

R&R for the men of Captain Upton's Division came at the right time, as expected by Sergeant Cobb. They were “let loose”, once again. This time on the city of Dong Ha, near Quang Tri, in the Quang Tri province. It wasn't Saigon, and definitely not Singapore, but the military “brass” wanted to keep as many soldiers in the area as possible, in case of counter-attacks by the North Vietnamese.

“Its rest, but not exactly the kind I expected.” Sergeant Cobb told Lieutenant Montgomery when informed of the news. With the large American base there, the soldiers would get plenty of time to have fun, and experience elements of the city. When they hit the base, the first thing that got their attention was the women. From nurses to native workers, to peasants peddling their goods, the men of 1st Platoon set their sights on everything that had two legs and long hair.

They hit the enlisted men's lounge. The NCOs hit the NCO's lounge; and the officers the officer's lounge. Sergeant Major Burrell, and Staff Sergeant Huff were transferred up to the base, after the Tet Attacks, to be closer to the men.

Martin bought a round of drinks for his buddies, and the men shot pool and “the shit”.

Bloods:

They told us we had to take our weapons to the armory and lock 'em up. We said naw. So they decided to let us keep our weapons till we went to this show.

It was a big club. Looked like 80 or 90 guys. Almost everybody is white. They had girls dancing and groups singin'. They reacted like we was some kind of animals, like we these guys from the boonies. They a little off. I don't know if I was paranoid or what. But they stare at you when you first come in. All of us got drunk and carryin' on. I didn't get drunk, 'cause I didn't drink. And we started firin' the weapons at the ceiling. Telling everybody to get out. 'Y'all not in the war' We was frustrated because all these whites were in the back having a big show. And they were clerks. Next thing I know, about a hundred M.P.s all around the club. Well, they took our weapons. That was all.

The next day Davis got in trouble 'cause he wouldn't salute this little second lieutenant. See, we weren't allowed to salute anybody in the field. Officers didn't want you to. A sniper might blow his head off. The captain wanted to be average. He say, 'I'm just like you, brother.' When we got in the rear, it was hard for us to adjust to 'automatically.

Once they saw all the amenities of the soldiers in the rear, the men of 1st Platoon began to wonder what was going on.

“Ain't this some shit?” Casey said to Martin, as they surveyed the vast abundance of the enlisted men's lounge. “Bet the officers got even more.”

“Hell man, I'm just glad to be here.” Martin responded, sipping on his third beer.

The men around him: Casey Allmond, Vernon Jansen, and William Blakenhip, had been tested by severe conflict, and lived to tell about it. They'd seen comrades fall, and perish, but knew they had to keep on and survives the war.

Colby Hearn, Paul Heckers and Ray Frederick walked in place and saw the guys drinking and joined them. Martin was beginning to feel like they now belonged, and were respected. Besides the racial joke Heckers had made, the more experienced soldiers had been a valued part of their experience

so far. And had shown them how to make out of this foreign country.

Hearn and his buddies gave a toast to their wounded friend Josh Flowers, and took down shots of bourbon and scotch.

“Hmmm, mmm, mmm, now that's what R&R is all about gentlemen...good food and good drinks.” Heckers said, as he took down yet another shot.

Sergeant Cobb ordered a bottle of whiskey, Jack Daniels, at the NCO club. He watched the television set above the bar, and smoked a few cigarettes. He was soon joined by Sergeant Major Burrell and Staff Sergeant Huff, just in from Saigon.

“Heard it was pretty bad out there.” Burrell said, with his hand on Cobb's shoulder.

“It was,” Cobb responded, frankly.

“They hit us in Saigon, we had to leave the base and troop it over to MACV. VC were everywhere.” Huff informed him.

“Yeah, I heard. Looks like Charlie was harder at work than we thought.”

“Looks like.” Burrell added, ordering a round of drinks for them all.

As the Sergeants sat and drank, they each silently reflected on what they'd been through. Each taking a drink, and watching the T.V.

The officer's club was much more extravagant than any of the others, alluded to before by Casey Allmond. Lieutenant Montgomery passed his time watching the simplicity of the waitresses in the lounge serve drinks. He wasn't much of a drinking man, so he just had a soda. Some of the other officers drank with each other, and shared a meal, but the Lieutenant just kept to himself, marveling at the “wonderful” life the men had on the base.

Baseball had started “back in the world”. A good game was on, and the men watched it like they were seeing it for the first time. Martin wasn't too into the “All-American” sport, and slid over to the juke box to play a tune. Junior Walker All Star's “Shotgun.” The room started to jump, and the party got going. The Vietnamese waitresses came over when they noticed the mood change in the room. The men grabbed their waists, and behinds, cajoling them to join them.

For Martin, it felt great to be back in the company of young ladies, no matter what their nationality. It reminded him of, now what he saw as, more innocent times in his life. For a little while, he was back home in Alabama.

The weren't allowed to get too raunchy, and the party moved outside, where the men got the addresses of the women, and headed towards the city.

Watching the men head out of the base from the window of the officer's lounge, Lieutenant Montgomery thought, go ahead boys, you've earned it. And they had. Martin had expected to be “humpin' the bush” the whole tour when came to Fire-Base Delta. He didn't have any idea of the kind of carnage he would see after the Tet attacks and Hue. Headed to Dong Ha, the men took in the sights of dusk in the middle-to-small sized city. Peasants were headed back from the base on their bicycles, or walking, carrying their tools and supplies for their day's work with them. Now Martin could see the toll taken by these people who were struggling for an identity. Something in them was attracted to the American lifestyle, and they played their parts in trying to experience it for themselves.

