

## 2.6 VIETNAM ERA: 1961-1975

The government referred to its force as soldiers or servicemen. America again instituted the draft to fill the Vietnam “dance card”, and again found not many wanted to fill it.

“Soldiers in Vietnam called each other ‘Grunts’.”

—Tim O’Brien, The Things They Carried.

“The things that you carry are burdensome.

A load for the weary beast.”

—Isaiah 46:1a, The Holy Bible, NASB

The average infantryman in the South Pacific during World War II saw about 40 days of combat in four years. The average infantryman in Vietnam saw about 240 days of combat in one year thanks to the mobility of the helicopter. One out of every 10 Americans who served in Vietnam was a casualty; 58,148<sup>1</sup> were killed and 304,000 wounded out of 2.7 million who served. Although the percent that died is similar to other wars, amputations or crippling wounds were 300 percent higher than in World War II. 75,000 Vietnam veterans are severely disabled. MEDEVAC helicopters flew nearly 500,000 missions. Over 900,000 patients were airlifted (nearly half were American).

—Capt. Marshal Hanson, USNR (Ret.) and Capt. Scott Beaton, Statistical Source. From blog: “Vietnam War: Facts, Stats & Myths”.

<sup>1</sup>Protests over the conflict began in 1964. As of 2012, there are 58,300 service deaths attributed to the war. More previously designated MIAs, PKIAs, and graves of Prisoners of War were found between 1997 and 2012. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vietnam\\_Veterans\\_Memorial](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vietnam_Veterans_Memorial).

### **Dedication**

To all my friends  
Who found themselves in uniform,  
Including my brother.

## Command is a Heavy Load

I once carried a dead man  
60 kilometers through Korean no-man's land  
On my back  
Because he had been my radio operator  
And because Marines don't leave anybody behind.  
I wrote a letter to his family.  
I wrote a lot of letters to families.

But it was Vietnam that gave me nightmares. I drank too much  
And had night sweats. Unwhole, stumbling around, a dead man walking.  
Tired of being a chameleon commando, I had to change something inside.  
So I cleaned up my act and got help.  
Went to support groups in Thailand where there were guys,  
Wounded, disillusioned, unsettled, who had been through the same crap.  
It helped. It helped a lot.

I believe we gave each other a hand to climb back out.  
I was then told I could be a full colonel or receive a discharge,  
And I finally saw the stress for what it was. So I got out.  
Stateside, there was a telegram offering me a job,  
So I came to Minnesota, sight unseen. Suddenly I was making  
3x more than in the military without having to blow things up.  
It worked for me.

—Retired Lt. Colonel Eugene (Dick) Tirk

“How to Succeed with Brunettes” is a 1966 United States Navy Training Film about how to be polite, proper and gentlemanly in social situations. <http://www.YouTube.com> to view.



Hand-to-Hand  
Combat Manual.

“Rookie soldiers usually suffer casualty within the first five minutes of their first battle. If they survive those minutes, Then surprisingly, most come home alive, because they aren't rookies any more.”

—“Lieutenant Dan”, in the movie “Forrest Gump”, Warner Brothers, 1994.

## Life at the Speed of Teenage Angst + Boot Camp

My Dear Son,  
You said, "I am a failure".  
That doesn't add up.

Better:

"Unaccustomed as I am to live ammo,  
I did not fulfill their expectation of me.

For 30 tiny seconds  
I paused.  
I fumbled.  
I was scared.

I was unstellar;  
The star they expected  
Didn't flash in brilliance  
There. In that drill. That's all."



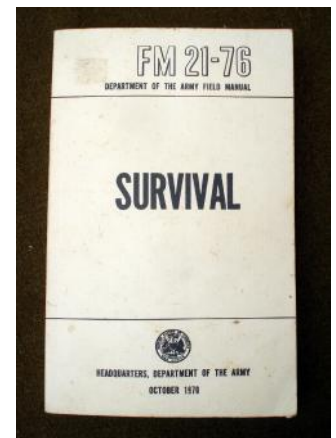
Son,  
While it's true you must learn to take mastery of  
Frightful situations in order to survive  
The predicament over there, what I mean to say is  
You *will* take mastery.<sup>1</sup>

You *will* overcome with training and faith and grit.  
And even if that fear rears its ugly head  
When you get into a real circumstance, if the pundits are right,  
You have as much as 4:59<sup>2</sup> to gain hold and course-correct.

But you are so much more than a battle machine.  
You, my Son, have succeeded in  
Talking *me* out of the deepest depression,  
Beyond wildest expectations,

You  
Have been the most faithful friend  
To your fellows the world has ever known;

You,  
Who holds daily counsel with God,  
Allow startlingly pure humility  
To slay dragons in the spirit.



You appropriately  
Question authority—though  
You might not get to exercise that just now!

You eloquently present logic  
Refute argument  
Offer solutions,  
Get to the heart of a matter.

