



PETTY OFFICER 3RD CLASS MARCUS V. ARROYO UNITED STATES NAVY VIETNAM

Marcus V. Arroyo was born on August 5, 1950 in the South Bronx of New York. His father was a sailor in the Merchant Marines, who sailed during World War II in the Atlantic, delivering desperately needed supplies through dangerous, submarine-infested waters to England. One of his father's ships was blown up and he was thrown into the water before being rescued. His father's maritime experiences influenced Marcus to think about joining the Navy.

When Marcus was five years old his family moved to the projects on the Lower East Side of Manhattan. "I was a typical street kid...but I was fortunate to join the Boys' Club of New York. A marvelous institution to keep boys off the street, involved in worthwhile sports projects, and out of trouble.

"Because my dad was a merchant mariner I didn't know him very well. He was constantly sailing six, seven, or nine months a year." Only after his retirement did they start to get to know each other.

At the height of the Vietnam War, and faced with the prospect of the draft, Marcus decided to go into the Navy. "I wanted to be a scuba diver, like Lloyd Bridges in the television show 'Sea Hunt.'" Marcus enlisted in the Navy in 1968, right out of high school. "Back then the Navy had three boot camps. One was in Florida, one in the Great Lakes, one in San Diego. I went to Great Lakes." He was inducted in Lower Manhattan at Whitehall, put on a train at Grand Central Station and rode to Chicago, arriving in 13 feet of snow.

After starting with a regular boot camp company, Marcus elected to re-start boot camp with a specialized company, commanded by a "hard nose" Underwater Demolition Team Frogman Chief. The purpose of this specialized company was to pre-screen and find recruits in order to prepare them for Underwater Demolition/SEAL training. During



World War II, Combat Underwater Demolition Teams (CUDT), full-fledged naval combat units, were the first to land at great risk on enemy shores, their dangerous mission being to gather topographic beach reconnaissance data and clear beachheads of any landing obstacles with explosives. These dangerous missions enabled the Marines to land on enemy islands in the Pacific, and the Army to land on the beaches of Normandy on D-Day with their landing craft, tanks, ammunitions, supplies and other essential gear. CUDT's were later converted to UDT's after World War II, and later evolved into the Navy SEALs, under President Kennedy. In the 1960's during the Vietnam War, SEALs were the Navy counter-part to the elite Green Berets of the United States Army.

UDT boot camp was hard, designed to get the recruits ready for BUDS (Basic Underwater Demolition SEAL) Training. The Chief would wake the recruits up in the middle of the night, have them dress then run through the showers until they were soaking wet right down to their socks and boots and then march them outside in the freezing cold and snow, having them stand there until they became a block of ice. Some recruits quit on the spot, others became ill, and some hung on for another day. Marcus says he was one of the lucky ones. The Chief just wanted them to toughen up and learn how to survive.

After successfully completing UDT boot camp Marcus wanted to go straight to BUDS training in Coronado. His Chief advised Marcus to attend his Class A, Damage Controlman (DC) school. The Chief told Marcus, "you are good, but you are not that

good. You might fail or get hurt at BUDS, and then you will be some 'black-shoe bo'sun's mate' on a tin can."

Marcus took the Chief's advice and attended the DC Class A school in Philadelphia. DC training gave Marcus an official naval rating of Damage Controlman, also known in the military as an MOS (Military Occupational Specialty). "A Damage Controlman had to learn everything about saving a ship, any ship, from a tender, to a submarine, to an aircraft carrier, how to decontaminate from nuclear and biological agents, how to shore up ship bulkheads under pressure, how to pump incoming water out of the ship, how to fight fires on board the ship, etc. In order to save a distressed ship, a DC must know electrical systems, carpentry, plumbing, everything about the ship in order to save it and the crew during an attack. Everyone thinks sailors on ships are safe, but ships are very dangerous with all their ammunition, explosives and fuel and subject to attack at anytime." After this very intensive DC training, Marcus was committed to succeeding, because he "didn't want to be on some dangerous ship in the middle of the ocean."

Next came BUDS, twenty intense weeks of training, with week number five being the infamous "Hell Week." After completing BUDS, he received his SEAL Trident at graduation. Then he was shipped off for three weeks to Army Parachute Jump School, at Fort Benning, Georgia.

