

## Diplomacy

The wet season has passed for a few more months and I, for one, I am pleased not to see it for awhile. When you are on night ambush or night roving patrol, it is necessary to lay in the water with only your head exposed to the rain and wind. I found if I could lie still for a few minutes the water around my body would warm some. This would help keep away the chill until I found it necessary to move, then I had to start the process all over again. . During the wet season, the visibility is poor; the rice paddies are full of with smelly dung filled water. It is usually safer to walk through the open paddies than walking on the rice paddy dikes where you are liable to find booby-traps.

The dry season is once again upon us through. I prefer this to the wet it has some drawbacks as the bugs and the snakes were more prevalent. I must admit the snakes did their part in controlling the bugs. Also, during the dry season, you might be blessed with heat rash or prickly rash. This is a subject in itself. It occurs when the skin's sweat glands are blocked and the sweat produced cannot get to the surface of the skin to evaporate. This causes a rash common symptoms of heat rash include red bumps on the skin, and a prickly or itchy feeling to the skin (also known as) prickly heat. The rash appears as reddened skin with tiny blisters and is due to inflammation. It often occurs in skin creases or areas of tight clothing where air cannot circulate, like where your web gear touches your shoulders and waist. heat rash usually fades when the skin is allowed to cool. Medical treatment is necessary only if the area becomes infected. heat rash can be prevented by avoiding hot, humid conditions, wearing loose fitting clothes and using air conditioning or fans to allow air to circulate. I would like to have known where these places existed in Vietnam during the time I was there.

Now that you know something about our outside elements, let us look into other uncomfortable aspects of this police action. Our mission this evening was to leave the parameter at about 1900 hours; we will be out all night with a roving night patrol that will follow a set course of checkpoints. A, B, C and so on. Each point is plotted on the map back at the tactical operation center (TOC). We stay at each point for an hour or two then move to the next while staying in contact with TOC so they know where we are at all times. They also relay our position to the artillery batteries that give our team support during the mission.

It is not important to leave base during the hours of darkness for roving patrols, because as we fade into the darkness between our first and second checkpoint, most likely the enemy will not know where we go after our first checkpoint. While the team is always on the watch for anything out of the ordinary, we are more at ease during the daylight hours. If the enemy is near, they have us in sight. The members of the team that smoke will have a cigarette as we move through open areas. Cigarettes were cheap and seemed to steady the nerves some. They were ten cents a pack (we did not pay the taxes) and most guys were not worried about lung cancer; bullets would do us more harm. At that time, I was smoking over two packs a day. Other than coffee, I had no other addictions. Some of the others in the patrol was hooked on marijuana. I wanted nothing to with it, and they knew it.

We were setting up in our first checkpoint. There was still an hour or so before the darkness would settle over us. The team always deploys a few claymores (anti personal mines) each time we set up a temporary line of defense.

I was about to place my claymore when I detected the smell of marijuana in the air. Immediately all my senses were at a heightened alert, it could only mean one of two things: Either the enemy was near us and we were in for a firefight, or someone in the team did not care that they just put the team in danger of giving away our position to the enemy if they were downwind of us.

I duck walked as fast as my legs would carry me back to the team. They knew I knew something was up. As soon as I was within speaking range, I ask the obvious, "anyone smoking a joint?" I first got some strange looks, as though I were kidding them. One of the team members asked me if I had one for them. I just shook my head and said, "funny."

I explained I could smell it, and the wind is carrying the smell to us out of the east. We were set up in an open dry rice paddy with a paddy dike to give us some protection. Our backs were exposed for about 100 meters to the next dike. The enemy could be anywhere east of us hiding behind another rice paddy dike, just waiting for dark to settle in.

I told the teams if it is not one of you then I am sure we are going to have company of the unfriendly type this evening. They could see I was ready for action, so one of the guys spoke up, he said, he had just smoked a joint. My mind was searching for ideas on what to do next. Should I return to base? What would be the reason? Should we pick up now and move to a new location? TOC would wonder why the change. I decided to talk to the degenerate that put our team in danger for no-good reason.

I told him what he had just done to jeopardize all of our lives. I also said I could not have this, as we need all of us to be as sharp as possible; we are a team of five roaming around in enemy territory until daylight. I concluded by telling him I will let it pass this time and this time only. No one outside the members of this team will know what happened, but if I know about another episode of this happening, I WILL HANG YOUR ASS. We picked up and moved our check point about 300 meters to our right. I called TOC and explained I thought we would have better cover at this new location. They understood and passed this information along to others that needed to know.

You might wonder why I decided to do what I did. A situation like this needs some diplomacy. I made my case and I made it clear that I will let it go just this once. I have heard stories of patrol leaders that had no respect of their team or the team members did not trust their leader. These leaders could find themselves in a bad situation during a firefight and might not survive. One learns quickly whom to trust and who not to trust. I was always straight up with the team they knew my word was good. By the way, I never had a situation like this ever come up again.

I heard someone tell a reporter, "they were born and raised in the United States, but grew up in Vietnam." Wars and conflicts have a way of aging a teenager about fifteen years. I don't think anyone in the patrol was older than twenty-five. I was twenty-two when I got out of the service. I did a lot of maturing in two and a half years.