



I'm Frank "Don't Do Anything I Wouldn't DO" Have Sunny Days

& Don't look down at all the Shit on your road, When there are boulders in your road Walk the woods

Many friends have asked me to write a book, but my first wife conveniently lost all four of my diaries, covering my childhood, after high school, two tours in Vietnam and my four years at UW Stout. So, I have trouble remembering; I call it senioritis. But I'm pretty sure of 95% of it.

My folks were on a rented farm where I grew up, north of Chilton, but I was actually born in the Fond du Lac, Wisconsin hospital. 5-29-1947

My father was Francis, Senior. I'm a Junior. My mother was Bernice. My dad was a carpenter until WWII got hot, then he became a farmer to avoid the draft. My mom didn't complete high school. They got hot for each other, she had a kid, and they had to get married. Dad had a heart condition, so she got to do all the labor, milking the cows, feeding, plus the house chores and having these kids. Later on, my dad became quite abusive.

There were a dozen kids and the last three were no good, born dead, mental retard, all those issues, because mother was over 40 at the time. I was the first boy. They gave me the nickname "Buddy."

I was the only kid in my class in a one-room school house for three years. One day I went to the outhouse, and the latch turned, locking me in. I was in there crying for an hour until they came looking for me.

Then dad bought a farm north of North Bristol, away from his own family. I went to a Catholic school in East Bristol, one of the oldest churches in Wisconsin. The class that I joined was more than a half year ahead of me, especially in reading. That's why I was failing most of the time. And with the huge amount of hours working on the farm, I didn't have time to study. I was taking care of the pigs. We only got a bath once a week, so my classmates called me "stinky." I went there through eighth grade, then to Sun Prairie High School.

I left home with my younger sister in the middle of the night, after eighth grade. We turned ourselves in to the Portage police, but the judge sent us back home. I was home less than two years. I took two paper bags of clothes, my working boots, \$5.00 in change and left home for good. I had a job for \$1 a day, for a year. Then I worked for another farmer for two years, for \$3.00 a day. For survival I needed to get off the family farm; I could have killed my dad several times. My grades went from Ds and Fs to As and Bs after leaving the family farm. I graduated from Sun Prairie High School.





Then I went to two years of technical college for welding, when MATC was a vocational school on the top of the square. After one year I was a certified welder. I took a job in Evansville, Wisconsin with VP Buildings for \$2.70 an hour. I was with them one year until my number came up and I had to go in the military.

I went to Gulfport, Mississippi in August 1968 for five weeks to be a Navy Seabee. We were all journeymen in our trades; they made me an E-4. Our hitch was only two and a half years. I was out in 25 months and two days. After Boot Camp, we went to Davisville, Quonset Point Rhode Island. When I came home on leave from boot Camp, I invited my dad and mother to lunch; but they didn't recognize me in dress blues with shaved head. I told my dad I was going to Vietnam, but I wasn't going over there to kill people, but to build and fix equipment. I was a steelworker –welder.

I made it a point never to shoot anything in Vietnam. Except a 50 cal on the DMZ; I asked the Marines if I could try that puppy out. My dad sent me four green \$100 bills, which I gave to the chaplain for the orphanage. The church was made of bamboo and straw.

My first tour in Vietnam was with MCB-53 (Mobile Construction Battalion) as a welder. We did mostly sheet metal work and pre-fab. There was one period when it was over 100 degrees for 14 days and nights. I got to work with some fantastic guys. And I got to go to Australia on R&R for ten days. Because I wasn't married, I had to stay an extra two weeks when the battalion went home. With two days left, the chaplain came to me and said my dad had passed away, that I needed to go home immediately. I laughed at him and said, "They can keep that SOB on ice." But he came back with orders and escorted me to the Da Nang Airport on a medavac cargo plane. My Uncle Joe told me that my grandpa had passed away two weeks before my dad, and dad never went to the funeral.

I buried my dad, and rented a car. I was in Madison when a police siren came behind me. I stopped and was under the car; the cop wanted to know what the hell happened. I told him I'd just come out of Nam.

Later that night I went to the Kollege Klub on State Street, with my dress blues on. Those SOB's called me baby killer, threw beer on me and cursed me. I lasted about an hour. I went home, changed into civvies, went back, and everything was cool. That changed my attitude.

Two weeks later I went back to Rhode Island. I had orders to Gitmo Cuba. I asked what do I do there, look pretty? I volunteered for MCB-10, in California, going back to Vietnam. They found out I had skipped out of escape and evasion and hell week; I skipped it again by volunteering for the advanced party. About 20 of us landed in Da Nang...on one wheel! Then we took a beat-up small cargo plane to Phu Bai/Hue.





We went down to the pub, and the captain of the battalion was sitting with the enlisted guys. They told me he was the third CO, one had been fragged, the other's jeep blew up.

