Mark Baker's NAM excerpted short story

We were in the monsoon season, in the middle of a driving rain. Monsoon rains didn't start, they arrived. I was about to go get something to eat and somebody came running in and told me I had to fly. "S...., not again. Don't we have enough time to get some dinner?"

"No, we got to go right now." I threw on my clothes; I didn't slow down long enough to put on any underwear.

I jumped in the helicopter behind Lieutenant Carver. Carver was . . . from Texas, bucking for command pilot, so he was flying on the right side of the helicopter today. Warrant Officer Tyler was flying on the left side. Normally, their positions would have been reversed. I didn't like Tyler. Not that he was incompetent, I just didn't like him personally. There was no love lost there. He didn't like me either. The crew chief, named Blake, was seated on the left in the rear.

We sat there for about half an hour. There was no way we were going to take off in that rain. You can't do it. I'm moaning, "We could have had dinner. It's not going to let up for another half an hour. Any idiot can see that. You could let us go to dinner now. You're not going to take off."

"Nope, we've got to be ready."

"Jesus." The roof of the helicopter was leaking and I was bitching because the water was dripping on my machine gun where it was laying on the floor. I didn't like that. So I leaned forward to move the machine gun out of the drizzle.

At that point, lightning struck the helicopter behind us, charging the ship. The rockets in the helicopter were fired electrically, so seven rocks were set off. Coming out of the tubes the fins on six of them opened. They hit each other and knocked around all over the place at random. One rocket went straight forward and entered the tail boom of my helicopter. It came tearing through the transmission and through the fire wall of the cabin. Had I not been leaning forward it would have torn through the left side of my chest and ripped my left arm off. As it was, it passed over my shoulder.

There was a tremendous explosion. Weird. No warning, nothing. One second I was leaning forward, the next there's this loud noise and the world was gone.

When I opened my eyes I realized that I wasn't dead. Carver's chest was torn away, clean as a whistle, but his spinal column was intact. His head was still on top of the spine. It was bowed over backwards, kind of bobbing there with his eyes open, weaving in front of me. His left arm and shoulder were in my lap.

Blake and his door were picked up and thrown out about ten feet away from the helicopter. He wound up standing on his feet going, "What? What happened?"

Tyler had just one side of his face wiped away. He was a mess. Part of his arm--thumb, forearm from up to the biceps was cut down to the bone--all of that was gone.

I didn't even realize that the door on the other side of the helicopter was just gone. I was panicked because I could see fire all around. That was the solid propellant from the rocket burning. I didn't want to be in the helicopter when the fuel cell exploded. I didn't want to burn to death. My door was jammed on its tracks. So I was beating on the door, thinking I was trapped. My door wasn't about to be opened. I was clawing at it. Crazy. Finally---I don't know how--all of a sudden it just fell off.

I did this flying spasm to get out of the helicopter. But an ammunition can with 1500 rounds of 7.62 ammunition in it had been picked up and bounced around and was wedged on my foot. So there were a few more minutes of panic getting that thing loose.

I got out and kind of wandered off down the active runway. It was still raining. I just limped away in a state of shock. I was deafened.

The crew of the other helicopter grabbed me and Tyler and dragged us off the airfield. They dumped us in a truck and rushed us to the hospital. I didn't realize it at the time, but I looked like I was at death's door. All they could see was blood and garbage. They didn't realize that most of it was from Carver. I was spattered with lung and everything.

I had some fractured bones in my leg and spent a couple of weeks in the hospital. I got a Purple Heart out of the deal. I'll never know why. We weren't in a combat situation. I woke up and it was pinned next to my pillow--sort of like a visit from the tooth fairy. Not many of the guys in the hospital wanted to talk to me. I was in an extreme state of shock, compounded with guilt. Unreasonable guilt, "I should have done something for Carver." He was gone. I don't know what I could have done for him. But I felt guilty.

There was a big delegation of my buddies from the company who came down to see me in the hospital. "All right, what job do you want?"

"What do you mean what job do I want?"

"Well, you know, how would you like to be . . . " They offered me easy, easy jobs.

