

**Clarence
Kugler**

AMC I graduated from Infantry Officer Candidate School on 1 Aug 69 and became a Signal Officer. This is akin to graduating from medical school and being issued a law degree. The Army works in strange ways. I was then sent to Ft. Gordon in Augusta, GA for Signal School for 8 weeks. What I remember about the school is that the Army uses the somewhat vulgar term PRC (pronounced "prick") as the nomenclature prior to a number for most of their radios. I never did find out what PRC signified.

At Infantry School, I was informed that if I volunteered to serve in the Army indefinitely which could mean up to the age of 60, I would be given one year at any Army base in the world. The program was referred to as "VOL INDEF"; I signed a contract for New York City and hoped I was not going to be assigned to a chaplain school located in Brooklyn. As luck would have it, I was assigned to the Army Pictorial Center (APC) in Queens, and given the military occupation code of a "motion picture producer". I was assigned to produce the Army's television show, "The Big Picture". In reality, the show was produced by career civil service employees and my duties were very limited which gave me the opportunity of exploring New York City. In those days, soldiers wearing their dress uniforms were admitted free to Yankee Stadium and Shea Stadium. On one very cold afternoon, with only about a thousand people in the stands, I sat in the 3rd row behind home plate and cheered Tom Seaver on for the Mets as he consecutively struck out the last 10 San Diego Padres in the game; the 10 straight KO's remain, to this day, a major league record. Sad to say, the APC was closed down in early 1970 and the Army gave me the choice of going immediately to Vietnam or taking another year anywhere in the world to complete my VOL INDEF contract; I chose Washington, DC.

On 25 FEB 70, it was my 25th birthday and I was a second lieutenant (2 LT) sitting in the Pentagon personnel office awaiting my duty assignment. I had just put my personnel file on the desk of the officer in charge of the office (OIC) when a 3 star general walked into the office and announced to the OIC, "I need a cracker jack lieutenant for a top priority job." Without even looking inside my file, the OIC said confidently as he handed my file to the general, "I have just the man here, Sir." The general looked at me and said, "Follow me" (an infantry motto which gave me a feeling of trepidation) before leading me through multiple corridors before marching me into a large wooden paneled room.

In the room, containing the largest oak oblong table I had ever seen was a 4 star general (General Ferdinand J. Chesarek) seated at one end flanked by 6 men dressed in coat and ties. I thought perhaps the 3 star general's unfriendly attitude toward me might have resulted from a 4 star general sending him to fetch a 2LT out of the personnel office rather than sending one of the civilians in the room. The General introduced me to Dr. Craig Crenshaw, the Chief Scientist of the United States, and told me I was now assigned to the Army Materiel Command and I was going to be touring all the research and engineering laboratories in the U.S. with Dr. Crenshaw and selected scientists chosen from across the country to write a report on the status of the labs. Somehow, with no forewarning, I had matriculated from a motion picture producer to the military attaché to the Chief Scientist of the United States.

During my year on the job, I taste tested dry frozen strawberries at Natick Labs outside of Boston, watched rockets take off at the China Lake Naval Weapons Center in California, toured the missile operations in Birmingham, AL, visited Rock Island Arsenal which is located in the middle of the Mississippi River between Iowa and Illinois, tested night vision goggles before they were issued in a lab in Virginia, toured helicopters downed in Vietnam that were brought back to Corpus Christi, TX for investigation, among my most lasting memories of the twenty some locations we visited across the

country. My main value to the team was getting Dr. Crenshaw's chess moves in the mail each morning and picking up letters addressed to him. During my time in DC, I saw A's Vida Blue pitch against a Ted Williams managed team; the Senators. In 1971, I was in Vietnam, as the Information Officer for the Da Nang Support Command and was in charge of tickets for the Bob Hope Christmas Show. I was able to shake Vida Blue's hand after helping Mr. Hope out of his helicopter in a rain storm and after getting Jim Neighbors to the medical tent for treatment.

What I always found strange about being in the Army was the fact you really never knew where you were going until you got there and if you did not know where you were going, any road would get you there.



