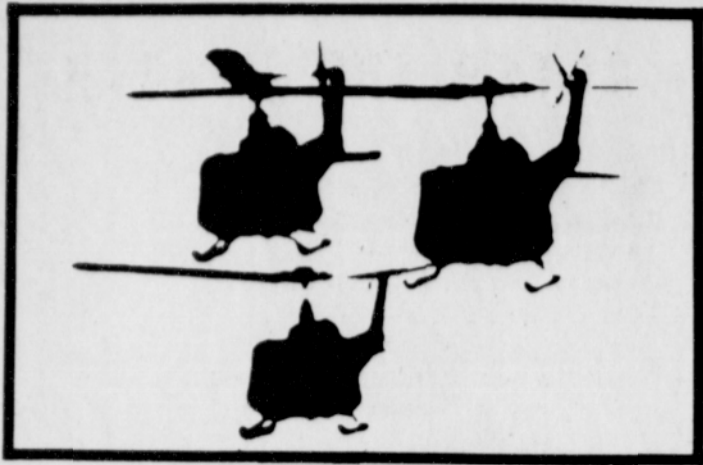




IT IS MONSOON AT LAST

The black peak at Xuan Loc
pulls a red apron of light
up from the east.
105's and 155's are walking shells
toward us from Bear Cat
down some trail
washing a trail in fire.

An eagle flight snakes west from Lai Khe,
a demonstration of lights
flashing green and red across a sky
still black above.
Our boots rattle off the boardwalk
Cha-Chat-Cha-Chat
the sound spills across the helipad
out towards the forest
out towards the dawn;
it chases devil dusters
out to the jungle.

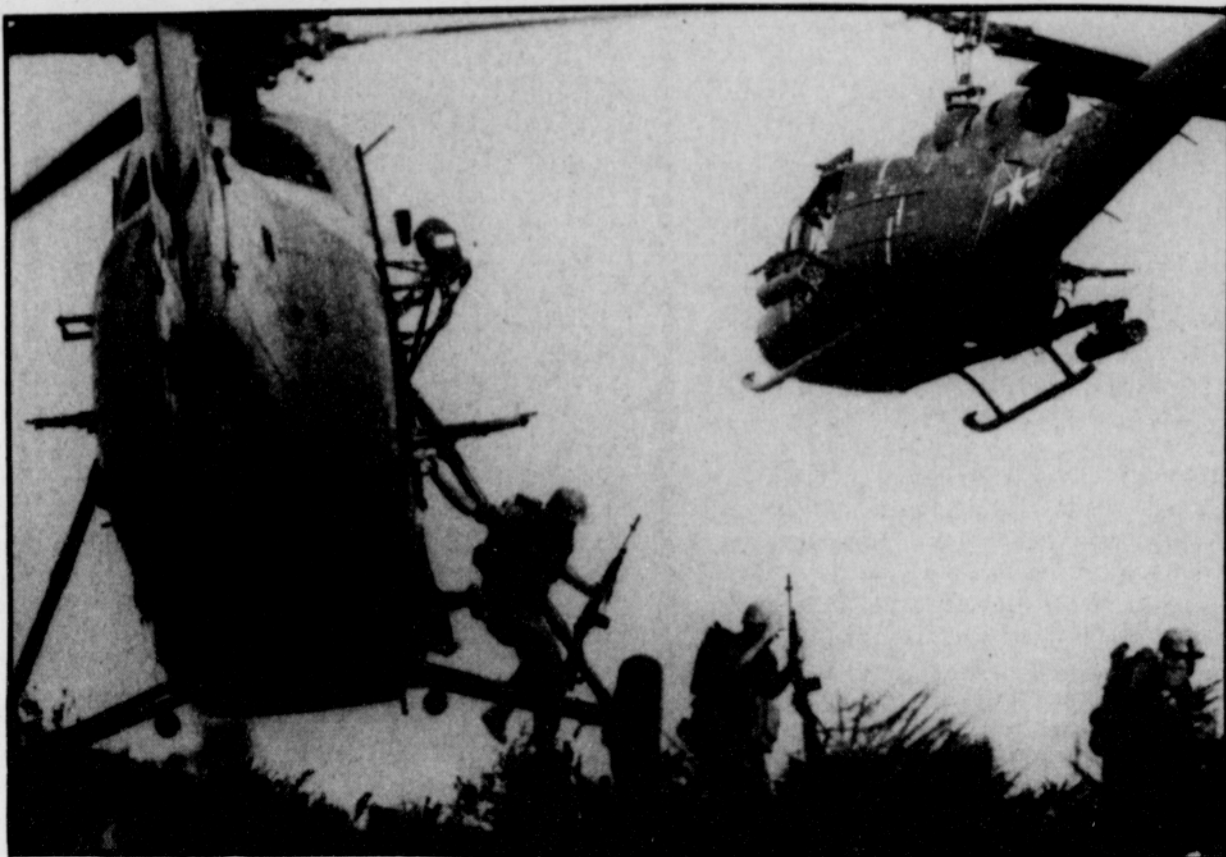
The boardwalk bends
with our ungainly walk
litter handles creak
with the heavy weight of the dead,
the dull whoosh and thud of B-40's
sounds south along the berm
the quick flat answer of 16's follows.

