



I was not there...

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You will note that this is not a war story ... I was not there. However, these words have been lurking in my head, and heart, for a number of years and, until this moment, were unshared. Coming upon your excellent web-site, I thought that, perhaps, you might be the conduit through which I could express my respect to all who were there. At least from my grateful soul ... to your e-mail ...

I WAS NOT THERE

I was not there.

I did not board the plane, close-shaved
innocence hurtling ... full metal jacket ... at 30,300 feet
toward oblivion--or manhood.

I did not taste the heat
nor feel the stink against my skin.

Men with sunken chests and kill-haunted eyes
did not greet me sneering "FNG"
dragging on cigarettes, so burned down,
when the fire touched they no longer felt the pain.

I did not walk point
and wonder if I would see the wire
stretched taught, stretched thin ...
The wire—and me.

I did not watch the night—shapes reforming
rocks into death, with mouth so dry
I believed I could see my breath—and it was dust. A
droning in my ears of the thousand things wishing
to taste my blood—to shed my blood.
Insertion, Extraction ... I did not hold the collective
nor dance the skids—bungee monkey dancing a jig
with the pig snorting at the tree line. Hose down the
blood ... autorotating.

I did not ride the brown waters, Swift at 28 knots.
Cargo in the sampan rice ... or rifles—little boy with
crooked smile and bamboo arms salutes and tosses
shrapnel fruit into our mouths ... and
chests ... and backs.

I did not drive the armor-plated trucks waiting for
the road to erupt ...
ammo cooking off mixed with pound cake
and Bud.

I did not try to tape plastic wrappers on boyish
chests ... see the newly legless, armless, brainless ...
lifeless

Until one last trip—that damned shake 'n bake who is
now staring at parts of himself he was never

meant to see—around finds me,
and I cry "Doc!"—and realize
I am talking to myself.

I did not drop the napalm, pump the defoliants,
load the artillery rounds, patrol the perimeters,
clean the mess, burn the s--- cans, bag the dead ...

none of these things ...

Ia Drang, Khe Sahn, Dong Ap Bia, Dak To,
Lang Vei, The Rung Sat ... Da Nang, Hue, Saigon,
Phu Cat, Cholon, Phuoc Bien, Nha Trang,
Lai Khe ...

I was not there ...

Except through the illumination rounds
fired into black and white nights.

Dinners on a TV tray.

MREs for a teenage girl ... with a boonie rat's heart.

No ... *You were there.*

Ensign ... Eltee ... Airman ... REMF ... Sarge ... PFC ... You
Fought the boredom, Charlie, loneliness, Jodie.

The hits ... the runs ... the errors

Until your scorecard was full and you were
so short you could do hand to hand with an ant ...
and lose ...

And, finally, the freedom bird back to
The World ... chose-shaved discarded innocence ...
hurtling ... full metal jacket ... at 30,000 feet
toward oblivion ... or manhood.

And yet, by grace of some mystery I do not understand ...
walking-drag for the lost platoon ...
thirty years gone ...

I was there.

With deepest respect and gratitude to those who served ...

I will not (and cannot forget!)
Win Norwood

Photo courtesy DownUnder Website, 1996.