

Ode to E Pluribus Unum for May 15 2022

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Firefall by Moonlight



Image Credit & Copyright: Tara Mostofi

On certain dates in February, an elusive firefall can be spotted at sunset in Yosemite National Park, when water flows, the weather cooperates and the direction to the setting Sun is just right.

Often photographed from vantage points below, at the right moment the park's seasonal Horsetail Fall is isolated in the shadows of the steep walls of El Capitan. Then, still illuminated with rays of reddened sunlight the waterfall briefly takes on a dramatic, fiery appearance.

But a Horsetail firefall can be photographed by moonlight too. Even more elusive by moonlight, the firefall effect can also be seen when a bright Moon sets at the right direction along the western horizon. And skies were clear enough for this well-planned imaging of an ephemeral Horsetail firefall, lit by a bright gibbous Moon setting in the early morning hours of April 15.

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A Space in Time



We who can remember WWII
Remember coming together,
We were more than a few.

Learning the threat of bombs and guns,
Accepting the absence of fathers and sons.
Adults and children organizing scrap drives,
All consideration given for mothers and wives
Of brave men fighting in faraway places,
Holding close the photos of absent faces.
Parents did not know we would win the war.
Nations struggled on how to settle this score.
Children all learned how to stand together,
Holding each other in a new kind of 'bad weather'.
No sugar, no butter, a scarcity of paper,
Gasoline rationed, victory gardens with neighbors.
We pledged allegiance and most of all

We sang our national anthem
And proudly stood tall.
Francie Troy

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1906 San Francisco Street Remastered Video in Color



<https://youtu.be/sHkc83XA2dY>

A Trip Down Market Street, Shot on April 14, 1906, four days before the San Francisco earthquake and fire.

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Where Did Cheese Really Come From?



<https://youtu.be/juDbb5LNIIY>

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Why Free Stuff Makes Us Irrational



When something is free, people feel a positive glow — and standard cost-benefit analyses go out the window.

By Mark Dent

If you've ever wondered just how passionate people are about free samples at Costco, look no further than these 2 incidents:

- 2015: At a Southern California Costco, a 78-year-old was punched in the face after accusing a 24-year-old of hogging too many Nutella waffle samples. An arrest was made.
- 2018: At a South Carolina Costco, 2 septuagenarians on a cheeseburger sample binge got into a spat over line etiquette that ended in a hat-flying slap to the face.

It may seem odd that a few small nibbles on toothpicks would incite violence. But this conduct is rooted in behavioral psychology.

In short, free stuff makes us do very strange, irrational things.

We'll look at how "free" affects consumer behavior across 3 different areas: grocery store samples, shipping, and online content.

The 'positive glow' of not having to pay

Dan Ariely, a professor of behavioral economics at Duke University and the author of *Predictably Irrational*, has researched the allure of free for years in all kinds of settings.

One time, he even hired somebody to give out free tattoos at a party. People who otherwise may not have considered a tattoo — especially not on a whim — got inked up because the price was right.

"There is something special about being free," Ariely tells *The Hustle*.

In 2007, he co-authored a study titled "Zero as a Special Price: The True Value of Free Products" in which participants were asked to choose one of the following:

\$0.13 Lindt truffle (a superior product in quality that retails for multiples more than a Hershey's Kiss)

More than 2x as many people chose the free Hershey's Kiss than chose the \$0.13 Lindt truffle. But when Ariely and his co-authors put a \$0.01 price tag on the Hershey's Kiss and adjusted the Lindt truffle price by a mere penny, participants overwhelmingly selected the Lindt truffle.



Zachary Crockett / The Hustle

The researchers conducted other experiments involving real chocolates and photos of chocolates, and the results were similar every time.

They dubbed this the zero price effect: People overvalue things that are free and make irrational decisions in many cases when something free is involved.

Kristina Shampanier, a co-author of the study who now works at an economics consulting firm, told The Hustle the behavior is irrational because the research participants who picked the free item gave up something better, something they should prefer in a traditional cost-benefit analysis.

People do it because they are guided by a good feeling — "a positive glow that people have about not having to pay," according to Shampanier.

As Ariely explains further, when people see something for free, they don't see the downside.

Most days, we're not confronted with a choice between free Hershey's Kisses and inexpensive Lindt chocolates. We do, however, face situations where accepting a free offer feels good but isn't necessarily the best deal.