I said, "I'm a door gunner." By this time I have to admit I was really into being a door gunner. I loved it. I loved flying. I liked shooting people as long as I wasn't too close. Those little things on the ground were okay to kill. It was okay that they were shooting at me--that's part of the game.

I must have liked it. I got fifteen medals. I was part of the elite. I was a big, bad door gunner. We had had too many wild, maniac times, drunken revelry . . . . We were the tough guys. We were like brothers. It was a nice feeling. We were the heroes. We got to fly the helicopter.

Occasionally the copilot would say, "Well I want to fly the helicopter." We'd trade. There I am at twenty years old and I'm flying this machine worth hundreds of thousands of dollars . . . . It was like Sgt. Rock, and I didn't want to leave that. I didn't want to become one of these noncombatant, anemic types.

I told my buddies that. I was a hero at that point. ". . . The guy goes through this and he still wants to fly with us. Jesus, what a heart. What a great guy." I felt on top of the world.

I spent a month or so in a cast. I pulled away part of the inside and rubbed it so that I got an ulcer on the front of my skin. I talked the doctors into cutting the cast off early. I went back to flying. I was crazy.

Galveston Bay

by

Bruce Springsteen

For fifteen years Le Bin Son
Fought side by side with the Americans
In the mountains and deltas of Vietnam
In '75 Saigon fell and he left his command
And brought his family to the promised land

Seabrook, Texas and the small towns in the Gulf
of Mexico
It was delta country and reminded him of home
He worked as a machinist, put his money away
And bought a shrimp boat with his cousin
And together they harvested Galveston Bay

In the mornin' 'fore the sun come up
He'd kiss his sleepin' daughter
Steer out through the channel
And cast his nets into the water

Billy Sutter fought with Charlie Company
In the highlands of Quang Tri
He was wounded in the battle of Chu Lai
Shipped home in '68

There he married and worked the gulf fishing grounds
In a boat that'd been his father's
In the morning he'd kiss his sleeping son
And cast his nets into the water

Billy sat in front of his TV as the South fell
And the communists rolled into Saigon
He and his friends watched as the refugees came
Settled on the same streets and worked the coast
they'd grew up on
Soon in the bars around the harbor was talk
Of America for Americans
Someone said, "You want 'em out, you got to burn' em out."
And brought in the Texas Klan

One humid Texas night there were three shadows
on the harbor
Come to burn the Vietnamese boats into the sea
In the fire's light shots rang out
Two Texans lay dead on the ground
Le stood with a pistol in his hand

A jury acquitted him in self-defense
As before the judge he did stand
But as Le walked down the courthouse steps
Billy said, "My friend you're dead man."

One late summer night Le stood watch along the waterside
Billy stood in the shadows
His K-bar knife in his hand
And the moon slipped behind the clouds
Le lit a cigarette, the bay was still as glass
As he walked by Billy stuck his knife into his pocket
Took a breath and let him pass

In the early darkness Billy rose up
Went into the kitchen for a drink of water
Kissed his sleeping wife
Headed into the channel
And cast his nets into the water
Of Galveston Bay

Bruce Springsteen: vocal, guitar, keyboard

Goodnight Saigon by Billy Joel

We met as soul mates
On Parris Island
We left as inmates
From an asylum
And we were sharp
As sharp as knives
And we were so gung ho
To lay down our lives
We came in spastic
Like tameless horses
We left in plastic
As numbered corpses
And we learned fast
To travel light
Our arms were heavy
But our bellies were tight
We had no home front
We had no soft soap
They sent us Playboy
They gave us Bob Hope
We dug in deep
And shot on sight
And prayed to Jesus Christ
With all of our might
We had no cameras
To shoot the landscape
We passed the hashpipe
And played our Doors tapes
And it was dark
So dark at night
And we held onto each other
Like brother to brother
We promised our mothers we'd write
And we would all go down together
We said we'd all go down together
Yes we would all go down together
Remember Charlie remember Baker
They left their childhood on every acre
And who was wrong? And who was right?
It didn't matter in the thick of the fight
We held the day in the palm of our hand
They ruled the night and the night
Seemed to last as long as six weeks
On Parris Island
We held the coastline, they held the highlands
And they were sharp
As sharp as knives
They heard the hum of our motors
They counted the rotors and waited for us to arrive
And we would all go down together
We said we'd all go down together
Yes we would all go down together

