

Memoirs of a Bodhisattva

Short stories by Skip Nelson



SLEEPING WITH A VIPER

I was getting off midnight guard duty on “The Mountain”. Ready to sleep.

We slept in a cut out portion of earth under the sandbag bunker we called home. Just below that was another cut out for standing and to the left, another cutout for storing our ammo.

Our air-mattress, like most others belonging to soldiers in Vietnam, had a slow leak. If you managed to blow it up and get to sleep quickly enough before it deflated, you might have a decent sleep. This night, that was the case.

When I awoke in the morning, with the bright sun glaring though the makeshift windows of the bunker to greet me, I started to stir. I noticed that the bag, once again had lost it's charm and was deflated. All except under my head.

As I moved around something else was moving around. The soft mass under my head was moving. As I slowly and carefully sat up, I saw a greenish-yellow blur pass in front of me and down into the ammo pit.

Again. Holy Shit!! A snake. I was determined to dispatch him just as I had presumably dispatched the sniper a few nights before.

I took something that was long and rigid. I still don't remember what it was, but I used it to gingerly remove the ammo cans from the pit. With a flash light, I illuminated the reptile and with a couple of shots from my M-16, he was eliminated.

I pulled him out and threw him outside. In the glaring sun, I realized, with the help of others in the group, that it was a Bamboo Viper, one of the most dangerous snakes in SE Asia.

We had two more nights up there. After my two episodes, my sergeant, Sgt. Adams, did not sleep one wink the rest of our time there.

Peace and love,

Skip Nelson