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## Greater Love

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Lumbering through the protective berm out of the division base camp, past the checkpoint, four dusty olive drab deuce-and-a-halves headed down a barely-paved road. Bouncing and swerving, the convoy turned onto another equally rough delta lane past a town on a branch of the Mekong River. The trucks were bound a few kilometers into the bush to return the men to their fire base. Earlier that day the road had been swept for mines, but ambushes were always possible. Two lookouts stood behind the cab and two faced the rear. Everyone else rode along talking, smoking or looking at the scenery, always on alert.

They rode through small clusters of hooches, what passed for the suburbs in this part of Vietnam. Farther along, the road ran between green jungle and open rice paddies tended by farmers and ever-present water buffalo. The soldiers kept a wary eye on both sides of the road. Some of them grouched about the kidney-jarring ride, the smells, and why the brass couldn't have flown them out on choppers, faster and safer. So far, the trip was routine, without sniper fire.

Over the truck's rumble came a metallic clang. One man toward the front jumped up and like a football player scrambling for a fumble, fell on the grenade bouncing on the truck bed. Frozen, the other soldiers waited for the detonation.

None came. After an eternity, the down soldier man threw the grenade into the nearby paddy. Still no detonation. A dud? Where had it come from? How could a VC have gotten so close without being noticed?

As the men began to accept that they were safe, someone noticed one of the grenades he'd clipped to his web gear was missing. At least, most of it was missing. The fuse, the safety pin, and the lever were still there. While bouncing on the road, the body of the grenade had come unscrewed, and fallen.

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MPP

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No one spoke until the convoy reached the fire base. The soldiers jumped from the truck. Someone mentioned to the lieutenant the possibility of putting their buddy in for a medal, a Bronze or even a Silver Star. Nothing was ever done because the grenade didn't detonate.