

The Weasel that Weaseled out

"On *New Year's Day* we were *slogging* our way over the *Outpost* trail. Talk of you cold through the parka's fold, it stabbed like a driven nail. If our eyes we'd close, the lashes froze till sometimes you couldn't see. It wasn't much fun but the only one to whimper was *frozen me*."

This "adjusted" quote from Robert Service's poem, The Cremation of Sam McGee, pretty much describes the winter of our discontent. Read on.

My unit, a detachment of the 301st CR BN consisting of seven of us, shared our base camp with Detachment 3 of the 330th CR Company (which at that time was the home of the Very Reverend Charles Knappenberger, our loyal, dedicated and beloved Chaplain and treasurer, who, during our frequent snowball fights, graciously dispensed with vigor ninety mile an hour snowballs, many of which I was the unfortunate recipient). The 330th did its hifalutin dit-dah thing in a nice warm hut on the back of a deuce and half while our thing was more grunt like, walky-talky eavesdropping in a snow covered bunker on top of a 3300 foot mountain overlooking the DMZ. We did have a lovely ocean view.



Once each morning we had to make the 12 mile round trip from base camp to OP to get the "stuff" for processing. Then, about four thirty in the afternoon, we put it on an L -19 plane at a remote dirt strip and sent it on the way to BN. In the case of bad weather, no plane would arrive and one of us "volunteered" to make the 5 hour round trip to BN.

The wind and cold were the real enemies along with giant snow drifts alternating with wind swept ice patches. We tried everything: snow shoes, ice cleats, Micky Mouse boots. Removing gloves to tie and strap froze fingers to the bone. The final solution: just combat boots. They did everything poorly, but they did it and with our gloves on. We were told to stay on the road. Anti-personnel mines were in the area. The problem was finding the road. Once we, always traveling in pairs, wound up in a communication trench four hundred yards from

the road. "Hmm, This doesn't look right!" As the snow accumulated, the weight of the snow began to trigger the land mines. Fortunately, they were so deep in the snow that they were not a danger to us. Since we were carrying sensitive material from the OP and to base camp and BN, we were always armed. I carried a Thompson, some used side arms, and other liked the carbine.

We dreamed of the day when that fearsome walk would be a thing of the past. Then one day, an M-29 Weasel arrived, the ultimate snowmobile! Our salvation! We praised Studebaker and joyfully boarded it for our maiden voyage, smiling and laughing, giving Mother Nature the finger. We made it half way, to a bad spot past which no wheeled vehicle had climbed since the snow began, dismounted, and watched the Weasel scratch and claw its way up the steep, twisting incline. We happily reboarded and moved smartly off on our journey to the OP. We actually made it about 300 yards, rounded a sharp curve, and came face to face with a 15 foot wall of snow. The road was cut out of the mountain side so the snow drifted at a slant taking on the original contour of the mountain. If the Weasel could have made it to the top of the drift, it would have slid off the steep side slope into the valley below, only a couple thousand feet. The little engine that could, couldn't! There was nothing else to do but make the round trip on foot to the OP and then ride the Weasel back to the base camp.

Then, came another nasty surprise! (Never give Mother Nature the finger!) While we were trying to do our thing up on the mountain, Mother Nature was doing hers below. Half way down we came to a halt facing the result of an avalanche, the first of the season. There was a pile of snow about six feet deep covering the road for about 40 yards. The Weasel climbed the drift but then it was two feet forward and one foot sideways toward the drop off due to the side slope. By hand, we clawed the snow from the high side to the low side making a lesser slant, one that the Weasel could handle, as it inched its way across the barrier. Once again, we boarded and proceeded on only to round another bend and come face to face with a second avalanche. Same drill! Home at last with a great story to tell our grandkids.