



Win Steiger served with the 26th Marines in Vietnam.

Courtesy photo

The lighter side for our veterans

By WIN STEIGER
Special to The Press

Veterans Day is here again. It's a day to honor those who have served and suffered. But there is a lighter side in serving, and I choose to address this here for it will bring a much-appreciated smile from those who went through this journey with me.



Steiger

The siege of Khe Sanh, during the Vietnam Conflict, made me an instant regular. I won't bore you with details, for those who were there with me are aware of its uniqueness. Hollywood has remarkably filled in the rest of the vision.

One of my closest friends was a chaplain who served with me with the 26th Marines. After a time, our battalion pulled to the rear for refitting and recreation. This was called "in country R and R." Are you kidding? There were no hotels, but at least we had a shower to use. Most will remember the adjacent artillery pieces that barked so loudly as an intermittent chorus of "H and I," which is short for harassment and interdiction. The intent was to interrupt a possible nearby enemy position. But we didn't hear it! Call it conditioning, tuning out, or self-protection. The brain is amazing.

So there we stood chatting in friendly boredom. The chaplain and myself, amidst armored vehicles, trucks, and of course tanks. And remember that we heard only our own spoken words. We soon were joined by a brand-spanking-newbie with CONUS (continental United States) polished boots. The only Jewish chaplain in our area of operation, from Da Nang to the DMZ. The bars on his collar were still shiny. Not grimy and purposely hidden on the undersurface of our collars where we placed ours. Why advertise our rank to a potential front-line sniper?

The newly arrived in-country Rabbi tried to fit-in with us "older-timers." We all talked and he smiled, and

then suddenly he dropped to his knees. He covered and his head looked around from side to side. He really appeared to be frightened. He blurted to us "we are being shelled." A nearby rumbling tank completed the picture.

I turned and said, "No Rabbi, that is just H and I going out. It is not incoming." By then the smell of cordite had reached the area, which enhanced the experience.

"How do you know it is going out and not coming in?" the Rabbi asked, still appearing quite shaken. It was then that my friend and seasoned veteran chaplain started to laugh, and said in a most reassuring and comforting fashion, "God will tell you." That caused me to laugh, and we both helped the newbie to his feet. A job well done.

To all who have served, I am keenly aware that you appreciate your own stories such as I presented this one. They help to make it bearable. And they undoubtedly became better as your time went on. Mine did.

A short two weeks before I was scheduled to leave the service, and on the grounds of Los Alamitos Naval Air Station, I was told that I had to stand a formal high-level inspection. Of course I protested, but to no avail. The base commander, who was also a personal friend, said to me with no chance of escape, "Win, you are my highest ranking and decorated officer and I need you. The big brass will all be here."

I knew that it meant wearing my formal dress uniform, complete with a sword. I didn't have a sword, and I was not about to buy this expensive and never-used weapon. And then my inner cunning took over when I remembered that I had treated his personal pilot a day or so earlier for a minor malady. I placed his pilot into the infirmary the day of the inspection, and borrowed his sword. He didn't mind, for he didn't want to attend the inspection either. He was released immediately after the event concluded. Problem solved! I still laugh to this day.

To my fellow veterans. I hope that you enjoy a marvelous Veterans Day. It is our day. How sad that those who gave up so much could not have celebrated with us. But to all of you let me say with the utmost sincerity, thank you for your service!

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Dr. Win Steiger is a Coeur d'Alene resident.

By UYLESS BLACK
Special to The Press

Today, November 11, 2018, marks the centennial of the cessation of World War I. In the early hours of November 11, 1918 (just after 5 A.M.) the warring nations signed an armistice agreement. Immediately thereafter, the front line generals were told of the agreement via radio or telephone. The fighting was to stop at 11 A.M.



Black

They were so-informed, but many of the units (on both sides) kept on fighting and killing each other past the 11 A.M. agreement.

For what? There was nothing to be gained by continuing the slaughter. A few feet of ground forward or backwards was negated by the terms set forth in the armistice. Yet records show that on this day, 100 years ago, 2,738 men were killed for no cause except killing for killing's sake.

WWI was at that time called the "war to end all wars." Later, WWI was called by many the "war that caused WWII." The first phrase was based on hopeful expectations. The second phrase was based on hindsight.

Even today, people disagree if the harsh terms imposed on Germany by the victorious allies in

the armistice accords had anything to do with the rise of Hitler and WWII. This writer believes that the armistice was a major contributing factor (but not the only one).

Compare the post WWI armistice terms to the post WWII terms. The former sought to punish the loser and debilitate Germany's economy and social structure. The latter, learning from the past, sought to resurrect the losers (Japan, Germany, and Italy).

But the WWII victors also aimed to restructure the political and social fabric of these countries. They did not want a replay of the aftermaths of the Great War (WWI).

The resurrection and reconstitution of a defeated Japan by the United States is a phenomenal story. Granted, the Japanese emperor (after two atomic explosions) directed the citizens to admit and accept defeat, and the emperor's directives were followed to the hilt. Germany was prostrate, its people starving. It had no other choice.

Still, America knew an ongoing practice of repressing and punishing its defeated foes would lead to these foes eventually becoming formidable (and even more resentful) foes in the future. We reconstructed these nations. Today, they are democracies and our

close allies.

WWI introduced weapons that changed the nature of how war was conducted. Tanks, aerial bombing, and sometimes the use of gas changed the warfare landscape. It also reinforced the common sense notion that once the enemy is defeated, kiss that enemy, so to speak. If you do not and also do not completely irradiate your enemy, eventually, that enemy will irradiate you ... and dispense with the kisses.

We did not take this lesson-learned experience into Iraq War II. We invaded with great success, dismantled the country's political, financial, and social infrastructures, and did not even possess the hindsight/foresight to have plans in place to replace the many vacuums we created.

WWI and WWII: Their political postscripts, as well as that of Iraq II, should have taught America's leaders a simple lesson: Defeating the enemy is essential in any war. But post-war victory is hollow if the victor does not insure the defeated party no longer has the motivation to strike back.

WWII is a model for how to accept and practice victory. WWI is not.

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Uyless Black is a Hayden resident and a Vietnam veteran who writes regularly for The Press.

Tomorrow is...



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