

CHAPTER 1

THE STORY BEGINS

February 8, 1968

Đông Hưng District, Thai Binh, Vietnam. Seven miles south of Da Nang

I snap my head around as gunfire erupts to the west. Twenty-five yards away, Echo Three has walked into an ambush. The enemy, hidden in the trees, waited until they were close. I spy one marine lying only a few feet from the tree line.

Charlie's firing both small arms and automatic weapons. We have to do something. An RPG fired from deep in the bush explodes near them, and I know they're in a world of shit.

"There in that ditch," shouts Hammond.

I look and find two more marines lying in front of the ditch where Echo Three has taken cover. I spot Captain Joselane talking on the radio. I expect air or artillery to start dropping bombs, but nothing happens. The NVA and VC are in full assault.

Hammond looks at me and yells, "Don, you and Joe lay down cover fire."

Joe and I take a knee along with Hammond. We start picking off the VC and NVA as they leave the trees and rush the squad. The enemy must think Echo Three is killing them. I don't think they realize we're here. I watch and fire at the enemy as they get closer and closer to Echo Three. Dozens more leave the trees. There are too

RICK GREENBERG

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many for us to stop.

Still firing, I watch the NVA reach the ditch and shoot whoever is left. Now I stare in disbelief. It's over. Echo Three is gone.

Joe, still shooting, yells, "Keep firing, Don! Kill those motherfuckers." Stunned by what I see, I look over at Joe as an explosion erupts behind me. Gunfire follows. The enemy has figured out where we are. The rest of our squad is in a ditch that looks a lot like the one where Echo Three just got slaughtered. They're a few yards away and catching hell.

A round zips past my head, and the ground around me is

peppered from enemy fire. I drop to the prone position and cover my head. Everything is happening too fast. I'm frozen until Hammond grabs the back of my flak jacket, pulls me to my feet, and shouts, "Get in the ditch! Let's go! Move!"

January 19, 2020

My name is Don Talbot. I'm sitting in the home of my friend Rick Greenberg, talking about my time in Vietnam. Rick, who is writing my story, has asked what happened to me during the North Vietnam offensive of 1968, better known as Tet, the Vietnamese New Year. But that's not the story Rick wants, or at least not all of it. He wants the whole damn thing. I don't know if I can give him that. He wants me to start at the beginning. The beginning? What was the beginning? He's watching me, expectant. I draw a deep breath and let it escape through my teeth. Okay, Rick. You want it? You can have it. I open my mouth and begin to speak, surprised that my voice doesn't even waver. "It was March 13, 1967, when I landed at Da Nang Airfield. I checked the time as soon as we touched down. It was 2330. The plane was taxiing down the runway when off to the side, I spotted jets parked in bunkers. I wondered if they were F-4 Phantoms. There's one thing about that first night I will never forget. It was dark ... real dark."

Every thought I speak leads me back to that first night in Vietnam. I can feel myself changing back into that eighteen-year-old marine. Before I realize it, I am back in 'Nam... telling my story, reliving it... I am there again.