



LAST MAN *Based on a Dream*

VIETNAM, **Monkey Mountain, Hill 621**

620th Tactical Control Squadron/ SP,
1/366th SPS, 1970-1971

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Dark. Night. I am topside on the mountain; it's cold up here at 620 meters. Must be late September with the monsoon approaching. Don't know why I'm here, maybe I've been ordered into a second tour. I am alone. I am unarmed.

There are no perimeter lights and the wire is down. Concertina blown away, barbed wire cut, the chain-link fence gone -- laying along the slope in places. The cloud blows across the moon sealing me into greater darkness. I must be behind the generators which are silent. I crawl along the edge of the building feeling the concrete with one hand. There is a corner; I can feel the wind in my face. I can see an orange illumination as if made by fire. There are voices drifting off echoes. Vietnamese, but not the sing-songy talk of women. It's strident. Military. This is the enemy. They are moving. Searching. They are armed.

The breeze lifts the cloud for an instant and I can see all the way down to Đà Nẵng harbor. But now I know that the entire expanse of brush from where I am, two miles to the peninsula is hostile. The road to Tien Sha and beyond cannot be traveled. Đà Nẵng is no longer under American control. The light fades and I am socked in again with visibility declining to thirty yards.

The only hope I have is getting to a radio. I don't know the frequencies, I've forgotten most of the call-signs. But I can't stay here, they'll catch me by dawn and I'll face execution or life-long imprisonment. For a moment this seems funny. I don't have 364 and hook before rotation; more like "50 years and a hook." I hope one day I can relate this to a friendly person.

I scoot low behind Operations and crawl up along the concrete steps behind the newer TACC building. Gently I try the steel door. It's locked. I retreat and fold myself very small against the steps trying to think. I am facing one of the "new" bunkers made out of cheap sand that could be dug through with a pencil. Behind it is the area where old classified logs were burned and the alien profusion of radio aerials. Somewhere nearby was a radio building, but I wouldn't know what to do there. There are only two ways into Operations; and the back is locked.

With my heart hammering I crawl along the garbage alley toward the front of Operations. The main entrance is there. I see enemy soldiers emerging from the old VNAF break shack. The roof had blown off during a typhoon I remember. I had watched it sail across the street into the power-plant and knock all the electricity out. The soldiers head toward the new chow-hall. They have their AK-47s at port-arms so they are not at ease. They must think somebody's still here.

I scurry along the wall and peer through the window in the front door. I smell smoke. Something is burning inside. I enter anyway but stay on my knees. How many nights had I spent with a .38 on this post? Even more nights between 'Panama' and 'Motel' checking badges, wasting time; imagining a ground penetration and how unlikely it would be for us to do anything more than be targets.

I move through the darkness toward the sound of a slow burn. I bump into things and try to feel my way forward. I see a corridor lit with the hues of hell-fire. Before me and behind me is the empty unknown. In the shrinking flickering light, literally at the end of this dim tunnel-of-vision unaided by faulty recollections, I stumble forward, hoping to find a pistol that will not melt in my hand, that has cartridges not made from chocolate, or a rifle that will not become dust, a radio that turns on a recognizable voice, a way out of this last lonely stand at the end of my world.

The rush of enemy troops at the front door has turned into a stampede. I go forward, my feet breaking though damaged floor tiles over cable-troughs. I round what could be the last corridor between the latrine and magnetic steel door now blown off its massive hinges. In my mind's eye I can imagine the rifle-rack on the dais and the radar-positions lined up in threes. Each scope with a radio-call box and black handset. I crash forward trying to slow down time as a half platoon closes behind me. I am the *last man* on Monkey Mountain in an unknown year and noise stops

as all goes black.

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