So you forgive yourself, and then be released  
From trying to be perfect in order to make up for inexperience  
As an earnest, but not-yet fully-matured and seasoned man  
Who has been told to become a soldier.

God would not tell us  
We have committed unpardonable sins,  
So whose voice is it,  
Condemning us still, but our own?

Centuries ago, an overwhelmed Chinese General  
Zeng Guofar wrote in his report to his Emperor  
Of an impossible situation:

“We fight, but the enemy defeats us.”

His Comrade, General Zuo, read the account and suggested  
But one correction:

“The enemy defeats us, but we fight on.”<sup>3</sup>

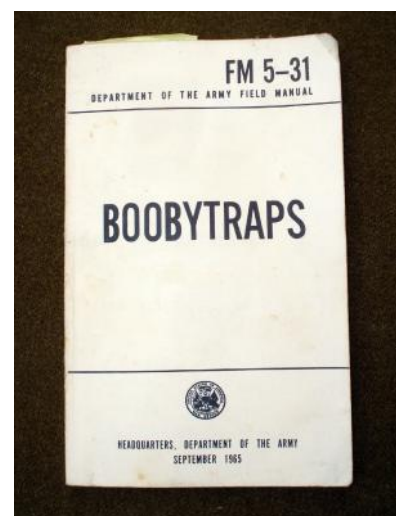
Still truth. Still fact.

Except this new “but” leaves hope for change.

There are enough Blood Stripes<sup>4</sup> to ante up;  
Enough enemies in this cold and heartless world; so  
Let us not be  
Our own worst.

Let us be as good and kind  
To ourselves  
As we learn to be  
To each other.

The Lord does not condemn us;  
In whatever our heart condemns us,



God is greater than our heart,  
And knows all things. (I John 3:20)

Love, Dad

<sup>1</sup>Mastery: i.e. “Bruno Zulu”: Well done (Radio code).

<sup>2</sup>Since statistically the average novice ground trooper has a few minutes survival time in which to orient himself to battle, use the time to good advantage.

- Observe what seasoned veterans of combat are doing.
- Discover the positions of aggression.
- Form a plan for stealth.
- To avoid friendly fire, let others in your platoon know your idea.
- Use cover and back-up to advance your position.
- Conserve ammo by planning shots.
- Let training kick in and take over.
- Wait the first minutes out to acclimate to the situation if you are able, and talk yourself into making reason—rather than panic—rule.
- Make peace with God ahead of the onslaught. It helps.
- Review constantly your platoon’s objective and your part in it.

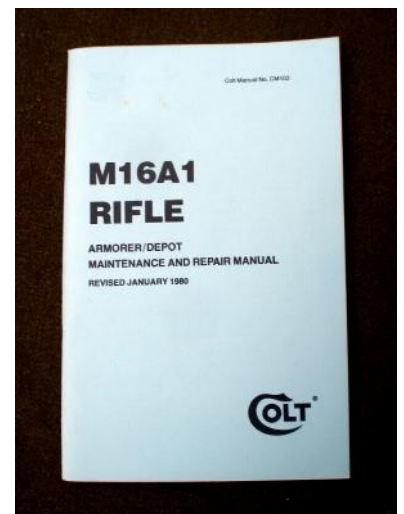
—For Gary W.

<sup>3</sup>Quoted in Grammar Moves: Shaping Who You Are: First Edition by Lawrence Weinstein, Thomas Finn. Longman Publishers 2010. Chapter: “Grammar for Being Optimistic”, Section: “But”.

<sup>4</sup>Blood Stripes: an immediate promotion due to death of the person who previously filled the position.

A 1969 Army study of daily urine and blood samples from the Army troops along the Ho Chi Minh Trail showed there was less stress in troops than in officers coming up to the day of a predicted attack. The troops were physically preparing perimeter defenses which calmed their nerves, whereas the officers were planning for possible contingencies and unknowns.

—Based on War by Sebastian Junger, p. 34.



## DeserveD

Basic was almost over.  
We were tested with live ammo in battle simulation.  
The launcher jammed and an artillery shell exploded in my barrel.  
The flash wounded several of us,  
Instantly permanently took my hearing, and  
Admitted me to the infirmary for a couple of weeks.

I would have gone to serve, hearing or not,  
But they discharged me. "Unfit" they said.  
"If you didn't finish basic, you aren't a vet", they said.  
So I did not receive anything for my loss until 3 years ago.<sup>1</sup>  
A lifetime of missed music is now valued at \$236 a month.

—Daryl Olk

<sup>1</sup>45 years after injury, disability compensation was begun.

**Note: See Book 3 for additional information and help  
for PTSD, with questions for discussion.**



Rain poncho. 4-6 ponchos  
snap together to make a tent.

## Now I Know Why There's Been So Much Rain

May the rain you experience in life  
Nourish your roots,

May the blustery wind grow your trunk strong,  
May lightning strikes produce fortified air to breathe.

Then may your branches, though scarred,  
Be a shelter and a testimony for all.

