



CASTOR OIL



"Feeling gratitude and not expressing it is like wrapping a present and not giving it."

— William Arthur Ward

In 1967, nearly 200 U.S. Army Rangers were trapped in a valley in Vietnam. The Rangers were surrounded by a much larger enemy force and their prospects for survival were ominous. An officially unauthorized, hasty rescue mission was directed.

Why, you may ask, would a rescue mission be unauthorized? For several reasons: the runway at the closest U.S. airbase was being re-constructed, it was nighttime, the runway was not illuminated, it was monsoon season, and the pilots had been playing cards – and perhaps enjoying a beer or two.

Nevertheless, the aviators took off from a taxiway illuminated only by jeep headlights. They flew their F-4B Phantoms into the downpour and black Vietnam night.

The pilots were led by a young man named Manliff "Manny" Simpson. Military pilots, then and now, are often identified in battle by a unique "call sign."

Manny's call sign was "Castor Oil" because he left a bad taste in the mouths of most every commanding officer he met.

Castor Oil soon made radio contact with Captain Ramirez, the leader of the encircled U.S. Rangers. Even though Ramirez had already lost most of his left hand in that night's fighting, he directed Castor Oil to enemy locations. Castor Oil was hit many times and his wingman was killed.

Castor Oil's fearless heroics saved the lives of Ramirez and his men. Soon after the battle, Ramirez devoted himself to finding Castor Oil to thank him. But, because the rescue mission had been unauthorized, there was no official military record of the battle so Castor Oil's real name remained unknown.

Delivering much-deserved thanks to Castor Oil seemed likely to remain an elusive goal for Ramirez.

Nearly 20 years later, Ramirez, had graduated from Harvard Law School and was practicing law as in-house counsel for General Motors. Castor Oil had returned to

Chicago, graduated from DePaul's law school, and opened his own Chicago law firm.

General Motors needed a new legal team for a project, so it sent Ramirez to Chicago to hire the right lawyer. While waiting in the conference room of a law firm in Chicago, Ramirez noticed some military aviation plaques on the conference room wall. As the hosting lawyer entered the conference room, Ramirez asked, "Did you fly in Vietnam? What was your call sign?"

The Chicago attorney responded, "Yes, I flew. My call sign was Castor Oil."

Decades after the fight in Vietnam, Ramirez was able to personally thank Castor Oil, the man who saved his life. And you can guess that Castor Oil became legal counsel to General Motors on that very day.

Why tell this story now? Serving our clients and friends is a privilege. As Captain Ramirez learned, one does not always have the opportunity to express gratitude. At this time of year, I would like to say thank you. Please accept these humble thanks for your kindness and confidence.



Bob visiting Manny "Castor Oil" Simpson at his home in Florida. Manny was given his call sign because he left a bad taste in the mouths of his commanding officers.