Front Line

I am a veteran of the war
I up and joined the army back in 1964
At sixteen I just had to be a man at any cost
I volunteered for Vietnam where I got my leg shot off
I recall a quote from a movie that said "who's more a man
Than a man with a reason that's worth dyin' for"

Chorus
They had me standing on the front line
They had me standing on the front line
They had me standing on the front line
But now I stand at the back of the line when it comes to gettin' ahead

They gave me a uniform and a tiny salty pill
To stop the big urge I might have for the wrong kind of thrill
They put a gun in my hand and said, "shoot until he's dead"
But it's hard to kill when 'please your friend' echoes through your head

Brought up in church taught no man should take another's life
But then put in the jungle where life has no price

Repeat Chorus

Back in the world the paper reads today
Another war is in the brewing
But what about the lives of yesterday
And the many happy families that have been ruined

My niece is a hooker and my nephew's a junkie too
But they say I have no right to tell them how they should do
They laugh and say "quit braggin'" 'bout the war you should have never been in
But my mind is so brain-washed I'd prob'bly go back and do it again

I walk the neighborhood parading my purple heart
With a fear of agent orange that no one will stop

Repeat Chorus (3) times . . . fade out

STEVIE WONDER—Drums, Synthesizers, Percussion, Vocals
Benjamin Bridges—Guitar/Nathan LaMar Watts—Bass

NAM--Why people joined the military to fight in Vietnam

The following are excerpts from Mark Baker's NAM. They are quotes from real soldiers who fought in Vietnam explaining why they joined the military to fight in the war.

I got into the Marines because the Army wouldn't take me. I was seventeen, hanging out in the neighborhood in Brooklyn with nothing to do. I knew I had to go to court sooner or later for some [stuff] I was into. The Army recruiter didn't even want to look at me since they didn't get involved with court problems or seventeen-year-olds. Forget the Navy and the Air Force. They had intelligence tests and I didn't have any.

One of the big boys who remembered me as a kid on the streets found out I was having a hard time getting into the service. He put his arm around my shoulder and look me down to talk to the Marine recruiter.

This big Marine takes one look at me and says, "This guy's a pussy. We don't want you. Get out of here." So I stand on a chair and get in his face and say, "Tell me about your big, bad Marine corps."

"How old are you?"
"I'm only seventeen."
"Will your mother sign for you?"
"She ain't around."

The recruiter gave me ten dollars and said, "See that lady standing over there? Go give her the money and I'm sure she'll sign for you." I was in this big courthouse in Queens, huge, with columns and the whole bit. She was standing next to a candy counter where they sold newspapers and stuff. So I go over and say, "Hey, I'm trying to get into the Marines. Will you sign for me?" No problem. She must have been doing this for a living.

That weekend I was in the Marines. I had to leave a note for my mother: "Mom, I went to Parris Island. I'll be back in a couple of months." I had no idea what I was getting into.

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I was in John Hopkins Medical School at the time. As a prank, somebody cut one of the fingers off the cadaver I was working on and kept it. When I went to turn in the cadaver, I couldn't account for the finger.

I knew who'd done it. So the next day, while he was doing a dissection on the leg, I took the arm off his cadaver and snuck it out. I put it in an ice chest and drove out to the Beltway around Baltimore. At a tollbooth, I stuck the frozen arm out the window with some money in the hand and left the toll attendant with the arm.

This got back to the president of the school, who was Dwight Eisenhower's brother, Milton, a real . . . hawk. He told me to take a leave of absence to reconsider my commitment to medical school. I thought that was probably a good idea. I said, "Great." A week later I had my draft notice. They turned me right in to the Board.

****

I came from San Jose, California. I grew up in the suburbs and went to public school. I lived on the last block of a new development surrounded on three sides by apricot orchards and vineyards.

The high school was typically middle class. There were very few blacks. We had warm weather and cars. Most of the kids' dads were engineers at Lockheed or they worked at IBM. Most of my friends were preparing for a college degree.

