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KHESANH 1 (normass/deepe)

(This is the first of a series on the mood, preparedness, strategy and significance of Khe Sanh, often termed an American ~~Dien~~ Dien Bien Phu, reminiscent of the pivotal French defeat which began 14 fourteen years ago this week on March 13).

KHE SANH, VIETNAM, MARCH 13—Khe Sanh is six dirty hands grabbing into a C-ration box. A Communist mortar round ~~thumps~~ thumps into the center of the box, between the outstretched fingers. Six Marines lay dead, like tattered ragdolls.

Khe Sanh is the Catholic chaplain who rode over hill and dale of the combat base on his fire-engine red Honda to joke with the living and pray with the dying. But, watching the helicopter evacuation of critically wounded, ~~and~~ he was knifed along the spine by Communist mortar fragments, PARALYZING which paralyzed him from the waist down. His sole request before being litter-borne to the helicopter: for the corpsman to retrieve ~~the~~ the sacred wafers used for mass, which he carried in a cloth ammunition case attached to his web belt.

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khe sanh 2 (normass/deepe)

Khe Sanh is an over-weight corporal from Seattle, nicknamed Porky, who strolls around the tattered remains of his tent cooking donoughts and coffee for his supply unit. An Air Force C-130 rolls overhead, like giant metallic butterflies, disorging his ~~"bunk"~~ ~~"bun"~~ its "bundles for Khe Sanh." One parachute fails to open; Porky is ~~sc~~ scissored in half by the pallet of supplies. (~~Porky~~ ("Porky was only 21," his buddy says. "He had ~~only 21~~ 24 more days left in Khe Sanh and then he was going to meet his wife in Honolulu"). Porky's buddy, nicknamed Cooky, also failed to evade the blizzard of airborne cargo; he was critically crushed. ("We called him Cooky, because he was a kock," his friend explained. "After he got out of Marines, he wanted to be a mercenary. I guess he'll never get to do that ~~now.~~ now.").

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khe sanh 3 (normass/deepe)

Khe Sanh is a Negro staff sergeant, the top Air Force non-commissioned officer here, who swandives behind a wall of sandbags, but his hand wrist is bloodied and broken by Communist mortar fragments. He walks fifty feet to the medical evacuation bunker, and while running towards the helicopter ~~for kuth further treatment,~~ is wounded a second time--twice in two hours.

"Everyone has a Hollywood view of death in Khe Sanh," an Air Force officer says dryly. "But actually its quick and simple here. A round comes in and eight Americans are killed or wounded."

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khe sanh⁴ (normass/deepe)
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Khe Sanh is the close calls, the split second margin of error between life and death. It's the Sergeant with pellet-like fragment holes in his brief-case and ~~earlobe~~ his right ear-lobe standing on the helicopter pad. It is the Marine Corporal reading a sex magazine on a bunker step - with a four inch scar in the back of his skull. He was hospitalized thirteen days with his wound - and then returned to Khe Sanh. It is the supply Major who receives a Communist mortar fragment the size of a T-Bone steak on the top of his helmet. He is uninjured and laughs about it.

Almost everyone in Khe Sanh has ~~cheat~~ cheated death two or ~~the~~ three times, escaping the ~~incoming~~ ~~incoming~~ incoming rounds, ^{or} seeing his buddies killed by invisible Communist fiery visitors.

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khe sanh 5 (normass/deeps)

Khe Sanh is ~~perhaps~~ lovely Playboy pinups, but here, B. B. does not mean Brigitte Bardot—it means body bags, the zippered, plasticized shroud of the dead.

Khe Sanh does not mean either security or happiness, but yet Charles ~~see~~ Schulz's Snoopy has been handpainted, begoggled with neckerchief flying, ~~see~~ on an ammunition crate, since riddled with *RECOILLESS Rifle* ~~fragments~~ mortar fragments.

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khe sanh 6 (normass/deepe)

And then there^{are}s the love letters ~~of Khe Sanh.~~ to Khe Sanh.
"Bob, My Love," the staff sergeant recalled. "Those are the letters I'm wary of. My wife writes three pages of mush, then tells me she's bought a new Pontiac, and then three more pages of mush to build me back up. I can do without letters with like that."

"Dear Dad," the Air Force officer recounted, as Communist artillery and mortars bracketed his airstrip bunker throughout the day.

"I'm fine, but I wrecked the Mustang. What a letter. But, at least she's fine, that's the main thing. What's a Mustang, after all."

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khe sanh 7 (normass/deepe)

Khe Sanh is helmets, boots and flak jackets, worn not as the armor of war, but as appendages to the human body. The Marines sleep in their flak jackets and boots, and wear them throughout the day. One ranking officer said he had taken his boots off for only four hours in the past six weeks. One pfc. takes ^{off} his ~~off~~ once a month as the price of being constantly prepared for any event.

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khe sanh 8 (normass/deepe)

Helmets, rifles, shotguns or pistols are close at hand as they sleep in their damp bunkers and trenches.

Often, on their flak jackets and helmets, the Marines scribble or paint their inner thoughts, personalities or philosophies.

"I love Mom and Dad," "Linda," "Alabama No. 1; Birmingham The Magic City," are mixed in with choice bits of profanity.

"God is Dead," one has penned on his helmet, but the next has the counter: "My God is Alive. Sorry about yours, Charlie."

"God, send more flowers and less Marines," one has scribbled under the armhole of his jacket, a thought he said he copied ^{From} an advertising sign in the "land of the big PX."

"40,000 NVA (North Vietnamese Army) can't be wrong," another asserts.

"Khe Sanh—where the action is," reads another.

"Chicken Little was right," a 21-year-old lance corporal has penned upon his back. ("I copied it from that fairytale about the 'sky is falling;' he says).

"Life divided by time equals death," another youngster has painted in black letters across the full breadth of the back of his jacket. ("Actually, it should be turned about—time divid

reversed it and I copied it from

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khe sanh 9 (normass/deepe)

Each jacket also carries the individual's ^{LAST} name, ~~rank~~,
serial number and blood type.

Even this four-square mile combat base, currently symbolic of a well-publicized deathtrap, has been ironically named. In English, Khe Sanh means the "The Birth-Giving Gap between Mountains." ~~✂~~

(Hank: sorriest eye unable to get this to you sooner. I'm now ~~planning~~ planning to do a total of five part series, but might cut it down to four. Next pieces will be more words and substance and less morbidity. Regards Bev).

--end reuter