
THIRTY NINE**NVA R&R**

An odd incident happened one day, a week later, while the company was climbing one of the many stairways toward a peak. Three shots rang out from somewhere near the end of the column. Everyone stopped where we were and waited for word of what had happened.

Shortly the radioman for the second platoon, who were bringing up the rear on this particular day came on the air and explained that a single North Vietnamese soldier had popped up out of a spider hole, beside the trail, and tried to stab at the passing men with a knife. Fortunately he was shot before anyone was injured.

A spider hole was a small, one-man hole dug in the ground with a camouflaged trap door on top, making it extremely difficult to detect.

This incident, and the single grave we came across the previous week, were the only two occasions when we had any real contact with the enemy during our month in the mountains. There was never a shortage of signs, however, that they were making regular use of these trails. The problem was that there were so many trails throughout the mountains, and so much dense growth, that it was very easy for them to skirt around us whenever they knew we were in the area.

At the base of one particular declivity we came across a series of mud and thatched huts lined neatly along one bank of a gently flowing stream. It was obvious from the construction and uniformity that these huts were a form of barracks for the enemy whenever their troops passed through here.

Not only were there the huts, but there was also an ingeniously constructed outdoor shower system made from bamboo shoots. Long shoots were cut in half lengthwise to form troughs of five inches in diameter. Standing on bamboo legs, aqueduct fashion, these ran, end-to-end, from farther up the valley, where the stream was at a higher elevation. At a point, directly in front of the huts, the larger channel split off into five smaller shoots which spilled water out into the stream about six feet above the surface. All this bamboo piping was held together with a form of rope made from the bamboo plant and there wasn't a leak for the entire length of it!

Because of the dense canopy of trees overhead this small outpost was virtually invisible from the air, making it a safe haven for the NVA to take a shower and get some rest before moving on. Something of their own R&R.