

## CHAPTER TWO

I slowly and feebly stood up and started my long trek back up the other handlers I was still feeling poorly so I was extra slow in getting moving. As I stumbled pass the CP there was all kinds of radio traffic going on FO's calling artillery , ARA's and and/or strikes I could hear the CO's conversation with the battalion commander .

"Red six alpha this is alpha six over, over." The CO calmly said into the radio.

"Alpha six this is red six alpha , over." Came the reply of the Battalion CO.

"Red six alpha this is alpha six . We have gotten ourselves in one hell of a mess down here and need re-enforcement's and supplies ASAP. over" The CO calmly said.

"Alpha six this is red six. You're going to have to wait your turn, right now all companies in this command are under heavy contact and are unable to assist you at this time, over."

"Red six this is alpha six. I need an emergency re-supply of water and ammo M16 and M60 type, over." The CO requested.

"Alpha six this is red six. Am sending emergency supplies and water ASAP, ETA approximately three zero mikes, over. The Battalion CO replied.

"Red six this is alpha six. Thanks much, out."

I was so busy in the jungle that I hadn't noticed that the wounded were still lying around the CP. I saw a medic attending a WIA I walked over and said. "What happened to the medi-vac?"

"To hot an LZ. They tried to land but drew to much fire." The medic said

"Sorry bout that man." I said.

"No sweat, we can handle it for now but some of these guys are real bad , and we will need one real soon," He said.

As my eyes scanned over the wounded , and my ears heard all the destruction in the jungle I couldn't help but think that if there ever was a valley of the shadow of death this must it.

I soon came to my senses and realized I needed to get back to my dig handlers and see how they were taking all this shit. I kept stumbling back in their direction. And my mind was even wondering more, the rumor was if you get killed in the Nam it usually happens your first ninety days or your last ninety days, and right now all of us dog handlers fit in that category.

"Hey Sarge what did you find out?" Bowers asked.

"There's a lot of shit going on down there." I said.

"Yea we've been watching from here and it looks awesome." Detrick said.

"Are we going to be able to get that chopper today , Sarge?" Epps asked.

"If I were a guessing man I would say no." I answered.

"Sarge, Where's your M16? I saw you take it with you when you went down that hill?" Bowers asked.

I stood there looking around kind of stupidly and said. "I must have left it down there somewhere. I'm not really worried about it right now, I'll find it later."

We continued to watch the action all afternoon and it was a spectacular sight. The coordination with arty, the jets, and ARA's was unreal. I was very impressed.

"Hey you guys got any extra water?" The grunt asked as he approached our position.

"Why." I asked.

" We're just about to run out and the WIA need it bad." The grunt replied.

"Check your supply. I ordered the handlers. "And give him what you can spare. The dogs can do without for a while. " I said. I knew dog handlers usually carried a large amount of water for their dogs. I also out of habit had two extra two quart canteens of water. We gave up what water we could.

"Any sign of re-enforcement's?" I asked.

"As a matter of fact we are expecting a company that has broken contact and it is forced marching to this location at this minute, we expect them any time." The grunt replied.

" Hey look at that shit." Detrick said as he pointed to the chopper with the net sling hanging down filled with fifty five gallon drums.

In another few seconds the sling dropped the drums and the hit the jungle floor about where the gooks were. In another few seconds a gun ship swooped in firing his mini gun (gatling gun) and his grenade launcher creating an explosion similar to napalm.

"I think they are dropping foo-gas(napalm in drums) then setting it off with the gun ship."

"Why not just use napalm." Epps asked.

"I think it is because they can get in a little closer to our troops that way. Napalm bombs are to big to get that close." I said.

A short while later we could see the chopper with a three hundred gallon bladder of water heading our way. When he started to get in a little closer we could hear the AK's open up on him and then an RPG (Rocket Propelled Grenade) fired at him and missed. The chopper got as close as he could then dropped the bladder. It was about fifty feet from the ground, and it bounced like a football. It made a couple of hops then rolled right down into the jungle to the gook controlled area.



"So much for the water." I said thinking to myself what next things don't look good.

"You think they will try to get more water to us Sarge?" Bowers asked.

"I don't think the 101st Airborne Division is going to let us or our dogs die of thirst." I answered.

About half an hour went by and the fire fight blazed on with all the fury of an erupting volcano. I heard some noise like people moving through the jungle, then I started hearing voices that sounded like they were bitching about something. All of a sudden strange grunts started showing up and passing us by grumbling something about having to set up security after a fire fight and a forced march. Typical GI bitching.

About fifteen minutes later there was a loud explosion that was to close, way to close. I thought we might be getting attacked from the flank.

"You guys stay here, and keep your steel pots on and your head down! I'm going down to check this shit out." I yelled excitedly.

On my way down to the CP I saw some medics heading for a position that was not far from where I had left the dog handlers. I could see smoke coming from the trail in the jungle that we had originally come in on.

"What the fuck, over?" I asked a grunt as he ran by.

"Those three guys that was supposed to be pulling security on the trail got into an argument over who was going to pull first watch, and while they argued a gook tossed a hand grenade right on top of them. It killed one and badly wounded the other two." He answered.

I thought to my self what a shame and what a waste. All over who is going to look down a stupid , dirty stinking trail in this stupid fucking Ashau valley. Why are we even here? I questioned myself.

By this time it was getting late into the afternoon and the sun was beginning to set behind the mountain tops. I guess it was the constant pounding from the Air Force, artillery, ARA'S, and the intense fire that the grunts were dishing out that caused the gooks to ease up on their fire power. It wasn't long before the pinned down elements were beginning to slowly make their way back up the slope toward the perimeter and some safety.

