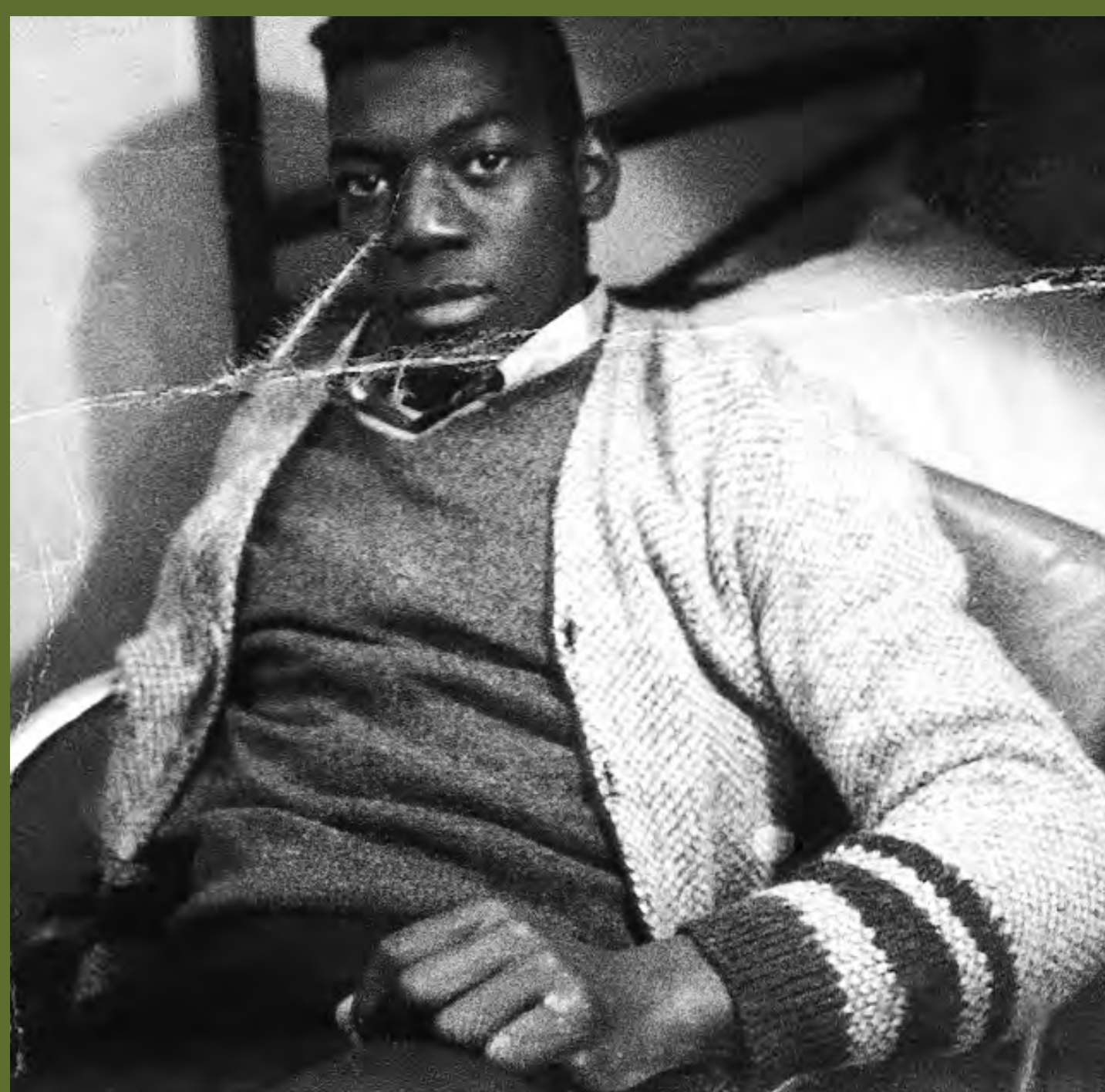
I drank to sleep. I felt guilty about how I was living. I would flip back to Vietnam and how I could have been a better officer and then once in awhile I’d get a flashback. The only reason I drank was to get intoxicated when I got back from Vietnam.”

— Interview with Michael McMahon, Menands, New York, 04.16.12



SECOND FRONT: VIETNAM

Cpl. Willy Wilson: Not the Same Person



Wilson, before Vietnam, in Utica, NY



Wilson today, Veterans Outreach Center, Utica, NY



Vietnam, March 1968

“I was 17 years old. I graduated in 1965, [and began service in 1966]. I was the second oldest in my family. I grew up in the church. My father ruled the house and I wanted to get away from my family. I joined the Marines. I went to Syracuse then to Paris Island and then Camp Lejeune in North Carolina. I was sent to Morocco for nine months, and then I went to Vietnam.

When I came back from Vietnam, I was not the same person I was before. I was not friendly. I had gotten good at what I was doing in Vietnam, using weapons. I did not like me. In Vietnam I was a violent person. I wouldn’t trust anyone who wasn’t American. I would watch the Vietnamese like a hawk. I was 19 when I finished Vietnam; I was still a teenager. I was wounded; I got psychological problems.

[With PTSD] you are always looking at your surroundings before you do anything. You always have your back to the wall. I don’t like crowds. I like basements. I work in a basement. I said I was going to serve my country. I came back nuttier than a fruitcake. I was a violent person in Vietnam. When I came home, I worked hard to get rid of that person. That person died. I am closer to the person I was as a teenager. I never thought the person in Vietnam would exist, but he did.

War is bad and coming home is worse. The Post-Traumatic Stress is bad. There has to be a deprogramming. You have to know when you come back that there are going to be rules. You need a readjustment period.

I dealt with me by turning around and saying I can’t change the violence that took place in Vietnam, but I can end up hurting somebody if I keep doing this stupid thing of drinking alcohol. I was blessed enough that I got a DWI ticket, that turned me around and I said, ‘You got to make decisions.’ So I had to stop doing the foolishness that could end up hurting other people. That’s how I’m working towards living my life.”

— Interviews with Willy Wilson, Utica, New York, 04.11.2012 and 06.14.2012



SECOND FRONT: VIETNAM

Cpl. Willy Wilson: Blown Up In Vietnam



Wilson teaching boxing at the Veteran's Outreach Center, Utica, NY



Wilson as a member of the U.S. Marine Corp Boxing Team in Spain, before Vietnam



Teaching counter punching in the ring

“[Racism in] Vietnam was not my problem. There was little discrimination in Vietnam. When you get wounded they don’t talk about your skin color, but blood type. There was little discrimination in Vietnam because we all had guns and on the front lines there was no time for that foolishness. I was young and I went into a hostile environment that was not natural. We did things just for survival. You are trained to respond, to survive for yourself and your men.

I was blown up in Vietnam. I lost my eye on May 29, 1969. I received a Navy Achievement Medal and a Purple Heart. Coming back... the VA was too legalistic.

I boxed when I was in the Marine Corp for a short period. I was on the Marine Corp boxing team. The crazy thing is, boxing for me was an escape. I boxed as a professional as long as I could before they found out that I was legally blind in one eye. Boxing’s been my savior.

