

Editor's Page

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Back in 1966, our battalion commander was a chunky, bespectacled fireplug of a Marine named Walter Moore. His nickname was MuMu. No one knew where the moniker came from. Years later I found out. It's hilarious, but unprintable.

MuMu took over our battalion just before we mounted out for Vietnam. He whipped us into shape, then took us in-country. We were young and tough and looking for trouble. MuMu was tougher than all of us. No one doubted that.

About a year later, I was in the San Diego naval hospital, recovering, after a fashion, from a run-in with a landmine. The Marine Corps bureaucracy was causing problems for me. My pay records had gone missing, the result no doubt of my ungainly departure from Vietnam. I had not been paid in six months.

Also, a few days before I was wounded, I learned that I had been selected for captain. In San Diego, I was told I would not be promoted until I was fit for duty, which was not in the cards.

Not long after he rotated back to the States, MuMu came to see me in the hospital. He had been promoted to colonel, something that never would have happened absent a war; he was not a cocktail party Marine. I was in the midst of a deep depression, but seeing the rotund tough-as-nails MuMu storm into the room (he stormed into every space he ever entered) immediately raised my spirits.

We chatted. He filled me in on old comrades. The he asked if he could do anything for me. I told him about my pay problem. And that the Corps wouldn't promote me. His eyes narrowed, his brow furrowed, his mood grew dark.

Two weeks later, he stormed into my room again. I tried to sit up. "No," he said. "Just stay there." He reached into his pocket, pulled out a small box, opened it, and took something out. He pinned the double silver bars on the collar of my hospital gown. Then he saluted me.

"Congratulations, Skipper," he said. "By the way, you'll be paid, back pay and all, next payday."

I don't know how he pulled it off. There was probably a rule, if not a law, against it. For some reason I got the impression that Lieutenant General Victor Krulak, the father of my Naval Academy classmate (and future Marine Commandant) Chuck Krulak and a longtime friend of MuMu's, had played a role. But mostly I think old MuMu screamed bloody murder about the way I had been dealt with and scared the daylight out of anyone who tried to reason with him.

That episode has come back to me many times in the past few weeks, ever since two *Washington Post* reporters, Dana Priest and Anne Hull, exposed the disgraceful treatment our combat troops from Iraq and Afghanistan have been receiving as outpatients at Walter Reed Army Hospital.

Nearly as distressing to me has been the reaction of those officers in charge and quite a few other members of the military community, active duty and retired. Too many have tried to play down the situation, a classic example of who are you going to believe, me or your lyin' eyes?

They have also tried to deflect criticism by talking about the great medical treatment the troops at Walter Reed were receiving, which is true but beside the point since no one has ever questioned it, certainly not the *Post*.

At issue, as the *Post* described in excruciating detail, were outpatient facilities such as rodent-infested, black-mold-oozing Building 18, on the grounds of Walter Reed, and similar facilities within spitting distance of the home of the hospital's commanding officer.

That wasn't all. Many wounded troops, it seems, were being shortchanged on disability benefits by cost-conscious officers who one suspects never heard a shot fired in anger. The *Post's* exposure of this dreadful situation was as important as ventilating Building 18.

But, again, where is the outrage? Unless my ears need tuning there hasn't been much from the professional military community. Instead, we've gotten defensiveness and press bashing, the latter the default response of politicians, corporate crooks, and, all too often, the military when problems are brought to light. Seriously, does anyone truly believe our troops would be better off if the press hadn't exposed the conditions in the Walter Reed outbuildings?

I thought of the phrase that is drummed into the brain of every officer and NCO in the Corps: *Take care of your Marines*.

And, I wondered, where the hell is MuMu when we need him?



COURTESY OF J.J. KEEFE

Lieutenant Colonel Walter "MuMu" Moore, CO of the 1st Antitank Battalion, is flanked by XO Major Bob Harris (left) and S-4 Major John Keefe in this 1966 photo taken on Okinawa days before the unit deployed to South Vietnam.