

Full Circle: May 9, 1967 – May 9, 2017
by: Bob (Marty) Marten EO3



My career in the Navy started out in the fall of 1966, after graduating in the spring and not looking at going to school. The draft at that time was hot on my tail so I opted for the Navy, thus the odyssey begins. It was decided by the powers to be at boot camp that I would be a radioman. The only problem was that radioman school was full at the time so I, along with my buddy from my home town who I went through boot with, were assigned to the USS Twining (a destroyer) until our slots in "A" school were open.

Of course, we were immediately assigned as Boatswains Mates and got to know all the ins and

outs of chipping paint--so much for my qualifying high in the radioman test at boot. I can honestly say I have never had a bad case of flu or any other sickness but I suffered big time with seasickness, puking day and night no matter how calm or rough the seas were. I'm not sure who was sicker my buddy or me but we both knew we had to get off that tin can.

My career as a fleet sailor ended one night as I stood starboard lookout, unbeknownst to me the Captain of the ship was standing behind me, not a good place for him or me. I was sick as usual and had to upchuck and let go with gusto; only problem was the wind carried it right back at me and the Captain. Right there and then it was decided by the Captain and the U.S. Navy I was not a candidate for a fleet sailor. On return to port I was assigned temporary shore duty until they could decide what to do with me. I was called into the office one day and a Yeoman asked me some of my work history and I told him of my many summers working on my uncle's farm. BINGO, his eyes lit up and he asked "can you drive a truck and tractor," I responded "no problem-- no problem driving that kind of equipment." He joyfully said "we have found a slot for you; you are going to be a Seabee as an Equipment Operator."

I went home on leave in May before showing up at Port Hueneme; while at home my best childhood friend was killed in action in Vietnam. It was May 9, 1967. I was sitting on my parent's front porch that morning when the Marine recruiter showed up across the street at my friend's parent's house. A lasting impression to this day, all we were told he was KIA in Quang Tri providence.

So, it was "Port Hueneme here I come." As soon as I got there I learned that my "A" school for EO, wouldn't start until September so I was assigned to the base hospital do all sorts of jobs. EO

school was great and I met many friends and loved the area. After finishing EO school I, along with one other classmate Carl Stahl, were assigned to MCB 11. As they weren't back from Dong Ha yet I was assigned to Seabee Team Training under Steelworker Chief Snyder. I must say it was some of the best duty I had as a Seabee and the Chief was a great teacher and mentor, it was there I learned to weld which I still do to this day. Once everyone from 11 was back from leave I joined the battalion. The next few months were a lot of training to get ready for our next deployment to Quang Tri. I was on one of the first flights out and was immediately assigned to Security Company and the infamous Sanders who everyone came to adore (ha ha). Security Company was a different exercise in futility; we had orders to hold fire until given permission to do so no matter the situation. I was on bunker 9 and every night around 6 o'clock one of our friends across the river would take a couple of pot shots at us. After a couple of weeks of this harassment it became a sport to see who could shoot or shoot the moon first by yours truly. Once I returned to Alpha Company I was assigned to first platoon as a truck driver, it entailed dumps to cargo, with day after day on the road from Cam Lo to as far south as My Chan and an occasional convoy of cargo trucks to Da Nang and back.



I served under Chief Tom Ryan. He was another important part of my Seabee experience; I had the utmost respect for Chief Ryan and would do anything he asked. I ended up working on the bridge detachment at My Chan until Operation Roadrunner started and then the fun and grief started. Being a truck driver put us in

harm's way every day as we were continuously exposed to the enemy (and our own troops) at times. Roadrunner was a twenty four/ seven ordeal with the worst times driving at night. We never knew what was around the next corner and frequently were shot at, only to have to dodge the tanks that were our security. We were not given shotgun riders so we were on our own hoping our trucks wouldn't break down. The road masters had us spaced out so if one truck went down we wouldn't be bunched up and loose more. My truck died one night and I was told to wait for the wrecker. It was a really long wait in the pitch black hearing all kinds of noises in the bush around me. To say the least, I was ready for a beer when getting back to camp. I thought that would be it for the night but no way; EO2 Earl Harris meets me assigns me another truck! A lot of prayers and talking with the angel on my shoulder got me and the others through that ordeal. My time with the Seabees instilled a work ethic in me that has lasted throughout my life. I have many fond memories with those I served with, especially the close man-to-man friendships I experienced in Vietnam—nothing has come close in the 50 years since.

On a side note, four years ago Ted Lyman sent me an e-mail and asked if I would look into something for him—something that bothered him. He said that there is a Marine website devoted to Khe Sahn and its battles. It has listed all the KIA's and had our Senior Chief Barnes as being from MCB 10. Ted had tried to get them to correct it to MCB 11, to no avail. Since my wife and I are webmasters for the MCB 11 Association he asked if I could contact that webmaster to get that error corrected. I did, and the correction was made.



While in the process I read through their site and found my childhood friend had passed there on May 9, 1967, I mentioned this to Ted and he said he had been at Khe Sahn at that time and had helped with the off loading of stretchers that particular night from the choppers (he must have found this info in his journal or letters home.) MCB 11's tents were next to Charlie Med and across from the med-evac LZ. I write this on May 9, 2017, fifty years since Joe Klemencic passed. It is a bitter-sweet day for me as May 9 is also my wife's and my forty second wedding anniversary. Joe was a much loved young man as his nephew and my

son are also named Joseph. Life has come full circle!

Career Summary since the Navy

Upon returning to Montana and 40 below zero weather I went back to work for the U.S. Forest Service where I had worked before entering the Navy. In the off season I attended the University of Montana for two years, the U of M was the hot bed of political Vietnam protests so I didn't fit in so well. I continued to work for the Forest Service on the interregional Hot Shot fire crew eventually in 1974 becoming crew boss. We fought fires for 6 to 8 months a year from Florida to Alaska, my last season was a difficult one and I decided to go back to school. I attended Vo-Tech for diesel mechanic where I also met my wife and was married and was hired by the FMC mines in Green River Wyo., loved the job but hated the country so moved on after a year. I was hired by the Federal Aviation Agency as an electro/mechanic and stayed with them for 25 years retiring in 2002. The FAA was a great job but entailed a lot of on the road travel so I missed out on a lot of watching the kids grow up. Still married to the same wonderful wife and we have three children and three grandchildren. My hobbies include woodcarving and working on old cars. Life has been good!!!!

Contact: Bob (Marty) Marten at marten14@bresnan.net