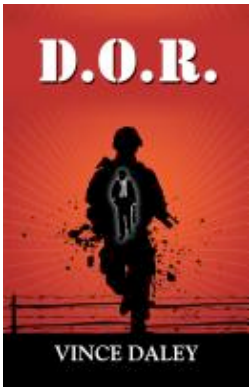
D.O.R.

VINCE DALEY



D.O.R. deals with the two relatively tumultuous years that Vince Daley spent as an enlisted man in the Marine Corps after being injured during OCS training at Quantico in 1968. It also refers, somewhat obliquely, to the relatively serious subject of the Viet Nam War from the often frustrating and frequently comedic perspective of an enlisted man in the Marine Corps during this volatile period. Anyone who has served in the military, particularly as an enlisted man, should be able to relate to this book.

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A MEMOIR

Vince Daley

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PROLOGUE

The Viet Nam War era has proven to be the defining event for those of my generation. It represented not so much a coming of age for all of us as much as it meant an end to idealism, hope, and whatever other illusions may accompany the ideological mind set. From a purely personal perspective, the war first registered its impact on me in the early to mid-sixties when I was a student at Fordham University and the effects continued until the mid-seventies. During that period of intensive U.S. involvement in Viet Nam, I attended college, graduated, worked for a year and a half, served two years in the Marine Corps, married, was discharged, went back to work as a civilian, and divorced. By the time that 1976 had rolled around, I had married again and started graduate school.

Those of us who had started our college years during John F. Kennedy's term of office could not help but feel that the world would become a better place. Kennedy appeared to be an enlightened and compassionate president. Unfortunately, none of that was to be.

Following Kennedy's assassination and Lyndon Johnson's ascendancy to the presidency, we still felt that there was hope as Johnson's administration spoke of the possibility of discontinuing the military draft, further developing the domestic economy, and ensuring the civil rights of all citizens. With the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution and the attacks on Bien

Hoa in 1964 and the subsequent landing of Marines in Viet Nam in 1965, however, our hope for a better world dissipated quickly. The U.S. seemed to enter a period of downward spiral from a moral, ethical, political, and economic standpoint, from which it would not recover for many years. As the United States, continued to spin, seemingly out of control, the lives of many of its citizens seemed to follow a similar path.

What follows is the story of the two frustrating, and, at times, humorous years, that I spent in the Marine Corps from January of 1968 thru January of 1970. To say that my plans did not develop as expected would be the classic understatement of the day. Fortunately for me, my two years were spent stateside, rather than in Viet Nam. Others were less fortunate. Many served in Viet Nam and emerged physically unscathed but emotionally scarred. Others served and were either wounded or killed. My own experience provided a somewhat unique perspective that tended to bridge the gap that had developed between what was happening in civilian life at the time with the impact of a brutal and futile war. I was in the military but not in combat so I could relate somewhat to the civilian point of view. At the same time, being an enlisted man in the military I could also sympathize with the plight of the poor "snuffy" who had been unlucky enough to, not only end up in the military, but also in combat. I was also fortunate enough to serve with intelligent, talented "draftees" who simply wanted to go home alive and in one piece as well as with a group of individuals that had chosen to say no to a commission in the Marine Corps. I was a member of the latter group, having "come to my senses" during a three-month stay in Casual Company at Quantico in early 1968. We were known as "D.O.R's" or those who had decided, for one reason or another, to 'drop on request" from the program. In some

cases, the individual just "couldn't hack it", physically or mentally. Others, myself included, had been injured in training, spent several months in Casual Company, and simply wearied of being "jerked around" by the Marine Corps.

Perhaps, I was simply too naïve when I enlisted or perhaps my personal expectations were too high. And then again, maybe, it was all simply brought about by the urgencies of a very messy war. In many ways it truly was a very painful two years and I wouldn't have minded missing the experience. On the other hand, I might have gone through life castigating myself for not having served during the Viet Nam War. At the very least, it was certainly an unusual experience and provided me with the material upon which this book is based**.**

I believe that the experiences of that particular period of our history can best be summed up by the following words:

As the years come and go
Names in stone row on row
Images alive in their gaiety
Ever young in our memory

The lesson now so clear to me
War's cruelties once set free
Select its victims absent care
Pain sufficient for all to share

