



A physically and emotionally damaged Vietnam veteran wants to live a quiet life in his small southern hometown. A west coast drug cartel using mortuary services at Ft Benning interrupts his recovery. Lives are lost in Kill Em All.

Kill 'em All

By Sid Mickle

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A SAM BENNETT SERIES STORY

KILL 'EM ALL

SID MICKLE

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First Edition

The second thriller from the
Sam Bennett series:

Kill ‘em All

“Kill ‘em All” begins with an emotionally damaged former soldier finding help and putting his life back in order. While seeing his doctor at nearby Fort Benning he unexpectedly has a reunion of Vietnam veterans who served together and experienced the horrors of a war fought without a plan to win.

The Vietnam veterans had overcome their physical and mental wounds and joined a fight to stop members of a well-financed Chinese drug cartel known as “The Big Circle Boys”. This drug cartel partners with a rogue US Army Colonel, Vernon Delano, who is directing the flow of heroin into Sam’s rural Alabama county.

Small town corruption, intimidation and terror rule the day until Sam’s team fights a new war. Death and destruction intrude into the daily lives of local folks while they fight to stop evil people in powerful positions around them.

Lives are lost, and families are destroyed in the fight against influential businessmen and corrupt politicians who turn their backs on everyone. A hunger for power, influence, and enormous amounts of money are revealed in “Kill ‘em All”.

The first book in the Sam Bennett series is:

Who Killed Glenna

Other books from Sid Mickle include the following:

A Backwards Glance

Principles

If I Could Turn Back Time

The Class of '73

The Chambers Academy Football Review

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Table of Contents

Introduction.....	9
Chapter 1: Life And Near Death.....	11
Chapter 2: Killing the Ghosts.....	38
Chapter 3: Paying the Tab.....	56
Chapter 4: A Few Bad Men	70
Chapter 5: The Loveliest Village	93
Chapter 6: The Devil is in the Details	100
Chapter 7: On The Brink	110
Chapter 8: Pulling Back the Veil	118
Chapter 9: Stand Up and Fight	129
Chapter 10: First Contact	142
Chapter 11: The Battle of Wards Mill.....	160
Chapter 12: The Set Up.....	178
Chapter 13: Bethel Baptist Church	182
Chapter 14: Finding the Light	195
Chapter 15: If I Could Turn Back Time.....	204
Chapter 16: The Battle of Buffalo.....	226
Chapter 17: Kill ‘em All.....	238

Chapter 1: Life And Near Death

The damp leaves clung to Dwayne Fitzgerald's combat boots. The wet stink of the rotting vegetation around him never seemed to change. His close-cropped hair allowed sweat to stream down his face, chest and back. His shirt was soaked under his M-89 body armor and clung to him tightly. The flow below his bullet resistant vest had dampened his belt and created a wet line halfway down his green fatigue pants pockets.

Dwayne was twenty years old. A schoolteacher's son from Gaylord, Minnesota. He was six months into a year long tour with Charlie Company, 502nd Infantry. Minnesota seemed impossibly distant in the heat and humidity of the jungle outside Quang Tri City. Dwayne was a rifleman with the company's six man Alpha Fire team. He had been "Stork" since the first day of basic training nine months earlier. It had only taken the company wise asses one look at his 6-foot-2, 165-pound frame to land on that one.

The team was walking in what the veteran ground pounders called, "the bush" when they weren't calling it "the shit", or "Charles' house." This was a routine patrol: three troopers on either side of a small footpath winding toward the Ben Hai River. Six young men with orders to go out and see if anyone shot at them. Just behind Stork was a tall, muscular, grass-green newbie, on his first insertion. Fitzgerald had met Sam Bennett two days before the patrol and wondered how anyone could be so massive at nineteen. He had noticed a similarly sweat soaked Sam sucking down a full canteen when the squad took a break on the edge of a clearing twenty minutes earlier. Stork had said, "Slow down on the water man. You might need it later." He knew the aloof nod meant nothing. "He'll learn no to do that," he silently thought.

Now, walking down the trail, he turned to the FNG and said, "Don't get in a line. Widen out a step or two." The new guy took one step to the right before the brush around him danced from machine gun rounds. Stork Fitzgerald flew backwards three feet, landing on his back. He was inches from the green trooper with a large hole torn into his chest, and a jagged wound in his neck causing long spurts of blood to shoot onto his body armor. Fitzgerald was dead before he hit the damp, musty leaves.

Trooper Bennett was on the ground, frozen. He stared at the blood geysers and watched as they became shorter. Fitzgerald made no sound at all. He was quickly covered in a sticky, dark red flow. A smell of salt and iron filled Sam's nostrils. He stared at the body and remembered he had spoken with him minutes before.

Bennett stared at the body. He thought the racket from the VC ambush and his own team's weapons was quieting, but that couldn't be. The leaves, limbs and tops of small bushes were still being chopped to shreds all around him. Sam realized he wasn't breathing. He was about to pass out. He lowered his face into the leaves and screamed. Finally, he caught a breath and looked at Fitzgerald, hoping to see some movement. He realized the thought made no sense and then felt vomit surging upward into his mouth. He puked a pint of warm water from his mouth and nose.

The awful sensation only added to the misery of his worst living moment. Bullets streamed across Stork's boots and right ankle. The end of his boot disappeared leaving only a ripped sock and the stub of two toes. That sight, the mutilation of a dead man's toes, hurt him more than he could understand. It somehow kicked him into action. He grabbed Fitzgerald and tried pulling him closer. He was shocked at how heavy the dead man was, as he could barely move his body. Sam ran his hand into the webbing of Stork's field vest and rolled his own body to the left, hoping to gain some leverage. It worked, but now he was

covered with blood up to his elbow. He had pulled so hard that when he tried to flatten down, he was halfway covering the dead trooper. The open chest wound that killed Fitzgerald was directly under his ribs. He felt the straining pressure of vomiting again, but only had dry heaves. His eyes clouded and he felt his tears start to flow. He lay there, crying and screaming at no one.

