



KEN HARRIS

U.S. ARMY

Service Dates:
Sept 17, 1973 – Oct 5, 1993

I joined the army (along with Bill Miller, also a Reagan '73 graduate) in 1973, just a month after graduating from high school. We left a couple of months later, in September, and remained together through Boot Camp (Basic Training) in Ft. Leonard Wood, Missouri, as well as through the next phase of Army training (AIT). When leaving for Basic Training, it was the first time that either of us had flown on an airplane.

We knew that we would be going to Europe after training (Nam was winding down). The lack of respect was startling – in the JFK airport, I remember being spit on by a group of people (hippies) and called a “killer.” In Basic Training, I learned a lot about myself, who I represented, and why I wore a uniform. I represented the Army. I represented the United States. I would not disgrace or shame who I was representing by reacting to the show of disrespect. It was a true test of my patience and control of my temper.

After AIT, Bill and I were separated – Bill was sent to Augsburg, Germany and I was sent to Berlin. We visited each other several times while stationed there and were in the ASA (the Army's version of NSA), where we reported our activities to NSA, CIA and even directly to the President's office. While stationed in Berlin, I had the opportunity to travel to Amsterdam (multiple times), Paris, England, Scotland and Austria. These were really great times, where I had a niche for the Army and enjoyed it, although I wasn't delighted about my actual specialty.

I re-enlisted first to become a Medic and then a Surgical Tech. I trained at Ft. Sam Houston in San Antonio, then in Georgia, and then in a field hospital unit very similar to MASH on television. While I truly wanted to be in the operating room, I also saw the need to be in the field and combat. I soaked up all that I could learn about the Army – real soldiering and maneuvers, etc. I was stationed at Ft. Lewis, Washington, where I loved the view of the mountains (Mt. Rainier in particular), which were visible from the barracks and throughout the base. After a few hikes and overnight campouts, I was hooked, and spent many weekends hiking and climbing. In 1980 I made it to the top of Mt. Rainier with a friend.





I was good at what I did in the field, and word got around. I was selected to be an instructor at Ft. Sam Houston, teaching trainees how to be Medics. I soon began teaching more complex subjects, including Anatomy and Physiology, to a wide variety of students, which I was not initially pleased about (I thought that I would be teaching Medics and Surgical Techs how to set up and run a field hospital). After two weeks of heavy-duty cramming in the subject matter, I presented my first class, and moved into harder and deeper levels of training while gaining much self-confidence.

I got married and became a father when I was transferred to Ft. Sam Houston. On the due date, my wife and I were informed that the baby was too large and that a C-section was required. There in Labor and Delivery (assisting in C-sections) were some of the very students that I had instructed only months before. It was a joyous occasion when they allowed me to “scrub in” and assist with my own baby’s delivery. While this was not allowed (never had been), I got away with delivering my own son (9 lbs., 10 oz), something that few other fathers will ever experience. Later, I was also able to deliver (traditionally this time) my baby girl (11 lbs., 3 oz).

While Surgical Tech was my focus, I began to gain an admiration for the Green Beret Medics and Army Ranger Medics that I was instructing. It was extremely gratifying and rewarding to see these young men graduate and move on to another phase of medical skills. They were so thankful for my impact on their lives that they made me an “honorary” Green Beret (couldn’t be official without going through Green Beret school). I continued teaching other courses as well as Surgical Techs, Green Beret Medics, Ear, Nose and Throat Techs and more with a total of 18 different courses on various levels of A&P. In 4 years of time, I had taught over 5000 students... and loved every minute of it.

I received a letter from the Army letting me know that I was in the top 10% of all Army instructors, and therefore they had chosen me to become an Army Recruiter (of which I wanted no part, but the Army does not take kindly to being told NO). I finished Recruiting School and chose Seattle as my recruiting grounds, being assigned an area that was fairly rural and sparsely populated, including Mt. Rainier and the National Park... where nobody lives! Needless to say, my success as a recruiter was “limited” which made my life miserable (10-12 hour days, phone calls until you drop, endless visits to high schools) and I had gone from the best to the absolute WORST job in the Army. Once you join, you belong to the Army for no less than four years. After a rather serious altercation that I had at the Seattle processing station I was allowed to return to my original duty (Surgical Tech), with orders to go to Ft Leonard Wood, to the 93rd Evacuation hospital. Upon arrival I was promoted (after 10 years of waiting) and replaced the platoon Sargent. Three months later, Saddam Hussein attacked and entered Kuwait. This placed the 93rd on the deployment list as #5 to go. It was my responsibility to make sure our equipment and our people were prepared and ready to go, and to set up and deliver medical care.

After months of training with the newest and most modern equipment, we deployed on Jan 3. There were some pretty hungover (and probably still drunk) people on that plane. Upon

landing in Saudi Arabia, tension turned to frustration when the pick-up buses were 6 hours late. We rode through the city with no idea where we were going and pulled into a dusty encampment that was “home” for the next few weeks – an old, abandoned cement factory complete with tents with no lights and a large circus tent serving as a dining facility. When we arrived, about 75% of the hospital had been set up, although nothing was yet operational. We still had at least a week of work to do in order to get it ready to receive and treat patients. Engineers came with a bulldozer and pushed up 10-foot walls of dirt around the encampment to create a barrier or line of “protection” – no barbed wire, no bunkers to seek shelter in case of bombardment, no guns or weapons to protect us. Needless to say, we were a bit concerned considering our location to the enemy. Our defense situation was terribly inadequate. But we were “told” that we were safe and that we would have units that would protect us if needed. We didn’t feel very reassured. Once we got the hospital established (air conditioning, heating, airtightness, power, water), we had to fill 63,000 sand bags by hand to ring the sleeping tents as “protection”. Our hands got totally chewed up and raw from handling the sandbags.

After four days in the heat and dust, we were allowed to shower. In the first week, we were alerted to alarms and sirens, and we watched SCUD rockets being fired at us. We were within SCUD impact range six times. Casualties trickled in (mostly vehicle accidents and minor accidents), along with a few really bad ones. We had been in blackout conditions so as to NOT allow interception of communications to Iraqis, so we knew little about what was going on. A Dustoff chopper brought un some wounded. There were dead (not ours) and some in many pieces. The pilots told us that our position was actually in IRAQ and not Saudi Arabia, which was not true – and this didn’t make us feel safer or better about the situation.

The most proud accomplishment that I came home with was... if they got to us alive, they left us alive. We treated about 265 people, some not too bad, others horrific. I also had to keep track of my own “platoon” of doctors, nurses and technicians. I’m proud to say that I also brought each and every one of them home safely to their family and friends.

After returning home from war, many families were torn apart from the 5-month deployment, including mine. My wife left and took my kids (ages 4 and 6) and went back to Washington State. I was devastated but I HAD to pick myself up and keep going. A few months later I was given order to transfer to Seoul Korea, to the 121st Evac Hospital (if that sounds familiar, you have watched “MASH” on T.V.). In fact, it DOES exist, while the 4077th doesn’t quite match, the 4007th does (I suppose that for legal purposes they changed the numbers). Now I was in charge of the Operating room and staff, and sterile supplies for the entire hospital. I enjoyed it, although I was older than everybody else. I soaked up a lot of the country and culture while there but came to a crossroads when our President (Bill Clinton) exhibited his lack of support for our soldiers in Mogadishu. We lost a lot of good men there, and I decided that that was enough. It was time to retire and come back to home to Austin Texas. I successfully arranged to be home for the Reagan 20th Reunion. I was glad to be home with some great people.

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