

Dale Richard Colledge interview August 2, 2007

Hospital Corpsman 3rd Class, US Navy, September 1966-April 1971

Dale decided to enlist in the military, rather than be drafted, to give him the most flexibility in choosing his military occupation. After graduating from Owen J. Roberts HS and deciding upon the Navy, he enlisted and was sworn in on September 29, 1966. From there, it was onto a train for Chicago and the Naval Station at Great Lakes for basic training.

Choosing a Job...

While there, the recruits were asked to pick three areas of interest in which they would like to serve. Dale selected his three and then was advised by a counselor that he should pick a fourth area, hospital corpsman, which he probably wouldn't get. Sure enough, Dale was selected to become a corpsman

Hospital Corpsman school was also at Great Lakes and there were three months of learning to draw blood, bandage wounds, give shots and other basic medical training. After graduating, Dale was transferred to work in the dispensary Little Creek Naval Amphibious base near Norfolk, VA where he served from April to August 1967.



In August, 1967, it was off to Camp Lejeune, NC. It was here that Dale went through Field Medical Service School which consisted of learning to give medical treatment in the field while dealing with combat situations at the same time. Part of the training consisted of crawling under barbed wire while live rounds were fired overhead.

In March of 1968, orders were given assigning Dale to the 5th Marine Division at Camp Pendleton, CA. Duties included working in the dispensary and handling Marines on sick call. After serving for three



years in the Navy, Dale had never been on a ship. His chance came during landing maneuvers with the Marines. In order to board the ship that was to take them out to sea, they had to walk across another ship. On this ship, Dale saw a fellow OJR graduate, but didn't have time to stay and talk.

While the ship was docked overnight, Dale became seasick from the sound of the water splashing against the ship. Once at sea, things were better. After a few days, everyone climbed down the rope nets over the side of the ship, fully armed and boarded the landing craft which took them into the beaches at Camp Pendleton, WWII style. Once on shore, the medical company set up a tent and practiced triage.

An interesting helicopter ride...

During another set of maneuvers, some of the medical corp heard that the Marines would be taking a helicopter and they thought it would be fun to go along. It wasn't until they were airborne that they found out the Marines would be exiting the helicopter by repelling down ropes and so would the

Dale R. Colledge

medical corp! The rope went down through a hole in the floor and the instructions were to hold onto the rope and slide.

California was a nice place to spend off duty time and Dale saw the Phillies play the Dodgers, take in a John Wayne movie at Graumen's Chinese Theatre and ride the cable cars in San Francisco. They had four weeks of leave per year and in 1968, Dale came home for Christmas. During this time, the new sanctuary at Cedarville was being built and Dale got to see the cinder blocks going up.

Overseas...

In July of 1969, orders were received for duty in Vietnam, starting in September of that year. After taking leave at home, Dale reported to Travis AFB for the flight to Vietnam via Hawaii, Midway and Okinawa. Upon landing, Dale joined the 1st Marine Division with the First battalion, 7th Marines who had been in combat. Dale's responsibility was for three or four platoons of Marines as the Corpsman. While he assumed he was a replacement for the previous Corpsman, he didn't ask what happened to his predecessor.

One of the first patrols involved boarding helicopters to be taken to the top of a mountain and then sweep down the side in search of the enemy. They stopped half way down for the night and Dale remembers thinking that this time, the guards were posted for real. But no enemies were seen and the Marines walked back to camp.

Where they served was not jungle, but open fields and rice paddies with some wooded areas. Because of the severe rain, sleeping in pup tents was difficult and staying dry was not possible. For most of the six weeks he was there, it seemed like a big scout troop out on a hike. Numerous patrols brought no contact with the enemy. Although they would witness helicopters firing in the distance and shells would be fired over their heads. They would patrol for days at a time, a fact Dale kept from his Mom in letters home.

In one of his letters home, Dale mentioned someone in Pottstown who wanted to send letters to a Marine who didn't get much mail. Dale had talked to the chaplain about getting the address of a Marine who the volunteer in Pottstown could write to.



A Life Saving Helicopter Ride...

On the morning of October 4, 1969 Dale wrote his mother a two page letter and mailed it. In the afternoon, his squad went out for a "walk around the park." Beside a line of trees and the Lieutenant stopped the column and took two men with him to the right of their position and told the rest to stay. Dale heard rounds going off and for the first time heard the phrase "Corpsman Up". He moved forward and found a marine lying on his back with a bullet wound to the throat. Dale was over him on his hands and knees and saw that he had to do a tracheotomy on the Marine, but had nothing to do it with. While deciding on a course of action, Dale was shot with the bullet exiting near his left kidney in the front.

Dale R. Colledge

In severe pain, Dale went into shock, but does remember asking to make sure his wallet stayed with him and a Marine known as "Frog" saying it would be all right, "We'll get him." A helicopter was called in to evacuate Dale, the wounded Marines and others. Dale believes the wounded Marine he had been assisting died that day along with another member of the squad.

After arriving at the Da Nang hospital, Dale had extensive surgery which required 13 units of blood. During the surgery, a tear in the bladder was repaired, some of the bowel was resected and his left kidney removed and a colostomy performed. On October 11, Dale was transferred from intensive care to the surgical ward. He remembers waking up at night around 11 pm and saying something to the nurse who said be quiet and go to sleep. Dale put his arms down by his side and found blood. He was hemorrhaging internally. Taken into surgery, it was discovered an artery was leaking.

A Helicopter Ride to Japan...

When he was sufficiently recovered, Dale was Helicoptered to Yokosuka Naval hospital in Japan. After being placed on a ward, a corpsman or a nurse came back to check on him. This person found him unconscious and hemorrhaging internally again, and he was off to surgery again. Later, in intensive care, Dale was still in pain and another surgery was ordered where a gangrenous gall bladder was found and removed. During this time, Dale's Mother was receiving Western Union telegrams updating her on Dale's condition. Because of the fluctuations in his conditions, his Mother would go to a friend's house before opening the telegram.

By November 21, 1969, Dale was recovered enough to be flown home via the short route over Alaska and then to Philadelphia naval hospital 35 miles from home. The first time his mother came to visit him, she came up in the elevator with the pastor from church, J. Stewart Kreiss. Dale's Mother didn't do elevators, but did go with the pastor. Cedarville United Methodist Church held a prayer vigil one night for Dale's health and recovery after learning he was wounded. Dale feels that these prayers contributed greatly to his healing.

In February of 1970, Dale was released from the hospital and given temporary duty there pending further surgery. In October 1970, the colostomy was removed and Dale was almost as good as new. In January of 1971, the medical board released Dale to the Veterans Hospitals and in April was released to the Naval reserves for another year and a half.

Dale views 1969 as a turning point in his life and has not bitter thoughts about his experience. Even today, little things remind him of that year and what he went through.