

Night Patrol Memories

By Ken Kalish, February 27, 2019

I was 21 the day I left for Viet Nam on May 31st, my birthday, and 23 when I got home. Even now some of those fights wake me at night, shouting things my wife can't unscramble, sweating and so deathly cold. That's what I remember most about the night patrols – the insane cold. We lost guys to pneumonia from their trying to stay warm by huddling under their shelter halves and ponchos as if they might be a blanket. They would begin to sweat, wake up, toss off the poncho and wind up two days later in sick bay. We lost more guys to pneumonia, worms, and bugs than to combat.

If any of you ever saw the goliath beetles, I'm sure you were impressed by their powerful jaws. They could fly long distances, and twice in one week we had gunners taken out by catching one in the face. One had imbedded in a man's cheek, the other in a man's right eye lids. It would take a pair of wire dikes to cut off the legs so the victim could get some relief from the bug trying to tear itself free.

Our oldest boat captain was "Pappy" Barlow at 32. Most of our crews were made up of guys 18 to 25.