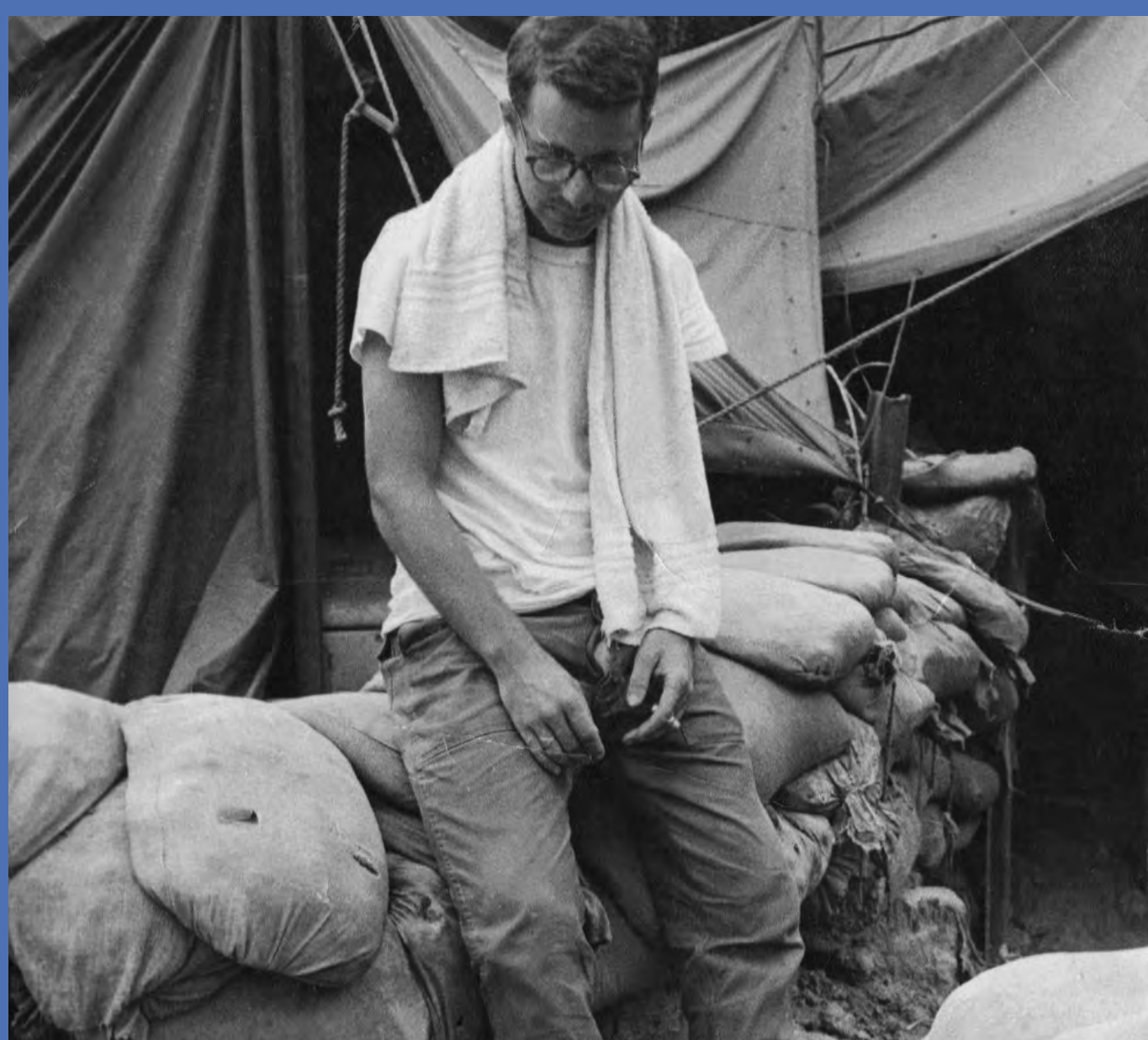
Now I work with kids in the Big Brother Program at the Veteran’s Outreach Center in Utica. Some of their parents are overseas. I teach boxing.”

— Interview with Willy Wilson, Utica, New York, 04.11.12, with excerpts from The VA Statement Appeal Status Election pg. 1, 12.19.06



SECOND FRONT: VIETNAM

SPC George Story: Drinking 24 Hours A Day



Story in Long Binh



Story, far right, unloading supplies



Long Binh

“I got back from ‘Nam in June of ‘67 and I can remember just sleeping for 24 hours that first day home and then getting up and going out, getting drunk... I got married in November of that year, still in the service. My drinking was under control for a long time, nine years of marriage, but every time we got in a fight, I’d run out and go to a bar. That was my escape. Then I got divorced in about ‘76 and I was on my own awhile and it really escalated then, and then it turned into drugs. Drugs supported my drinking and helped me either maintain or increase my capacity.

Anytime I drank, I drove. It wasn’t an issue for me. I didn’t drive because I had too much to drink, I drove because I needed to find another place to drink. I drove thousands of times, probably drunk, home from Manhattan on the West Side Highway to Henry Hudson Parkway. Yea, I was fortunate that I didn’t have a serious accident or kill somebody, or that I never got a DWI.

I guess it was 1981 in Washington, DC. ...I got pulled over. I don’t know why I’m not in jail. It was a trooper with a campaign hat on his head, you know the big white rim things. And I remember saying something to him like, ‘Well if it isn’t Smokey the Bear.’ That didn’t go over too well. He wrote me up and gave me a ticket, but that was just for speeding, and I was flying on booze and I think it was crystal meth at the time. That’s all I got, was a ticket for speeding.”

— Interview with George Story, New Bern, North Carolina, 04.02.12



SECOND FRONT: VIETNAM

★★★★
FINAL

DAILYNEWS
NEW YORK'S PICTURE NEWSPAPER ©

15¢

Vol. 56. No. 264 Corp. 1975 New York News Inc. New York, N.Y. 10017, Tuesday, April 29, 1975★ Showers likely, 45-62. Details p. 71

