



# **Gittin' Off Zero**

## **A soldier story**

### **Vietnam 1969**

(GOZ ) GITTIN' OFF ZERO originated in Atlanta, Georgia, in the early 1980s. My associates and I used the street phrase GOZ. The phrase inspired my imagination and determination to create the company (GOZ) GITTIN' OFF ZERO Inc. As a disabled Vietnam veteran who received the Purple Heart as a result of injuries in South Vietnam in April 1969, the phrase has been a motivating force in my life over the years.

While on patrol in April of 1969 in the jungle of South Vietnam, we came upon a Viet Cong base camp. The Viet Cong typically booby-trapped these camps before they abandoned them. Nevertheless, our job was to search the camp and destroy any Viet Cong ammo dumps we found. I was carrying the m-60 machine gun, which kept me in the middle of the formation as we patrolled the area. We moved into the camp, and I was behind three or more troops in the formation, which I had hoped would minimize any risk of injury in this particular situation. The trail was hard to follow as we investigated the camp. As we were leaving, trying as best we could to backtrack on the same trail we entered, there was a loud, deafening shatter of an explosion, and after a couple of seconds, I realized I was hit. It was a landmine.

After immediately falling to the ground, unaware of what exactly had happened, I could feel an unexplainable and painful burning sensation coming from my left ankle. I needed to see what was causing me so much pain. I looked, and the front half of my left foot was gone. I was bleeding profusely from the dismembered main artery that led down my left leg. Fortunately, the medic was able to get to me and apply a tourniquet above my knee to stop the heavy bleeding. Doc, the medic, gave me a shot of morphine to reduce the pain. Two of my buddies carried me out of the bush and put me on the chopper that had come to take

me to the rear, where the main field hospital was located. While on the chopper, another medic asked if I was in pain. I said yes, and he gave me another shot of morphine.

Later, I would find that I had received more injuries other than the loss of a foot, but at the time, the pain in the lower part of my ankle dominated all other feelings and emotions going through my mind and body. That day, along with different experiences in South Vietnam, changed the course of my life forever, both mentally and physically. I would never be the same.

After being discharged from the military at Fort Gordon Hospital in Augusta, Georgia, in December of 1969, my oldest brother Sweet was stationed at Fort Bragg, North Carolina; he and my brother Lee had made it possible earlier for us to move around the Fayetteville North Carolina Hustlin community without a whole lot of problems. Sweet came and got me and said he needed some help running a house he was hustling out of, so I went, and my other brother, Reginald, came later. We were living outside of Fayetteville in a place called Spring Lake; we were hustling out of a house where all kinds of things were going on: drugs, alcohol, gambling, prostitution, you name it; we got out of that town by the grace of the good lawd, because my MOTHER didn't raise us that way. After leaving Fayetteville, North Carolina, alive, we returned to Atlanta, Georgia. I started school on the GI bill, but I was still struggling to cope with the psychological results of my injuries in Vietnam by using drugs and alcohol and couldn't apply myself, so I gave up and gave in to drugs and alcohol.

(GOZ) GITTIN' OFF ZERO has been a process that has evolved over the years. It began as an attraction to the expression/phrase itself. GOZ came out of an environment of the streets and all the activities that go with that lifestyle. The guy I heard say That had the greatest Impact On me was an old hustler by the name of (Jessie Cup Davis) it was just how he said it that inspired or impressed me. The phrase GOZ was first expressed as GITTIN' ME OFF ZERO, but that expression seemed to imply looking for something outside myself. However, The expression GITTIN' OFF ZERO implies self-determination or looking within.

I knew nothing about starting a business when I first designed the logo. I just got started, getting information from anywhere I could. I thought it was a good idea and started to make it happen. I found a silkscreen artist and had a few t-shirts printed. To see my idea come to life was awesome. It made me feel great; I began to show the t-shirts to friends and tried selling them. Having somebody like my idea and pay me for the product felt good.

I stayed focused for a while and found myself back in the grip of addiction, ripping and running behind drugs and alcohol again and doing a lot of illegal things to maintain my drug and alcohol problem. This led to going in and out of jail and ultimately to a stitch in prison;

after serving 33 months on a 10 ten year sentence, I got paroled. My experience in prison taught me that prison wasn't for me.

After I was released, a partner of mine named the thin man I used drugs with had turned preacher before I went to prison, and I have a great deal of respect for him. The thin man had bought a truck and started a rolling store. He came and talked with me after I was released and let me know what he was doing, and we decided to do something together out of that meeting. He already had the rolling store, so he brought me in.

We needed a name for the rolling store, so the thin man asked me to come up with a design for the name he called ("grits on wheels"). After I finished the logo, I put it with some artwork I had done before I went to prison. The Gittin' Me Off Zero logo was part of that artwork, so I put (the "grits on wheels") logo with the artwork and slid it back under my bed. When the thin man came to see the ("grits on wheels") logo when I pulled the artwork from underneath the bed, he looked at it, and as he was looking at it, the gittin' me off zero logos caught his eye. He asked me what it was, and I told him that was my gittin' me off zero logos I designed before I went to prison.

He looked at me with great excitement and said that's the name of the rolling store, Gittin' me off zero. After getting a loan from one of our associates, Buster (who was in the game), the Thin Man and I had some products printed up and posted on Georgia Avenue in the community we were raised in, Summerhill. The part of Georgia we posted up on was where all the twisting and turning was going on; in the process, the thin man upgraded the truck to a larger one, and we had the gittin' me off zero logos put on both sides and went to rollin'. Again, I stayed focused for a while, and with a bit of success with GOZ, I lost sight and started using drugs and alcohol again.

As a result of my using a strain was put on the thin man and my relationship, I continued to market GOZ myself with the help of another one of my associate name (Frank) who also like the gittin' me off zero idea, Frank was good people but unfortunately Frank had a substance abuse problem as well, Again I found myself back in trouble with the law, I manage to get some probation stacked on top of probation and my probation officer gave me an alternative I could either go into a drug treatment program or go back to jail so I chose to go in to a drug program and he sent me to the VA hospital so I decided enough is enough I would get my life together and resurrect GITTIN' OFF ZERO this was in 1991 and over the years I have redesigned the logo fine-tuned it's meaning, added and deleted product, marketed the product on consignment, create a website, I currently operate a kiosks downtown in Atlanta Georgia at Peachtree Street and Decatur Street at Five points, I

also promote GOZ on Facebook and Instagram, contact me @  
WWW.GITTINOFFZERO.COM.

Although (GOZ) GITTIN' OFF ZERO seems to have originated from a negative environment, it has evolved into something richer for me. However, the expression in its origin was like finding a diamond in the rough. As a disabled Vietnam vet who lost a foot in South Vietnam, lives with PTSD, and has been recovering from substance abuse for the last 21 years, the expression has been and is a powerful tool in my recovery process. The expression has revealed to me that we all have diamonds in the rough inside of us; these diamonds can be expressed in a variety of ways: Mentally, Spiritually, Physically, Intellectually, Financially, Politically, or Socially. GITTIN' OFF ZERO is the starting point of one's goals, aspirations, and Dreams; GO GIT IT.