From San Jose, people would go up to San Francisco for concerts. Smoking dope was just coming in at the time and psychedelic music. Some of the kids I knew were involved with that. They weren't pioneers. They were the ones who joined, who wanted to be the first to do this or that--the trendy group.

Then I was conservative. I hadn't experienced any inequality in the social system. Things looked pretty hunky-dory to me. Plus I had read all the war fiction. It never had a particular fascination for me, but it implanted this idea in my mind that war was a place for you to discover things.

I saw older people, World War II age, who weren't in that war. When they were asked about it and what they were doing then, they had to say, "Oh, well, I was in college." It was a major historical event that convulsed the world, and yet they missed it. I was the perfect age to participate in Vietnam and I didn't want to miss it, good or bad. I wanted to be part of it, to understand what it was.

Why should I take the . . . SATs and go off to college? Everybody was going to San Jose State College right there in town. And who wants to do what everybody else does anyway?

I joined the Army at the end of my senior year in high school with delayed induction. I would leave for basic training at the end of the summer when everybody else went away for college. I spend the last summer at home, playing a lot of basketball, riding around with my friends in an old '54 Ford. Nobody's picked up on their adult life. *American Graffiti.*

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I came from a town called Wilcox in the heart of one of the richest counties in the United States--at least that's what they told me. Mine was an ideal childhood. Everything around me was "nice." The schools were good. Everybody was responsible. There were no derelicts in town. Everybody lived in a "nice" house with a "nice" yard. I played Little League Baseball and lived the standard American experience. *Happy Days,* only without the Fonz. There was a part of town where there were a few hoody guys, but I always kept my distance. When I went to college, I was really an innocent coming from this background.

In my sophomore year I had had it with school. I didn't know what . . . I wanted to do. School was boring . . . and I was floating along in a state of limbo. About Christmas, I got word from home that Johnny Kane had been killed over in Vietnam. I couldn't believe it.

Johnny was the All-American boy. He held the state record for the high hurdles. He was the quarterback of the Wilcox High School football team who led Wilcox to an undefeated season and the Class C championship. He was about three years older than me. Even though I was just a punk kid, he was always nice to me. I really liked Johnny Kane.

Johnny and I ended up going to state colleges that were rivals, so I got to see him play football in college. After he graduated, he went into the Marine Corps, became a second lieutenant and then went overseas.

For some reason, his death really affected me. I said to [heck] with it. Instead to going to class one day, I went down to the Army recruiter and talked to him. I was totally unimpressed. The guy was promising me the world and I couldn't believe it. So I went over to the Marine Corps

recruiter. This guy was everything you thought a Marine was supposed to be. All creases, squared away, he looked like a rock.

"Well, I'll tell you quite frankly," he said," you join us, you're going to Vietnam. No bones about it." I figured that was true for the Army, too, but the Army recruiter wouldn't tell me.

I had also been kind of brainwashed since I was a kid. My father had been a Marine in the South Pacific during World War II. Although he never talked about it all that much, when I was in the second grade I had his web belt and his Marine Corps insignia. I always felt the Marines were elite. If you're going to do something, you go with the best--like playing for Wilcox High. We always had a reputation for being smaller than the other teams, but we were faster and our attitudes were better. We beat people on attitude.

What am I going to do? I'd rather be over there with motivated people, people who've got their [act] together, as opposed to being in a paddy with a bunch of zeroes who don't even want to be there.

Not that I really wanted to be there. Yet when I found myself right in the prime age and a war was going on, I knew that I had to be part of it. It was my destiny. It had always been meant for me to do this thing. It sounds strange, but once it happened, I knew somehow, somewhere the handwriting was on the wall.

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I graduated from college three days after Robert Kennedy was shot, two months and three days after Martin Luther King was assassinated, an incredible double whammy. The war was hanging there like a sword over everybody. I had been reclassified in the middle of my senior year from 2S to 1A and gone through about six solid months of really examining my fellings about the war. Chiefly, I read a lot of pacifist literature to determine whether or not I was a conscientious objector. I finally concluded that I wasn't, for reasons that I'm still not sure of.