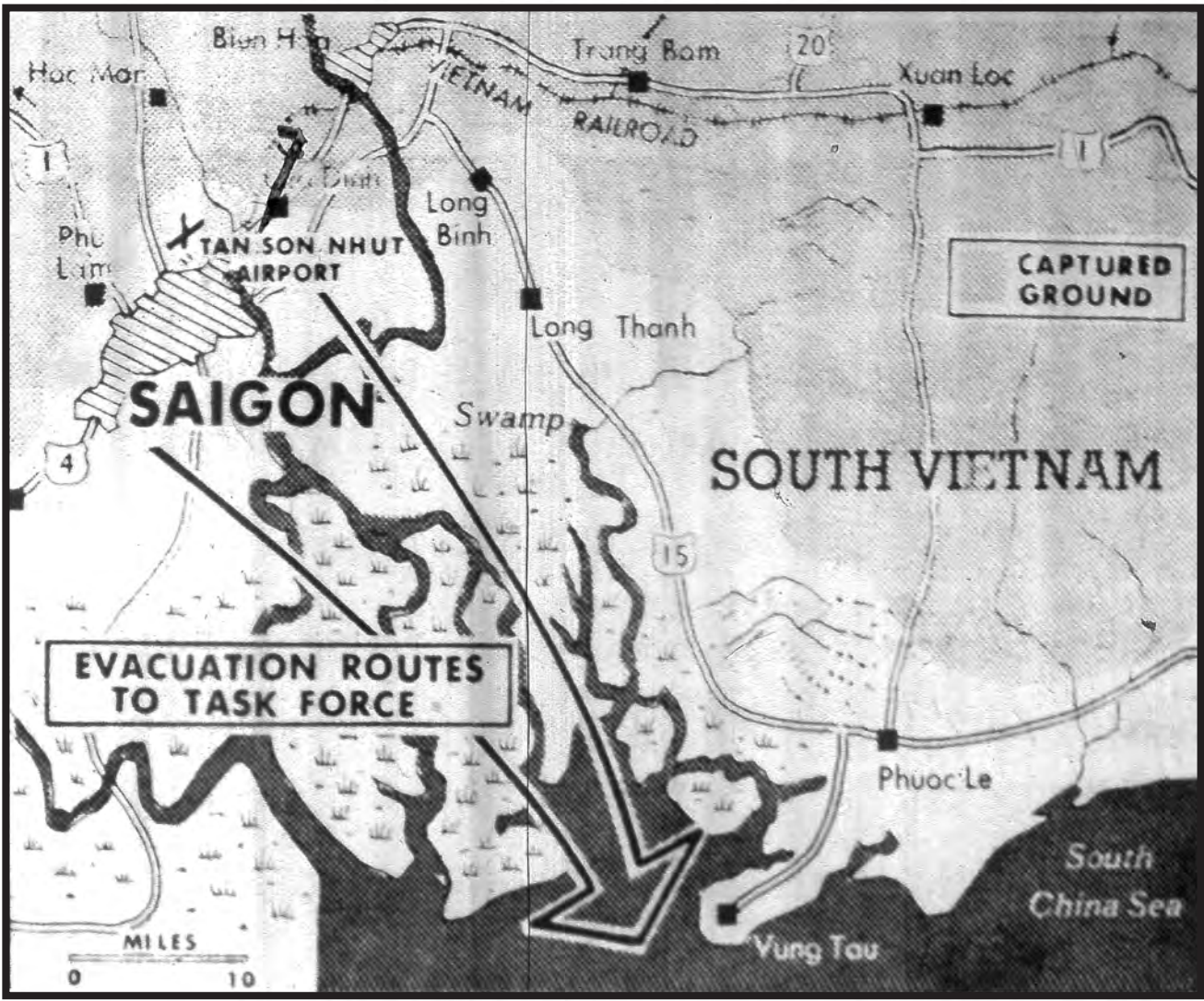
U.S. BEGINS LAST
SAIGON PULLOUT

*Americans Ordered to Leave;
Reds Hit Airport; 2 Marines Die*

Vol. 56. No. 265 Corp. 1975 New York News Inc. New York, N.Y. 10017, Wednesday, April 30, 1975★ Cloudy, cool, mid 50s. Details p. 87

Saigon Surrenders to Viet Cong
American Pullout Is Ended;
Reds Move Into Capital

Saigon, Wednesday, April 30 (Combined Dispatches)
—Outnumbered, surrounded and with nearly all Americans evacuated, South Vietnam surrendered unconditionally early today to the Viet Cong, ending 35 years of fighting that began with the Japanese invasion of Indochina in 1940.



News map by Bill Kresse.
Helicopters brought Americans out. Later Saigon surrendered.

SECOND FRONT: VIETNAM

Sgt Michael Fernandes: Kolekole Pass



Fernandes, right, and Len Chancy outside the Provost Marshall's office at Schofield



Kolekole Pass



Fernandes outside barracks of the 38th MP detachment at Schofield Barracks, Hawaii

“My feeling [is that] at Schofield Military Barracks, Hawaii, there was a disproportionate amount of fatal car crashes of veterans who had just returned from Vietnam. Alcohol was a factor in most of the crashes. It was ironic that they had survived Vietnam and all its horrors, and got killed, supposedly, in one of the safest places you could be stationed in the service.

The drinking age was 18 and there was an accessibility to alcohol at government run EMCs (Enlisted Men's Clubs) and NCOs (Noncommissioned Officer's Clubs). Alcohol was easy to obtain and was cheap. At Schofield Barracks there was even a beer garden. Government beaches where they served alcohol were only a short car ride away, so you had access. You had young inexperienced drivers and the consumption of alcohol, and soldiers died.

The inexperienced drivers, who were drunk, went through Kolekole pass in order to return to the base. The pass was a short cut over the mountains from the government run beaches and the bars. The key to understanding what I saw, the alcohol related crash fatalities at Schofield Barracks, is a combination of alcohol and inexperienced driving.

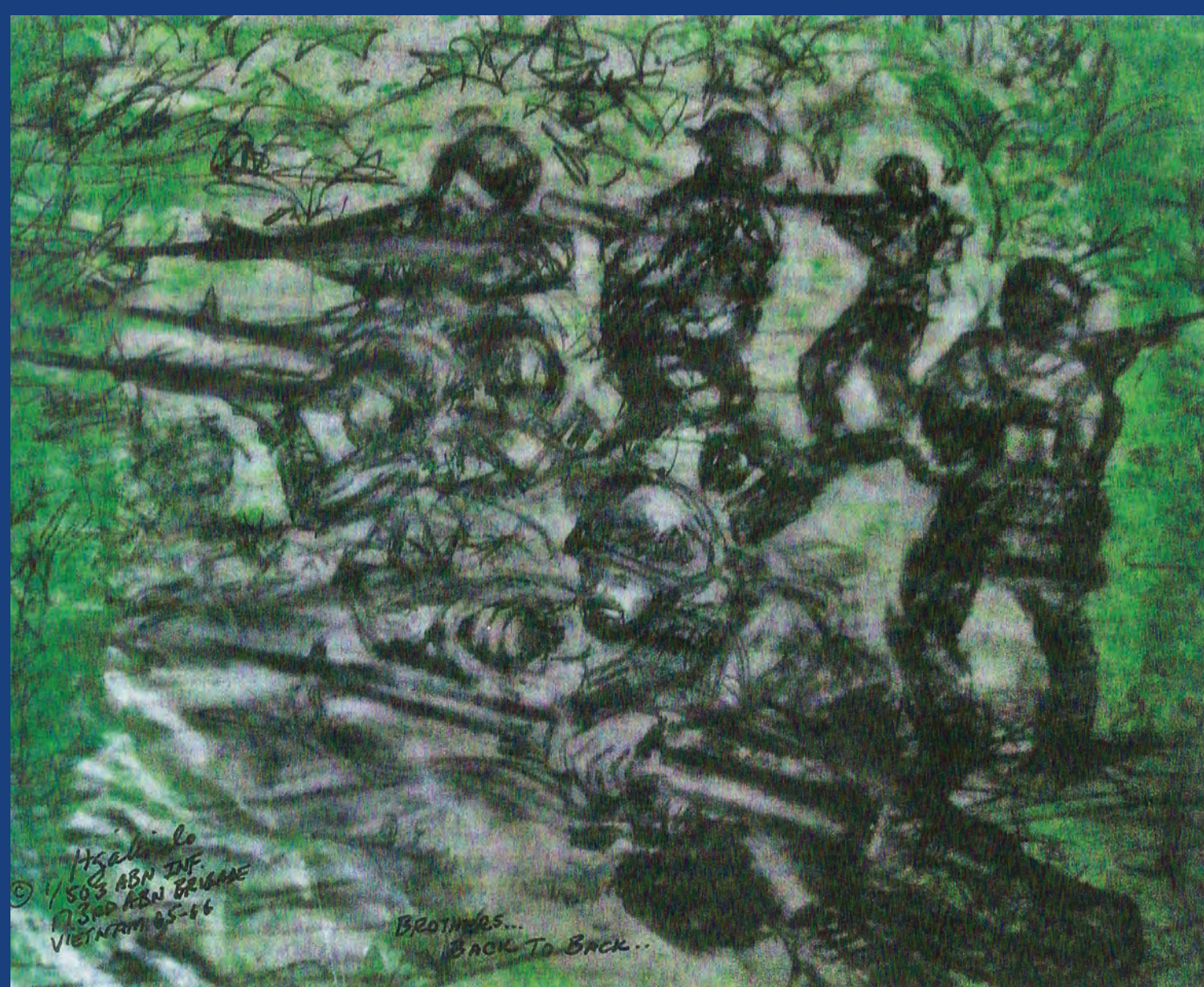
I was struck by the irony of the situation. You're in the safest place when you just finished being in the worst place you could be. They die like they are on a spring break.”