Panama

By 1989, I had been in and out of the Army Reserves as a Captain four times. Each time, I would return to the Army more for social reasons than for financial ones. I enjoyed the comradeship of soldiers with like military experiences; especially with soldiers that served in Vietnam. However, by 1988, I was 43, married and with two boys under the age of 4. My wife, who had been working in a stock broker office, made a career change and returned to college to pursue a teaching degree. In short, we needed additional income in addition to my full time job with the U.S. Department of Labor and my wife's part time jobs.

I was aware that since I had been an enlisted man in the Army before becoming an officer, I had the right to come back into the Army if I could show that I could attain retirement before turning 60. (A full retirement requires having 20 good years based on 50 points a year) My major challenge in getting back into the system was a fire that had ravaged the records storage area in St. Louis, MO. I spent almost two years trying to get back into the system and I was continually told my records could not be found. I worked in the federal building in Ft. Lauderdale and one morning I passed the office of U.S. Rep. E. Clay Shaw and decided I would see if his office could be of assistance to me. Within 5 days, my records were found and within 2 weeks I was back into a unit in W. Palm Beach, FL. The mission of that unit was to take over an active duty Army base and process soldiers going overseas in a time of conflict.

I thought I would return as a senior sergeant. I was wrong; I was given the same lower sergeant rank I held before becoming an officer in 1969. I knew that if I could retire from the Army, I would retire at my highest rank; a Captain. To get to be a senior sergeant I would have to attend three different two week schools. I was excited about the school prospect as I knew I would be getting paid to attend the schools. In early 1990, I was attending my drill weekend when I was told the unit was cutting personnel and I would have to find a new home unit or I would be out of the reserves and my pension hopes would be lost. In APR 1990, I drove to a hospital unit south of Miami and I was told they had no openings but there was a unit down the hall being assembled called Civil Affairs (CA) and they were looking for experienced soldiers. The unit had been sending soldiers on a regular basis to Panama to support soldiers following Operation Just Cause which was the invasion of Panama and the removal of General Noriega from power on December 20, 1989.

I walked into the CA office with my personnel file in my hand and informed the Master Sergeant in charge I was eager to get back into the Reserves as soon as possible and I would enjoy any assignment. Based on my experience, he accepted me into the unit in less than five minutes. He explained the Army had combined multiple disciplines into what was now termed Special Operations. The unit was located at Ft. Bragg, NC. (Rangers, Special Forces, Physiological Operations, Civil Affairs and Special Air Ops) I would later see a cartoon featuring a series of 3 cartoon boxes. In the first box a Ranger soldier was crawling thru mud under barb wire and quoted as saying, "I love this." The second box was a Special Forces soldier crawling thru the same mud scene saying, "I really, really love this." The third box featured a CA soldier jumping up and down on a bed holding a TV clicker while saying, "What, no cable TV." The CA cartoon gives you an idea of the hardships CA soldiers have to endure while working in the civilian communities of foreign nations.

