

Overnight with Mya

By "No Socks"¹

Take me out of here! This pin gun flare behind your ear will blow your nose from this end. Drive asshole! Now, that we are clear of your black pajama cowboy boyfriends, let's get real. You were setting me up.

Take me to the address on the paper I gave you. You wanted those cowboys to kill me and take my money. Well, asshole you picked the wrong guy. Now take me to that address or I will blow your head off and steal your taxi. I'm staying in Saigon tonight.

I remember getting out of the cab with pounding in my chest. Fearful and pumped. I was trying to meet up with my special bar girl. Her name is Mya, or at least that is what I call her at the bar. She takes good care of me. The bar girls are our main source of bought affection. Mya is my favorite. She is older, maybe twenty-eight. She supplies affection and tending for money. All the bargirls smell good and flirt with us. When you are thousands of miles from round eyed girls your age, Vietnamese bar girls are very desirable. They are in the war also. They sell their bodies for money to survive. Women have few legit jobs in the city. They make their money off G.I.s. that get time off and can get into Saigon. American CIA and government officials do not indulge in bar girls. They are big time. Most have a Vietnamese girl friend that they maintain in high style. I bet they do not write home about those arrangements.

I wear a rubber because some of the bar girls are Viet Cong and wish to give me the clap. Sorta, feminine guerilla warfare. I always wear a rubber. Better for my health and I do not want a child on my conscience.

¹ Sargent, United States Army. This story, "as raw as a war zone", is based on real events occurred around May 1970.

I also know that the Vietnamese children of American G.I.'s are often shunned by their community. I don't want to be part of that. It is tough enough to live in this war-torn country. I don't want to leave anything or anyone here.

Guys in Vietnam get the clap. Some guys do it to stay out of the field. Jones is like that. He is scared to death about going out in the jungle. Snakes, booby traps and ambushes just scare him shitless. So, he always goes down to the laundry and gets some. Those girls at the laundry will sell you anything and usually donate the clap. One time I took Jones out of the infirmary for a combat mission. All he had was gonorrhea and I administered the penicillin. It just was not fair that some guys had to patrol while Jones missed another mission while in the infirmary.

Our two medics go to the laundry to get heroin. I guess they get laid while they are there but I think the heroin is what they desire. I should turn them in but we would probably just get more heroin addicts. Drugs help us pass our year of duty. The whole war zone is high and lawless.

The black-market supplies anything you need as long as you have money. Even at \$450.00 a month I am rich compared to the locals. That \$450 includes \$50 combat pay. \$50 extra for the privilege of getting your ass shot off in sunny Southeast Asia. All of my Ranger team purchased fire power on the black market. On our six-man team we have two M2 carbines, one Thompson sub-machine gun and a Swedish K purchased on the black market. My M-16 and the M 60 carried by Zeke round out most of our arsenal. The M-16 provides plenty of rounds but is minimally effective in triple canopy jungle. Bamboo for example, is so dense that the small rounds of the M-16 cannot penetrate. Now the Thompson, well bamboo and trees get knocked down by those 45 caliber rounds. Between the M-60 and the Thompson cutting through thick foliage the dinks have little cover. My deputy team leader carries the Thompson and he protects our rear.

I stay away from the drugs mainly because I want to go home. I am not into this war. I fight because I must. There are no referees for this fight. If you get hit or drop your magazine while reloading you must

still continue to fight. No refs to stop the fight or execute a penalty. I'm not sure but I think the Ohio State football coach said that football is like war. He is mistaken. No refs, no substitutions and no rules.

As a Shake and Bake Staff Sergeant I know that I am just fodder for this political power grab. I was raised by patriotic Americans. My dad was in the Navy during WWII. So were my uncles and dad's friends. I think I would have been disowned if I did not show up for duty. One particularly helpful thing for me was that I was raised in the valley of a forest. I know my way around the woods and the jungle is very similar. Water in the ravines, rocks and trees in the higher lands. Snakes, monkeys, elephants, tigers and leeches everywhere.

I was drafted right after college. Basically, I was lazy and did not prepare or develop a strategy to beat the draft. My friends joined as bookkeepers or something. They signed up for three years to get a better job. I'm sure that some were put into the infantry but not many. Others joined the National Guard. That was the smart move but it required connections. I got through college on a wrestling scholarship but I did not have friends in the National Guard with any pull. There are several guys that joined up for the big adventure. Some wanted to see the world. Some wanted to kill the yellow hordes. Others, and probably most, just wanted something to do.

I talk with Mya. We share enough Vietnamese and English that we can get the main idea across to one and other. To talk low while lying close with Mya is the only intimacy I could find in the warzone. She has trauma. The war with the French and now us spans her lifetime. She was born into a warzone. All the stages of her life have been affected by war. Not so for me. I was skating through life and got drafted. Now I am a guerilla fighter in a war far from home. Her story is different. The war affects all of her family as well as herself. Her brother was killed by Viet Cong. NVA soldiers had their way with her when she was sixteen. Now she is a whore making money for herself, her family and mama-san. A bargirl's life is hard. Mama-san gets more money than Maya.

Maya thinks that life is even harder with the Americans now in her country. Mya would just like us to leave.

This night when Mya comes home from the bar, I am waiting in her bed. She brings her scent. I just breath her in and we sleep.

