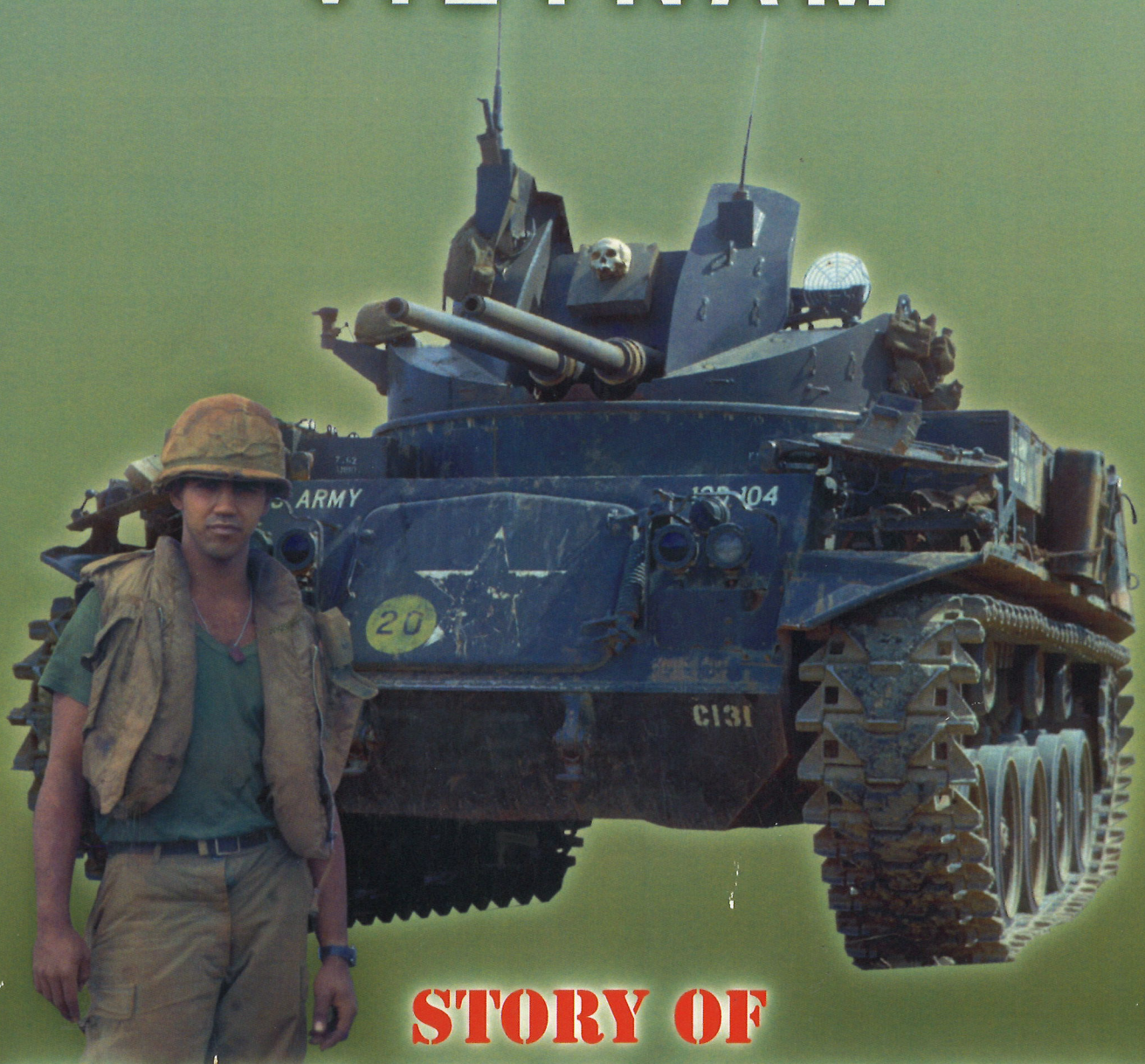


DUSTERMAN

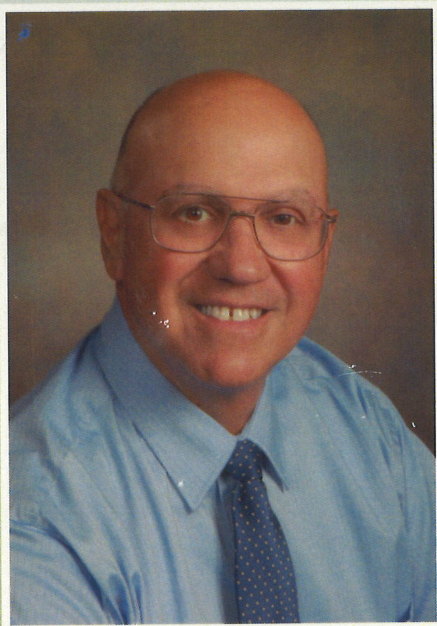
VIETNAM



STORY OF THE LAST GREAT GUNFIGHTERS

TRANSCRIPTS FROM MY VIETNAM DIARY AND MEMOIRS

JOSEPH M. BELARDO, SR.



From The Author

I tell everyone that I am a "Blessed" person. I've had a successful career and have a loving family. I have a wonderful wife who has listened to all my stories, over and over again and has given me her love and support since we were high school sweethearts.

Then God honored me by having me meet the most courageous men on earth. Not only were they fearless and brave under the most horrific, terrifying war conditions, but they were also the kindest, gentlest men you could ever meet. They became my best friends. To this very day, we still talk to each other weekly and see each other at our yearly reunions. If something is wrong, we are still there for each other. From our friendship, we now have extended families.

There are a few out there to whom I owe my life, but there are hundreds of Dustermen, Quad-50 Men, Marines, Seabees, Medics, Corpsmen, Soldiers, and Chopper and Air Force Pilots who came to my rescue and to the rescue of my friends and crew. Hopefully, my story has done justice to all these brave men.

I have dedicated part of my life to giving speeches and seminars at high schools and colleges about what it was like being a combatant in the Vietnam War. I explain to them that we believed that we were fighting for another human's freedom and civil rights. My heart has always been broken by the journalistic slanted rhetoric against all Vietnam Veterans. I cannot change how history was written, but I can give young Americans a true accounting of the war. I also tell them what a much better world it would be if wars were solved with thumb wrestling contests instead of weapons. At the end of each lecture, I ask the audience what freedom is worth and how much would they be willing to pay for their liberties.

I can only hope and pray that my efforts as a Dusterman have made a difference in someone's life and that difference has made them a better person.

