

PRIVATE MIGHTY MOUSE



This is the most unusual yet strangely familiar story I have ever penned concerning a Vietnam veteran. Unusual due to the veteran involved; strangely familiar of the assumed fate of Nam veterans after returning home from the hell of Southeast Asia. Richard J. Flaherty fought for the privilege to enlist in the U.S. Army against almost impossible odds. In basic training, he endured insults and discrimination. Tagged with the nickname Private Mighty Mouse, Flaherty's determination and acumen during basic training and advanced training caught the attention of his superiors. Flaherty was sent to OCS (Officer Candidate School), gained a

commission, and later earned the coveted Green Beret. Incredible achievements, considering Flaherty stood at 4'9" tall and weighed right at a hundred pounds. He was the shortest man ever to serve in the U.S. military.

Flaherty was born on November 28, 1945 in Stamford Connecticut's Regional Hospital. The doctors worked feverishly to save his life. His mother's blood type, RH-negative, a rare blood disorder that can lead to serious health problems and/or death in a newborn infant, put the newborn in extreme danger. The resulting complications and hormonal imbalance stunted Flaherty's growth which classified the tiny child as a proportionate dwarf. Doctors projected his adult height would be no more than 4'7". He proved the naysayers wrong, growing to 4'9" and 97 pounds. It wasn't the last time he'd prove naysayers wrong.

Kids can be cruel, and certainly were to Flaherty. Growing up, he was called names and bullied, yet what he lacked in stature gave way to the study of martial arts and breaking wood or bricks with his bare hands. He was athletic and strong. As a teenager, Flaherty already knew he wanted to be a soldier and tried to enlist as the war raged in Vietnam. The Army said 'no' due to Army requirements: Minimum of 5 feet in height and weight of at least 100 pounds. Flaherty was 3 inches too short and at the time weighed 94 pounds. He gained the required weight by eating six meals a day, but could do nothing concerning his height. Flaherty appealed to Senator Christopher Dodd of Connecticut for a special waiver. Dodd attained the waiver and young Flaherty was on his way to basic training.

Flaherty's drill sergeant took one look at Flaherty and welcomed him to the U.S. Army with the statement, "What the hell is this?" The insults and ridicule continued, not only from his fellow recruits but also from his superiors. They nicknamed Flaherty 'Private Mighty Mouse.' Yet to their

amazement, Private Mighty Mouse quickly showed a physical and mental prowess. Still, a few recruits thought 'the Dwarf' was unworthy of being a soldier. One soldier in particular always picked on Flaherty. Twice Flaherty's size, he picked a fight with 'the Dwarf.' Private Mighty Mouse whipped his ass. Flaherty had earned the respect he deserved.



Flaherty deployed to Bien Hoa Airbase, Vietnam in December of 1967 with the 101st Airborne Division. He fought during the infamous 1968 Tet Offensive at the end of January. Once wounded from gunfire and grenade shrapnel, he recovered and continued his unit's mission. In April of '68, several soldiers of Flaherty's company C were lost behind enemy lines. Flaherty make a decision to use the clothes and helmet of a North Vietnamese cadaver, grabbed an AK-47, and crawled towards the lost men. As daylight faded, he crossed enemy lines, gathered the lost soldiers, and safely returned them to friendly lines. For once, his short stature had paid big dividends.



On April 20, Flaherty's heroism and courage earned him the Silver Star.

The Citation: "For gallantry in action in the Republic of Vietnam on 20 April 1968, Second Lieutenant Flaherty distinguished himself while serving as a platoon leader of Company C, 1st Battalion (Airborne) 501st Infantry. Company C was involved in combat operations in the Quang Dien District, Thua Thien Province; Republic of Vietnam. At 1140 hours, Second Lieutenant Flaherty's platoon, the lead platoon, was taken under intensive automatic weapons and RFC fire. Second Lieutenant Flaherty, realizing the seriousness of the contact, immediately maneuvered his platoon to deliver a flanking assault against enemy positions. Throughout the battle he repeatedly exposed himself to the hostile fire in order to better direct the suppressive fires of his squads. Lieutenant Flaherty immediately called a 90mm recoilless rifle team to his position

