

NO, I'M NOT A DRAFT DODGER,  
OR THE SAGA OF A CIVILIAN  
IN UNIFORM

PRESENTED TO  
THE  
ATHENEUM SOCIETY OF HOPKINSVILLE, KY  
MARCH 5, 2009

*JIM LOVE*

I'M JUST A TYPICAL AMERICAN BOY FROM A TYPICAL AMERICAN TOWN  
I BELIEVE IN GOD AND SENATOR DODD AND KEEPING OLD CASTRO DOWN  
AND WHEN IT CAME MY TIME TO SERVE, I KNEW "'BETTER DEAD THAN RED'  
BUT WHEN I GOT TO THE MY OLD DRAFT BOARD, BUDDY, THIS IS WHAT I SAID

SARGE, I'M ONLY EIGHTEENL, I GOT A RUPTURED SPLEEN  
AND I ALWAYS CARRY A PURSE.

I GOT EYES LIKE A BAT AND MY FEET ARE FLAT,  
AND MY ASTHMA'S GETTING WORSE.

D THINK OF MY CAREER, MY SWEETHEART, DEAR, AND MY POOR OLD INVALID  
AUNT.

BESIDES, I AIN'T NO FOOL, I'M A GOIN' TO SCHOOL, AND I'M  
WORKING IN A DEFENSE PLANT.

I HATE CHOI EN LAI, AND I HOPE HE DIES,

BUT ONE THING YOU GOTTA SEE

THAT SOMEONE'S GOTTA GO OVER THERE

AND THAT SOMEONE ISN'T ME.

SO I WISH YOU WELL, SARGE, GIVE 'EM HELL

YEAH, KILL ME A THOUSAND OR SO

AND IF YOU EVER GET A WAR WITHOUT BLOOD AND GORE

WELL, I'LL BE THE FIRST TO GO.

THAT WAS PHIL OCHS' TONGUE-IN-CHEEK PROTEST SONG AGAINST THE VIET NAM WAR, AND WHILE I DIDN'T INVOKE ANY OF THOSE EXCUSES WHEN I WENT BEFORE SELECTIVE SERVICE BOARD NUMBER 146 IN GENEVA, ILLINOIS IN THE SPRING OF 1968 I CERTAINLY THOUGHT ABOUT USING ANY EXCUSE I COULD.

THE VIET NAM WAR HAD BEEN IN PROGRESS FOR ABOUT 4 YEARS AND WAS DESTINED TO LAST 7 MORE, WITH THE WEEKLY DEATH TOLL IN THE 200'S INTO THE LATE 80'S, AND IT WAS A WELL-KNOWN FACT THAT THE AVERAGE "'GRUNT'" IN THE JUNGLE WAS A DRAFTEE, BECAUSE THOSE WHO ENLISTED GOT THE REAR ECHELON JOBS...WHICH WAS WHAT MY EXPERIENCE WAS.

ANYWAY, THE REASON I MET WITH THE DRAFT BOARD WAS TO PROTEST MY RECENT CHANGE IN STATUS FROM A "'2-S'" STUDENT DEFEREMENT TO "'1-A'", OR YOU'RE NEXT.

EVEN THOUGH I'D BEEN OUT OF HIGH SCHOOL 6 YEARS AND I'D ONLY MISSED ONE SEMESTER OF COLLEGE AND WAS ENROLLED AT MURRAY STATE, I HAD YET TO ATTAIN SENIOR STATUS.

THE BOARD MEMBERS INCLUDED, OUT OF A COUNTY OF ABOUT A QUARTER-MILLION PEOPLE, A MAN WHO LIVED IN THE HOUSE IN SOUTH ELGIN WHERE I WAS TAKEN AFTER I WAS BORN IN 1944.

FRITZ KRUEGER AND THE OTHER TWO BOARD MEMBERS ACCEPTED MY LAME EXCUSE THAT I HAD "'CHANGED MY MAJOR'" AND NEEDED A 7TH YEAR TO COMPLETE THE REQUIREMENTS FOR A BACHELOR'S DEGREE.

THEY SAID THAT I WOULD HEAR FROM THEM IN A YEAR--AND SURE ENOUGH, IN MAY OF 1969, I RECEIVED MY "'GREETINGS'" AND DIRECTIONS TO REPORT TO THE INDUCTION CENTER IN CHICAGO, ILLINOIS, ON JUNE 9TH, 1969.

THIS PAPER GOT ITS START ON AN EVENING ALMOST 20 YEARS AGO AT FORT CAMPBELL WHERE I HAD GONE TO COVER A DIVISION REVIEW AND "'PASS-IN-REVIEW'" WHERE ALL THE TROOPS MARCH BY THE REVIEWING STAND.

THE ANNOUNCER ASKED IF ANY VETERANS IN THE AUDIENCE WANTED TO MARCH, BUT FOLLOWING MY INCLINATION OF NON-PARTICIPATORY JOURNALISM, I SAT IN THE GRANDSTAND AND PREPARED TO ENJOY THE SHOW, WHICH OFTEN INCLUDES UNIT MASCOTS SUCH AS BULLDOGS AND GREYHOUNDS AND WHAT'S KNOWN AS 'CEREMONIAL HEADGEAR', SUCH AS THE CAVALRY HATS WORN BY CERTAIN HELICOPTER UNITS.

HOWEVER, I NOTICED IN THE AREA WHERE THE VETERANS WERE CONGREGATING THAT THE VIET NAM ERA WAS SADLY UNDER-REPRESENTED AND I TOOK IT UPON MYSELF TO STAND IN FOR THE OVER 50,000 SOLDIERS, MARINES, SAILORS AND FLYERS WHO WENT TO THAT FARAWAY LAND IN SOUTHEAST ASIA AND DID NOT RETURN ALIVE--OR DID NOT RETURN AT ALL.

AS IN ALL SUCH GATHERINGS, ONE OF THE 'TYPE A' PERSONALITIES STEPPED OUTSIDE THE MILLING CROWD AND BROUGHT MINIMAL ORDER TO A GROUP WHO WERE NOT EXACTLY INTERESTED IN FORMING STRAIGHT LINES AND MARCHING IN STEP.

AS LUCK WOULD HAVE IT, I ENDED UP NEXT TO A VIET NAM VETERAN FROM TENNESSEE.

WE COMPARED NOTES ON UNITS, TIMES, AND PLACES WHERE AND WHEN WE SERVED IN THE BRIEF TIME BEFORE THE PARADE BEGAN, WITH BOTH OF US COMMENTING ON 'AGENT ORANGE' AND THE SUSPECTED EFFECTS IT HAD ON US.

