

To Be a Ranger

My dad died when I was only seven years old, my mom ten years later. My older brother, in his ultimate wisdom and greed, didn't really throw me out of the house, but made my life so miserable that I had no choice but to hit the streets. That left me, at 17 years old, a senior in high school and no transportation or roof over my head.

What could I do? Where could I go? Would you believe I thought of joining the Army? Thank goodness the recruiter told me to finish high school and see him in six months. I went over to a friend's house to spend the weekend. This is where my story of Preston B. Hogue, my friend's father, begins.

I had seen the movie "Darby's Rangers" years before, but didn't know that Pres had been one, as he seldom talked about the war. I learned later that he had been captured at Anzio, where three Ranger battalions had been caught between two Panzer divisions and almost completely annihilated. Approximately 1500 Rangers were trapped that day—about 300 were taken prisoner, the rest killed. Pres was one of the lucky ones. They couldn't hold him long, as he and another Ranger, Joe Larkin of Coronado, California, escaped and made their way back to friendly lines. After the war, Pres became an executive with Westgate Company of California and was later called back to duty in Korea.

Pres would have nothing to do with my quitting school. "Where am I going to live? How will I get around?" I asked. "You'll live here with me and use my car," was his answer. Not wanting to look a gift-horse in the

The following is a speech given by Ranger Steve Crabtree last year at the 50th anniversary of the birth of the Rangers at Fort Benning, Georgia. Steve served during the Vietnam War with G Company, 75th Rangers, Americal Division. An article about Crabtree's Ranger unit, "Into the Dragon Valley," appears elsewhere in this issue.

We are running Crabtree's story in this issue in honor of all Rangers, but especially those who gave their best in a hell-hole called Somalia.

mouth, I agreed. Little did either one of us know, the weekend I was spending at his house was to last, on and off, for the next six years.

I finished high school. Pres and his wife Jeannie were there to see me graduate. In the next six months, they watched me get a job, get married, start college, and move out. In the two years that followed, they watched me quit my job, get a divorce, quit college, move back in with them, and get drafted. Pres drove me to the bus station and left me with these words, "Don't volunteer for anything."

A year and a half later, when I was living at beautiful downtown LZ Hawk Hill, about half way between Da Nang and Chu Lai, I received a Red Cross telegram informing me of a death in my family. Can you believe the Army actually asked me if I wanted an emergency leave back to the world? Without any hesitation whatsoever, I caught a chopper to Chu Lai, a plane to Cam Ranh Bay, the "freedom bird" to Seattle, and the good old "Friendly Skies" back to San Diego.

I arrived at Pres' home about 2200 hours on a Saturday night. Jeannie answered the door with, "Oh my God, he's AWOL!"

Pres answered, "No he's not. Come here and let me see your Ranger tab." I can't describe the look of pride on his face or the gleam in his eyes as he looked at me. "I've got two tickets on the 50 for the Charger/Raider game tomorrow, do you want to go? The only thing I ask is that you go in uniform."

So there I was, less than 48 hours out of combat, sitting on the 50 yard line with Pres and his friends. Even President Nixon was sitting about 10 rows behind us. Do you know what they do when the Chargers score? They fire off

a cannon. I dove for cover, knocked about a dozen people down, while Pres laughed and laughed.

I went back to Vietnam, finished my tour, was discharged from the Army, and moved back in with Pres. I stayed for a year and a half and finally went my own way. We saw each other once in a while, but not often enough. The times we were together were special. We had a mutual respect for each other, knowing we both were Rangers.

Jeannie died about seven years ago, and I buried Pres two years ago last May in Tucson. Don't grieve for him, as he was doing something he always wanted to do—riding his bike from Arizona to Florida at the age of seventy. Grieve for me, as I lost a good friend, a friend who took me off the streets and changed my life 25 years ago, a friend who gave me something that money can't buy—to know what it means to be a RANGER.