Excerpt from the poem "Viet Nam" by Vincent Philip Daley

CHAPTER ONE

NO GOOD DEED GOES UNPUNISHED

After forty-five years, I still think back on it now and again and wonder how it all came about. It still never ceases to amaze me that I actually spent two years as an enlisted man in the Marine Corps. Seeing me as I am now, I'm sure my children can't picture it either. To begin to understand, you really have to go back a lot of years to a time when our country had not yet lost a war and people were still wrapped up in the nostalgia of World War II, only slightly besmirched by a blip, an aberration, known as the Korean War. Those were days when we still believed everything that our government told us. John Wayne still stormed up Mount Suribachi in "The Sands of Iwo Jima", William Holden attacked "The Bridges of Toko Ri", and Van Johnson and Spencer Tracy bombed Tokyo from B-25 bombers launched off the deck of the aircraft carrier Hornet. It was certainly a happier, and, perhaps, more foolish time that had followed World War II and carried us gently through the fifties. Unfortunately, all of that was about to end and most of us never saw it coming.

With the exception of the fact that the war in Viet Nam had been escalating rapidly for more than a year, my graduation from Fordham University in 1966 still offered many

promising prospects. I had been accepted for graduate study in Economics at Fordham and I had also been offered a job with Texaco as a computer programmer trainee. Given the situation in Viet Nam, there was no question that all of us in the graduating class of 1966 were "standing in a draft." In those days there were only a few safe places to be. The first was in school with a "2S" deferment. The second, believe it or not, was in the Reserves or the National Guard. The Pentagon, in its infinite wisdom, had decided to fill its military ranks with draftees and volunteers, rather than activating the Reserves. The final "safe house" was "married with children."

My personal game plan was relatively simple. I would accept the position with Texaco, work there for the summer in order to make some money and then return to graduate school in the fall, protected by a student deferment. It wasn't that I was unpatriotic but spending two years in the military seemed very inconvenient at the time, particularly for a war that didn't seem to draw much interest or concern from either our government or the civilian populace. According to the government, we were winning big and it would all be over soon. Most families watched the hostilities as part of the evening news and failed to get too excited about it unless they happened to see a familiar name on the casualty lists. Ultimately, that is what would end the war. The fact was that it began to get too close, to touch too many people that we knew and loved. But that's another story.

Unfortunately, along the way, I had become quite comfortable with the money and the life style while working at Texaco and, once the summer had ended, I did not return to graduate school. At the tender age of twenty-three, I really had not thought all this through too carefully and it didn't take long for

the draft board to catch up with me. They were not amused. By the time that October had rolled around, they had concluded, quite correctly, that I was not attending graduate school and that appeared to piss them off a bit. In those days, pissing off Selective Service was akin to pissing off the IRS. Within twenty-four hours of a phone call from Selective Service to my parents' home, at which time my father refused to divulge any information about my activities and my whereabouts, I was promptly reclassified from "2S" to "1A". For those not familiar with the doings of the local draft boards in those days, "1A" was the "kiss of death." That meant you had essentially been classified as "potential cannon fodder." They also were kind enough to schedule me for a pre-induction physical in early December at Fort Hamilton in Brooklyn, New York.

As I arrived at my local draft board office in Freeport, Long Island, in early December for transport by bus to Fort Hamilton, it looked like "old home week." I ran into many old friends from high school, all of whom seemed to have a note in hand relative to being excused from military service due to some medical condition, marital status, or educational studies. To be honest, I felt quite naked without a note of some sort explaining why I was not fit to be drafted. I need not have been concerned. Upon our arrival at Fort Hamilton, all notes were summarily dismissed as nonsense by either army doctors, officers standing by, or smiling NCO'S. Many potential draftees were virtually brought to tears as they saw their notes torn to shreds and trashed before their eyes, "What's this? You have a bad back? No, you're all right.", "Sorry, sonny, nine college credits ain't enough. You need twelve.", "Being married don't mean nothing unless your sugar is pregnant."

More than one candidate went home with a new resolve to get his wife pregnant. When the physical exam was completed, one of the NCO's gleefully shook my hand and said, "Congratulations. You passed with flying colors. You'll be in by Christmas."

My response was brief, "Thanks a lot."

