

Memoirs of a Bodhisattva

Short stories by Skip Nelson



CLOSE CALL WITH A SNIPER

In the late Spring of 1968, while still reeling from the shock and awe of The 1968 Tet Offensive, US troops in the South were slowly becoming adjusted to the realities of guerrilla war. We were slowly learning that there were no longer any “Front Lines”. We were immersed in the middle of a war we didn’t understand.

Although I was in a non-combat unit, we constantly pulled guard, on our own perimeter and at remote locations around the area. One of those guard posts was at the top of Vung Chau mountain, just outside our host city of Qui Nhon, Vietnam.

They called it “Provisional Guard”. We called it “The Mountain”. It was the place where we lost four guys at the height of the Tet Offensive.

I was up there in May of 1968. The temps in Vietnam that time of year were hot. I was assigned to Delta Company, Headquarters Bunker, which meant we had the M-60 machine gun and the radio.

One evening, while sitting on top of the bunker, about midnight, I decided to have a cigarette. I thought, hell, I am way out here in the middle of nowhere. It is perfectly safe.

Almost as soon as I lit up, and as I was looking down the mountain, I saw it. A muzzle flash. In a split second I heard a bullet go whizzing past my head...not more than a foot or two away.

Holy Shit! I immediately jumped off the top of the bunker and scrambled inside. I picked up the phone and called Headquarters Company and told them I had “Incoming” fire.

Well, it was midnight, and even though we were on guard, many slept or weren’t paying attention. They said they would have to check it out and get back to me. You see, even at that time in that place, you had to ask “permission” to return fire.

I said “Fuck it”. I then grabbed the M-60 and became the original version of Rambo. I literally filled the area from which the muzzle flash came with about 500 rounds.

I never got return fire. And I never got a return phone call. No mention of it ever.

Peace and love,

Skip Nelson
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