The G.I.s were looking for “weed”, and Colby Hearn knew of a distributor in the city. Kai Won Pham was a big local dealer, and Hearn had bought large quantities of marijuana from him before, when he first came to the I Corps region. Pham was known by many of the troops who like to “smoke”, and made a good fortune off the American soldiers who used the herb to ease their burden in the country.

Martin figured he'd try some now that the fighting was over. His former fears and concerns over getting in trouble back in the States were far gone now. Hearn sort of confused him a bit. He was Black, and from the streets of Detroit, but seemed to fit in well with the Whites. They enjoyed his company, and gave him respect. Martin didn't know if this was because of the war's ability to diminish certain social barriers, or just a part of Hearn's personality. Any which way it was, he admired the

quality in him, and felt better about hanging around him now.

Pham would always have a load of women in his house. Good looking women, who loved the attention the G.I.s would give them. Marijuana wasn't the only narcotic he sold, and those who wanted it could go into the back room of his house and get high off opium. But Hearn loved the "weed", as did most of the American troops. It was rather harmless, and did the "trick" for them every-time.

After buying a sufficient quantity of it, Pham would allow the men to hang around and enjoy the ambiance of his dwelling. Martin took shotguns from an actual shotgun, and joints were rolled and passed all around.

"You 'lit now baby!" Casey played with Martin. As he took satisfying drags of the quality Southeast Asian product, Martin reminisced back on the many times he'd relaxed with "questionable" elements of Black Mobile society back "in the world". The product didn't do any good for Paul Hecker's seeming paranoia, but he enjoyed it as much as the next man.

The "Thai weed" was very pleasing for the group of men.

"This the best shit over here man." Hearn said, with a grin, and a joint in his hand. "Back at home, them boys ain't getting shit. It's a fringe benefit man, a fringe benefit."

"Hell yeah." Heckers complimented.

Ray Frederick was pretty shaken up after his experience with the hooker in Hue, and smoked and kept to himself, almost exhibiting a type of psychosis. The other G.I.s just thought to themselves, what the hell's wrong with him. But Hearn knew. He didn't say anything...but he knew.

All types of women were there: busty, petite, voluptuous, and heavy set. Most of them were very attractive.

"Betta holler." Vernon Jansen said to Martin, who was staring at a medium sized beauty with a gorgeous body. He didn't waste time in debating the matter, and went over to her, pulling her up out of her seat by the hand, and leading her to a back room. Passing through the black curtains that hung up as a door, Martin led her to the bed, and began to undress. She kissed him gently all over his body, and he felt more blessed by the extra healing he was receiving.

The other men followed suit, and began to mingle with the women. This is gonna cost extra, Hearn thought. But he could take up a collection later. With two women on his arms, he sat on the large sofa Pham had, and flirted with both.

Some of the men from another unit went to smoke opium, and Heckers watched them depart, thinking man they're about to get blasted.... Looks like Ray could use some of that shit. Frederick had a heavy set woman on his lap, but didn't seem to mind nor pay attention to her. Every-now-and-then he'd whisper something in her ear, and she'd laugh, but altogether he didn't seem to be too much into any of the after-hours activities.

Late into the night the men were still "at it". Finding pleasure with the women and the vices offered by the South Vietnamese entrepreneur. Back at the base, Sergeant Cobb found a pretty waitress to go home with. She was 23 years old, and had a pretty face and demure personality. He liked that about her, and talked to her about how it was "out there", "in the field." She listened, but really didn't care. She liked the fact that he paid so much attention to her.

He'd met her two before, when at the base, first coming into operations in the area. She was 21 then, and he'd almost asked her hand in marriage. His own marriage, back at home in Indiana, was falling apart, as he'd devoted so much of his time to the military. His wife, Serena, was German, and he'd met her when there, stationed in Frankfurt, when first serving in the army. It was hard for the two to keep their marriage alive, due to the pressures faced by an interracial couple in the States, and his commitment to the armed forces. Eventually, he forgave himself for the way things were falling apart, but still was concerned about her well being, even though he suspected she had found other men to be with. She hadn't said it, but he knew that with him being in Vietnam, and the way things were going with their marriage, and all of the domestic unrest back at home, as well, that she could be doing such a thing.

But who was he to worry, he thought. He'd found something he wanted here, and he enjoyed being with Sui Wi An.

The Lieutenant stayed alone the first night there. In his bunk, reviewing command papers and reading. He was somewhat of a "workaholic". It was what had gotten him out of VMI. And he found it hard to let his old habits die. He would be getting help before going back into the field. A 2nd Lieutenant was to be added to the platoon and this would help ease his burden. Going over his papers at his desk, by lamplight, he found himself admiring the man's record. Adam Hansen was his name and he'd attended the Citadel in South Carolina. Both men had opted out of going to the premier institution of West Point, and chosen smaller, but well respected military colleges to attend. Hansen was from Hilton Head South Carolina, and Montgomery thought to himself, he must come from some money, hailing from such a place as that.

Bloods:

When we got to be LURPS, we operated from Hill 54. Then they'd bring us in for like three days. They'd give you steak, all the beer you could drink. They'd know it's your last time. Some of us not coming back. We'd eat half the steaks, throw 'em away, have a ball. Go into town, and tear up town.

Davis couldn't make no rank 'cause he got court-martialed for what we do in town. We stole a jeep. Went to town. Tuy Hoa was off limits. Davis turned the jeep over comin' around one of them curves. But Davis was a born leader. He went back to the unit and got some more fools to get another jeep to push this jeep up. But he got court-martialed for stealin' the jeep. And for having United States currency.

Davis would take the American money into town. Somebody send him \$50, he get 3 to 1. Black market. First chance we go to town, he go get some cash. 'Cause he stayed high all the time. Smokin' marijuana, hashish. At mama san's house.