

Dance With The Devil



These are memories and thoughts of 43 years ago in a little no name place in LZ Buff AO just East of OP George in 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. Area was heavily booby trapped and high ground was mined. I had on a flak jacket and was carrying a full pack of equipment and ammo can. The temperature was hot and the heat was brutal. We moved all morning, until around 9:00 am, when we drew automatic weapons fire from the tree line from snipers, and our 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 Banda our M-60 machine gun man 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 to spend 20 years in the Army than go home the other way. We picked up where we left off, the rest of the afternoon we Danced With The Devil. At 3:00 pm 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 some 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 I was about to take off my rut sack...I heard a large explosion that shook the ground and hit me across the back leg & arm. I was flung into the air 5 feet and my back felt like a baseball bat had found its way across it....I thought that my back was broken. At first the intense pain followed by numbness and then a then a wet sensation. But I

had my jacket on and I felt safe thinking this was the million dollar wound and if I survived, I would be going home. 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 & nose and I figured that this can't be a good thing, and I had vision of John Wayne in an old Army movie that he was 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 certainly lose. I waited for a dust-off helicopter which seemed like hours, but in fact it was only minutes. I could hear those wonderful sounds of the Hueys in the distance and slowly getting louder and louder. My brothers loaded me into the floor of the Huey on my stomach. My brother from Atlanta Ga was on the left side with massive leg wounds and in the middle was the one who detonated the Bouncing Betty...and he was silent

in a poncho. The Huey lifted with its human cargo and then I really got scared, because the helicopter was at treetop high and the door-gunner was putting some lead out....I figured we would catch some rounds up through the belly of the helicopter and crash. I was positioned right, next to the door gunner, I must of have looked pretty bad because he said”hang on”.. . “we are almost home”and then proceeded to give me a cigarette.....I thought of the Duke again. I could see the ocean as the Huey began to make a wide turn...we were home at the 312th Evacuation Hospital at Chu Lai and setting down on the pad. Four orderly’s were waiting for me on the pad with a stretcher, while running toward the triage building...boots were pulled off while they were cutting my clothes off with scalpels andrunning all the time.... God Bless Our Doctors and Nurses... The doctor’s and nurse’s started to work on me immediately, ex-rays and a few questions from the surgeon who looked just like Jim Backus. My brother Larry from Atlanta GA came through and said something to me while our brother from TX was being brought in. I could see the nurse was very 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. I was loaded on a C141 in Da Nang Vietnam headed for our surgical hospital in Japan. It was snowing in Japan when I was being taken from the C141 to the hospital by helicopter. This hospital had many giant surgical wards each 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 to be examined. A cadre of surgeons came through the doors to started to evaluate one by one...all were told they were going back to their units in the field in Vietnam after medical proceduressome 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 all discussing my case, for about 5 minutes....The head 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 thought I wanted to get malaria to acquire sometime in the

rear.... I got what I wished for. My fevers were up to 106 degrees - and I thought I was on fire. My freedom wasn't a BOAC but a C141 that landed at Anchorage Alaska with no flaps in a snowstorm and then onto McGuire Air Force Base New Jersey and then to The Walson Army Hospital at Fort Dix New Jersey and then home. David Marino A-4/3 11th Light Infantry Brigade 68/69

