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military veterans since 1952.

Summer 2020

VETERANS' VOICES®

Special Issue for Unusual Times

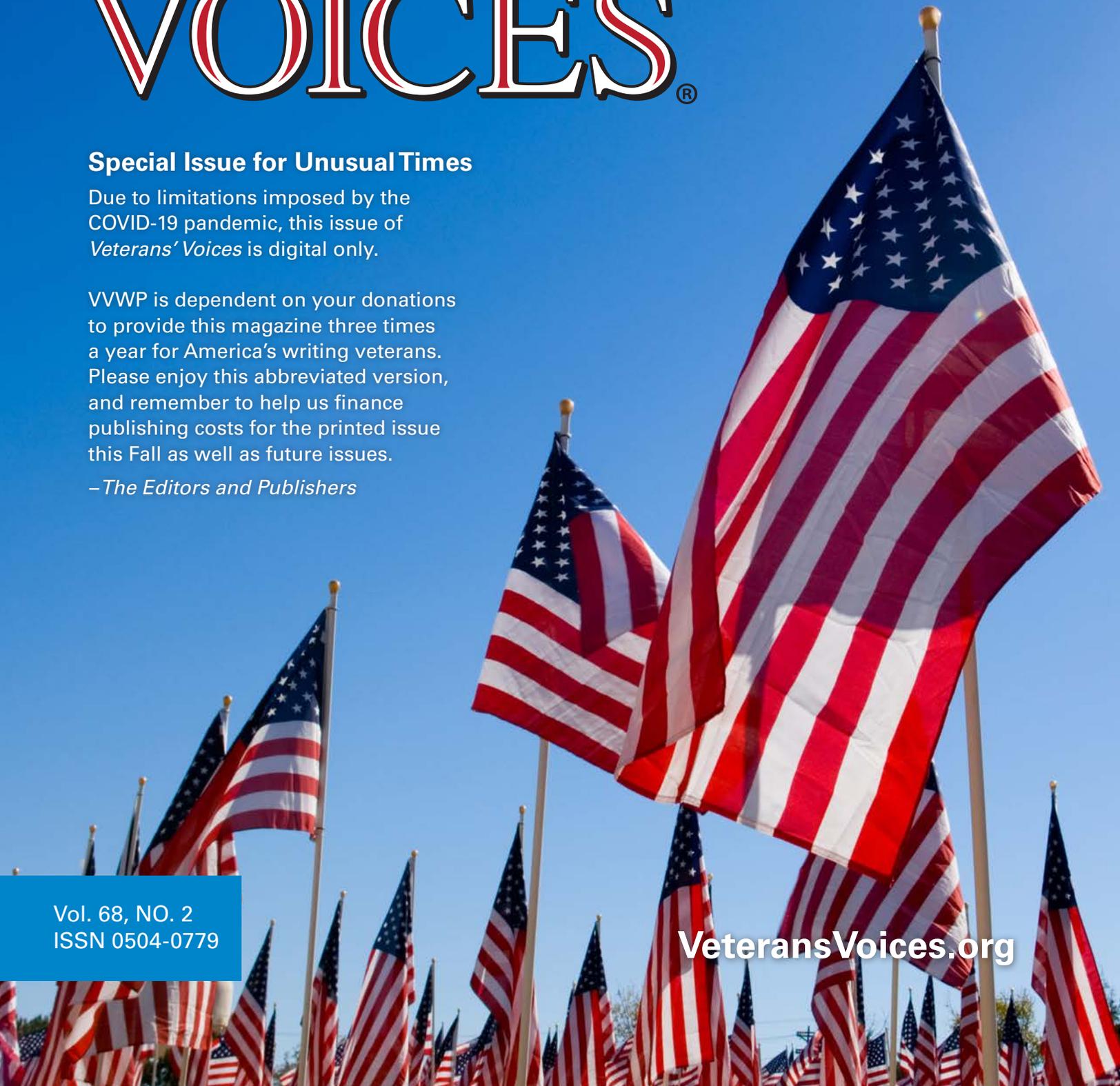
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VVWP is dependent on your donations to provide this magazine three times a year for America's writing veterans. Please enjoy this abbreviated version, and remember to help us finance publishing costs for the printed issue this Fall as well as future issues.

—The Editors and Publishers

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Veterans' Voices®

Summer 2020 Vol. 68, No. 2

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VVWP was established as Hospitalized Veterans Writing Project in 1946 by **Elizabeth Fontaine** with the support of the Chicago North Shore chapter of Theta Sigma Phi (now The Association for Women in Communications) to address the physical and recreational needs of veterans returning from World War II. In 1952, journalists **Margaret Sally Keach** and **Gladys Feld Helzberg**, with assistance from the Greater Kansas City chapter of Theta Sigma Phi, established *Veterans' Voices* to provide a national outlet for writing produced by the project's participants. The three founders believed that writing could do everything from entertaining bedfast veterans to helping others conquer mental health issues.

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Contact Us

Veterans Voices Writing Project, Inc.
406 West 34th Street, Suite 103
Kansas City, MO 64111-3043
Phone & Fax: (816) 701-6844

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The CLSP Party

*By Christopher Bremicker
VA Medical Center—Minneapolis, MN*

The Congregate Living Services Program (CLSP) threw a party for the residents of my high rise. It was our holiday party. Thirty people, the same gang that used the community room a lot anyway showed up.

A singer/impersonator entertained us. He was an older, handsome, robust man, with a good head of white hair. His wife sat in the corner as he set up his synthesizer, amplifier, sign and guitar.

The sign said, "Bill. A Party of One." He was, indeed, that. He played an electric guitar and accompanied himself on his synthesizer. He had a gentle voice and looked healthy for a man his age.

He knew a lot of Buddy Holly music, and we tapped our feet to "Peggy Sue." I was the only one in the audience who lived my life to the songs he played, but many of us heard them before. "Peggy Sue, Peggy Sue, pretty, pretty Peggy Sue," we sang.

He switched to Frank Sinatra, donning the same style of hat Frank wore onstage, and sang "New York, New York" as we swayed in our chairs. "If I can make it there, I can make it anywhere," we sang. Bill played songs we all sang to.

Sandy, a woman who sought therapy for her anger toward life and won, showed up and instigated us into clapping along to the music. She was animated; she either loved a party or was embarrassingly overdoing things. We all joined in her infectious spirit. She celebrated her victory over herself wherever she went.

We sang Neil Diamond's "Sweet Caroline, life has never been so good" and swayed our arms in the air to the music. Bill got us to sing along and do the "Ba, Ba, Ba" part to his prompt. "Neil Diamond?" I asked the man next to me. "How corny can you get?" But we loved it.

Bill took requests, too. I yelled, since I sat in the back of the room, for "Pretty Woman," by Roy Orbison. Bill put on sunglasses, Orbison's trademark, and began singing to the women in the audience. "Pretty woman, the kind I'd like to meet," he sang. He kneeled next to one of our women and crooned to her.

The attention embarrassed the women, but we did not care. He moved from woman to woman, holding his portable microphone and singing to them. "But wait! Is she walking back to me? Yes, she's walking back to me. Pretty woman!" We roared with approval.