— Interview with Michael Fernandes, Delmar, NY, 06.04.12



SECOND FRONT: VIETNAM

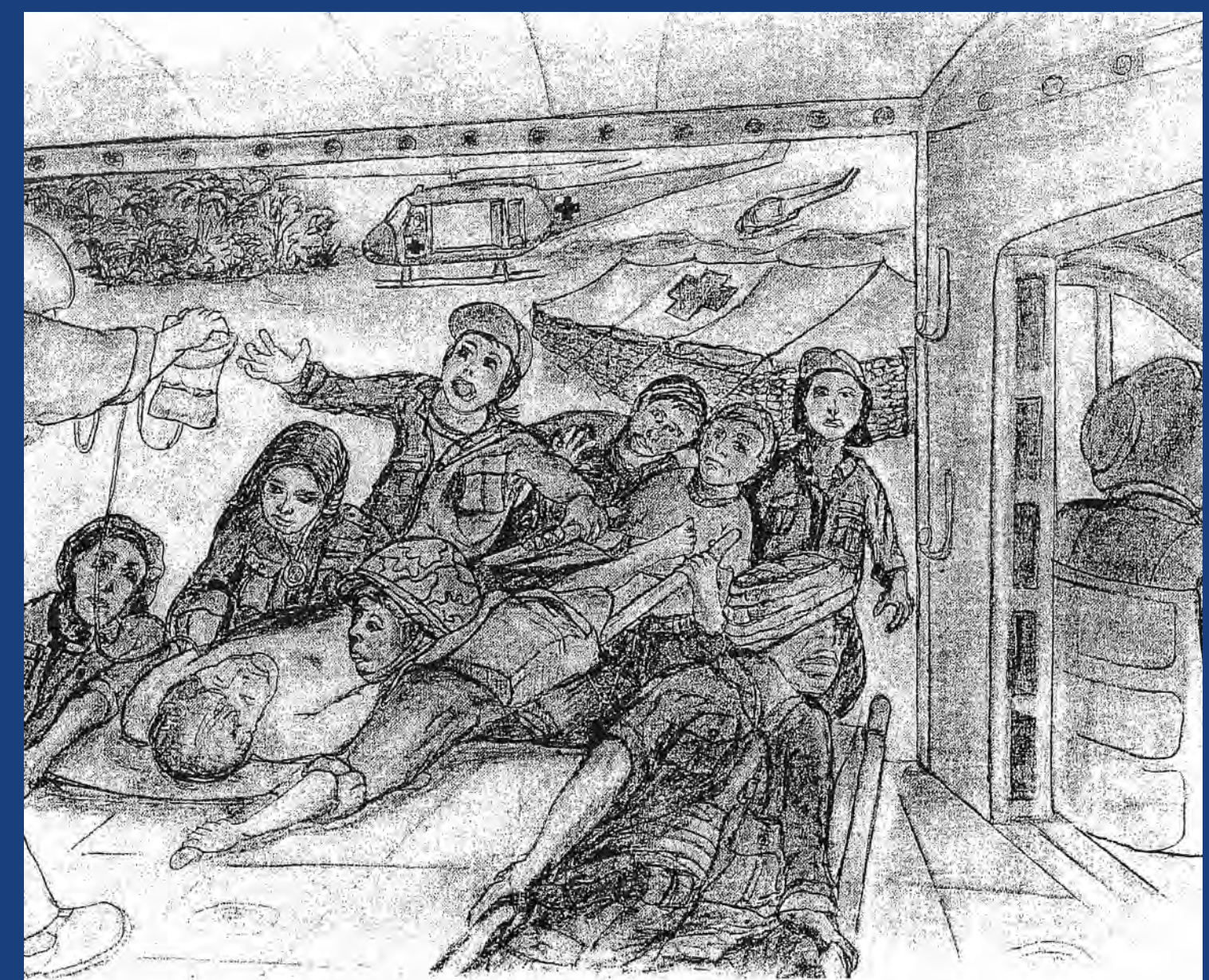
PFC Charles Hicks on Nightmares



Brothers...back to back.



Ready for combat in the 173rd Airborne



Putting a wounded soldier in the helicopter.

“People do not want to hear about nightmares. Each time you open up you are exposing vulnerable parts of yourself and it cheapens it, so I do not open up. I only talk generally about my nightmares because they contain my innermost fears and weaknesses. These feelings are pretty sad. A good deal of my nightmares are about post-Vietnam, that I view with self-failure and self-incompetency... experiences [that] came to a height in my first two years coming home from Vietnam.

Just a week ago, I broke my foot. I banged my head and arm. All I know is that I was having a night terror. I had to accomplish something. It had to be done. So I flung myself out of bed. I do not want to go to bed because of the night terrors and nightmares.”

— Interview with Charles Clarence Hicks, Hudson Falls, New York, 11.09.11

“There’s something in the past.
An issue unaddressed.
A pain that holds you down.
A scar that’s unconfessed.”