—Based on Psalm 1; Jeremiah 17:7-8.



Bamboo, by Chuck  
Keller.



*Note: The preceding poem was judged to be one of the top 3 submissions of the Sower Gallery Spirit Writing Competition, June 17, 2017.*

## Coming of Age

A 12-year-old tomboy  
Observes and identifies  
Fighter aircraft  
In tight formation over the farm.

A 13 year-old girl  
Plays with her dog on the walk from the bus,  
Waves at training jets  
Circling from Duluth.

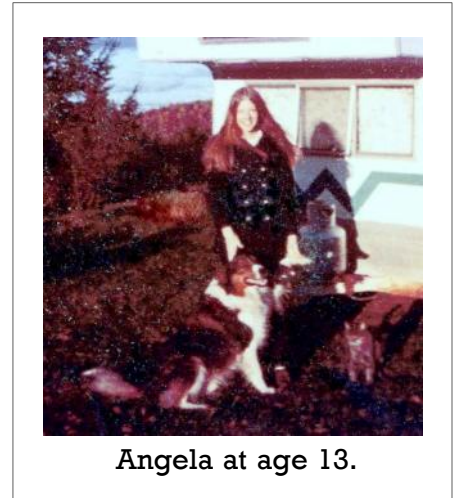
Pilots on low maneuvers  
Make eye contact from cockpits  
And dip their wings above quilted fields,  
Picturesque lakes and pocked gravel pit,  
A place to practice emergency fuel dumps.

A 14 year-old farmer's daughter  
In raggy-bottomed cut-offs, pigtails and halter top  
Pulls miscreants from her father's ranks of vegetables,  
Smiles and salutes.

Pilots in good humor  
Watching from above  
Consider her frequent presence a destination,  
A one-person general-audiences USO show.

A 15 year-old cheerleader practices her routines,  
Sees family and friends off to war,  
Sits in her room writing letters,  
Her blue fountain pen and Flower Power stationery  
An encouragement factory.

She writes of normal things, daily things,  
Signs with "A friendly hello", "Your good friend",  
"See you soon", and "Always".  
Seals it with a prayer, stamps it halfway around the world  
To pack into a rucksack, rain and tears blurring the words.



Angela at age 13.

## Frog in the Kettle

2 female Pre-Med Biology Lab partners:

Me, a wide-eyed teen

Wanting to challenge brain cells with science,

She, a girl wanting to save the world,

Kiss every boo-boo, make it all better,

Compassion oozing through blue eyes, out every pore.

He, a male nurse, rotated out from Vietnam,

An old young man who understood triage too well;

Bodies full of working parts poured out in gory splendor,

Trying to save the human being in each one,

Wondering about having been of benefit;

Looking exhausted in his fatigues,

Wanting olive-drab to melt him again into invisibility.

The assignment: to conduct experiments on poor jungle-green frogs.

Me, rationalizing this, trying to see the benefits:

Its senseless pain for the greater good:

Our medical boot camp, redundancy getting

Us ready to combat the next step. Me: considering a hypothesis:

She, Angel of Mercy needing desensitization,

He, stuttering, shaking, needing a stiff drink of Human Kindness.

Me, taking a chance, approaching the no-nonsense Prof,

Hoping She will see the benefits.

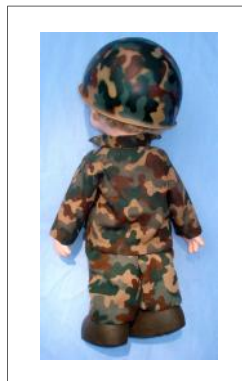
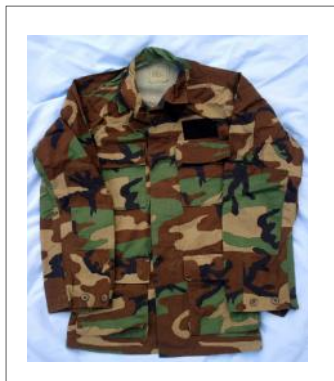
Her, making a good tactical call.

Me, donating a perfectly fine lab partner for an experiment:

She of The Big Heart to He of The Broken Corpus,

Me, going it alone. Not minding the extra work.

*—Hope it worked out to benefit you both, Mike and Debi.*





## Ambivalent to Bivouac?

I was coming up on 18 when I registered at trade school for Refrigeration and the Draft blew in. It took me to the main post office; someone had opened the Registration for Selective Service Window. I was fingerprinted, all identifying marks and scars were cataloged. They scrutinized the driver's license and social security number to make sure it was me.

I had a good classification, but school was moving faster than the war did. Being sent to battle was a prime motivator for doing well in college. Everyone was focused. When war quotas were at their highest, stipulations and stringency for degree programs wranked<sup>1</sup> up, too. It was a stress to achieve—either in school or in Basic, to claw for a better assignment; one test score, one birth date over another seemed to mean life or death.

