

This letter is written to support **John Feagin** as a candidate for the **Distinguished Graduate Award, US Military Academy, West Point**. I have known John Feagin from the day I landed in Qui Nhon, Viet Nam in April, 1967 till the present time. I have only written about topics with which I have some personal experience and knowledge. John's life has had so many facets and situations I doubt there is anyone who knows them all.

References: Abbreviated C-V of John Feagin, March 2003, Diaries of Jerry Sisler, 1967 -1968, Personal experiences and recollections.

On April 8, 1967, I staggered off the C130 transport plane in Qui Nhon, Viet Nam, considerably weakened by 4 long days of air transport from Tulsa with stops in San Francisco, Hawaii, Philippines, Long Bien and finally Qui Nhon. During this trip there had been plenty of time to ponder my bad luck of being snatched from my family and a fledgling orthopedic practice then being deployed to Qui Nhon, a never before heard of funky little town in Bien Dien Province of South Viet Nam. Militarily speaking this was an important city for military operations in the central highlands of Viet Nam. Supplies and troops pass thru Qui Nhon on their way to the front and casualties and worn out troops pass through here on their way to R & R or to medical care.

I soon learned there were two evac. hospitals in Qui Nhon, the 85th (opened for about 2 ½ years) and the 67th (opened about 2 months before my arrival). Before being assigned to the 85th Evac Hospital in Qui Nhon I had a short interview with Col. Brunner

(MSC) in Saigon. Col. Brunner indicated he was unsure of the staffing situation in Qui Nhon but assured me there would be a place when I got there.

In Qui Nhon, I was taken by jeep to the 85th Evacuation Hospital and ushered into the commanding officer's (Col. Dunahoe ?) office. The Col. appeared quite tired and his clothes were disheveled. During most of the brief interview he reclined in his easy chair with his feet on his desk. He informed me that the 85th Evac. was fully staffed orthopedically so I was not needed at the 85th Evac. Hospital. He was unsure of the staffing situation at the 67th Evac Hospital, a recently opened second evacuation hospital in Qui Nhon. By this time my spirits were below my knees and I kept telling myself, "I've come all this way and they don't need me".

Now, enter the scene, Major John Feagin, chief of the orthopedic service at the 85th Evacuation Hospital and fellow orthopedic surgeon. He was the first person I had encountered with a smile on his face and he had a springy lively gait. Since no temporary housing arrangements had been made for me he was concerned about a place for me to stay. He found temporary quarters for me at "the villa," the 85th Evac. Hospital's officers quarters. John's upbeat spirit was infectious and this had an immediate beneficial effect on me. I was lifted from the feeling that nobody in this army cared a hoot about me or my needs to this man I had never met before, who not only cared about me but also obviously cared about his patients including the wounded enemy.

Three casualties with orthopedic problems came into the 85th Evac. hospital that evening. A Vietnamese boy with gunshot amputation of the arm, a VC soldier with gunshot wound of the thigh and fractured femur and a GI casualty, a gunshot wound of the leg. It was John's turn to pull call. He invited me to assist in surgery, which I did. Although we had been instructed on proper management of high velocity gunshot wounds during basic training at Fort Sam Houston TX, it was very helpful for me to see several cases handled by an experienced military doctor. We were up till 0300 hours taking care of these injuries. The score that evening was two of three injuries were non American casualties and, as such, could have legitimately been refused medical treatment and sent to the civilian or military hospital. For the injured, that would have been a fate worse than death and John knew it. He was willing to work no matter his personal feelings or fatigue level.

The next morning, I made rounds with John and met other members of his orthopedic staff. They were a lively group. I had the feeling that John's spirit and enthusiasm had permeated through to the entire orthopedic staff.. Later that morning, I received orders to report to the 67th Evac Hospital, commanded by Col. Zone, for my new duty assignment. for the coming year. In less than 24 hours I had come to like the orthopedic service at the 85th Evac. Hospital and I was sorry I had to leave.

Thinking back on the first assignment to the 85th Evac. Hospital, which I initially regarded as simple army bungling, I now know this was a blessing in disguise. The room in the villa, to which I was assigned for one night, remained unoccupied for the

next month, so I was able to stay on in the unoccupied room in the villa for a month before being moved to tent city, otherwise known as the 92 compound, living quarters for the 67th personnel. As a housemate of Feagin for a month, there was ample time for philosophical discussions about our pasts, and our futures, both professional and personal. Although we were both quite busy conducting our orthopedic responsibilities, Qui Nhon was peaceful enough that we could play an occasional game of tennis or enjoy a beautiful beach. Regardless if it were work or play I noted that John had boundless energy and curiosity. It seemed that he always had one or two special projects under way plus several projects in the planning stages.

One topic of particular interest to both us was international orthopedics. There was much to learn from our counterparts in various countries and much to do in many of the third world countries. We both knew of instances when a single corrective surgical procedure would turn a life around completely. This was a far cry from the typical stateside practice, overloaded and bogged down with medical-legal cases.

