

# The Veteran's Denial

by Gary D. Chartier

## Chapter 1

September 2004    Oklahoma

The big red Dodge Ram was sliding in and out of traffic on Highway 169 heading into Owasso. The driver was glued to the window in front of him and his hands were white holding the truck's wheel. He seemed like he was in a trance of some kind. Other drivers were going seventy and the red truck just passed them as if they were stationary.

The older Ford station wagon pulled up into the intersection with the green light showing. A loud BAM sounded when the red truck speared the wagon right at the driver's door. The wagon's driver was killed instantly. The air bag went off in the truck as it bounced back off the wagon and slowly rolled past the front of the station wagon making horrible scraping noises all the way to its stop. Grady Clinton slowly got out of the driver's door though it was horribly bent. He staggered over to the curb and sat down. Blood ran down his face. He had struck the steering wheel with his nose and bloodied it. He also had broken his collarbone on the left side.

Police and ambulances sounded their sirens and had their lights flashing as they entered the intersection. Grady had dropped most of his clothes and had some nurse trying to give him some aid. Blood was all over his face and bare chest.

"What happened?" was his silent question.

He sat frozen on the curb.

## Chapter 2

July 1969    South Vietnam

The U.S. soldier was crouching as low as possible and still trying to walk, sneaking along a small jungle trail in South Vietnam almost fifteen miles

south of the DMZ and eight miles west of the east coast. He was soaked from head to toe from the light rain and his own sweat. His head hurt and he felt sick from being awake for over 30 hours with very little food in his stomach. A touch of lightheadedness was present. His current weight of only 135 pounds at six foot tall was not healthy in theory or in truth.

He was the point man for a platoon from the U.S. Infantry's 208<sup>th</sup> Battalion. They were traveling at night.

This soldier's name was Grady Clinton and his hometown was Broken Arrow, Oklahoma.

It was well past three a.m. Grady hoped that no VC or Regulars were awake at this hour. He knew better however. His platoon was returning from a search and kill mission through a dangerous region known as the "Glowing Pearl".

Grady slowly took ten quiet steps, after the trail they were following intersected with another. Hearing a noise to his left, he ever so slowly spun his body counter clockwise toward the sound. His weapon, an M-16, was smoothly and slowly raised. Grady didn't breath.

A flash exploded in the dark jungle night and turned it into instant sunlight.

Grady's memory would only remember the sudden brightness.

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Seven days later, E-4 Clinton awoke in a hospital in Tokyo, Japan. After being shot in the face by the Viet Cong scout, and the short firefight that followed, his platoon medic along with two other soldiers quickly carried him back to their CP (command post), where they had departed two days earlier. They were sure that he was dead from the wound. My God, his eye was hanging out and he had teeth and pieces of flesh all over his fatigues.

The bullet had struck Grady in the fleshy part of his left cheek, erasing forever a deep dimple used in happier times, and then removed five teeth from that side. It continued through his mouth and exited the right side of his face, taking another handful of teeth, again in the fleshy cheek area. One tooth had gone upward and penetrated his right eye. The ruined eye had

been surgically removed there in Tokyo. His entry and exit bullet wounds had been cleaned and stitched. He had a horrible headache and kept the headache for years afterward.

Lots of dental work plus facial cosmetic surgeries would be scheduled and on the way. Over three years of residence with the Army's hospitals were on tap for Grady. He had been wounded on the 283<sup>rd</sup> day of his second tour in Vietnam. He had been transferred back to the states a lot quicker. His weight was at 128 pounds on his six-foot frame when he arrived at the VA Tokyo Hospital.

Just being in the atmosphere of the hospitals, taking the drugs prescribed and seeing the damage the bullet had done to his face, would be a test to his mental health.