Gunships are going up
sucking devil dusters into the air
We can see them through the morgue door
against the red froth clouds
hanging over Xuan Loc.
We lift the boy into a death bag.
We lift the boy into the racks.
We are building a bunker of dead.
We are stacking the dead for protection.

This dead boy is on my hands
My thighs are wet with the vomit of death
His blood is on my mouth
My mouth My mouth tastes his blood.

The gunships are firing over the Dong Nai
throwing fire into the river
clouds are coming in from the sea
I can smell the rain, see it
over Xuan Loc, over me
it is monsoon at last.

— Basil T. Paquet



SEARCH & DESTROY

by Wayne Karlin

There were fiery needle pricks in his foot,
jabs felt through a half dream, and he kicked
out. His foot connected with something warm
and hairy, and he sat up abruptly, sleep sucked
from him like water down a drain. "Shit," Joshua
said, and tried to go back to sleep.

He lived in a hut at Marble Mountain Air
Facility with ten others. They had a parachute
hung under the ceiling and partitions and shel-
ves of scrap wood and straw matting. Home-
made, homemaking.

Up to the month before, the hut had been can-
vas roofed and almost unbearably hot. The new
tin roof made it much cooler inside. "But now
we got rats inside," Joshua said to Rodriguez.

"Yes, indeed," said Rodriguez, "and it seems
like it's been raining more since you white
men invented this tin stuff."

"Rats," Sam said, shaking his head. He was
lying on his cot, reading a paperback. "Jesus
Christ. Rats."

"Don't let it worry you," Torenelli said.
Eventually it worried all of them.

At least once a night someone would be snap-
ped awake by the feel of a small hot body some-
where in his cot. Usually the rats preferred to
attack feet, two naked hunks of meat that tend-
ed to become exposed in the night. Sam, for one,
could never get back to sleep after feeling a
rat. He would begin to drop off, then a mental
picture of the animal eating his nose or an eye,
jumping across the floor with a chunk of Sam-
face dangling from its mouth, would wake him
up. He began to sleep hunched protectively over
his genitals, like a man about to fight.

There was a constant squeaking at night. It
got on the men's nerves, and they would lay
awake listening, feeling the sweat from their
backs wetting the sandy canvas of their cots.
Often they could see the small dimples the
rats' feet made as they ran along the top side

of the hanging parachute. The men would throw
things at the impressions but the rats were
too fast.

It wasn't until Torenelli was killed, actually,
that it became an obsession to kill the rats. The
night before it happened he had flipped out at
the soft scuffling noises on the silk above his
head, and had shot a few holes in the roof with
forty-five. He would have been court-martialed
if he hadn't caught a fifty-caliber round that
blew most of his chest away, on a medevac the
next day.

The rats became a jinx to the men on flight
pay after that. They began calling them gooks.

They would lay awake at night, waiting. When
someone would feel or hear a rat, he'd yell,
gook, and Perez would switch on the light. They
would chase the creature frantically, upsetting
cots, tripping over seabags. It would have been
a funny, Keystone Cop scene, except for the hate
and fear in the marines' eyes.

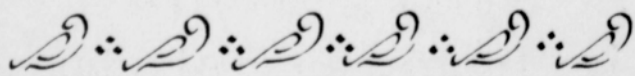
At the weekly movie they didn't laugh any-
more at the little cartoon mice. They would
stare at them with hate-rimmed, sleepless eyes,
and look at the people who did laugh as though
they were idiots.

Perez almost got one once. He was chasing
it with a Montagnard spear he had picked up
near Khe Sahn. He cornered the rat and was
trying to jab it with the spear, mock-dueling,
laughing hysterically. The animal suddenly
reared up on its hind legs and drew back its
thin rubber lips, exposing sharp, wicked-looking
teeth. Its eyes bulged with frantic hate. Perez
was taken aback and stopped jabbing for a split
second. The rat immediately leaped away and
disappeared into some unseen hole.

On the day that the hunt was finally success-
ful they killed eleven rats.

It happened right after Perez and Billings
were knocked out of the air while on a resupply
to Hill Fifty-five. A recoilless rifle round had
punched a huge hole in the side of their heli-
copter, but they were able to autorotate down
with no one hurt.

VIGIL FOR PEACE IN SUPPORT OF THE NUCLEAR WEAPONS FREEZE



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to a gathering that will take no more than
an hour or two of your time and help guarantee
that earth will survive the peril it now faces.

That peril is in the form of nuclear
weapons and the international competition
that striving for superiority generates.

Millions of people like us in cities all
around the world are meeting to express their
fervent hopes & desires that the nuclear
nations will sincerely agree to freeze, reduce
and ultimately eliminate the nuclear
threat to our common survival.

There will be no speeches, no public
address system, no political affiliations.
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with a placard or other sign. Come
at ONE O'CLOCK and stay as
long as you like.

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