A person didn't have the luxury of taking time to decide a long-term plan of action or any dream about the future, just lock into a course path or marching orders and keep moving forward. Would the government's whims about the "Police Action" ultimately determine if I would ever be married or have children?

The lottery came because they could not seem to fill the holes fast enough. Once the number was drawn, that was it—everyone with that birthdate was called. They took up to number 186 that year. (My birthdate had become number 273.) We kept friendship so loosely attached; Guys would see the handwriting on the wall<sup>2</sup> and march in step: to Basic Training to join the fray—or try to disappear. So little talk of what each future might hold.

Enlistment would allow specialties, but drafted guys were meat for the killing machine. Still, if I'd had a low number, I would have waited to get drafted before I would enlist. It was not in my constitution to kill or even to fight. But a big part of me was raised to be Patriotic, to do my part, to step up and be a man, as if the only attribute of Manliness is to be able to shoot someone else.

The more we discovered, the more struggle we had seeing a benevolent America behind the red-and-white striped curtain, seeing stars again in our eyes. Were we in Vietnam for the right reasons? What was the ultimate goal? Could I be willing to die for why we were really there? So few reliable sources to consult. I was not good at convincing people of my worth: I'd be just one more body to the Army.

A body to fill a hole, like everyone else 18 years old. Our lives seemed so cheap. Even though I wasn't Prime Rib, I didn't want to be Hamburger. I was willing to be a support by repairing vehicles; if they'd take the time to type me, a

parts master would be a good match. But would my help make me culpable for someone else's death? It was war then, understand, not "peacekeeping."

I'd be lying if I said I wasn't reluctant to die in Vietnam, but not going was barely a choice; they were hunting guys down and prosecuting them for not reporting. Faith that the Lord would give me strength to do whatever I had to do sustained me. I didn't think He would ask me to kill anyone. Turned out I was right.

I'd thought about it a lot. How strongly do I take "Thou shalt not kill?"<sup>3</sup> We are also to pray for and obey our leaders.<sup>4</sup> If the President commands me to go to war to kill, will the Lord take that into consideration?

Those who wanted Conscientious Objector status were subjected to character assassination, intimating that a guy who wouldn't kill was a freak of nature. Going to the Draft Office? Whoever delayed became a prime candidate to be a draftee—some even said *marked* for the front lines. If a person didn't register, he didn't get a student deferment, so he was stamped "Prime Meat A-1." It was very nearly "no win", just like the war.

Being assigned to Germany or stateside?

It didn't seem likely.

I never felt I missed something

Valuable or important in my life

Just because I was not drafted.

Conscientious Objector? I decided I didn't quite fit that criteria. I gradually hoped I'd have the strength to do what was commanded of me. I believed in the *concepts* of the country. I thought at the time we *must* be there for a decent reason, but I am a guy who doesn't make waves, doesn't feed on confrontation, doesn't fight back, so it would have been very, very difficult.

Trying to grow into adulthood during that time affected me because I didn't learn *how* to make plans or learn to consider future consequences. Too, a person used to look people in the eye when speaking. But in the 60's and 70's, there was very little eye contact, especially between guys, whether civilian or GI, maybe to keep from revealing our fear. Avoidance hasn't served us well.

We didn't dare say things, really, because everyone seemed so conflicted about service or non-service. Just kids, we barely had our *own* opinion formulated, let alone want to step on a friend's. So a few freely protested; the rest of us stayed knotted in the closet. The draft, that lottery, still divides my generation of men: those who served and those who didn't.

Society grabbed angst and anger, bombast and bullets,

But it didn't entertain questions or options very well:  
It didn't allow us the etiquette of dialogue *or* choices:

“Could I still serve somehow, and be against *this* particular war?”

“Could I bow out of *this* one and still be a patriotic American?”

Couldn't we have said honestly, “Maybe you and I feel the same ambivalence about Vietnam. I'm hoping to fade into the woodwork so they won't pick me yet, you're in Camouflage, already blending in as best you can; maybe that's all the difference there is.”

Then suddenly, Vietnam was declared “over”, just because they said it was. We left the place a wreck: ostracized Amerasians, orphans; their economy, ourselves, in shambles.

—James, 1969 high school graduate.

<sup>1</sup>Wracked: overgrown. Degree programs were suddenly augmented with rigorous coursework requirements, seemingly to intentionally cause students to wash out.

<sup>2</sup>Prophetic reference to the future Vietnam Memorial.

<sup>3</sup>Exodus 20:13. <sup>4</sup>1 Timothy 2:2.

## What's One Day More or Less?

He turned 5<sup>1</sup> on Labor Day, 1957, so became a kindergartener the next morning. That meant he was able to get a student deferment for college—the last one on the last day they were ever issued, which was also the first day of his 4-year<sup>2</sup> university program. Electrified by study, he didn't give the draft another thought until the night of the Lottery.

