



SAFE DUTY ASSIGNMENT

Thomas Johnson

WITH A FIFTH OF JACK DANIELS and another of Wild Turkey in my oversized pants pockets designed for carrying ammo—and a special surprise in a brown paper bag—I headed for the red-light district of Can Tho. If you were dressed as an American soldier in olive drab and extending a thumb, someone on a little Honda would pick you up for a dollar then take you anywhere in the city.

That hot humid morning, I jumped off the bike and walked toward my girl's apartment, breathing in the usual smell of rotting food. This time, a large potbelly pig and several chickens rooted through garbage placed on the side of the wide street, all crumbling asphalt and dirt with deep potholes filled with stinky muddy water. Three children were herding quacking ducks to the river. As I walked, the aroma of street vendors cooking spicy Vietnamese food and baking bread replaced the stench.