

'For What Its Worth' is this author's first published work. Writing at night and on weekends, the author scheduled himself one year to complete the book. Beginning on the anniversary date of his discharge from the Army, he kept to his schedule even when faced with technical equipment problems. The author recognizes his story came to be told by pure chance, but he found the journey to be engaging as well as cathartic. If there is another book forthcoming from this author, the subject matter will be entirely different as his file for this information is now closed.

This non-fiction, coming-of-age story of a young Oregon man who joins the Green Berets unfolds in the chaotic late 1960s. We experience his steps as he graduates rigorous Special Forces' training and is selected as part of an elite team in Europe. This action/ true- life memoir concludes with revelations from his Vietnam tour-of-duty and his jungle patrols' diary written during the 1968 TET Offensive.

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Michael Holman

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by

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This book is dedicated to three of our San Antonio Special Forces Class-9 medical- trainee classmates who gave their lives in Vietnam while serving as Special Forces medics with their teams.

**Sp4 Richard P. Teevens – KIA November 17, 1967
Wall –Panel 30E – Row 011**

**Sp4 Herbert R. Anderson – KIA January 16, 1968
Wall- Panel 34E - Row 057**

**SSgt Leslie L. Bucker – KIA August 25, 1968
Wall- Panel 46W – Row 011**

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Wikipedia

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William Pamplin III

CSM (ret) Reg Manning

Chapter 1

That rainy afternoon I quietly finished the letter on my laptop in the dining room while Mom rested in the back bedroom. It seemed now she was tiring more and needing assistance to complete her daily routine. Only a year earlier, we would have been on a nice family drive up to Multnomah Falls on the Columbia River Gorge. But I was only *in* Portland to see my Mom. I no longer lived in Oregon but did manage to visit for a few days several times a year.

Needing a much needed break from sitting in front of the computer screen, I tilted the lid down over my laptop keyboard and climbed down the stairs into the basement. My *intended* journey was to bring a basket of clean sheets and towels upstairs from the laundry room and save Mom the trouble.

Our Holman family home was large; it had three levels, with bedroom space upstairs that could sleep three or four. My grandparents had purchased it in the late 1940s. There was a fully finished basement, including a party room built by an old family friend. Now Mom mostly confined her living space in the home to the main level bedrooms, living room, dining room and kitchen. For years, on my previous Portland visits, I had kept to the main level of the big old house, not venturing upstairs or into the basement, which was now used mainly for storage and laundry.

When I reached the bottom of the basement stairs, I paused to get my bearings and pull the string-switch on the naked light bulb twisted into the ceiling fixture. The dimly lit basement was stacked high with old furniture, and boxes were everywhere. As I looked around, somehow, I remembered Mom and Dad telling us they had been storing stuff from their four kids' lives in the basement. "*Just in case you ever want 'it' again.*" Dad's subliminal reminder to each of the children over the years on our visits home now echoed in my head.

I found the laundry room and then began sorting through the hi-rise of boxes to see what treasures they might hold. As I moved into the party room, I spotted my Dad's old, hand-made wooden trunk. I found the switch on the floor lamp beside the couch and slowly lifted the

trunk's lid. Inside, carefully stored, were papers, photographs and books from my Special Forces' training and Vietnam duty. For the first time in many, many years, I saw items I thought had been long lost. That rainy Portland afternoon, as I carefully sifted through the old photos and papers, I rediscovered the true life story that I share with you now.

Late summer 1965

Three ten-speed road bikes could fit in the trunk of the old Ford. As we began the drive up Mt. Hood to Timberline Lodge, some six miles of twisting, winding blacktop road stretched out before us. This same serpentine route would become our race track for the breakneck bike race back down Mt. Hood to Government Camp. Each of us would take turns driving the Ford back down the winding road to meet the exhausted racers in the finish line area. Drive up; race back down; over and over.

It was late August in Portland, Oregon, and as always, it was hot and muggy. The cooler mountain air was refreshing as it rushed across our faces. The thin rubber bike tires on the steep, curved, hot roadway at maximum speed caused the adrenaline to surge through our bodies. Each race we screamed and yelped from the start for the quick steep ride down the sidewinder mountain road. We completed three races and stopped for the lunch we had brought from home. "Man, Mike! That "S" curve near the bottom is just not safe." Ted said, shaking his head side-to-side.

