



SERGEANT HOWARD GOLDIN UNITED STATES ARMY VIETNAM

Almost fifty years after fighting a war against an often unseen enemy in the jungles of Vietnam, Howard Goldin has returned to Vietnam to fight another battle. He and his fellow Rotarian members raise money to build schools in developing countries for orphaned children. They have built three schools in Vietnam, one in Jamaica, and one in Honduras, and completed a water project in Ghana. Their first school, in Da Lat, Vietnam is a three-story building with running water, computers, and an elevator for handicapped students. Goldin has made it his mission to help impoverished children overseas obtain an education and a better way of life.

Howard Goldin was born September 5, 1947 in Bridgeport, Connecticut. His grandfather owned a chicken farm, but lost it during the Great Depression. Howard's mother was a secretary; his father, an Army Air Forces veteran during World War II, worked for Sikorsky and Pratt & Whitney in the electronics field. His parents, both blue-collar workers, had three children. Howard, the middle child, moved with his family to the Bronx when he was four years old. The Bronx was "multi-cultural," and gave him a strong foundation of values growing up. Being used to an ethnically diverse environment, he recalls his first visit to the South as a "culture shock," as he witnessed segregation for the first time.

At the age of twelve, Howard's family moved to Spring Valley in Rockland County, New York. Although he had liked the neighborhoods of the Bronx, he discovered new activities and a new sense of freedom in semi-rural Rockland. Howard enjoyed playing basketball and baseball, "and was pretty bad at both." He soon moved on to building model airplanes, which he and his brother often flew in the nearby park. Howard attended Spring Valley High School, graduating in 1965. His high school



was to lose thirteen patriots to the Vietnam War.

Howard took a job to earn money for college. Always understanding the value of education, having to work to pay for college never deterred him from seeking knowledge. He was employed at Litton Industries building components for the space program. The government granted Howard a draft deferment given the company's importance to the war effort. He refused the deferment and registered at the local draft board number thirteen, for good luck. He was inducted into the United States Army on February 9, 1967.

As his friend told him, "If you ask for something in the Army they never give it to you. So I asked to go Airborne, Infantry, Vietnam. They gave me Airborne, Infantry, Vietnam." Howard was assigned to Basic Combat Training at Fort Campbell Kentucky, home of the 101st Airborne Division. But as it turned out, paratroopers were not needed in Vietnam at the time, so he was then sent to Advanced Individual Training in Fort Polk, Louisiana.

In June 1967, Howard received orders to deploy to Vietnam. He admits to feeling a moment of fear, a sense of disbelief. "Just where is this place called Vietnam?" he remembers asking himself. He was reluctant to tell his mother that her son was about to be sent into the middle of a warzone.

After thirty days' leave back home, Howard shipped

out in July 1967 in a commercial airliner. His first stop on the way to the front lines was at the airbase in Bien Hoa, Vietnam, where he reported to the 90th Replacement Battalion, whose job was to assign incoming soldiers to areas where manpower was most needed. As a result, these soldiers went to Vietnam as individuals, and not as part of the unit they had trained with in the States.

Private Goldin was assigned to the 4th Battalion 25th Infantry Division in the Cu Chi District near Saigon. Cu Chi was located in the Iron Triangle, a 120 square mile area stretching between the Saigon River and the La Tinh River. Vietcong soldiers had dug hundreds of miles of hidden inter-connecting tunnels underneath the ground. The Vietcong used their tunnels for communications, supply lines, and to harass. Snipers would pop up out of nowhere, shoot, and disappear. It was difficult for American soldiers to search the tunnels- the openings even if uncovered were too narrow, and the tunnels

The mission of the 25th Infantry Division was “search and destroy.... Our mission was to search for the enemy and destroy the enemy....” Even if it meant going into the tunnels. For that, special units were brought in, called “tunnel rats.”