Arroyo was selected for SEAL Team One. He was assigned to Zulu Platoon, a fourteen-man unit consisting of two seven-man squads. "Now, you train together for the next six months. As a platoon/squad, you train continuously with these same fourteen guys, learning how they think, how they breathe... you become 'one' and that's what it's all about: cohesiveness. You develop a close 'commonality' with each other. Everybody has a specialty, but everyone knows the other guys' specialty also."

Marcus and his platoon were deployed to Vietnam in early 1970. How did they travel to Vietnam? "It was quite different than how the regular troops were going to Vietnam. In the early days they went by ships; later on they travelled by regular commercial airplanes. Imagine going on Pan Am, TWA, or World Airway to a combat zone - that's crazy. For SEALs, we deployed right out of San Diego, a Navy town, we went down to North Island, there was a plane ready for us, just our fourteen-man platoon. This plane, a VR-21, carried all our gear, weapons, diving tanks, starlight scopes, explosives, everything we needed."

The VR-21, a four-engine propeller plane, stopped in Hawaii "where we did one more survival training session while they repaired the airplane. I had noticed an engine was leaking

oil while we were flying." They stopped over in Manila, then Taipei before landing at Tan Son Nhut Airport, Saigon (today, Ho Chi Ming City). From there, on to Can Tho and then Ca Mau in the Mekong Delta, arriving at the naval base called Seafloat, which was "nothing more than a bunch of barges lashed together, like an island smack in the middle of the Delta."

Their mission: to control the Delta and deny passage to the Vietcong and the NVA (North Vietnamese Army). "Seafloat, which later became 'Solid Anchor,' was our base of operations. From there we would go out and interdict the enemy. We ran clandestine operations engaging the enemy in ambushes, calling in air and artillery assault strikes, and also setting up to call in large RVN (Republic of Vietnam) Army Regulars and U.S. Army ground troops."



Navy SEAL squad armament typically consisted of two "Stoners" (belt fed M16s, assigned only to SEALs), one M-60, three AR-15's and an AR-15 with an XM148 mounted grenade launcher, which was Arroyo's weapon, Arroyo being the "grenadier." "Weight was critical, rarely did we carry food, little water, but lots of ammunition, as much as we could carry and not drown.

"We had at least one senior petty officer, usually a chief or a first class who had had multiple tours; possibly an officer who had no experience; and then you had your enlisted men. The other squad was a carbon copy."

Their routine: "You did your reconnaissance, your interdictions, your intelligence, then reported back to base camp. Unless you got involved in an engagement and had to be resupplied in the field.

"We were quite active. We'd go out and do our patrols. We'd set up ambushes and engage the enemy. A couple of times we were ambushed.

“On the first tour everyone’s excited, you’ve been training all this time...on my third mission we had our first combat. I thought to myself, ‘they really shoot back!’ When someone is coming at you and the bullets are flying right near you, it’s an amazing experience.

“You always have to be careful for ambushes. The enemy was always setting up booby-traps. Fortunately my platoon was never hurt by booby-traps. Our guys who got injured were wounded by gunshots.

“We collected as much intelligence as we could. You don’t always engage the enemy; sometimes you let them go to get a bigger fish. Sometimes you might see a junk out there at night, then you might engage them.

“When we had only eleven days left, we were packing up our gear, getting ready to go home. Our officer, LT, did a VR – Visual Reconnaissance – and saw enemy movement. I didn’t like day operations, because the enemy could see the helicopters, they could hear them...they’re waiting for you. But LT saw this enemy movement, he came back to the base – he was not my squad leader, ours had been wounded and sent back to the US. We were down to nine guys left in the platoon. LT said, ‘We want to run one more quick mission. So we loaded up in the helicopter. It wasn’t well planned. The enemy had set up and was waiting for us to insert.’”

Marcus and the others were burning waste in a 55-gallon drum when the command was given to go back out on that last operation. “One of my buddies, a good friend, he was a ‘short-timer’ and getting married soon. He had a bad feeling... so I said, you stay here, I’ll go out. All our gear had been packed, but we still had our weapons and ammunition.

“The purpose of this mission was to engage this enemy movement. But what LT didn’t realize was the size of the enemy – he thought it was a much smaller troop movement.”

Arroyo’s thoughts at the moment? “We did it so many times. You don’t think, you just do it. You grab your vest, grab your weapon, grab your ammunition.” They were always prepared: “the first thing you always do when you get back from an operation is to clean your weapon and prepare for the next operational patrol.”

