

The Last Moments of Pham Hai Bao

The order was given to advance on the Americans at dawn. His helmet crowned with a leafy camouflage, a young, well-prepared soldier screamed enthusiastically, and ploughed forward with his Vietnamese comrades, firing his MAT-49 submachine gun at anything that moved. He loved his country and would defend it with his life; hated the invaders and would proudly kill every last one of them. As his troop approached a large group of enemy soldiers, an unholy rumbling filled the sky, and an apocalyptic fury erupted nearby. He was splashed with a sticky, gooey substance that burned, melted his face and the right side of his body. His uniform ablaze, he thrashed wildly, engulfed in flames, grabbed his gun with his left hand and awkwardly reloaded it, holding it steady with his wilting legs and flaming torso, as he lost the use of his right eye – his pleasant features now repulsive, bubbling with rage.

Yelling profanities at the shrinking, retreating intruders, advancing and firing, aiming with his one good eye, his passion outweighed the immense pain and he hit several more enemies before collapsing onto the bloodied ground. Looking up, past the clouds of fire and smoke, at the deep blue of a beautiful morning sky, he thought of his wife and children as an F-100 Super Sabre fighter jet dropped another load of napalm, finishing him off along with some of his friends, and a few Americans too. His last breathless words translated to “I love you Nga.”