

"Son," Mom said, "If you just trust in God everything will be all right."

"I will, Mom," I said, sniffing.

I was mostly concerned about and afraid of being killed by the Vietnamese and of becoming a hard-core killer. I never was a great fighter or anything like that. My high school buddies and I got into a few scraps in our travels, dating girls from communities other than our own, but somehow we always managed to bluff our way out of fighting. And killing--that was out of the question. Although I lived in Roberson County, a rural section of North Carolina where hunting were a popular sport, I never even killed a rabbit. Now, I found myself en route overseas, to kill people.

I was barely in Fort Bragg before news had spread that Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., the civil rights activist, was shot and killed. Fighting and looting broke out in most major cities. I thought I would be safe being on the army base. I thought everyone on post would be as one, preparing to destroy the Vietnamese. I could not have been more wrong. Not only did fights break out after the news of King's assassination but they broke out every-day. I was quick to learn there was just as much, if not more danger, inside than outside. How would I protect myself? I would have problems identifying my enemies.

In my basic and AIT training, I had been conditioned and brainwashed about how to destroy the Viet Cong. Never did I receive any training in protecting myself from my squad members. Now, with a promise from Marcus that "its-not-over-with," I would probably need all my basic and AIT training plus a pair of eyes in the back of my head to handle that maniac.

Marcus had fallen in love with killing, exactly what I didn't want to happen to me. Once when our entire company was on a search and destroy mission. We searched the village thoroughly, at least we thought we had. Those Viet Cong were so clever they had ways of out-smarting us. When we thought the village was free of any danger from the Cong, we surrounded it and relaxed our on-guard positions. A few of us, if not all, took short naps, which was probably what the Viet Cong were waiting for. I dozed along with some of the other members in my squad. As I was waking up, blinking my eyes, I noticed three or four Viet Cong with AK-47s and homemade grenades, sneaking out of our perimeter. They had had all the opportunity in the world to blow us away, but choose not. I dared not move, not even an inch. I pretended to be asleep. One good deed deserves another, I figured. Marcus however, woke up and chose to have a field day. The fool could have gotten a lot of us hurt or even killed. He shot one, but the others got away. He continued to put holes in the one he got after he was down and out, completely dead. I watched the enemy's body as it jumped from the impact of the shots. My God, doesn't he realize the man is dead? He was always trying to look big. The truth was, he was making himself look small.

