

“MY PURPLE HEART 2”
(a True account)
by Ken Daniel
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Source: War Stories Collections, Dr. Ralph R. Chase West Texas Collection, Angelo State University, San Angelo, Texas The following document has been reformatted from its original version and partially edited.

My wife, Inge knew the major that gave me the Purple Heart from Stuttgart, so it is a small world. The hospital was a concrete block building with two floors. There were about forty beds on each floor. I had two IV's and each IV had its own stand on wheels. The surgeons had opened my underarm up at least sixteen inches to repair the main artery and ligated the veins. They had left it open to drain.

Suddenly this nurse appeared in fatigues and combat boots and told me I needed to dance. She got me out of bed and danced me around a few minutes with the IV stands in tight tow.

One nice thing they did in all the hospitals was call me Kenneth. Gone was the military Sergeant Daniel. It was nice. When I got back in bed I could not use the bedpan so had to take my two IV stands and march to the latrine. Somehow I managed to pull one of my IV's out, which truly upset the nurse. She tried hard to put the IV back in but finally called for a male nurse on the second floor to come down and start it. What impressed me the most was about twenty hair-lipped Vietnamese who looked like C.G. Lyles. The Army surgeons were reconstructing their lips. I thought it was wonderful. During this time a North Vietnamese sneaked into a hospital like ours, they were all like ours, and killed a nurse. A huge black medic caught him from behind and choked him to death. It was not our hospital, but we all grieved for the nurse.

When my artery repair finished draining I was sent to surgery and promised any meal I wanted when I woke up. I asked for steak, chocolate ice cream and cake. When I came to the steak was cold and the ice cream completely melted. I appreciated the effort as they wheeled my tray one way and me upstairs to further recovery and evacuation to Japan after a two or three day layover at Cameroon Bay.

Before I close this page I want to mention three events. The surgeon came to me to tell me he saw a piece of shrapnel in my median nerve, which would most likely leave my arm and hand partially paralyzed. The surgeon was wearing a Hawaiian shirt and shorts so the movie and TV MASH was not truly a stretch. He was off to Hawaii for R&R but said I would be in capable hands. My anesthetist was a middle-aged Japanese man in scrubs who slept in the bed next to me the entire night. We had Vietnam AFN-TV playing

a Roy Rogers special with Roy and Dale singing, "You are walking on the Fighting Side of me." At that time I enjoyed the program but felt I did not have a fighting side anymore.

Actually there were four things I wanted to cover. Across from my bed a young sailor kept asking someone to please call his wife in Hawaii and tell her he couldn't meet her for R&R. The young man had been on a riverboat, or swift boat they called them, which exploded and burned him horribly. About four in the morning the nurse woke me up calling someone to come pick up his body. The other death that bothered me was one Sunday in our base camp at Pleiku. For a few minutes it was a scene from MASH with medics running out from their noon meal to unhook him from the helicopter pod, then discovering he was dead. They just dumped him on the pad and went back to their dinner.