

Alone amongst the crowd

I walk along with my head down low.

It's almost 8:30 and off to class I go.

I don't stop to talk or slow my stride

Trying not to show that I'm without much pride.

It's 12 o'clock and time for lunch.

"Oh, how much I envy those girls sitting in that bunch.

They seem so happy and full of joy."

I think as I sit alone, scarcely making a noise.

Some guys are wispering something cruel about me.

Is it my imagination or can it really be me?

I get up to walk away trying not to stare.

I try to lie to myself saying "I don't care".

It's time for class once again.

I go there early so no one will notice that I'm without a friend.

My classmates get seated and wait for the prof.

I hate this time 'cause I'm the only one who doesn't talk.

My shyness makes people think that I'm strange.

If only they got to know me, their thinking might change.

If only someone would give me a chance

I swear that someday, their life would enhance.

I wonder what happened to me since grade twelve?

As far as I know, I'm the same old self.

Did I change that much is such a short while?

Don't I have the same old look and the same old smile?

It's 4 o'clock and time to go.

I get up to get ready for my ride home.

My eyes get misty as I wonder how,

With so many people, I'm alone amongst the crowd.

K.M.



"Two skeletons fighting over a copy of The Gem"
By Leonard Maltin

Combat Duty

Fiction by John Doucette

Mekong Delta Region, Vietnam, 1967.

u've been assigned to Bravo Company, 5th Marine Amphibious Unit. You just completed basic training at Paris Island, Florida three weeks ago. Now you're in "The Nam", the name those who've been in this hell called Vietnam call their new home. Those that've survived, that is.

Your welcome here was short and sweet. F.N.G.'s (fucking new guys) aren't expected to live long, so not much effort is wasted on you. Your platoon sergeant told you the ground rules as soon as you got off the plane. "Keep your weapon with you at all times, ladies. That means you go to the john with it, you sleep with it, you bathe with it, you fuck with it, got me? Another thing. Be suspicious of every Viet you meet. There's a few you can trust. You'll find out who they are after a few weeks. You'll find that you're going to be treated like outsiders. All F.N.G.'s are. You'll find out what that means too. If you survive long enough, you'll find that your status has changed. If you survive long enough, that is."

The Mekong Delta Region of Vietnam has been

a hot spot ever since the war started. Bravo Company's 'home' is Firebase Victor, a fire support base ten miles up the Mekong River. The Vietnamese guerillas, the Viet Cong, 'Charlie' for short, are active in the area. You arrived by chopper. Sergeant Willows was ordering you out before the chopper even touched the ground.

One of your friends commented that things were a bit rushed. "Take a look", Willows said. The landing zone and the base were pockmarked with craters.

"Charlie hit us last night. He knows that we'll be bringing in replacement supplies and men, so he likes to liven the place up a bit for you new guys." As if to emphasise Willows' statement, three mortar rounds land on the landing zone.

"Incoming!!"

a replacement. Nervously, you continue on. Point man is twenty feet in front of the rest of the platoon. If anything happens, the point man is the first to get it.

0100 hours, 18 June

The moon hasn't come out yet and you can barely see ten feet in front of you. You stopped for a few minutes until you could see the rest of the platoon. You're ten feet out in front, now. You've only gone six clicks and you feel like you've gone sixteen. Right now you'd give a month's pay for a nice, soft bed.

0130 hours, 18 June

There it is again. The same noise you heard a minute ago. A branch breaks with a loud snap behind you. You spin and go to one knee, bringing your M-16 to bear on the target, your finger tightening on the trigger.



Everywhere men are running for cover. "Into the bunker! Move!" All six of you run towards the nearest bunker. After several minutes, the bombardment stops. "Welcome to Nam, ladies."

THREE WEEKS LATER...

2200 hours, 17 June

You got the word two hours ago. Your platoon is going out on patrol. Your first combat operation...

0000 hours, 18 June

"Johnson, take point," Willows whispered.

"Yes, Sergeant," you reply. You change places with Wilson, one of the men who came in with you as

"Easy! It's me. Willows. "Jesus, Sarge, you scared the shit out of me!"

"Good. That'll keep you alert a little longer. Jenkins is taking point now. Get back to the platoon."

"Just before you came up, I thought I heard something."

"Like what?"

"I'm not sure. Sort of a rustling sound."

"Probably just me."

"Yeah. Must've been."

"Alright, let's get back." The two of you make your way back to the platoon and you take your position with your squad. Five minutes later, the platoon starts moving again.