

“Waste”

I was sitting on one side of a small stream in a hot foreign country, drying off after a dip – the water was brown but cool. All my clothes, helmet, flack jacket, boots, M-16 were strewn on the other side – talk about being out of uniform. Across the bank in an open area on a gradual uphill slope, there was a lean-to type open-air market with old mama-suns, kids, and maybe a few old papa-suns, where you could get most anything we weren't issued already, like drugs, (gals), etc. You could also get some things you really didn't want – like VDs, or I guess they're called STDs now, that didn't even have names yet. I did try to get to know one nice young gal from this open-air market. There didn't seem to be any young adults in the female population, but this gal seemed to have a pleasant manner and was old enough to be a friend. A mama-sun put the nix on that and offered to get me a whore. We service guys were perceived to only want one (or two) things, which was not always the case.

So anyway, I'm sitting on one side of this muddy creek, drying off in the sun in the wide open and I started to hear these “zips” or “zings” over my head. “Holy f---! Some bastard is shooting at me!” The shots were coming from the slope above and to the left of that little open-air market. His elevation was off because he was shooting downhill...lucky for me. The SOP when you can't see who's shooting is to put your rifle on automatic and spray the area with bullets as you get to better cover and put another magazine in. I always thought, and still do, that the innocents caught in the middle are the major losers in these type deals. As I pondered all these likely responses with my lightning swift mind, this guy stopped shooting and that was that. I'm not sure what I would have done if the whole thing lasted much more than a few seconds.

We moved our Battalion from An Khe to Buon Me Thuot, two nowhere places in the central highlands, which put us precisely in the middle of nowhere. As our fairly large convoy of trucks, etc. was rumbling through a small village, one guy who was riding “shotgun” in a jeep saw something barely move in the brush so he put his M-16 on automatic and emptied it

in that general direction. It still makes me cry to think that it was most likely kids in the bushes trying to see what was going on.

So, anyway, back to my dip in the creek. I do remember thinking afterward that I wouldn't mind talking to this guy and saying I didn't want to be there any more than he wanted me to be there...and that we both probably had families that we loved and loved us and were looking forward to seeing again...and that we probably had higher aspirations for the rest of our lives than trying to kill each other...and that if he left me alone, I'd leave him alone and we both could wait till this whole deal was over...and maybe we'd say we didn't feel like we had a choice in this whole deal. That's what we were dealt.

Do you remember the conflicting arguments over our involvement in Viet Nam? It was hard to know what to think. I, too, wasn't sure what to think except that I had to fulfill my military obligation and Viet Nam was where most of us did that at the time. So to help me figure out what I was doing there, I took an unofficial survey of mostly NCO's (we enlisted guys don't talk to officers), and everyone said there's absolutely no sense in being here. Have you ever heard an overused cliché so many times that you could scream if you heard it again? – At the risk of going crazy, I'll say it just one more time..." it don't mean nuttin." Subsequently, history proved that almost immediately after we declared "victory" and left the country.

We (U.S. service guys) were easy to spot, in or out of uniform. All the Vietnamese looked alike to us, and you couldn't identify the good guys from the bad guys. Anyone other than "us" was viewed with distrust. As far as I could tell, no one liked anyone very much. We didn't have an opportunity to get to know each other. There were some major stress factors going on, so we stayed with our "own kind" and we really didn't want to make friends with "those kind." Wherever there is a noticeable difference between groups and a perceived or real danger involved, and not much of an opportunity to relate with one another on a personal level, there's a good chance racism will appear in one form or another.

A couple of other things I learned from my sabbatical in Viet Nam are that the military will do just about anything to not look bad, and you can't

believe much of what you hear from a war zone. If you research reports from different sources, you usually get conflicting information. I believe there are similarities of the Viet Nam era and our current foreign affairs. It's not fair to ask our troops to perform an unachievable mission. The troops are identifiable and a real danger and they can't tell who the "bad" guys are. They will be stereotyped, feared and disliked. And when it's all over, it "won't mean nuttin."

— *John, Troy*