
FIFTY THREE**Food Poisoning**

The second incident took place two nights later. The company was dug in on top of a peak that was part of a long ridge. We'd had a hot meal, consisting of ham, boiled potatoes and corn, flown out for supper and, now that it was totally dark, were asleep with the exception of the men on watch at each hole.

It wasn't long before I was awakened from a deep sleep by an unusual sound. It stopped as I cleared my head, so that I laid there for a moment, under my hooch, just listening in the dark.

There it came again. It was the sound of someone on the perimeter vomiting!

I sat up to listen more closely because I'd never heard anyone doing that while we were out in the field. It just sounded so out of place.

Then I heard the same sound again, but this time, on the other side of the perimeter! What the hell was going on here?!

Water Buffalo had his hooch set up right next to mine so that I could hear the low rumble of his snoring. I made my way over and shook him awake.

Buffalo sounded groggy when he opened and closed his eyes to try and see me through his interrupted sleep.

“What's the matter?”

I was squatting in front of his hooch, staring out into the inky darkness with some reservation.

“Listen,” I said.

It was only a matter of moments until the gut wrenching sound of dry heaves filled the night air again. Now, however, it sounded like there were four or five people on different parts of the perimeter going at it.

Buffalo shook his head, as if he thought he was hearing things, “What the...?!”

Though it was the middle of the night, everyone in the company was now wide awake and trying to find out what was happening. A figure appeared out of the darkness, moving in our direction. Buffalo flagged him down. It was Wada who was on duty as one of the Captain’s radiomen.

“Wada, what’s going on?” Buffalo asked when he squatted on the ground with us.

“It’s some kind of food poisoning, man. At least half the guys in the company have it.”

“Food poisoning?” I was completely puzzled,..“From what?”

“They’re not really sure, but they think it might have been the ham we had for supper.”

My gaze moved slowly from the hand I’d just placed on my stomach over to Buffalo, “I ate some of that ham too.”

Buffalo stared back at me uneasily, “So did I.”

There was a brief pause in which we three could hear as many as fifty or sixty guys upchucking in the darkness!

“Anyway,” Wada continued, “I was just over talking to Two-Six about guiding a bird in up here. They’re sending a bunch of doctors out to see what they can do.”

He began moving away, “I’ve got to get back to the CP. I’ll see you guys later.”

Within a half-hour a medevac Huey was heading in toward the top of the mountain. The pilot had to turn on his powerful searchlight in order to find a spot where he could bring it in. Unfortunately, the light also made the Huey visible for miles around, not to mention exposing our location to anyone who might be interested. It was a dangerous situation, but one that couldn't be helped.

Luckily the enemy was caught completely by surprise at the open display on our mountaintop, simply because they weren't in a position to do anything about it. The Huey glided in, its finger of brilliant white light shining down through the tree branches, casting moving shadows on the ground.

Over the roar of the bird's engine we heard several poofs of a mortar tube way off in the distance. Shortly they were followed by the sound of the rounds going off, but they too were far away and ineffective. The NVA were down near the base of the same mountain that we were on. They probably hated the idea of passing up such a golden opportunity at catching an American company so obviously exposed and figured they'd take a chance that their tube had enough range to reach the top. It didn't. The rounds were going off somewhere down on the side of the peak.

The doctors made it in all-right. Fortunately, the food poisoning wasn't a critical type, which meant that there was no danger of anyone not recovering pretty quickly with treatment. And the NVA were wasting rounds taking out a bunch of trees lower down on the mountain.

With everything fairly under control again, after the Huey departed with its compliment of doctors, Water Buffalo and I sat together under one of our poncho hooches. It was late and we were both tired, but, with all that had occurred, we couldn't even think of trying to sleep just yet.

On top of everything else that was odd about this particular night, it turned out that the two of us were among a handful in the entire company who hadn't been affected by the bad food. There were

different degrees by which the others were reacting, from mild stomach cramps to dry heaves, but Buffalo and I appeared not to have been touched by it in the least!

We sat in silence for quite some time as the sound of up-chucking still came from all different directions in the darkness. Then something began to happen which neither of us had planned, nor over which either of us seemed to have any control. Maybe it was due to the exhaustion of having the events that just took place heaped on top of a grueling day of climbing,...or maybe it was a release of tension knowing that the enemy could have had us at a tremendous disadvantage with the Huey exposing our position,...or maybe it was just something that was long overdue, but I heard a strangely muffled sound coming from Buffalo. He was sitting cross-legged, opposite me and, whenever I heard the sound, I noticed his stout body rocking slightly, front to back. My first thought was that he too was now getting sick.

It wasn't long before I realized that the sound coming from him seemed to grow louder immediately after a particularly audible session of dry heaves from the perimeter. Finally, I could tell that it was laughter.

At first it struck me as rather odd that Buffalo would be laughing at a time like this, but then, knowing that no one was in any real danger from the food poisoning and that the closest enemy were obviously a good distance away, the heaving sounds, coming out of the darkness, did take on a rather comical quality.

Laughter really is contagious. I felt the corners of my mouth begin involuntarily rising when I saw Buffalo looking at me with that devilishly impish expression on his face. Each time the sound of heaving

came from a different direction, with different tonal qualities, it made the two of us laugh just a little harder until we were both bent forward, holding our stomachs.

Eventually, between sporadic little chuckles caused by the decreasing occurrences of heaving, we were overcome by our exhaustion and fell into a deep sleep under Buffalo's poncho hooch.