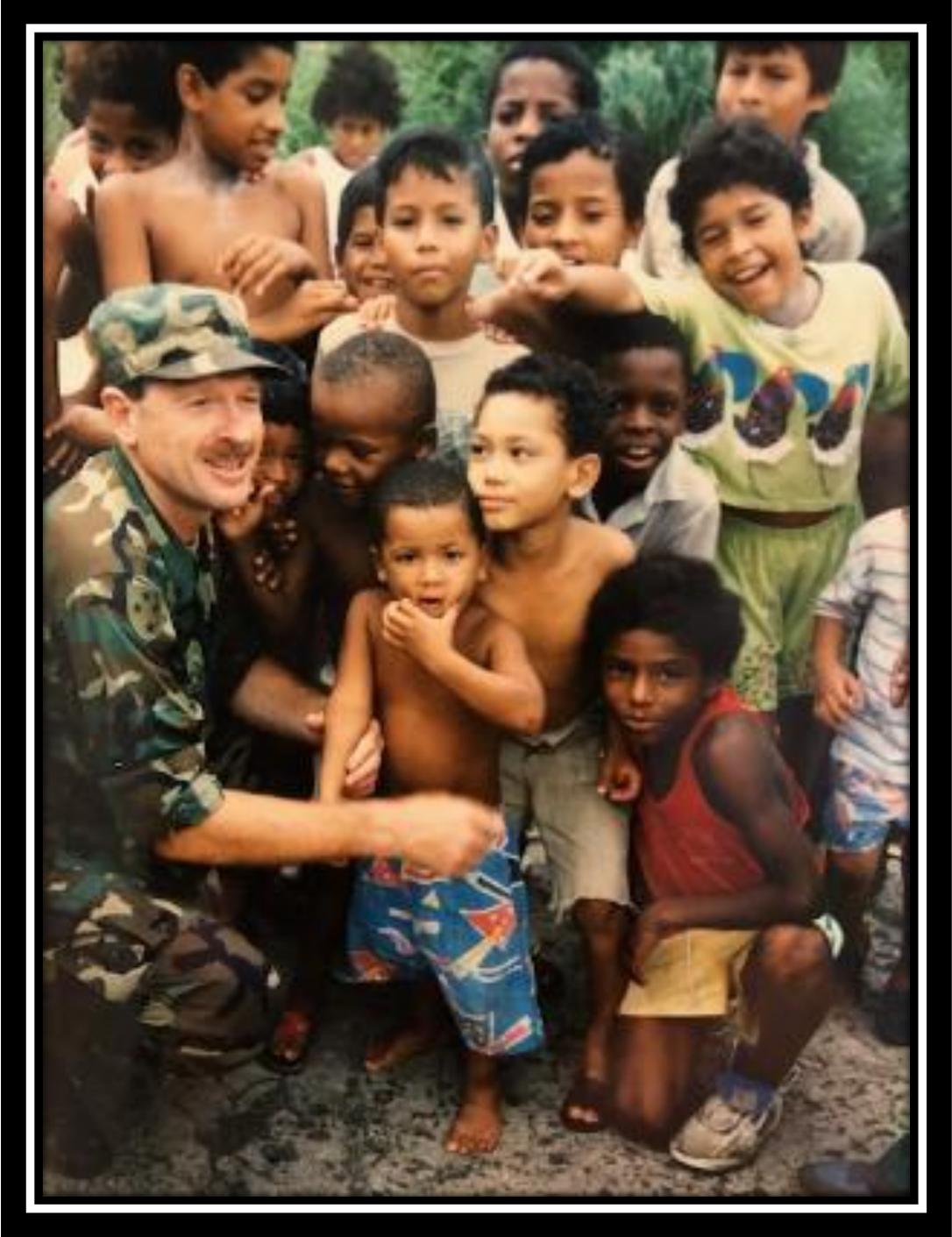
The CA Master Sergeant said, "How would you like to go to Panama for 3 weeks?" I said I would welcome the opportunity and asked him what date. He said, "This Friday, four days from now." He said he needed a driver for an Army Reserve general by Saturday. With orders, but without a security clearance and without an airplane ticket I was at the Miami Airport waiting for the Sergeant to show up with my ticket. I managed to get to the gate using my orders but with no ticket; I could not board the plane. As luck would have it, there was a full Panamanian band with free beer, at the gate, to celebrate my flight being the inaugural one for American Airlines to Panama. I used the free beer to lesson my ticket tension during the wait.

Five minutes before the plane's departure, I saw my sergeant, in uniform, running down the hallway with a younger man waving what I presumed was my ticket over his head. Indeed it was my ticket. The young man running with my boss did not have a ticket. I was past the ticket agent when I heard the young man behind me say to the ticket agent, "Don't you know who I am?" The ticket agent said she did not know him and that he was required to have a ticket in order to board the plane. As a baseball fan, I recognized the young man as the Panamanian born NY Yankee pitcher Mario Rivera. (He would end up being the only player elected to the Baseball Hall of Fame unanimously). I approached the ticket agent showing her my military ID and told her that Mr. Rivera is one of Panama's most distinguished celebrities and he should be allowed on the plane. I said I would vouch for his authenticity. After a very brief telephone conversation, Mr. Rivera was admitted onto the plane in the first class section and I was relegated to the rear. He did effusively thank me for my intervention. It was surf and turf and all the beer you could drink before landing in Panama so I had no problems with the seating arrangements.

