

## The Pause that Refreshes

My wife and I had a discussion this morning about hot water. No, not the kind I occasionally get in with her, but the real thing that comes out of the tap for showers and dishwashers.

We run the dishwasher at night just as we slip between the sheets for a good night's rest. If we forget to turn on the dishwasher, the dishes wait patiently until morning. It usually happens when I am about to take a shower.

My wife remembers those days when hot water tanks held smaller amounts of hot water and she gets concerned about the hot water turning cold halfway through my shower. That is when I tell her the story of taking showers in Vietnam. I was one of the fortunate. Many GI's who were required to be in the field, or on outposts had to go several weeks without a shower.



The shower used by the patrol was constructed of a frame made from salvage (stolen) wood 2x4s and 2x8s, and wrapped with salvaged corrugated sheet metal. It had a 2.5 x 7 foot opening for a doorway, no door. The cross members above our heads were 4x4s and held two inverted wing tanks from jet fighters. Someone had sealed 3/4 inch pipes into the tanks and put a shower nozzle at the end of them. The water was controlled by pulling a ring at the end of a chain that opens the valve to allow the water to flow. Above the water tanks was sky, sometimes clear and hot, sometimes cloudy and full of rain.



The shower was the highlight of the day (I wish I could say it was the food, but I spoke of the food in another story). After a long day patrol, it felt good to soothe the heat rash and try to get some of the dirt embedded in the pores removed.

I will remember the first time I came home from Nam; I lived in Seattle, Washington. It was spring, and my friends remarked what a great tan I had. It was true, my tan was better than people who lived in Florida. That lasted until my second or third bath in warm soapy water. I realized most of my tan was embedded dirt.

It was best to take a shower in Nam at about 1300 hours. You could enjoy the best shower of the day, provided there was still some water left in the tanks and it did not run dry before you were able to remove the soap from your skin and hair.

The water was replenished nearly every day. Someone driving a five-ton truck with a 500-gallon tank and pump in the truck bed filled the shower tanks. This water was pumped from one of three wells on the base. I don't know how deep these well shafts were drilled down to get the water, but I am sure they needed to pass several layers of ice before they found it.

If you were to take a shower before the warmth of the day heated the water in the tanks, you were in for a quick awakening. The only pleasure I got from these types of showers was to tell the guy with a towel wrapped around his loins heading for the shower, that the water was perfect, and no one ever believed me. Maybe the first guy did.

One day our patrol was loaded into the deuce in a half (2.5-ton truck), and were about to go on an afternoon walk through three or four miles of rice paddies and rubber tree plantations. Eric was backing the truck away from the patrol area when he felt a sudden resistance and he stopped the truck. He did not stop it until he destroyed half of our

shower. The guys in the back were yelling at him to stop. My guess was that his hearing was no better than my hearing, due to all the firefights, the patrol had gotten into.

A doctor at the Veterans clinic asked me one time. Why didn't you use earplugs? I said, "we need to hear everything when we're in the field". I should have asked him, "Should I have stopped the action so I could put in my earplugs"?

We asked the dog handlers if we could come over to their area and sponge off them for a few weeks. They were under standing and we shared their shower. The people that do repairs of base buildings had a new shower built for us within three weeks. They remembered where we lived because a few months earlier they built us a new outhouse. A fire had destroyed the old outhouse.

Now it's been nearly 50 years and occasionally I still will take a cold shower. Most of the time I rinse in cold water, it closes the pores. I live in Eastern Idaho, the elevation is over 4,600 feet, and in the winter it can get very cold; you can just about hear your pores slam shut during a cold shower.

A cold shower is truly, the pause that refreshes.