Free shipping

According to the 2019 Walker Sands Future of Retail Survey, 77% of 1.6k respondents said free shipping had made them more likely to buy an item online, ranking far above inducements like same-day shipping or the ability to visualize products in 3D.

The power of free shipping

Percentage of consumers who say the following traits make them more likely to buy an item online



DATA: Walker Sands Future of Retail Survey 2019



Zachary Crockett / The Hustle

In a study about free shipping in ecommerce, former Wharton School professor David Bell found that free shipping lulled buyers into financially unsound decisions.

The consumers he studied preferred to save \$6.99 and get free shipping, versus saving \$10 on the purchase price but still pay for shipping, even though the savings would have been greater.

In addition to the positive glow inherent in the free offer, Ariely says the popularity of free shipping is attractive for another reason. Consumers, he says, have a difficult time understanding why shipping should cost anything:

They feel OK paying for a tangible product, but they don't compute how the time and labor involved with shipping should drive up the price.

The added price of shipping makes them see the total purchase as having an "unfair" cost.

When the "unfair" barrier is removed (by making shipping free), people are more likely to buy the product.



FedEx workers sorting and processing packages with free shipping on Cyber Monday in 2008

(Joe Raedle/Getty Images)

And inexpensive shipping isn't nearly as effective as free shipping — at least anecdotally.

During Amazon's early days, the company introduced free shipping in several European countries. In France, it reduced shipping to one franc. While business increased dramatically in the free shipping countries, purchases in France didn't rise at nearly as high of a rate.

Free samples

When stores like Costco, Sam's Club, Whole Foods, and Walmart halted free samples at the peak of the pandemic, they had to adjust.

At Walmart, Cure Hydration made a deal for samples of its electrolyte-infused beverage to be featured in curbside pickup orders. Walmart also started offering samples for ecommerce customers.

Why so much trouble for a freebie? It's simple: Free samples often make people spend money.

To get samples in stores, businesses typically partner with independent companies that staff sampling events and that have relationships with major stores.

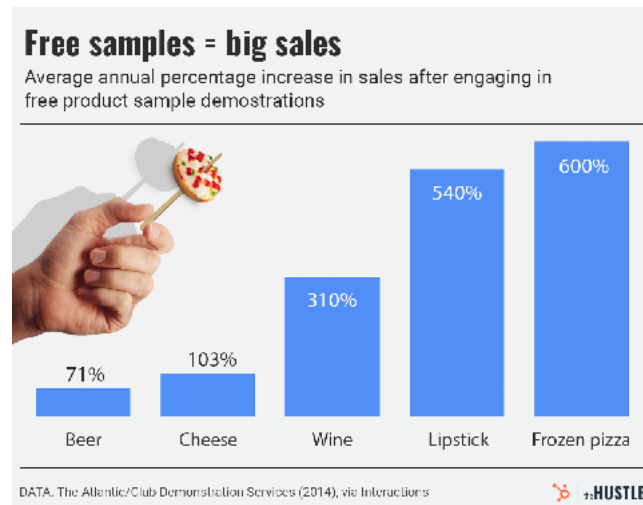
Based on 2011 data from The Street, costs for contracting with a demonstration company for one sampling event at a grocery store range from \$150 to \$340 a day. Companies spend ~\$2B a year on free samples.

The returns are usually high, both for the companies looking to sell new products and the stores.

The former supermarket chain Marsh found 68% of samplers were persuaded to buy a product after sampling.

A sampling event by one brand leads to higher average sales of brands in the same category that were not part of the sampling event, according to a Brigham Young University study.

When Ziploc sampled a new space bag at Costco, it saw a 156% sales increase. Products in categories like beer, wine, cheese, and frozen pizza have seen increases ranging from 71% to 600%.



Zachary Crockett / The Hustle

Researchers have identified several reasons behind the success of the free samples, from customers gaining familiarity with a product they may have otherwise never tried to customers learning where sampled products are located in the store after sampling them.

But because something free is involved, irrationality is also at play.

The “free” aspect of a free sample causes the same glowing feeling that people experienced with the Hershey’s Kisses, and, Ariely says, people who receive the free sample want to reciprocate.

“You feel obligated to some degree, [making] it more likely you buy the full package,” Ariely says.

But the feeling of reciprocation doesn’t apply everywhere.

Free content

Whether it’s a Substack newsletter or a publication as decorated as The New York Times, many media outlets have readership bases built on giving away a few stories before requiring people to sign up for a subscription.

