

When I Dream of Vietnam ...

THE UNIFORM

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I DEROS'd from Da Nang Air Base in 3 July 1966. My four years of USAF were at an end. One day I was patrolling with Blackie X129, my K-9, in Da Nang's ammo dump ... and a few days later, cruising through old high school hang outs in California. *No debrief. No war. No more Vietnam.* Just a dream that began and ended with a sudden startling wake up, as if I were *falling asleep on post ...* and being wide awake I had the feeling that I couldn't find my uniform and *I wasn't ready.* I also didn't realize it at the time that the dream was actually a small part of a more complex issue of feeling guilty that JB died and I lived, and was eventual part-solution to a haunting dream that would linger for a generation. Decades passed, and the war and dream continued.

One long weekend my three brothers asked me to go hunting with them. Sounded like fun, so I said okay, and went out and bought a set of cammies. Went hunting. It was fun.

Later, when I was home, I cleaned out my garage and found my old Air Force blue duffel bag, still latched-up tight. I opened it and pulled out all the old uniforms, a pair of VC sandals made from old tires, belt buckles, old jump-boots leather-cracked beyond hope. At the bottom of the duffel bag was my Vietnam helmet and the last uniform I wore at Da Nang Airbase.

I hung that uniform in the closet---and *rarely had the dream again.*

The helmet is right beside my uniform, which is still hanging in the closet today.



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