

## A Tale of History and a Hero

By David "Bucky" Miller

Everyone has their stories. We are all, in our own way, a walking history book. And all of our stories are important. Some stories about families in distress, about people helping people, about acts of heroism, about random acts of kindness and, most importantly, about love of our children. Some of my favorites are those of people who have faced tremendous adversity, overcome it and pressed on with life.

I play in a senior softball league here in Palm Bay, Florida. There are about 120 guys who range in age from 50 to 74 playing on 9 teams. We are a bunch of "ustawuzes", "wannabe's" and "maybe I can's" who just can't seem to get the clay off our shoes. We live for that moment when our badly worn bodies grant us the elation of a sterling defensive play or generate a rifle-shot line drive to win "the game".

Think about all the stories that were lived during the 6500+ years those players have lived. This is just one of those stories - about one of my team-mates.

Carl Miller is a very pleasant man to talk to, quiet, enthusiastic, a team player, a real nice guy. Like everyone in the league, his best softball days are behind him. We all accept that and play the best we can with what we have left in the tank. Carl is one of the guys who enjoys the game of softball, is content to catch, gets an occasional hit and is thankful that he can still play.

I just didn't know how thankful he is.

Last evening, during some of my bench time while the team was on the field, I over heard a young man, about 10 years old, talking to Carl.

Something about a relative who had been a Marine. Carl mentioned that he too was a Marine. Remember, once a Marine - always a Marine. It was a short conversation but the young man was, like all kids, of the Mindset that all Marines had "been in a war" and he asked Carl if he had "been in a war". Carl responded that he had been to Vietnam and had been hurt. End of conversation, the kid walked away.

I approached Carl and asked, "You take a round?" He said something about being torn up pretty good. Then he rolled up his left sleeve and revealed a deep scar in his shoulder, missing muscle tissue and other scars leading down his arm. His right arm had long scars on the forearm up to his shoulder. He commented that he had also taken "Three AK rounds in the left thigh and hip."

And his story began to flow.

Carl was a Marine, an infantryman, with the 1<sup>st</sup> battalion, 5<sup>th</sup> Marine Regiment. The most decorated marine unit to come out of Vietnam. There was an assault on his company's position. His wounds were caused by shrapnel from "An eighty deuce that landed right in our foxhole". He was sharing a foxhole with 2 other Marines. Carl was on watch, sitting upright, when the round hit. Carl was blown out of the hole and his two buddies were killed. Carl's left arm was severed at the shoulder and he suffered numerous other wounds including to his right arm. During the attack, Viet Cong overran the Marine positions and began to bayonet the wounded and dead Marines. A Viet Cong soldier began to bayonet

the body of one of Carl's buddies. Although he was seriously wounded, Carl used his injured right arm to reach his rifle but didn't have the strength to aim. He fired a couple rounds into the dirt just to stop the bayoneting. The Viet Cong turned, walked over to Carl, stood over him, put a fresh magazine into his AK-47 and started firing - full automatic. The first round hit Carl's lower left thigh, the second one mid-thigh and the third hit his hip. The impact of those hits caused Carl to roll to the side and the remaining rounds missed. The Viet Cong ran away, leaving Carl for dead.

Carl lay there, in excruciating pain, from 9:20PM until the next morning and never lost consciousness. The corpsman who found him had the foresight to gauze-wrap his arm to his body.

There were 30 Marines in Carl's company. Only 11 lived and they were all seriously wounded. Carl spent a year and half in the hospital, lost 2 inches of his left arm and his left proximal humerus. Ultimately, he was discharged from the Marines.

I stood there looking at this man, blinking back tears that he had given so much for his country. I reached out, shook his hand, stammered a choked-up, "Thank you." and turned away.

But this story doesn't end there.

A few minutes later the young man returned. He asked Carl what he did after he "got out". Carl placed his arm around the young man's shoulder and said, "I went to college." Carl used his GI Bill to earn both a Bachelors Degree and a Master's Degree.

Remember - we were playing softball and the game was moving into its final inning. It was the bottom of the last inning and we were down 4 runs. We scored 1, made an out and eventually loaded the bases. And who came to bat with the game on the line - The Marine!!!

Carl usually hits ground balls or short fly balls out to about 100-125 feet - not difficult outs for the defense. The defense knew that and pulled their outfield in to about 150-175 in the hopes of turning a quick double play since Carl doesn't run too fast.

The pitches to Carl begin. With the bases loaded the pitcher has to throw strikes. And he put one in Carl's wheel house! The Marine blasted the second pitch. A 225 foot screamin' line drive into center field! Burned the center fielder! While the center fielder chased the ball into the outfield, 3 runs raced home to tie the game! Carl used all the speed he could muster and rolled into 2<sup>nd</sup> with a double!!!! He could be the winning run!!! He asked for and we provided him a courtesy runner. The next guy up was the other catcher, who was smart enough to wait out a walk. Next up - our lead-off hitter. They walked him to load the bases and set up a double play all the way around. The number 2 batter in our line-up stroked a single, scored Carl's runner from 3<sup>rd</sup> and the game is ours!!!!!! If we could have, we would have carried Carl off the field!!!

The Marine was the hero of the game.

The game isn't the important thing. What is important is that a man who gave youthful pain, flesh and blood to his country and overcame debilitating injuries can still play and enjoy the game we all learned as boys. These are the type of men - among whom we walk. They all have a story.

This Marine's softball story is one I will never forget. Semper Fi, Carl Miller