He took a request for Johnny Cash and sang "Folsom Prison Blues." He put on a black cowboy hat, Cash's emblem, and sang, "I hear the train a coming; it's rolling 'round the bend. I haven't seen the sunshine, since I don't know when." That's how we felt about the high rise. "I shot a man in Reno, just to watch him die. When I hear that whistle blowing, I hang my head and cry." Some of us, myself included, would die in the high rise.

CLSP put out cookies and apple cider on a table, and I had six oatmeal cookies and two cups of cider. There was a bowl of Chex Mix, too, which we ladled onto our plates. Our CLSP supervisor handed out little pieces of quiche lorraine, too. I sat at a table with Harvey, who was an opera and ballet buff, but even he enjoyed the singer. "He's very genuine," he said. "Down to earth."

The man sang "Staying Alive" by the Bee Gees and we began to dance. Sandy started first, always in a celebratory mood, and Gary, a Marine who suffered a brain injury, joined in. Gary was not an inhibited man; he could dance, and he jitterbugged with our CLSP cook, Ellen. She joined him on the dance floor when she saw he had some moves.

They bumped and grinded to the music until they felt they overdid it, and Ellen went back to the corner of the room to watch the rest of us having fun. She loved us, and it was a pleasure for her to see us enjoying each other. She had some moves, too.

I asked Darlene to dance. She was a demure, shy lady, whose granddaughter joined us for dinner on occasion. She and I got on the dance floor, held hands, and moved around to the music. Neither of us was sure of ourselves. I told Darlene it was years since I had danced. It was years for her, too, she said.

Cell phone cameras flashed as CLSP employees took pictures of us to show to their bosses, friends or families. I was not sure which. The success of the party guaranteed doing it again next year and the photos were a basis for a budget request. It was the best party I ever attended and worth recording with pictures.

Then the singer gave a tribute to veterans. I was a veteran, and this got to me. The music was in remembrance of the Civil War. Bill started with "Dixie," and I wondered how the African-Americans in the audience took it. "I wish I was in the land of cotton," he sang. "Old times there are not forgotten. Look away. Look away. Look away, Dixieland."

I looked at Gloria, an African-American friend of mine, for her reaction. She listened attentively. "In Dixieland, I'll take my stand, to live and die in Dixie." Gloria was born in Mississippi.

Then Bill switched gears to the "Battle Hymn of the Republic." He strummed the guitar slowly and gave the music the reverence it

deserved. "Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord." I began to weep. I was a Vietnam era veteran and could have died because of this song, I thought.

Our CLSP manager put her hand on my shoulder, rubbed my back, and said, "Thank you for your service." Never did these words sound so sweet. Her gentle hand rubbed my back and I felt a pride in myself I had not felt in years.

Bill pulled a cord on the sign that displayed his name, and an American flag unfolded. It stood prominently behind him. He was unabashedly patriotic, and, at the end of the party, I introduced myself to him as a veteran. His eyes held mine as he shook my hand.

The party ended at dinner time. The singer was with us for an hour, but the afterglow of the party, for some of us, lasted all night. Dinner was a chicken breast and mixed veggies. I plugged in my laptop, began to write, and resumed my life.

Requiem for a Tet Survivor

By La Decker
—Ballwin, Missouri

"If I had known how much coming home would suck, I wouldn't have complained about the war so much."

— Unknown Vietnam Veteran

1968

Cpl. Clayton Deckard Lawrence, known as Clay to his Marine friends, was promoted quickly during his tour in Vietnam. He was looked up to by peers and superior officers alike for his bravery and ferocity in a combat zone. Having come to Vietnam in January, he learned his craft during the infamous Tet Offensive. He also learned something else that was to haunt him the rest of his life. He learned to hate people enough to want to hurt them and kill them. This was not something to be unlearned easily, but without the proper therapy it could grow into a thing worse than the most aggressive cancer. One incident stood out in Clay's tour of duty: the time that a Vietnamese civilian (if any of those people could be identified as such) threw a can of gasoline at him and set him on fire. This Vietnamese was considered by Clay to be his friend, and they talked together often when Clay saw him. The man's name was Nguyen Van Houg, and Clay ended up killing the man (or, in his words 'wasting the gook'). He survived without any long-term disability or disfiguration, but after that incident his favorite expression was "the only good gook is a dead gook."



1969

When Clay finally boarded a plane in Danang to leave Vietnam, he had been newly promoted to sergeant. After arriving in Okinawa, he spent the next 35 days there in Camp Smedley Butler awaiting transportation back to the United States. When he landed at the El Toro Marine Air Station and touched the ground of his home country again, he was at first ecstatic to have survived Vietnam and be back home. But then, as he received his orders and was told that he would get 30 days leave and an air ticket home, he was cautioned not to interact with demonstrators at the airport in Los Angeles. "What demonstrators?" Clay asked. "The peaceniks," the processing sergeant told him. "If you get into a fight with them you will probably end up in the brig." "What kind of bullshit is this?" Clay shouted. "Political bullshit, Marine," the sergeant told him. "I just got back from 'Nam six months ago. Don't you remember? Life sucks and then you die anyway. Welcome home." At the airport in L.A., Clay got into a fight with demonstrators, but the police broke it up and let him board his plane home. When he landed and met his wife at the airport, they embraced and kissed, but in the background, he heard demonstrators yelling "Baby killers!" As he and his wife walked to the parking lot, he thought, "What the f... is this all about?"

1970

The last year that Clay and his wife spent in the Marine Corps was not pleasant because of Clay's difficulty adjusting to the stateside military and getting along with people around him. He was not used to the stateside spit and polish and related everything he encountered to the "way we did it in 'Nam." He

spent his last year as sergeant of the guard (24 hours on/24 hours off) or as a brig chaser. He was at first assigned to train young Marines, but after two incidents in which he hit a young Marine, he was relegated to duties that “kept him out of trouble.” In August 1970, Clay was discharged from the Marine Corps under honorable conditions and got a job in a foundry as an electrician. Clay still had adjustment problems with civilian life; he would be ready to fight at the least perceived insult. References to the still ongoing Vietnam War would sometimes throw him into a fit of rage. The worst of these fits happened during a news broadcast when Clay and his wife were having dinner with a group of friends. A small band of National Guardsmen was trying to protect property at Kent State University, Ohio, from peace demonstrators. The television was on in the adjacent room, and it was announced that the demonstrators were throwing things at the guardsmen. Clay got up and ran into the other room and shouted at the television, “Shoot the bastards, God dammit! Shoot them all.” Then, when the guardsmen lost their control and actually fired on the demonstrators, Clay totally lost his control, “That’s it! Kill the mother f...ers! Kill them all!” It took his wife and several of their friends an hour to calm him down. Never again would his wife and friends look at him in the same way; they all were afraid of him from that day forward.