— Excerpt from *Self Acceptance/Self Love* by Charles Clarence Hick, 1994

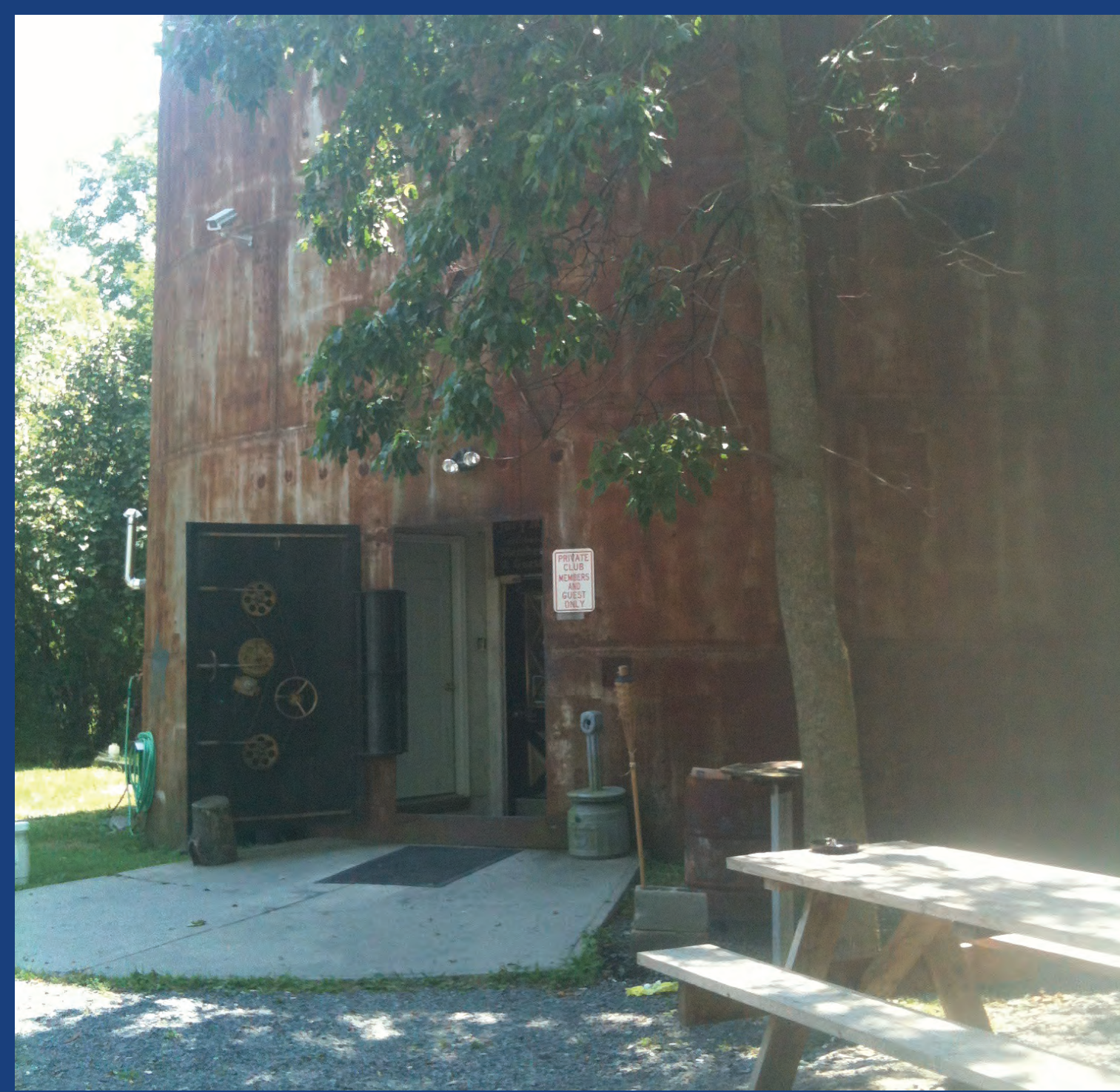


SECOND FRONT: VIETNAM

PFC Charles Hicks on Drinking and Driving



Kickstand Saloon, Hudson Falls, NY



Entrance to the bar at the Jury Motorcycle Club's oil tank, Hudson Falls, NY

“When I came back from Vietnam, I needed the adrenaline fix, driving on a motorcycle, getting into fights, driving recklessly drunk, getting into close calls. I drank and drove each day on my propane tank, drunk for ten years... I was stopped in 1982 by Sheriffs deputies; that’s when the laws started to get tough. They said I was a DWAI (Driving While Ability Impaired) and they said they were waiting for something better and let me go.

Three years ago, I was drinking [at a bar] and got into a fight. I told the cops I was a combat vet, but I got arrested anyway.

Today if I go to a bar, I take a cab. You have to address the issue of drinking and driving and make the important decisions when you are sober.”

— Interview with Charles Clarence Hicks, Hudson Falls, New York, 11.09.11 and 01.11.12



SECOND FRONT: VIETNAM

PFC Charles Clarence Hicks Timeline 1965-1967



Castleton State University



173rd Airborne in Tay Ninh Province



Cam Ranh Bay Hospital



Fighting in Tay Ninh Province

“I remember sitting in my foxhole, deprogramming myself because I had to write benign letters home, particularly to my mom. I would write about the guys, the flora and the fauna of the area, but never about combat.” – Interview with Charles Clarence Hicks, Hudson Falls, New York, 11.09.11

“I was an amazing student – I flunked out of college after my first semester. [After] one semester in college I received my reclassification form from Student Deferment from the Draft Board. I got my 1A status before I got my college marks. This did not give me much time to enlist before they would draft me.

I went immediately to the Army recruiter in White River Junction to enlist as a Green Beret. I was 18 and half years old, or 19 and half, but I was six months too young for the Green Berets. I asked the recruiter what was the next big thing. He declared, ‘the Airborne,’ so I said I would take it. Then I asked him, ‘What’s next?’ and he said, ‘the infantry and going to Vietnam.’”

– Interview with Charles Clarence Hicks, Hudson Falls, New York, 01.11.12

Fall 1965, Castleton State College of Vermont

“I was passing the word, ‘Do not fire, our men are coming in.’ I was guarding the perimeter, then I saw ten North Vietnam regulars in full battle garb. They dropped a bomb... I dropped down on one knee and popped one guy. Then I hit a second one. I knew I had hit them from the way they fell and because I had hunted woodchucks as a boy.

I had an adrenaline rush. You lose track of time. Then the bushes erupted into confetti; there was a barrage of automatic weapons aimed at me. I flipped my weapon to automatic and sprayed the bush. I was running for my life...”

– Interview with Charles Clarence Hicks, Hudson Falls, New York, 01.11.12

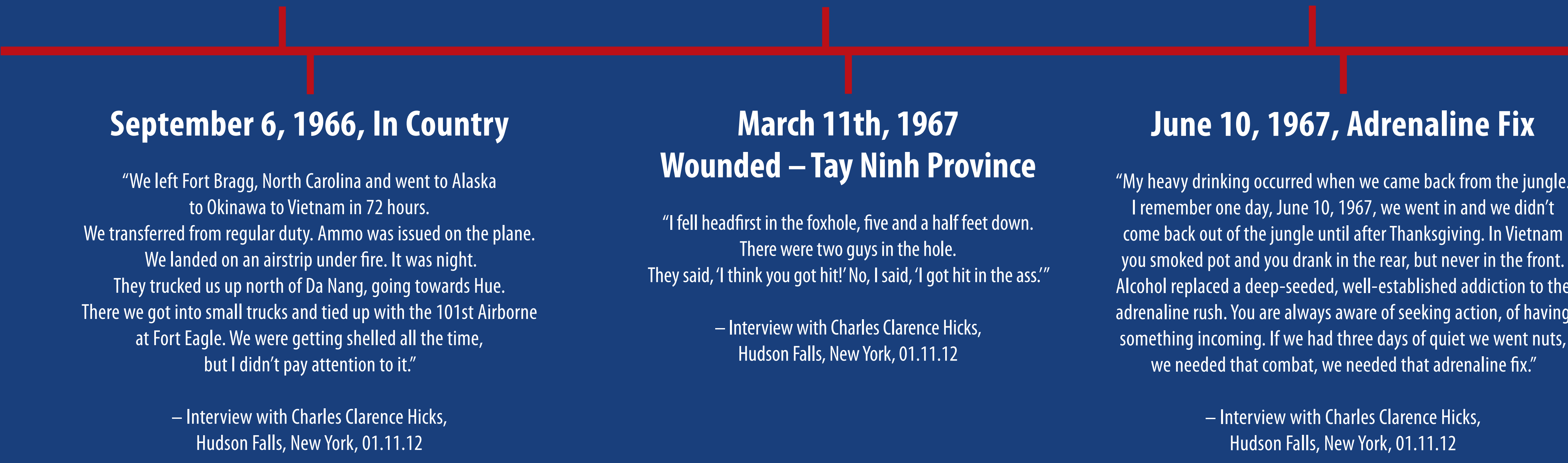
**March 9th, 1967
Military Action – Tay Ninh Province**

“Two days later, when I was in the hospital, an American general came up to my bed and said, ‘We found 400 dead bodies in front of your position.’ I said, ‘Me and Wallace got a few. The Arial bombs got the rest.’ The General told me we had been assaulted by a full regime of NVA who wanted to overrun us, then wait for those who went to claim our bodies and attack the rescuers.

