

# IT WAS JUNE.

As I stepped off the plane at Da Nang, the heat hit me like a blast furnace. We were herded like cattle into a replacement depot for a two-day orientation on Vietnamese culture and how to conduct ourselves in the “villes.” Amid endless instructions, warnings about “the natives,” and knowing we were going “in country,” along with a sense of disbelief, I was filled with dread. It was impossible to really know what the others felt, but as draftees, none of us were there because we wanted to be. I was assigned to the Second Battalion. It would be my home in Vietnam for one year, if I lived that long.

We were helicoptered to the rear-area firebase where the battalion staged its search-and-destroy operations. From there, eight of us were assigned to Bravo Company, a group of one hundred and sixty men. We were replacements for the dead, and we knew it. Bravo Company had been in the bush for six weeks and now had a three-day holiday to smoke dope, drink beer, and gamble. We replacement soldiers would have three days to get used to the heat and humidity and prepare ourselves before combat operations resumed. Then it would be into the boonies.