By contrast, his best friend Bob S. had been in the womb a couple more days: He wasn't eligible to start kindergarten until 1958. Therefore, he didn't get a student deferment for college, so had the unenviable choice of the Draft, the National Guard, or Canada. He chose the Guard, which required Basic, so he started University not 1—but 2—years later than his buddy, and had a 6-year service commitment vying for study time.

When the Lottery was instituted, Guy 1 was only number 70, (they picked up to number 95 that year) but with a 1-S,<sup>3</sup> he was hopeful for one more year in school. The war was winding down and even if they called him, including time

in Basic, he figured he might miss the action.

The Army gave everyone an IQ test so they were typing people all the way through. The stronger Uncle Sam built the political platform for war, the broader the stripe was painted for service. They took anyone over 70 IQ, but rumor was they reserved anyone higher than 149 for special projects like Intelligence and Decoding. That helped settle him a lot. Even in a desperate situation, he reasoned it was unlikely the Army would plug anyone with an Electrical Engineering Degree into the front lines.

He also calculated 9 support staff to every combat soldier, so his odds improved past the worry mark. He finished school in June, the Lottery was suddenly disbanded and Saigon fell the next spring. Even if they had drafted him the day after graduation, he might have spent only a few days grounded, packing up the stuff of war.

—Gary, 1970 high school graduate.

<sup>1</sup>Starting kindergarten never seemed so life-defining, with draft registration required by a male's 18th birthday.

<sup>2</sup>If starting in the next cohort, the Electrical Engineer program required 5 years of study.

<sup>3</sup>Code for Student Deferment. With 186 dates called the first year and 95 the second year, 85 days on the calendar were never called for the Vietnam Draft.

## Students of War, Students of Peace

### South Campus, West Bank

Ugly attacked the university one Spring day:  
The noise of demonstrations interrupted Logic 20,<sup>1</sup>

Scuffles on the street vied with wrestling ideas.  
Then there was a FFFOOP.  
We ran for the window and threw down the sash,  
Fools believing that stiff film  
Was an insulator from the unrest,  
Shutting ourselves up  
Against a gagging belch of tear gas.  
How could people possibly study with a war going on?  
Eureka! Inverse Logic:<sup>2</sup>  
We kept our heads down

Our noses buried in theory,  
Therefore, daring with syllogism<sup>2</sup> the chaos to end.

—Gary

<sup>1</sup>CB code 20: everything's fine; "Copasetic, Good Buddy"

<sup>2</sup>People cannot study because a war is going on. War is disrupting our lives. Ergo, war cannot survive if everyone becomes busy studying instead.

## North Campus

SDS<sup>1</sup> came to campus after Freshman Week,  
Inviting everyone to a meeting at Student Union.  
Curious for news of the war, I attended.  
Perhaps 30 came. As people gathered,  
I asked the speaker what his major was. He was vague.  
Being an event planner myself,  
I asked how much time it took to do all this organizing,  
When did he have time to study? Warming to my long blonde,  
He admitted he didn't actually attend campus right there or then, he  
travelled a lot.  
The co-ed in me had already seen his wedding ring,  
5:00 shadow density  
And his intensity: no 20-year-old. A student impersonator.

His demeanor made me savvy,  
But not in the direction he'd hoped.  
A demonstration was whipped up for the following day.  
I went to the Provost and asked,  
If *they* could have a sit-in,  
Could *we* stand for troop support?  
Showing colors was strange to the little middle-of-the-road campus,  
But he created a solution:  
SDS wrangled on the south side of the building,  
A bullhorn shouting what to think at their corralled handful,  
And all 5 of us found each other north of the Midian hillside,<sup>2</sup>  
Not knowing what to bleat, the silent minority.

<sup>1</sup>Students for a Democratic Society, which later was rumored to have been a CIA front organization hoping vacillating students would acquiesce to the draft rather than to the student unrest; and if they didn't, through the miracle of generational disagreement, would garner adult Silent Majority and Dove support to fund the war.

<sup>2</sup>Numbers 31:8 Biblical reference to 5 smug kings on high ground being blindsided by the Israelite Army. Our campus was built on a hill, and we 5 students had the mistaken impression we were merely taking the moral high ground by not being angry. It also echoes the reference to the Meridian/parallel dividing North and South Vietnam.

“In his famous book, Rules for Radicals, Saul Alinsky, an activist and organizer of the Far Left, makes it clear that leftists trying to effect change are to have no conversations with their opponents, because open discussion could lend credence to their opponents’ arguments and humanize them in the sight of the public...Alinsky suggests cultivating hypersensitivity to perceived slights (proffered by conservatives) as a convenient way to halt important conversations and to demonize opponents. Unfortunately, hypersensitivity is not limited to those on the Left. Conservative politicians have also adopted the strategy of feigned offense...We must start focusing on what is the right [thing to do or the wrong thing to do as a nation] and not on what someone else did.”

—Ben Carson, M.D. in One Nation: What We Can All Do to Save America's Future, 2015, p. 15.