Curiously, when I advised my employer, Texaco, of my dilemma, they suggested a surprise alternative. The government, always difficult to understand or predict, had decided to grant draft deferments to computer programmers because of an apparent shortage of programmers in the work force. Texaco asked for my permission to submit my name for a possible deferment. I agreed resignedly, not really expecting anything good to happen. One of my co-workers at Texaco, Pete Rader, was also approached relative to submitting his name. Pete was married and had received a deferment at the time as the sole support for his mother. He didn't think that his existing deferment would hold up over the long term and so he "took a shot." I was single and the sole support of only myself. The draft board, acting wisely and fairly as always, granted me a deferment, classified Pete "1A" and immediately drafted him. I felt more than a little guilty attending Pete's going away party with my new "2A" classification tucked safely away in my wallet.

During the following year, my younger brother Paul, who had dropped out of college, enlisted in the Marine Corps, the war in Viet Nam heated up dramatically, and I became engaged to be married. By the time that the engagement broke up in late 1967, I had decided to enlist, either out of frustration over the broken engagement or a misguided sense of patriotism. To be

honest, the former was probably more relevant to me than the latter at that point in time. During the course of the preceding year, I had taken the various written and physical exams for flight programs in the Navy, Air Force, and Marine Corps. Flying seemed more appealing than crawling through the mud. By the end of 1967, only the Marine Corps had approved the results of both my written and physical tests. The Air Force continued to call my home to schedule a flight physical at Stewart Air Force Base but my mother kept trashing their messages each time that they called. She was not a big fan of the military, particularly, when it involved one of her sons. The Navy had approved me as a Naval Flying Officer Candidate (Weapons Officer) but not as an Aviation Officer Candidate (Pilot). Making the assumption that all aviation programs were about the same, I decided to go with the Marine Corps. That naïve assumption is what would lead to my two tumultuous years in the Marine Corps.

I signed all six copies of my enlistment papers in New York City on December 11, 1967 with the assistance of a grizzled Gunnery Sergeant. When I completed my signing, he made a few notes to himself and said, “We’ll have to notify your local draft board of your enlistment. You’re draft classification is “1A”, right?”

My response apparently took him back a bit, “No, Actually, I’m classified “2A”. I have an occupational deferment.”

Lowering his pencil, he looked up at me puzzled by something, “What the hell are you doing here? Why are you enlisting?”

I have to admit that the warning signs went up a bit at that moment but I chose to reply as sincerely as I could, “Well, there’s a war on and I thought it was the right thing to do.”

He continued to stare at me for a moment or two, perhaps looking for any other signs of mental illness before replying, “Sure! Got it! I understand.”

It was then that I should have run. Unfortunately, I didn’t. Shortly thereafter, I was sworn in by a major who closed by saying, “If I were you, I’d get in shape.”

To be honest, up until that very moment, I thought that I was in shape. In the very near future, I would understand better what he had meant.

CHAPTER TWO

THE AWAKENING

What struck me first was how dark and cold it was. It was one of those winter mornings when the stars are still clearly visible in the sky. We had been rousted out of our racks at 4:45 AM and, now, forty-five minutes later, we were standing in a formation listening to a tall dark apparition dressed in green scream profanities in our faces. Reality has only now begun to sink in. At this very moment I am saying to myself, "What the hell happened? What am I doing here? I thought it was warm in Virginia. Jesus Christ, it's seventeen degrees out here."

We are now into the second week of February and I'm standing in a formation as a part of 2nd Platoon, "E" Company, 50th OC, MCB, Quantico, Virginia. This particular level of Hell is what is known as "The Annex." "The Annex" is a relatively remote location as compared to what is known as "Mainside" Quantico. I should also add that, in my considered opinion, Quantico itself is in the middle of nowhere to start with. I find myself in the unique position of having succeeded in saying "no" to both the Air Force and the Navy and "yes" to the Marine Corps. The thought rings clearly in my mind like a chapel bell, "I must have been out of my fucking mind!"

How long has it been since I was sitting in Schraft's on 43rd Street nursing a Jack Daniels on the rocks or waking up in the brownstone on 18th Street next to Sharon's warm body? I've only been here for two weeks, "God! It seems like two years."

It occurs to me that this is really only a bad dream and that if I close my eyes and shake my head, I'll wake up and all of this will be gone. Not daring to move my head while either Staff Sergeant Puida or Gunny Koppel are still screaming, I close my eyes for a moment and then open them again, "God! It's all still here. This is real."

