

CHAPTER SEVEN

The C-130 Hercules (Prop driven air transport) circled the Phu Bai airport and was making the bumpy descent toward the beat up airstrip.

“Look at all those fucking holes,” Frank Bagatta said. “It looks like the fucking moon.”

“I thought that Bien Hoa was in the middle of nowhere,” I said. A little nervous and scared of what we were getting into.

“I don’t like this place already,” Pearce said. With a slight tremble in his voice.

The big C-130 made its way down the bumpy runway that had visual signs of repair from frequent rocket attacks. It made a wide turn into position on it’s designated place on the runway. The rear door was lowering and we could see the members of the 42nd Scout Dog platoon waiting to escort us toward LZ SALLY, our new home for the next eleven months.

Stepping down off the C-130 I could see that this place was a lot more informal than around Bien Hoa and Tan Son Nhut. Most of the soldiers looked rugged and combat worn. Sgt. Roach still looked mean and tough. His jungle fatigues were even more faded and worn. But almost all the guys that were authorized wore the combat infantry badge. This was a way of telling everyone not to fuck with them because they were combat veterans. Supposedly the only ones allowed to wear them were Infantrymen that had actually came in contact with the enemy. The gooks all wore the usual black pajamas which made me nervous.

“All right men,” Sergeant Sprowl bellowed out. “Lets get this gear unloaded and ready to move. We haven’t got all day.”

“We are going to head out to our final destination as soon as possible.” Lt. Stocked said moving around hurriedly. “We have to be there,” not saying where there was. “as early as we can so these guys can go home to their area before dark.”

“I can imagine what this place is going to look like.” Joe McMahon said in his loud grumbling Buffalo, NY accent. “If these mean looking guys don’t want to stay there over night.”

“This place must be really fucked up.” Corsello bitching because we had to be in such a hurry.

“We gotta get out of this place.” I sang from the Rolling stones song. “If it’s the last thing we ever do.”

“It could be the last thing you ever do you little fucking short Texan asshole.” Corsello said laughing at my singing.

“I told you guys that it was hot up here didn’t I, Fred Said in that I told you so tone.

“Yea this place has gotta be fucked up,” Craig said, again bitching.

Amazingly everyone was quiet for a change. I supposed thinking of what lie ahead, and wondering if we were going to make it through the year. Solemn looks were on all the faces of the worried dog handlers. Now it was just waiting for the first mission, and the fear of what that might be like. These were not day dreams, these were daymares probably worse than nightmares since you were actually looking around an area that was scary and hearing noises of war that would scare the bravest.

In a short while the trucks were lined up, the dogs were on top of the crates that had been loaded at Ft. Benning, Ga., and were headed out the gates of Phu Bai airport and toward LZ Sally. The scenery was a little different from Saigon, the countryside looked a lot more hostile than did the Saigon area. There were more bomb craters, more bullet holes in the buildings and there was ARVN's everywhere some toting AK-47's. being new in country I was a little worried about those ARVN's anyway. Traveling into the ancient city of Hue it was easy to see that there had been a big battle there, the buildings were shot up and some were totally destroyed by rockets and artillery. On into the city there was a huge bridge that been destroyed, and we had to cross the Perfume river on a small pontoon bridge, that didn't look to sturdy, only two trucks were allowed on the bridge at a time. All along the river there were parks and at one time this place must have been beautiful. It had a weird beauty even now with all the destruction from the war. Once on the other side we traveled by the Citadel where the walls were twenty feet high and twenty feet thick made of concrete and brick. This was a place built long ago and was really battle torn. It had holes in it from the direct firing of 175mm cannons. Just looking around I could see that this battle had been a fierce one. I was beginning to get that butterfly feeling in my stomach again. I held my hand out and say that I was shaking a little. It was one of those times I wanted to cry but knew better. I began to think of Jimmy and all of those other GI's that must have died here. The convoy made its way out of Hue and onto this dirt road that was called Highway 1. It didn't look much like a highway. As a matter of fact it looked like one of those unpaved back roads in east Texas. I became more scared as we moved further away from Hue. It was weird but everyone on the truck was extremely quiet. I wondered if they were thinking the same things as me.

The silence was broken by the sharp cracking of rifle fire, everyone turned quickly toward the sound just to see two ARVN's shooting up in the air. They must have seen that we were green troops.

"What the fuck you doing!" I asked Corsello? Just as he was jacking a round into the chamber of his M-16.

"I'm going to shoot them mother fuckers," he said angrily. "They scared the shit out of me."

"You fucking ass hole," I yelled back. "You can't do that. They are on our side."

"I don't give a fuck they shouldn't have shot their fucking weapons at me, Corsello replied angrily.

