

Sleeping Conditions

Wet, damp conditions have always created problems for armies, and Vietnam was no exception. It's more difficult to keep equipment clean and working properly. Infection will spread easier. Your vision is greatly reduced during a rain shower. Even ground surveillance radar has difficulties sorting out movement.

Sometimes, if it were raining and I knew the patrol would be wet until we returned to their hooch; I would create a game of tag or something like that. As we came near a large puddle of water, I would look for a rock or chunk of mud to throw into it. I wanted to see how many of the patrol I could get wet. I had to plan well and move quickly, for if anyone guessed what I was up to, I would be the first to get wet. Everyone knew the game, and why we played it. Once you were no longer concerned about being wet, the men could keep their minds on the patrol function.

Some of our day patrols we would be walking through wet rice paddies in mud to our ankles, sometimes to our knees; and the water might come to our waist. I remember one time being so deep in the mud I had to bend at the waist and roll to break free of the suction. I thank God the Viet Cong were not over the next rice paddy dike.

At night, during the monsoon season, you were going to get wet.

It has always been a good practice not to move much once you settled into a night ambush position. Lying submerged in the rice paddy up to your neck and the richly fertilized water. You were less likely to be noticed by the enemy, and if you held still for about fifteen minutes the water around your body would warm some so you retain some body heat so it seemed anyway. If the wind was blowing, not much of anything helped except a poncho. All it takes is a quick shiver or a small movement and you start the process all over again.

The roving night ambushes were always more of a risk. During the wet season the risk were always greater. It became more difficult to see the surrounds, the noise of rain hitting your clothing and poncho, and the walking in the water made it more difficult to hear.

Has the patrol moves from one site to another the risk increases of being spotted by the enemy. They might wait until we were moving out to the next area and spring an ambush on us.

Many times we would wrap up our night time activities in the wee hours of the morning just before daylight. It is important that the patrol should leave the area unnoticed. Then we were more likely to use this position again with out as much danger of walking into booby traps or worse.

Getting started for the base was not much fun after these conditions. You were, of course, wet, cold, and somewhat stiff. Your boots were filled with water and every step you took the murky paddy water would gush out the vent holes below your arch. We sounded like the march of the soggy sponges as we crossed the open fields returning to the base camp.

About half way back to the base, I would call for the truck to pick the patrol up at one of the gates. Then the command center notified the bunker line in the area we were returning so they would hold fire if they saw the patrol nearing the perimeter. One would hate to be shot by a sleepy bunker guard.

Once safely inside the base perimeter, there was the matter of getting most of the leeches off you before they became much bigger. You needed to rely on a buddy to find the ones you could not see. A quick touch on the slimy creature from a lit cigarette or a little salt would allow you to remove them easily; I preferred the salt.

After climbing into the back of the truck and bouncing down a dirt road inside the perimeter toward the hooch's, you had two things on your mind, getting some food, and crawling into the rack for some decent sleep. By now, daylight was stretching across the eastern horizon, and a new day was beginning; you and the returning patrol were the only people moving about.

Soon the cooks in the mess hall would be getting the powdered eggs mixed into the water for breakfast. The night patrol usually returned too early to eat; and most of the time if you took a cold shower to clean up before eating, all you wanted to do was go to

bed. You were too tired to dress again in dry clothes and eat. Yes, that's correct: *cold showers*. The only way we had warm water was by the solar method and sometime in the night the water cooled.

So, if you were hungry and could tolerate wet clothes a little longer, you might get a few winks by lying down on top of your foot locker to rest. Our clothes were still too damp to lie on the bed. The top of this box was just large enough to support your back and part of your butt; you could rest your head on your bunk, you bent your knees and placed your feet flat on the floor. It was possible to doze until it was time to eat. Now that I think back, I wonder what we must have smelled like standing in that serving line. Most of the time we had the mess hall to ourselves. I always thought it was because we were the first to arrive.