I had arrived in the town of Quantico on the evening of January 28, 1968, after a leisurely drive down from New York in my '67 Sport Fury. Quantico sure didn't seem like much of a town compared to New York. Actually, it didn't seem like much of a town period. This is going to be home for the next ten weeks, or so I thought at the time. I checked into a small motel right next to the main gate for Quantico taking time to admire the replica of the Marine Corps Memorial, seemingly standing guard over the base. I knew that it was a smaller version of the original that stands in Arlington but it was still inspiring to see, all the same. I felt a little lost that first night, grabbed dinner in the dining room of the motel, hit the sack early, and fell asleep. The next morning I took my time getting going.

Check in time at Quantico was scheduled for 1:00 PM. I had a leisurely breakfast and drove thru the main gate at about 12:30 PM. I was dressed in a pinstriped suit, button down shirt, regimental striped tie, wing-tipped shoes and a raincoat. In my mind I was reporting to OCS, not Parris Island, and I thought that I ought to at least look like I knew what I was doing. That

was my first mistake or perhaps my second. The first was enlisting in the Marine Corps. I checked into the personnel office, was looked up and down with some amusement by a black gunnery sergeant, and was then told to wait outside until further notice. Not exactly the auspicious welcome I had been expecting. That should have been the first hint that things were not going to be what they should have been. Over the next few hours, the "candidates" began to drift in. With the exception of the enlisted marines dressed in class "A" uniforms who had been accepted into OCS, I was clearly overdressed. Up until that point in time things had been fairly casual and informal.

After about three hours of people drifting in, things started to get formal in a hurry. Several NCO's appeared on the scene and the screaming started, not to abate for many weeks. They first called for a formation. The next order of business was to go into what appeared to be a small version of the PX to draw a bag of toilet supplies, grab your personal bags, and get back in formation. We were then told to ensure that all personal vehicles were locked and to stand by to board a bus that had arrived on the scene. There were clearly more people than could comfortably fit on the bus but that didn't cause a problem. They just herded everyone on, "Get your asses on that bus. Move it. Move it. You there dummy, get inside the bus. I don't want to hear no talking in there."

I thought to myself, "How about groans? Are groans permitted?"

I felt like a holocaust victim in a cattle car on his way to Auschwitz. This was unbelievable. It was also impossible to maintain any sense of direction as to where you were or where the bus was going. It was beginning to get dark outside and

this further contributed to a loss of orientation. I had no clue as to where we were or where we were going. Finally, the bus stopped outside a series of squat red brick buildings and the shouting started again, "Outside. Line up. Move it. Move it, asshole. All zoomies over here!"

All but the enlisted marines looked puzzled. What the hell is a zoomie? "Listen up dummies. If you're MOS is 9900 then you are a zoomie. You are either an AOC or an NFO. That means that you think you are too good for us ground-pounders. Now get the fuck over here."

I then realized that all aviation candidates were being assigned to the first building, "Get inside dummies and line up at the foot of a rack. How you going to fly a plane if you can't follow simple instructions?"

About thirty candidates hustled into the first building and lined up at the foot of one of the double-decker bunks. It was then that we first met "The Red Baron". He was squat in build, had red hair and freckles, and wore the stripes of a gunnery sergeant with rows of ribbons on his chest. His name was Zimmer and he really did look "mad as a hatter." His face was red, his eyes bulged, his neck seemed too big for his shirt, and he seemed to have a sneer permanently etched on his face. I thought to myself, "This is definitely not a happy camper."

We were all lined up next to our bunks and he strode purposely up and down the aisle, periodically lunging at someone, to see if they would flinch. Most did. The enlisted marines looked relatively placid and he didn't seem to bother with them. Suddenly he stood in front of a kid from California who I would later learn was named Poulsen and screamed in

his face, “What the fuck are you looking at? Are you in love with me? Are you some sort of wiseass?”

As he asked the last question, he grabbed Poulsen by the front of the shirt and slammed him back against the wall. To his credit Poulsen said nothing and looked pretty calm. Near as I could tell, Poulsen had done nothing but “The Red Baron” apparently felt that some sort of “object lesson” was in order. I thought to myself, “This is really nuts. Whatever happened to not laying hands on another enlisted man? This sure doesn’t look like any OCS that I’ve ever heard about.”

