

Remembering Vietnam

Five Fragments of Memories

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1. Yesterday's Soldier

Lean, potentially mean.

A cog in a wheel.

Part of a machine.

"Yes sir!" says the young soldier.

"I do what I'm told."

Be all you can be! the Army says.

I'll give you a place to sleep,

Food to eat, clothes to wear,

A weapon, boots, and more.

I'll train you to fight.

I'll teach you a specialty.

"Yes sir!" says the young soldier.

"You can count on us.

No need to worry.

We're here to serve.

We'll fight,

if that's

what you need."

2. All Secure

Is it?

Is it ever?

No one knows
for sure.

It depends
on luck,
randomness,
probability.

There are laws
for probability.

A pattern
emerges.

A sniper fires
at the flight line
every night
at 21:00 hrs.

One night,
the sniper
is reassigned.
All secure!

A mortar team
hits the compound
every three hours
until they receive
orders to relocate
or to change position.

All secure!
Until it isn't.
It depends.

3. About War

It's been said before,
more powerful
and more eloquent
than I could ever write.

Nothing seems to change.
We still fight
to protect
what we decide
is right.

As witness, I write to protest.
(Someone yells): I protest!

Our only hope is for aliens
to descend and rid the earth
of its weaponry.

We can use rocks
and sling shots
to fell our enemies.

(Someone yells): I protest!

We can again
fashion knives and swords,
long bows and cross bows
to kill one at a time.

(Someone yells): I protest!

We can poison our foes,
destroy their food supply,
starve them out.

(Someone yells): I protest!

We can set fire to their cities,
sterilize their women,
castrate the men.

(Someone yells): I protest!

4. Eyes that Talk

He has a puppy that followed him everywhere.
One would guess he lives in the village outside the wire.

Always smiling, always playing with that yellow pup.
Every day he comes through the tangle wire.

We made a hiding place for him under a bunk.
If the Lt. found out, he'd be a goner.

In the meantime, we feed him. We play marbles
in the dirt. He learned to spit shine our boots.

He plays cards with us. We read him stories.
He seldom speaks. But those eyes, they talk.

5. Images I Carry

Green and red tracers curving through the night.
Grunts single file walking a paddy berm.
Parachute flares casting an eerie glow.
A battleship firing its 16-inch guns.
A B52 strike rumbling the ground.
A flame thrower's controlled arc.
The blue dress of a donut dolly.
Napalm unleashed on target.

The soothing smile of a nurse.
An F4 screaming overhead.
A sky full of choppers.
The weary look
of refugees
who have lost
what little
they had