Two gunships escorted each transport chopper. “You sit right on the edge of the doorway. Your feet are dangling. One gunship’s flying very low above the trees, the other is flying high, with the troop chopper in the middle. They try to get you in as low as possible and then you jump out.

“As soon as we landed we got hit. We took fire right from the beginning.

“That’s where your M60 is critical, it has the heavier bullets. You let it loose and lay down fire...As grenadier I’m lobbing grenades. It seemed as though as soon as a guy stood up he’d get shot. Fortunately the gunships were at the tree line. Called in support... We had no idea how big the enemy force was. A lot bigger than our platoon.” They had been placed in an open field. Now they had to try to move to the tree line.

Five of the SEALs including Arroyo were wounded that day on February 11, 1971. “LT was shot in both legs, shot up pretty bad, but he survived and became a district attorney in San Diego. Another officer got shot through his hand. He became an admiral later, had a distinguished career with the SEALs.

“I owe my life to the Army medics. The medics came and got us out, to the Army field hospital where they performed surgery on us. I lost a lot of blood, but they stabilized me. I was then sent to the Army hospital in Japan.”

It took six weeks before he could return to the States. Arroyo was ordered to go to St. Albans Naval Hospital in Queens, New York. “I realized if they sent me back to St. Albans my career would be over. So I asked to go to Balboa Navy Hospital in San Diego, from Japan, because I wanted to stay

in the Navy.” Arroyo didn’t realize, though, that the war was almost over, at least for Americans. Operations were about to be turned over to the South Vietnamese. “Nixon made a commitment to end the Vietnam War, and we were winding down.”

Marcus could not go back to SEAL Team One. He had to stay six more months in the hospital, undergoing more surgery. He decided he wanted to transition into police work or the FBI, or the CIA to apply the skills he had learned in the SEALs.

In 1974, now out of the Navy, he took advantage of the G.I. Bill and earned his Bachelor of Science Degree in accounting, from Stockton State. The FBI was hiring accountants as well as lawyers and other professionals. Marcus passed the FBI exam but was rejected due to his injuries sustained in Vietnam. Arroyo went on to earn an MBA from Fordham University.

Marcus worked as an accountant and auditor before moving into aviation security, as an Aviation Special Agent. This was the age of airplane hijackings and the new federal Air Marshall program. He worked on doing R & D to learn how to protect against bombs in flight, especially after the disaster of Pan Am Flight 103 over Lockerbie, Scotland. They ran simulated hijacking exercises using real airplanes with instructors role-playing as hijackers and police.

In reflecting on his experiences as a Navy SEAL, Arroyo states that he is proud of his service, and “would do it all again, except getting shot.”

Arroyo worked his way up the ladder. He was promoted to the FAA Eastern Region as Division Manager of Civil Aviation Security. He went on to serve under the U.S. Embassy in Belgium doing aviation security and working on bi-lateral security treaties, and then returned as manager of the FAA 's U.S. Eastern Region. When September 11, 2001 dawned Arroyo was head of security over sixty-four airports on the East Coast.

Two of the planes hijacked that day were flying out of his jurisdictional airports, Newark and Dulles. At first, there was no way to know what was about to happen. Arroyo was at work at the JFK control center when, around 8:30 in the morning, they received reports of a plane crashing into the World Trade Center. Then other reports came pouring in and everyone knew it was a deliberate terrorist attack. "There were thousands of airplanes in flight. We couldn't know where they all were going. We were worried about West Point, Annapolis. So the command came out of Washington to shut down the air system and bring all flights down for a total ground stop.

"After 9/11 the world changed.... Aviation security was

placed in the new TSA, the Transportation Security Administration." Arroyo went on to become the first federal Security Director of Newark Liberty Airport. After 34 years of federal service he retired in 2007, although he still performs aviation security consulting.

Arroyo lives in New York with his wife of 38 years, having raised a daughter and a son. Their son followed the Navy tradition, entering the U.S. Naval Academy in 2001, and graduating in 2005. After seven years of active duty he resigned his commission in 2012 to attend Notre Dame University, where he graduated with an MBA. Their daughter earned a Bachelor of Science Degree from Tufts University and an MBA from Smith University.

Marcus received his Purple Heart while in the field hospital in Vietnam, while heavily sedated. "An admiral came in, woke me up and pinned the medal on my bandages." In reflecting on his experiences as a Navy SEAL, Arroyo states that he is proud of his service, and "would do it all again, except getting shot."

