

1964–1992

IT'S CLASSIFIED

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There is an old adage, “Military intelligence is to intelligence what military music is to music.”

All my experiences supported that adage.

Here are just some examples.

In 1965, I was a Private First Class (PFC) assigned to Company A, 2/48th Infantry (Dragoons), 1st Brigade, 3rd Armored Division on a *kaserne*¹ outside *Glenhausen*, Germany.

We had a mission of stopping the advancing Soviet Armies in the Fulda Gap. We were advised that Soviet spies were everywhere so we had to be very careful in our conversations and in our correspondence so that we never divulged “classified” information.

The number one prohibition was mentioning the number of troops in our unit. However, it always bothered me that the first duty day of each month was a mandatory formation. Every soldier, including those on kitchen police (A.K.A. ‘KP’) and the cooks, was required to stand in formation so that we could all be physically counted.

All one had to do was to look at the mountains surrounding the *kaserne* where we were stationed in order to see the Germans sitting there watching the show. Anyone of them, who could count, should have been able to figure out the exact number of soldiers in the battalions.

Another “secret” was that we were woefully short of fuel. From 1964–1967, the Vietnam War was draining resources on a level that even we privates could comprehend. Along with a shortage of ammunition, we had a dangerous low level of fuel.

Surely none of the Germans living near us knew we were short of fuel.

¹ According to *Wikipedia*: “The German word *Kaserne* (plural: *Kasernen*) translates as “barracks”. It is the typical term used when naming the garrison location for North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) forces stationed in Germany. U.S. forces within a *kaserne* could range anywhere from company size, with a few hundred troops and equipment, to brigade level formation with supporting units, or approximately 3–5,000 troops and their equipment.” At *Glenhausen*, we were part of the 1st Brigade of the 3rd Armored Division. (A brigade is typically composed of 2–5 battalions.)

In 1965, we would be alerted and moved to positions near the Fulda Gap, 40–50 miles away. By 1966, we would be alerted, drive our vehicles out the front gate, turn left on the main highway, turn left at the corner of the kaserne, circle around to the back gate of the kaserne and return our vehicles to their positions and ourselves to the barracks.

In 1965, we were going to the field 3-out-of-4 weeks a month. By 1966, we were going to the field 1–1.5 weeks per month. All because we did not have the fuel to keep our armored vehicles running.

If I could figure that out as a private, surely the Soviets had spies smart enough to figure it out.

So much for secrets.

By 1967, I had graduated from Officer Candidate School and had joined Company A, 3/503rd Infantry, 82nd Airborne Division, at Fort Bragg, North Carolina.

It was a “SECRET” that our battalion was organized and equipped to go to Vietnam. Of course, the fact that we were the only battalion in the 82nd Airborne Division that wore jungle fatigues, wore jungle boots and carried jungle rucksacks *might* have been a clue.

The battalion was constituted, organized and field so quickly that we didn't have time to get all the security clearances that we needed. So the decision was made that if something was classified, none of the troops in the units needed to see it unless someone in the battalion S2 (intelligence) section deemed it worthy. In English, that means we never got any classified briefings.

I lead a Weapons Platoon composed of 81mm mortars² and M-60 machineguns. The moment we reached Vietnam, we were designated a rifle platoon (for which we had not trained) because none of the units in the 173rd Airborne Brigade (Separate) carried mortars. That must have been classified or we could have trained as a rifle platoon at Fort Bragg instead of having to learn through on-the-job training in a war zone.

² The M29 mortar is a U.S. produced 81 millimeter caliber mortar comprised of a tube, a bipod for that tube, and a base plate. Together, they weighed about 100 pounds; but, the parts were carried by 3 men. It had a maximum rate of fire is 30 rounds for the first minute followed by 4–12 rounds per additional minute. The range was 5,140 yards. Each mortar was serviced by a crew of four.

On a Victory Ship over to Vietnam, I gave each of the 46 men in my platoon a blank map of Asia and asked them to circle Vietnam. Only my platoon sergeant, assistant platoon sergeant, and I could do it. I marveled that these men were going to a war many would not return from, and yet none could circle the terrain where their lives would be lost.

In 1986, after 10 months in the field in Vietnam, I was leading a patrol. We saw some strange markings by the side of the trail, but had we had no idea what they meant.

Sensing danger, I requested artillery fire to clear a path ahead of us. The battalion commander, flying in a UH-1 Huey helicopter at 3,000 feet above us, denied the request because under the "Rules of Engagement" we were too close to a "friendly" village and civilians might be injured.

Within minutes, we were ambushed.

