I was with Fox company 2/5 (Hue City) up until I was medevacked to Yokosuka, Japan in April 68. I was in the hospital until late June at which point, I was returned to duty and sent to Okinawa. I had traveled to Okinawa twice before, but this trip was different in that it was carefree. My tour was up in just over one month, so I knew that this time I was not on my way back to the “Nam”. I was going home.

I had been medevacked before (August 67 – naval hospital Guam) but when I was released at that time (11/67) I still had 8 months to do on my tour and was sent back to Vietnam. That required that I go back thru Okinawa. The processing seemed to take no time at all and within a few days I was on a flight back to Danang. As bad luck would have it (I blamed it on the Green Machine) this last visit to Okinawa was not going to be so short lived. Because I was going home it seemed the medical folks on the “Rock” were in no hurry to rate me fit for duty. So, I was on light duty, sleeping late, no assignments, going into town every night and spending lots of the money I had banked over the past year. It was during that time that I was informed of a mandatory formation for all enlisted men, Sgts and below who had or were awaiting orders for CONUS and who had a minimum of 18 months to do on their enlistment.

The meeting was led by a Captain and two SSgts from 8th and I. These three were as “squared away” Marines as I had ever seen. They had been sent to Okinawa for several weeks to identify enough returning Marines (all Marines leaving the Nam went thru Okinawa on their way to the US) to fill all the slots in both Guard and MCI companies. Their offer was simple – if they liked you (the eyeball test) and you had the 18 months to do then they would have your orders changed to Marine Barracks, Washington, D.C. Oh, and the sweetener was that while there was no guarantee it was very unlikely that you would go back to the Nam. I was an 0311 with nearly 23 months left on my enlistment. I was a corporal with two hearts and a years’ worth (not counting hospital time) of combat experience. I was certain that I would get back to the states (my orders were for Lejeune) spend several months with some grunt unit and then get orders back to the land of rice paddies. I could remember my DI’s boot camp speech – “The country may not be at war, but the Corp is and if you are a grunt and haven’t been to the Nam you are going and if you’ve been you are going back.”

I jumped at the deal, went home on leave, received my change of orders and reported to the Barracks on a very hot night in August 1968. I had no uniforms other than the summer kakis I had been given in Okinawa and was still limping from the leg injuries I had been medivacked for. I spent several weeks in “Weeds and Seeds” (mostly shinning brass at Post #1 (??) and going to Henderson Hall to get uniforms) during which time a full platoon had been assembled. We were sent to live in a vacant barracks across the river at what was then Bolling Airforce base. It was an odd, very uncomfortable and tense situation. Most of the Marines teachings us the ins and outs of 8th and I were the very Marines we were replacing. Some had been there so long that their enlistment was nearly over, and they would be getting out. However, there were several who would be going to Vietnam as soon as they were no longer needed as our instructors. We were not the most attentive students. We were all “salty” vets, all had been to the Nam and most had Purple Hearts. We were not very patient with a second trip through boot camp which was what the 8th and I training felt like. By the spring of 1969 we were ready for our first Friday Night parade and Tuesday night ceremony at Iwo.

Some guys couldn’t or wouldn’t adjust, took their chances and requested transfers to Lejeune or worst of all Pendleton. (Pendleton was going in the wrong direction). There were others who wanted out and had a nonhazardous MOS (i.e. air wing) and went on to Middle River or Memphis or El Toro. I had no such MOS and wasn’t taking any chances. I had spent nearly 7 months in I Corp so for me DC was just a little slice of heaven. They could shave my head all they wanted or have me stand for an hour plus in the summer heat outside the chapel at Arlington. They could send me to Camp David in the middle of winter and have me stand a post on one of the towers along the fence line in the snow. Nixon’s first inaugural parade was freezing and Eisenhower’s funeral in Kansas was boiling. Being a shaved head Marine in DC during the height of the antiwar period limited our social life. But none of that mattered. It didn’t even come close. I never forgot my daily Vietnam promise, prayer and pleading that if I survived this insanity …….. I knew I had hit the jackpot. Even when the troop drawdown in the Nam got serious in 69’ and Marines were coming home in entire units, I never second guessed my choice.

I met my wife in DC. She worked at the Navy Yard, just a few blocks from where I lived. (At that time Guard Company was housed at the yard and MCI at the barracks). We were married three months before I was discharged and in February will celebrate our 50th anniversary. My wounds resulted in a VA disability and the means to get a degree from Georgetown University. I still have my dress blues, a cover that is just the right shape without being too flat. Neither fit but that is ok. Next to them in the closet are my jungle boots, pants and the “salty” utility cover that I wore when I left Okinawa for the last time. They are my only possessions from the Nam.

The pictures of Memories of the 70’s brought back these memories and many others.