A green clad body hit the ground beside him and a strong hand pulled him away from his dead teammate. Sergeant Marlon Berger was shaking him and suddenly he could hear what he was saying, "Shoot, you bastard. Fire straight ahead. Kill those sons of bitches." His first shots in Vietnam were with closed eyes. He was firing wild and high, but Berger was pleased with the reply to his order.

In the middle of a cold, March night, a young Vietnam veteran lay perspiring as a repetitive nightmare of fear and death haunted his sleep. He was back home with his parents after fourteen months of military service. He had come very close to dying in Vietnam. His journey to this fate was typical for many members of the US Army in early 1968. He had spent eight weeks in basic training, then nine weeks in AIT (advanced infantry training), both at Fort Benning. After that intense period he had a welcomed 30 day leave before deployment to Vietnam.

He arrived in Vietnam, February 14, 1968. It was not only Valentine's Day back in the real world, it was his mother's 51st birthday. He was so worn out from the past twenty four hours, he didn't even know what day it was until later that night. He had left Fort Benning, Georgia, and flown to Fort Lewis, Washington. There they waited through a thirty-six hour layover, confined to a barracks and mess hall area. His detachment, members of the 2nd Battalion, 502nd Infantry, boarded a chartered Boeing 707, and flew directly to Japan. He wasn't sure of the city since he was asleep until the plane roared down the runway on landing. They never deplaned and departed

as soon as the big jet was refueled. The next stop was Cam Rahn Bay, Vietnam, for a two day orientation.

Sam Bennett was a southerner and accustomed to heat and humidity. Stepping off the plane and standing at attention on the tarmac was a total shock to his system. Twenty minutes after landing, a rain shower swept over the troop intake pavilion where he waited to be processed. The shower was not cooling or refreshing, and the humidity from the bright sunshine seconds after the rain ended, seemed like an oven. Vietnam was far beyond anything he had experienced in his hometown of Chambersville, AL.

The next nine months of his young life would be spent in country with Baker Company, Alpha and Bravo Fire Teams at Camp Mudville near Quang Tri City in the Quang Tri Province, South Vietnam. After being seriously wounded when his company was overrun by a North Vietnam (NVA) battalion, he was hospitalized for seven weeks. Two weeks were spent at Walter Reed near Washington DC, and another five weeks at Martin Army Hospital, also located at Fort Benning.

The flashbacks to his action in Vietnam started almost as soon as he settled into his childhood room in the old farmhouse on County Road 183 in north Chambers County, Alabama. It was as if finally returning to the place where he once felt safe, loved and protected opened the door to his nightmares. In the beginning, he would awaken in a cold sweat and not remember exactly what he had dreamed. He only felt panicked and frightened during the early recurrences, but the dreams had grown more vivid and were a repeat of the painful emotions he had endured in Vietnam.

Almost every time he awoke from the painful dreams he would remember his squad leader, Sergeant Berger, and the last time he saw him. They were in the Mudville field hospital being prepped for the 93rd evacuation hospital in Da Nang. Berger had

said, "Well Corporal Bennett, you ain't ever goin' to hell, 'cause you've seen war in Vietnam, up close! Hell ain't got nothin on this stinking shithole!" That was Berger. Always fighting and never giving into the struggle.

Sam Bennett didn't expect fear and pain from Vietnam to follow him home. He never considered being haunted by scary dreams. He only wanted his body to heal so he could move away from everything related to the US Army.

Tonight's dream took him to his former firebase, Company B (Baker) Infantry Camp 9, which they had nicknamed, Mudville. The place was just far enough away from Quang Tri City to make that small hamlet of insanity seem like a slice of heaven. The city had bars, restaurants, hotels, clean sheets, hot water, whores and hopelessness in abundance. Camp Mudville in contrast, only had the typical Vietnam amenities. There were sturdy tents with wooden floors and a two foot tall wooden sidewall, multiple Army issue cots, footlockers at the end of each cot and a stand up locker similar to his high school football dressing room. Mudville had a company HQ building, a communications post, a relatively large and well equipped field hospital, a mess hall, a row of latrine stalls under tall poles covered by a heavy tarp, and a large helipad capable of landing six Huey helicopters at a time. On the outskirts of the main area stood a motor pool and a heavily sandbagged ammo dump.

Along with the US Army camp there was a small compound which housed a platoon of ARVN troops. They were a support group patrolling the camp perimeter and almost never saw action in the jungle. They were under the command of a Vietnamese captain who hid in his air conditioned office with two staffers most of the time. These guys were abundantly disliked by US troopers as they were constantly trying to steal anything of value to sell on the Quang Tri City black market.

Intentionally located on the opposite side of Mudville, far from the ARVN compound, was a small camp for a dozen or so South

Vietnamese Montagnard guides. These guys looked like ancient warriors, and several of them were leftovers from being attached to the French army units a few years earlier. Mudville was a bleak and unwelcoming place with constant smoke from burning latrine barrels or campfires stoked by the ARVN and Montagnard units. Even with its shortcomings, it was a welcome respite after three and four day patrols in the Vietnamese jungle.

The camp was also a magnet for mortars and rockets at any time, day or night. The day Sam had arrived the stench from a burning fuel tanker hung heavy in the damp, humid air. Two days earlier a mortar attack had hit the semi trailer filled with Jet A and JP 5 fuel for the thirsty Hueys. It had been intentionally parked fifty yards from the helipad. The trailer was constantly being switched out with fresh fuel even though the air group only used the fuel station to “top off” or give them enough fuel to fly to Hue or Quang Tri to fully fuel the birds. The random attack had wounded two troopers, burned out two deuce and a half trucks, and a jeep. Sam and Ray Nueves had talked about how unconcerned everyone was with the damage and the stink the attack had caused as they unpacked on day one. The unusual sights and smells seemed to be SOP for Camp Mudville.

Within a few hours the camp could go from a foot of mud to a tornado of dust stirred up from Hueys and supporting gunships. These mechanical marvels brought a gut tightening discomfort with every jungle insertion and ongoing apprehension about their return for removal from a hastily created jungle LZ. Every briefing on a patrol or new fire team insertion raised this fear to a high level and began a new round of hope that they would make it back if some VC, NVA, Russian or Chinese bastard shot you or blew you up.