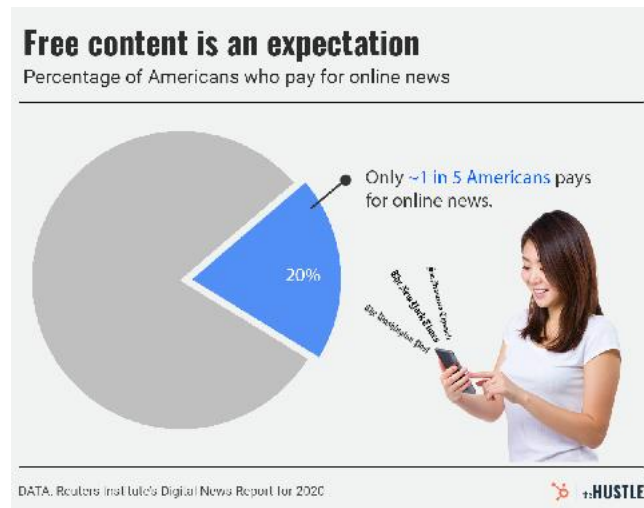
On the surface, it sounds similar to offering a free sample. So readers should be basking in the glow of a free deal after consuming a couple of articles and then feeling the need to reciprocate, right?

Ariely says the circumstances are different.

People who read 3 articles for free may want to read another when they bump up against a paywall. But they may see a monthly subscription rate as an expensive price for one more article.

For food and drink items that get sampled at stores, people are familiar with their regular prices. Because so much content is still free on the internet, people think of online media "in the realm of free."

Some 20% of Americans pay for online news, according to the Reuters Institute's Digital News Report for 2020. Their reasons for subscribing are varied, ranging from supporting a specific journalist, to wanting to get ahead in their careers, to believing that paying for news is a societal good.



Zachary Crockett / The Hustle

But ~40% of Americans say they would never pay for news.

Similarly, Ariely says hardly anybody would want to pay for Facebook after being ingrained in its ad-based model for so long.

Yet free content isn't necessarily the best deal. It's possible that subscription news sites are higher quality than the free options and also that the free sites — as well as the free version of Facebook we're accustomed to — include more ads that hook users into paying more money in the long run.

The behavior isn't rational, a common thread when something free is involved.

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Luigi Boccherini: Fandango (Quintet in D Major G448)



Performed by Constellations Musicales https://youtu.be/IgEaS_d6qUE
Who knew that a couple of castanets could light your fire?

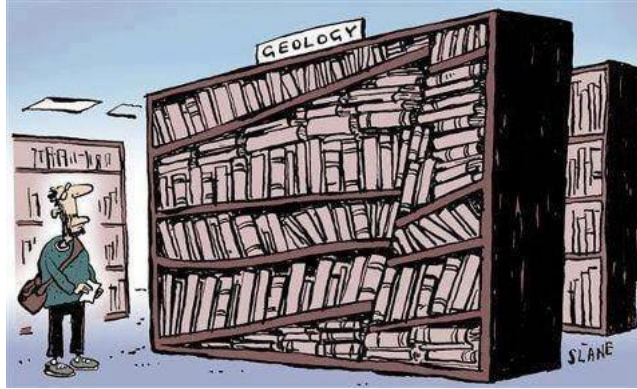
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Golden Retriever Parents Watch Newborn Puppies