FOR ME, AS AN ARTILLERYMAN INFREQUENTLY EXPOSED TO THE JUNGLE AND THE TOXIC DEFOLIANT, IT IS A MINOR CASE OF PEELING SKIN ON MY HANDS WHICH SURFACES ONLY PERIODICALLY.

FOR HIM, AN INFANTRYMAN WITH CONSIDERABLE TIME IN THE FIELD, AND IN SOME CASES, WITH 'AGENT ORANGE' DRIPPING FROM HIS HELMET, IT WAS AT LEAST TWO BOTTLES OF VASELINE 'INTENSIVE CARE LOTION' A WEEK, AND CRACKED AND BLOODY SKIN IF HE DIDN'T USE IT.

THE EVENT WE ATTENDED OCCURRED ABOUT THE TIME 'OPERATION DESERT SHIELD', OR WHAT'S NOW KNOWN AS THE RUN-UP TO THE 'FIRST GULF WAR', WAS UNDERWAY AND THIS TENNESSEAN, WHO, LIKE ME WAS A CONSCRIPT--A DRAFTEE--FOR VIET NAM, SAID TO ME VERY EARNESTLY THAT HE WOULD GLADLY PUT THE UNIFORM BACK ON AND TAKE ON THE 'RUGHEADS' IF HIS COUNTRY ASKED HIM.

IT'S DIFFICULT TO DEFINE SUCH A MINDSET.

WAS IT PATRIOTISM? OR JINGOISM? OR POTENTIAL REVENGE FOR THE LOSS IN VIET NAM AND THE CHANCE TO BE ON THE 'WINNING SIDE'?

ANYWAY, WITH THAT REACTION, COUPLED WITH MY OWN PERSONAL EXPERIENCES, I THOUGHT I MIGHT OFFER SOME PERSONAL OBSERVATIONS AS A VIET NAM VETERAN.

THOUGH I WASN'T PRESENT FOR THE VIET NAM PAPER DELIVERED BY RETIRED COLONEL BOB FREEMAN, WHO SPENT TIME OVER THERE IN COMBAT HELICOPTER UNITS, INCLUDING ONE WHICH COUNTED AMONG ITS PILOTS NONE OTHER THAN SINGER/SONGWRITER KRIS KRISTOFFERSON, I UNDERSTAND IT WAS A SOLID, SCHOLARLY LOOK AT THE CONFLICT WHICH WAS THE SIGNAL EVENT OF THE 1960'S IN THE UNITED STATES, TARNISHING THE IMAGE OF J-F-K AND SENDING L-B-J BACK TO TEXAS.

SOME PEOPLE CONSIDER THE END OF THE VIET NAM WAR APRIL 30TH, 1975 WHEN THE SOUTH VIETNAMESE GOVERNMENT SURRENDERED TO NORTH VIETNAMESE FORCES AFTER THEY TOOK SAIGON.

FOR OTHERS, IT OCCURRED OVER 7 YEARS EARLIER WITH THE TET OFFENSIVE WHICH, IN REALITY, WAS NOT MILITARILY SUCCESSFUL, BUT WAS A DEVASTATING LOSS TO AMERICANS' PERCEPTION OF THE CONDUCT AND STATUS OF THE WAR.

AND A CHARACTER IN STEPHAN KING'S 'HEARTS IN ATLANTIS' WHO WAS A VIET NAM VET, SAID HE KNEW THE WAR WAS LOST WHEN HE FIRST HEARD 'INCENSE AND PEPPERMINTS' BY THE STRAWBERRY ALARM CLOCK ON THE COMMISSARY JUKE BOX.

BUT I CAN PINPOINT EXACTLY WHEN THE WAR WAS LOST--IN THE EARLY MORNING HOURS OF JULY 4TH, 1970, WHEN NEWLY-MINTED FIELD ARTILLERY SECOND LIEUTENANT JAMES HARRISON LOVE, U-S 54844247, LANDED AT TANH SA NUT FORCE BASE IN MILITARY DISTRICT 3, REPUBLIC OF VIETNAM.

THE U.S. HAD REACHED THE BOTTOM OF THE BARREL---MILITARYWISE---WHEN THEY CONFERRED THE "'BUTTER BAR'" ON ME. LIKE MUHAMMAD ALI---I DIDN'T HAVE NO QUARREL WITH NO VIET CONG. THEY NEVER CALLED ME "'WHITE BOY"'.

THINK OF THAT GREAT LINE OF AMERICAN MILITARY LEADERS WHO BEGAN THEIR MILITARY CAREERS AS 2ND LIEUTENANTS IN THE U.S. ARMY, INCLUDING ROBERT E. LEE, U.S. GRANT, PHIL SHERIDAN, JOHN C. FREMONT, GEORGE ARMSTRONG CUSTER, JOHN J. PERSHING, DWIGHT D. EISENHOWER, GEORGE S. PATTON JUNIOR, AND GEORGE C. MARSHALL.

AND THEN THERE WAS LIEUTENANT LOVE, WHO WAS PROMPTLY NAMED "'BRO LOVE"' BY HIS FIRST FIRE DIRECTION TEAM AND CERTAINLY EPITOMIZED THE PHRASE ENGRAVED ON ZIPPO LIGHTERS OR DISPLAYED OPENLY ON HELMETS: "'WE ARE THE UNWILLING, LED BY THE UNQUALIFIED, TO DO THE UNNECESSARY, FOR THE UNGRATEFUL"'.

A FIRE DIRECTION CENTER IS THE "'NERVE CENTER"' OF A FIELD ARTILLERY BATTERY.

IN THE SIMPLEST TERMS, THE F-D-C PRODUCES THE DATA ON HOW HIGH TO RAISE THE BARREL OF A HOWITZER AND WHICH DIRECTION TO POINT IT ALONG WITH HOW MUCH POWDER TO USE AND WHAT KIND OF FUSE TO INSTALL--ONE THAT BURSTS ON IMPACT, ONE THAT DELAYS FOR A HALF-SECOND AND THEN IGNITES THE SHELL, PRODUCING A HUGE CRATER, OR ONE WHICH BURSTS IN THE AIR, RAINING HOT, LETHAL STEEL ON TROOPS IN THE OPEN.

(CRATER ANALYSIS STORY)

THE FIRST FIRE DIRECTION CREW I WORKED WITH. AND THAT'S EXACTLY WHAT IT WAS...I IMMEDIATELY DID AWAY WITH THE OFFICER/SUBORDINATE ROLE AND ADVISED THEM THAT THE ONLY DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THEM AND ME WAS THE 6 MONTHS OF EXTRA TRAINING I'D HAD IN OFFICER CANDIDATE SCHOOL WHICH PRODUCED A GREATER CHECK AT THE END OF THE MONTH.

