
FIFTY ONE**Typhoon**

For the next couple of weeks we remained in the mountains, each day climbing down the side of one peak and up the side of the next, so that we could set up our nightly perimeter at the top. It was a particularly grueling time for me, with my carrying the radio along with the rest of my gear, and I could tell from the weariness in the faces of the other guys, at the end of each day, that it was just as hard on them.

There were a few positive points to be made for this period in the mountains, but the bad far outweighed the good.

On the plus side there couldn't possibly have been a healthier, more in-shape group of guys with all that climbing. Each day was divided in half with the morning being the period when we made our way down from a lofty peak into the sharp ravine at the base. At times we might be lucky enough to come across some of those incredible stairs cut into the rock, but the majority of the descent was usually at a sharp angle with rugged terrain and jungle growth to contend with every foot of the way.

Often there was a cold, freshwater stream running through the rift at the bottom. Here we could stop for lunch and take a quick dip in the refreshing water.

In fact, it was during a foray into one of these mountain streams, to wash, that I witnessed a startling phenomenon. One of the guys in my squad, Danny Margo, had been complaining of something in his nose for more than a week. At one point, a few days earlier, Doc Clark had sent him back to the

rear for a more thorough examination. The people back there found nothing substantial and sent him out again, saying that it was merely a sinus condition.

On this particular day, the two of us were standing in the chilling, knee-deep water when I happened to glance over at Danny just when he was bending over to splash water on his face. I saw something about five-inches long and nearly a quarter-inch in diameter hang down out of his nose! I only saw it for a moment before it shot back up and out of sight again.

“What the hell was that?!” I said to him, really startled.

Danny straightened and answered almost nonchalantly.

“I don’t know, but I’ve been trying to tell them that there’s something in my nose. They just won’t believe me.”

“Believe you?!...Hell, I believe you. I just saw it!

I called over to Doc Clark who was sitting back from the bank and talking with several other guys. When the medic was standing on the shore, I could hardly hide my astonishment.

“Doc, I just saw the craziest thing! Something that looked like a worm of some kind just hung down out of Danny’s nose.”

Then I turned to the other man, “Danny, bend over like you just did and see if it happens again.”

The medic squatted on the bank, to watch closely, as Danny bent and proceeded to splash water on his face. Suddenly, the same long, slimy object slid out and hung down, just as it had the time before. Again, too, as soon as he straightened, it shot back up into his nose, disappearing with amazing speed.

Now Doc looked stunned, “What the hell was that?!”

“That’s exactly what I said,” I told him.

Danny just shrugged his shoulders, “I don’t know, but its been there for quite awhile.”

Doc Clark stood up, “Come on out of the water. We’re sending you in to have that checked out right away.”

Danny smiled wryly, “They’ll just say it’s a sinus condition like they did the last time I went in.”

Doc shook his head, “Oh, no they won’t. This time you’ve got two witnesses who saw the damned thing, right Bob?”

“You got that right, Doc. There’s something there that just isn’t right,...something like I’ve never seen before.”

Danny left the water and was flown out on the next supply Huey. Three days later, when he rejoined the company, he had an amazing story to relate. It turned out that he had a rare type of parasitic leach attached to the membrane inside his nose. It was actually living in there!

He told us how the doctors wouldn’t let him have anything to eat or drink for twenty four hours and then held a paper cup up to his nose with a small amount of milk in the bottom. The leach let go of its hold and came out to get the milk. As proof of this Danny had brought a glass jar out with him with the dead leach curled up inside. The leach was so strong that it had actually torn the bottom out of the paper cup when the doctors tried to remove it. In death its large sucker was still fastened to that piece of paper cup in the jar!

On another day, while we were in this part of the mountains, a call came out from the rear that a typhoon had taken a sudden turn toward the coast of South Vietnam. We were told to try and find as much cover as we possibly could because no aircraft would be able to get out to us.

The typhoon came in at unbelievable speed, giving us no chance to find any kind of real shelter. For twenty-four hours we could do little more than lie on the floor of the jungle with the equivalent of a hurricane howling over us. The wind raged and the rain poured down in torrents. Everyone was soaked to the bone and actually shivering with the difference in temperature. Everyone, that is, with the exception of a few hardy souls.

One of them was the kid from Oklahoma, Benjamin Harrison, whom we called “Water Buffalo”. I’d become good friends with Buffalo because he was good friends with Doc Clark. He was a stocky kid with blonde hair and glasses and an easy laugh that went with his devilishly good sense of humor.

Doc and I were lying on the ground, under a poncho that we’d pulled over us. We were fighting desperately to keep the poncho from blowing away when, out of nowhere, Buffalo came strolling up.

First of all, it was hard to imagine anyone walking around in these hurricane-force winds and rain that was so heavy you almost couldn’t see through it.

Secondly, neither I nor Doc could figure out where he’d gotten them, but he was wearing a pair of bright blue, skin-tight bathing trunks, his buck knife tucked into the waistband at one side, his jungle boots, and nothing else. It was a particularly odd sight to see him standing over us, hands on hips, the pouring rain flooding down his face and that impish laugh of his just audible over the raging wind.

“How you guys doin’?”

He held up his hand, palm out, in a mock gesture of testing and looked up into the deluge.

“Do ya think it’s gonna rain?”

Doc’s head, like my own, was just barely visible under the poncho. He yelled over the wind,

“Harrison, you’re nuts!...Where the hell did you get a bathing suit from?”

Buffalo simply laughed and held his arms out at his sides feigning ignorance.

“Why?...Doesn’t everybody carry one? I thought they were standard issue.”

Then, seemingly impervious to the storm, he moved away to visit with the next group of guys who were huddled together under their ponchos.

I shivered in my soaked fatigues, trying to imagine how anyone could walk around almost naked, in the cold rain, and still maintain his sense of humor. Lying soaking wet on the ground, in a driving torrent, hour after hour, left little room for laughter. But then, that’s why we called him Water Buffalo. He was one *strong* individual. Truth of the matter was, it was little things like he’d just done that went a long way in raising the guy’s spirits during horrendous conditions like these.

Every now and again, someone would make his way over to our position and ask Doc if he could give him something for a sore throat or a headache. The medic would smile when he turned to his medical bag.

“So, you’ve got a headache, huh?”

“Yeah, Doc, a real bad one.”

Both he and I knew that the headache was just a sham to get something that might alleviate some of the misery of the situation. Doc Clark was a man of integrity who, under normal circumstances, would never dispense prescription medicines without a good reason. In this raging torrent, however, if a few Darvon could take a man’s mind off the discomfort for awhile, why not? I agreed with him a hundred percent. It was no worse than sending young men out into this miserable countryside to die in the first place.