

A Letter That Began with GREETINGS!

By Hap Hansen

When I was 18 years old, I received a letter that changed my life. When I opened the official looking envelope, I read just after my name and address, a word in capital letters that read, GREETINGS, Mr. Hansen, you have been selected by your Draft Board to become a member of the United States Armed forces. You will report to Army headquarters in Omaha, Nebraska on February 16 for a physical examination.

I passed the physical and in April, reported for Infantry Basic Training at Fort Leonard Wood Missouri. Following eight weeks of basic, I got to go home for ten days, then it was back to Leonard Wood for Engineer training. As soon as I was finished, I was sent to Fort Belvoir, Virginia. After several months of advanced Engineer training, my MOS (Military Occupation Specialty) was now as a Combat Engineer. Even though I was eventually discharged, because of my MOS, which was considered critical, I am registered as such and am subject to recall over my entire lifetime. While I was never recalled, there were some frightening moments when conflicts happened in the Middle East and Viet Nam.

As an example, that Engineer training allowed our platoon to build a pontoon bridge over a fast moving river that would accommodate tanks. Then, if there was a retreat, we could blow up the pontoon bridge with an explosive called 'Plastique'. It could be molded like clay around a bridge spar, then we would insert a blasting cap, get the hell out of the way, and blow up everything we had built.

While I am a Korean Veteran, my time was spent on Guam, helping to oversee the extension of the airstrip to accommodate heavy bombers. I was also our group's paymaster and once each month, flew to the island of Tinian, to pay our few remaining troops there. You may recall, that it was from Tinian that our bombers took off in World War II to bomb Hiroshima and Nagasaki, which helped end the war against Japan. My group showed me where the bombers took off after loading an Atomic bomb on their aircraft. The bombs were too large to simply put them under the plane. There were holes dug to accommodate the bombs, then they were hoisted into the belly of the planes. The holes were about ten feet long, six feet wide and four feet deep. You may not know that there were four holes that size, all filled with bombs. Only two were necessary. I believe, if needed, the other two bombs were meant for Tokyo. Fortunately, they were not needed. I took a roll of film of all four holes. When the pictures were developed, they were all clouded, probably as a result of the radiation that remained.

Other than my family, there are three things I am happy about this morning. One: I am proud to be a veteran of the United States Army. Two: Last Friday was my 83rd Birthday. Three: My age, more likely than not, makes me to damned old to be recalled!