"I love that curve! That's my favorite curve," I laughed, holding my biking helmet under my arm while I peeled off my biking gloves.

We had all skied Mt. Hood in the winter. The summer recreational speed biking gave us a new perspective on the hill and the thrills. For the last few summers, during school break, we had started biking everywhere; to the store, to the park, to work. Then someone came up with the idea of racing each other down the narrow twisting road from Timberline Lodge to the Government Camp parking lot. Ted, Gary and sometimes a third guy would join us two times a week for the forty-five minute drive from Portland. Breakneck bike racing down the side of an 11,300 foot mountainside with good friends was well worth it.

Alternating drivers, the Ford would follow the racers down the mountain at a distance so no other traffic would surprise us from behind. Each race was different, and the curves and dips flew by as we

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each tried to anticipate the road and gain the lead. This was good cheap fun. Our gang all held summer jobs while working their way through school. Sharing the Ford's gas money and bringing lunch sandwiches from home went without saying. We knew our school tuition and books obligation would be paid from our summer job earnings.

My biking buddy Ted was a year younger than me and was in ROTC throughout college. ROTC was a college preparatory program to obtain a commission as an officer in the military. Ted shot a great game of call-shot pool and played aggressive singles tennis. Our other biking buddy Gary played a little tennis too and always had a car so we could go places. Other than road biking, tennis was our great competitive passion. When we weren't at work, we were on the tennis court, night and day. Washington Park by the Portland Zoo had night lights and fast surfaced courts. We would arrive by late morning and play match after match until it was time to go to work in the afternoon. On days off, we played past midnight.

Tina G, the number one girl tennis player from our school team, liked to 'hit with the boys' because we hit harder. Once or twice a week, she would join us. She was always a fantastic doubles partner. We switched off team partners and broke up into singles matches. It did not matter who played who. It was tennis. Slam that next overhead serve as an *Ace* past your opponent or punch a backhand down the line. The greater part of my life that summer was wrapped up between downhill bike racing and tennis. My body liked to exercise.

I was at that *place* in my life, in a transition from just completing school and exploring what was to come next. For the past 15 years, I had been cloistered as a student in schools. It was *now* the time to begin my own journey in life. I was not focused on any specific career yet. I had had many types of summer jobs, including everything from retail sales to playground counselor at the local public park. Nothing I worked at part time or over the summers attracted me as a possible career. I was healthy and, with my degree, like all 22 year olds, I was optimistic about my prospects as I entered the *real* world.

The *real* world in the 1965 was in the throes of a cultural revolution. The war in Vietnam under President Johnson was escalating. More and more of my friends who were not in school had received their unwanted Draft notice letter. I had just graduated from Portland State in June and knew my military Draft notice was not far behind, probably already in the mail.

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Selective Service and the registration requirement for America's young men served as a backup system to provide manpower to the US Armed Forces. President Franklin Roosevelt signed the Selective Training and Service Act of 1940, which created the Country's first peacetime draft and formally established the Selective Service System as an independent federal agency.

The obligation of a man to register was imposed by the Military Selective Service Act. The Act establishes and governs the operations of the Selective Service System. From 1948 on, during both peacetime and periods of conflict, men were drafted to fill vacancies in the armed forces which could not be filled through voluntary means.

Military Draft Classification is the process of determining who is available for military service and who is deferred or exempted. The classification list includes the following:

1-A - Available immediately for military service.

1-O - Conscientious Objector - conscientiously opposed to both types (combatant and non-combatant) of military training and service - fulfills his service obligation as a civilian alternative service worker.

1-A-O - conscientiously opposed to training and military service requiring the use of arms - fulfills his service obligation in a noncombatant position within the military.

2-D - Ministerial Students - deferred from military service.

3-A - Hardship Deferment - deferred from military service because service would cause hardship upon his family.

4-C - Alien or Dual National - sometimes exempt from military service

4-D - Ministers of Religion - exempted from military service.

4-F - Physically disqualified for military service.