John was about 7/12 (months) into his rotation at the time of my arrival. He encouraged me to join him and his staff on the Leprosarium project. The project had been started about 2 years before by his orthopedic predecessors at the 85th Evacuation Hospital. The project fit well the objectives and goals of the U.S. Army that encouraged our involvement with the medical needs of the civilian population. The program consisted of a leprosy clinic held once a week on the leprosarium premises – usually on a Saturday morning. This clinic was staffed by an army orthopedic surgeon,

a Catholic nun who represented the nursing staff, and an army orthotist (usually an army “cast man”), capable of fabricating or altering footwear or upper extremity devices. In addition there was usually a second team of army personnel consisting of two orthopedic surgeons and a surgical scrub nurse. This team performed surgery in a make shift surgical suite. All of the instruments and materials had to be brought in from the hospital. Most surgical cases were conducted under local anesthesia but an occasional spinal was utilized with the surgeon acting as an anesthesiologist. Most of us surgeons who participated in this project had limited experience with leprosy so we required some education as to the limited goals we could achieve in this setting. Running this program required a person with administrative skills including delegation of various tasks – something that John Feagin was very good at. He brought the leprosarium project to new heights.

The Leprosarium project seemed simple enough from conception to execution however consistency and dependability in a war zone were a different matter. Unfortunately this project fell apart during the Tet offensive in 1968. Qui Nhon had been a peaceful town but starting in February 1968 had offensive VC activity around the radio station and government buildings of Qui Nhon, and a U.S. ammunition depot was blown up. War activities in the Central Highlands of Viet Nam also picked up, producing a large number of casualties from helicopter crashes, land mines in the roads and assault raids on artillery fire bases. The narrow 1 lane road to the leprosarium over the mountain pass made us an easy potential target. During the remainder of my tour in Qui Nhon (March 1968) the project was deemed unsafe and remained shut down.

John Feagin's tour of duty in Viet Nam was completed in September, 1967. We were sad to see him go but glad that he completed his tour of duty unscathed by the many potential hazards that were part of every day life. His next duty assignment was the "Team Physician" at the US Military Academy, West Point. He held this position till 1971. This was a unique opportunity to study and follow cadets with injuries to the anterior cruciate ligament. His work with the cruciate ligament was well known and literally put him on the map in sports medicine circles. He became a Founding Member of the American Orthopedic Society for Sports Medicine in 1972 and continued to be active in this organization throughout the remainder of his career. He served as president of this organization in 1985 – 1986.

John also showed exceptional interest in joint replacement surgery, a subspecialty of orthopedic surgery coming into its infancy in the late 60's and early 70's. While in Viet Nam in 1967 John became acquainted with Dr. Richard Welch, an orthopedist with special interest in joint replacement surgery who had been practicing in San Francisco. Dr. Welch had landed a coveted 6 months fellowship with Sir John Charnley. He encouraged John to apply for this fellowship. John was accepted and in 1972 spent 6 months at the Joint Replacement Center for Hip Surgery in Wrightington, England. At the end of this fellowship John and I spent 4 weeks touring the major orthopedic centers of the UK. Professor Charnley assisted us in this endeavor by putting in a good word for us when necessary. Not only did we visit with most of the well known orthopedic

surgeons in the UK, we visited professor Smillie at his farm in Scotland where we had a lesson on bird watching.

John entered private orthopedic practice in Jackson, Wyoming in 1979 and remained there for the next 10 years. He was a very busy man taking care of his private practice, working on his book on knee ligament injuries and treatment, "The Crucial Ligament", staffing the clinic which he owned at the Jackson Ski resort, and attending to administrative duties with the Sports Medicine Society and numerous other organizations. We kept in touch through our mutual interest in mountain climbing. I recall that we climbed the Grand Teton mountain 3 times with various members of our families. John's daughter, Nancy, was an exceptional climber in those early days and has continued with climbing as a career. Recently she summited Mt. Everest and Denali (by two routes).

While practicing in Jackson, John held orthopedic clinics at various small towns around northwest Wyoming. Distances (and travel times) to these clinics by auto travel were excessive and impractical. This problem was solved by turning to private aviation. He claimed that flying was in his genes—his father had been a military pilot. His interest in flying has continued and in 1999, he flew solo over the North Atlantic. His goal was to fly to Africa however political unrest in Africa caused him to abort the final leg of his travel plans. He did succeed with his volunteer commitment at Tenwek Hospital and hopes to return for another stint.

In 1989, John was offered a job in orthopedic academia at his alma mater, Duke University. He remained there until his retirement in 1999. His C-V lists a number of administrative positions and responsibilities which will keep him engaged as a productive worker in orthopedics for years to come.

John believes that much of his success in life can be attributed to his attendance to West Point Military Academy. He remembers and follows the motto "Duty, Honor, Country"