1975

Clay continued to have trouble with his peers and had picked up the habit of drinking more than he used to when he was younger. He did not drink on the job, but he drank a bit more than just “socially.” One day at work in April, a man was talking about the end of the Vietnam War and how it was a waste of all the lives of the men that fought there. Clay started to argue with the man and said, “You never served, you f...ing coward. You don’t know what you’re talking about.” The man got into Clay’s face and said, “Right, just what I would expect from another crazy Vietnam veteran.” This was too much for Clay and he kept hitting the man until several of his co-workers grabbed him and restrained him until the police arrived. The man he hit did not press charges, but, not for the last time, Clay lost his job. After four months of unemployment, Clay went to work in a steel foundry known for recruiting its employees from the ranks of the previously incarcerated. Clay now began to drink on the job like his new peer group.

1989

After losing his job at the steel foundry, due to participation in a fight that included a number of his on-the-job drinking buddies, Clay took a job at an aluminum foundry where there were fewer ex-cons but plenty of on the job drinkers and dope smokers. He told his wife, as he always did when he was fired, that he quit the job to better himself, but she was all too familiar with his habit of

concealing the truth. His relationship with his wife was not the best, but it could still be said that they loved each other. It was his wife’s suggestion that he should go to college at night to earn a degree. He enrolled in a local college in a curriculum that would lead him to a degree in computer science. He could only take two courses each semester and still keep working, but against the odds, Clay graduated seven years later with a bachelor of science in computer science, graduating summa cum laude no less. He eventually left the foundry and got a job as an engineer with a local food processing company. Although he was good at his job, it required him to travel a lot, and his drinking continued. Also, he was known as a man with a short temper and was regarded warily by his associates. When his wife asked him to leave this job, spend more time at home and seek help from the VA for some of his problems, he would become angry. He told his wife that he was not a crazy Vietnam veteran with PTSD and that he did not need help with problems that were everyone else’s fault. He drank, he insisted, but he was not a drunk. He had an anger problem but said he could control it. Over the years he had become proficient in the art of lying, not only to his wife, not only to his employers and friends, but also to himself.

1998

Clay was asked to leave the food processing company, not for his drinking, not because of a poor work record, but because people had become afraid to be around him. He still refused to seek help as his wife begged him to do over and over again. He did however become self-employed by starting a business as an independent consulting engineering contractor. Surprisingly, he was good at this and was able to easily acquire clients. However, he traveled more often but was able to restrict his drinking to the hotels he lived in after work. When he was home, he argued with his wife, and their relationship deteriorated. On the other hand, since he worked for different places all the time, he was able to keep a job for a short time before moving to another. Therefore, he did not stay in one place long enough to become an irritant. He made a few friends but lost more than he made.

2008

After working as a consultant for many years and continuing his drinking and his hyper-defensive attitude, which he always blamed on the legacy of Tet, Clay ruined what was left of his life. He came home one weekend and got into an argument with his wife. During this aggressive confrontation, Clay hit the love of his life and knocked her down. His wife was not the type of person to let this pass, but it can be said that for over 40 years she had stuck by her man in good times and bad. She had him charged with domestic abuse, and a merciful judge sentenced Clay to two years’ probation. Although his wife did not leave him, things would never be the same. Clay was very bitter about the charges his

wife brought against him; after all, again, it was not his fault. Like most things after Vietnam, it was always somebody else's fault. Clay did notice something that, had he understood it the right way, could have turned his attitude around. His wife had bought him a hat that displayed 'Vietnam Vet' on the front. Whenever he encountered people, wearing the hat, they would often say, "Thank you for your service." Sometimes they would even shake his hand. Clay would think to himself, "What's going on? Has everyone had a change of heart? Have I acted like an asshole all these years and all of the misery in my life was my fault after all? NO!! NO!! I know you're out there somewhere Houg, waiting for me to drop my guard. Well, f... you. I'm ready for you this time."

2010

Right before Clay was to finish his probation, he got into another argument with his wife. This time it was because she begged him to get help before he destroyed himself. He flew into one of his old rages, and this time he not only struck his wife he put her in the hospital. As an encore, Clay got into a fist fight with the arresting officers and injured one of them severely. This time the marriage ended in divorce. The judge was not lenient after this case, and Clay ended up spending three years in jail. The judge commented sarcastically at the trial, "Once a Marine, always a Marine."

2013

Clay, at 66, was no longer able to work and lived in a one room flat by himself, existing on some savings and his Social Security. He spent his days at a bar near where he lived, drinking mostly beer. He was known among the regulars as that "crabby old Vietnam Vet." He would sit for hours, reliving the Tet Offensive again and cursing and swearing at people on the bar's television. Most of the bar's customers considered him an eccentric character who was enjoyable to watch because you never knew what he would do next. From the people outside the bar, the reaction to him was not as charitable. He was considered a dangerous old man by his neighbors, and children were not allowed anywhere near him. At the end of 2020 he became unable to care for himself and was put into a veterans' home.

2025

One day, a few years after Clay was admitted to the home, a group of school children visited the veterans before Memorial Day. When some of them saw Clay sitting in a wheelchair in a corner by himself, they went over to him and said in unison, "Thank you for your service, sir." Clay glanced at them and thought to himself, "What's this? They are thanking me and not calling me a killer or a mercenary. Is this real? NO!! You are behind it aren't you Houg. You're getting ready to throw the gasoline. I'm no fool.

F.k me once, shame on you. F... me twice, shame on ME!"

As Clay gripped the arm rests of his wheelchair tightly, he scowled at the children. "Don't bother Mr. Lawrence, children," said the nurse nearby. "He is not right in the head, but it was nice of you to thank him, because deep in his heart I know he appreciates it."

"Houg, where are you, I know you're there." Clay sighed.

"Who is he talking to nurse?" a child asked.

"A person named Houg, honey." The nurse answered. "No one knows who he or she was, but they must have been important to Mr. Lawrence."

At 10 p.m., right before Clay Lawrence's birthday, his heart was failing, and the nurses called for the veterans' home chaplain. Rev. McKinley rushed to Clay's bedside so that he could be with him before he passed. As Clay took his last breath, he gasped, "Houg.....are you there?" And then Clay passed away.

The chaplain made the sign of the cross and said gently, "God bless you, brother. May you find the peace with the Lord you didn't find in life."

Then Chaplain McKinley looked at the two nurses and quietly spoke, "And, let us not forget: thank for your service, Sgt. Lawrence."





Life Was Simpler When I Carried a Duffel Bag

By George S. Kulas
—Fond du Lac, WI

I remember when I started out in the military and life seemed simple. Everything I owned could be carried in my duffel bag. When it was time to move on, my fatigues, underwear, socks, boots, shoes, hats, etc. were all packed into the duffel bag, which was then locked with a padlock. I guess I didn't want anyone stealing any of my stuff. Of course, if a thief wanted to, he could have simply picked up the bag and stolen all of me. Upon arriving at my new location, I took everything out of the duffel bag and placed the contents in a footlocker or wall locker in my area of the barracks, tent or hooch. Sometimes I had a cot to sleep on, sometimes a bunk, and sometimes the ground. But it was my area, my home.