Sam's dreams continued to refresh his memory of the camp and the stinking jungle. His dreams also painted a picture of Mudville troopers passing through the bugs, snakes, spiders, mosquito and rats the size of house cats that lingered around the

camp and gathered in quantity just outside the perimeter wire. He could almost smell the mud tracked barracks. As he slept, he could feel the steaming humidity that settled over the place, day after day. Even in his dreams he still remembered the exact location of his first firefight where Stork Fitzgerald died. The Ben Hai River was 13.6 miles from Quang Tri City and his patrol was three miles from the river. When the first round of shooting started he felt he was a million miles from any civilized place.

Some nights he saw the face of Pvt. Morris Bell, a likable young black kid from Baltimore who talked non-stop until a rocket explosion tore him to shreds. He remembered Bell staring back at him as he lay on a stretcher beside the Huey medivac copter. Sometimes he saw the faces of Benny Proski, Edgar Levine, Mike Kondice and Nick Cozarri. All of them were either killed or screaming in agony from bullet, mortar or grenade wounds. He could also see Arthur Green, a close friend from basic, bandaged and crying from a bullet to the chest, begging the members of the Bravo fireteam not to go back into the bush. He remembered Arthur's words just before being transported to the Evac Hospital, in Da Nang. He had taken a strong grip on Sam's shirt collar and began screaming, "We ain't doing no good here. They gonna kill us all."

If the night was really bad the worst dream came to him. He would dream about and relive the day he got hit. That day, he and Sergeant Berger were leading two Charlie Company fire teams on a wide, sweeping arc within a mile of the Ben Hai River. They ran into an NVA battalion that crossed the river unnoticed and were rushing toward Quang Tri City to capture an ARVN 105 MM artillery battery. Sam's company commander responded with all the support he had, including close air support. Berger's fire team took two casualties and he called for a medivac and airlift for both his Alpha team and Sam's Bravo unit. The two teams linked up and sent six uninjured troopers to a nearby LZ with the three WIAs. Berger, Ray Nueves and Sam provided cover and planned to pull back in time to catch

the second wave of slicks (slang for Hueys) taking them out of the fight. They were outgunned, cut off from the LZ and nearly overrun before a relief unit reached them. The three man team killed over fifteen NVA troops as they held on and prayed for help. After Berger and Nueves were hit, Sam was the last man standing.

Berger was shot twice and fell against Sam. Shortly after, Ray Nueves, his closest friend in Vietnam, was wounded in the back by enemy fire. He remembered Berger moaning in agony as he rolled him behind his back. He could see Ray's vacant, staring eyes as he pulled him off the M-79 machine gun and on top of Berger. All the time, firing with one hand and moving the two wounded troopers with the other. The ache in his hands from vibrations of his own machine gun felt like needles sticking into him and were present in his dream. Finally, the blast from an NVA mortar ripped open his right thigh, gashed his neck and almost blinded him with dirt and debris. He remembered his last conscious words, "Vietnam is going to kill me after all."

Three weeks after being stabilized and out of danger, he left Vietnam. His first stop was Landstuhl Medical Center in Landstuhl, Germany, then several weeks of care in Walter Reed Army Medical Center in Bethesda, MD. He was finally shipped to Fort Benning's Martin Medical Center for several weeks. He was a highly decorated veteran, honorably discharged from the US Army, and he was totally broken.

Tonight, the dream was particularly bad. Every other time he had this nightmare, he woke up as he recalled his own last words during the vicious firefight. Tonight, the terrible nightmare with its perfectly exacting smells and voices, blood, horror and memories, continued. Instead of waking, he was falling through a long black corridor and he heard familiar voices repeating, "Sam Bennett isn't coming home, he's dead. Vietnam killed him." His mind was spinning tonight and tormented with the thought

he really was dead. He sat up in bed screaming, "I'm dead. They killed me!"

This night, he heard another familiar voice saying, "I'm here Sam, everything is alright. Wake up boy, you're ok." The strong, reassuring voice of his father and the small table lamp flashing on in his bedroom, shook him from the painful nightmare. Sam sat up in his bed, soaked in sweat and shaking. It took a few seconds but he soon realized his dad was in the room and walking toward him. He was shaken, and terribly embarrassed by his fear. He hated his father seeing his trembling hands, arms and face. Bill Bennett put his hand on Sam's shoulder and said quietly, "You had a bad one tonight boy, but you're safe. It was just those damn dreams again. Let's get you into some dry clothes."

For the last two months, once or twice a week, either Bill or Gail Bennett were awakened by the restless and dream filled nights their son endured. The nightmares didn't come every night, but they were common and painful to hear. Each time Sam relived Vietnam in his dreams one of them moved to a chair in the hall outside his room. If it was a very bad night, they would go into Sam's room and sit in a desk chair by the window hoping he would go back to sleep and avoid another torturous night.

Sam shook off the startled wake up and looked at his dad. After a few minutes he said, "I'm sorry Dad. Didn't mean to wake you up. I wish you and Mom didn't have to listen to me." Bill Bennett's six-foot-two, work hardened frame moved easily back to the desk chair. He was fifty-six years old and had spent most of his life working in the local cotton mill eight hours a day. After his regular work shift he came home to do more work on the farm. For years Bill had farmed the ground and split the proceeds with the property owners, Horace and Edward Felder, before being able to buy the small farm. He was one tough man and even though he was an imposing figure with a tendency to cuss like a sailor, he was privately emotional and sensitive. Like

most every man from his generation, he hid his emotions like a terrible family secret. Since Sam had returned from Vietnam, decorated with a Silver Star, wounded and mentally shaken, he had not been able to hide those emotions as well as before. Like any parent, hearing his child being tormented by wartime memories tore him apart inside and drew tears easily. The big, tough man most people respected and some honestly feared, gave up trying to hide his own pain. He and his wife Gail had each cried more in the last few months than any other time in their lives.