<https://youtu.be/ph8HdeAcDQI>

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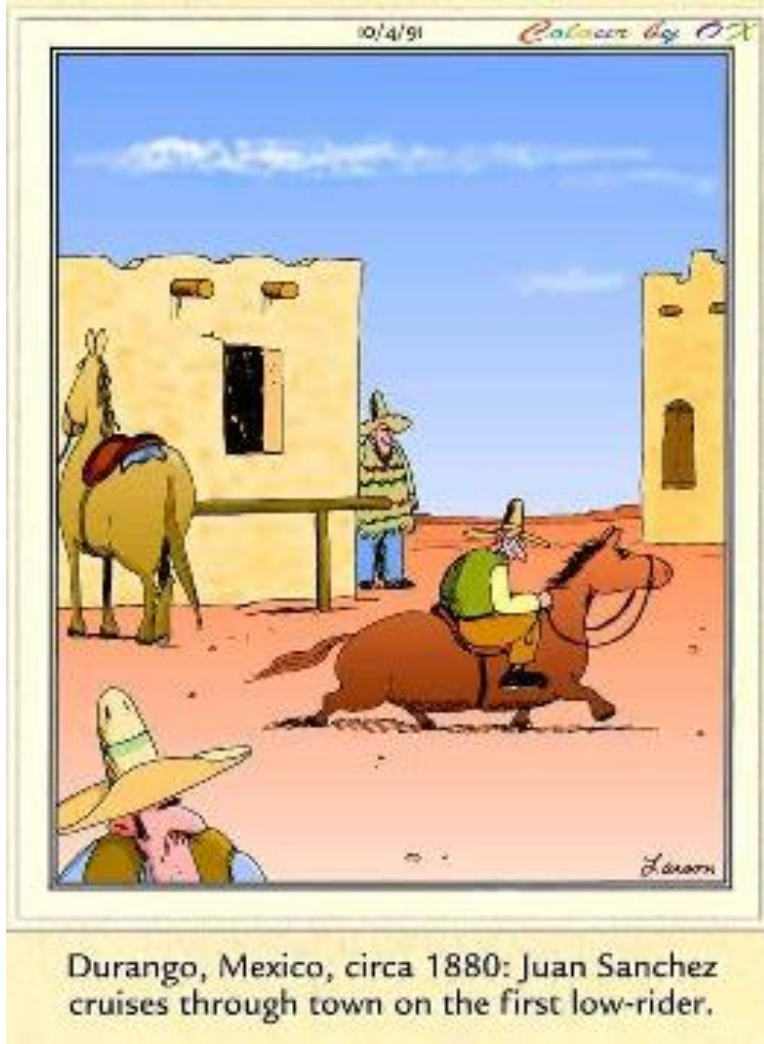
How to Make a Guitar...Even if You Can't Play One



https://guitar-making.com/?fbclid=IwAR18xeey_bozEd9UN0bP-JODwMY8AV_H-RWXaGU5nu99k5coylVbupXSFQM

https://youtu.be/8dNsZ_wBBV4

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Feel Like Wasting Some Time? Paint Some Masterworks



<https://artsandculture.google.com/experiment/art-coloring-book/1QGsh6vSfAQBgQ>

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Donnie Iris and the Cruisers



Love is Like a Rock <https://youtu.be/WFmPEgNuELM>

That's the Way Love Outta Be <https://youtu.be/GqSL4sz0ErE>

Donnie Iris found fame as the lead singer of the Jaggerz, the hit wonder from 1970 responsible for the number-two hit The Rapper, but Donny Iris and The Cruisers returned to the pop charts in the early '80s several times as a solo act.

Born Dominic Ierace in Beaver Falls, PA, Iris began singing at weddings at age five, and by eight was performing on local television and entering talent contests.

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How Do Your Neurons Know When to Start?



Dopamine, a neurochemical often associated with reward behavior, seems to help organize precisely when the brain initiates movements.

https://www.wired.com/story/dopamine-helps-neurons-know-when-to-start-a-movement/?bxid=617fdd8c62717d23af47aa50&cndid=67131721&esrc=growl2-regGate-0321&source=EDT_WIR_NEWSLETTER_0_DAILY_ZZ&utm_brand=wired&utm_campaign=aud-dev&utm_content=WIR_Daily_050822&utm_mailing=WIR_Daily_050822&utm_medium=email&utm_source=nl&utm_term=P4

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German WWII Submarine Tour- The U995 - Type VIIC/41



<https://youtu.be/TbblBA4oqTY>

The last remaining Type 7.

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Volcanic Magic Show



Volcanic lightning is an electrical discharge caused by a volcanic eruption, rather than from an ordinary thunderstorm.

Volcanic lightning arises from colliding, fragmenting particles of volcanic ash, which generate static electricity within the volcanic plume.

Sergio Tapiro Fotografía

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Wildfires on the Rise, but New Tech Could Help in the Fight



By John Fialka

Right now, 12 wildfires are burning through nearly 280,000 acres in five states. Many more will burn in the months ahead, thanks to a changing climate that is resulting in widespread dryness across the U.S.

Already, the country has seen hundreds of thousands more acres burn than usual for this time of year. Between Jan. 1 and May 4, wildfires had burned over 1.1 million acres. Over the last 10 years on average, those four months see about 707,000 acres burned, according to the National Interagency Fire Center (NIFC). In drought-stricken California, fires have already scorched 6,500 acres, more than double the state's five-year average for this period.

Federal and state agencies are hoping high technology — literally — can help put fires out more quickly and save lives.