THE CREW HAD NO FEWER THAN 4 COLLEGE GRADUATES--TWO MICHIGAN STATE, ONE GEORGIA TECH, AND ONE HILLSDALE COLLEGE OF MICHIGAN GRADUATES--AND THEY WERE SMART ENOUGH TO SHOW THE PROPER RESPECT IN THE PRESENCE OF THE "'LIFERS'" AS WE CALLED THE CAREER SOLDIERS.

THE TERM WAS ALWAYS SAID IN A RATHER DEROGATORY MANNER.

IN THE AIR FORCE, THE TERM WAS "'LIFER FLY'", ACCORDING TO GERALD BURKE, WHO SPENT A SHORT STINT WITH WHOP AFTER RETURNING TO HOPKINSVILLE FROM A HITCH IN THE MILITARY.

HE SAID THE CAREER GUYS WERE CALLED "'LIFER FLYS'" BECAUSE THEY "'EAT SHIT AND BOTHER PEOPLE"'.

MY STINT WITH THE COLLEGE GUYS LASTED ABOUT HALF MY TOUR, WITH THE ACTIVITIES IN THE LONG, TEDIOUS DAYS AND NIGHTS AT A FIREBASE CONSISTING OF CONVERSATION GENERALLY REVOLVING AROUND SPORTS OF ALL KINDS AT ALL LEVELS, DISCUSSIONS OF BOOKS WHICH ARRIVED BY THE BOXFUL AND MADE THEIR FIRST STOP AT THE FIRE DIRECTION CENTER, AND COUNTLESS HOURS PLAYING THE DICE GAME "'YAHTZEE'", WHERE WE HAD TO "'HAND LINE"' OUR OWN SCORE SHEETS WHEN WE QUICKLY RAN OUT OF THE PRINTED ONES.

THE SECOND GROUP WERE A BUNCH OF HIGH SCHOOL KIDS, WHO, INSTEAD OF PICTURES OF THEIR WIVES, CARRIED PICTURES OF THEIR CARS, A 1957 CHEVY TWO DOOR HARDTOP, RAKED IN THE FRONT, NO CHROME ON THE HOOD OR TRUNK, ROLLED AND PLEATED NAUGHAHYDE INTERIOR, WITH A SMALL BELL STEERING WHEEL; A GRAY PRIMER 1957 CHEVY NOMAD STATION WAGON, WITH A 4-54 RAT MOTOR; AND A 62 CHEVY IMPALA SUPER SPORT. THEY LOVED THEIR CARS AND TALKING ABOUT THEM, BUT SOME OF THEM SPORTS, AND THERE A KID FROM ARKANSAS WHO COULD TELL STORIES LIKE GRADY RUFF.

THOSE OF YOU WHO WERE HERE FOR MY LAST PAPER, WHICH WAS ON THE SUBJECT OF SUICIDE, MAY RECALL THAT MY FATHER TOOK HIS OWN LIFE THE DAY BEFORE HE WOULD HAVE CELEBRATED HIS 90TH BIRTHDAY.

I WAS 52 AT THE TIME AND DURING THE ALMOST HALF-CENTURY FOR WHICH I HAVE SPECIFIC MEMORIES OF HIM, I SAW HIM "TEAR UP" ONLY TWICE.

ONE WAS WHEN A PARTICULARLY PROMISING BIRD DOG PUP HAD TO BE EUTHANIZED AND THE OTHER WAS AT THE TRAIN STATION IN GENEVA THAT MORNING IN JUNE, 1969, WHEN I HEADED FOR CHICAGO AND INDUCTION INTO THE U.S. ARMY---THOUGH, LITTLE DID I KNOW, I FACED THE POSSIBILITY OF WEARING THE "EAGLE, GLOBE, AND ANCHOR" OF THE UNITED STATES MARINE CORPS.

AFTER WE TOOK THE STEP FORWARD INDICATING OUR INDUCTION INTO THE ARMY, THE LIEUTENANT IN THE ADJUTANT GENERAL CORPS SAID, "OH, BY THE WAY, THE MARINE CORPS FAILED TO MEET THEIR RECRUITING GOAL THIS MONTH..AND WE NEED ABOUT 10 GOOD MEN".

I WASN'T THE ONLY ONE WHO WAS SHOCKED TO LEARN THAT DRAFTEES CAN BE DIRECTED TO OTHER BRANCHES OF THE SERVICE, INCLUDING THE MARINES.

AT THE TIME OF MY INDUCTION, I WAS 25 AND A HALF YEARS OLD, HAD BEEN MARRIED TWO YEARS AND HAD WORKED IN THE RADIO BUSINESS LONGER THAN THAT.

TO SAY THAT I WAS OUT-OF-SHAPE WAS AN UNDERSTATEMENT, AND I COULD PICTURE MYSELF GOING TO PARRIS ISLAND AND DYING IN THE HEAT.

BUT, LO AND BEHOLD, MORE THAN ENOUGH DRAFTEES VOLUNTEERED FOR THE MARINES...AND I DODGED MY FIRST BULLET....BUT THE SECOND ONE WAS ALREADY IN THE CHAMBER.

THE MILITARY NOW USES SOCIAL SECURITY NUMBERS AS PERSONAL IDENTIFICATION NUMBERS, BUT THAT WAS IN TRANSITION AT THE TIME OF MY INDUCTION, WITH MY ORIGINAL "DOG TAG" CARRYING BOTH AN ARMY SERIAL NUMBER AND MY SOCIAL SECURITY NUMBER.

IT ALSO HAD THE "NOTCH" IN ONE END TO FIT BETWEEN YOUR FRONT TEETH FOR BODY IDENTIFICATION PURPOSES IN THE EVENT OF YOUR DEATH IN COMBAT.

AN ARMY SERIAL NUMBER HAS TWO LETTERS AT THE BEGINNING, WITH U-S DENOTING A DRAFTEE, AND R-A, FOR "REGULAR ARMY" AN ENLISTEE.

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THERE WERE ABOUT 200 OF US SWORN IN JUNE 9TH, 1969, AND ABOUT 50-50 BETWEEN U-S AND R-A.

ALL THE R-A'S WENT TO FORT LEONARD WOOD, MISSOURI, OR FORT LOST-IN-THE-WOODS, AS IT'S KNOWN, WHILE THE U-S'S WERE HEADED TO FORT POLK, LOUISIANA...FORT PUKE..TIGERLAND, THE "JUMPING OFF" PLACE FOR VIET NAM, WHERE IF THE WORLD WERE TO RECEIVE AN ENEMA, FORT POLK WOULD BE THE INSERTION POINT.

