

WHY?

Agent Orange

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Words can stir the hearts of warriors and prompt them to fight, if only one more battle. At the bleakest hours of the Revolutionary War, when all appeared lost, writer Thomas Paine scribed these words, titled "American Crisis":

"These are the times that try men's souls. The summer soldier and the sunshine patriot will, in this crisis, shrink from the service of their country; but he that stands by it now, deserves the love and thanks of man and woman...."

Timeless words: "These are the times that try men's souls." Equally so, those who've never heard weapons fired in anger cannot appreciate that 'such times' form a lasting bedrock that scars men's souls and bodies for life, and in quiet times of the night and sucker-punched dreams, pose the ever unanswered question: why?

Why did the mortar burst 30 feet from my tent and not fly a little further?

Why did the mortars fall on the same post I guarded a dozen times...but killed J.B.?

Why did mortars fall like rain and within yards of my K-9 fighting hole, and miss the bull's-eye?

Why did the enemy fight to enter the ammo dump, only to flee?

Why did Jackie Kays run through a minefield, only to be broken while rescuing others?

Why did they tell us Agent Orange was harmless? Yet Phil Norwich's eyes burned with infection and he is now dead?

Why did Tom Baker lose both legs and die a lingering painful death from Agent Orange?

Why are all those I served with, save one other, suffering the open wounds and scars of the soul and body from Agent Orange?

Why is Gary Eberbach* laying in hospital once more from that ever life-choking curse of Agent Orange?

Why was Gary Knutson* in hospice with Agent Orange?

Why all the others?

Why not me?

... Why me, now?

Thomas Paine's timeless words of inspiration are suitable for warriors standing before the rushing carnage of battle, and for citizens and politicians alike. A country should never commit its military to war without providing the tools of war, support of the nation, and commitment to victory by its leaders. But stuff happens, and those who accept the call to military or law enforcement service are destined to understand that names on honor roles were men and women once alive as we are today...feel the loss in quiet moments...the power of The Wall...and ask once again the timeless, unanswerable, and neverending questions of a scarred soul...'why?'

You cannot Man-Up to a sucker-punch dream. That ficked manly solution to 'why' inevitably fails, heaping further anguish upon the hearts and minds of those who still love you. You stand alone only if you chose to. It is true that we must handle the war-years before they surely handle us. What better way than being there for a brother who was in Vietnam only last night, and in some small but real way, lighten the burden of his personal cross, far heavier than your own? Take care of our own by quietly listening and thus helping bind his open wound...and together, as brothers, face the torment head on and not turn away.

In Remembrance of

* Phil Norwich, RIP 1997 * Gary Eberbach, RIP 2016 * Gary Knutson, RIP 2018 * Newell Swarts, RIP 2019

... and countless others