Upon arrival, I assumed my Panama driving duties and drove my general, a reservist dentist from Mobile, AL, around for a few days before his departure. My next assignment was with a Special Forces team who asked me if I wanted to go into the city as they were looking for members of General Noriega's police force who were assuming a civilian status. I asked the team commander if I could wear shorts and he said "Sure, be casual". I wore a pair of yellow Brooks Brothers shorts and I was somewhat taken back by most of the male Panamanians I encountered pointing and laughing at me. I noticed that my SF team was walking with long pants on the other side of the street and that I was the only member of our five man team not carrying a sidearm. Later that day, the team leader explained to me that only gay men in Panama wear shorts and that my wearing yellow shorts was a good distraction enabling the team to check out civilians without drawing attention to the team. Good to have a vital role on a SF team.

My third assignment was at an airplane hangar near Ft. Clayton by the canal where some 200 Panamanian civilians were temporarily placed following the destruction of their barrio during the invasion. My assignment was to organize sporting activities for the children lodged in the hangar. We played baseball, kickball, and did various exercises. The kids laughed heartily at my limited Spanish which was augmented with my pantomimes. (The Tennis Ball-holding knees and bouncing up and down; The Elephant-bending over using your right arm as a trunk and flopping lips up and down; The Alligator-performing an Army low crawl; among their favorites) My performances were subsequently rewarded by Civil Affairs assignments where I was name requested by Army units for Central American engineering assignments. My job was to perform for children in churches while Army engineers surveyed schools and medical buildings for repairs. Turns out my two sons were excellent evaluators of talent for my future performance missions.

I am very proud that through much time and effort I won an Army pension. It is a gift that never stops giving.



Army Ironman

\

In 1982, I had not been in the Army in any way shape or form since 1974. However, I kept checking “yes” upon receiving yearly Army post cards asking if I wished to remain on the standby Army Reserve roster. I was unaware by answering yes I was collecting retirement years at the rank of Captain. By 1982, I had run 20 some marathons under 4 hours in many of the major American cities that offered the event and multiple times in some cities. I started with the New York marathon in 1976 and followed that by running Boston (as a bandit), Philadelphia, Miami, Detroit, Houston, and Chicago to name a few). At 215 pounds in the 70’s, I was euphemistically called a “Clydesdale” in the distance running community.

In the summer of 1982, I received a letter from the Army informing me the Army was looking for candidates to try out for their orienteering team that was scheduled to compete in Norway the following year. I called the number in the letter and was informed that a month of training would be done at Fort Sam Houston in San Antonio, Texas and the team would be chosen from those participating in the training. To be paid for running, swimming and shooting with a chance to go to Norway was an opportunity I could not pass up. There was only one catch, to be considered for the team you had to be active in some element of the Army. I was asked if I had attended the Army Advanced Course (AAC) which was needed for promotion to the rank of Major; I had not. In fact, becoming a Major never entered my mind. Then I was told that there was an AAC opening up in Ft. Lauderdale, FL which if I attended would make me eligible for the Army orienteering team. I signed up for the course and after finding the short sleeved kaki summer uniform I left Vietnam in, I was ready to re-enter military life. The course was being offered in a one story building directly across from the stadium where the NY Yankees held their spring training.

I walked into the class with a case and a half of iced canned beer in a cooler which highlighted to my classmates my dedication to the Army mission. The fact I was a Vietnam veteran gave me some latitude in conduct with the instructor; he also liked beer. At the conclusion of the course, several of my young officer classmates urged me to join their unit in W. Palm Beach, FL saying my zest for fun would be appreciated by the unit. The unit in question was the 3220 US Army Garrison whose unit patch was a bobcat which was worn by General Pershing’s unit in WWI and was the first authorized Army unit patch. Soldiers not in the unit often referred to the patch as the “Kitty Cat”.