The one clear decision I made in 1968 about me and the war was that if I was going to get out of it, I was going to get out in a legal way. I was not going to defraud the system in order to beat the system. I wasn't going to leave the country, because the odds of coming back looked real slim. I was unwilling to give up what I had as a home. Spending two years in jail was as dumb as going to war, even less productive. I wasn't

going to shoot off a toe. I had friends who were starving themselves to be underweight for their physicals. I wasn't going to do it--probably because it was "too far to walk." I wasn't just stupidly righteous, there was a part of me that was real lazy at the same time. I wanted to be acted on, and it was real hard for me to make a choice of any kind. Making no choice was a choice.

With all my terror of going into the Army--because I figured that I was the least likely person I knew to survive--there was something seductive about it, too. I was seduced by World War II and John Wayne movies. When I was in high school, I dreamed of going to Annapolis. I was, on some silly level, really disturbed when the last battleship was decommissioned. One of my fantasies as a kid was to be in command of a battleship in a major sea battle, and having somewhere in my sea chest Great-uncle Arthur's Naval dress sword from the eighteenth century.

One way or another in every generation when there was a war, some male in the family on my father's side went to it. I had never had it drilled into me, but there was a lot of attention paid to the past, a lot of not-so-subtle "This is what a man does with his life" stuff when I was growing up. I had been, as we all were, victimized by a romantic, truly uninformed view of war.

I got drafted at the end of the summer. I went into a state of total panic for days. What . . . am I going to do? I went running off to recruiters to see if I could get into the Coast Guard or the Navy or the Air Force. No way.

There were probably some strings that I could have pulled. One of the things that is curious to me, as I look back on it, is that I had all the information, all the education and all the opportunity that a good, middle-class, college-educated person could have to get out of it . . . and I didn't make a single choice that put it anywhere but breathing down my neck. Even in the midst of the terror after the induction notice came, there was a part of me that would lie in bed at night and fantasize about what it would be like if I went.

The long and the short of the story is that at least half of my emotions were pulled to going. I couldn't get into any other branch of the service, so my final choice was to enlist in the Army. They had a delayed enlistment option. It was August when I got drafted and I figured, "[Geez], I don't want to go until October." I took the option. I spent that time at a

cottage in Maine, enjoying the wonderful weather, reading books and writing dramatic farewell letters.

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My old man, when the war came, he says, "Oh, go. You'll learn something. You'll grow up to be a man. Go."

[Geez], if my folks had to send their little poodle, they would have cried more tears over that than over me. But I'm supposed to go, because I'm a man.

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I foolishly went into the Army thinking, "Hey, with a few years of college under my belt, they're not going to put me in the infantry." I didn't see anything wrong with going to Vietnam. The only part I thought was wrong was my fear of being killed. I felt that somehow or other that shouldn't have been part of it. And I couldn't really picture myself killing people. I had flash images of John Wayne films with me as the hero, but I was mature enough even then to realize that wasn't a very realistic picture.

In boot camp I didn't meet very many patriots. They were guys that a judge had told, "Either you go in the Army, or it's two years for grand theft auto." Or they were schmucks like me who managed to lose their deferments. Or they were people who really had decided that the Army would be good for them in the long run.

To discourage us from going AWOL and deserting, all the new draftees were told that only 17 percent of us were going to Vietnam. And of that small percentage, only 11 percent would actually be combat troops. That eased my mind a great deal. Hey, there's still a chance that I won't have to go and get my guts blown out. Terrific.

At the end of our training, with only three exceptions--one fool who had gone Airborne, one guy who kept fainting and another kid who had a perforated eardrum--every single one of us went to Vietnam--200 guys.

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NAM--Homecoming

The following are excerpts from Mark Baker's NAM. They are quotes of what real soldiers who fought in Vietnam said about their homecoming.

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The nose lifted abruptly and the wheels bounced over the last hump on the runway. As the plane pulled hard over the trees, a brief cheer reverberated through the cabin.

A few men on night ambush several kilometers away looked up as the airliner wheeled and climbed. They watched until the navigation lights, red and green and flashing white, disappeared into a cloud bank over the South China Sea. The words that pulsed in each of their minds were, "They're going back to the World." Their thoughts diverged as each man quickly calculated his own remaining time in-country.