He smiled at Sam and tried to lie convincingly, saying, "Boy, you know I'm a light sleeper. I was awake before I heard you so don't worry about it." His story didn't work as Sam recalled how his dad was in fact, a very heavy sleeper. Once he had slept through a wind storm that blew down a large pecan tree in the front yard, crushing the corner of the porch. Gail Bennett had teased him for months about having to shake him awake as she feared a tornado was destroying the entire farmhouse. Still, he let the white lie go as there was nothing he could do anyway. Sam climbed out of bed and changed into a sweatshirt and jeans. He said, "Go back to bed Pops. I'm wide awake. I think I'll stay up and go downstairs." Bill stood and said, "Do you mind some company? I'm ready to get up anyway." Sam smiled at his dad and noticed the blue illuminated face of his alarm clock read 3:40 AM. "No sir, I wouldn't mind having a cup of coffee with you if you're sure you want to stay up."

They moved into the hall and walked toward the stairway only to hear Gail Bennett's voice. "What are you two doing now?" Sam turned toward his mother and noticed how tired she looked. She was four years younger than Bill, but seemed, at the moment, to be ten years older. Sam's heart ached for the worry and strain he had caused both his parents. That strain was most noticeable with his mother. She had always been the strongest, most faithful person he had ever known. She was still beautiful,

unwavering in her faith, but he thought to himself, “Damn she looks so tired.”

Before these hard days Gail had always been the figure of good health and energy. Her Scottish heritage had given her beautiful green eyes and jet black hair. Now those same eyes were sunken and rimmed with dark circles by a lack of sleep. However, her thick black hair showed no signs of gray. She suffered greatly from the circumstances of her youngest child’s life. She hated to be fussed over and refused to sink into self-pity. No, Gail Bennett would carry her part of the load without complaint and wouldn’t stand for anyone worrying about her troubles.

She had been supported by her resilient husband and had also leaned on her oldest child, daughter Carolyn and her husband Louis Carter. They had brought the Bennett's first grandchild into the family four months after Sam had been wounded. Carolyn and Louis were constant visitors to the farm with young William Jason Carter.

Sam loved Carolyn and Louis. He was thankful for them trying to lessen the load on his parents. He tried to show interest in them and their young child, but felt emotionally empty. He wondered if he felt guilt or anger over his failure to celebrate the family’s first grandchild. His parents, Carolyn and Louis agonized over the contrast of his suffering and their joy. The up and down array of emotions within the family was painful for everyone. Sister Carolyn openly hated the war in Vietnam. It had taken away her baby brother and she wasn’t sure he would ever come back.

Sam walked to his mom and kissed her forehead. His own 6-foot-4, 220-pound frame towered over her. He hugged his mother close and said, “I’m so sorry I woke you up, Mom. I’m fine. Please go back to bed. Dad says he was already awake, so we’re going downstairs.” She smiled back and said, “Your Daddy woke me up, not you. I think I will lay back down for a little

longer, but I'll make us a big breakfast in a little bit, ok?" She closed the door and fell asleep almost immediately, knowing there would be no more nightmares for a while. Bill and Sam sat quietly at the kitchen table, drinking coffee together.

Bill concentrated on his coffee cup. He wrapped his big hand around it, took a quick sip, then put it on the table. He stared at the black liquid in the cup. He knew if he looked up he'd catch his son's eye, and Sam would see the worry he felt. After the Bennett men had studied their cups, their fingernails, the table and the wallpaper for a good five minutes, Sam forced himself to speak up. "Dad," he said, "I think I should move out of the house. I'm causing y'all too much trouble. The two of you ain't sleeping, and me being here makes everything harder." Bill paused, and took a deep breath before he spoke. "I understand that, but do you really think that's the answer? Boy, don't you know she'll worry more if you ain't close enough for her to watch after you?" Sam wasn't fooled by Bill's effort to place the subject of worry on Gail alone. But he let it pass. Bill continued, "We both know what the problem is, and we both know who has to work on the answer. I ain't able to fix this for you and neither is she, but we damn sure are willin' to help you. Do you understand me?"

Sam did understand. He was the only one who could find a way to end the nightmares and his occasional lapses into a dark, sullen place. The only person he had been able to share the entire story with was his girlfriend, Cindy Crossin. Today, he was back in his childhood home, sleeping in the same bedroom he had occupied when his life seemed full of hope, excitement and incredible opportunity. Now, he was a grown man, an adult with a particular struggle. At times, it was very tough to fit in and be comfortable in his parents' world. He had left them as an inexperienced, naive kid. With Vietnam, he had traveled across the world and seen things very few people from his part of the world ever see. When he first arrived, he had never even had a beer. Two months later, he and Ray Nueves had drunk enough

beer to fill the small pond behind the farm's barn. That change and its pleasant memory was one of many for a kid from a small, quiet southern town. He had shed his Sunday School kid personality in 'Nam. He developed a love for cigars after smoking dozens with Sergeant Berger and Warrant Officer (WO-1) Chandler Bettenhausen. He had never met anyone from New England before meeting Chandler. They were from very different worlds and the two became friends quickly. It felt odd how two people from totally different worlds had enjoyed each other's company. Chandler was a blue blood from Stamford, Connecticut who had disappointed and truly pissed off his wealthy parents by leaving Brown University and joining the Army. He qualified for flight school and chose to fly close support in Hueys. Later on he moved to the Huey Hog which was a modified gunship. When his background became known in Mudville, he was nicknamed, "Money Man." After three months of close ground support missions, his name was changed to "Main Man Chan." He was simply another dedicated, tough man who fought like hell in Vietnam to keep other soldiers alive.

The conversation about living at home made him think of Cindy. He remembered how hard it had been to tell her about Vietnam. The first time they'd tried to talk about the war was on a quick trip to Destin. He had brought the long letter he had started when Stork Fitzgerald had been killed. He had used it almost as a diary. Writing down his experiences was miserable. In the beginning, he had hoped telling Cindy about them would help him make sense of the war. Later on, he often wondered if he'd ever see her again.