I interviewed for a position in the unit and I was told I was going to be the new Equal Opportunity (EO) Officer based on my investigative experience in the government. I immediately notified the Army orienteering folks that I was unavailable for training due to my forthcoming EO training. The EO position required attending a month of Defense Department training at Patrick Air Force Base in Melbourne, FL. The base is located on the Atlantic Ocean and trainees were lodged at a Holiday Inn on the beach. Flip flops, swimming suits, sun glasses and sun screen were military items required for the training. (“Death where is thy sting?”...W. Shakespeare) In addition to the month of classroom activity with testing, soldiers were required to write a term paper and attend a weekend of training at a National Guard base in Arkansas of all places. I learned a lot about the friendliness of folks from Arkansas when, during my EO training out there, I locked the keys to my rent a car in the car with the engine running as

I entered a 7-11 store to buy beer. A kind Arkansas citizen drove me out to the airport for a spare key and back to the store for which I compensated this kindness with money for time and gas.

Earlier in 83, I watched ABC's Wide World of Sports Hawaiian Ironman on tv. (An event featuring a 2 and a half mile swim, a 112 bike ride, and a marathon run all in one day) At that time, there was no competition to get into the event. All you needed for acceptance was to send a check for \$100 and be crazy enough to enter the event. Despite not being a very good swimmer and not having a racing bike; I was accepted for the Ironman. I would later learn I was the only Army Reservist in the event. For me, Army EO training was excellent Ironman training.

My Garrison Commander allowed me to participate in the Ironman in lieu of attending the drill weekend. Thus, I became a professional triathlete. The first Ironman was held in Oahu and subsequently moved to The Big Island (Hawaii). My October 1983 race was made even more difficult than usual when islanders spread carpet tacks over the biking course (in an effort to eradicate commercialism) causing a multitude of flats and winds picked up to 60 mph during the biking phase. I reached the top of one long hill standing up on my bike and the wind blew me down to the bottom of the hill I had just spent 15 minutes getting up. It was frustrating but I plugged on and finished in some 16 hours.

The next morning I awoke and remotely turned on my hotel room tv. To my astonishment, feeling as tired as I had ever felt in my entire life, I heard we were at war. The newscaster proclaimed, "The U.S. Army has begun Operation Urgent Fury in an invasion of Grenada." Without getting any further details, I called the Garrison and asked why we had invaded Spain and did I need to return to the mainland. I was informed that the invasion took place on a small island in the Caribbean, that I was unaware of at the time, and that I should relax. I took this as a Garrison order and I called room service.

My Army duty Ironman efforts were published in the Army Times giving me modest celebrity status within the Garrison. I was unhappy with my time; not my effort. I returned to the Ironman in 1985 with a better bike and more training. In my second effort, proud to say, I had the fastest bike time, 6 hours flat, of anyone over 40 and I was able to knock 4 hours off my previous finish time. Many years later, my wife and I took a cruise to Grenada. I ended up having to lie about my age of 72 in order to be allowed to go zip lining with my wife on the island.



WEEKEND

'Professionals in Reserve'



CL. No. VII USAG (3220) West Palm Beach, FL 33408 APRIL 84

RESERVE



Soto Cano It was a hot Miami drill weekend in September 2001 when the Commander announced in our morning formation that our civil affairs battalion was being tasked to send five soldiers for 15 days. in October, to the Soto Cano Air Force Base in Honduras. I was one of the soldiers selected for the mission. The base houses 500-600 U.S soldiers. Their mission is to provide a launching point for U.S. humanitarian aid to Central and South America.

We performed a corkscrew landing in the Honduran capital city, Tegucigalpa, and waited for a bus to take us on a 60 some mile trip to the base. I noticed an ice cream shop across the street from the airport and I began to cross the street when I noticed a uniformed guard with a pump shotgun standing outside the shop; I wondered about safety in Honduras and I decided to wait until I got to the base for ice cream.

