

The First Team
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MEDEVAC: They will be remembered.

"...Nor shall I deny any man's call, whether for hazard of health or inconvenience or danger, but go to him."

—Hippocrates
425 B.C.



AHRBECK

A Medic's Greatest Fear

(Editor's Note: PFC Gary Holland has served as a field medic with the 15th Medical Battalion. This is his account of a medic's anticipation of battle and his reaction to the inevitable call for help. The nightmare, of course, did not come true.)

Since graduating from the U.S. Army Medic School, I have suffered the terror of a recurring dream. Or should I call it a nightmare? I know that someday it is bound to come true.

I dream I am shuffling along a narrow sandy roadway winding snake-like through dense, moist jungle. Triple canopy foliage drapes the tops of trees two-hundred feet above, shutting out the sun. A small unit of infantrymen stalk slowly ahead and behind. We walk wearily, but with increased caution. No one speaks, yet we sense from the forest that something is wrong. Maybe it is the unusual absence of birds, the silence broken only by snapping twigs under heavy pack loads, clicking machine gun shells dangling in bandoliers sagging from well-worn shoulders, heavy panting of sweat-soaked men.

We continue, waiting for something to happen. We are looking for it, expecting it, seeking it — yet hoping it is never found. We know it is useless to hope. This is war.

My head turns up at the faint crack of a twig somewhere ahead. I am caught for an instant by an intense twinkling of sunlight slipping between emerald jungle leaves. I linger for a moment, hypnotized by the blade of light, aware of what is about to happen.

There is no reason to think. I react without deciding. My legs collapse, crumbling slowly to one side, my body falling yet hanging in mid-air.

A cloud of red dust puffs into the still air as my body drops heavily to the ground. I bounce and roll, tearing at my pack straps. I am still in the open — still rolling.

I feel the jab and tear of jagged rocks and sticks as I roll to a stop in a shallow gravelike depression. My arms are free. My pack lays with the aid bag in a clump of weeds a few feet away. I feel no wounds.

The whole length of my body is pressed flat-hard against the earth, my face compressed into the soil. I try to be thin but feel grossly conspicuous. Certain my rear is high up in full view, I grind my pelvis tighter into the ground. It will go no lower.

I am stiff and trembling as bullets crack and whizz randomly about. The air is full of speeding metal. I expect the shattering, hot impact at each second. I sweat in sheets, my lungs heaving, my heart pumping a rapid pulse to the brain. Any time now...Any moment... "Medic!"

A voice cries out before me, echoing back again and again. My mind tries not to hear but the sound in my ears grows increasingly louder with each reverberation. "Medic!"

Bullets whine, exploding into fragments, shattering branches which drop to the ground, whole limbs ripped and torn. "Medic!"

Louder he screams out to me in panic. Slowly, through the evolution of seconds, my mind can see him sprawling face-up in the chalky dust, writhing in a puddle of spreading blood coagulating in the intense noon heat. "Medic...Please..."

He claws the air beckoning to me, opening and closing each hand desperately, pleading. One hand moves back clutching his eyes, a brush of tangled blond hair caught between sticky fingers wet with blood. "Please...help me?"

The jungle is roaring a rain of bullets, the air pungent with grey smoke and dust. I begin to rise. Suddenly I imagine an explosion splattering my face, turning it to jelly...I cannot move. I know he is dying. I must get up! "Please!"

I try to move. I am paralyzed, lying helplessly. "Please!"

Tears stream glistening down my face, plunk softly into the earth. I am sobbing and falling apart. I begin to vomit.

It always ends there. I awake and am relieved to remember that it is only a dream. But today I am less certain.

The airline stewardess speaks into the microphone solemnly. "Good morning, gentlemen. Hope you enjoyed your flight. Please fasten your seatbelts and observe the 'No Smoking' sign. The weather in Bien Hoa is hazy, but dry. The temperature is now 110 degrees. Hope you will all enjoy your stay in the Republic of Vietnam."

KAMALICK





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