Even on his few optimistic days it was hard to imagine her reading about Mudville, the jungle, the screaming and the deaths. He stopped writing about the war the day Arthur Green begged him and Ray not to go back into the jungle. He had decided to finish the letter in Martin Hospital during his rehab stint, but kept it hidden away for months. He had given it to her

the first night in Destin, after a long morning in the car and a hot afternoon on the beach. He saw the shock on her face as she read. She closed her eyes at several points. Sam sat in agony during her long silent breaks. He would have given anything to have burned the letter months ago. As he watched, he felt stupid and careless for letting her read it. Cindy took deep breaths as she struggled to find any words of understanding. Finally, she set the creased, stained paper down and took his hand. "I can't say anything to help you," she said, her eyes damp. "I don't even know how you survived. This is the worst thing I have ever read. Just know I love you and I am sorry you had to see any of it. I just can't understand it, but I am happy you shared it with me."

Sam was sure she meant every word. In that moment, he made a promise to himself. He would never tell her anything more about the war. If he had to talk about it, he would find someone else to do that with. He loved Cindy Crossin. There wasn't much else in his life that felt like it had any future. Still, something wasn't right. That day his mind had raced with questions. "What am I even doing with her?" he asked himself. "What the hell is she doing with me? She can do better than a farm boy with a screwed-up head. She deserves a lot more."

Still, he had to admit that he needed her, and he had to admit she didn't seem to mind. She hadn't pulled away from him once since he'd come back from Martin Hospital. She never failed to understand when he wouldn't talk, or couldn't bear to spend time with friends or family. He was sure they loved each other. Was it enough? Was feeling lost without her strength the right reason to hold on to her? She was in school now, fall semester at Auburn University. Could he be enough for her?

Sam realized his dad was talking again. The 90 minutes they had spent together had felt good. Normal. "Sorry, Dad, I wasn't listening." Bill just smiled, said something about more coffee, and let the question go unanswered. As he picked up the coffeepot, Gail stepped into the kitchen. She said, "I need 20

minutes to get breakfast ready.” She glanced at Bill. “Don’t you have some animals to check on, Honey?” She was hoping her husband would get the hint and give her a few minutes alone with her son. Bill mumbled something about his work never ending and gave her a kiss. Sam stood and said, “OK, I need to shower. Back in 15.”

Gail didn’t get her alone time with him, but dealt with that minor disappointment like all the others of the past few months. She did press him for one thing. “Give your mama a hug and a kiss before you go,” she said, reaching up to her massive son’s distant shoulders. He gently squeezed her close and kissed her cheek. Then he playfully lifted her off the floor as he had done since he was 15 years old. As she always did, Gail insisted he put her down. She didn’t get her private conversation, but enjoyed the playful teasing that had been missing for so long. Even Sam realized he had unconsciously teased his mom like the old days. He felt comfortable and relaxed as he went upstairs. Soon he stepped from the shower and pulled open a drawer looking for a fresh pair of jeans. He picked them up and noticed a t-shirt with the words “An Hotel” printed on its front. Finding the cheap, fading shirt immediately took him back to the only time he had stayed at the old hotel. He sat on his bed and let his thoughts drift back to that time. He smiled as he remembered the hotel pool, the bar, and the tiny Japanese restaurant that sat directly across the narrow street from the lobby. His next thought was of Lucy Tan.

Sam pushed his pillow upright, then sat back against the creaky old headboard. He hadn’t thought about Lucy for a long time. He had pushed her from his thoughts. He didn’t feel any guilt about having been with her while Cindy was waiting for him at home. He thought she was proof that every relationship he had didn’t turn into a disaster. Right or wrong, he was happy he had met her. She had offered him what had been missing with Glenna and Denise. And his feelings for her had certainly felt a

lot less weighty than his hopes and fears for Cindy. Thinking about Lucy was uncomplicated and pleasant.

He had met Lucy Tan on a bus ride in Quang Tri City while on a two day pass out of Mudville. She was South Vietnamese and worked as a nurse's aid in the military hospital. As they waited to board the bus, a trooper had pushed past her and said, "Get your slope ass out of my way, bitch." She had stepped back and lowered her head allowing several other soldiers to board. Sam felt his temper rising and saw the shock and hurt on her face. The moment reminded him of all the insults Glenna McMann had endured as he silently did nothing. It also reminded him of the abuse Demarcus Carr had gone through as one of the first black athletes on his Chambers County High School football team. He despised the slurs and ignorant comments by a few redneck fans of his own team and from visiting teams.

She was in Army fatigues with the Red Cross emblem on both shoulders. The nameplate over her heart said "TAN" in neat block US Army letters. On the other side of her chest her ID tag read: "US Army Hospital: Quang Tri City." When he reached her, he smiled and said, "After you ma'am." She hesitated and he gently tugged on her arm to move her in front of him. Lucy took a window seat and immediately turned her face to the window. She was embarrassed and humiliated since the dumb-ass trooper had been loud and angry. Sam had slowly moved three rows past her and stopped in front of the guy who insulted her. Sam read the guy's name plate out loud, and extended his hand. "PFC Douglas? Are you assigned to 2nd platoon, Dog Company?" The prick actually smiled and said, "No I work in battalion headquarters here in Quang Tri," while shaking Sam's hand. "Do I know you?" Sam's hand covered his and with a mixed sense of joy and anger, he began to crush it with his vice like grip. The REMF (rear echelon mother-f'er) with the smart mouth immediately said, "Shit man, you are breaking my hand!" Sam leaned close to him and said in a loud, clear voice, "No, and I don't want to know any chickenshit REMF like you. I figured you

were in Dog Company because you act like a dog. But you need to look at me close boy, 'cause if I ever see you disrespect another Army hospital staffer like you just did, I am going to knock your head off and piss down your throat." The guy was banging on Sam's hand with his left and began to shout, "Ok man, ok, I'm sorry. Let me go man."