The US mandatory Draft, begun during the Second World War, was still in full effect in late 1965. The day a young man turned 18 (a senior in high school), he was required to register for military service for the United States of America. I was classified 1-A - available immediately for military service. If the United States was at war, and you were not a student in school, married and a parent (3-A), or physically disqualified

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for service (4-F), you were eligible to be called up to serve a *minimum* two year military obligation. As I didn't qualify for military exemption, in my mind, my only two options were to stay in school for a Master's degree in something (?), or face being *drafted* into the United States Army.

That summer, my only plan was to save a little money from my job, take the family on a short vacation, and then face any future decisions about military service and a work career – later. I knew that if I started a working career immediately after graduation, my career would be quickly interrupted by the impending US Army Draft notice. For now, being up here on the mountain racing my friends in heat after heat before we had to work that hot August afternoon was all I wanted to concentrate on.

We raced each other one more time six miles to the bottom of the twisting, treacherous blacktop road and headed back to Portland. The only things waiting for us upon our arrival would be the muggy heat and our swing shift jobs. Gary worked evenings in a small auto shop running the business office. Ted, who had beaten me twice in today's races, had family money. However, they required him to work at their family food market to earn tuition for college. I'm certain they also wanted a family member in the store to close-out and ensure the day's proceeds were locked safely in the floor safe at the store's midnight closing time.

As we drove home, I enjoyed the feel of the old Ford packed to capacity with the bikes and my buddies' conversation about the day's race event. My little brother made me promise that he "had dibs" on the Ford when he got older. That car had brought good times for me, my brothers and my friends for biking, tennis and skiing. I dropped Ted and Gary at home and went to my house to get changed for work.

One of the neighborhood kids shouted my name as I parked the Ford in the driveway and unloaded my 10 speed bike. "Hey, Mike!"

"Hi, Jordan! How's it goin'?" I yelled back.

Mike. That's my name – Mike Holman. I can only describe myself as the typical 'guy next door'. Through grade school and high school, our family lived in the same house on N. Greeley Blvd., Portland, Oregon. From grades K through 12, my siblings and I grew up with the other families with kids on our sleepy, tree-lined "Leave it to Beaver" street. There was a great feeling of suburban stability, continuously cultivated through Scouts and organized sports with the same kids from the same neighborhood families. Immediately after high school, I

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enrolled for college classes in downtown Portland, only because of the generosity of a little financial assistance.

Our senior-year high school Social Studies teacher, Mr. Marsupian, was ambitious for his students. He entered the classroom ten minutes late one afternoon and posed this question to the patiently waiting class: "Who in here needs a scholarship for college?"

Every student in the room raised his hand. Mr. Marsupian helped me, along with a few other needy souls, obtain small college scholarships towards tuition. He also arranged for me to receive the "Foot-Printers" scholarship of \$500. I wasn't certain how I qualified exactly, as it was usually awarded to young people who planned to pursue police work as a career. Even with the scholarship assistance, I still always needed part time work while attending school for spending money, books and supplies.

Along with required classes, I took some political science courses during my freshman year of college. I shifted my interest my second year and, primarily, my major in school until I graduated was in science. I found myself in all the same classes as the pre-med and pre-dental students – Comparative Vertebrate Anatomy, Physical Chemistry, Physics, and so on. At the end of junior year, I even caught the train to Seattle to test for admittance to dental school. It didn't hurt that after the test I got to have dinner with a girl from Seattle I had met skiing the winter before at Mt. Hood.

"How many races ya' win today, Mike?" a small voice questioned from across the driveway.

"Three today, Jordan." The neighbors' kid, Jordan, watched me as I stored the 10 speed bike in the garage and entered the back door of our house.

Upstairs I changed into my denim work pants and long-sleeve cotton shirt. I packed myself a lunch bag from leftovers in the refrigerator and drove the bicycle-carrying Ford to my swing-shift factory job. Northwest Packing, the local vegetable and fruit cannery, was close to our house and paid the highest wages per hour. I knew this was no long term career opportunity, but it let me save the most money over the summer while I decided what was to come next in my life.

