

## Vietnam: A Soldier's Story

By Artie Maglionico

The Vietnam War was the subject of much controversy during the turbulent '60s. To those American men and women who were called upon to serve their country, it was a mission that would change their outlook on life forever. One thing is for certain: a soldier did not come out the same way he or she went in, while 58,000 plus never came home.

Mr. Dan Galdo of Lodi, NJ was among those who served in that war. Dan was born in Newark, NJ on September 10, 1940. He attended Barringer High School where he graduated in 1959. In May of 1963, Dan was drafted into the United States Army and soon found himself suffering the rigors of boot camp at Fort Dix. From there Dan was sent to Fort Benning, GA where he received 8 weeks of advanced training on the 105 Howitzer. In 1965 Dan's entire 1<sup>st</sup> Cavalry Air Division was shipped to Vietnam. On arrival the Howitzers {Machine Guns} were attached to CH 47 Chinook Helicopters.

"We boarded a transport ship in South Carolina towing the Howitzers behind us," recalls Galdo. "I knew I was safe since the name of the ship was the USS Rose, which was my sister's name." After a short stay over in Long Beach, CA, the Division began its 30 day journey to the unfriendly shores of Vietnam. "Our base camp was an airfield that housed Helicopters and war planes," said Dan. "From there we went on firing missions on the CH47 where I served as a door gunner firing the M60 machine gun at treetop level." Most transporting was done by Helicopter since the terrain was not conducive to successful maneuvering.

Upon entering a landing zone the CH47 unloaded the crew and artillery in a crucial 11 seconds. There were times when the Helicopter landed in the wrong location causing the crew to locate on foot the position where the first Howitzer was dropped off. "Only then," recalls Dan, "could fire be directed toward the enemy, which to our surprise was only 100 yards away." For Dan and his fellow soldiers, it was a them or us situation. It is a reality that changes a person's outlook on life forever. "Only a soldier at war could understand a situation like that," said Dan.

Besides fighting an elusive, no holds barred enemy, Dan and his division had to cope with malaria, Dengue Fever, Trench Foot, deadly snakes, 130 degree temperatures, and relentless monsoons that dropped as much as 66 inches of rain in a month. All of

this while trying to stay out of harm's way which was difficult to accomplish since the worst that could happen was always happening. "We were in constant danger," said Dan. "We carried our M-16 rifle 24/7, even in the latrine."

Among the weaponry in Dan's arsenal was the 105 Howitzer, M-60 machine gun, 3.5 Bazooka, M-79 Grenade launcher, the M-16 rifle and Claymore mines. "I had access to this arsenal at all times," said Dan. "I was an Assistant Gunner."

"There were no showers," recalls Dan. "We shaved using our helmets as sinks. Sometimes we had to wait three weeks before we could return to base camp and clean up."

Toward the end of his tour the stress of facing death on an hourly basis began to take its toll on Dan. During the heat of intense night fighting Dan had to call his supervisor to fire illuminating rounds from the 105 Howitzer, which enabled soldiers to locate the position of the enemy. The enemy was only a few hundred feet away and all hell broke loose.

"Then there was direct and intense fire at close range," remembered Dan. "There was no time to think. There'd be plenty of time for thinking later if you were lucky."

Due to the constant stress of battle Dan's physical and mental wellbeing was on a downward spiral. By the time he returned to Long Beach, CA Dan, 6 footer, went from 180 pounds down to a feeble 112. His cousins who lived nearby had to nurse him back to health. They didn't want his parents to see him in this horrible condition. Finally, in January of 1966, Dan returned home to his loving family. Upon his arrival, Dan was met with a dark reception. "We were met with disrespect from our fellow Americans," recalls Dan. "We came home to riots, violent anti war demonstrations, and draft card burning. I felt as if I was the bad guy; there was little or no support. I asked myself what did I risk my life for?"

Dan's tour of duty included Cambodia, Laos, Pleiku, and Ia Drang.

In 1968, Dan became a stagehand for Union Local 21, where he received an award for 50 years of outstanding service. Dan retired in 2010. In 1977, Dan married Connie Brouder, who he met and married in Nashua, New Hampshire. Connie passed away in 2013. The couple moved to Lodi in 1999 and have a son, Daniel, and two grandchildren, Oliver and Enza.

“This is my life so far and what a ride it’s been,” said Dan. “God bless America and our men and women of the military.”

Dan would agree that it’s worth repeating: God bless America and our men and women of the Military. Past, Present, and forever.