

SICK

35th APS, 366th APS K-9, 1966

by Don Poss,

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A few more hours and it would be time to go to the K-9 kennels and pick up Blackie. My head is still spinning and my stomach has kept me running to the crappers since yesterday. Someone placed C-Rations and a P-38 by my cot. I felt the rise of bile at the thought of food. The monsoon rains pound relentlessly. Tent mates are rattling around. *Looks like crap...* someone says.

I find my way to the dispensary and asked the medic for something to stop the diarrhea and nausea. *I can't give you anything more,* he'd said. *Your temperature's bumping 102 and if it clicks up a notch then I'm taking you off duty no matter what you say.* I turned and walked back to the tent, and he yells...*next time wear your poncho!*

An unplanned stop at the cantonment crappers. Mamasan's daughter is pissed that I have barged in to a stall she wants to clean. Several retched minutes later I stagger out and she is scowling. I think up an insult like *Clean That*, but could not voice it. I didn't care.



I trudge the gauntlet of tents and stepped off the wooden pallet sidewalk and splashed-slogged through the downpour to the second tent from the last in the first row. I thought briefly of the day I arrived at Đà Nẵng, and being taken to the then vacant dirt field to our waiting tent, and the sergeant pointing to a canvas wad on a pallet covered with red dirt and saying, *There it is.*

I flipped the mosquito net and collapsed on the cot without taking off my boots. *I made it.* Humidity was like swimming on the bottom of a pool. The tent sides were unrolled which made the tent like a sauna. I wondered if I could drown with the sides down. The neverending torrential torrent pelted the canvas like gravel shoveled into a

C-130's reversed-props and blasted back like buckshot.

Eating was out of the question. *Blackie is waiting.* I stood outside the tent and for several long seconds couldn't remember what I was doing outside. *Blackie. That's right...* I knew that. I trudged toward the K-9 kennels on the perimeter road. A Navy Duck with giant tires and empty of its bomb load stopped to give me a lift. I couldn't climb up and in, and just continued walking. *You okay ...* called the driver.

I nodded to JB as I passed his Memorial Day room. Somehow I found myself at the kennel's gate post, which really was only a bunch of plywood hammered together as a sorry wind break. The AP's rain poncho was worthless and he was like a drowned rat. The world was a drowned rat. When he told me to set down, I did ... *Not in the mud...!* and he lifted and guided me to his sandbag-stool. I finished dry heaving and retching what little liquid I still retained. The sarge showed up at the gate, talked to the AP, then told me to get *my sorry ass* in the jeep. He didn't drive me to Blackie, but instead drove me back to my tent. Said something to the cantonment AP... *shoot his sorry sick ass if he tries to leave again.*

Wind rattled the flopping tent like four angry old maids dusting a quilt. Rain was a constant calamity like thousands of marbles in mom's clothes dryer. I'm laying still...*why is the tent spinning?* I close my eyes and lower a boot to the wooden pallet floor. *That's better.* I've got to go to work. *Blackie's waiting.* I roll over and dry heave holding the side of the tent away from the floor as rain clatters against the canvas and my hand like a rogue typist. I take the last of the medic's-whatever, struggling to work up enough moisture to swallow ... and dozed off.

Rain. Thunder. 105s. *Blackie.* Cramps curl me into a fetal position. Sweat soaked. Rain soaked. Puke soaked. *I must really be sick.* Dark was coming. Hell was already here.

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