

## Provide Love

by Bobby Muller

I'm just going to share a little bit of a personal thing that happened. I really considered myself a very righteous guy, a very good guy, and when I went into the Marine Corps, you know, I was really sensitive to kids. And I went through the whole training thing, went to Vietnam, and—

Vietnam was a very confusing war. You didn't have a front-line, and you didn't have a clear identification of who your enemy was. And I had a lot of situations—I was a platoon commander—where I had my guys out doing operations. And as they would often do, you know, they would have the kids come in and we'd give them C-rations, we'd give them stuff. And a couple of times actually, you know, that night we would get hit, we would get attacked. And our command position and our critical positions were obviously known to the attacking force, the Vietcong, and it turned out that it was the kids that we had befriended and given the C-rats to, et cetera, that had gotten their brothers to come in and attack us that night.

I won't get carried away with it, but a lot of things happened in my interactions with the Vietnamese that I remember. At one point, you know, we used to have these heating tabs that we would light up, and they'd burn with an invisible flame to cook up the C-rats. And we were on a truck convoy going down the highway, and my guys were lighting up these heating tabs and throwing them off the truck. And they were a valued little commodity, so, you know, kids would be coming out of the villages, and they would pick up these heating tabs, and being that they had an invisible flame, the kids couldn't tell that it had been lit up, and it would stick to their hand, their fingers, and burn them.

And I remember laughing at that.

When I got shot, I was medevacked to a hospital ship and they had me in intensive care for several days, and they had a psychiatrist come and talk to me. He said, "Is there anything you want to talk about?" He was presumably inquiring about the fact that I was going to be a paraplegic. But my question to him was,

two days before, I had sat down, chowed down, and had a big lunch amongst a whole bunch of dead bodies. And it meant nothing to me. And I said, "Is there something wrong with me?" And he said, "No, there's nothing wrong with you. You've been in an extraordinary circumstance, and your mind has its automatic defense mechanisms that come into play to allow you to get through these extraordinary circumstances." He said, "You go back to New York City, and next year, you see somebody get hit by a cab, and you're going to be as affected as anybody else."

Which is exactly what happened. What I'm saying to you is that I think people are inherently good. I think the power of love and the power of good is a very, very strong force, but we can be affected by the negative. We can be affected by the forces of, for lack of a better term, darkness. And in being on the ground, and getting involved in a situation of killing people and having my guys killed, I sometimes say that I think I took a little bit of a walk down that path of darkness, and I personally realized how a good guy could wind up doing unconscionable things, have a value structure so fundamentally altered.

And remember My Lai, okay? In My Lai, it was "the good guys," it was an American infantry unit that went in and murdered 505 Vietnamese women and children and old people without one single shot being fired in return. That was the good guys, okay?

So, what I'm saying may not be clear but, you know, when you get exposed to evil and when you get into darkness, and the circumstances around you are of that nature, they can have an affect on all of us. Those of you that may say that could never happen to me, let me tell you something: you're kidding yourself. I didn't think it could happen to me. I was shocked when I realized it did happen.

But the positive part of this story, to wrap it up, is that by coming back, getting love, getting nurturing, getting out of where the forces of darkness and the negative energy of, basically, evil can work on you, [it] allows you the opportunity to rehabilitate, to rejuvenate. And I've seen it with literally hundreds of veterans that were exposed to the most horrific combat. I've seen it in kids. I've seen it with a lot of people in war zones that I've gone to.

So we have a rejuvenative capability. You know, stop feeding the negative. Take them out of those situations. Provide love, and get a decent environment, and even with those that have been crushed, you can so oftentimes bring them back to wholeness and good health.

Remarks on Nov. 5, 1998 at the University of Virginia.