after having spotted an enemy bunker position to his front which was delivering automatic weapons fire on his platoon. Lieutenant Flaherty then personally directed and assisted the 90mm recoilless rifle team in an assault of the enemy bunker, braving the intense hail of enemy fire. Under Lieutenant Flaherty's astute direction and leadership, the enemy bunker was swiftly destroyed, enabling his platoon to advance and continue its devastating attack against the enemy. Second Lieutenant Flaherty's extraordinary heroism while engaged in close combat with a well dug-in enemy force was in keeping with the highest traditions of the military service and reflects great credit upon himself, his unit, and the United States Army. By direction of the President of the United States under provisions of the Act of Congress established 9 July 1918."



His first tour completed, Flaherty returned stateside and applied for Green Beret training. Again, his height was a determining factor. He refused rejection and his resolve paid off as he completed Green Beret training with flying colors. Sent back to Vietnam for a second tour, he

engaged in special operations behind enemy lines, earning two Purple Hearts, two Bronze Stars, and a promotion to Captain.

As America's interest in Vietnam became a dishonorable 'honorable withdrawal', the U.S. military was downsized in manpower and budget funding. Among the decommissioned officers was Captain Richard J. Flaherty. He had fought to serve his country; now his service was no longer needed. Flaherty was in low spirits.

He attempted a normal civilian life, moved to Florida and studied at the University of Miami. He met a young lady, they became engaged, yet misery continued to haunt Flaherty when his fiancée was killed in a traffic accident in 1975. Distraught, most likely suffering from PTSD, Flaherty joined the ranks of the homeless.

A Miami police officer, David Yuzuk, befriended Flaherty and the two became close friends for 15 years. One day Flaherty finally told Yuzuk who he really was, what he did in Vietnam, including ongoing work for the CIA and Drug Enforcement Administration. Yuzuk was skeptical of a story he considered too fantastic to be true, yet the two remained good friends. On May 9, 2015, two joggers spotted what they thought was a body in some bushes alongside a road in Aventura, Florida. The joggers reported their find to the local police. Police found the body of 69 year old Vietnam veteran Richard J. Flaherty. He had been the victim of a hit-and-run driver, yet the driver was never charged with the hit-and-run. Officer Yuzuk was devastated by the news.

Yuzuk started digging and researching, trying to confirm his homeless friends' almost unbelievable story. Yuzuk soon located witnesses and interviewed people who knew Flaherty and found documents Flaherty had accumulated in a storage unit. There is an unknown in war called 'the fog of war'. In Flaherty's situation, his was 'the fog of civilian life.' Yuzuk discovered that his homeless friend was conducting clandestine

missions around the globe, in Cambodia, Venezuela, Iraq and Jordan to name a few. But who was Flaherty working for? The CIA, perhaps the FBI? Maybe private contractors? Or were his missions much murkier in nature?



Yuzuk began a three-year discovery process that took him down dark rabbit holes of CIA conspiracies, stolen classified weapons, smuggling, support for the Nicaraguan Contras, even time in jail for trafficking silencers. One incident involves high-altitude military-style parachute jumps in 'Alligator Alley' in Florida during the 80s when cocaine, guns, and drugs ruled the Miami area.

Apparently Flaherty also worked for the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms (ATF) as an undercover agent to stop the flow of cocaine and weapons in and out of Fort Bragg, California. (Not Fort Bragg, NC, but California).

Officer Yuzuk wrote a best-selling book on Flaherty entitled, "The Giant Killer." There is also an award-winning documentary available on YouTube, iTunes, Tubi, Amazon, and Google Play entitled, "The Giant Killer Finding Flaherty."

A man's height does not determine his manhood. His weight does not determine his courage or strength of character. Color doesn't, religion doesn't, race doesn't, nor does sexual preferences. In combat, all that matters is training and covering your buddies' six. A ton of antiquated brick walls of perception have tumbled in the past few years, perhaps

Private Mighty Mouse broke a few of those timeworn bricks with his bare hands.