From here it continued to go downhill but in a more orderly fashion. An officer made his appearance at the head of the squad bay and “The Baron” stepped back quickly from Poulsen. The captain, who appeared to be Hispanic, looked quizzically at Zimmer but said nothing. There was also a general sigh of relief among the “candidates”. If it was not audible, it certainly was discernible in the looks that crossed our faces. “The Baron” looking disappointed, quickly glanced down at the floor. I thought to myself, “Now things will get straightened out. Surely, this officer knows the score and will fix this mess.”

Unfortunately, not a great deal was about to change simply because an officer was present. Captain Garcia stood at the head of the squad bay and spoke softly but directly, “We have to check your gear for contraband. No drugs or medications are permitted. Place your gear on your rack and open each bag.”

I groaned to myself, “What the fuck is this? Are they kidding me or what? What drugs? What contraband?”

Something else was going on here. Contraband might be part of it but not all of it. The Captain, "The Baron" and one other NCO moved down the aisle checking everybody's gear. "The Baron" screamed at Poulsen, "You there, smart guy, get that shit can and bring it over here. That's it. Hold it up."

As they stopped at each bunk they went thru a whole litany, as they trashed any pills, after-shave lotion or whatever, "What's this? You don't need that shit? You ain't going to have time to take no medicine or put on any after-shave lotion. What's wrong? Do you want to smell good?"

I stood quietly as they approached, trying to look aloof and detached. Surprisingly, almost nothing was said to me. At first they couldn't find anything that appeared to be a problem. Finally, "The Baron" with a nasty smile reached over and grabbed a clothes brush with nail cutters and file inside the handle and dumped it in the can, saying, "You don't need that shit."

I thought to myself, "Fuck you, Baron."

At the same time, I was happy to see the group move on. The Captain, apparently noting that some of the items that were being dumped were of some value and clearly not contraband, added, "Don't worry. These items will be returned when you complete your training."

I almost laughed out loud as I thought, "Right. I noticed how you're taking time to put everybody's name on their stuff. What a bunch of shit."

"The Baron" gave me a funny look but he moved away. It was almost as if he could read my mind but he seemed to sense weaker prey down the line. One of his next victims was some kid from Wyoming who really did seem to be some kind of "momma's boy." His stuff included a robe, pajamas, slippers, medications, all sorts of toiletries and they were just killing him, "What the fuck is your story boy? Do you think you're on vacation here? Look at this shit. I'm going to be watching you boy."

Finally, they finished up this latest episode of jerking everyone around and they left almost as fast as they had arrived. The exiting shot from "The Baron" was, "Stow your gear and form up outside for chow. Do it."

We exited the squad bay in a hurry, joined the formation outside and were quickly marched to chow. Outside the mess hall we were forced to stand at attention, cut square corners, and close it up. As they like to say in the Marine Corps, "Asshole to bellybutton. Close it up. Move it."

The chow turned out to be pretty decent although we only had about ten minutes to eat it. We then returned to the squad bay, showered and hit the rack. The next two days things were pretty quiet and I thought, "Maybe the worst has passed."

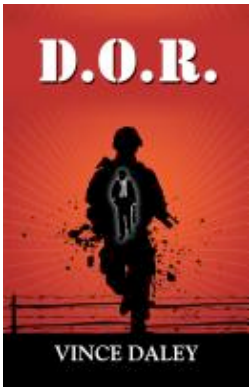
After all, I thought, "This is supposed to be OCS."

But, I was wrong.

We were trucked up to "Mainside" several times over the next few days for all kinds of medical tests. We were all "zoomies" as they liked to say in the Marine Corps. That is to say flyers.

We repeated virtually every test that we had undergone before being accepted in the program and that was probably why we had reported early. We had just started to settle in one morning when, a tall red-haired staff sergeant who was ramrod straight and spoke with a hoarse smoker's voice appeared and hollered, "Bates, Carson, Daley, Peterson, Poulsen, and Smith. Grab your gear and fall in outside."

Such was our initial introduction to Staff Sergeant Anthony Puida, our platoon sergeant for the next ten weeks. Before long, Puida would soon make the "Red Baron" seem like an absolute pussycat.



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