FOR SOME REASON, THEY PUT ME IN CHARGE OF THE U-S'S, WITH A MISSION OF GETTING THEM FROM DOWNTOWN CHICAGO TO ENGLAND AIR FORCE BASE IN ALEXANDRIA, LOUISIANA, AND CONNECT WITH A BUS TO TAKE US TO FORT POLK.

DURING MY CUSTOMARY MINIMAL RESEARCH FOR A PAPER, I LEARNED THAT ENGLAND AIR FORCE BASE FELL VICTIM TO THE "'BRAC'" FOLKS, OR "'BASE REALIGNMENT AND CLOSURE'" IN 1992.

MY FIRST "'COMMAND DECISION'" AS A LEADER IN THE UNITED STATES ARMY WAS TO GIVE THE "'B BALLS'" AND SCREWUPS AN AMPLE OPPORTUNITY TO GET OUT OF THE WAY.

WE ARRIVED AT O'HARE AIRPORT LATE IN THE AFTERNOON, AS A I RECALL, AND WE HAD ABOUT AN HOUR AND A HALF BEFORE OUR "'PURDUE AIRLINES'" CHARTERED PLANE WAS TO TAKE OFF, SO I JUST ADVISED EVERYONE TO DO WHATEVER THEY WANTED.

IF THEY COULD GET A CAB AND GO BACK DOWNTOWN THAT WAS OKAY WITH ME, JUST BE BACK ABOUT 30 MINUTES BEFORE DEPARTURE TIME FOR THE AIRPORT..AND GUESS WHAT? WHEN THE APPOINTED TIME ARRIVED, THEY WERE ALL THERE.

I HAD PASSED MY FIRST LEADERSHIP TEST, AND REPORTED EARLY THE NEXT MORNING TO WHAT WAS KNOWN AS THE "'RECEPTION STATION'" AT FORT POLK.

I RECEIVED BOTH BASIC AND A-I-T(ADVANCED INDIVIDUAL TRAINING) AS AN INFANTRYMAN AT FORT POLK, BEGINNING IN MID-JUNE AND ENDING IN LATE OCTOBER.

I TELL PEOPLE I GOT OFF THE PLANE JUNE 10TH AND BEGAN SWEATING AND DIDN'T STOP UNTIL HALLOWEEN.

THE SECOND BULLET I DODGED WAS NOT SUFFERING HEAT STROKE WHEN A DRILL SERGEANT HAD US ROLLING IN A GRAVEL PARKING LOT FOR SOME REAL..OR IMAGINED INFRACTION SHORTLY AFTER WE ARRIVED AND THOSE OF US FROM DIFFERENT CLIMATES HAD NOT HAD THE THE OPPORTUNITY TO PROPERLY ADJUST TO THE DESERT-LIKE CONDITIONS OF SOUTH-CENTRAL LOUISIANA IN THE SUMMERTIME.

IT DIDN'T TAKE LONG TO LEARN THAT THE ARMY AS AN INSTITUTION HAD SOME SERIOUS PROBLEMS, OR THAT THOSE IN CHARGE REALLY DIDN'T CARE ABOUT TRAINEES' PROBLEMS.

THE PROBLEM WAS A SWITCH IN CLOTHING BETWEEN ME AND A GUY NAMED LEAKE THE DAY WE REPORTED TO CHARLIE COMPANY, 3 TRAINING BATTALION, 5TH TRAINING REGIMENT, AT NORTH FORT POLK, LOUISIANA.

WE PLAYED "'DUMP YOUR DUFFLE BAG'"..IN THE GRAVEL PARKING LOT..AND IN THE ENSUING CONFUSION, I PUT MY STUFF INTO LEAKE'S DUFFEL AND HE PUT HIS IN MINE.

THE BAGS ARE STENCILED ON THE OUTSIDE AND WE DIDN'T BOTHER TO CHECK WHEN WE NOTICED THAT HE HAD THE ONE WITH MY NAME ON IT AND I HAD HIS.

NATURALLY, WE WERE ASSIGNED TO DIFFERENT PLATOONS IN DIFFERENT BARRACKS, AND DESPITE REPEATED REQUESTS AND COMPLAINTS, IT TOOK THREE DAYS TO GET MY CLOTHES FROM A BARRACKS WHICH WAS LESS THAN A HUNDRED YARDS AWAY! ..AND THEN I DID IT ON MY OWN INITIATIVE.

I DON'T THINK IT WAS A TEST TO SEE IF COULD "'ADAPT AND OVERCOME'", I THINK IT WAS BECAUSE THE DRILL SERGEANT REALLY DIDN'T GIVE A LARGE RODENT'S REAR END ABOUT MY WELFARE.

ONE OF MY OTHER INITIAL MEMORIES OF THE ARMY WAS THE SCOREBOARD ON A SOFTBALL FIELD ON THE MAIN ROAD BETWEEN NORTH AND SOUTH FORT POLK--THE "'HOME TEAM'" WAS LISTED ON TOP.

EASILY, THE HIGHLIGHT OF BASIC TRAINING WAS THE 4TH OF JULY--A TRAINING HOLIDAY AND I HAD MY FIRST BEER SINCE EARLY JUNE.

IT WAS A FALSTAFF "'TALL BOY'". IT COST 25 CENTS..AND IT WAS THE BEST EVER, SERVED BY AN ATTRACTIVE YOUNG WOMAN, AS I RECALL, THOUGH BY THAT TIME ALL WOMEN LOOKED ATTRACTIVE. SHE PRODUCED IT FROM A LARGE ICE-FILLED ALUMINUM POT. I HAD ANOTHER.

I SURVIVED BASIC TRAINING AMONG A GROUP WHICH INCLUDED NUMEROUS TRAINEES KNOWN AS "'WOFTS'", SHORT FOR WARRANT OFFICER FLIGHT TRAINING.

THEY WERE HEADED FOR FORT WALTERS, TEXAS AFTER 8 WEEKS OF BASIC TRAINING TO LEARN HOW TO FLY HELICOPTERS, WHICH WAS THE PRIMARY MODE OF TRAVEL IN VIET NAM, WITH A FAIRLY HIGH MORTALITY RATE.

I THINK THE NAMES OF ONLY 3 OR 4 NATIVE CHRISTIAN COUNTIANS APPEAR ON THE WALL--THE VIET NAM MEMORIAL IN WASHINGTON--AND ONE OF THEM IS JERRY ROBERTS, THE BROTHER OF RETIRED SCHOOL SUPERINTENDENT LEON ROBERTS, WHO WAS FLYING A HELICOPTER WHEN HE DIED.

INTERESTINGLY ENOUGH, WHEN THE HALF-SCALE WALL APPEARED AT FORT CAMPBELL, THE ACCOMPANYING NEWS RELEASE LISTED JERRY ROBERTS AS A TRIGG COUNTY RESIDENT.