Only two items I considered luxuries never entered my duffel bag; I wore them almost constantly. One was a Marine Corps ring that looked like real gold when I bought it at the base exchange immediately after I had completed boot camp. I only took the ring off to clean it, and my finger, of that green stuff. Then it looked good again for a few days. Unfortunately a corpsman had to cut the ring off after I caught it on a gate while jumping off a deuce-a-half, (2 1/2 -ton truck), at Dong Ha, South Vietnam. The mishap ripped off half my finger, but fortunately I still have both the finger and the ring.

The other luxury item was a Seiko chronograph watch I saved for in Vietnam and bought on R&R in Tokyo. It was useful for timing myself when I ran, and it held up at incredible water depths. Even

though I didn't swim, it was an interesting feature to brag about. The watch looked sharp and impressive with its large face and numerous buttons and dials.

I remember vividly the night I lost it in a poker game on Okinawa. I had a full house and thought I was a sure winner, but the hustler raised 10 bucks. I only had five. He said my watch would cover the bet. He turned over four 3s; I turned over the watch, and a lot of pride. It was a long time before I could afford to buy another Seiko, longer before I played poker again.

How things change. Now I'm retired with several pensions. I have a home, two cars and more possessions than I ever thought I would have. What is troubling is that all the possessions I have now don't seem to be enough. There always seems to be something I still want.

I still have the duffel bag. I used it for quite a while to lug softballs and bats to games I coached. I guess I have come a long way from when all I owned were necessities, a watch and a ring. But I often wish I could pack up my duffel bag and go back—back to when life was simple and clear. It was truly the best time of my life.

Welcome to the Suck

By Korby Lee Rhodes
VA Medical Center—Boise, ID

The Marines of Third Battalion, Fourth Marine Regiment are getting restless. We have been here for three weeks and haven't seen anything. We have spent our whole time in the Corps training for combat. So, with no combat there is no excitement.

The constant days of boring patrols, terrible food and lack of motivation are starting to take its toll on all of us. We have nothing to do out here except watch bootleg movies on our portable DVD players and call home using paid-for phone cards that don't eliminate the six-second delay when you actually make the call.

We in Kilo Company are mostly a mobile unit, which means our patrols are mostly done using Humvees. When we started three weeks ago the unit was in good spirits and trying to keep it fun. We hooked a Jolly Roger to the fourth Humvee in the caravan and would blare "Ridin" by Chamillionaire as a sort of a theme song (the lyrics "ridin dirty" seemed to fit here). That was until the captain got wind of it and put a stop to it. "We are trying to make friends here, not enemies," he said--a statement that made no sense to us bloodthirsty Marines, because we were there to kill, not make friends. The captain didn't understand this.

Some of us have been here before, with some on their third

deployment. They are hardened combat veterans of the fiercest fighting of the war so far, in Fallujah, two years earlier. Even they are chomping at the bit. Lance Cpl. Florence, however, has never been here before.

Florence is different than most. He is a Security Forces Marine, which means he spent his first two years in the Corps guarding nuclear weapons at some base in Washington. That is not infantry work. Any punk can guard nukes.

This is not the main reason that he is so different, though. Most of us make fun of him because he holds tight to his Christian beliefs. Back in the states he doesn't chase women, drink to excess or engage in a lot of the vulgarities that most Marines take part in. Even the ones who claim to be Christians have been corrupted, but not Florence. He is a really good guy, which is something that doesn't fit in a Marine Corps infantry unit. We all think he is soft, too nice to fight. We are not sure how he will react in a combat situation.

There are patrols going out all the time here from Camp Gannon at Husaybah, the tiny village just outside the control point of the base. The captain doesn't like having too many boots on the ground at one time in the town. "Too many targets," he says. The fact is there really isn't a need.

Husaybah is so small you can barely even describe it as a village. It's one of those places you won't see on a map in America. Just some unincorporated town you fly through on your way to the Grand Canyon, or wherever your next family vacation is. Not that Husaybah is uninhabited. This place is packed with upwards of 4,500 people in just a few blocks. It's like a sardine can but hotter than hell.

But it is still a standard Iraqi village in the traditional sense. Five mosques rise above the rest of the ramshackle buildings to create a sort of skyline. We can see this really well at night from the guard towers at Gannon—the minarets in all their glory backlit by the setting sun, while the smoke of burning trash rises from the ashes. If this was the only view you got to see of Husaybah, you would think it was quaint.

Unfortunately, it is not. Most of the other buildings are falling apart from years of neglect and war. For the buildings that are still fully intact, you could jump from one rooftop to another because they are so close together, which we see the children do from time to time while playing.

Other than the mosques, the only building that is still fully intact is the mudhif. This is the ceremonial house owned by the local sheik to hold weddings, funerals and other important events. It is mostly made of reeds harvested from the nearby Euphrates River. The roof on this one is round, as is the inside. It reminds us of

one of those tunnels we would pass through in a haunted house, minus the illusion of spinning and subsequent vertigo. The only opening to it is the one we go in and out of; the walls have no windows. So it stays relatively dark and cool.

The sheik gave us a tour of it when we started our tour a few weeks ago. He had done it for all the previous units as well. There is no sewer system in the village, so water tainted with urine and feces run rampant throughout. The locals drink it; they have too. Not only is there no sewer system, there is also no running water or filtration. The locals get by with what they have.

The food isn't much better. The meat of choice around here is sheep. They raise them for slaughter on the few farms outside the city. They kill them and hang them in the city market for purchase. They bake in the sun for hours, and the unsold meat is rotten by the end of the day. But they are out there the next day selling the new meat with the old. For some, this is a livelihood, or as close as you can get to one out here.

The most interesting, or maybe more appropriately, depressing thing here is "Gas Day." You see, there are too many vehicles around here, so the people who own them are only allowed to get gasoline once a week. It is a government rationing program, which doesn't make sense because there is so much oil around here we could take a bath in it. The government runs everything, so whatever it says goes. It is an unfortunate reminder to all of us at Gannon just how lucky we have it in America.

We are heading out of the gate now, minus the pirate flag and theme music. Just four Humvees—trucks as we call them—16 Marines and a desire to see some action. The Humvees are packed tight with enough ammo to destroy a small army, which is the point. They all have four large water jugs, two boxes of MREs, a first aid kit and other necessities in the trunk. The first and fourth trucks are equipped on top with the M240 machine gun. The second one has the M2 50-caliber machine gun (or "ma-deuce" as we call it), while the third truck has the Mark 19 cyclical grenade launcher. They are getting rusty because they have yet to be used since we have been here. We are all hoping that will change.

The anticipation is overtaking us. In Truck 3, Florence's truck, Huddy listens to the radio and relays the messages. Huddy is the team leader in charge of the four guys in this vehicle. He is a private first class (the second lowest rank in the Corps) because he was insubordinate to officers and has been busted down. The Marines of Third Platoon love him, not just because he doesn't take crap, but because he is a hardened war veteran. This is his third tour to Iraq. He has fought in Fallujah and Ramadi and knows how to motivate troops. He is cool under pressure and knows how to coordinate an attack. Everybody under his command listens intently to his instruction.

“It looks like we are heading down by the river,” Huddy says. “Company headquarters seems to think there are some smugglers down there, peddling cigarettes and other stuff. This is the time they think they are usually down there. I ain’t so sure. We haven’t seen them yet. Not sure what gives HQ the idea that they would be there now... bunch of idiots.”