Soto Cano is surrounded by lush green mountains. Soldiers are housed in separate tin roofed “hooches” with a common toilet/bath area beyond the sleeping area. There is a large gym, an Olympic sized swimming pool and soldiers, upon request, are issued mountain bikes to keep off duty boredom to a minimum. Our volunteer group did not have much to do as we sat in a large office from 7am to 4pm with an hour for lunch. We were spending our time looking through maps of Honduras and practicing our Spanish while talking with one another.

During a lunch break, I noticed a travel agency ad on the bulletin board touting a 3 day trip to Roatan, an island 65 kilometers off the coast, with plane fare and hotel package. The ad pointed out Roatan was located next to the second largest coral reef in the world. Normally, reservists are given the weekend off to “familiarize” with the local culture. This “familiarization” often entailed shopping and beer drinking. Since my Spanish was so poor, I was able to convince the base commander to break precedent and allow me an extra day of immersion at a remote location to improve my Spanish.

I was joined on the flight to Roatan by an active duty Special Forces (SF) SGT, an active duty Air Force major and his wife and the pilot in our tiny plane. Our hotel was small but it was located across the road from the ocean. The SGT and I rented masks and snorkels and headed out into the ocean across from our hotel. We were swimming over coral some 50 feet from the beach with 50 feet or more of visibility in crystal clear ocean a half hour after landing at the airport.

The next day, the SGT decided to go out on a boat for tank diving. Being thrifty, I decided to walk off the beach and spend the day in shallow water where the fish were smaller but more plentiful and the colorful coral visually amazing. After about an hour, I was looking directly at an octopus when it turned a different color and blended perfectly into the coral. I lifted my head up to see where I was in relation to the hotel; when I turned to look out at the ocean, I saw the sky had turned pitch black. In minutes, without any warning, Hurricane Iris was on me with wind and rain so intense I could not see the shore. I navigated under the water following a grouper to shallow water. I made it back to the hotel and discovered there was no electricity and the roof in my room was leaking; some vacation.

Lucky for me, the Air Force officer had a cell phone and he was able to communicate with the base as all travel from the island to Honduras was blocked for the next few days and I was not considered absent without leave. (AWOL) Unlucky for me, I had little cash and credit cards were of little value in the local economy. With constant rain and diving closed down, my SF friend and I decided to explore the island on foot. We walked north along the beach until we came upon a large hotel on the beach. Despite the rain, there was a tent on the beach with what looked like a bar set up. It didn't take us long to realize that it was

a free bar and we enjoyed several Italian beers until security came to us seeking some form of identification. When we told security that we were not guests of the hotel but stranded American soldiers, we were told to leave and we were marched through the lobby with security by our side. Like prisoners going to the gallows, we headed to the front door area of the hotel when a female voice yelled, "Stop, we have no men, we need them."

We had walked into an Italian travel club hotel with a hundred or so Italian women and very few Italian men. The Italian social director had spotted us and needed us. Clad in only bathing suits and T-shirts, we were given waiter pants and jackets and brought into the dining room to feast on a buffet and beers. There was a talent show after dinner, my SF friend won the show doing an imitation of Elvis Presley during which he continued telling the Italian speaking ladies he was "All Shook Up" while wiggling his legs. By employing a low crawl (learned in Army officer school), I won the dancing contest featuring my "Alligator". In fairness to the 3 other male dance competitors, I believe none of the Italian ladies giving me the winning applause had seen a 56 year old soldier doing a low crawl to music. For my part, I did learn chow in Italian was not a meal or a dog.

We turned in our waiter uniforms and headed back to our hotel with bottles of victorious champagne to drink in darkness. The next morning, after five nights on Roatan, we were able to fly back to the mainland. Upon arrival at the base, I was brought to the base commander who informed me that I should know there would be no three day leaves granted to reservists in the future. I told the commander that I fully understood his position but noted that my Spanish had improved. I did not mention Italian language to him.