He released the wrinkled, squeezed white hand, and straightened up. Glancing around at the other troopers he continued just as loudly as before, "That goes for the rest of you REMF sons-of-bitches." A half-dozen faces stared at him and said nothing. He turned, walked back to Lucy Tan's seat and said, "Ma'am, do you mind if I sit by you?" She had heard the commotion and watched what had happened. She nodded silently and after a long pause said, "Thank you, it is ok. Do not have trouble over me, please." In his best, intentionally overdone, western hero voice, he smiled and said, "You are welcome little lady, no trouble at all. That boy just forgot his manners." His corny line drew a smile from her even though she had no idea what he was attempting.

During the fifteen minute bus ride to downtown they talked about their jobs and got acquainted. She wasn't beautiful. She was normal. She was so clean, and she smelled of soap. She reminded him of the bright white sheets his mother hung on a clothesline back on the farm. It was so strange to see anyone who looked clean, orderly and pleasant on the streets of Quang Tri City.

Sam described being assigned to Mudville and Fire Team Bravo with little detail. Lucy told him her family lived in a small farm village outside Hue. She had been lucky, able to attend a nearby missionary school. She was sent to Quang Tri City to volunteer at the city hospital. It was hoped she would earn an opportunity to work in the Army field hospital. For months her work only earned her food and a small room shared with two other female orderlies. Finally, she was recruited to the hospital unit because

she had some experience and was reasonably bilingual. Her monthly income there was more than her parents earned rice farming in six months.

With her stop coming near, she told Sam “thank you” again and moved into the aisle. She stopped, turned to Sam and said, “Want to have beer with me?” He smiled at her phrasing and said, “I sure would.” One thing led to another and he spent the entire afternoon with Lucy. After an early dinner he asked if she wanted to go to his hotel. He surprised himself with his bold move, and was equally surprised when she said yes. The sex wasn’t based on anything more than a need to be near someone as lonely as the other. She spent the final two days of his three day pass, her only days off for two weeks, with him. On the last day, Lucy awoke early. She sat beside him and kissed him goodbye. Stopping at the door, she turned back and said, “You a nice man. Please don’t die. Go home with family.” He never looked for her on return trips to Quang Tri, and never saw her again. He hoped she was safe, but really didn’t want to know anything more. Now he wondered what had happened to Lucy Tan. Was she safe, was she still in Quang Tri City? He quickly dismissed the uncertain thoughts about her. He only wanted to think of how good he felt about knowing her.

He closed his eyes and thought about the random passes the team received to Quang Tri City. The team was most always given time off after two jungle insertions. They gave the men something to look forward to and something bordering on a normal schedule. He and Ray had burned some midnight oil on a few trips. He wished he could only recall the few good things from Vietnam. Like the ones with Ray and others from Baker Company, instead of the mind twisting memories of fear, and dead troopers.

Then his thoughts turned to his one and only official 7 day R & R (rest and relaxation) pass to Australia. Sam wasn’t sure how Sergeant Berger had pulled it off, but he’d managed to get his

name, and Sam's, substituted for two poor bastards who were spending the next month in a hospital. After Sam completed his second ever flight on a passenger jet, a spotless Pan Am 707, he and Berger waited on the tarmac for their bags. When their green duffle bags arrived, Berger said, "See you here in one week. Don't get your ass in any trouble and don't get robbed." It was clear he had plans that did not include Corporal Sam Bennett.

The Army's official guidebook said Australia was full of exciting sights and activities. Sam had only seen his hotel's pool and bar. But it was a fair trade. You could keep the coral reefs and kangaroos. Sam had seen the best of Australia. He had seen Janet Cook.

Janet was a native Australian who met Sam at the luxurious Chevron Hotel's pool bar in Sydney. He was chatting with a well endowed redhead in a bright yellow bikini at the bar. The attractive woman simply walked away when he asked if she wanted to "get together." The much less naive young guy was no longer the Boy Scout he was when he arrived in Vietnam. She had watched Sam's small drama and sent the bartender to him with a drink. When he asked why, the bartender only pointed to Janet. Sam made his way to an empty seat beside her and said, "Thanks for the drink." She had reminded him a little of Cindy. She was blonde, sexy, and had a great smile. But where Cindy had been lean and athletic, Janet was ... different. More of a world wise woman. She had big blue-gray eyes. Her wispy blonde eyebrows stood out almost white against her deep tan. She didn't have Cindy's athletic figure. She looked like a former athlete who had decided to work out less and drink more beer.

Over the next couple of hours he learned she was a former member of an active swim club back home. The early morning's long workouts had become boring and after college she decided to skip the pool and enjoy the bar scene instead. Janet was on holiday with two friends from her hometown of Canberra about four hours away. They'd picked the Chevron Hotel out of a

phone book. "Lucky for us, we found it full of handsome Yanks," she laughed. They had three days remaining on their trip. After more drinks and conversation, she leaned closer to him. "How about joining me for dinner?" she asked. With all the whiskey swimming in his bloodstream, Sam couldn't hold back a big grin, but tried to pull himself together. "What about your friends? Won't they miss you?" Janet smiled and said, "No problem. We are all adults and don't need to spend every minute together. Besides, I've only seen my girlfriend Shelly for ten minutes the past two days. I think she found a friend."

They planned to meet in the lobby bar at 6:00PM. She walked into the bar wearing skin tight blue slacks and a bright orange halter top. Sam noticed how almost every guy in the bar checked out her beautiful, round ass and looked her over as she walked to him. What was unusual was the fact that most every woman in the bar took a long look at her as well. He stood and reached out to her. She kissed him softly and said, "Am I late? I didn't think Kerry would ever get out of the shower." He smiled, said no, and pulled her close and kissed her again. Janet squeezed his arm and said, "Order me a drink love."

They sat in the hotel lounge making small talk. Sam tried to keep his eyes on her face. With an effort, he focused on the conversation instead of her sexy body. She had been an accountant for a large trucking company for six years. He was surprised to learn she had seven years on him. She talked about swimming, about Aussie politics, and movies he'd never heard of. Janet wasn't at all like the women he had grown up around back home. She said exactly what she thought. She matched Sam drink for drink. She cursed with a practiced and familiar ease. He couldn't imagine Cindy dropping F-bombs in a public bar with no concern for who was listening. There was something a little dangerous about this woman. She was brash, funny, smart and damned sexy. She reached down to adjust a sandal and her large, round breasts almost fell out of the halter top. She reached over with her opposite hand and casually pulled the top

back into place. “Oops,” she said with a smile. “Almost showed you my boobies before dinner, hun.” He smiled and said, “I don’t mind that at all, Janet.” She leaned against him and with a little softer than her normal voice said, “You just keep on being nice and charming, and that might happen later.” He wasn’t sure if the facial heat he felt was from a blush, or the effects of the booze and her great body.