## The Read, Why'd and Blew

*One Baby Boomer's observations about war from the 1940s forward:*

### *Late 1940s*

I've stood beside this flag,  
A veil of values, a plump of pride to swelling notes;  
This furl in the wind swelling my chest,  
Dragging me into its black-and-white living-color spell  
At the end of the 8:30 pm broadcast day, an innocent observer.

### *1950s*

I've not cast a die  
Or yet truly lived under this flag. Mine  
An illusion<sup>1</sup> of innocence:  
I've not hard-questioned its sometimes questionable standings  
Nor tested its fibrous filibustered strength,

### *1960s*

Nor looked behind the curtain of its red and blue Party window-dressings  
Nor exposed its smoke-filled bilious shenanigans—



Or struck my own ☒ to a ballot.  
I've shrugged at this flag, allegiance mere schoolroom platitude.  
Assuring the ideals be true? Foreign.

### *1970s*

I gave my time,  
Fulfilled my duty,  
I was willing to die for my country, for this flag,  
But I never made the bargain to be dragged back sick  
Ignored, haunted, and half a man because of it.

### *1980s*

I've now spent myself for this exhausted flag  
A sheet of shreds, a tatter of tenacity  
This white of my knuckles  
Still gripping **blued** metal  
In the fading rain.

### *1990s*

I've suffered for this flag,  
A suffering more dear than dyeing a clearly marked battlefield  
For an altruistic cause at a well-defined moment.  
A tired shroud of mere survival, beaten by the wind of relived recollection,  
Great drops of blood easier than this great sweat of memory.

### *2000s*

I've died for this flag  
A stripe of strike, a vein of victory  
This **red** of my allegiance, this **blue** of my loyalty  
Pouring out duty,  
Its **red ochre** iron flowering florid<sup>2</sup> in conflict's ground.

### *2010s*

I've lain under this flag  
A cerement<sup>3</sup> of strength over an expressionless empty,  
A Bailiwick,<sup>4</sup> an epitome of veils; these lips of **blue**  
Neither objecting to the heat of battle or  
Smacking over another Cold War.



<sup>1</sup>Illusion is a filmy tulle fabric. Layered over an opaque one, it was a popular fashion statement of the 1960s. Illusion: being intellectually misled; causing misinterpretation.

<sup>2</sup>Florid iron flowering: iron-rich blood takes on a distinctive odor and color when exposed to jungle heat and humidity.

<sup>3</sup>A waxed cloth to cover a corpse.

<sup>4</sup>Bailiwick: a special domain (Bailey: a place for; the space between two outer walls of a castle; inside hiding spot.) Beetle Bailey, a popular military cartoon character for Baby Boomers, was thought to have only air between his ears, but he also often created safe or sacred space for a peaceful activity, such as watching butterflies, smelling flowers or napping.

### **Important dates in American History**

<http://www.datesandevents.org/events-timelines/14-american-history-timeline.htm> including dates like National Anthem Day declared March 3, 1931.

For a list of days when to display the flag from sunrise to sunset as weather permits, ask for “Memobook 11”, Disabled American Veterans, Box 14201, Cincinnati, Ohio 45250-0301.

Check your local county government center to sign up for state e-alerts on when and why to fly the flag half-staff.

An editor in Cincinnati, puffing<sup>1</sup> air-tight caskets, said, “No person having tried one of these coffins will ever use any other.” — “Iowa State Register”, Des Moines, Iowa, on Friday, July 7, 1882, “Thistles” column. From family archives.

<sup>1</sup>That is, advertising using embellishment.

### **Hair-Razing Trail**

The military machine recruited soldiers from  
The American Indian Reservations as jungle trackers  
But once they became Marine Brothers with shaved heads,  
Their accuracy dropped from a hair’s breadth into an abyss—  
Despite 2 pairs of stalkings in combat boots.

It was discovered long hair is an extension of the nervous system  
Enhancing intuition, creating antennae, providing a sixth sense.  
Oops.

When Anglo vets got out of Vietnam  
Many grew theirs long, too,  
Trying to feel again.  
The Beast of War, it seems,  
Shaves heads so we can't detect  
Its logic has a bald spot.

—With thanks to Gary

## Hair Today, Gone Tomorrow

Old Testament David “hid in the mountains with 400  
Whose faces were like the faces of lions,<sup>1</sup>  
Who lived like wild goats,”<sup>2</sup>  
And kept an army of 3000 stealthfully at bay  
While the kingdom was in contest.

Biblical Samson<sup>3</sup> should have paid attention  
To what the raised hairs on the back  
Of his neck were telling him;  
Instead, his enemies dispatched them;  
His hands were tied.

<sup>1</sup>1 Chronicles 12:8: Not regulation; scruffy; rogue warriors.

<sup>2</sup>1 Samuel 24:2. Kashmir goats of the area have particularly long hair, live precariously and thrive on craggy hillsides.

<sup>3</sup>Judges 16:18-22. Enamored with his own strength, Samson was enticed into a compromising position, then provided with a crewcut by his enemies.