AT THE CONCLUSION OF BASIC TRAINING, EACH TRAINEE RECEIVES A NEW SET OF ORDERS WITH SOME REQUIRING TRAVEL AND THE PAPERWORK SPECIFYING A REPORT DATE AND OTHER DETAILS.

MOST OF US IN C-3-5 KNEW WHERE WE WERE GOING AND IT WOULDN'T TAKE US LONG TO GET THERE.

'TIGERLAND' AS IT WAS KNOWN WAS THE PRIMARY TRAINING POINT FOR SOLDIERS TO EARN AN 11-B-10 MILITARY OCCUPATIONAL SPECIALTY--M-O-S.

THE TITLE FOR THE 11-B-10 MOS WAS 'LIGHT WEAPONS INFANTRYMAN', AND THAT'S WHAT WE BECAME OVER A 9 WEEK PERIOD.

ONE PERSON WHO DIDN'T GO TO TIGERLAND WAS A LARGE AFRICAN-AMERICAN TEXAN BY THE NAME OF GENE BANKS, WHO SAID HE PLAYED BACKUP CENTER TO ELVIN HAYES AT THE UNIVERSITY OF HOUSTON---AND THAT'S WHAT I PREFER TO BELIEVE--THE INTERNET NOTWITHSTANDING.

WE WERE SPECULATING ON OUR ORDERS---I STILL HELD OUT THE POSSIBILITY OF CLERK SCHOOL OR SOME OTHER ADMINISTRATIVE POSITION GIVEN BY COLLEGE DEGREE AND 142 ON THE MILITARY QUALIFYING TEST, WHICH IS ENOUGH TO GET YOU INTO 'MENSA', THOUGH I'VE NEVER TRIED. GENE PULLED OUT HIS DOG TAG AND SAID, 'SEE THAT N-E-G' WHICH STOOD FOR 'NEGRO' BACK THEN. HE SAID THAT WAS A TICKET TO TIGERLAND AND VIET NAM.

HE MAY HAVE ENDED UP IN SOUTHEAST ASIA, BUT IT WAS MOST LIKELY AS A NON-COMMISSIONED OFFICER IN THE MILITARY POLICE FOR THE ORDERS FOR PRIVATE EUGENE BANKS WERE FOR M-P SCHOOL AT FORT GORDON, GEORGIA.

BUT FOR LOVE, JAMES HARRISON, U.S. 54-844-247, IT WAS CHARLIE COMPANY, 5TH TRAINING BATTALION, 2ND REGIMENT, FORT POLK. NOT QUITE WALKING DISTANCE FROM C-3-5, BUT CLOSE.

BY THE WAY, THE C-3-5 COMPANY AREA, WHICH WAS OVERSEEN BY A CAPTAIN BY THE LAST NAME OF PETERS, WAS THE MOST NORTHERN ONE AT NORTH FORT POLK.

WE SAW NO WOMEN OTHER THAN ON FRIDAYS WHEN ONE DROVE PAST THE COMPANY AREA ON THE WAY OUT THE BACK GATE.

HAVING BEEN DRAFTED AND BEING SENT TO FORT POLK AND THEN GETTING ORDERS FOR "'TIGERLAND'", I BEGAN TO CONSIDER MY OPTIONS--SHORT OF GOING AWOL--WITH THE WAR IN VIET NAM STILL CLAIMING LIVES.

MY STRATEGY WAS TO STAY IN THE U.S. AS LONG AS POSSIBLE--EVEN IF IT MEANT SPENDING SOME MORE TIME IN UNIFORM.

DURING THE VIET NAM WAR, THE ARMY OPERATED THREE OFFICER CANDIDATE SCHOOL PROGRAMS: INFANTRY AT FORT BENNING, GEORGIA; ARTILLERY AT FORT SILL, OKLAHOMA, AND COMBAT ENGINEERS AT FORT BELVOIR, VIRGINIA.

THEY WERE 6 MONTH PROGRAMS--SIX MORE MONTHS FOR THE PARIS PEACE TALKS TO REACH A CONCLUSION.

BY THIS TIME, THREE PRESIDENTS HAD OVERSEEN THE WAR, WITH NIXON AND SECRETARY OF STATE HENRY KISSINGER NOW INVOLVED IN THE PROCESS.

I FIGURED KISSINGER COULD GET THE JOB DONE BEFORE I BECAME A SECOND LIEUTENANT, AND IF HE DID, THE OLD ARMY MIGHT NOT NEED MY SERVICES.

THE ARMY MADE IT A "'CRAP SHOOT'".

YOU HAD TO REENLIST AFTER YOUR COMMITMENT TO O-C-S, NOT KNOWING WHICH BRANCH YOU WOULD BE ASSIGNED TO.

THERE WAS AN INTERVIEW PROCESS WITH A MAJOR AND TWO CAPTAINS ALL BORED OUT OF THEIR SKULLS ASKING ME IF I KNEW WHAT THE "'PEACE SIGN'" MEANT AND IF I KNEW OR HAD PARTICIPATED IN A "'WESSON OIL PARTY'" WHERE EVERYBODY GETS NAKED AND JUMPS IN A PILE AND BASTES THEMSELVES WITH COOKING OIL.

I GUESS I ANSWERED SATISFACTORILY BECAUSE I WAS CHOSEN FOR THE FIELD ARTILLERY PROGRAM IN OKLAHOMA.

IT WASN'T "'OUT OF THE FRYING PAN INTO THE FIRE'", IT WAS "'OUT OF THE FRYING PAN AND INTO THE DEEP FREEZE'".

I REPORTED TO FORT SILL, LAWTON, OKLAHOMA ON PEARL HARBOR DAY, 1969, AS AN ADMINISTRATIVE E-5, BUCK SERGEANT FOR PAY PURPOSES, AND LEFT MAY 22ND, 1970, HAVING FINISHED SOMEWHERE AROUND THE MIDDLE OF A CLASS OF ABOUT 100 BRAND NEW SECOND LIEUTENANTS.

HALF OF US GOT ORDERS FOR STATESIDE ASSIGNMENTS AND THE OTHER HALF, INCLUDING LIEUTENANT LOVE, RECEIVED ORDERS FOR THE REPUBLIC OF VIET NAM.

IN RETURN FOR THAT, BECAUSE THE ORDERS CAME DOWN SHORTLY BEFORE GRADUATION, WE WERE GRANTED A NIGHT AWAY FROM THE POST--ONE OF THE FEW NIGHTS I SPENT ON BALDWIN WAY IN LAWTON, WHERE MY WIFE CHERRYLL RESIDED AND WORKED AT THE COMANCHE COUNTY HOSPITAL.