Private Goldin was “the new guy” in his unit that July 1967. “I’m the outsider... it was hard at first to make friends. I’m out in the bush and this guy smacks me in the back of the head, saying, ‘you gotta take that thing off,’ referring to my white T-shirt. ‘You don’t wear white out here, or you’re a sitting duck.’” Private Goldin was issued an M79 single shot grenade launcher. “I felt naked.” Distressed by his lack of firepower, he wrote home to his mother, explaining his situation. His mother wrote to the local congressman, requesting she be allowed to send a pistol to Howard. Her requests eventually resulted in a congressional inquiry. Private Goldin’s grenade launcher was replaced, but with an M16, a weapon criticized for jamming while in combat.



were rigged with booby-traps and poisonous snakes. As it turned out, the American base in Cu Chi was built on top of such a tunnel complex. Hence, sniper fire was not uncommon on the base.

“All of a sudden the plowmen started yelling they saw something, a bunker complex....” The lieutenant asked for volunteers to go up and check it out. Private Goldin volunteered.

Halfway up, he heard the distinct sound of an AK-47. Then someone shot off an M16. Instantly, the Vietcong hiding in the bunker opened fire. "I got shot right through the knee... as I was going down, unbeknownst to me, I got shot three more times." Frank Beavers, a medic, ran in under heavy fire to pull Goldin back out. The medic gave him morphine, and helped him into a medevac helicopter.

"I told the doctor that it felt like there were thorns in my knee. He told me that there weren't any thorns in the area [they were fighting in]." It was then the doctors discovered that Private Goldin had been shot three more times through the leg. He was rushed to the 25th Infantry Division Hospital back in Cu Chi, where "the doctors saved my life..." Howard Goldin spent two weeks in the hospital, during which time he was awarded the Purple Heart. "The pain, the morphine, I don't remember them coming in, don't remember them pinning it on.... It was the most intense feeling I had ever had in my life. It felt like a boulder had been thrown off a roof onto my leg. The pain was intense." The doctors removed as much shrapnel as they could. Even so, Howard Goldin still carries around pieces of metal in his leg.

After being released from the hospital, he spent ten days in base camp, undergoing physical therapy to give mobility back to his leg. The Army's version of physical therapy: giving Private Goldin a five gallon bucket of water and making him climb a ladder to fill a fifty-five gallon tub. "Even so, I can't complain," Howard states with a laugh. "My leg works pretty good." After Private Goldin finished his rehab, he was shipped back to his unit, the doctors having classified his injury as a "through-and-through" wound.

During his tour, Private Goldin and his unit were exposed to Agent Orange, a chemical sprayed out of planes designed to kill the vegetation in the Vietnamese forest, allowing Allied soldiers a clear field of fire. No one realized at the time how easy it was to absorb it into your body. When Agent Orange gets onto the skin, it has a greasy feel to it, eventually turning into powder, easily ingested without knowing it. The soldiers would often cut the empty Agent Orange barrels in half, using them as tubs or barbecue pits. "There were many ways to be exposed to Agent Orange.... Only years later did we learn it was deadly. It's the disease that keeps on giving." Goldin still suffers from its effects.

At camp, on patrol, Private Goldin got along well with his fellow soldiers. "It was the brotherhood, the fraternity.... It was not yellow, black, white- we all wore Army green. It was that brotherhood we cherished." He became close friends with Frank Beavers, the medic who had rescued Howard

from enemy fire when he was wounded. Their camaraderie and companionship were often the only things that made the war bearable.

On January 30, 1968 the North Vietnamese Army launched the Tet Offensive. Every major American base was attacked. The 25th Infantry Division was placed on guard, and reacted quickly enough to break the North Vietnamese siege of Saigon, while local troops and Military Police secured the U.S. Embassy complex. The offensive saw some of the hardest fighting of the war. "It was horrific at times."

The North Vietnamese were attacking in human waves. B-52 Bombers were called in. It was during a North Vietnamese attack, on February 14, 1968, when Howard's closest friend in Vietnam, Frank Beavers, was killed.

Howard wrote to Frank's mother. He had a photo of Frank he cherished, but he couldn't bring himself to send it to Frank's family. "If there's any regret I have, it's that photograph... I felt so guilty I had survived, and Frank didn't."

"Helping just ten children makes a difference in the world.... Education is the hope for the future. Above all, do whatever you can to make a difference in this world."