Some of my school chums were also at Northwest Packing again this summer on the swing shift. It was union labor, but students only had to pay a prorated summer union fee. This was my second summer, and they placed me in charge of the team with the responsibility for cooking raw green long beans. The beans were picked fresh early each

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morning from the surrounding farms. Once inside the packing plant, the green beans were washed and then canned by an assembly line of ladies in gray uniforms and funny looking headwear.

Once these cans were filled and sealed, they were stacked on pallets for cooking and labeling. The 10 inch cans were stacked on a round metal pallet five rows high. Our team used overhead cranes to lift the beans into 15 foot deep ovens. With heat and pressure, the beans cooked through their cycle, all recorded on a paper circle graph above each oven. Any batch without the corresponding completed cooking-cycle graph report was rejected. The crew was sharp, mostly all summer employee students waiting to return to school in the fall. The shift supervisor, who doubled as maintenance engineer, proudly reviewed the team's daily production.

Most of the time at work, I hung-out with my school buddies on the lunch breaks. I struck up a couple of new friendships so I could share a ride to work now and then. These were blue collar factory workers helping with their family's weekly living expenses. New employees showed up at Northwest Packing each day of the summer. Some stayed only a short while others were there for the entire summer school break.

One afternoon a new big guy, Glen, showed up on the swing shift. The pay was always extra per hour and the summer heat was dissipating by then for the day. He was a good worker supporting his wife and a new baby. One day, after he had been there about two weeks, we started chatting about school and the military.

"When do you graduate, Mike?" Glen asked with a look of keen interest.

"I just graduated, and the old military has an eye out for me!" I joked back.

We returned to our job duties while we waited for the fifteen minute break just about twenty minutes away. As the factory whistle blew and we stopped working as mandated by the union, I waited to chat with Glen in the processing factory rather than join the others in the break/lunch room.

"What branch of the service are you looking at?" Glen shouted over the stack of wooden boxes.

"Navy, Navy pilot seems really exciting," I replied.

We both headed in the direction of the break room and our lockers. I knew I wanted to retrieve a snack from the lunch I had packed at

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home earlier. Glen grabbed his lunch pail from the top of his locker and examined what surprise his wife had prepared as his first break snack.

When the conversation turned to the military, Glen knew a lot. He was qualified for military service with a 3-A draft status. He had cousins and buddies who had been drafted or joined the Navy, the Air Force and the Army. He knew all their stories and was happy to share. I told him I was scheduled for an appointment with the Navy to test to train as a flyer in two days. One of my college friends who got turned down for dental school had already tested and qualified. He was headed to his first Navy pilot training assignment. Glen didn't know a lot about the pilot training program but shared what he did know and what to watch out for when joining any branch of the service.

Two days later, I arrived at the Portland Airbase, on time, because my Dad gave me a ride. They had me fill out some forms and proctored two separate written tests. I scored well. Glancing over the test scores, the Sergeant nodded enthusiastically and said, "Great! Let's just check your eyes." Well, no problem, I had 20/20 vision and was even a bit far sighted. I began to feel good about my chances to fly.

Immediately after the standard E's and O's eye chart, they pulled out the color blind test to check if I could read the numbers in the center of the circles. Nothing! I could see no numbers. I thought they were joking. Well, I found out right then and there that I am dichromatic, red-green color-blind. It is a condition called Daltonism after the 18th Century chemist John Dalton, who also was color-blind.

The textbook definition states, "*An inherited defect in perception of red and green; red-green colorblindness.*"

The doctor explained carefully to me this meant I could *not* be a pilot, but perhaps a navigator. Evidently the control panels on most USAF aircraft have various warning lights that flash red or green in case of a malfunction. The Daltonism color-blindness could lead to catastrophe if I should somehow miss a control panel indicator light.

I arrived at my Northwest Packing job that afternoon slightly dejected. My clearly thought-out plan to become a 'fly boy' had been derailed. Glen, wearing canvas gloves, was already stacking pallets when my shift began. After he threw the last wooden pallet on the pile, he wiped sweat from his brow and walked over to where I was recording the green bean cooking cycle results on a clip board tablet. "How'd it go, Mike?"

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I told him I could not be a pilot. I shared the day's events and the disastrous color perception Daltonism test results. On the next break, Glen approached me and asked if I ever heard of the US Army Special Forces.