After dinner, they sat together on one side of the big banquet booth. An awful Aussie lounge singer was murdering Sinatra and Dean Martin songs. Janet leaned close to him and said, “Got a girl back home?” “Yes,” he said. She gave him a wry smile. “Charming, sexy and honest. Shit, mate, I might spend the next couple days with you.” He smiled back and said, “What about you? Anybody special back home?” She kept her eyes locked on his as if she was interviewing him. “A fiancé, but the jury is still out on the whole marriage thing.” She saw his glance down at the table. “Do I shock you, Sam? Change your mind?” He met her eyes, “It’s really not that different from me, is it?” That was clearly the right answer. She waved to the waiter and mouthed, “check.” For a moment he wondered if he had made her angry, but before he could speak, she said, “Neither of them is here Sam, we are. I don’t want to mess with your deal and you won’t impact mine. I really like you and if you want me, we should go upstairs right now.” He dug in his pocket for cash as he stood, and took her hand. She tossed a twenty on the table, “My treat this time,” and pulled him toward the bar exit.

Two days later, Janet kissed him long and soft. “Don’t get your ass shot off, please. Go back home and figure out if that girl is right for you. I think I have my answers already.” In ten minutes, she was dressed and closing the door to his room. He never spoke to Janet Cook again, and never regretted spending time with her. She wasn’t his future, but she had been an unforgettable part of his past.

His wandering thoughts were interrupted by his dad's voice. "You ok up there Sam? Breakfast is ready." He pulled on the An Hotel t-shirt, slipped into his well-worn Adidas tennis shoes and headed for the kitchen. The pleasant, uncomplicated memories from earlier had shifted his mood. He decided to work on his relationship questions later in the day. For the first time in months he smiled, laughed and chatted with his folks. The three of them sat around the breakfast table for almost two hours. They were the happiest moments he had spent in the old farmhouse in a very long time. After helping clear the breakfast dishes, he asked if he could help his father with anything. Bill Bennett said no, then suggested Sam take it easy and do what he wanted to do. Deep down, Sam felt relief that nothing was pressing around the farm or with his dad. While they were talking over breakfast he thought about how long it had been since he had taken a ride around town. It was something he and his friends, male and female, did for hours after school and in the summers. Back then, he would slip a cassette tape into the player in his Chevy Nova and slowly cruise all over town. He thought back to the cool nights driving around with Cindy listening to songs. He remembered a few tunes. There was the Beatles-Paperback Writer, The Troggs-Wild Thing, The Monkees-Last Train to Clarksville. All were soft, low key fun. Then he remembered the harder, more angry rock music he heard almost every minute he was in Mudville. There was We Gotta Get Out Of This Place by The Animals, Paint it Black, All Along the Watchtower and Fortunate Son. That edgy music propelled him back to a place he wanted to forget. No, he wasn't ready to listen to those songs yet, but he desperately wanted to hold on to the pleasant backward glance to time before 'Nam.

He shook the anxiety and decided to take the ride into town. Since Cindy was still using his car in Auburn, he asked his dad if he could borrow his truck. His dad sat back and said, "We can do better than that. Why don't you ride your old motorcycle into town?" He barely heard the next exchange between his parents. Gail was worried about him riding to town on the bike after

being off it for so long, and protested. Bill pushed back saying, "Let the boy alone sweetheart. He ain't forget how to ride that damned old bike." He jumped into the conversation. "You have my old Harley? How did that happen? We traded it in when granddad bought my car?" Sam's dad stood, moved to the kitchen door and said, "Come on, I'll tell you about it." The normal, "Please be careful son. Don't go too fast until you are sure you can handle it" comments from his protective mother were pretty much ignored. He slowed at the door and said, "Don't worry, I will. Love you," as he hurried after his dad's long legged strides toward the barn.

Sam was anxious to see the bike, but equally anxious to understand why and how his dad had regained it. Bill put his son off while they walked to the large fading red barn. He took Sam through the open dirt driveway in the center of the barn, and walked to the far right corner. He pulled an old dusty paint tarp away. There stood the Harley-Super 10 he had purchased from Travis Moore. He had traded it back to him when his grandfather bought Mr. Moore's 1963 Nova as a graduation present for Sam.

The smile on Sam's face was worth the world to his dad. Seeing him excited, animated and happy had taken a long time. Sam turned to him, but before he could ask a question, Bill spoke. "When Mr. Moore heard about you getting hurt, he brought the bike over here. He was really shaken up about your trouble. He told me the bike was serviced and ready to go when you got home. Wouldn't take a damn dime from me, and believe you me, I tried like hell to pay him. Ole Travis wouldn't even listen. All he said was, "It ain't enough. Ain't nearly enough!" I just shook his hand and thanked him. You might want to ride by his house..." Sam cut him off and blurted out, "Jesus Christ Dad, I'll go right now." Realizing he had never spoken that way in front of his father, he quickly apologized. "Sorry, didn't mean to talk like that." Bill gave him a quick grin and said, "Sam, you're a grown man. You don't need to hold back on me or anybody else.

You're old enough to talk any way you want." Sam knew he had grown up as the spitting image of his father. They looked alike and had behaved very similarly. Vietnam had changed him, but did not remove the deeply ingrained respect he felt for his parents.