As we leave the entry control point of Camp Gannon, evening prayer call starts playing over the various loudspeakers attached to the mosques for just such a purpose. It is dusk, so we can see and smell the smoke rising up over the town as the residents’ burn their trash and bathroom waste. This is the only option they have. There are no trash bins. People have to deal with it on their own.

As we exit the gate, we make a hard left down the road that doubles as the border of Iraq and Syria. We are headed toward the river, just like HQ wants. The Euphrates has the only greenery in this part of the country, fertile enough soil used mostly for rice paddies. But there is some grass, and the river is actually pretty clean for a third world country.

We drive through the last wadi before hitting the area near the river and make a hard right. The ground here is uneven and can give way. We almost lost a truck a couple weeks ago when it veered too close to the river and the front wheel started to slide. We know better now.

“Not sure why they have us come down here,” Frenchy says. “This ground is awful. One of these times we are going to get stuck.” His real last name is Hebert, but we all just call him Frenchy because nobody can pronounce that crap. We all nod in agreement at his assessment.

The river is about a half mile north of the city and flows west to east. It is the longest river in the Middle East with very few bridges to cross over. Thus, we focus on patrolling the side we are on, the south side.

Clack, clack, clack--the distinct sound of the enemy’s AK-47. It is coming from the south, from where the city is. We can hear the shots whiz by us. Then there is the distinct hiss of an RPG, and another and then another. As we dismount from the trucks and start taking cover on the north side of each vehicle, the first RPG rips through the side of Truck One. The second RPG is high, flying over the head of the gunner in Truck Two, while the third RPG blows up harmlessly several feet behind Truck Four. The machine guns have opened up at this point, peppering the field with fire. We recoup and come up with a strategy to end the firefight.

Cpl. Martinez, the squad leader, starts barking orders from the front. Truck One is completely disabled from the RPG at this point. “Get those guys!” Martinez screams.



We spread out on a line behind the trucks, preparing to rush the field. The AK-47 fire had stopped by this point. Martinez gives the order for the machine guns to cease, and the rush is on. It doesn’t appear that any fire came from the buildings in the distance. This appears to be a coordinated ambush by a small faction of the enemy in the open field. They knew we were coming. Maybe these were smugglers like HQ said. However, they were prepared. How did they know we would be coming this way? They must have been scouting us.

Dusk has turned to night by this point, and we all have to enable our night-vision goggles in order to see any movement in the field.

As the rush across the field continues, Florence sees a figure pop up out of the field just to his right. The figure clearly has a knife in his hand and is going toward Hebert. Florence lifts his weapon and fires three quick shots toward the figure. The third one pierces the man’s neck and he goes down, blood spewing out of the hole in his neck.

“Frenchy, you okay?” Florence says as they go to check out the dead man.

“Yeah, I’m good. Nice shot, brother.”

“All in day’s work buddy.”

The rush across the field is complete. An unspent RPG lies a few feet from the man Florence shot. Four enemy bodies in total lie wasted in the field. Three were taken out by the machine guns as indicated by their wounds; the fourth was the one Florence shot. None of them made it. It’s clear by the lack of backup that these were the only enemy sent to carry out this attack. They had been tossed to the wolves, knowing full well that they were going to die

that day. Four enemy soldiers with limited ammo are not going to take out a squad of Marines. We all turn to head back to the trucks and cordon off the area until the cleanup crew arrives.

“Holy crap, Florence! You smoked that hadji,” Huddy says. “How did it feel?”

Florence isn't sure how to answer that. His emotions were all over the place. He went from scared, to mad to...well he didn't really know how he felt. All he knew was that he had taken a life, albeit an enemy one. Should he be happy? He didn't know.

“I feel like I am going to pass out, my adrenaline is flowing so hard,” Florence says.

“Don't get used to it,” Huddy says. It only happens the first time. You just get numb to it after a while.”

Florence knows this was true coming from Huddy. He just doesn't know how to feel about it, though.

“Hey! Stop lollygagging and get your asses over here!” Martinez yells. “We got wounded!”

We all run to where Truck One lies in a pile of rubble. The gunner had taken shrapnel to the lower leg when the RPG slammed into the back side of the vehicle. Martinez is bleeding from the back of his neck, and PFC Realmuto, the gunner for Truck One, is lying on the ground when we approach.

“How is everybody? Everybody okay?” Huddy asks.

“No, Muto is dead,” says Martinez with tears welling up in his eyes. “Those bastards got him with that RPG.”

War is hell, but losing a fellow Marine is the worst.

“THIS...” Huddy says pointing at Muto's body and staring at Florence, “you never get used to. War makes you numb, but death scars you forever.”

War makes you numb, but death scars you forever. Florence keeps running that over in his mind. Does he just mean the death of a fellow Marine? What about when you kill someone? Does their death scar you? Florence just wants this day to be over. He has had enough.

“I already called in our position,” Martinez says. “All we can do is wait now. It is going to be a long night. From what HQ said, there are skirmishes everywhere. The cleanup crew may not get here for several hours because of all the fighting. We will just have to hold tight. We are actually in a pretty good spot here. There isn't any place for the hadjis to hide except for that field, and we killed all of them. We should be able to hold our position with no more

threat. All gunners mount up, and Huddy, since your truck has the hero of the day, you guys get first watch.”

We are all spent but excited. We have finally seen some action, and from what it sounds like there is more on the way. Florence had wasted a guy. We couldn't believe it, honestly. The good little church boy stepped up and killed someone. That makes everyone feel better about him. There will never be a doubt about him again. We can all trust him now.

We had only been back at Gannon a few hours. We had been sitting out there for the better part of a day. It was evening again now, a day after the firefight. As the last faint light of the sun dropped below the skyline of the city, Florence continued to ponder the events of the last 24 hours. He was tired now, just ready to hit the sack, but his brain wouldn't stop racing. He had killed a guy, and he had liked it. What did that mean? Should he feel that way? He needed to reconcile those feelings, and only more war could do that. He couldn't wait for the next fight.

So This Is Memorial Day

*By Paul James Nyerick
VA Medical Center—West Haven, CT*

So, this is Memorial Day. 58,320 names etched on that black granite wall must be remembered and honored for their ultimate sacrifice. Our nation, in lockstep, has finally recognized our suffering and has come to grips with the nightmare known as Vietnam.

I can't remember the names of those Marines who died in the mountains and jungles, fighting for Lima 3/7, except for Jessie. It would be hard to forget Jessie because besides dying Jessie unselfishly protected his platoon from harm and was awarded the Medal of Honor. His picture hangs in the Marine Corps Museum, alongside those other Marines who were honored for extraordinary valor.

Many more combatants delayed dying, but mark my words, Vietnam killed and is still killing us at an alarming rate. I am remembering personal friends of mine who are relegated to a footnote to the ever-changing list of casualties from those horrific, confusing times. We were not prepared for the dilemma caused by the consequences of what was thrust into our delicate moral upbringing.

Two Marine friends of mine gave up the ghost last week—Kurt W. and Marty T. Kurt struggled with a glut of ailments, including



PTSD caused from exposure to what were the horrors of war thrust upon us at an early age. He had been dealing with diabetes, failing kidneys and pain from all sides.