"I have not," I admitted and listened to what Glen knew about this specialty branch of the Army.

The very next day I did a little research and found this definition.

"Special Forces, highly trained branch of the United States Army, specializing in unconventional or Guerrilla warfare. Popularly known as the Green Berets because of their distinctive caps, the modern Special Forces came into being in 1952. The growth of the force, most notably through its role in Southeast Asia during the 1960's, reflects the increasing importance accorded Guerrilla tactics in modern revolutionary and political developments around the world.

*Special Forces personnel, all airborne- or paratroop-qualified, with high security clearances, were trained to infiltrate enemy-controlled territory and contact and organize local dissidents for guerrilla operations. The forces were known for their strong esprit de corps and **intensive cross-training**, that is, their schooling in more than one specialty as a precaution against loss of, or injury to, members of a combat (A) team. Rigorous physical conditioning, familiarity with foreign weapons, and hand-to hand combat and night fighting were important training aspects, as were the extra-military concerns of medical training."*

The next week, I caught the bus downtown to the main Army recruiting office in Portland. As I walked in, there was a fully outfitted Special Forces soldier's uniform displayed on a mannequin. It had a beret and special night gear and stealth equipment. I was interested immediately. I found out from the Army recruiter that you had to be a high school graduate, 22 years old or older and qualify for Airborne and some rigorous physical and mental training for the better part of a year. There was a three year minimum commitment, which meant I would be required to sign on to a three year Regular Army (RA) enlistment.

I found a brochure at the recruiter's office outlining the various MOS (military occupational specialty) training for qualification in Special Forces. The medical information portion contained the following.

"The Special Forces Medical Sergeant (SFMS) –

Duties and responsibilities:– The SFMS provides US forces, allied and indigenous personnel preventive medical, dental and medical care

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within the limits of his training and subject to the remote or proximate supervision of a physician authorized by the US Army Special Operations Command (USASOC)"

Major duties. Employs conventional and unconventional warfare tactic and techniques in providing medical care and treatment. Skill level 3. Performs and maintains proficiency in all major duties. Ensures detachment medical preparation and maintains medical equipment and supplies, provides examination and care to detachment members and establishes temporary, fixed and unconventional warfare medical facilities to support operations with emergency, routine, and long term medical care. Provides initial medical screening and evaluation of allied and indigenous personnel. Manages detachment, allied or indigenous patients, administration, admission and discharge, care laboratory and pharmacological requirements and the initiation, maintenance and transfer of records. Orders, stores, catalogs, safeguards and distributes medical supplies, equipment, and pharmaceuticals. Supervises medical care and treatment during split detachment missions. Operates a combat laboratory and treats emergency and trauma patients in accordance with established surgical principles. Diagnoses and treats various medical dermatological, pediatric, infectious and obstetric conditions using appropriate medications, intravenous fluid support and physical measures. Develops and provides medical intelligence as required.

The job description above fueled my appetite for physical and mental challenges. President John F. Kennedy, in his inaugural speech on January, 20, 1961, had challenged my entire 1960's generation with these words:

"My fellow Americans, ask not what your Country can do for you: Ask what you can do for your Country".

The vision of a young President's inspiring plans for the future reverberated with all my school classmates. While in college, I had briefly considered entering the Kennedy Peace Corps, as did many others. If I had joined, I would already be living in a foreign land helping educate the less fortunate of Earth's citizens. But the Army had pre-qualified me as I-A for draft status for an escalating war in Vietnam. I knew I needed to make a choice, and my options were fairly select.

I made the decision *that* day to become a Special Forces Medical Sergeant (**SFMS**). This became my dream, my goal: to test myself and hopefully benefit others through Special Forces' comprehensive medical training. I wanted to train with the best and be the best. Special Forces

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represented the best. My biggest risk was that, although I *volunteered*, there was no guarantee I would make it *into* Special Forces, let alone graduate in my chosen MOS (military occupational specialty). I signed the required three year obligation enlistment paperwork and caught the bus home to share the great news with my family. My US Army draft notice arrived in the mail just ten days later. I knew if I was lucky enough to make it through to Special Forces training, I had already 'set my own course'.