
TWENTY SEVEN**No Umbrellas Here**

Leaving the two bodies behind, we made a cursory search for any other hidden enemy in the first and second villages, which turned up nothing, so the captain had the company move back through the treeline and out into the open rice paddies again.

As I emerged from the trees, about ten feet behind the man in front of me, it was really something to see over a hundred men in jungle fatigues and steel helmets, with packs on their backs and weapons in hand, stretched out one-behind-the-other across the open paddies.

It was just at the beginning of the monsoon season so that, at least once a day, we'd get a short, sudden cloudburst. Later in the season the rain would be almost continuous for weeks, but at this point it was more of a nuisance than anything. One minute the sky was absolutely clear with the merciless sun beating down, and the next, dark storm clouds appeared on the horizon moving quickly toward us. It became almost a game to see if we could outrun the approaching downpour,...but the effort was always futile. We invariably got drenched.

This was one of the many discomforts of the soldier in the field. No matter what the weather, there was no getting out from under it. At first, being soaked, your clothes pasted to your body, felt miserably uncomfortable, but, like everyone else, I'd get used to it. It wasn't hard to adjust to these smaller inconveniences when the larger "inconveniences" of ambushes, firefights, snipers and booby traps were always at the back of your mind.

The rain only lasted about ten minutes and then the sun came out again, burning down as hot as ever.

The weather with its rain and high humidity, as well as the adverse landscape with its swamps, rivers, and flooded rice paddies, forced us to become extremely proficient at protecting whatever we carried. I had all of my letter writing materials, that is, paper, airmail envelopes, and pens sealed in zip-

lock plastic bags. Mail, sent home from the troops in Vietnam was delivered postage free—the government had to give us some kind of perk for being here—but it was probably more so that they realized keeping the glue on the stamps dry would have been virtually impossible.

In a plastic bag, in my pocket, I carried my wallet and, in still another, my camera and film.

Not only were all these items protected from the elements, but the ones in the backpack, strapped to my aluminum rucksack frame, were strategically placed so that the pack rode high on my back. If the pack wasn't kept high, backaches became a constant problem.