

## Chapter 1

It's a tiny noise, just out at the edge of consciousness, different than the stumbling shuffle of a hooch mate going out to relieve himself, or the furtive scratch of a rat making its way across the room dividers.

My blood pounds in my ears as I realize we have an uninvited visitor in the hootch. Living close to the perimeter on the flight line means NVA (North Vietnamese Army) sappers will reach our hootch before any of the others. My breath comes in rasping gasps trying to be quiet as I reach for the M79 grenade launcher loaded with buckshot hidden near my bed.

My hands grope for the weapon, and I can't find it! I'm trapped! The sound conjures a small man with black pajamas carrying the grenade that he will toss in my room to end my life. My panic is building; my heart is pounding so loud that surely the intruder must hear it.

With no weapons to fight with, the only option is run. Before the enemy can toss the satchel charge or shoot, I jump up and leap through the window, the screen yields and flies before me. I land 8 feet below as my ankle explodes in agony.

I lay there for a couple minutes there are no explosions, no shots and nobody is coming after me. I realize I am lying outside my bedroom window at St Anthony, ND. I sheepishly limp to the back door and ask my wife to let me in.