I GOT TO SEE HER ABOUT 5 MINUTES A NIGHT AND CHURCH ON SUNDAYS. AND I THINK THERE WERE ONE OR TWO WEEKENDS WHERE I ESCAPED SUFFICIENT DEMERITS TO EARN A WEEKEND PASS.

I CONSIDERED MYSELF FORTUNATE TO RECEIVE THE APPOINTMENT TO ARTILLERY O-C-S BECAUSE I FELT I COULD HANDLE THAT JOB IN COMBAT, EVEN AS A FORWARD OBSERVER.

ON THE OTHER HAND, I WAS NOT GOING TO LEAD MEN INTO BATTLE IN THE JUNGLES.

I DID NOT HAVE THE STOMACH FOR IT, AND I PLANNED TO REPORT TO FORT BENNING, COMPLETE AS MUCH OF THE TRAINING AS POSSIBLE, AND LET THE CHIPS FALL WHERE THEY MAY WHEN I WASHED OUT.

FORTUNATELY FOR ME--AND THE ARMY--THAT SCENARIO DID NOT DEVELOP.

OFFICERS CANDIDATE SCHOOL, FOR THOSE OF YOU WHO HAVE PARTICIPATED IN A FRATERNITY INITIATION, IS MUCH LIKE "'HELL WEEK'" FOR THE FIRST 8 WEEKS.

CANDIDATES WERE DESIGNATED LOWER CLASS, MIDDLE CLASS, AND UPPER CLASS, DEPENDING ON WHERE THEY WERE IN THE PROGRAM, WITH VARIOUS RIGHTS AND PRIVILEGES ACCRUING OVER TIME.

IN ADDITION TO CONFINEMENT TO POST ON WEEKENDS, THOSE WITH SUFFICIENT DOCUMENTED TRANSGRESSIONS WERE ORDERED TO RUN WHAT WERE CALLED "'JARKS'" IN HONOR OF CANDIDATE CARL JARK, A LEGENDARY RUNNER.

I THINK I BECAME A "'HUNDRED MILE MAN'" IN RECORD TIME.

MOST OF MY CLASSMATES HAD COME FROM A-I-T AT FORT SILL AND WERE ALREADY FAMILIAR WITH ARTILLERY, WHILE CANDIDATE LOVE WAS RECOGNIZED AS A TRAINED KILLER, AND AS A MATTER OF FACT, I WAS MUCH BETTER IN AREAS OF CALLING IN FIRE AND FIELD PROBLEMS THAN IN THE CLASSROOM, THOUGH I PASSED ALL THE NECESSARY COURSES, INCLUDING HOW TO MEASURE WEATHER CONDITIONS WHICH MAY HAVE AN EFFECT ON A HIGH FLYING PROJECTILE.

I WAS IN OVER MY HEAD, BUT THROWN LIFE PRESERVERS BY SEVERAL CLASSMATES FOR WHICH I WILL REMAIN ETERNALLY GRATEFUL.

A BITTERLY COLD WINTER OF 1970 LED TO THE SPRINGTIME WHEN WE RECEIVED OUR ORDERS, WITH A TRIP TO VIET NAM IN STORE FOR ABOUT HALF THE CLASS.

THE REAL COST TO THIS COUNTRY OF THE WAR IS VISIBLE ON THAT WALL IN WASHINGTON, BUT I ALWAYS CITE TWO OR THREE PERSONAL EXPERIENCES TO PROVIDE SOME PERSPECTIVE ON THE COST OF THE WAR IN DOLLARS.

ABOUT A DOZEN MEMBERS OF MY O-C-S CLASS WERE ISSUED ORDERS TO REPORT TO TRAVIS AIR FORCE BASE IN SAN FRANCISCO BY 3:30 A.M. THE MORNING OF JULY 1ST, 1970, WHEN WE WOULD BOARD UNITED AIRLINES CHARTER FLIGHT U-2-B-3 AND DEPART FOR BIEN HOA AIR FORCE BASE, REPUBLIC OF VIET NAM, A FLIGHT WHICH USUALLY TOOK AROUND 24 HOURS, AS I RECALL, . THOUGH IT ALSO INVOLVES PASSING OVER THE INTERNATIONAL DATELINE.

THERE WERE TWO MAJOR AIR ROUTES TO VIET NAM FROM THE WEST COAST--THROUGH ANCHORAGE, ALASKA, OR "'MID-PACIFIC'" THROUGH HAWAII.

BOTH INVOLVED ONLY ONE STOP UNDER ORDINARY CIRCUMSTANCES; HOWEVER, IN EARLY JULY, 1970, THERE WAS A TYPHOON IN THE PACIFIC, WHICH APPARENTLY DEVELOPED SOMETIME BETWEEN OUR DEPARTURE FROM SAN FRANCISCO AND OUR ARRIVAL IN HONOLULU, WHERE WE STAYED FOR TWO DAYS AND TWO NIGHTS.

WHEN I SAY "WE" I MEAN ABOUT 220 OFFICERS AND SENIOR ENLISTED MEN.

YOU WOULD THINK THAT SOMEWHERE ON THE ISLAND OF OAHU, WHICH BOASTS THE PEARL HARBOR NAVAL INSTALLATION, SCHOFIELD BARRACKS AND HICKAM FIELD, THERE WOULD BE ROOM TO PUT UP THAT MANY PEOPLE.

THERE MAY HAVE BEEN, BUT WE WERE PROVIDED QUARTERS AT THE AIRPORT HOLIDAY INN AT A RATE OF 4 LIEUTENANTS TO A ROOM, TWO CAPTAINS, AND FIELD GRADE OFFICERS BY THEMSELVES.

SOMEBODY SAID THE RANKING OFFICER, A FULL COLONEL, HAD A "SUITE".

WE LIEUTENANTS DIDN'T CARE SINCE WE DIDN'T PLAN ON SPENDING MUCH TIME IN OUR ROOMS ANYWAY.

IN ADDITION TO THE EXPENSES OF ROOMS FOR 220 PEOPLE FOR TWO NIGHTS, WE ALSO HAD 30 DOLLARS A DAY CREDIT AT THE RESTAURANT, WHICH SOME USED RIGHT DOWN TO THE PENNY. (ONE GUY ORDERED A REUBAN SANDWICH TO GO).

EVEN AFTER THE IMMEDIATE THREAT LIFTED AND WE GOT BACK IN THE AIR, WE FLEW LIKE A DROP SPRAYER THE REST OF THE WAY, WITH STOPS AT MIDWAY, WAKE, GUAM, AND KADENA AIR FORCE BASE ON OKINAWA.