Marty dropped dead between sentences. His sudden demise, witnessed by his wife of 49 years, dissolved a lifetime of love. It all came home when a Marine presented her with a flag. That vision put in perspective the finality that will come to all of us.

I also must remember some of my friends who prematurely came to their end in many different ways from the same source. Suicide, substance abuse and diseases all linked that war.

Army vet Andy L., my roommate when we came home, ate a Smith and Wesson pill that disconnected his brain in the driver's seat of his pristine Austin Healy 3000. After the deed, it wasn't so pretty. Andy was riddled with shame, and couldn't live with accidentally killing one of his platoon members in a frenetic firefight. Chalk up another casualty to the fog of war. My dear Marine friend Jack M. couldn't cope with civilization, so he gassed himself in his mother's garage, floating away into oblivion. Jack was on a downward spiral into the cavernous pit of addiction. Lifestyle choices took the lives of so many of my other dear friends. Marine Joe M. didn't want anything to

do with American values. He lived outside the norm until he was catapulted from his Harley through the windshield of an oncoming car.

Army soldier Jimmy V. had no concept of reality and like so many others slowly numbed himself to death.

Marine Rick B. valiantly tried to fit in with the rest of society but couldn't escape the horror of being one of the few survivors of one the war's bloodiest battles. This highly decorated hero couldn't understand why he survived. He lived with his guilt until the day they took him off his respirator.

These friends of mine died before there was mention of a new disorder called PTSD. I truly believe some of them would still be on this planet if they lived long enough to get the help they needed.

Other friends of mine died from the invisible scourge of Monsanto's Agent Orange, Blue or whatever these diabolical fiends called this slap in the face. They unceremoniously turned this beautiful country into a wasteland. To this day, the Vietnamese people as well as we who distributed tickets of death wait until the grim reaper pays us a final visit. None of us deserves this fate.

Navy Corpsman Roland (Doc) T., Marine Lenny C., Marine Buzz H.; Army vets Mike S., John D. and Frank A., members of our Arts Council, all died of cancer. All of them were in therapy for PTSD-related afflictions. The irony is they thought the war was over for them, or at least they were coping with decades of anguish.

I would be remiss if I didn't honor the man who made the ultimate sacrifice saving my life. In a split second between life and death, ARVN interpreter Lt. Tam pushed me from harm's way, thus taking the full blast from an incoming artillery projectile. This Vietnamese hero, who wasn't just a gook, gave me a second chance at life. Without his selfless act, my name would be scratched into that wall for all posterity to mourn.

So, this is Memorial Day. Let us not forget the sacrifices of the men and women who gave their all for this country, right or wrong. We must also honor those of us who may fall from the still lingering dangers ready to unceremoniously snuff us out. I am grateful I survived, but it saddens me that a new generation has to repeat what we so long have tried to forget. I am worried that our present political leaders are clueless or could care less about the lives lost over their bottom line. Oorrah!

Tonight's Patrol

By Justin Stone

—Yorktown Heights, NY

The day had been long and hot. I was more thirsty than hungry. Today's patrol moved us from village to jungle to minefield and, ultimately to this farm.

I would not be hungry. I never was hungry out here. Tonight's dinner just as most night's dinner is C-rations. There was one B-2 meal that virtually everyone hated, ham and lima beans. I thought ham and lima beans were the equivalents of manna. I was told, more than once, that either my taste buds were dead, or I was insane. In any event, I rarely had to go a whole day without food. Because nobody on this patrol would eat the slime and filth called ham and lima beans. Today was another one of those days.

The sun has just set, and the purple hours begin. The battalion has settled in for the night. We will move again in the morning. The perimeter has been established and once the purple turns black, the patrol will move out beyond the perimeter. The crickets chirp unceasingly; they seem louder than usual. They will stop chirping when the movement begins. They will be quiet as the patrol deploys itself, and every soldier's nerves, from the ear to trigger finger, will be waiting for them to begin their song again. If they stop chirping later in the night, there will be no need to wake those who sleep. The cessation of the noise will act as an alarm. God created crickets to protect soldiers.

Tonight, we rest on dry farmland. If the crickets do not stop chirping, everyone except this patrol will get some shut-eye. This area appears benign, but nothing is what it seems to be. The place is deserted. Where are the farmers? Where are the animals? Where did they all go, and why did they leave? Do the farmers know something we do not? The replacements do not see anything, and it is only the old guys who see emptiness as inherently dangerous. I am one of the old guys; I am 20 years old and came over by troopship. The new guys did not sail across the Pacific; they flew across on Braniff International Airlines.

The purple time approaches. The new guys want to do the normal things -- calm down, eat, rest. There will be no calm; it is already too late to eat. They will learn to eat earlier, and there will be no rest for anyone on this patrol. The old guys are uptight, irritable, nervous, and angry. We trained in Hawaii, and it was our recon platoon that proved repeatedly in training that we were most vulnerable during those times just after sunrise and just before dark. I call them purple hours because the natural lighting is dim, and scarlet and purple colors dominate the skyscape. Others call it twilight.

Tonight, I am part of the patrol. I am its radioman. Rank wise, I am fourth in command. That means that all three of those before me must be killed or seriously wounded before I become the leader. I hope that does not happen. As the purple fades, our sergeant quietly tells us to "mount up." We move out into the darkness. The pace keeper tells us we have reached our predetermined place in front of the line. We deploy as instructed by our sergeant.

It is critically important to know where one is relative to the battalion behind us. From the perspective of the line, we are 5,000 paces out. They do not know for certain where we are, and if they get nervous, we could be killed by friendly fire. From our perspective, we are on a short rise over a large depression and immediately to the left of the route we took to get here. Immediately to the right is a dammed-up irrigation ditch. It is filled with water. I would learn later it was up to the middle of my chest. Its floor was mud, the kind that makes loud sucking sounds as you try to move through it.

One hour and 12 minutes out a trip flare to the left side illuminates the night and reveals soldiers in uniforms different from ours. Our sergeant, after the M-79 guy spotted and fired at targets on the right side of the trail, tells me to get into the ditch and provide cover for a two-man team that will move from



right to left, sweeping the enemy into the patrol. My job is to kill anything that gets behind them.

I'm confused. The trip flare was on the left and it had been tripped. That seemed to me to indicate the threat was on the left. Why are the targets on the right? Why am I on the right? Why is it necessary to push folks from the right to where they already are?

Sergeants run the Army, and they do it well because they know what to do and how to do it. Although I'm confused, my sergeant says "move," so I go into the ditch. The ground in front of me is flat and grassy. From my worm's eye view of the place, it looks almost as peaceful as an altar before a service.

At that moment, I am the only American in the ditch, as well as the only member of the patrol on the right side of the trail. Before I got into the ditch, our duper guy told me he got at least two kills but could not find the bodies with the starlight scope. He is now the closest guy to me on the left side of the route. He is also right and wrong. He hit two of them but killed neither. They were both wounded but not mortally. I was luckier than they were.