Just touching the heavy rubber throttle grip gave Sam a slight shiver. He wanted to hug his old man. He wanted his dad to understand how much he loved him for everything he had done for him. He hesitated for a second. Since he turned fourteen and began riding the bike, their exchanges had been different. Most of the time they shook hands, bumped against each other in fun, or tried to grab one another by the back of the neck, and give an aggressive squeeze. These changes were his dad's way of recognizing that Sam was growing up. At fourteen, the bike had brought independence, but included an ironclad set of rules. Sam walked to his dad and thought about taking his hand. When he looked at the big smile on his face, he thought to himself, "Screw that shit." He grabbed his tough old daddy and hugged him tightly. The returned firm hug from his dad almost brought tears to his eyes. After a few seconds, Sam said, "I love you daddy." Bill held on to him and without hesitation said, "I love you boy. Love you with all my heart." Nothing else needed to be said and wasn't.

Finally, Bill pushed back, turned away to gather himself and said, "See if it'll start. I ain't ever tried to get her going." Sam stepped over the seat and pushed out the swivel top on the kick starter. He made sure the ignition was off, and snapped the kick start pedal four quick times. He flipped the ignition to on, and kicked it again. The big motor sputtered, popped and then died. He kicked it two times in quick succession while cranking the throttle grip. The Super 10 roared to life and blew white smoke out the tailpipes.

Twenty minutes later Sam pulled into the driveway of Travis Moore's house. He dropped the kickstand and began walking

toward the front of the house. Suddenly a voice caught him off guard as it swept to him from his left side. His infantry instincts snapped into effect and he almost dropped to one knee to protect himself. He turned to the sound and saw a familiar face staring at him. Travis Moore had stopped dead in his tracks when he saw Sam's reaction to his shout. He was embarrassed and unsure of what to do next. Sam was also embarrassed and he immediately tried to play off his overreaction. He said, "Hey there Mr. Moore. Didn't see you first thing," as he walked toward the shaken old man. They shook hands, but Travis Moore looked anxious and a little sad. "I'm sorry Sam. I should know better than to..." Sam cut him off quickly and said, "No, Mr. Moore, don't think that way. I'm not quite back up to speed yet. I'm just glad you didn't have an AK in your hand", casually referring to the common weapon he had faced too many times in Vietnam. "My fault for not paying attention." His wide smile and the easy conversation made the awkward moment end, and also made Travis Moore smile. Inside his gut, Sam could feel the knot of fear and worry start to relax. It was a familiar feeling and something he felt almost every second he was in the jungle during his abbreviated tour. He was pleased with himself for realizing and calming Travis Moore's concern. He was also happy he didn't have a weapon. Most likely, it would have been pointed at Mr. Moore's chest out of pure reflex.

The two talked about the Harley Super 10 and Sam pleaded with Travis Moore to allow him to pay for the bike. Finally, Travis had enough and said, "It's like I told yore daddy, you ain't paying me for nothin'. That's been yore bike since you was a kid. I just been watching after it for you." Sam knew he was wasting his time with the smiling old farmer.

After one more final attempt to pay and a few more minutes of catching up, he decided to get going. "I appreciate this Mr. Moore. My granddad would be aggravated with me for not paying, but I guess I can't change your mind." The simple one word answer was what he expected. Travis Moore said, "Nope."

A final handshake sealed the conversation and Sam swung his leg over the seat and kick started the bike. Mr. Moore walked to him and said, "Change that oil regular. Bring it by here anytime she don't run right. I'll straighten her out for you." With a nod and another thank you, he swung the handle bars to the right and eased down the dirt drive. As he drove away, he thought to himself, "That's a damn good man right there. Granddad knew how to pick out friends."

He turned left instead of retracing his arrival direction and roared down County Road 88. The winding dirt road would help him get acclimated to the heavy bike and take him to State Highway 77, just south of the Penton community. From there he would take another left, then be in downtown Chambersville in fifteen minutes. Continuing down the rutted dirt road took him past Mr. Moore's parents' farm. It was maybe two miles from Travis' house. Sam remembered how nice the place had always been kept up before the elder Moore's passed away. Since they were his grandparents' neighbors, he had been all over the property years before. One memorable feature of the place was their two story, red barn sitting fifty yards or so across the road from the house. The Moore's old family home place was crumbling but the barn looked to still be solid.

Sam drove past the barn, and glanced into his right side mirror. He caught a glimpse of a familiar sight. Behind the barn was an Army green deuce and a half truck. He was surprised to see the big military vehicle there. He thought it looked to be in good shape and noticed the rear section's green tarp cover was taunt and whole. "What in the hell," he thought to himself, and considered turning back to check out the truck. He slowed, but didn't stop the bike. He guessed Travis Moore had probably bought the truck from Army surplus and used it around the farm. If anyone could keep that tough old diesel running it was Mr. Moore. He focused on the dirt road again and added a twist of throttle to the bike. He had places to see.

Inside the Moore family's barn, a former member of the People's Republic Army lowered a year old US Army M-1 carbine and shouted at two other men unloading boxes from the truck. They had been lucky. If the motorcycle had stopped and turned back toward them he would have shot the driver, then buried him and the bike behind the barn.

The barn crew were running late after having a right front tire go flat just as they pulled off CR 88. The man with the carbine was worried and anxious. He shouted at the workers again and hoped Dominic Harraway wouldn't find out they had gotten a late start and were working in daylight due to the tire. He decided to lie about the situation and tell Dominic they discovered the flat after unloading in the early morning darkness. He would say they decided not to drive back to the garage in Phenix City, Alabama in daylight. The old garage was only a few miles from Fort Benning, and where the truck was stored. He hoped the lie would be convincing and not cause Harraway to beat the shit out of him later that night.

When the truck was unloaded, Bao Shi Dan backed it close to the barn doors and drug an old, rotting tarp over the front end. He was one of Harraway's lieutenants and in charge of bringing chemicals to the barn. Bao was also one of the few members of the transfer team who could speak English. That was needed, just in case they picked up a traffic stop or needed help from the locals. He brought chemicals used to cut the raw heroin, which another driver delivered from the Mortuary Affairs processing center at Fort Benning.

Sam had just escaped another bullet simply because his normal impatience overcame his curiosity about the truck.



A physically and emotionally damaged Vietnam veteran wants to live a quiet life in his small southern hometown. A west coast drug cartel using mortuary services at Ft Benning interrupts his recovery. Lives are lost in Kill Em All.

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