While easing my way down toward the CP I noticed a large pile of equipment and another of weapons. As I was stumbling over to the pile of weapons I happen to notice a grunt with my M16. I knew it was mine because it had a spot where the varnish or paint was still kind of shiny.

I walked up to the grunt.

"I think that's my sixteen buddy." I said.

"How do you figure." The grunt replied

"The serial number is 665836." I said.

"You are right it must be yours. Here." He said as he handed it to me.

"I lost it helping out in the jungle." I said.

"I found it in that pile of weapons over there." He said as he pointed to the pile of weapons.

Once all the grunts were out of the jungle and the firing and support had ceased the CO ordered a staff meeting. As I was in charge of the dog handlers I was allowed to attend.

"I want each platoon leader to have his men re load and prepare to go back into the jungle." The CO said.



Everyone just looked at each other dumbfoundedly finally after about thirty seconds the first platoon leader (one six) stood up and said. "Sir with all due respect I did not ask for this job and I certainly will not ask my men to go back into that hell hole again today. It is getting dark and the men are exhausted from the action today."

Before the CO could reply to the disobedience the other two platoon leaders said.

"I won't ask my men either." The second platoon leader (two six) said.

"I feel the same way." The third platoon leader said.

Just as the CO was about to open his mouth, when the CO ( an older looking and more cautious man) from the company that had came in for support said. " I think these men are right. It would be way to much to ask of any man to try this at night. And further more I will not subject my company to such a foolish mission. I recommend setting up a good strong perimeter and continue this tomorrow."

"Perhaps you're right I was getting a little ahead of myself. OK this is how we are going to set up. I think the NVA will be coming after us tonight so we need strong doubled up positions to the east, that seems the most likely place they will attack. " The CO was explaining.

"Excuse me sir but the dog handlers can man one position for you." I interrupted.

He gave each of us an area where we would set up for the night. Luckily we did not have to move far and were on the south west part of the perimeter. I gathered up some claymores (command detonated personnel mines) some hand grenades, flares, and some more ammunition and headed back to tell the handlers.

"Get your shit and get ready to move to a new spot." I said.

We moved into position along the perimeter and found some more old NVA bunkers and set up there.

"Stay out of the shit holes Bowers." Epps said jokingly.

It was getting pretty dark but a chopper finally made it in close enough to drop a bladder of water. I gathered up the canteens and headed for the life saving liquid.

We laid out our claymore mines and set our position up for the night, and placed our weapons where they easily accessible in the event of an emergency. The NVA foxholes were ideal because it didn't take much more digging to have a good defensive position. The handlers placed themselves in positions where the dogs could not get close enough to fight. I was pretty sure of myself but not so much of the others because of lack of experience. I had decided that under the circumstance I would stay awake all night. I told the dog handlers that they could sleep and I would stay awake all night. They thought that they might stay up with me.

The darkness began to set in on the jungle, and had a whole new meaning. In Vietnam the night so dark that the stars seemed a thousand times brighter than any other place in the world, and it appeared as if thought you could reach out and touch them. I was thinking to myself how noisy the jungle really was, and how amazingly quiet it can get when the human element was in the area. The quietness would be so subdued that my ears felt like they were moving, and that someone had suddenly turned off the sound. It's like all the animals think humans should be avoided at all cost. All at once I heard the familiar sound of the fuck you lizard (a lizard that's cry sounds like he is saying fuck you).

"Hey Bowers listen to that lizard he sounds like a draftee." I whispered.

"Where?" He asked as all three quietly moved to my position.

"Listen, re-up." I whispered.

The lizard promptly replied. "Fuck you."

It was all the three handler could do to keep from laughing out loud.



"I think I speak for all of us when I say we agree." Epps replied.

I knew that the handlers didn't want to sleep but they were extremely tired as was I, but I had gotten in the habit of forcing myself to stay awake. One by one they began to doze off.

It must have been about midnight when the jungle noises quieted and I began to get those eerie sensations of uneasy quietness. Soon I began hearing gentle noises of movement not commonplace with jungle creatures. Now I began to worry. One of the handlers moved and made a low groan. My face grimaced as he finally settled into his new position. One of the dogs made a low growl.

"Detrick wake up." I whispered as quietly as I could as I nudged him.

"What Sarge?" He said.

"Shhh. Keep your dog quiet." I whispered.

"What is it?" He asked in a whisper.

"Shhh. Keep quiet. Gooks." I whispered.

He started to move toward me as he was comforting his dog. I motioned him to stay still. As I listened from what I could tell the gooks were probing our perimeter trying to locate our defensive positions.

All of a sudden I noticed one of the claymore wires move, then another. I now knew what the term deadly quiet meant, for any sound could mean sudden death. I was praying that the dogs wouldn't get a good alert on the gooks and get restless. For once I became really frightened, and began to think about death and what my family would think. I quickly caught myself and relinquished all those thoughts. I began to assess the situation and determined that the gooks must have been cutting the claymore wires. I felt that if they were going to attack it would be soon. After about an hour the jungle noises had returned.



I felt much relieved. It is amazing what goes through a person's mind when all you can do is think.

I turned and looked at the handlers all asleep. I couldn't help but notice how young they looked. I just wondered if I looked that young when I first got in country. I shook my head and realized that I was twenty-one and looked like I was fifteen, so I've been told. Never the less I felt much older, much, much older. Still I wondered if these guys will still be around when they have ten months in country. I never thought I would, but I did.

I began to drift off into what I call a guard duty trance, something I had taught myself back in basic training. I would let my mind wonder off into another dimension yet still stay alert to what was going on around me. I also felt a little lonesome and out of place without Sig, my scout dog. This was the first time that I had ever been in harms way without him. I sure missed him, and I sure wish he were here now.

As my eyes and ears were glued to the jungle, my mind raced back to Ft. Benning, Georgia where it all started and I got my first scout dog.