The U.S. Forest Service is preparing to use two new types of drones: one designed to spot new fires, and another that can set fires around existing wildfires to deprive them of fuel.

Firefighters are being introduced to both technologies now through crash courses, to prepare them for a long, hot summer.

Currently, Northern California, Texas and the Central Great Plains are in drought, along with parts of the Gulf Coast, South Florida and the eastern Carolinas, according to NIFC. This condition, which results in "above normal significant fire potential," is likely to continue into July.

In a normal year, the beginning of May would be just the start of what firefighters used to call "fire season." But that era has passed, according to Jon Heggie, a battalion chief for the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (Cal Fire), the largest state wildfire control agency in the U.S.

“There’s no more talk about fire season,” Heggie said. “Now it’s always the fire year.” Cal Fire, he said, is also preparing to use more drones, which are being adapted from autonomous aircraft previously developed and used by the military.

People who live near fire-prone, but remote, areas may also soon benefit from emerging technology for wildfire detection. Dryad Networks, a German company, is designing a system of cheap, low-power sensors that can be hung on trees to pinpoint traces of carbon monoxide and other gases emitted at the start of forest fires. The sensors would then send warning signals to satellites, which issue alerts.

And by next year, some firefighters will have computer-based “hazard mapping systems” that can give them “trusted information in real-time,” explained Andy Henson, vice president of artificial intelligence at Science Applications International Corp. (SAIC).

Firefighters have traditionally been limited by what they can see and what they’re told by radio contact from headquarters. SAIC, which is based in Reston, Va., is designing computerized “operation centers” that can be trucked or airlifted to collect information around major fires.

“You can have all the drones you want, but if you can’t get information back to firefighters, it’s useless,” Henson said.

Nighttime fires on the rise

The changing climate is not only driving more total fires, but also more fires that start or grow at night. That can make it harder for firefighters to detect them in time.

A [recent study](#) by the Cooperative Institute for Research in Environmental Sciences at the University of Colorado Boulder examined tens of thousands of wildfires around the world. It found that nighttime fires have increased by 7.2 percent since 2003. In the U.S., the rise has been 28 percent.

The reason, according to the study, is that rising temperatures have gradually reduced the moisture levels that night air could previously hold.

“It’s easier to start something on fire when they are dry and hot than if they’re cold and wet,” explained Adam Mahood, a fire ecologist and one of the authors of the study.

Researchers first heard anecdotal evidence from Brazil that fires were burning more often at night, Mahood said. After two years of studying data from recently launched satellites, the scientists were able to quantify the change. They call the cause “vapor pressure deficit.”

The study, recently published in the journal *Nature*, concludes that “traditional fire monitoring systems rely on ground-based cameras or satellite imaging to see smoke or flames and alert local firefighters, but by the time they detect them it’s often too late.”

The study notes that some of the most devastating forest fires have recently burned fiercely at night. They include California’s Dixie Fire in July 2021, which incinerated more than 963,000 acres, and the Marshall Fire in the suburbs of Boulder, Colo., which destroyed over 1,000 homes starting on Dec. 30, 2021.

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The Real Trader Joe



Joe Coulombe opened his first store in Pasadena in 1967

https://www.cnn.com/2022/05/07/business/trader-joes-history-joe-coulombe/index.html?utm_source=join1440&utm_medium=email

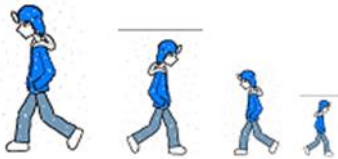
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I'm as Dangerous as I am Beautiful



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My Walking Thoughts



May 15th 2022

The Assault on the Special Forces Camp at Ashau

[a three-part series removed from my almost finished Phantoms from Vietnam]

Part 1 was pretty much a soliloquy on North Vietnamese Colonel Minh's 1966 vision of the war in which he details the stupidity of the American leadership and his country's future when in the end the Americans just pack up and leave.

Part 2 was an Air America Flight to Ashau in which Colonel Minh took the opportunity to view the special forces camp from the air and to review plans for its attack. A blown engine in the C-45 Bugsmasher provided a bit of excitement to the episode

The Assault

The battle for the Special Forces camp at Ashau went easier than Minh could have dared dream, which is not to say that it didn't have its moments. The attack began at dawn under cover of a low overcast that prevent any effective air support for the defenders during the early stages of the battle.

The fight was barely joined before the Special Forces and Nung found themselves caught in crossfire between Minh's troops attacking the perimeter from the east and the CIDG troops manning the north wall of the redoubt.

