

A YOUNG MAN'S DREAM

From Jerry Wood

I don't know how some guys remember dates and locations so well. I remember events and that is about it.

I remember a time on a mission when we had set up an ambush in triple canopy jungle, with 5 claymores and a couple WP frags. We had monitored the trail for a night and in the early morning along comes a patrol of Dinks that appeared to be around 7, and we were about to blow the ambush when I saw two of the people had long beards (5-6 inches) and were taller than the others and carrying large packs.....POW's being used as 'mules'.

A thousand thoughts rush through your mind at these times in just a couple of seconds. First is not to blow up a couple of our guys, second is how do we 'save' them without getting them killed while running all the possible scenariosand by that time they are gone.

This 'haunts' me every day. I regret not jumping out and not chasing them down and attempting to kill their guards...realizing they would likely have been killed in the process. I will always wonder who these guys were and what happened to them.

Another time we had an ambush set up with claymores and in the early morning when its kind and the jungle is shrouded in mist. We were set up just 30 ' off the trail behind a giant log, just above it on a gentle slope when we hear 'traffic' coming along the trail. We are all set to blow the ambush when 7 or so are in the kill zone and we hear one of them say 'Hey Lieutenant' in a hushed voice. We all look at each other...totally dumbfounded.....(no one was allowed to be in the same area of operation that we were in. Ours was always a free fire zone) One of us said 'We are Americans...don't shoot. Then we hear their weapons locking and loading. We stand up and begin identifying ourselves. After we all recognize the situation, one of the guys in the ambush (must have been a newbie) says to us 'You guys are really lucky, we'd have blown you all away". We just turn and look at this guy and one of our guys takes a step off the trail and uncovers a claymore pointing right at this idiot. He didn't say anything else. Come to find out, this was a grunt platoon that had been inserted into the wrong area.....our area. What a mess that could have been.

All of us served on many patrols and the conditions always kind of amazes me. I imagine normal people have no idea.

We would get our mission orders and pack for what we/they thought we would run into and/or the missions purpose. 85-95 pound packs doesn't really sound like a lot until you are climbing mountains, ducking under, climbing over everything imaginable while moving through impenetrable jungle while looking for people that want to kill you.

130 degrees during the day with a 50 degree drop at night. Sweating unbelievably during the day and freezing at night. Never removing your boots and growing black mold covering your body while being under attack by leeches and mosquitoes that could carry you off.

Sleeping on the ground with your body slowly creating a 'pit' in the jungle floor that would be full of water (during monsoons) and then having a 12-15" worm coming tearing out of the compacted soil under you (like being jabbed in the middle of the night) while being investigated by all the jungles occupants and our enemies in absolutely an pitch black environment.

We never spoke, always tried to be in camouflage, rarely made sound and contact was almost always sudden and violent. (Just a sample)

Then we would be extracted by whatever means, return to our rear area and have no water in the shower bladder, go to our private company bar, get screwed up for a day, still moldy pack up and do it again.

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