

THE SECOND ROUND.

By James Collins.

Vietnam was a war without boundaries. No place was safe. When guerrillas attacked, a localized front line developed. Then the guerrillas would run away and the front lines disappeared. However, death was always just around the corner. American air bases were a favorite target for mortar rounds. The guerrillas would sneak up at night, lob a few grenades and mortar rounds into the area and disappear. To counter this, the American government generated safety bunkers deep in the ground around all of the facilities. Everyone was within running distance of a bomb shelter, and had many opportunities to use them.

It was always hot in Vietnam and everyone dressed to accommodate this problem. An Air Force colonel, David Noones, commanded a squadron of C-130s. He and six other officers each had an office in an old one-story barracks like building. Immediately outside the center entrance, there was an underground bunker, which could accommodate about 10 people. The bunker consisted of a subterranean area about the size of a one-car garage. The ceiling was at ground level and the floor was approximately 8 feet underground. Heavy logs and planks roofed the area, topped off by sandbags and earth. The ground sloped into the entrance so that people could enter on a run into an open doorway while sandbags lined both sides to ground level. All seven officers used this bunker as their safety location in case of an attack. Recently there have been many strikes by mortar rounds. Sometimes one round was fired, sometimes three, sometimes there were dozens, There was no way to tell how large and prolonged the attack was, so everyone expected the worst and just dove into the bunkers as quickly as possible.

On this particular hot, muggy Tuesday, the Colonel was busy processing a mandatory report, which was due to his commander within an hour. Dave was about three quarters through the report when a single mortar round came in and hit about 100 yards away from the barracks. The siren went off and the other six officers dove for the bunker. Dave started to rise from his desk, and halted. He felt he had to get this report out and would only take a few minutes. He told himself, this is most likely a nuisance attack and is only a single round. Therefore, he started writing more quickly. Then the second round hit just outside his window. He decided the bunker would be a much safer location to be in. He ran through the door, down the corridor and out the front. The sandbags were all in disarray; smoke and dust were everywhere; the bunker was a disaster. The second round had been a dead on hit, into the entrance, and all six offices died instantaneously. Normally Dave would have been one of the first into the enclosure as had happened many times before. This time he hesitated and it saved his life. God must have other plans for this lucky individual.

THE END