After the Tet fighting, Private Goldin and the 25th Infantry Division were pushing the North Vietnamese toward the Cambodian border. "We controlled the top and bottom of the Black Virgin Mountains. The North Vietnamese Army controlled the middle." In March 1968 the 25th Infantry Division had set up their base in a logger camp in Trang Bang, Vietnam. "That night we were hit hard by

the North Vietnamese Army. We had to have our artillery come in with beehive rounds, firing point-blank at the enemy.... The NVA had great training, were great fighters. We hated them, but they were great fighters."

Sick of cold C-rations, Goldin was tempted by the hot foods the locals would come around peddling. He purchased once a meal of French bread stuffed with some kind of suspect meat, ate it, and quickly came down with a violent case of dysentery. He was to lose thirty-nine pounds in less than a month. The medicine the doctors gave to him made his jaw lock up. They then changed his medication, which brought the dysentery under control, but not his bad humor. The Army sent him back into the field. He was to finish out his deployment with his unit.

At the end of his tour, Goldin was assigned to Fort Hood, Texas to train new recruits with an armored infantry unit. Exhausted and burned out, he wrote to his commanding officer. A few weeks later, his orders changed, and the Army re-assigned him to Fort Wadsworth in Staten Island, New York, where he underwent physical therapy from a trained professional. His military occupational specialty was changed to

11 Bravo, Motor Transport. He signed out vehicles to Army personnel, while he waited for his enlistment to end.

Howard Goldin retired from the Army as an E-5 Sergeant. He briefly returned to his old job at Litton Industries making parts for spaceships and missiles. Realizing that he had had enough of the war, he left the company. With his knowledge of weapons, he took the police test, scoring well. He joined the Spring Valley Police Department on May 1, 1970. His chief, Adam J. Krainak, a combat World War II veteran, chose the date in honor of Alfred Stonehouse, a fellow soldier from Rockland County who had been killed in action in the jungles of Vietnam.

He and his patrol partner developed a good reputation among the local citizens and a good rapport with the community, accomplishing a lot in his thirty years on the force. He worked his way up from patrolman to Chief of Police. Along the way his son died, a collateral victim of Agent Orange, and Goldin realized where his heart lay. Until then he could not talk about Vietnam. "It was locked up inside me." But now he decided it was time to open up.

He started up a program for school children to talk to veterans about the Vietnam War, taking the students through the history of the war, doing their best to present an unbiased view to the children. "We were not there to glorify war, we were there to present them with the facts." By the time he retired in 2000, "I had found my niche in humanitarian services."

A turning point in his life came in 2004 when he met an adopted Vietnamese girl while teaching local eighth graders about the Vietnam War. She had an adopted sister, also Vietnamese. Learning that one of the girls was from an area near Hanoi, that her father had died from Agent Orange, that there were so many children there still in need, set Goldin to re-

flecting. In 2005, he returned to Vietnam as part of a group of fifteen veterans, looking for peace of mind, trying to find out "what it was all about.... I didn't see a country of former enemies. I saw 83,000,000 Vietnamese who were now our friends."

After he returned home, Chief Goldin and fellow Vietnam veteran Ed Frank created a not-for-profit organization with the help of the Spring Valley Rotary Club. Named STEP, Schools to End Poverty, its mission is to help children in impoverished areas obtain an education in a safe, sanitary environment. Thanks to the Rotary Club, local veterans groups, and several fundraisers, STEP raised enough money to build three schools in Vietnam, one in Jamaica, and one in Honduras. The group completed a water project in Ghana, and another school will soon be built. Their first school, in Da Lat, Vietnam, is a three-story building educating 545 children complete with running water, sanitation, and an elevator for the disabled students, all paid for by STEP and the generous donations of the Rockland County Rotary Club.

Howard Goldin and the Spring Valley Rotary Club continue to support Vietnamese children in need. On top of building schools and water sanitation systems, the Rotary Club donates medical equipment and supplies. The next time Howard goes to Vietnam, he will be giving out the 287th wheelchair to a child.

"Helping just ten children makes a difference in the world. Don't look at the world through tinted eyes. Try and see the world for what it is. The only way to break poverty is through education. Through education, you break the cycle. Education is the hope for the future. Above all, do whatever you can to make a difference in this world."



Rose School, Vietnam