## Stealth Sheath

A stab in the dark  
Decides who is dominant  
Whom submissive;  
A stab in the dark determines  
Who will speak in the morning,  
Whom cannot.



Cold War era and forward,  
Special Forces uniform, de-  
veloped but never used offi-  
cially except for mercenaries  
and contractors.



Bowie knife.

## Pop Goes

My M-16 grew slimy rust overnight in the jungle heat, despite effort.  
Once it misfired. The only thing that saved me was a vine-covered tree—

Adrenaline propelled me up the trunk into the canopy  
And I waited, a mere snake's tongue from the enemy.  
From then on I watched for a chance at an AK-47

And found one at the end of my Bowie knife.  
“My” Kalashnikov was sturdy, reliable as a dog, compact, lightweight.  
It could dispatch 7.62 mm rounds in fully automatic mode,<sup>1</sup>  
The tumbling action of the high muzzle velocity<sup>2</sup>  
Contributed to, shall we say, its faithfulness.

Operator accuracy was not a major requirement, which was good in the dark.  
I suddenly had thirty bullets at a moment's notice between me and the VC  
But its pop drew friendly fire like fleas. So I learned  
To make it bark the Star Spangled Banner  
And hoped our grunts were singing along.

—With Jesse Hunt

<sup>1</sup>An AK (Auto-Kalashnikov) reports like a machine gun, as long as the trigger is squeezed.

<sup>2</sup>Machining inside the barrel creates the producing-speed of the bullet after firing. <http://www.vietvet.org/glossary.htm>



Ammo clip for M-16/M-193, 5.56 mm; ammo bandolier for Bale speed loader 10-round clips.

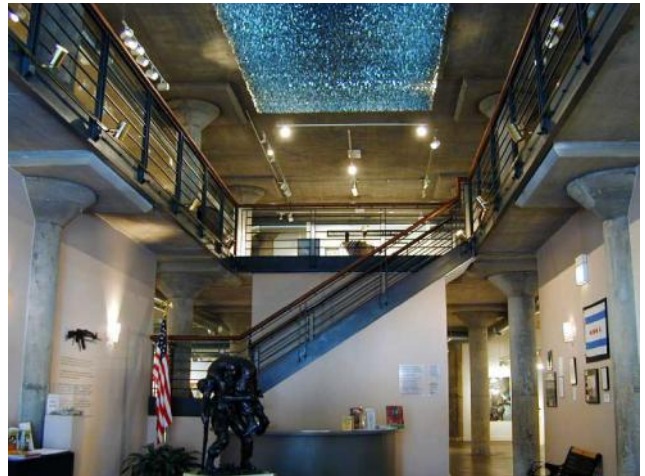
**The National Veterans Art Museum in Chicago** has an unusual work of art. When visitors first enter the museum, they will hear a sound like wind chimes coming from above them and their attention will be drawn upward 24 feet to the ceiling of the two-story atrium.

Dog tags of the more than 58,000 service men and women who died in the Vietnam War hang from the ceiling of the National Vietnam Veterans Art Museum in Chicago installed for Veterans Day, November 11, 2010. The 10-by-40-foot sculpture, entitled “Above & Beyond”, was designed by Ned Broderick and Richard Stein.

The tens of thousands of metal dog tags are suspended, 1-inch apart, from fine lines that allow them to move and chime with shifting air currents. Museum employees using a kiosk and laser pointer help visitors locate the exact dog tag with the imprinted name of their lost friend or relative. <http://www.nvam.org/>



Close up of dog tags by Lucas Carter, reprinted with permission from "The American Legion Magazine" © March, 2016. [www.legion.org](http://www.legion.org) During "The Conflict" protesters and the news media were calling for a review of total casualties and daily body counts, wondering if they were accurate or low-balled.



58,000 dog tags suspended from the ceiling of the NVA Museum in Chicago. Photo used with permission from Keeley Construction, Inc. [www.keeley.com](http://www.keeley.com)

## Cleaning House

What is it  
About life  
That demands our attention  
Keeps us beating our hearts  
Even when emergency rooms  
Paddles and monitors  
Are nowhere in sight?

What is it  
About the will to live  
That creates order  
Prioritizes the facts  
Triage the urgencies in neat, stacked piles  
And helps us work through them, one by one,  
Until the crisis has passed?

—From I Am Still Me! Brains are Injured, Hearts are Mended by the author, p. 74.

## Help! Medic

I was a medical corpsman in Da Nang in '65.  
There was a kid  
Just *a kid*  
Who'd been wounded in a firefight.  
I patched him up.



They sent him back to the fighting before he could even heal.  
He had no stamina.  
The likelihood of infection in that jungle heat was almost assured.  
But I didn't have to worry about that.  
He was struck immediately on the battlefield.  
It's like both sides could hardly wait to see him dead.  
Not too much made sense to me about war after that.

