



My First DQS Reunion

by Louis J. Block

C 1/44 (67-68)

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After 30 years I am reunited with my brothers in arms. The National Dusters, Quads & Searchlights Associates held its annual reunion in Knoxville, TN. from July 9th to Sunday the 12th of July 1998. It was a most uplifting experience for me. Even now over a week later I am still feeling light headed. I think it was almost a little too much for me.

It has been thirty years since the 12th of July 1968, when I was Medivaced off of the Rock Pile and away from my brothers in arms. Such a long time, not knowing what happened during that one year of hell, thirty long years ago.

I don't think any major issues, except for Joe Belardo, were settled for me. I still do not know who was on my crew that night. I still have no idea as to who else from C 1/44 was Medivaced out that night. I guess I never got the answers I went looking for.

But there was Joe Belardo.

Joe and I were inducted into Uncle Sam's Army together, at Newark, NJ on the 24th of October 1966. We were sent to Fort Hood, TX for our basic and advanced training together. This worked out well because Joe and I became the best of friends. We did everything together. From the good to the bad, Joe and I did it together. We were assigned to the 1/78th Arty. (Honest John Rockets) together after training.

I believe it was sometime in July 1967 when we received orders for Vietnam. We had a thirty days leave. We traveled back to our home towns, spent time together, went to the "Jersey Shore" with our girls together, and traveled to Oakland Replacement Depot, via Haight & Ashbury (a center for free love & peace freaks) together. We even sat together on our Braniff International Air Lines flight all the way to Vietnam.

At the replacement station in Nam they assigned us the same flight North to Da Nang. In Da Nang we were assigned to the same artillery unit in Dong Ha, the 1/44 arty. At Battalion Headquarters in Dong Ha we are both assigned to C battery based at Camp J. Carroll.

When we arrived at Camp Carroll we were each assigned duty on separate Dusters. This was the first time, in a year, that we no longer bunked together. We did run convoys together (at times), guarded the same perimeter together (at times), and always sent word too each other. So we were still together, just on different dusters, in our new AO. After eleven months and eleven days in the Nam I was involved in a heavy assault on my out-post by the NVA . Before midnight on 12 July 1968 I was Medivaced out of the area, safe at Sea on the USS Sanctuary.

Like magic I was back in the World (via 106th General Hospital in Japan). I was stationed at Walter Reed Army Medical Center in Washington, DC. I was allowed leave to rehabilitate at my family home in New Jersey.

I believe it was sometime in September that Joe who just came home from Nam came to see me at my family home. Joe told me that he wanted to kill me (the grim reaper inside himself had not died). That was the last time I saw Joe Belardo until this reunion. I am very happy to report that I am still alive. With hard work at rap group and the grace of God, Joe stopped hating me. I have prayed for Joe and his family since that day back in 1968. I was happy to hug him, to welcome him home, to talk about life and times, and even to cry together.

The wounds of war are deeper than any one person can tell. But I know the pain of the heart is much more painful then the shrapnel in my flesh. How happy to remove some pain! The road home is not always easy, but, it must be taken. Both Joe and I have walked separately on the different roads to get too the same place. We meet back together with our brothers in arms. I could not think of a better reunion between two brothers.

I can not think of a better reunion. The planning was superb. My hat is off to the DQS brothers who pulled this reunion together. Having Sgt. Maj. Radford and his 1/44 ADA Color Guard from Fort Hood, Texas there for the Memorial Services was a special honor. The music throughout the reunion was well chosen. The participation, enthusiasm, and reverence was outstanding.

I arrived on Wednesday the 8th sometime around 2200 hr. After putting my bag in my room I went down to the DQS Headquarters. As I looked around the room I did not recognize anyone right away, I had to look. I had to look deep into thirty years of loneliness to see if I could remember a time and place when I was young and whole. I had to look deep into the faces of aging men to see if I could find myself in their past.

I walked to the back of the room and took a cold cola from the ice filled tub. Then I returned to the front where I got a name tag, wrote my name and unit on it before attaching it to my shirt. I took a seat and listen to the ongoing conversation around a large round table. I looked hard. I start to remember, then it fades. The faces I had tried to forget. The names I had tried to forget. The places I had tried to forget. Some of it starts to come back, slowly, softly, gently touching my inner mind. I look and listen.

There are several tables with smaller numbers of people than ours. Men are walking to and fro. One of the men came over and sat down at the table. He started to talk about a guy who said that he will come. He was trying to think of his name saying "...you know he came over with Belardo and Steve Harris, he was from New Jersey..." The accent gave him away, it was Paul "Boston Conley".

I looked real hard. Yes, I could see Paul thirty years ago. I said, "Paul, Paul, it's me." He said, "Yea, he was from New Jersey." I held my name tag in his direction and again said, "Paul, its me Lou Block." He glanced at my name tag then looked dead into my eyes. Deep down to my inner soul he glared. Looking and remembering we stand up, moving

toward each other, still looking, then knowing. We give each other big welcome home hugs.

At that others around the room start to hug me. Gary Puro, who I found on line, the man that told me about this. He and I hug as though we have always known each other. Then I see Richard Shand from the Nickel Duce. I know his face from a photo on his web site. And Steve Moore, my first combat line officer. Ed Allen, DQS President. George Nagelschmidt, our cook. John Rowe, the only other DQS member to have returned to Vietnam. So many names and faces. My Lord; I know these men. I knew them when...

John Huelsenbeck and Hugh Roberts, who I spoke with by phone November 1982 in Washington, DC. We had the conversation that started the National Dusters, Quads & Searchlights Association. You see John and I had agreed to meet the next day at the end of the Wall. Problem was there were some 60,000 + or - Veterans at the end of the Wall, we never found each other. Next time out John and Hugh put a sign on their backs. When they found a DQS brother they hung on to him. Thus the start of NDQSA, as I understood what happened from John.

At 0230 on the 9th I tried to gear down by slipping into the hot tub at the hotel. After 15/20 minutes in the hot water by myself I started to get tired, so I went to my room. I could not sleep. My heart and mind were racing fast. My blood pressure was taxing my arteries. I took a chill pill that my doctor gave me for anxiety (70% PTSD). I look at the clock 0400, still no sleep. I can not shut my mind down. I lie in bed awake, totally awake. This is like Nam, I can't sleep. I try hard but sleep does not come. Day light shows it's 0600, so up and into the rain room I go for my morning clean up. I'm tired.

I tried to watch the morning news on TV but nothing could take my mind off my DQS Brothers. The USA Today paper was under my door. I tried to read it but my concentration was focused on my first DQS reunion. I went down stairs to the hotel restaurant. I had some coffee and fresh fruit.

I am running on adrenaline, like Nam. This is opening day for the 1998 DQS reunion. I am numb to pain and stress. My mind and heart are open. After thirty years I can enjoy the company of my Brothers in Arms and their families. I hope to see you all at the 1999 DQS Reunion in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. Welcome Home Brothers! **"We are Somebody"**.