The men aboard the plane were quiet and within an hour most of them were asleep--a deep childlike sleep, mouth open with saliva collecting in the corner, dead to the world. Bodies conditioned to tropical heat shivered in the cool air. A stewardess busied herself putting blankets over the sleepers, tucking them in.

The in-country flight had been hectic with too many loud jokes, the aisles blocked with young men roving from card game to card game, upset stomachs excused as airsickness. The return trip would be serene, unless a bad dream rocked one of her passengers out of his lounge-backed cradle.

The big Bird to Paradise was flying home, straight and true. A GI could leave the foot-sucking muck of a rice paddy and within thirty-six hours find himself in civilian clothes, walking down Main Streets of his hometown, searching faces for a glimmer of recognition. But they never returned to the world they had left.

People, buildings, cars, dogs, everything looked like clever imitations of the real world. The World that they had talked about and dreamed of every day in Nam was gone, replaced with a flat, lifeless forgery of reality. They didn't belong; couldn't fit in, find out. Nothing worked. No one wanted them. "I went from a free-fire zone to the twilight zone."

Simple things change in a year--clothing, hairstyles and television shows--but nothing had changed as much as they had. They had seen too much, done too much. And now they found out they had hoped for too much.

****

When I got my honorable discharge, I thought it would be really nice. It comes in the mail and it's a computer printout with my Social Security number on a piece of cardboard, so I just threw it away. I was really disappointed. I thought I'd at least get a little plaque or something.

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When I came back about six of us were walking through the airport and a girl--maybe eighteen or nineteen, about the same age as me really--she asked me how many women and children did I kill. I told her, "Nine. Where's your mother at?" I thought it was great fun putting her down like that. But inside I felt, "Gees, why is she treating me like that?"

I thought I would come home as a war hero, you know. I didn't really want to be a war hero, but I thought I'd get a lot of respect, because I'd done something for my country. Somewhere deep in my psyche I thought that people would react to what I'd done, and say, "Hey, good job. Good work."

My family did. "Hey, great. How many people did you kill?" That wasn't right either. I didn't tell them when I was getting home, because I didn't want a party. But it happened anyway. I couldn't stay at that. I hung out an hour or two. Then I went out with my friends and got [drunk].

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I landed at Travis Air Force Base. My brother was living in Berkeley. I didn't think anything about that. All I knew was that my brother lived there and I was close by, so I might as well stop and see him. The first day back, I had survived. I had made it.

I took a cab from the base to Berkeley. We were riding down Telegraph Avenue. I told the driver, "I want to get out, I want to walk."

"You want to walk? Here?" I was full dress uniform with decorations, medals.

"Yeah, man, pull over. I want to walk."

"Okay, it's up to you." So I paid him and got out.

Walking down the streets of Berkeley, I felt like the man from Mars visiting the Earth. Everybody was looking at me. All kinds of comments. People spit at me. I was more scared walking down that street than I had been in Vietnam. There I had my weapon and I could protect myself. But they had taken my weapon away. These people looked like they wanted to kill me more than the Viet Cong did.

I immediately went to a bar to call my brother to come and get me. Kids in the bar started throwing peanuts at me. Then my brother showed up with a bunch of guys and hustled me out of there.

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The day I got discharged, I flew into Philadelphia Airport. I got two and a half rows of ribbons. I'm very proud. I'm a meritorious sergeant and I got an honorable discharge. How do you like that . . .?

I got off the plane and I went into a bar. The only thing I knew how to do was drink. I order a shot of CC and a beer and I'm standing there with a big smile on my face. There was a guy over at a table with two kids and a woman. The kids were about my age--nineteen or twenty.

"Home on leave, are you," the guy says to me.
"Nope, just got discharged."
"You just got back from where," one of the kid says.
"Vietnam."
"How do you feel about killing all of those innocent people?" the woman asks me out of nowhere.

I didn't know what to say. The bartender got a little uptight. But, I didn't say anything. They told me when I got discharged that I was going to get this . . . . But, I didn't believe them.

"Excuse me," I called the bartender over. "Could I buy them all a drink?" I felt guilty. I did kill. I tried to make amends somehow.

"We don't accept any drinks from killers," the girl says to me. Now I'm [angry]. The bartender tells me to take it easy and goes over and chews out this girl. She says, "How does it feel being in the Army?"