Within two hours, the outer defenses were breached, and Minh's soldiers roamed the inner perimeter looking to mop up the remnants of resistance along the south wall. Just as the climax appeared to be at hand, a pair of US Air Force Skyraiders lumbered into the fray below the overcast, scattering the attack and allowing the defenders time to regroup.

The anti-aircraft positions dug into the surrounding hills opened up and almost immediately dense smoke began to boil out of the cowling of the lead plane. For an instant, Minh felt compassion for the pilot, remembering with terror his own experience over this very same airfield. Then his feelings turned to amazement and finally shock as the stricken airplane, its landing gear suddenly extended, made a beeline for the very spot where he was standing.

At once it came to him. He was standing in the middle of the runway and that was where the pilot intended to land. He found himself with most of his soldiers running for the drainage ditch alongside the runway. Forgotten was the near triumph of just moments before. Lost too, in the headlong plunge for the safety of the fecund waters was the initiative that had been theirs from the very first. When Minh resurfaced and cleared his vision, the Skyraider was out of sight at the far end of the field, a trail of grey-blue smoke marking his route.

Dumbly, he was on his feet running after the plane with the rest of his troops, bent on exacting revenge for the humiliation he had just suffered. Dimly at first, and then in a burst of cognition, Minh knew that something dire was about to happen. Even before he turned to face the on-coming airplane, he knew he would be hit with a hail of bullets from its eight 20 millimeter cannon. But it was more awesome than that.

It took an instant to grasp the significance of the apparition that bore down upon him from now no more than 100 meters. Like its predecessor, it approached ominously with gear extended, nose cocked high for landing. For the second time in thirty seconds, Minh found himself sprawled face down in abject terror, envisioning himself sliced into canvas wrapped salami by the four-bladed propeller that mangled the air in a vicious succession of clubbing swipes.

The Skyraider's landing gear slammed down, straddling Minh, propeller and tail wheel skimming not more than six inches above his supine misery. Pressing himself deeply into the sod, he would have remained there for all eternity had not the excited shouts from his troops brought him back to the present.

Gathering himself quickly, he gained his feet in time to see the second airplane wheel back around toward him like an avenging devil, the pilot of the first plane stuffed head first into the cockpit with his legs flailing in the slipstream.

It was too much for Minh who was by now so drained of emotion that it never occurred to him to clear out of the way or even dive to the ground. He just stood there watching as the behemoth loomed larger by the instant in its rush for the sky. It seemed impossible, but the plane - propeller and all - missed him, though there were those who swore that Minh had actually passed through the prop's arc.

Long after the Skyraider had clawed into the overcast dragging its fury behind, Minh stood transfixed, oblivious to the stinging and snapping sounds of spent small-arms rounds whizzing about as the fighting resumed.

It was Lic Son who finally succeeded in bringing Minh back to the present, explaining that they needed to regroup before continuing the attack. Reluctantly he agreed, ordering the sounding of retreat while standing at the threshold of victory. It was a wise decision as the clouds lifted, permitting enemy fighter/bombers access to the valley floor.

Unable to make a concerted assault under such conditions, Minh's troops kept up a steady barrage on the base, sending small units inside the perimeter to disrupt communications between the CIDG on the north wall and the Special Forces detachment dug in to the south.

On the third day of the siege, the fight was over. Helicopters arrived to retract the beleaguered Special Forces unit that had taken nearly fifty percent casualties. The low clouds helped the evacuation that started out smoothly. Then as their numbers diminished, the remaining Special Forces found themselves under assault by the CIDG attempting to escape annihilation.

The Americans suffered more casualties the final half-hour than during the rest of the operation combined. Finally, after the last helicopter had paddled away out of the valley, Minh's troops made one last sweep through the demolished base and departed to prepare for the next mission.

That evening, back at Hoi An Ca, Minh held an award ceremony where he heaped lavish praise on his weary but victorious soldiers. The rain, which had held off during the

siege, began as he spoke, muting the distant thunder of bombs pulverizing the abandoned base at Ashau. The combination lent the ceremony a dreamlike and timeless quality adding to the poignancy of the scene. Minh was saddened by the loss of thirty-one men, but he was thankful that of the forty-five wounded, all but five would return to ranks again within the month.

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For his heroic action that day, Major Bernard Fisher was awarded the Medal of Honor.



Fisher was the first living Air Force recipient of the Award for action in the Vietnam War.