I lost 5 dead and 10 wounded out of the 20 men with me. I was one of the casualties. I was hit 5 times, my glasses were ripped from my face, and some sort of chemical sprayed into my eyes so that I could barely see.

Fortunately, the medic was among those not injured and began life-saving steps on those critically injured.

I noticed there was not much blood on my chest but I could tell I was bleeding rather heavily in that area. I asked my platoon sergeant to open my shirt and tell me what he saw. He confirmed that I had been hit just to the right of my solar plexes, but that there was very little blood coming out.

We both knew that meant only one thing: I was bleeding internally. Usually, that meant death because there is no way to stop internal bleeding.

In the haze of the battle, I could tell from the blood on my hands and arms that I would not be able to continue to use them and because I could not see clearly without my glasses, I turned command over to my platoon sergeant.

The rest of the engagement is a little hazy for me. Somehow, I was evacuated and airlifted to a Mobile Army Surgical Hospital (MASH) somewhere in the rear area.

When I regained consciousness, both my hands were bandaged as was my right arm. A tube ran from my right lung into a gallon bottle on the floor. Fortunately, my internal bleeding had been from a punctured lung. I can tell you that waking up was a surprise for me; I thought I was going to die.

A year later, I took over as the Intelligence Officer for the 6th Special Forces Group at Fort Bragg, North Carolina. As a part of those duties, I was to maintain the safe containing all the classified documents.

So I took an inventory.

The first document I picked up was entitled “Lessons Learned: Vietnam.” It was dated 1965. It was classified Confidential. There, on the first page of text and drawings were the markings we had found next to the trail on that fatal day back in 1968.

Some time later, I ran into the Major who had been the Intelligence Officer for the 3/503 Infantry (that unit I was in prior to going to the Vietnam War). When I asked about the manual “Lessons Learned Vietnam,” he replied, “Of course, we had it; but, we decided that it was classified so we did not share it. I read it,” he went on, “and if you had asked me what was in it, I would have told you.”

“How could I ask what was in it?” I asked, “I didn’t know it existed.”

“Oops!” he replied, shrugged, half-smiled and walked away.

It took all my restraint to stop from ripping his eye out so he could *begin* to feel the pain I had felt watching my warriors die.

Because *some* of our troops did not have clearances, *none* of us were briefed on the very signs that would later lead to the death of five of my warriors and the wounding of 10 others.

Had we been briefed, I don’t know that I would have remembered those signs; but, I sure would have liked to have had the opportunity.

After I was an Intelligence Officer in Special Forces for about six months, the Army decided I needed to be trained as an Intelligence Officer. So I was sent to the U.S. Army Intelligence Center and School at Fort Holabird, (in Baltimore) Maryland for the Intelligence Officer’s Advanced Course. (Fort Holabird is now a civilian housing area as the military sold it off about a decade after I was there.)

The first few days were spent indoctrinating us with the concepts that the Soviet Union had spies sneaking into the country every day and they were everywhere. Classified documents had to be protected to keep these godless heathens from learning about our intentions, our capabilities and our vulnerabilities.

Then, they brought in some full colonel to brief us on the national-level abilities and threats of the Soviet Union.

His first viewgraph transparency showed a large logo of the National Security Agency based at Fort Meade, Maryland. It was the only slide that was not classified SECRET.

The logo & agency name was huge; but, his name in small letters. Since I was in the 20th row of an auditorium of 50 rows, I couldn't read his name due to the small print.

His second slide was classified SECRET. It was the legal ports of entry for Soviet ships into the United States. "No wonder the Soviets are sneaking into this country," I thought to myself. "We haven't told them where they can come in legally."

I arose to my feet with my hand in the air. Without waiting to be called upon, the moment the colonel looked at me, I asked, "Sir, why is that slide classified SECRET? Surely, we're not hiding those ports from the Soviets — are we?"

He looked at the slide. He looked at me. He thought for a moment and replied, "I'll have to get back to you on that one." (For the uninitiated, that's Pentagonese for "I have no clue and you will *never* hear from me in this life time or the next.")

So I sat down.

His third slide, also classified SECRET, was a map of the U.S. showing all the Soviet embassies and trade offices. "My God, I thought, we haven't even told the Soviets where their embassy is!"

My hand was up in a shot, but as I was rising from my seat (again, without being prompted), the colonel motioned his hand in a downward motion and remarked, "Don't even bother asking. I'll have to get back to you on this one, too."

What I learned in the Intelligence School was:

- ❶ The military intelligence motto: If you classify it, you won't have to answer questions about it because no one will want to see it and those that do will not pass it along or even admit they've seen it.
- ❷ When faced with a decision, classify it.

But I graduated as a full-fledged Intelligence Officer.

I was so proud.