"He's not in the Army, he's a Marine," the bartender said.

"You bet . . . , I'm a Marine."

"Oh, you going to get nasty now?" They were harassing me right in the . . . bar. I paid for my drinks, left the bartender a tip and walked out. Forgot all about it. I got in the car with my brother and his wife and I was just too happy being home to let that bother me. But now it does.

Later when we got home, my brother said, "Don't wear your uniform." What . . . was that? I wanted to wear the [my uniform]. I had my ribbons. I was proud of what I'd done. I'm a king. That didn't hurt me then, but it hurts me now.

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I wonder sometimes whatever happened to those guys. Some spinal cord injuries and guys that had stepped on these things called Bouncing Betty. They explode and get your thighs, take your penis, your rectum. So big deal, you get a guy to the hospital and you save his life, but if he's not a quadriplegic, he's got a colostomy, he can't have sex, he can't have kids.

A lot of those guys committed suicide on the way to Japan or in Japan or in a VA hospital. I know of guys that had drugs smuggled on the ward to kill themselves before they were being evacuated. They'd say, "What time does the plane leave? I got to tell the guys in my unit. They're bringing my pictures. They're bringing my stuff."

"Well, it's not due till eleven. You know with the Army, that probably means noon or so." They were waiting for their stuff to come in and they would commit suicide on the Plane to Japan. Especially the bad ones. What nineteen-year-old kid wants to live like that?

****

I went home straight from California to O'Hare Airport in Chicago. I got home about three in the morning. Everybody in the house got up and said hello. Then they all went back to sleep. At 8:30 when my father left for work, he woke me up to say, "Listen, now that you're home, when are you going to get a job?"

I packed up and left. I haven't been home since.

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I had always heard that you got to have your job back. When I went to them for my job, they said, "What you want to do? Put somebody out of work? They got families and kids." After their little song and dance, I ended up working in the stock room where I had started the first time around. The only way I got that was to threaten to take them to court.

They told me that I couldn't have the seniority that I had built up before I left until I had been back physically for one year. In the second week of the eleventh month I was fired. But they resented the fact that they had to take me back. I had already worked back up to my old job.

I went to the VA and told them I needed some assistance or a job. They sent me to a factory paying minimum wage. I went there and it was a sweatshop. I ended up without a job.

I went to the power company and I had to take a physical. The doctor and I were talking and when he found out I was a veteran he asked me if I went to Vietnam. After that he started looking me over like something has got to be wrong. When he was taking my blood pressure, he took my arm and lifted it up and started looking it over, from my armpit to my wrist and back again, turning it over and back. I knew what he was doing, but I tried to ignore it. Then he grabbed the other arm and I had to say, "How dumb do I look to you? Are you trying to tell me my blood pressure has changed from one arm to the next?" He's still twisting my arm. I said, "Get your hands off me, man. The physical was going all right up till now."

He was looking for tracks and it [really made me angry]. I wasn't going to be put in that position. I told them what they could do with that job. The telephone company told me to get on the waiting list and that it wasn't their fault that the service only taught me to use a gun and didn't

try to teach me a trade. I got on the waiting list for federal jobs, the waiting list for UPS, for the Post Office, for correction officers. I wound up taking a parking agent's job. From the very beginning they said to me, "Oh, so you're one of those veterans. Well, there are no special privileges here for you because you were in Vietnam." Now, I had just walked through the . . . door and this is what I got thrown in my face. I didn't come in there asking for nothing but a job.

So I bought a gypsy cab and rented out three others. The cops gave me such a hassle, they wound up pulling my license. So I went and did the thing that most of the guys did. I was out on the street running numbers, selling some smoke, some coke. I had to survive. I had to take care of me and my family.

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We were all strapped in. They figured you might act up on the plane and grab at a window or a nurse. But they would hype them up, put you out automatically with morphine. Psychos coming back, amputees coming back, guys that wanted to die.

