

They all sat around that night, telling sea stories about getting shot down. Perez was religiously grateful the round hadn't exploded the gas tank. "Thak fuck it didn't explode," he prayed, "thank fuck." All it had meant was a little time with the grunts for his gunner, Billings, and him. He was shaking his head when they all heard the squeal, punctuating his prayer. "Gook!" Perez yelled, his face hard.

The slick brown body jumped across the room, and they flew after it, yelling. They were surprised to trap the rat almost immediately. It stood on its hind legs in an unescapable corner, squealing shrilly.

Sam was the first too see why the rat was so easily trapped. He heard a soft noise from the opposite corner of the hut and went to look. Billings saw him move and followed. "Damn," he yelled fervently, triumphantly, "it's got babies! It was trying to lead us away."

There were ten of them, blind and pink, clutching at each other with small groping hands.

Billings took a long piece of copper wire and, kneeling, stuck its end through each baby's small, pulsing throat. The tinny sound of their squealing gradually died as the wire tore through flesh, until only the squeal of the trapped mother could be heard.

Billings whooped and brandished the chain of dead babies in front of the mother. Then he took them outside and plunged their still-twitching mass into the large water barrel just outside the hut. His face was alight and strained.

Donner, the big silent boy from Kansas, clubbed at the mother. She kept up her high-pitched squealing, her eyes darting towards the water barrel outside. Perez grabbed a canvas sack and dropped it over the stunned rat. The rest of the men stood around him, watching. He picked up the sack and carried it outside to the barrel, then took it by the bottom and shook the mother out into the water. The two ends of the wire on which the babies were dangling had caught on the rim of the barrel, and the bodies just broke the water, next to her face. She was still alive, swimming frantically.

Perez began pushing her face under with a piece of wood. He kept holding her down for longer and longer periods, but each time he let up she would still be alive and struggling. He swore at her.

Donner went into the hut and came back with his can of deodorant. He waited until Perez let the rat's head break the water, then sprayed the deodorant through the flame of his cigarette lighter. It sent out a sheet of flame; a miniature flame thrower. The hair on her face began to burn off, leaving her with surprisingly pink



skin that soon blackened and began peeling off like singed paper. Her eyes changed from alive black berries to small dead ones and then to cinders. They could almost see her blood boil. She kept coming up alive.

Perez and Donner began to look panicky. "Die, goddamn you," Perez swore, under his breath. The rest of the men watched silently. Both Perez and Donner were sweating profusely. They held the rat under for impossibly long periods, but she kept surfacing, her burned face coming up next to her dead babies, her mouth opening and closing, grabbing lungfuls of air and fire.

After a long time she died.

Perez and Donner stood there for a while looking at her gently bobbing body. Their mouths were hanging open, and they looked drained and exhausted. Everybody else went quietly back into the hootch.

Wayne Karlin was a sergeant with the First Marine Air Wing at Marble Mountain near Da Nang, South Viet Nam. He lives in White Plains, New York. "Search and Destroy" has been reprinted from "Free Fire Zone", a book of short stories published by The Viet Nam Veterans Against the War.

AFTER THE AMBUSH

The word was passed back
Through the file — "Dinks ahead."
Some in our file pulled a cordon
Around the two mud hootches,
While others broke off
And moved closer,
Stalking, wondering, watching
— left, right, forward, behind.

The mud walls
were blackened from napalm,
But the families had lived.
They stood before us,
Frightened, bewildered, hateful,
An old man, two old women,
Only young woman, five small children.

Big John demanded, "Can Cuoc!"
The old man reached in
The pocket of his black shirt
And pushed the ID card toward us.
I watched the youngest, a little girl,
Clutch the old man's leg
And her eyes grow big
When he pleaded for his card.

Big John looked at the card
And fingered the safety on his 16.
"Where's your son old man?
VC on the hill?"
I bent forward
To ease the pressure
Of rucksack straps from my shoulders,
And looked from
The frightened eyes of the old man,
To the cringing eyes of the young woman,
To the hard,
Smooth swept ground
In front of the hootches,
To the small pot of dried corn.