VA Care

After returning from Iraq in 2004, I was given free Veteran's Administration (VA) medical care for one year to include eye and dental work at the VA in W. Palm Beach, FL (WPB). Due to medical issues incurred while serving in Vietnam and in Iraq, I was awarded a disability rating of 60 percent which entitles me to free VA medical care for life. So, any time I have any physical issues I make a bee line to a VA facility for what I have experienced to be timely and excellent medical care with few exceptions. The VA issues veterans ID cards that we carry around our necks and there is a security officer checking individual tags before admission is permitted.

Every year I have my eyes checked at the VA in WPB and if there is a change in my prescription requirement, I am issued a new pair of glasses to go with the new prescription. Before departing for Iraq, I was issued a pair of reading glasses at Ft. Bragg, NC. The young soldiers called my glasses, "Birth Control Glasses" (BCG's). I was told anyone wearing my glasses would be unable to find anyone to have sex with during their time in Iraq or for the rest of their lives for that matter. Since I was happily married for 19 years, no problem.

Two years ago in March, I was in the optical department at the WPB VA and I had my eyes dilated for examination. Normally, I would wait for an hour for my eyes to adjust and I would wear sunglasses and drive the 30 miles back home. To avert any vision issues, I always took a backroad home that passed by a brand new spring training home of the Houston and Washington baseball teams. As I approached the stadium, my eyes were burning and I considered it to be a safety problem to push on and I drove into what I thought was the entrance to parking lot. I was surprised that there was no one to collect what normally would be a \$10 parking fee. When I parked my car near the gate, I got out and noticed there was a line of cars out on the main street waiting to get into the park. It was obvious that I had driven in the exit to the park. It was an honest mistake caused by poor vision and I did not see the need to admit my guilt and pay \$10.

Normally, when I leave the VA, I take my ID card off my neck and stick it in the glove compartment of my car for its permanent safe keeping. This day, I was so

discombobulated that I forgot to take my ID tag off and I believe this fact contributed to my forthcoming adventures. I then walked up to the stadium and purchased a standing room only ticket. The two home teams, the Astros and the Nationals, were playing and they would alternate changing the home team dugouts during the season when they played one another. Half blind I used both hands to hold onto the railing as I climbed the nearly 30 steps leading up to the main walkway. I thought I would only need to watch two or three innings between two teams I had no interest in before my eyes would adjust and I could safely drive home.

As I stood in the glaring sun after about a half hour I developed a blinding headache and I decided I would be better off waiting for my eyes to adjust sitting in my car in the parking lot.

I looked around and saw an elevator with a guard standing by it. I walked over to the guard and told him that I was having eye problems and I asked if for safety reasons I could exit the stadium without having to take the stairs. He looked at my ID card and said I could ride the elevator down to the first floor and if I kept right I would find the exit. He must have misunderstood me. When the elevator hit the first floor, I was standing in the Nationals dressing room with two guys getting rub downs. I immediately admitted my guilt and not being where I was supposed to be and I was directed to head down the hallway and I would find the exit door that I presumed would put me in the parking lot.

Obediently I trekked down the hall and when I reached the end and I opened the door and walked in. I was standing in the Astros dugout and I had a small conversation with a catcher in his full gear as the game was going on. My guess is the catcher thought my VA badge signified some status in Major League baseball and he told me that I should go back to the main hallway and head further down the hallway as that was the door I was looking for. He must have misunderstood me. Once again I was obedient and I moved further down the hall and I walked thru the last door in the corridor and I entered. I then found myself standing alone in the Astros owner's box. What became alarming at this point were fans sitting close by me waving at me while I squinted to see if I knew anybody or not.

I thought, “What the hell? Sit down and watch a half inning and maybe my vision will come back.” It did not and I thought no one would believe my honest account of my presence in the owner’s box so I departed while waving to the crowd. I had to retrace my entire hallway march and take the elevator back up to the second floor and inform the guard that I had decided my car was closer to the stairs.

One major league clubhouse, one major league dugout and a major league owner’s box in one day at the ballpark is more than any soldier is entitled to expect per baseball game. I refer to my post VA experience as “Mr. Magoo leaves the VA and visits the ballpark.”

