

## ANOTHER DARK NIGHT

"Return, O LORD, deliver my soul: oh save me for thy mercies' sake. For in death there is no remembrance of thee: in the grave who shall give thee thanks? I am weary with my groaning; all the night make I my bed to swim; I water my couch with my tears. Mine eye is consumed because of grief; **it waxeth old because of all mine enemies.**" Psalm 6:4-7

A second tour of duty in Vietnam began with joining the Combined Action Program. Four months combat experience was required to enter the CAP School at Danang. Completion of the training allowed us to serve with these **'all volunteer' units**, that would be living 24/7 among the locals, training the Nghia Quan, and patrolling in select villages and hamlets that had a high enemy presence. We were sometimes called "Peace Corps Volunteers, with Guns."

There was little peace for a small unit living in the villages and our guns were often fired in anger. Each night when darkness approached, **we would 'saddle up' and move** to an undisclosed location. Time was of essence to quickly get acclimated to our new surroundings and prepare for another long, dark night. Upon arrival we would dig fighting holes around the perimeter of a house that was sitting on a small clay island in the middle of a rice paddy. We would memorize grids for artillery and medivac support after viewing the maps by the light of a Buddhist candle inside the house. Preparations included setting out Claymores and placing their M57 firing devices also known as hellboxes, ammo cans, and M72 LAWS within reach of each hole. The Nghia Quan soldiers were strategically positioned, radio watches assigned, and the landscape was scanned with a starlight scope. Those who could rest in a wet hole tried to get a little sleep during the calm before the storm.

Perhaps the greatest weapon of the North Vietnamese and Viet Cong Armies was that of darkness. We were hit several times a week and these skirmishes, though short lived, usually took place shortly after dark. The enemy would slip undetected to a nearby tree line and hit us with skilled and experienced rocket teams. The darker the **night the more likely that 'Charlie' would try to crawl to the edge of our perimeter and toss a few 'Chicom' grenades** on our positions. We would blow our Claymores, return small arms fire, and our enemies would then disappear into the darkness of night. It was as though we inspired the title of the movie, **'The Ghost and the Darkness.'**

Darkness not only concealed our enemies, but the darkness also concealed the prayers of fox hole conversions made of empty promises to God if He would only allow us to survive another night. And darkness concealed the tears shed for those brave Marines and Nghia Quan who did not survive. The nights were long and soul searching, and we all anticipated the break of day with its brightness and assurance that all is well, until the coming of another nightfall.

David was a military man who led in battle, mourned his comrades, and grieved over his treasonous son Absalom. He **pled for God's mercy during those dark nights, he wept for** his son and the faithful fallen, and he knew that his chastening was from a merciful God. He knew that the darkness of his present condition would be short lived.

This is the first of seven penitential Psalms of David.

## FIRST, WE NOTICE DAVID'S DARK NIGHTS

We see **David's** plight. His strength is reduced to weakness. We see his plea for mercy when he says, "Return, O LORD, deliver my soul: oh save me for thy mercies' sake." The word mercy is a prominent word in the **Psalms. It is really the word for "loving kindness."** God extends to us not just kindness, but loving kindness. It was this aspect of the character of God upon which David, with true spiritual intuition, laid hold. He asks for mercy not justice. One **Medicare commercial says, "I called to get everything I deserve."** Believe me, **spiritually speaking we don't want everything** we deserve; justice from a Holy God. Rather call on Him to get everything we **don't deserve: God's mercy and grace.** Faith exchanges our service records that are imperfect with His service record that is impeccable. His perfect record is imparted to us by grace through faith, then becoming our perfect record, satisfying the holy demands of a just God. David knew that God is a God of mercy. "...The LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth...."

He told the Lord he was worn out and says, **"I am weary with my groaning; all the night make I my bed to swim; I water my couch with my tears."** All the night can be translated **"every night."** No Marine likes to be

around a whinny **Milquetoast**, and yet we read that David the King wept. The shortest verse in the Bible says, **"Jesus wept."** And I have known some brave Marines that have also wept. Some believe that tears are a sign of weakness, but perhaps they are a sign of strength. I once showed Major Cofty my wallet that was encased in a zip lock bag **and sent to my mother when medevac'd to Japan**. Our unit was written on the outside of the black leather with a white clothing marker, and the inside photo pages are still **caked together with Vietnam's mud**. **This hero** of Khe Sanh began to weep as he saw the inscription that jogged his memory of former dark nights of conflict and loss.

Tears are an eloquent argument with God. The British Pastor, Charles Haddon Spurgeon, **called them "liquid prayers."** **They need no interpreter and carry enormous weight at the throne of grace**. David had sudden peace in his soul, and inner conviction that God had heard him.

SECONDLY, WE **SEE DAVID'S CONFIDENCE** RETURNING WITH THE BRIGHTNESS OF DAY

His fears were stilled. **"Through the tender mercy of our God; whereby the dayspring from on high hath visited us, To give light to them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death...."** Faith in a merciful God dispels the darkness, gives light to our path, and raises the flag of victory over the trials of life. Faith also gives us the victory **over man's last enemy, death**. David put the remote down, got his hinney off the couch, and pulled up his socks. He had no assurance as yet that his situation was going to get better, but he was absolutely confident that his enemies were not going to get the best of him. He was going to wipe the tears and stand firm in the face of his unrelenting enemies. Verse eight says, **"Depart from me, all ye workers of iniquity; for the LORD hath heard the voice of my weeping. The LORD hath heard my supplication; the LORD will receive my prayer."**

**David's foes were stopped.** Verse ten says, "Let all mine enemies be ashamed and sore vexed...." David had found his vexation to be a highway back to God. How oft have we survived another dark night? There will come dark nights, tests of courage, and firefights throughout our entire lifetime. We must always stand firm and wait for the break of day. No matter how dismal and bleak our situation may become, and no matter how dark our nights, the Lord always turns the darkness into the brightness of day.

Semper Fidelis

*Chaplain Ron*



Above: Marines of CAP 2-3-2, 2<sup>nd</sup> CAG, 3<sup>rd</sup> Marine Amphibious Force. Chaplain Ron took this photograph. **Most of these guys were medevac'd out**, or rotated home. Sgt More took over the unit that became small in number.

Below: Chaplain Ron at daybreak following a firefight that lasted the entirety of a very dark night. Several casualties, especially among the Nghia Quan (Popular Forces).