In retrospect it seems I may have gone against orders. I initiated the action that saved our battalion from being overrun. If I didn’t act they would have been wiped out. They surely would have been overrun. I was awarded the Bronze Star with the “V” for valor device.”

– Interview with Charles Clarence Hicks, Hudson Falls, New York, 01.11.12

**March 13th, 1967
Evac. Hospital then to Cam Rohn Bay**



SECOND FRONT: VIETNAM

PFC Charles Clarence Hicks Timeline 1969-1975



Protest of the war in Vietnam



The Jury Motorcycle Club



Hick’s Argyle, NY home, where he ran his propane business



Hick’s propane tanker truck as it is today

“You’re now a 21-year-old kid and you’re lost. You see people on easy street compared to Vietnam and these people are bitching and moaning. I had been on the front line. I didn’t bitch.” – Interview with Charles Clarence Hicks, Hudson Falls, New York, 01.11.12

“When I first got back from ‘Nam, the first month of course I’m on leave. I wasn’t drinking too much around my mom and so fourth, but then it hit me. I was devastated. I didn’t have any inclination that there was any PTSD or anything about it until the ‘80s.

I came back to Norwich after Vietnam for just four hours. I picked up my civilian clothes and hitchhiked over to Castleton where I registered the same day for classes. It was on a Monday because it was the first day of classes after Winter Break. I got out of the Army early to go to college, so I had to register.”

– Interview with Charles Clarence Hicks, Hudson Falls, New York, 01.11.12 and Delmar, New York, 04.23.12

January 25, 1969, Coming Home

“When I came back, I was ostracized. You learn quickly not to talk about Vietnam. They would throw you out of a college bar if you were a Vietnam veteran. Anytime someone asked you about Vietnam, they wanted you to lie. They did not want to learn the truth, the brutality of war. Vietnam vets were not welcome.”

– Interview with Charles Clarence Hicks, Hudson Falls, New York, 01.11.12

1970s, Not Welcome

“I had a propane business in Argyle, New York, that I operated out of my house. Drinking is easier than facing reality. I drank and drove each day on my propane truck for ten years.”

– Interview with Charles Clarence Hicks, Hudson Falls, New York, 01.11.12

1975, Drinking and Driving in Argyle, New York

1969, The Jury Motorcycle Club

“I joined the Jury in 1969. I’m a former president of the club. I was devoted to the Jury after I got back from Vietnam. I am one of two living members who still have the Jury brand. I joined because I needed an adrenaline rush. They were the first people when I got home that showed me some respect... I got along with cops who were Vietnam vets. A lot of the vets became cops when they came home. I always wear my identification colors of my motorcycle club, that has a combat identification, on my shoulders. I have my combat infantry badge on my motorcycle jacket.”

– Interview with Charles Clarence Hicks, Hudson Falls, New York, 01.11.12

June 1970, Marriage and Seeing America

“Well I got a job as a bar tender and I’d drink a fifth of Seven Crown at work. Once in a while I’d drink a tequila, and after a couple years I gave up on the college business and left the area and got married, checking out different parts of the country and where we wanted to live. When we came back to Vermont, I got a motorcycle and kept a couple six packs in the saddle bags and found out the army fatigue pants were handy too. You could put a six pack in your pockets on the side.”

– Interview with Charles Clarence Hicks, Delmar, New York, 04.23.12

SECOND FRONT: VIETNAM

PFC Charles Clarence Hicks Timeline 1970s-Present



Flashbacks of Vietnam



North Hampton VA Hospital



Jury Oil Tank where Hicks stayed



Hicks Today

“Coming home was a lot harder than being in Vietnam. It was a better life over there. It was death or not death.”

— Interview with Charles Clarence Hicks, Hudson Falls, New York, 11.09.11

“This was after I’d settled back down in New York,
and when I got off work, I’d generally go to a bar.
I didn’t drink up the paycheck or anything like that,
but I always had plenty of alcohol.
I didn’t want to go home because I couldn’t address
that closeness with the kids,
tucking them in and stuff. That was my PTSD.
I didn’t realize it until awhile after that, how serious that PTSD was
and how much it really had to do with my alcoholism,
because I was drinking to avoid spending time, closeness, with my family.
And of course even though I can lay a cause on it,
today I miss that time, I miss that closeness and I wish it hadn’t happened.
When I started having grandchildren I said I got a second chance now.”

— Interview with Charles Clarence Hicks, Delmar, New York, 04.23.12

“I am writing this letter so that you know how valuable Ward 8,
North Hampton VA Medical Center in Massachusetts is to me
and my fellow Vietnam vets.
It is the very best and most valuable treatment that I, we, receive for our P.T.S.D.
It is the major means by which I have to cope and stay alive
with the emotional turmoil that my life takes on.
I urge you to support this program totally. Thank you for your time and support.”

— Excerpts taken from a letter to VISN, Network Director Jeanette Chirco—Post, MD
from Charles Clarence Hicks, 04.19.00

Late 1970s and Early 1980s

April 19, 2000, Advocating for Vets

The 1980s, The North Hampton VA

“I think it was in the ‘80s, I was at a VVA (Vietnam Veterans of America) meeting
and Robin Temple, who worked for Washington County,
came up to me at the meeting and said,
‘Charlie, you realize you have a severe case of PTSD.’
I replied, ‘I do not. I don’t even know what it is and would have trouble spelling it.’

[On Robin’s advice,] I was hospitalized and I underwent anger management
and decision making treatment programs.

As for my alcoholism, I made a decision to participate and for a while
my VA hospitalization consumed all, my vacation, sick, and personal time.
I was working 37 hours a weeks and my family never got a vacation that year.”

— Interview with Charles Clarence Hicks, Hudson Falls, New York, 01.11.12

Today, Better but not Sober

“I’m 65 years old and retired. The therapy has helped me in a lot of ways,
but not in stopping me from drinking.
I want to do what I want to do as long as I’m not hurting anybody else.

You learn how to deal in Vietnam the best you can,
and the best way is don’t get close with anybody.
And it was so hard. I learned it and I can’t unlearn it today.
Maybe if I’d started sooner, realizing what was going on,
but I can learn to control my anger and make better decisions.”

— Interview with Charles Clarence Hicks, Delmar, New York, 04.23.12

SECOND FRONT: VIETNAM

Cpl. Jack Michel on PTSD and Flashbacks



LZ Baldy, south west of Da Nang



Foothills of the Qua Son Mountains,
south west of Da Nang



Incoming mortar attack



Mortar attack at Qua Son

“My stressor for my Post-Traumatic Stress is a mortar attack. It was August 17, 1970. Our company had moved off Fire Support Base Rider the day before and was dug-in at the bottom of the mountain that Rider was on. The morning of the 17th we were getting ready to move out to our rear area at LZ Ross. Our night patrols were starting to come in and we were all busy packing our gear, eating, and filling in our foxholes. The mortar squad was firing extra rounds into the tree line in front of my position to lighten the load, so that the company could move a little faster back to Ross. The mortars were exploding about 150 to 200 yards into the tree line, which was across a rice paddy in front of me.

When a mortar round exploded in the middle of the rice paddy I said to a guy in my squad, “Geez, that was a short round.” As our guys continued firing from behind me, I thought I heard a mortar tube firing from my right. The next round to explode was at the bottom of the hill we were on, and the rounds started coming up the hill in front of my squad. We were under attack by mortar fire from our right. I yelled, “Incoming!” and everyone hit the deck. The VC peppered the top of the hill with mortars.

