

Me washie clothie?

Mamasan Go Cholon!

by Denis Cook (RIP: 21 May 2017), 1968

USAF: Tân Sơn Nhứt - When I arrived at Tân Sơn Nhứt I was a recently promoted Sergeant. Being the new NCO I immediately received additional responsibilities. The first was being in charge of the Mamasan of our barracks. Not a particularly difficult job: *Collect from the troops in my barracks, pay Mamasan, and fix any problems that came up.*

The troops started complaining about skin rashes. At first there were two or three complaints, then the problem spread to half the other guys. Then fungus problems became an every day occurrence in-country. Several guys went to *sick-call* and were diagnosed as suffering from a skin irritant such as coming into contact with a mild chemical of some sort. Someone suggested we check on what Mamasan used to wash and clean our fatigues.

Mamasan's laundry washtub-facilities consisted of three garbage cans: one to wash in and two to rinse with. As I watched Mamasan and her daughter, Babysan, doing the laundry one day I noticed she was using a black bar of soap.

"Mamasan, what you do?" I asked.

"Ahhh!!! Mamasan *washie-clothie*," she answered with a big beatlenut smile.

"What soap you use?" I respond.

"Mamasan use LYE SOAP---GOOOOD SOAP, clean clothes good---GOOOOD SOAP."

"But Mamasan, I gave you money to buy soap?"

"Ahhh!!! Mamasan buy GOOOOD SOAP---LYE SOAP IE ."

"Mamasan, LYE SOAP, *number 10* soap---make GI itchy all over."

Mamasan looked very bewildered, this soap worked good, it was cheap, she could pocket the extra money, and she didn't understand about the rash. I immediately went to the BX and bought a large box of TIDE. I gave it to Mamasan praising the values of TIDE.

"Mamasan, you use TIDE SOAP, *number 1* American soap!---good soap---you like!" Mamasan smiled weakly and shook her head in agreement. That took care of that problem, or so I thought.

A week passed and the rash plague grew worse. Back down to the shower and the three-trashcan-laundry. There were Mamasan and Babysan washing clothes with, of all else, a black bar of *number 10* LYE SOAP.

"MAMASAN, WHAT YOU DO?" I scream.

"Ahhh!!! Mamasan use LYE SOAP---GOOOOD SOAP, clean clothes good---GOOOOD SOAP---LYE SOAPIE---numba 1 soap!"

"LYE SOAP *number 10* Viet Cong Commie soap! NOT good soap---what you do with *number 1* American TIDE SOAP?" I bellowed.

"Ahhh!! Mamasan take Cholon---sell BLACK MARKET---make bouqu-Pe---me like *numba 1* American TIDE SOAP!!!"

Me no V.C. ... You Numba-10-thou GI!

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