Before I met Mya, I read that Westy (General Westmoreland) was doing Thursday briefings. They were called Westy farces. Westy and McNamara felt we were winning because we killed more Vietnamese than the Vietnamese had killed Americans. Evidently, McNamara had learned metrics while he was a big shot at General Motors. There he directed process improvement engineers to count waste, mistakes and malfunctions. Of course, since it worked for GM, it should work for a guerrilla war in Southeast Asia.

As a patrol leader I knew how this body count stuff really worked. The truth was that if you blow apart an NVA using 700 ball bearings flying from a claymore mine, then each body piece added to the body count. Evidently, Westy and McNamara had never been grunts on the ground. They thought it was like GM. One dead NVA equals one body count. But that was not the case. The left arm was a body. The right arm was a body, and so on. The brass wanted body count so us grunts gave them body count.

I bet they lied at GM also. If we had a high body count on a mission we got a pass to Saigon to go drink and flirt with bar girls. I wonder what was the reward for good metrics at GM?

Mya and I would talk about the incredible lack of truth in the war zone. Some ancient philosopher said the first casualty of war is truth. He probably was on to something. Westy did his Thursday Body Count briefings long enough for American's to believe America was winning. When I arrived in VN it was after Tet. Westy was out but the brass thought we were winning. We were not.

At one point I remember calculating the body count prior to Tet 1968. I was still in college but I started to pay attention because I would lose my deferment in June of 68. Not sure of officers' ability to quantify the mission but it was clear to me that Westy had reported enough dead NVA/Vietcong bodies to kill off most of the North Vietnamese male population. He declared that victory was near and then there was Tet. Surprise!

The NVA moved into positions around Saigon and damn near took over. I guess our count was wrong.

I arrived in country a year and half after Tet 1968. I timed it perfectly for becoming a combat veteran prior to invading Cambodia. I was called into some big tent with brass all over the place. Most had 1st Cav. patches on their sleeves. I did wear patches but I was in a Ranger Company attached to a much smaller infantry unit. It turned out that the brass decided they needed more Rangers for the invasion so they invited me and two Ranger teams from my unit.

I was scared. Everyone in Vietnam knew that the Americans were planning an invasion of Cambodia and the Ho Chi Min trail. As Rangers we were usually inserted into the jungle with as little noise and attention as possible. For the Cambodian invasion they knew we were coming. I was scared. The trail was the supply line for all of the NVA. They wanted to keep the trail free of infantry American soldiers and Marines. In short, there would be blood during this invasion.

The 1st Cav. Sergeant Major looked on my Ranger teams as spare parts. We got up at 0400 hours to get ready for air lift into Cambodia. We had spent the night near the Cambodian River on the Vietnam side.

We slept outside the mess tent. Just stop and think about that. A mess tent to feed hundreds of men – in the jungle. We were to be airlifted into Cambodia the next day. I did not think of the consequences of sleeping near a mess tent in the jungle. That night however, I was abruptly awakened by very large rats that ran over me from many directions. I have never been more shaken. Fuckin' rats were the size of terriers. I

scurried out of the makeshift and sandbagged hut. All of my team had already moved away from the mess tent. I was last to join them but join them I did. I still get the willies around rats.

From 0400 hours until 1500 hours two Ranger teams ate the dust of helicopters. Everything was going over the river except for my teams. So, at 1500 hours I requested that my teams go get something to eat from the still standing mess tent. Top says OK. So, we left the lift off area.

About twenty minutes pass and here comes Top demanding and ordering me to get my teams ready for lift off. As a draftee I was not regular Army, so I lied. I said, Top, the men are all around here shaving, eating, etc. It will take me some time to round them up. He cussed me and my eleven other spare parts. We didn't go out that first day, thank God.

My teams and I were sent back to our main fire base the next day. That meant I got to go back to see Mya and tell her about my adventures with the First Cav. Mya had not heard about my getting back to base after my last visit overnight. That was several weeks ago.

After the cab driver set me up and I stayed with Mya in Saigon, I had to get back to the base. I really had not planned how to get out of Saigon and back on base by reveille. Reveille is at 0700 hours. I was at least forty-five minutes away from the front gate. I was pretty sure that the guards would let me into the compound. The Rangers and Ranger sergeants were well known and appreciated by the rear troops. But how to get from Mya's home to reveille was a challenge.

I got up around 0500 that morning at Mya's. She had a friend that would drive me back to my base off of Route 1. It would take lots of cash. I had a wad of piasters in my pocket. I gave most of my money to Mya, keeping enough for my ride and to bribe anyone that tried to stop me.

Mya's friend was friendly and spoke English. He assured me that if we were stopped along the way we could bribe any authority and keep

going. I was assured I had plenty of money for his fee and bribes as needed. Also, I had my pin-gun flare just in case. The ride was uneventful but I did not recognize the guard at the compound. Shit!

I got out of the car and said hi to the guard. He said, what the fuck are you doing outside the gate. I said, getting laid, what else. He grinned, took the fifty bucks and let me into the compound. I had only minutes to show up for reveille.

The quarter master sarge hated my guts. He was soft and a lifer. During wartime it is easier to make rank if you're in the fight. Quarter master sergeants hand out supplies, they don't fight. So, this guy doesn't like me because I am an E-6 and he is an E-6. The difference is as a draftee I was only in a year before they promoted me to E-6. The quartermaster would probably be an E-6 for life. Fatso saw me coming from outside our company area. He was about to call me out when my teammates saw me. They quickly caused a diversion. Zeke pretended he was having an asthma attack. Men started calling for the heroin addicted medics and chaos broke out.

I snuck into the formation and all was well. Several days later I was off to the Cambodian border. You already know part of that story.