When the mortars stopped I set up my squad for security and got all the pressure bandages I could and made my way to the top. It was like a meat market, bodies all over the place, parts of bodies everywhere. I tended to some of the wounded and later helped load the dead and wounded onto Med-Evac helicopters.

We took over a hundred casualties in those few minutes. I can still see it, smell it, taste it, as if it was today.”

— Interview with Jack Michel, Utica, New York, 12.22.11



SECOND FRONT: VIETNAM

Cpl. Jack Michel Timeline 1969-1970



Morning physical training run at Paris Island, S.C.



Squad member, Al Gray, having “breakfast of champions” near the Qua Son mountains



Squad members, Gary Sanders and Doug Reed, field stripping and cleaning two M16 A1 rifles in the Qua Son mountains



Med-Evac “Chinook” chopper (CH-47) taking off from an opening in the Qua Son Mountains

“Drinking was natural. My dad did it, grandfathers, uncles and cousins. We all drank from an early age. No one thought there was anything wrong with it.” – Interview with Jack Michel, Utica, New York, 12.22.11

“I became a Marine almost by accident. I received my draft notice and went to the induction seminar and the recruiter said, ‘Two of you in this room will go in the Marine Corp., the rest will go in the Army. Is there anybody who wants to go in the Marine Corp?’ I figured my dad was a Marine in the Pacific in World War II and that I should also be a Marine.”

– Interview with Jack Michel, Utica, New York, 12.22.11

“We were in the bush between six weeks and two months at a time looking for the VC, NVA fighters, and weapons. We ate C rations the whole time we were out in the bush. I was southwest of Da Nang and near the Laos border where the Ho Chi Minh trail came down from the north. In the Qua Son Mountains we ran into enemy patrols... When we came back in we would all drink for two days and nights.”

– Interview with Jack Michel, Utica, New York, 12.22.11 and email correspondence, 12.28.11

“The 7th Marines finally pulled out of Vietnam in September of 1970 and I was reassigned to the 5th Marines. By this time I was a squad leader.

A couple months later I was on a hill during a lot of rain, set up at night. We hadn’t been resupplied with anything in a couple of days, so we hadn’t eaten; we were cold, wet and tired. At about 2:30, 3 o’clock in the morning I blew. I just stood up and put my arms up and said, ‘If I can’t get out of this place any other way, shoot me!’ I was asked politely by a commanding officer to, ‘Please keep the noise down.’ That was the first indication that my bucket was full. We were in combat situations or situations where individuals were booby-trapped or injured at least three or four times every week for the entire time up to that point.”

– Interview with Jack Michel, Utica, New York, 12.22.11

Spring 1969, A Marine

March 1st, 1970, Vietnam

“I went to Vietnam March 1st of 1970 and we flew into Da Nang. From Da Nang they helicoptered us out to our units. The guys who I came over with all got split up and I went to my company, 3rd Battalion, 7th Marine Brigade, 1st Marine Division and they were stationed on a place called LZ Baldy... a secure area fire base that was about 17 kilometers southwest of Da Nang. ...It was about four days to five days in our firebase getting accumulated to the heat, and then they trucked us out into our units. My unit was in a place called Triple Culvert, which was just a bridge crossing over a road where a river was running through.”

– Interview with Jack Michel, Utica, New York, 12.22.11

March 1970 to December 1970

August 17th, 1970, Mortar Attack

“I had never seen anything as gruesome...”

“The attack was on LZ Rider, August 17, 1970. I set up my squad and I got all the pressure bandages from each guy that I could and I went to the top of the hill. ...I just froze because I had never seen anything as gruesome as the scene that was in front of me at that moment. What finally sparked me and got me back in action was somebody started saying, ‘He’s turning blue, he’s turning blue!’ That snapped me back to reality.

One guy was screaming and said to get away, [his buddy] needed a corpsman. I tried to help the [blue] guy again... and for some reason, I said, ‘I’m a corpsman.’ And he said, ‘I thought you were a squad leader.’ I said, ‘Well I am, but I’m also a corpsman,’ because he was not going to let anyone touch this guy until a corpsman showed up. So I flipped the [blue] guy over, smacked him in the back and he spit out a huge glob of blood. We got him patched up. I don’t know if he lived or not; he had three holes in his side that I could have put my thumb in.”

– Interview with Jack Michel, Utica, New York, 12.22.11

Winter 1970, My Bucket Was Full

SECOND FRONT: VIETNAM

Cpl. Jack Michel Timeline 1970-1980s



Da Nang Airbase



Quantico, Virginia



Michel while stationed at M.C.B. Quantico, VA, in 1971



1980 State Trooper vehicle

“I was reassigned to Quantico, Virginia for the rest of my time in the Marine Corp and for that time, probably longer, I was never without a bottle of scotch underneath the seat of my car.” – Interview with Jack Michel, Utica, New York, 12.22.11

“When I finally came back to the States, I came home on emergency leave. My dad was extremely ill and was not expected to live and my grandmother who lived with us had just died of a heart attack. So when I came home, I flew out of Da Nang at 5am, South East Asian Time, and finally got back to Buffalo, New York at about midnight, a day and a half later. The stewardesses on the airline were very kind and let us drink all we could, so I was pretty drunk when I got off the airplane. I talked with my folks for a short period of time, and then I went to a bar. I spent the rest of the night in the bar until they closed. Very weird coming home... I went to the funeral the next day for my grandmother.”

– Interview with Jack Michel, Utica, New York, 12.22.11

**November 1970
Coming Home on Leave**

**September 16, 1971
Discharged from
Active Duty**

“I left the bar at about 3 AM and was totally wasted. I had drunk way too much and had taken about four hits of speed, so I was really cranked. I lived with some friends about 20 miles away and the Thruway was the fastest way home. I remember thinking that if I hurried I could get two hours of sleep before I had to get up for work. I was doing about 85 MPH when the police stopped me and took me to the lock-up. I blew a .26. That mistake cost me a lot of money in fines and auto insurance. It also cost me my license for six months.”

– Email correspondence with Jack Michel, 12.28.11

1979, Drunk Driving Arrest

“ I used to drive about 50,000 miles a year and it was not unusual for me to be totally enraged for most of my drive home. A friend of mine once asked me, ‘What are all these bumps in the roof of your car?’ and I told him that, ‘I get so mad and so upset that I pound the top of my car roof with my fist because I had to do something to let this anger out of me.’ [I felt that] if you cut me off on the road, I would cut you off. I would do anything I could to get up in front of you. I have been known to run people off the road because they did something that I didn’t like or that I thought was stupid.”

– Interview with Jack Michel, Utica, New York, 12.22.11

Early 1980s, Road Rage

**December 1970, Permanent
Reassignment Duty Station,
Quantico, Virginia**

“I was stationed at Quantico for nine months and the group of people that I was stationed with, we all partied a lot; drinking often, numerous times every week to the point of excess; it was just normal.”

– Interview with Jack Michel, Utica, New York, 12.22.11

1978, At the Bar

“It was probably 1978 or 1979, it was after service... I stopped off at a local watering hole and was having a few drinks in a bar in Buffalo. As time went by, some people I knew were coming in and we were getting really wound up. I would get to a point where I was not able to stop drinking and didn't really care about time or responsibility, like work.

