

Honor to Our U.S. Military Heroes Who Did Not Return Home

One early morning in May 1970, we landed at Travis Air Force Base in San Francisco. We departed Japan hours earlier on our return journey to America. Regardless of our current medical conditions, I have no doubt that each soul on that plane must have wondered while serving in Vietnam if they would see this place we call home again.

As the rear troop door opened, a brisk wind and the California sun engulfed the interior of the fuselage. If it were not for the men beside me I would have wept tears of joy. Instead, there was silence that seemed to embrace each of us as we walked down that ramp, with the exception of those whose wounds required assistance.

Two elderly and stately gentlemen welcomed us. No words were exchanged, none were needed, and their smiles spoke as each presented us with a small medallion: "Veterans of Foreign Wars." To date I cherish that small medallion above all the medals issued for my service and valor.

On October 15, 1968, I was drafted into the U.S. Army 11B, and spent almost a year in combat training prior to shipping to Vietnam. I served as a squad leader, platoon leader, and acting company commander, and later was selected to serve as battalion sniper platoon leader. As I reflect over my time in Vietnam, the memory of two young men has traveled with me all these years. I would like to honor them and share these brief comments.

Tennessee, as he wished to be called, died on his birthday serving his country at the age of twenty. I shall never forget the joy in his face upon receiving a birthday card from his sister and his wishing to share it with me, only hours later to die as he volunteered to lead us out of an ambush. I shall never forget the boyish face and wonderful spirit of this young African-American man. I also think of Spencer, eager to do a good job, married only three days before coming to Vietnam and killed during a fire-fight some six months later. I do not lament their deaths as I did in the early years, but I celebrate their lives however short they may have lived and their contribution to my life.

To the nurses and doctors who served at Letterman General Hospital (LGH), to the merchants and restaurants that sent food, to the city of San Francisco, and finally to the service wives and Veteran organizations who visited us weekly at LGH, thank you for your love and kindness to the serviceman at LGH.

What is before you, the Operation Legacy workbook, is a priceless tool that can make a difference on how you live your life and what you can become. It was developed as a labor of love by three incredible people, and is provided in appreciation for the service you have rendered. It is designed to help you create a vision and understand the steps required to achieve that vision. I encourage you to look behind in appreciation, but to move forward with anticipation of what is within you to become what you are capable of achieving in a lifetime. In his short story *Three Sisters*, Anton Chekov wrote, "For you must either know why you live or else nothing matters, everything is just wild grass."

Without purpose in life, there is no meaning. Define and understand what you value in this life, build your life plan around these values, and all that you do hereafter will have meaning and purpose. The decisions you make at every crossroad will have criteria and meaning.



I encourage you to embrace the principles of this book. You have served us well, and to that end we are grateful. Let the information herein serve you to help you become what you were destined to achieve—greatness.

As a Veteran and citizen of this great country, thank you for the sacrifice you have made. May God richly bless you and may you experience a life with purpose and meaning and happiness.

Respectfully,

Antonio Loya, U.S. Army Combat Veteran