

## VIETNAM

### SPIT ON!

#### O'Hare International Airport

January 5, 1970

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*"I felt... already... Nam calling me back."*

### Spit On

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"Ok, listen up troops." The SP Staff Sergeant was trying to get 160 homebound troops' attention. We were waiting to board the civilian DC-8, stretch-8, parked on the terminal at Cam Ranh Bay Air Base. The Freedom bird had landed a short time before bringing in new troops and now was ready to take us home.

When he failed to get attention, the SP SSgt. took a metal pipe and banged on the plywood wall till we all listened up. "Ok troops before you get on that bird you got do to *one more thing* here in the Nam. You see this here box marked *Last Chance?* Well any of you that are carrying any drugs, alcohol, weapons, ammo, illegal currency or illegal substances, this here box is your last chance. I am going to take my SP's and walk over to the canteen and have a cup of coffee and smoke a cigarette. While I am gone if you got something and it goes in the box --well--*no questions asked*. I ain't even gonna open it till you're an hour out over the South China Sea, then I am gonna dispose of all of it."

Some one in the back said, "*Or smoke it.*" This got quite a laugh, including from one of the E-3 SP's. The Sergeant did not crack a smile and walked off.

At first no one moved, then a few guys walked over and put a couple of small packages and little bags in, then a guy went and dumped in at least ten M-16 clips. Another guy dropped in two-fifths of *Jack Daniels*. In a few moments the SP's would be back, so I reached in my travel bag and felt for my black-blade Bowie Knife. I did not want to give it up. At that point the PA in the terminal announced ten minutes till boarding for out bound Yokota AFB, Japan.

The SP SSgt. was back and he said, "We are not going to search you, but they will tomorrow at McCord Air Force Base," and that if anything is found we would be detained and possibly charged.

I walked over and dropped my Bowie into the Last Chance box.

As I stood in line to board the bird I looked around one last time. I did not feel overly glad to go. Sure I was glad my tour was done but I didn't have much to go home to. No Girl would be waiting, my parents were divorced, I had no job lined up, and I still had nine months to go on my four years enlistment. I was headed for Westover AFB, Massachusetts. I had given some thought to extending my tour for six months and I would have if I could have gotten Pleiku AB up in the central Highlands. But I had heard the Air Force was giving early outs to some airmen because they were over staffed, and counted on that--and lost.

We boarded the plane from front and rear doors. There were five for-real American girls on board as stewardesses. Two leggy blondes, one well-built redhead, a gorgeous girl that looked like a young Lena Horne and a dark brunette that looked like Playboy's Miss October. We set there and watched their every move, and they new it and were enjoying it all.

As the plane taxied out and set briefly on the end of the runway I felt regret leaving my friends. We were airborne quickly; part of me could not believe it was over. It seemed anti climatic. I now felt just as I had upon arrival--by myself, no group or unit--just me. I did not know a soul on the plane.

My friend Ron Elliot had given me a book to read, but I had not looked at it when he gave it to me, called "The Valley of the Dolls." He said the book would pass the trip for me. I started to read it and found it unappealing and was putting it away when a guy across the Isle asked if he could read it. I gave it to him and said keep it, and then went to sleep.

I must have slept for hours because I woke up aware we were descending into Japan. We stayed for an

hour and they let us off to stretch and clean up while they took on fuel and food for the eleven hour trip to the states.

Eleven hours later we landed at McChord AFB, near Seattle. The Staff Sergeant in Vietnam was correct and we were searched, and I was glad I only had a small bag and had mailed everything important home earlier, except the Bowie.

After a bus trip to Seattle Airport I Bought a ticket home. The flight would have to go through Chicago. We landed in Chicago early in the morning. I walked to the American Airlines booth and confirmed my flight home and got the transfer plane number. I was flying Standby and the attendant told me I had about an hour and a half before flight time.

Throughout the airport were a lot of young people I would probably have labelled *Hippies*. Many were carrying signs like *End the War Now*, *Impeach Nixon*, and expressing support for the *Chicago Seven*. Some one near me said they were at O'Hara Airport to show support for some radical lawyer coming into town that I didn't know.

As I walked down the long hall I saw a beautiful long haired girl with big round glasses, a fringed jacket and bell bottoms pants, walking with two hippie guys, one with hair longer than her's.

I was in the prime of my life in those days, even though I had lost twelve pounds in Vietnam, and was tan, fit, and hard. I had my Air Force *dress blues* on and wearing medals including the five I had won in Vietnam. I was sharp and I new it. I saw her smile at me and she walked straight up to me. She pointed to my left breast pocket and asked, "Were you in Vietnam?" She was the first American girl I had talked to since the New Year's Eve party I had gone to over a year ago with some of my old high school friends.

I was tongue tied, plus she looked like actress *Michelle Phillips*, and I was a sucker for that look. I said, "Ah, yes."

She looked at her hippie friends, sneered and closed her mouth and hawked up a big wad of spit and let me have it. She hit my medals and got me in the face too. Then she stepped back and said, "You thought I was smiling at you--I wouldn't let a pig like you touch me."

One of the guys who she was with was wearing a shirt that said *I lost my virginity at Woodstock*. He stepped forward, I hadn't retaliated against her but when *Woodstock* came forward I went into a defensive stance turning slightly to the side. He stopped about four feet away and said, "*Peace and love brother.*"

Woodstock then he turned and said, "*Cassie--you didn't have to spit on him.*"

She snickered and said, "Yeah but it was great."

I stood there as they walked away. I was near a restroom so I went in and took one of the towels I was carrying in my travel bag, wet it and cleaned my face and uniform. Then I threw the towel away.

As I walked out a Ruddy-faced red headed guy standing with a beautiful Philippino lady came over and said, "Troop it's a good thing you didn't get into with the two fruit loops, the liberal press is crawling all over this place--you'd have been in every paper in the country tomorrow morning."

He extended his hand and said, "Names Rusty--Navy, '50-56, served on the *Rochester* in Korea. Meet my bride--met when I served in the navy and we been together ever since. I fly *in and out* of here regularly for my job--the country's changed since you been gone, I am sure. Those kids aren't *real* hippies they are probably from Hyde Park or Kenwood and go to the University. They will go back to class today and talk about what they did to end the war. This war has divided our country, Sergeant. You headed home or do you need a place to stay for a day or two?"

His wife spoke then. "If you do need a place, Rusty and I would be glad to put you up."

I told them I was outbound in an hour, but thanked them anyway.

I went back to the American Airlines ticket booth and asked the lady what it would cost to upgrade to coach. She told me, and I handed her twenty five dollars. I had, had enough of O'Hare International. I stood looking at the ticket agent, apparently too long she said. "Is something wrong?"

I said. "No."

She had the look all over her of an ex-cheerleader, and asked, "Am I the first?"

I said. "First what?"

She said, "Silly... the first American girl you have talked to since your got back home?"

I told her she was, and she laughed and said, "My brothers in Vietnam--glad you're home."

I had about an hour before the flight so I went to a small terminal restaurant and ordered a huge breakfast and ate. I was glad to be home but a part of me wanted to board a plane and go back to McCord and be out bound for Nam again. I felt as if I had left so many unresolved issues there, like it was incomplete, and I had not accomplished everything I had wanted to. Already I felt Nam calling me back.

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