It is important to note that I was going through a divorce at this time in my life and was more interested in whose pants I could get into and how much alcohol and/or drugs I could ingest without dying.”

– Interview with Jack Michel, Utica, New York, 12.22.11 and email correspondence, 12.28.11

Late ‘70s, Early ‘80s

“I was stoned for about two years straight in the late ‘70s, early ‘80s. I don’t really remember. The numbness, the ability to forget about August 17th, the loss of numerous Marine buddies, the afternoon I beat the crap out of a 10 year old kid because he tried to steal my weapon, patrol after patrol, ambush after ambush; we were scared all the time. It’s just a fact of war.”

– Interview with Jack Michel, Utica, New York, 12.22.11

SECOND FRONT: VIETNAM

Cpl. Jack Michel Timeline 2000-Present



NYS Thruway



PTSD Clinic Batavia, NY



Michel as a resident at PTSD Clinic in Batavia, NY in March 2005



Michel and Judge Russell at Vet Court in Buffalo, NY in July 2012

“I was forcing everyone I knew away from me. My thought was to have no one left to mourn me when I died.”

– Email correspondence with Jack Michel, 12.28.11

<p>“Driving down the Thruway at 80, 85 MPH every day, both ways, to and from work, was so frustrating that I would take chances and pit myself and my ability against anything else on the road. [I thought,] ‘You do it to me and you better watch out cause I’m coming after you.’”</p> <p>– Email correspondence with Jack Michel, 12.28.11</p>	<p>“I needed to be stabilized because I was super depressed and suicidal. [After the two incidents that made me look at myself,] my dad, who is a WWII veteran and suffers from PTSD, was going to the Veterans Service Center and I went with him. I told him that I think I need to talk to someone about combat stress.</p> <p>Later, I went to the Batavia VA and saw a counselor and they didn’t want me to leave. When I protested, they only would let me leave if I came in the next day. I had told them that I wanted to kill myself and I knew how and where but I didn’t know when, and I would have done it earlier if I didn’t have financial problems. I couldn’t leave my wife with such a financial mess. One of the ways I was going to do it was with a car.”</p> <p>– Interview with Jack Michel, Utica, New York, 12.22.11</p>	<p>“I work with veterans with PTSD, for suicide prevention, and at Buffalo Veterans Treatment Court. I have been given opportunities to meet and work with individuals who are not of this earth; people who are so special and so compassionate and knowledgeable and kind that they must come from a very special place.</p> <p>I know this sounds like I’m ‘Born Again’ and in some ways, I guess I have been. I found a reason to live and to go through life by giving 100% of myself to any veteran who needs help. I only wish I had more to give.</p> <p>Sometimes I’m a selfish bastard and that’s when I have to step back and look inside myself to remember who and what I am and why I exist. Ain’t life a funny old dog?”</p> <p>– Email correspondence with Jack Michel, 12.28.11</p>
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2000 – 2003, Road Rage Continues	2003, Veterans Service Center and the VA	Today
<p>2003, The Last Straw</p> <p>“I finally sought help after two incidents. [The first was when] a coworker, who I didn’t work with too often, heard me say again, ‘I should have died in Nam.’ He said, ‘You know Jack, you say that all the time now.’ That made me think...</p> <p>The second incident was when someone cut me off on the Thruway and I chased him for about 20 miles at over 100 MPH when I suddenly came to my senses and stopped on the side of the road. This was in 2003 and soon after that I started into PTSD recovery.”</p> <p>– Email correspondence with Jack Michel, 12.28.11</p>	<p>February 19, 2005 In-Patient Treatment at the Batavia VA</p> <p>“My first treatment for PTSD was for one week and then on January 5, 2005, I hurt my left knee in a skiing accident. Since I couldn’t do anything else, I went into the Batavia VA on February 19, 2005, for six months. First thing I saw, I was in a group of seven men, six from Vietnam, one from Iraq, and I felt I was home. At the VA, I learned to talk about my demons because for the previous fifteen years I spent withdrawing from society and now I had to learn new techniques. Now I do service and I’m in the mentor program.”</p> <p>– Interview with Jack Michel, Utica, New York, 12.22.11</p>	

SECOND FRONT: VIETNAM

Cpl. Jack Michel: In My Father's Footsteps



Saipan



Marines at Iwo Jima



Iwo Jima

“My dad still has bad dreams... he has been out of the Marine Corps for 67 years.”

— Interview with Jack Michel, Utica, New York, 12.22.11

“My dad went into the Marines in 1942. He was part of the 4th Marine Division assigned to take Roi-Namur. The invasion was fairly easy. The invasion of Saipan wasn't as easy. My dad was injured on his 21st day in combat. He was blown up on Hill 500 along with most of his platoon. Next for him was Iwo Jima. He was in the 1st wave to hit the island and things went really well for the first hour. Then all hell broke loose. The Japanese opened up with everything and from everywhere. My dad was severely injured by a heavy mortar. He was unconscious for, I think, two or three weeks and woke up in the hospital on Oahu, Hawaii.

He was mustered out and got married to my mom and started to work for the New York Central Rail Road. From the time I was small... I remember times my dad was pretty drunk. Alcohol was always available at parties and gatherings. My dad was gone at work a lot. He was a fireman and then became an engineer for the NYC RR and retired after about 40 years... he worked all the time.

I didn't understand many of his outbursts or reactions to many things until after I went through the four-week PTSD recovery treatment program. I was thinking a lot about what I had learned and somehow I came around to my dad and I was able to see the correlation between his family detachment, angry outbursts and his isolation from all the friends from the past, and my own behavior.”

— Interview with Jack Michel, Utica, New York, 02.04.12



SECOND FRONT: VIETNAM

Cpl. Jack Michel on PTSD and Therapy



Civil War



Trench warfare, WWI



Iwo Jima, WWII

“PTSD has a whole host of names like, *Soldier’s Heart* [from the] Civil War, *Shell Shock* [from] WWI, *Combat Fatigue* [from] WWII and now *PTSD* [and *Combat Trauma*]. It's all the same thing, and like alcoholism, it never goes away; you just try to find a way to deal with it, make peace with it. That's all you can do. But you have to do something or the problem will eat you alive and spit out the pieces. The therapy available today is so good and helpful that if you are a combat individual or have lived through trauma, you owe it to yourself to get the help. It's your only way to go because it won't go away!”

— Interview with Jack Michel, Utica, New York, 12.22.11 and email correspondence 02.04.12



173rd Airborne, Hill 875, Vietnam



Operation Enduring Freedom, Afghanistan



SECOND FRONT: VIETNAM

Second Front Today: Learning from Vietnam Veterans' Narratives *As 40,000 OIF and IEF Veterans return to NYS in 2012*



Last Duty Station, Thu Duc, Vietnam, 1967



Thu Duc, Vietnam, 1967

“The combat veterans depicted have, through availing themselves of the help in the VA system, gone on to highly successful and rewarding careers and have become valuable members of their communities.

Each of the heroes in this exhibit have changed their lives. All but one do not drink today, and their rage has subsided, for it takes courage to go forward on the Second Front.”

— Crafted with Michael McMahon, Menands, New York, 09.06.12



The Fighting 69th at Fort Hood before deployment



Sergeant Mike DiNitto handing out school bags in Nangarhar Province, Afghanistan

SECOND FRONT: VIETNAM

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Please answer our survey, which is available at www.surveymonkey.com/s/T5QW569

Your response will allow us to enhance our exhibits in the future.

You may also email Denis Foley PhD at foleyde@sunyit.edu.