—Anonymous

## Is there a Doctor in the House?

If grade school friends came over, I was drafted into their war games,  
But I always wanted to be the medic, because I didn't want to kill anything.  
The biggest problem for medics in combat is compassion fatigue.

Add to that the lack of supplies and evac support,  
Then being shot at without respect for Geneva Convention Rules.<sup>1</sup>  
Add to that the lack of value for human life from some commanders.  
Then there are the sights, sounds and smells of combat:

Of phosphorous burning holes in bowel,  
Wild screams of a GI watching his own gut  
Being eaten by eerie green heat.  
Add to that the futility of war: that no one ever truly wins;  
After all the carnage, we look around and ask, "For what?"

—Anonymous

<sup>1</sup>Referring to rules of war etiquette.



Photo of Maggie's truck taken by Chris Craim, contributed by Kenneth Roberts to Noonie Fortin, for her website dedicated to Martha Raye: <http://www.colonelmaggie.com/vets.htm> This truck became well known in the BanMe Thout area of Vietnam in 1971. Used by permission of Ms. Fortin.



## Entertain the Idea

Just before Thanksgiving 1967

We were scheduled to have singer and comedienne Martha Raye  
As entertainment for a USO show.

We were ferrying dead and wounded from a large GRF<sup>1</sup>.

We'd run out of body bags by noon, so the Hook<sup>2</sup>

Was pretty rough in the back.

We couldn't manage a program that evening with all the triage.

As it turned out,

Martha landed in her Special Forces beret<sup>3</sup> and jungle fatigues,

Helped process wounded. Raye set the tables,<sup>4</sup>

Assisted with surgical shifts and gave breaks

At the Army Field Hospital in Pleiku,

Exactly the spot of sunshine we needed.

Martha is the only woman<sup>5</sup> buried

In the Special Forces cemetery at Ft. Bragg.

—Author unknown, from "Martha Raye, Who Knew?" received by e-mail 10/4/13. Corrected by Noonie Fortin, First Sergeant, (Retired), U.S. Army, biographer and author of Memories of Maggie.

<sup>1</sup>Ground Relay Facility.

<sup>2</sup>CH-47 Chinook helicopter.

<sup>3</sup>Martha Raye was given honorary rank of Colonel, with uniform and medals, which she proudly wore when she visited and entertained soldiers in combat zones, often at her own expense.

<sup>4</sup>Prepared instrument trays for operating room tables. Although Maggie had very little medical training, "she was a fast learner and often helped in the military hospitals doing all types of things—extra hands were always welcomed." —Noonie Fortin.

<sup>5</sup>Statistic viable at the time she was buried. The Afghanistan War changed that.

## War Games

When we played monopoly  
He always chose the battleship.

He played soldier every day  
Even before he got his Daisy BB Gun.

Vietnam was starving for hungry pilots.  
He bit.

—A Brother



Angela with the Luger-Tuber in kitchen-jungle training; no match for a Salad Shooter.

## Things I Have to Do Today

After a failed mission  
With *beaucoup* casualties  
Fear of a tarnished service record  
Choked me.  
What other job could I possibly do,  
When all I knew was dropping bombs?

The weariness lifts:  
“Only three things are required of me:  
To love mercy,  
To do justly,  
And to walk humbly with my God.”

—Inspired by Micah 6:8b and a combat pilot.



The Luger-Tuber, the original potato gun, Grown by Jesse Hunt.

## A Family Affair

It's a family value: graduate, enlist, marry.  
Grandpas, cousins, both men and women  
Have made the service a career.

My Army uncle wrote home  
Anxious to take leave for his senses.  
He never made it back.

My female cousin signed up for the Navy on a lark.  
When graduation day came, she fluttered,  
Preferred to be a free bird,  
And thought her parents would help turn the key to her cage.  
They wouldn't;  
She migrated—and loved it.

Another uncle returned on leave  
Sat against the wall and fell dead asleep.  
When mom woke him for supper  
He threw her across the room.  
She nudged him with a broom handle after that.

—Sue Tammaro

### How Green Was My Valley?

Bunker yard at Firebase Buttons near the base of Bao Yo Mountain  
Was bulldozed stark, heavily sprayed with defoliants,  
A toxic dump swept by orange dust devils as vehicles passed.  
There were *a lot* of passing vehicles.

Even though our outpost at topography's apex  
Got shelled by the Viet Cong. Every. Single. Day.  
And every single day our base camp in the valley got shot at, too.  
Bao Yo itself was a verdant cone of trees,

An up-facing foliage-tunnel  
Of vibrant growth between the two.  
In the midst of all the bleakness.  
It was restful, surprisingly restorative

To gaze at that voluptuous vortex in the setting sun.  
In the middle of the heat of hell,  
I was juxtaposed at the mouth  
Of the Garden of Eden.

—From interview with James Kane, 6/28/2015.

**“Before leave I showered 3 times to try to get the orange Firebase Buttons dust out of my hair. It still stained the pillowcase when I met my wife and child in Hawaii for R&R.”**  
—James Kane.