WE WERE CLOSE TO BEING DIVERTED TO CLARK AIR FORCE BASE IN THE PHILLIPINES WHEN THE WEATHER CLEARED AND WE FLEW INTO VIET NAM.

AS AN ASIDE, THERE MUST HAVE BEEN SOME EXTRA PAY FOR THE FLIGHT ATTENDANTS WHO FLEW DIRECTLY INTO VIET NAM BECAUSE WE HAD A MOST SENIOR CREW WHO FLEW THE LAST LEG WITH US.

ANYWAY, WHAT BEGAN AS A ONE-DAY FLIGHT FROM SAN FRANCISCO TO HONOLULU TO VIET NAM ENDED UP A MULT-STOP, 3 DAY ODYSSEY ACROSS THE PACIFIC AT WHO KNOWS WHAT COST.

THE OTHER BIG TICKET ITEM I REFER TO IS THE NUMBER OF ROUNDS OF 155 MILLIMETER ARTILLERY WHICH WERE FIRED BY THE 2ND BATTALION, 35TH ARTILLERY REGIMENT DURING THEIR STAY IN VIET NAM WHICH BEGAN IN JULY OF 1965 AND ENDED IN FEBRUARY OF 1970.

THE REASON I KNOW THAT IT WAS 669-THOUSAND 636 IS THAT I WROTE THE BATTALION HISTORY WHEN THEY "STOOD DOWN" AND RETURNED TO THE STATES..I WAS SHIPPED TO THE 2ND OF THE 12TH, WHOSE GUNS BELONGED TO A NEW HAMPSHIRE NATIONAL GUARD UNIT WHOSE MEMBERS HAD LONG SINCE ROTATED HOME.

I FIGURE THAT EACH OF THOSE ALMOST 670-THOUSAND ROUNDS COST SOMEWHERE IN THE NEIGHBORHOOD OF 300 TO 350-DOLLARS.

DO THE MATH, AND THEN THINK IT'S FOR ONLY ONE ARTILLERY UNIT FOR A LESS THAN FIVE YEARS.

BUT AGAIN, THE REAL PRICE WAS IN HUMAN LIVES.

WHICH BRINGS ME TO MY FINAL WAR STORY.

BUT FOR PURE LUCK, I WOULDN'T BE STANDING HERE TONIGHT, OR PROBABLY ANYWHERE ELSE.

ALFA BATTERY, 2ND BATTALION, 35TH ARTILLERY WAS DISPATCHED TO THE MICHELIN RUBBER PLANTATION IN LATE FALL, 1970, AND WE HAD YET TO SETTLE IN.

THOSE OF YOU WHO REMEMBER THE ATTACK ON THE MARINE BARRACKS IN THE MID-EAST WHERE THE SUICIDE BOMBER IN THE TRUCK KILLED OVER 200 TROOPS KNOW THAT YOU SHOULD DISPERSE YOUR TROOPS AND NOT PRESENT A TARGET OF OPPORTUNITY.

I KNEW THAT, BUT LACKED THE IMMEDIATE RESOURCES TO PROVIDE ALTERNATE HOUSING FOR MY FIRE DIRECTION CENTER CREW,WHO WERE SLEEPING ON COTS IN THE EQUIVALENT OF A LARGE CORRUGATED PIPE..AND WHEN I SAY "PIPE", I MEAN A PIECE OF CORRUGATED STEEL IN A TRIANGULAR SHAPE WHICH ROSE TO A HEIGHT OF POSSIBLY 15 FEET.

AT THE END OF THE PIPE WAS OUR A-P-C, A TRACKED COMMAND VEHICLE CONTAINING OUR RADIOS AND OTHER EQUIPMENT.

THE TAILGATE WAS DOWN AND THERE WAS LITTLE ROOM BETWEEN THE VEHICLE AND THE PIPE.

IT SO HAPPENED THAT IT WAS NEAR THE END OF THE MONTH OF NOVEMBER AND AS PAY OFFICER, I HAD GONE TO LONG BINH AND THEN ON TO DIAN TO PICK UP THAT MONTH'S PAYROLL.

BY SHEER LUCK...NOT FOR THOSE WHO REMAINED,BUT FOR ME..THAT WAS THE NIGHT THAT 4 YOUNG SAPPERS...THEY APPEARED TO BE IN THEIR TEENS, JUDGING FROM THE PICTURES I SAW OF THEIR BODIES..SNEAKED INTO OUR FIRE BASE AND THREW A ''SATCHEL CHARGE'' INTO THE GIANT PIPE, SERIOUSLY INJURING 3 OF MY MEN, THOUGH NONE OF THE INJURIES WAS LIFE-THREATENING AND I WAS ABLE TO SEE THEM THAT NEXT MORNING IN LONG BINH, WHERE THEY HAD BEEN MEDIVACED.

THE ''PUNCH LINE'' IS THAT THE SATCHEL CHARGE LANDED RIGHT UNDER MY COT, WHICH WAS ONE OF THOSE ALUMIMUN FOLD-UP COTS WITH A NYLON BED.

THERE WAS VERY LITTLE OF IT LEFT...SO, OBVIOUSLY, I'M LIVING ON BORROWED TIME AND I APPRECIATE THAT AND UNDERSTAND IT.

MY TERMINAL ASSIGNMENT WAS AT FORT RILEY, KANSAS WHERE GEDORGE ARMSTRONG CUSTER TOLD THEM WHEN HE LEFT FOR THE LITTLE BIG HORN IN 1876, ''DON'T CHANGE A THING UNTIL I GET BACK''.

THEY HAVE FOLLOWED HIS ORDERS.

INCIDENTALLY, THE ORDINARY TOUR OF DUTY FOR AN O-C-S LIEUTENANT IS TWO YEARS FROM THE DATE OF COMMISSION;HOWEVER, BECAUSE THE WAR WAS WINDING DOWN, THEY DROPPED A TOTAL OF 4 MONTHS FROM MY SERVICE AND I GOT OUT IN THE WINTER OF 1972.

NOW I'M A P-F-C.

NO, THAT'S NOT SHORT FOR PRIVATE FIRST CLASS, IT'S SHORT FOR PROUD F\*\*KING CIVILIAN, A RANK SOUGHT BY 99 PERCENT OF THOSE I CAME INTO CONTACT WITH.

P-F-C WAS JUST ONE OF THE PROFANITY-LACED TERMS IN LIBERAL USE IN AN ALL-MALE, ''MACHO'' ATMOSPHERE WHEN SUCH CASUAL LANGUAGE WAS EXPECTED OF EVERYONE...AND ALMOST ALL SOLDIERS IN THE ''GREEN MACHINE'' USED IT.