I had moved so slowly that even when my eyes and shoulders moved above the top of the ditch. they did not see me. I saw one pair of eyes looking closely but further to my right. Those two men struggled, as if driven by some earthen god, to get into my ditch, kill me and attack the patrol from its right flank. They both failed. God bless all sergeants.

Thank You America

*By David Staffa
VA Medical Center—Orlando, FL*

Working, living and fighting in a combat zone can change a soldier's mind and perspective on many issues. Herewith are some of a soldier's amended perspectives and what he learned:

Thank you, America, for allowing me to fly to a combat zone. It was exhausting; it took us three days to fly from Florida to Afghanistan due to flight delays.

Thank you, America. I was able to provide some food and comfortable blankets to many Afghan families that lived in mud and straw homes and cooked food with wood as well as heating their home with wood. I am not talking about wood furnaces but stone home-built fire pits for cooking and heating.

Thank you, America. I learned that Muslims are good people; it is the terrorists that give the religion a bad name.

Thank you, America. I learned that you can still have some sense of humor in a combat zone. Thank you, America. I am grateful that my military pay was tax free while deployed. It really helped.

Thank you, America. My battle buddy and I were able to procure school supplies and backpacks for some of the Afghan kids and personally hand them out to them.

Thank you, America. The Department of Veterans Affairs is taking care of my medical and personal injury issues.

Thank you, America. I learned that what we were doing in Afghanistan was a complete waste of people and money. Just re-read what I just said, America.

Thank you, America. There are some gems of individuals, both military and civilian, who truly make living in a combat zone easier. They cut through the red tape and stupid mentality and get the job done, sometimes with no one knowing what they are doing to do so.

Thank you, America. I learned that we should have invaded Pakistan and not stayed in Afghanistan – Pakistan is where the terrorists are based.

Thank you, America. Because of my disabilities, I have to rely on the VA for disability compensation. I am truly sorry that I have to do this, but I can't work anymore.

Thank you, America. Deploying to Afghanistan was an experience of a lifetime, and I would do it again.

Thank you, America. I have lifetime memories of many good men – among the military two, Steve and Mike, and a civilian named Bob. All three were solid, good people who gave their shirt off their backs to help others.

Thank you, America. I learned to ignore opinion and honor knowledge. I deployed to Afghanistan at age 56. Thank you, America.



Zipline

By Donna Carol Zephryne
VA Medical Center—Northport, NY

When I think of flowers, I tend to think of the outdoors adventures that I have been on. Sometimes my adventures take me too far.

It was the summer of 2015 at Hunter Mountain, N.Y., as part of Wounded Warrior Project. I glanced around the area and was taken aback by the beauty of Mother Nature. The mountains and greenery were something I had never seen before.

But then as I looked closer, I saw the reason why we came to this spot. I could see the way these mountains were connected by thick cable wires. What was first beautiful scenery soon turned to a reason for nervousness and angst. The day started with safety precautions and a waiver that we had to sign. It was then that I realized I may be in over my head.

Ziplining looked fun until it was my turn to go. As someone afraid of heights, let's just say this wasn't my thing. We left as a group, and all I could think about was not letting the group down. So I put on my helmet, got on my gloves and climbed up the ladder to Stage 1. I peeked over the ledge and just couldn't make the leap. The group and the instructor were trying to coach me to jump.



I went for it, jumping toward the cable as the momentum took my body through the air. Eyes watering, legs dangling, heart pounding, I could hear the buzzing of the cable wires as I flew.

I made the mistake of looking down and did not like what I saw. I was suspended higher in the air than I thought as I cruised along the cable wires. The air had a suffocating pressure as my stomach dropped along the initial plunge. As I came to the finishing platform I thought I was going to crash. The instructor had to guide me onto the landing as my legs froze in fear.

When I came to, I told the group that I could not do that again. The next stage would be a point of no return, so I gave up while I could.

Ziplining and I were not meant to be.

Hanging Tough Is Tough

By George S. Kulas
—Fond du Lac, WI

After 19 months in Vietnam, I arrived at Camp Courtney, Okinawa, in December 1968. I was to spend my last six months on active duty in the Marine Corps at the camp.

Before I even unpacked, I started counting the days until I would get out of the Corps, go home to college and buy a brand new, candy apple red Mustang with my savings. I was looking forward to the “good life.”

Although I was lonely, I didn't want to get to know anyone. I had known too many Marines in Nam who always seemed to leave one way or another, just when we became good friends. After having to say goodbye to several of these buddies, I became hardened and tough. It was easier that way.

When it was finally my turn to leave Vietnam and say goodbye to my fellow Marines, I simply shook hands and said something like, “Keep your head down,” or “Have a nice life.” I wanted to say more, something like, “I'll really miss you,” or “I'll never forget you,” but I kept my true feelings inside. I “hung tough.”

But on Okinawa the inevitable happened; a few Marines took me in. Montgomery, Harrington and Kuhn became my best friends. We were always together after duty hours--playing tennis or basketball, running or lifting weights. After our workouts, we would have a few drinks at the enlisted club, sometimes more than a few. At the club we would laugh and joke around, but we'd also have serious discussions about our future plans, our hopes and our dreams.

Dancing with the Okinawan girls who frequented the club was always part of our evenings. One such girl was Yoko. I liked Yoko a great deal, but I fought off getting serious. I still was thinking about the “good life” that I was going to be having at home.

A few days before I was scheduled to depart Okinawa, I was transferred to the out-processing station at Camp Hansen. I had arranged to meet my buddies back at the Courtney Enlisted Club on my last night. When I arrived at the club, they were there waiting, along with just about everyone else from my unit. I was overwhelmed, but I didn’t show it. I told myself to be strong, be a Marine and “hang tough.”

Before long it was time for me to get back to Hansen for the midnight bed check. I “hung tough” as I made my way through the group, shaking each Marine’s hand while Yoko clung to my arm. I “hung tough” when I reached Montgomery, Harrington and Kuhn at the door. We shook hands, I wanted to hug them but I didn’t. Yoko still was clinging to my arm when we got outside. Then she said, “I think I never see you again.” That’s when it hit home, and I felt myself starting to break.

I quickly jumped into a waiting taxi. The taxi sped toward Camp Hansen, taking me farther and farther from my friends. My chest was heaving, and my entire body was shaking uncontrollably. My eyes felt swollen as tears rushed from them. I was thinking of Yoko, Montgomery, Harrington and Kuhn. I was thinking of the Corps and all of the good Marine buddies I had known during my three-year tour. I was feeling empty inside and as lonely as I had ever felt in my life.

The Okinawan taxi driver looked at me curiously and said, “Why tough Marine cry? You go home tomorrow. Be happy.”

But I wasn’t happy, and I couldn’t “hang tough.” I couldn’t fake it any longer. My home was quickly fading behind me, and I realized I would never see it again.



The Bunker Is a Tomb for the Living

By Hartley Barnes

—Royal Palm Beach, FL

The alarm goes off. INCOMING! INCOMING! INCOMING! Instinctively you take cover. You hit the ground or find the nearest bunker. You wait for the all-clear signal. During that time, you think about your life, your family, and dying. Thoughts go swiftly through your head as you listen to explosions and rifle and machine gun fire. A myriad of feelings tracing your life, you are reminded of where you were, where you are, and where you could be going. Moments of silence are deafening. Nerves are on edge, waiting for what comes next. Time slows down.

