



# Token to Chaos Bombs Bullets and Booby Traps, Vietnam

*Barry A. Popkin*

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To my fellow warriors and those to follow. What is not recorded is forgotten.

For a year, existence was defined as trying to survive madness—by killing, and saving life, especially our own. May this not be forgotten.

He didn't go a mile before he tripped a Chi-com claymore and looked like spiced tomato soup. I think he was with us two hours. The new guys always get it first.

\*\*\*\*\*

I can't believe how many times they dropped us off in hot LZ's. We would be taking incoming fire the moment we hit the ground.

\*\*\*\*\*

Suddenly, my steel pot came flying off. I had taken a round thru my steel pot helmet and it spun around my helmet liner. My ears were bleeding and I couldn't hear anything.

\*\*\*\*\*

It's natural and smart to duck and get into an extremely low profile as bullets are cracking out your ears and threw your behind, but if you continue to cower, you will die.

\*\*\*\*\*

You must start to put down a suppressing fire greater than the enemy. Remember, whoever is ducking, is losing and dying. Whoever has superior fire is killing and winning.

\*\*\*\*\*

It was a world of vipers, leeches, tigers, water buffalo and deadly enemies with vast bunkers and tunnels complexes, pungy pits, booby traps, and everything was trying to kill you.

\*\*\*\*\*

For the whole year, it seems like we went out for a week and then back in for a few days. During the out time you could always throw the dice, fire-fight today, no fire-fight today. It happened as much as it didn't happen. Most small, some huge and almost all of them we came back bloody.

\*\*\*\*\*

There was one consolation: With a few exceptions, our company leaders and platoon leaders were excellent. We are alive today because of exceptional men during exceptional times.

I was born in New York City, the youngest of six children. We had very little, but were rich being born in the shadow of the greatest generation. My first brother went into the Navy during the Korean War as a pilot on some of the first jets. The next went into the Air force and probably invented a new rank below private. My sister went into the Navy and was a Lieutenant at Guantanamo Bay. The next two brothers and I were drafted into the Army in succession, during Vietnam. They all came back from the service with their stories and this is mine.

Barry A. Popkin considers himself lucky. In addition to surviving 365 days in the jungle, he, unlike most of his squad, was able to make a smooth transition to civilian life and a successful career.

Upon my return from Vietnam, I went to college under the GI bill and spent the next forty years as a white-collar accountant/operational manager. Now I live in Dover, Delaware.

Looking back on my family, we were living through history and it was being taught at the "feel level."

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