IT WAS NEVER MY INTENTION TO DODGE THE DRAFT, BUT I'D BE LESS THAN CANDID TO SAY THAT I KNEW THAT STAYING IN COLLEGE WOULD KEEP ME OFF THE LIST OF THOSE ELIGIBLE FOR CONSCRIPTION.

I DIDN'T HAVE ANY STRONG POLITICAL FEELINGS ABOUT THE WAR, BUT FELT WHEN MY TIME CAME I WOULD GO AND SERVE MY COUNTRY AS AN AMERICAN, NEVER INTERPRETING THAT AS "'MY COUNTRY RIGHT OR WRONG'" AND I STILL DON'T.

THERE ARE LOTS OF KINDS OF FRIENDS...PEOPLE YOU GREW UP WITH, WENT TO SCHOOL WITH, FRATERNITY BROTHERS, TEAMMATES FOR VARIOUS SPORTS, CO-WORKERS, SPOUSES AND RELATIVES, BUT THERE'S NOONE LIKE AN ARMY BUDDY. YOU SHARE WITH THEM EXPERIENCES YOU'LL NOT SHARE WITH ANYONE ELSE.

I LOOK UPON MY TIME IN THE MILITARY AS A MERE INCONVENIENCE..GETTING MY TICKET PUNCHED FOR BEING AN AMERICAN.

I WAS ONE OF THE LUCKY ONES...I RETURNED WITH ALL MY LIMBS INTACT, NO DRUG HABIT, WITH MY WIFE WAITING AND A JOB I WAS FAMILIAR WITH.

IT'S FUNNY, BUT I HAVE NO ILL FEELINGS ABOUT THOSE WHO BOUGHT A MEDICAL DEFERMENT. (THERE WAS A DOCTOR IN ELGIN, ILLINOIS, BY THE NAME OF ANDY NOWAKOWSKI WHO WOULD DIAGNOSE YOU WITH EMPHYSEMA FOR A \$100 FEE!..I NEVER BOTHERED TO ATTEMPT TO DETERMINE WHETHER HE WAS ANTI-WAR, GREEDY, OR BOTH!).

I DID HAVE A PROBLEM WITH THOSE WHO FLED THEIR COUNTRY AND THEN RETURNED AFTER A PARDON AND WERE PAID MORE FOR PUBLIC SERVICE JOBS THAN THE 92 BUCKS A MONTH I RECEIVED AS A PRIVATE.

BUT THAT'S ALL BEHIND...THE WAR IS OVER..THOUGH IT WILL BE PART OF THE COLLECTIVE PSYCHE OF THE U.S. FOR YEARS TO COME.

AS NOTED, THERE WERE ABOUT A DOZEN OF MY O-C-S CLASSMATES ON UNITED AIRLINES FLIGHT U-2-B-3 WHICH DEPARTED FOR BIEN HOA AIRBASE, REPUBLIC OF VIET NAM IN THE EARLY MORNING HOURS OF JULY 1ST, 1970, BUT WHEN OUR "'DEROS"'--THAT'S SHORT FOR "'DATE EXPECTED TO RETURN FROM OVERSEAS"'--ARRIVED, ONLY THREE FROM FIELD ARTILLERY OFFICER CANDIDATE SCHOOL CLASS 12-DASH-70 WERE ON THE PLANE.

PHIL SHEESELY, WHO I RECENTLY MADE CONTACT WITH VIA THE INTERNET IN HIS FLORIDA RETIREMENT HOME, AND DAVE VALASQUEZ, OR VAS-KEZ, AS SHEESLEY CALLED HIM, WERE ON THE RETURN FLIGHT TO ANCHORAGE, ALASKA AND SAN FRANCISCO.

SADLY ENOUGH, EACH OF US COULD ACCOUNT FOR A DRUG-RELATED SUICIDE, AND APPARENTLY THERE IS NO EASY WAY TO DETERMINE HOW LARGE THAT NUMBER WAS, THOUGH THE USE OF DRUGS ESCALATED IN THE LATTER YEARS OF THE WAR, ACCORDING TO REPORTS.

I CHECKED THE ONE I WAS PERSONALLY ACQUAINTED WITH ON THE INTERNET AND LEARNED THAT THE ENTRY FOR TERRY CONWAY OF CALIFORNIA WAS THE SAME AS ALL THE OTHERS.

PRIVATE CONWAY PUT AN M-16 IN HIS MOUTH AND PULLED THE TRIGGER RATHER THAN ENTER REHAB AGAIN IN OCTOBER OF 1970 IN A PLACE CALLED NUI DAT ON THE VUNG TAU PENINSULA. HE WASN'T YET 20 YEARS OLD...AND HE WAS AS MUCH A CASUALTY OF THE WAR JUST AS IF A VIET CONG HAD SHOT HIM OR HE DIED IN A SAPPER ATTACK.

I INCLUDED THE QUOTE FROM STEPHEN KING'S 'HEARTS IN ATLANTIS' ELSEWHERE IN THIS PAPER AND I'LL CLOSE WITH ANOTHER ONE.

IT'S THE THOUGHTS OF A MAN WHO SURVIVED VIET NAM AS A LIEUTENANT IN A UNIT WHERE WITH A SLIGHT NOD OF HIS HEAD ORDERED ONE G.I. TO SHOOT ANOTHER TO HEAD OFF A POTENTIAL MY LAI MASSACRE.

LIEUTENANT DIEFFENBAKER IS MUSING ON THE DEATH BY HEART ATTACK IN A TRAFFIC JAM OF ONE OF THE MEN IN HIS UNIT WHO HE HAD JUST SEEN THE PREVIOUS DAY AT THE FUNERAL OF A THIRD MEMBER, WHO DIED OF CANCER.

THE HEART ATTACK VICTIM HAD BEEN PLAGUED FOR YEARS BY THE SPECTRE OF A VIETNAMESE WOMAN, KNOWN AS "MAMA-SANS", WHO DIED ON THE DAY THE LIEUTENANT HAD ORDERED THE SHOOTING.

DIEFFENBAKER THOUGHT "OLD MAMA-SAN'S VISITING DAYS WERE DONE.

IT WAS HOW WARS REALLY ENDED, HE SUPPOSED--NOT AT TRUCE TABLES, BUT IN CANCER WARDS AND OFFICE CAFETERIAS AND TRAFFIC JAMS.

WARS DIED ONE TINY PIECE AT A TIME, EACH PIECE SOMETHING THAT FELL LIKE A MEMORY, EACH LOST LIKE AN ECHO THAT FADES IN WINDING HILLS.

IN THE END, EVEN WAR RAN UP THE WHITE FLAG.

OR SO HE HOPED. HE HOPED THAT IN THE END, .EVEN WAR SURRENDERED.