— Frank A. Cross, Jr.

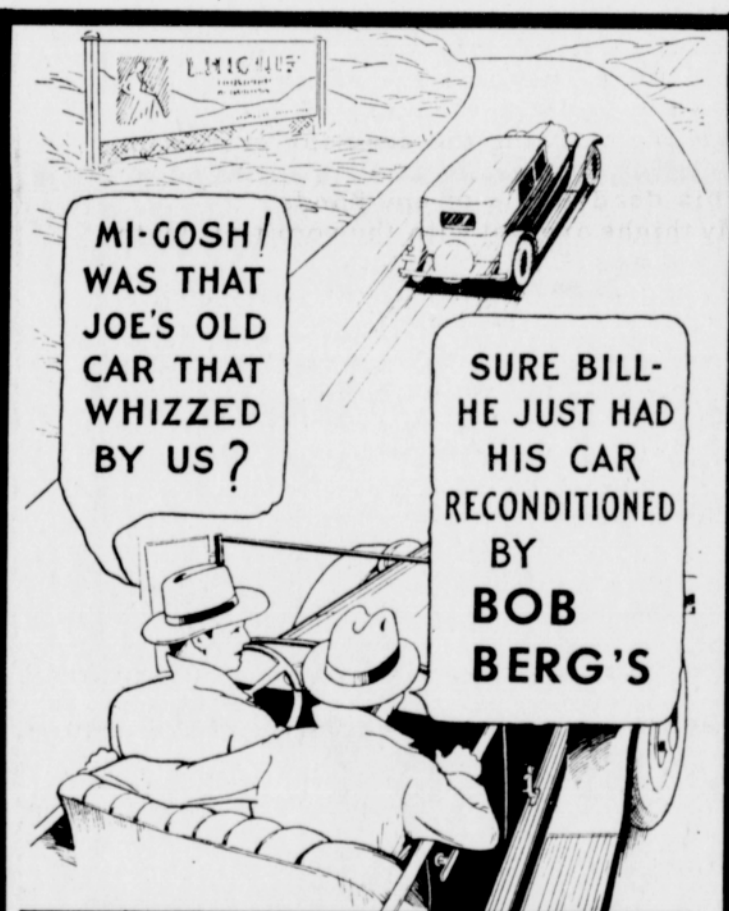
THE GIFT

What can I give you, child of the Asian sun?
Child of the holy rain, what shall it be?
You stand by the road, hopeful-eyed tiny one
Silent your cry though it echoes inside me,
Burns in the hollowness that once was a boy like you
When the future was vague and the whole world was new.

But when you are six you'll have had twice the years I've had
Learning that no one cares if you are good or bad
When you're a gook and I'm a white man
Who preaches ideals and takes what he can.
Tyranny's only a fact of your life, my friend.
Do you expect me to help you pretend
That I'll give you your freedom, the better to live?
I've nothing inside me, so here's what I'll give:
I'll bury your father who died by my hand
And build you a desert on your green land.
You'll have soldiers for brothers and if you want more,
For your sister or mother I'll give you a whore.

Why do you stare at me, shining-eyed ageless one?
Am I accused of betraying a trust?
Wheels are turning and leave you I must.
Your home is all burning; I give you the dust.

— Timothy Glover
(Dead in Viet Nam, 22 May 1968)



IMPORT AUTO CENTER
Parts & Service
for Imported Vehicles
738-8883
733 Ocean Way, Seaside

COLUMBIAN CAFE

ESPRESSO PASTA crepes

ASTORIA 325-CAFE

Prissy Martin's Old-Fashioned Herb Bouquet

Damask rosebuds, sage, dill,
artemesia, rosemary, oregano,
marjoram, lavender and sweet
grass fill this fragrant bouquet
hand-made at our coastal herb
farm - \$9.00 postpaid
Strawflower Farm P.O. Box 237 Manzanita, OR