We put bolts in culverts for two weeks. They said they weren't authorized to weld them. Then the whole of MCB-10 arrived. The XO realized the guy in charge of road repairs couldn't do shit. They asked who could do it. I said, "That's me!" So, I was in charge of the welding for all the road repairs. I was an E-5 in charge of up to 17 guys. We had 50 dump trucks on the road plus a lot of other road construction equipment. According to captain Don Johnson Over 500 pieces of road equipment, We were working six and a half days, 12-14 hours a day, and had a four-hour watch every fourth night.

They never left me out of the country for R&R. They sent me to Cam Ranh Bay for a week; I was there three days and they sent someone to get me. They had a crane collapse and the base asphalt plant was shut down until it was fixed. We worked around the clock to get this thing fixed in a day and a half. I had it done by five on Sunday night. A Chief took a frontend loader, picked it up, and slammed into the bars, bending it out of alignment. About six in the morning we were loading it and I noticed the bars were bent out of alignment. The captain was pissed. I had it fixed by about five pm and we were up and running by six. They gave me an award.

I was pulled into the captain's office, with five guys without insignia. They gave me a walkie-talkie and told me to call if I saw anything unusual.

I spotted a young Vietnamese; it looked like he was checking out things. I called it in, and under ten minutes, there were Special Forces surrounding him.

I was repairing the asphalt plant; we put out a lot of asphalt. They were using jet fuel in the rock dryer; it had to be 400-600 degrees in there. I had to do some welding to replace plates in there. I had to put on all the clothes I could find, and could only stay in for ten minutes, or I'd get heat stroke.

Then I was up on a ladder about 1:30 in the morning putting patches on, and a sniper found me. I had holes in my pants and shrapnel in my legs. I was tied to the ladder, so I pushed it off and fell on my left side. I cut a piece of T-11, armored aluminum to put on my back, and to protect my ass and my balls. If they took my legs out, I was going home. I got up there and at four am the sniper found me again. But with this reflective aluminum on my back, he didn't know what to shoot at. I called the captain again and we waited 'til sunup to finish it.

Another time, a buddy and I were walking the roads, base to base, when a Korean convoy came down. We stepped off the road. He stepped on one of those Russian plastic mines; tore his left side off, legs





gone, guts exposed. We landed three or four meters away, him on top, so I was covered in blood. The Koreans didn't stop. He bled out by the time help came.

The thing about a war is you can survive the fire zone. But it's every damn night after that the memories come back to haunt you. I was lucky I didn't have to pull triggers, but this has haunted me a long time. I had PTSD. I got some help from the VA: I'm more at peace now.

One Sunday, I welded a large sheep's foot drum on the front of a dozer, and went up and down Route One. I set off more than 20 mines. The captain found out and took a bunch of pictures. He surveyed the equipment so it wasn't on the books, then lent it out to the SeaBees, the Army and the Marines. By the end of my tour, they were shipping similar equipment from the states. Next, I modified a large roto-tiller machine with a bunch of chains and found a lot of small mines. They still use that today in Iraq.

When I was due to get out of the Seabees, they offered me E-6, a whole bunch of money, and a job teaching welding. But I decided to get out and go to UW Stout, where I did excellent. There I acquired a wife and a child. After my second kid, I decided to get my vasectomy. We were divorced in 2000, after 30 years.

I got my BS stamp, and got a lot of job offers. I ended up at Morton College in Cicero, Illinois, where I set up their welding program and taught to the needs of area companies. All competency based instruction. I was there four years. Eventually, I ended up at Madison Tech teaching welding and fabrication, some print reading and metallurgy for 26 years. Hosted 9 VICA Welding Skills state completions for HS & Tech Colleges. Three of my students won State compactions and did good also in Kansas City at nationals.

I retired from MATC in May of 2006. I was 57 and they told me I was burned out. I'm self employed, training and certifying welders in pressure piping, structural, and special applications. For more than 350 companies.

I met this little Vietnamese lady, Thu Lieu. She had an older sister in Vietnam she wanted to bring over. I said let's go tour Vietnam and meet her. So, we did. It took a while to get the sister, Thu Thuy, here. They approved her, but wouldn't let her daughter, 21, come. Thu Thuy and I married March 7, 2004. We are hoping to bring her daughter and daughter's family here within two years.

I started coming to the VA over 20 years ago. Today, versus five years ago, this care is 100% plus. They take their time to go out of their way to help us good old boys now. Four or five years ago I cannot say that at all. I'm over 70 now. Enjoy traveling, hunting, fishing, skiing, rafting and Hobie cat sailing. Remember "Don't Do Anything I wouldn't Do" or answer questions later like we did in Viet Nam.

Interviewed and written by: Robert "Bob" Hall, My Life, My Story Project, 4-2018

