

## A Lesson In Adventure, Youth And A War

The reason the US government and the military recruits eighteen year olds and not seventy year olds is that eighteen year olds are more filled with testosterone than logical thinking. Young men will be brave in the face of danger and will blindly obey their superiors for the benefit of the corp. and old men might just as soon not. This does not always work out the way the Army intended.

Young adventurous spirit also leads to consequences not anticipated by superiors when these young men are far away from home sent to countries to which the US military has become entangled. In 1967 I was twenty years old and I found myself in Cu Lam Nam, Vietnam with the 589<sup>th</sup> Engineer Battalion. We were paving the road QL1 from the coastal port city of Qui Nhon to the Central Highlands towns of An Khe and Pleiku. This was an important supply route to the Army Infantry divisions and support units headquartered there and fighting the war in this region of central South Vietnam, as it was know in those days.

Days were long and hot and nights were boring except for the nightly probing of our base camp perimeter by the ubiquitous local Viet Cong forces. These invisible, at times, enemy blended into the community during the day even occasionally working for us. Following foreign soldier encampments by entrepreneurial local women is as old as civilization. Sneaking out to conduct business transactions with these entrepreneurs necessarily follows especially given the age and maturity of the soldiers fighting this war.

One night in the Fall of 1967 Howard, another adventuresome friend and I grabbed our M-16s our flack jackets, and a 2 ½ ton truck from the motor pool and decided to sneak out of our base camp and visit one of these local entrepreneurs. We drove a dozen kilometers and we parked our truck behind a tin shack advertising cold beer. We put our rifles behind our seats, out of sight, and went in for a few beers and some company. After about an hour passed, we were getting very comfortable, and we were enjoying female

company for the first time in a long time. Suddenly the door opens and in walks a Vietnamese man with our M-16 rifles in his hands. Howard and I looked at each other and before we could make a plan this man, speaking very poor English and very rapidly begins scolding us for being so careless and leaving our weapons where someone could find them. He then hands the rifles back to us as we sat there with our hearts racing in our chests. We said goodbye to our hosts and thanked the 'papasan' for a valuable lesson and headed home back to our base camp feeling lucky we escaped another adventure in this strange country to which the US Army had sent teenagers to fight and grow up.