

6TH BATTALION, 11TH ARTILLERY

Hawaii



Viet Nam

On Time, Sir!

From Georgia to Viet Nam Section Eleven Rumors of War and Tall Tales V

by Clenton Thomas, B Btry, '68-'69

ON THE WAR PATH

Within B- Battery we had a full blooded Sioux Indian, Sam. I was talking with Sam one day and I asked him about him drinking alcohol. I had heard that Indians could not tolerate it. He informed me that he could do alright with a few beers but not too good with hard liquor. He told me about a party that he was attending just before he entered service. Alone with several Indian girls and braves, he was sitting on a couch next to a girl drinking that evening. When this brave came in and looking around at all of them stated in a loud voice "What you doing you bunch S.O.B.?" Sam said he looked around and neither male nor female said a thing, so he stands up places his drink on the coffee table ask the young lady to excuse him. Walks over to that brave and whips his tail real good. Goes back to the couch sets down and resumes drinking. He looked at me and said I don't know about the rest of them, but my mother was not a bitch.

Sam had a different form of recreation than what the rest of us did. Ours was playing horseshoes. We didn't have regular horseshoes to play with, ours was what we had on hand. On some of the Artillery Rounds it had a small horseshoe shaped piece of metal. We used it to play horseshoes with. Sam on the other hand would take a one by six board off the box that artillery rounds would come in. Lean it up against the sand bag wall around the artillery gun, it would almost be standing straight up on its long end. He would stand back some twenty to thirty feet from the board and take a machete and throw it at the board sticking the machete into it. He would do this in sets of twenty throws and be on target 20 out of 20 times with each set he threw 99.5% of the time. Very seldom did he miss by one or two hits.

Lance told me about this, him and Sam had went back to HQ in Duc Pho on some kind of business. They had to stay overnight there, they stayed at a barracks type building. It had a sand bag bottom a little over waist high and a long tent above that. That night around midnight Lance and Sam were setting on some sand bags that were being filled a short distance from the barracks. And they were drinking and carrying on loudly when the Sergeant Major came out of the barracks and told them to settle down and go to bed. Well Sam wasn't ready to do that and

the tone of voice the Sergeant Major used ticked Sam off and Sam told him he was going to scalp him. He then picked up a trench shovel laying on the ground and gave a Sioux war cry and went after him.

The Sergeant Major took off running around the barracks building with Sam right in behind him. Lance was laughing as he watched them going around the building with Sam letting out a Sioux war cry every once in a while. He figured that Sam would soon quit, but on the second trip around he figured that Sam really meant to scalp him and he saw that the Sergeant Major was getting winded and wouldn't last too much longer. So on the third lap around Lance tackled Sam as they came by him and sat on him until he calmed down. Don't know why the Sargent Major didn't bring charges against Sam, might be that he didn't want it public about what had happen.

A FLAK JACKET

A flak jacket or vest (we called them flight jackets) is a form of body armor, was not designed to protect against being hit with bullets. But depending on the type of weapon and its velocity and distance from the target, one might survive being hit. It was more to protect from shrapnel from mortars. "Charlie" often used a RPG "Rocket- Propelled Grenade" equipped with an explosive warhead. It was said that it could penetrate two layers of sandbags then explode. There was told of an event where a GI wearing a flak vest was hit with a RPG. But in his case it was a dud and when it hit him it wasn't at full power and bounced off his chest and dropped to the ground between his feet. Even so it could have still exploded when it fell to the ground, although it didn't. But still it could have exploded the mind of the guy it hit. I never did hear how it affected him, and I would not have wanted to have been him at any rate.

TWO CHIEU-HOI'S AND A HAND GRENADE

In Vietnam the Government had a program called Chieu-Hoi, The literal meaning of Chieu Hoi is "welcome return." We thought of it as an "I Surrender flyer". The program was a way the VC could defect back to the South Vietnamese Government. While some would "when in between a rock and a hard spot", use it to save their life, then turn around and return to the VC later. While other were serious about it and would become guides for our troops. Because they could read the jungle and knew the area. And the marking of booby traps, they were able to save many of our troops lives. There were several kinds of Grenades used in Nam. There were some that looked like the WWII German style, and the Chinese made one that looked sort of like ours. Then the VC made some out of bamboo, that would sometimes work and sometimes it didn't, all were called Chicom Grenades.

Marijuana grew wild in Viet Nam, the VC used it and sadly to say our guy's did also. There were many times while in Duc Pho or on the LZ when you could smell the odor of someone smoking a joint.

I know of one guy that was going to sneak some back into the states when he went home. He had a metal can of powder that he took the lid off without leaving any evidence that it had been tampered with. And he filled it full of Marijuana, I thought he was stupid to take the risk, especially seeing as he could have bought some off the street when he got back home. Of course he would have had to pay a larger sum of money for it.

Down on the infantry side of the LZ there was a guard bunker that was close to the Command Bunker. One day a couple of VC, high on marijuana decided they would take our hill. Each one had a "Chieu-Hoi Flyer" and one Chicom Grenade between them. Their intent was to crawl through the wire, sneak up on the guard bunker toss the grenade inside it. Which would kill those inside then they would go in and gather as many usable weapons as they could and take the hill using our own weapons. Problem was the sentry on duty saw them coming through the wire. He stayed cool, called it in and was told that the four duce's (Mortar Team) would open fire on them. And when that happened he was to cut loose with his M-60. Results was both were killed, none was even injured on our side.

I went down later with one of our guys and took my movie camera and took a short section of film of them. Both had multiple bullet holes in them and had suffered direct hits from the Mortars. One had half his face blown away.

MIND GAMES

I'm not making light of the Officers that were captured and went through so much. But there were two class of captives. The Officers would be transported up to the North and held in prison camps. But what about those that were not officers the run of the mill trooper. When these were captured their fate was very different, some would be killed right off. But for some of them the VC would use them in demoralizing the troops in the field.

One of the things they would do is dress them up in the standard clothes of the VC. This included black clothes and the straw cone hat that they wore. They would also tie them with a broom stick in a position that look like a rifle. Put a gag over their mouth and take them to an area where some of our troops was patrolling, then fire a couple of shots to draw our attention to their dressed up VC. We would not see them as a fellow soldier but as an enemy and would shoot them. Imagine the shock the soldier that killed him experienced when he found out what he had done.

The VC had worked on our minds with this trick. And it would affect not only the shooter, but each one in the patrol, how many would think twice about shooting a lone VC from then on. And would it cost more lives because someone would not shoot quickly for fear of killing one of our own? Propaganda was a weapon that the North Vietnamese used with those Officers that were captured also. Their purpose was to turn Public Opinion against the American Troops that served in Viet Nam. Sad part of this was that the North never told about what they did to their own people North and South to get them to join them.