I came back with an I-don't-[care] kind of attitude, on a military medevac jet. They connected for me to go into the VA hospital back home. They had a VA representative to talk to everybody. He was telling us all about our benefits. I didn't want to hear nothing from nobody. My scheme was, "Just let me get out of the Army." I had an honorable discharge. I had medals coming to me. They showed me this big paper with all the medals numbered on it. I didn't want to see [anything]. I said, "You can keep your uniform. You can take the medals and shove them up your ass." I had forty-four days that was coming to me and they paid me for that.

I got back to the World, but this wasn't the World that I had left. I was born again. Like the Christians say, "Be born again." I did not fit into the real world anymore. For that twelve months in the Nam, I used to sit down and imagine what I would do in the World when I got back. I'll be with this woman, I'm going to do this and that. I came back to the World and I see people rioting about Nam. People hated GIs for being in the Nam. They was blaming us. I flipped out. I couldn't believe it.

I was in a VA hospital the first time I heard anybody saying, "Those

. . . guys over in Vietnam. Look what they're doing." Man, it did something to me. Like I was guilty. I was a criminal. You had sentenced me to die. These are the same people from when I left the year before. I'm back but I don't belong. I wanted to go back to the Nam. I would have re-upped, but I was all wounded. This world was alienating, what people was talking about, what people was liking.

When my mom came to see me, she was a different person. I didn't hate her or nothing like that. But it was a different person. I couldn't communicate with her. I just looked at her. We talked and it was over.

I would just sit in the room in the hospital and my mind would flash back. I would have dreams about the Nam, the Nam and action. I could see myself fighting, when I'm actually sitting in a VA hospital on the bed. I could see myself back in Nam.

This is not the World. Lord, how can they do this to me? How can they bring me back to a World where I don't know what they're talking about? The United States is saying one thing. The people are saying something else. President Nixon is talking about the Silent Majority. The people are in the streets protesting. Who are these people out here protesting while there are guys in the Nam going through psychological and physical hell? Walking in monsoon when it rains for months at a time. Being sniped at. Being killed. Stepping in booby traps. Catching jungle rot. Getting eaten up by leeches. How can they say the war is unjust? How can you walk out of Nam and leave guys out in the field or missing in action?

I wasn't thinking they were un-Americans, but man, somebody pulled the rug out from under us. Somebody stabbed us in the back. The average person in the peace sruggle didn't understand. We got stabbed in the back by the Army, while we were in the Army. We got stabbed in the back when we got back to the United States by the Peace people. We got stabbed in the back by President Nixon. He's talking nonsense. Henry Kissinger is talking about peace and ending the war. All this is garbage.

I felt a guilt trip. I said to myself, "I can't let people know that I've been to Vietnam." I knew they could look at me and tell that I was different.

I got out of the hospital. I used to sit in my room at home and I would just drink and be quiet. I just couldn't imagine myself going to parties, being with women. I was totally disoriented. I just could not adjust.

That first Fourth of July was the hardest thing for me to get through. I was in a big store and somebody threw firecrackers. I crouched down. People laughed at me. I felt like somebody dropped a safe out a window on me. "They know that I'm a Vietnam veteran."

I went back to school that September. I paid my own way to school. I didn't want to get my GI benefit because I didn't want nobody to know that I was veteran. I was ashamed, because everybody in the U.S. hated GIs for being in the Nam. I was trying to hide myself.

I thought maybe if I go to school I can adjust. I go to school and they're saying, "Those . . . GIs over in Vietnam." The professors would shake their heads, "It's a shame those GIs are over in Vietnam killing innocent people." I wouldn't say anything.

I walked into the classroom and the professor told me to write a report. I'm sitting there and my mind clicked. All I could see was I was in Nam and the professors standing up there, he was a gook. He looked like a gook to me. He wasn't even oriental. But I wanted to kill this man. "I should kill this professor." My mind said, "Kill this dude, man. This is the enemy. What's he doing out in the field?" My mind was flashing back.

I would hear kids talk, "What's going down in Nam is a shame. We going to join the peace movement. Let's go on a demonstration." These guys are trying to kill the people that is my World. These are enemies. I got to kill these mothers.

Now a lot of vets back here in the World just picked up rifles and started shooting people. I can understand that. They could not adjust. They just threw us back into a place that we were uintrained to live in. They should have had to train us to come back into the World. It took me years to understand that I'm part of the United States.