"Now Tommy you know that they wasn't firing at you," Otis Johnson, our squad leader said. "Now clear that 16 and put it up."

"Corsello is ready to kill," Willie Jones said making a sneer at Tommy.

"Hell Tommy is always ready to kill," I said. "You and Tommy had to be ready being from south Chicago."

"Fuck you Allen," Jones replied in a humorous tone.

"I'm telling you there ain't nothing to laugh about." Frank said in a very serious tone.

"Hell if we don't laugh we'll go nuts." Joe McMahon said loudly.

The trip on through the countryside was nerve racking, it seemed that people were firing all around us and we were not quite sure if they were shooting at us or just shooting. It seemed that every person there had either an M-16 or an AK-47. We just wasn't sure who the enemy was.

About ten miles from LZ sally.

“What is that red cloud off in the distance?” John Carter asked.

“That’s where you are going,” Sgt. Roach said laughing knowing what a hell hole it was.

“What is the cloud from?” John asked curiously.

“Dust,” Sgt. Roach answered without any expression or explanation.

My stomach was churning with anxiety, as I looked around to see the solemn faces, wondering who would make it through this year long ordeal. Hell I was wondered about myself. Strange thing to be thinking right now. But this whole war was strange. How could anyone send their sons off to this terrible place? Why would anyone want to sent their sons here. Although things seemed relatively quiet, in the distance you could here the sounds of war and I knew we would be seeing them soon, real soon. Although the members of the 47th bickered and argued with among ourselves, we were still like a large family, and tried to take care of each other. It was going to be hard to lose more family.

We finally reached the small rough road that let to LZ Sally. Our home for the next year.

LZ Sally looked like a small knoll that had been graded down and bunkers were built down into and on top of the ground. It was dusty beyond belief, every time a small gust of wind blew up it covered everything with dirt and gritty dust. The place reeked of burning shit. I had a pretty good idea that this was going to be the worse place we could have wound up in. It was easy to see how the rumors of gooks getting inside the perimeter could start. The place did not look like a very secure place. Tents lined the west side of the small landing strip built for small spotter planes and choppers. Most of the troops I could see looked battled worn and tired.

The trucks pulled up to the gate and the MP'S directed us to move inside and pull over to one side. He then gave LT. Stockdale directions to the Headquarters area was. We had no idea where we were to set up.

In a matter of a few minutes Lt. Stockdale and SFC Sprowl returned in a cloud of dust.

"Load up and follow us," Sgt. Sprowl yelled turning his jeep around and heading toward the north east side of LZ Sally.

The trucks moved slowly toward a desolated part of the small LZ. in the middle of nowhere.

"What the fuck is this?" Corsello screamed. "This place is fucked up, there is no fucking body near us."

"This is a dust bowl here," Roger Hermann said. "It will suffocate the dogs."

"Fuck. I knew we would get fucked by the 101st," I said, a little pissed off knowing we were going to leave here on missions and our rear was going to be just another shit hole.

"This is the shittiest place that I have ever scen," Gary Mengle mumbled.

"Fuck! I wanna go home!" I screamed.

"You are home for the next year." Jon Wahl said with that Yankee smirk on his face.

"Fuck you, you Yankee mother fucker," I angrily replied.

"Don't worry about him," Frank quietly said. "He is just a little Sprowl.

"I guess you are right," I said laughing, knowing that everyone was a little on edge seeing this shitty place we were going to live in, and feeling the anxiety of soon going into combat.

Sgt. Roach had laughed at the location and headed back to Camp Eagle with his guard. He would have to wait at the gate until enough vehicles were assembled to make the long trip to his home.

"It is going to be to late for us to do anything today," Sgt. Sprowl blurted out. "So we will find a place to stake out the dogs, and bed ourselves down for the night."

"Where the hell can I take a shit?" Corsello yelled out.

“ We will move the trucks in position where we can have a little privacy and dig a small cat hole latrine temporarily.” Sprowl answered.

“It must be a hundred and thirty degrees up here,” Otis Johnson said. “It’s so hot I can’t breathe.”

“I think it is the hot dry season up here,” Frank Bagata said. “It’s gonna get hotter.”

Night came soon and the temperature dropped down to one hundred or so and the humidity had to be one hundred percent, but it was a little cooler.

“These fucking mosquitoes are eating me up,” Otis complained, you could hear slapping coming from everyone’s position.

The nights were just as miserable as the days. We all knew that the work was going to really start tomorrow. Filling sand bags and setting up tents. I eventually drifted off to sleep feeling a little secure after seeing the guys from other units come to the bunker line to pull guard in that little hole that had a few sand bags around it called a perimeter bunker. Tomorrow what a day.