Thank you all for my life,

Joe Belardo



to be a mental firefight. Frightened and concerned, I took a deep breath and stepped out of the chopper to meet my family. My father was the first to meet me. We just stared at each other. We both knew the price of war and did not need to speak. He extended his one hand to me and just said, "Well." I removed from my wallet his small red scapula and placed it in his hand and thanked him. "You can have this back when I die," Dad said softly. He hugged me tightly and kissed my cheeks and cried. "Now go say hello to your mother, Brenda, Kenny, Nancy and the rest of the family." I was fortunate, my homecoming was wonderful. I was loved and had forgotten how good it felt.

When we arrived at our house, my father had placed a banner on the front lawn that said "**WELCOME HOME SON**".

The previous was the last entry in my diary. I was thankful that my tour had ended and that I was welcomed home with the loving open arms of my family and friends.

My mother and father were thrilled when we took down Allen Ginsberg. I came home in time for the South Plainfield Annual Labor Day Parade. The local newspaper asked to do an article about my tour in Nam. The parade was in my name, and I rode with Mayor Gaynor in his Cadillac convertible. It was a great homecoming. The following month my parents had to change their telephone to an unlisted number. The twenty-four hour a day calls never ended. Nameless voices yelling, "**Baby burner – child killer – rapist – bastard – village burner – war monger,**" and a hundred other terrible names. My mother cried, and my father questioned my tour. I was never so sad. The war was bad enough. I thought what we read in the papers was journalistic bullshit. I was wrong. My fellow countrymen hurt me more than I can ever express. For years, if I were introduced to someone as a Vietnam vet, the reply would be a single expressive word "Oh". I always wondered what that "Oh" meant. That little word cut me like a knife.