

Dance With The Devil

These are memories and thoughts of almost 40 years ago in a little no name place around LZ Buff AO in the Quang Ngai province. On February 11, 1969, we moved out with full packs to participate in a sweep operation in Buff AO and the word from battalion was to stay off the high ground. I had on a flak jacket and was carrying a full pack of equipment and in that heat it was brutal.

We moved all morning, until around 9:00 when we drew automatic weapons fire from the tree line from snipers, and 3rd platoon was requesting a dust-off chopper for a wounded soldier. We did all the right stuff and called in gunships to kill the snipers and it got quiet. We continued to sweep and received more sniper fire all morning long, as we moved in the direction of the sniper fire. Quiet again. And we broke for lunch, which consisted of c-rations and they sucked as usual. I had eaten with a boy from Texas who was in country longer than me and I had a long time to go. I had made arrangements to re-enlist for change of MOS and get a job at Chu Lai on the 13th of February I had enough time and grade to re-enlist. I shared this with my brother from Texas and he replied "I'm going to do my time and go home". I was soon to become a lifer, but it was better than this or the other way. We picked up where we left off, the rest of the afternoon we danced with the devil. At 3:00 we moved to a small hill which was about a 35 degree incline and was free of any trees. Just as I walked up the hill 50 feet, I spotted old c-ration cans and I stopped dead in my tracks knowing that Charlie planted booby traps all over this ground. It was super hot and all the guys were removing their flak jackets and going to the top of the hill. I said to somebody that this God Damn hill was mined and I sat down in place with my back toward the hill, my jacket on and was about to take off my rut sack, ..I heard a large explosion that shook the ground and hit me across the back, I was flung into the air 5 feet and my back felt like a baseball bat had found its way across it....I thought my back was broken, but I had my jacket on and I felt safe thinking this was the million dollar wound. There was blood on me.... in my mind I was convinced it was not mine. Doc came over to me and said "Moe you are going home" as he worked on me and I thought it was strange, that doc had opened 5 or so pressure bandages....I knew it didn't look good. At this point blood was coming from my mouth, and I figured that this can't be a good thing, and

I had vision of John Wayne in a old Army movie bleeding from the mouth and asking for a cigarette... of course, he died 5 minutes later. I knew I was helpless and was in grave trouble and this would probably be the end for me. I had danced with the devil and I would lose.

I waited for a dust-off helicopter which seemed like hours, but in fact it was only minutes. You could hear those wonderful sounds of the hueys. My brothers loaded me into the floor of the huey on my stomach. The boy from Ga was on the left side with massive leg wounds and in the middle was the one who detonated the 105mm round..... in a poncho. The huey lifted with its human cargo and then I really got scared, because the helicopter was treetop high and the door-gunner was putting some lead out....I figured we would catch some rounds up through the belly and crash. I was right, next to the door gunner, I must of have looked pretty bad because he said "hang on... "we are almost home" and proceeded to give me a cigarette...I thought of the Duke again. I could see the ocean as the huey began to turn...we were home at the 312th Evacuation Hospital setting down on the pad. Four orderly's were waiting for me on the pad with a stretcher, and then slid me onto the stretcher while running toward the triage building...boots were pulled off while they cut the clothes off with scalpelsrunning all the time....God Bless Our Doctors and Nurses

They started to work on me immediately, ex-rays and a few questions from the surgeon who looked like Jim Backus. My brother from GA came through and said something to me while our brother from TX was brought in. I could see the nurse was upset and said "Oh My God". The mask came downI woke up in recovery alive and spent the next 2 weeks at the 312th Evacuation then off to Da Nang. It was snowing in Japan when I was taken off the helicopter. This hospital had a giant surgical ward consisting of 50 beds or more and was cold and dark inside. There were 7 guys waiting to see the surgical team and I was last in line. A cadre of surgeons came through the doors to evaluate and one by one they were told who was going home and who was going back to Vietnam after their procedures...some guys were crying.

Now it was my turn and I was never so scared in my life...if only I could look sicker than I was. The surgeons took my chart and they were discussing my case...The surgeon said, "Mr. Marino....You are going home...oh by the way...you have

malaria” Four days later I had a 105+ fever and I thought about all the malaria tablets I spit out. I got what I wished for.

My freedom wasn't a BOAC but a C141 that landed at Anchorage Alaska in a snowstorm and then onto McGuire Air Force Base and then to The Walson Army Hospital and then home.

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