

"My Country"

In 1967, I was a 26 year old rotating intern in Brooklyn. At the time numerous protest marches were being organized. I marched in two of them, Physicians against the War down Fifth Ave and the the March on the Pentagon. Many of my fellow interns and residents also marched. I did not get arrested or tear gassed so I was happy about that. But, I must be frank in telling you that I did not protest out of conviction or politics but rather I knew I would be drafted soon I was was frightened and concerned about being in a combat zone. I never felt any disloyalty to my country. So when the the draft notice came in December of that year with orders to fly to Fort Sam Houston in San Antonio, Texas and from there to Saigon I simply obeyed. While there, as fate would have it I was found fit for duty but not in Vietnam as I had a lung disease and was immunocompromized and since tuberculosis was endemic there, the medical board decided that I should stay stateside.

In January, 1968 at Fort Sam, 350 doctors and dentists were undergoing a modified basic training course so as to prepare ourselves for any eventuality. It was at the height of the Tet offensive. These guys were literally the cream of American medicine. Most were young married guys who were in practice at the peak of their careers and did not resented being drafted and having to go off to war. Some would do everything possible to gum up the works like starting to march on the right foot instead of the left, thereby throwing off the cadence. But for the most part all knew what the score was and served admirably.

After basic training I was assigned to the induction center in Cincinnati. Now that was an experience! The staff consisted of personnel from the Army, Navy, Air Force and Marines almost all of whom had spent at least one tour of duty in Vietnam. As an examining physician I was their "doc" and although not a CO and not a lifer we had a special relationship. If I were in Nam with them I have no doubt they would do everything to protect me. They were among the greatest bunch of guys I ever had the privilege to work with. Now you have to realize that although we were not in a combat zone, being in the Federal Building in the Armed Forces

Examining and Entrance Station rendered it fair game for the protesters and crazies. We had major bomb threats regularly but the greatest challenge was interviewing the draftees and volunteers daily and applying my medical knowledge as well as my sense of fairness to all. Recruiters would come in and present volunteers who obfuscated major medical problems so as to pass the physical as they were anxious to serve whereas on the other hand, kids would appear before me with reams of medical notes indicating all sorts of quasi disqualifying diseases. Doctors who were anti war would write up medical notes that bordered on outright untruths. One young man appeared with literally a one inch thick file of medical summaries so that I asked him whether he arrived via an ambulance! It was such a charade. Some kids while being examined by me and the other medical officer were asked to stand so that we could check for undescended testicles. On turning around one kid had "Fuck the Army" printed on his buttocks! It worked both ways, however. When I was examining a young man from Crab Orchard, Kentucky, I discovered golfball sized tumor in his left testicle. Upon asking him how long he had had said lump, he answered "what lump". He just wanted to fight in Vietnam. You had to be almost a King Solomon to discern to truth from the lie.

Some experiences at that time made me angry. If you flew in uniform, you could go standby and pay only \$50 one way, Cincinnati to New York.

The only problem was that the way people looked you in uniform was very uncomfortable. No one smiled or thanked me with the exception of the airline personnel.

All in all, my two and a half year stint in the Army was very positive as I learned quite a bit about those who served; how they thought and felt about the war, the country, the government. Every Friday afternoon work we would meet at the Apollo Lounge for Happy Hour. Almost everyone in the medical section would meet and chat. It was a special kind of camaraderie. Men and women, black and white, affluent and poor but all honorable citizens trying to do what we thought was best for us and the country. As an added bonus for me, I met my future wife there! She was a

Department of the Army secretary who booked consultations with specialists such as orthopedists and psychiatrists(of which we had many!)

—*Harold, Niskayuna*