

Remember the survival school training we had in flight school? In my class our training was reduced from a week to a single day so we could get to Vietnam sooner. We did sample the chocolate covered ants (tasted like a chocolate bar with Rice Krispies in it), dried grub worms (tasted like pumpkin seeds), and snake (had the texture of and tasted to me like white fish). But this didn't prepare me for what I would find in Vietnam.

I was on an ash and trash mission in the western delta when he stopped for lunch The Vietnamese officer I was flying offered me a biscuit with meat cooked inside. The biscuit was nice and soft. The meat was a ground dark meat that had a slight sweet taste. I liked the combination and asked for another one. The officer said that it was dog meat. No problem, the second one still tasted good.

After I got back from Vietnam I was having supper with my girlfriend who was the consummate animate lover. We were eating in a Mexican food restaurant and I mentioned that the meat tasted like dog. She was sure that I was teasing her for her animal convictions. However, two weeks later that restaurant was closed down for serving dog meat. If you add a tablespoon of molasses to a ground meat patty, you will duplicate the taste.

Back in Vietnam, we were noting that our steaks seemed to be getting tougher and chewier. The shish-kabobs were so tough they tasted like a rubber eraser. We knew that IV was close to the end of the Government supply line but we couldn't understand why we couldn't get tender meat occasionally. Our platoon hooches backed up to the Officer's Club. One of our pilots on restricted duty was spending his days sunning himself on top of the platoon bunker that overlooked the Officer's Club parking lot. He thought he saw the local rat catcher visit the back door of the Officer's Club. Maybe he had a contract to catch rats there?

The next day, our officer noted that the rat catcher's cages were full of trapped rats when he knocked on the Officer's Club door. However, the cages were empty when the rat catcher left. Whoa Nelly, what happened to the rats? The next day he had two other officers watch the Officer's Club with him. Sure enough, the rat catcher approached the Officer's Club with cages full of rats but didn't have any when he left. One more day of observation and a committee was formed to talk to the Officer in charge of the Officer's Club.

The investigation revealed that the ladies working in the Officer's Club were replacing with our steaks with the rat meat. The ladies would then position the steaks in their underware for their $\frac{3}{4}$ mile walk in the summer heat to the front gate where they could catch a motor scooter or rickshaw for home. I shiver to think what those steaks finally tasted like. This incident did teach us that there is a difference between caged rat and field rats. The meat from caged rats was not as tough and if ground could pass for hamburger. However, the meat from field rats was always tough and chewy even when ground up.

To this day, every shish-kabob I see reminds me of those rat meat morsels at the Officers Club in faraway Vinh Long, Vietnam and I just have to reach for anything else on the table.