



Down South: One Tour in Vietnam

William Hardwick

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“I was always happy to see first light.

By first light it was over . . . *for a while.*”

–from *Down South*

There were a lot of ways to get killed in Vietnam. You could get “zapped,” “dinged,” “burned,” “popped,” “smoked,” or “wasted.” Marine 2nd Lt. William H. Hardwick was familiar with all of them because, unlike most USMC artillery officers—who waged their war from bunkers inside protected compounds—Hardwick as a forward observer fought alongside rifle companies and lived like a grunt for most of his thirteen-month tour.

In Okinawa, Vietnam was referred to as “Down South,” and in 1968, “Down South” was a bad place to be. Hardwick did it all—walking point, springing ambushes, capturing prisoners, and spending months in the bush surrounded by crack NVA troops. At times the attacking enemy was so close, Hardwick had to call in air strikes almost on top of the Marines themselves just so they could survive. William Hardwick volunteered to fight as one of the few, the proud, the Marines.

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