The sensation of isolation in a bunker filled with people causes the imagination to curdle into outlandish scenarios, all ending with death. As you wait, you make silent apologies to yourself and ask God for forgiveness. Your future is in doubt. The bunker is a tomb for the living. Until you hear ALL-CLEAR, ALL-CLEAR, ALL-CLEAR, the bunker is a mausoleum. Can it withstand a direct hit from a high explosive? With that doubt, I wish to go instantly and avoid the agony of living after.

The splat of bullets on concrete or thud against sandbags are sounds etched in stone. Not all shots had names on them, but too many did. None had mine; still, I’m left with side effects. I walk with caution. Sit with my back against walls. I’m startled by the sound of a pin hitting the floor. I am frightened by my wife, saying hello with my back to her.

I’m chilled by my thoughts now as I was then. I am no longer secure. I left my bunker behind.

Author Note: My name is Hartley Barnes. I am a veteran with 27 plus years of service. I have been to three wars, Vietnam, Desert Storm, and Iraqi Freedom. I also worked as a government contractor in Iraq and Afghanistan for another six and a half years after retirement from the Army. I am now a writer of short stories and working on publishing my first book. Writing is one of the tools I used to help me overcome issues I have with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

Our Last Night in Xuan Loc

By William Paul Howard

VA Medical Center—Kansas City, Missouri

The sun disappeared behind us hours ago. To the east, the dome-like shape of Chua Chan Mountain is a black silhouette against the star-filled sky. It is impossible to see any detail on its slopes even when it is temporarily illuminated by the fireballs of napalm bombs.



To the south, red tracers rain on their target from an C-47 gunship nicknamed “Puff” after the dragon in a Peter, Paul and Mary song. It breathes fire that puts a bullet in every square inch of its target area.

Fred and I lie atop a bunker constructed of rough sandbags stacked around a foxhole covered with a piece of steel plate for the roof. The short walls of tan sand bags along the front and sides are tinted red by the dirt used to fill them. A detonator for a claymore mine sits on the wall next to the M-60 where I can grab it without having to see it. The mine itself is on the other side of a low berm about 30 yards in front of us. It is too dark to see beyond the berm where there is a field of amber grain that resembles a western Kansas wheat field. Beyond that is a forest that is green all the way to the mountain during the day.

The company is moving back to Bearcat near Saigon. It is time for soldiers to rotate home; we don't have enough people to drive all the trucks in one convoy. Drivers took half of our trucks today and will return tomorrow to move the remaining trucks. For tonight, there are just six of us.

Fred and I have practiced reloading the M-60 so that we can do it in the dark, if needed. We agree to take turns napping and settle in for a quiet night. We haven't had any activity close to us for a month.

Suddenly, the farmer's field explodes in bursts of gunfire with red tracer rounds from the left and green tracers from the right. The firing is so constant that the crops in the field are lit like the neon lights of a carnival midway by the glow of the rounds.

I do not know if any of our side are trying to maneuver. I decide I will only shoot if the green tracers turn toward us.

The firing continues for about five minutes, though it seems longer. When it suddenly stops, darkness and silence return.

Napalm still falls on the mountain.

Puff still rains death down the valley.

Our perimeter is quiet, but none of us will sleep tonight.

Clip Clop, Clip Clop

By Donald Conway

VA Medical Center—West Palm Beach, FL

This is going to be tough, Sgt. CB thought to herself. Two tours in Afghanistan had been hard, but this might be harder. I guess I knew that when I volunteered for this duty. Has it only been nine weeks since I started training? So much to learn—caring for the horses, polishing the bridles and saddles, how to sit at attention in the saddle, the protocols for each type of funeral. Clip-Clop. Clip-Clop.

Well, I'm here now, officially a member of the Caisson Platoon of the Old Guard, 3rd U.S. Infantry. Arlington is so beautiful on a fall day like this. The sun is warm, and the trees have turned colors. And quiet. The horse's hoof beats are almost the only sound. Clip-Clop. Clip-Clop.

I'm really grateful to the sergeant major for stopping by the stables this morning. He knows this is my first funeral. “Not to worry CB,” he said. “Just remember you're a sergeant in the Old Guard. You know how important this ceremony is to the family. It means they can finally bring closure to this difficult time. Your job is to maintain the dignity of the funeral. That's how we show the family that we are sharing their loss.” That was really helpful. Clip-Clop. Clip-Clop.

I have a good mount this morning. They call her Mom. She's a gentle, steady horse. I wonder how many funerals like this she has been part of. She makes me think of my Mom, gentle and steady, always there. Even when I decided to re-up in the Army. Clip-Clop. Clip-Clop.

I didn't mean to, but I got a glimpse of the family while the casket was being placed on the caisson. Two older couples. Parents, I

suppose. A young woman — wife? And a small boy about six or seven. I wonder if he really understands what is happening here. Perhaps one day he will. They are following along quietly behind the caisson now. Clip-Clop. Clip-Clop.

Almost at the grave site. There's the casket team waiting for us. Be sure to hold the horses steady while they lift the casket off the caisson. There, that's done. Wait a bit while the team and the family walk to the grave site. They're gone now. Time for us to leave. Yes, she thought, this is a privilege and I can do it. But why must there be so many funerals? Clip-Clop. Clip-Clop.

Author Note: This story describes a funeral at Arlington National Cemetery from the point of view of one of the Caisson riders.

The Hand of God in Vietnam

*By Max J Riekse
—Fruitport, MI*

In 1996. Lt. Col. Les Mitkos, an Army Reserve chaplain and a Lutheran minister in civilian life from Illinois, was asked to give the main Sunday morning sermon at the U.S. Army Infantry Center Chapel on Main Post, Fort Benning, Ga., which he did on Sept. 22.

It was an outstanding sermon from the heart in which he related the combat experience of a close personal friend who had been in Vietnam.

His sermon centered on the Three W's — Worship, Work and Witness. Chaplain Mitkos' friend had been an E-6 in the super-secret and mysterious U.S. Army Security Agency and assigned to the Fifth Special Forces in Vietnam. His friend later became a U.S. Army Reserve chaplain and was also one of those called up to support Operation Joint Endeavor.

In his Sunday morning sermon, he related that on one of his friend's excursions into the fields of Vietnam in late 1970, he was with a unit made up of seven Americans and indigenous personnel in search of a Vietnamese Communist (VC) unit estimated at battalion size. The unit that his friend was with had stopped at a Vietnamese village in search of information on their quarry and was given very good intelligence on where they had gone.

This particular village had a strong Catholic presence with a Catholic priest visiting it upon occasion. Off they went, and before long they had picked up the trail and begun tracking them, only to discover later that the enemy force that they had been pursuing had doubled back and was heading toward the Vietnamese village and the people that had been of such great of help to them.



His friend and the men he was with arrived at the village around two hours too late. The village was destroyed, and it appeared that every man, woman and child in the village had been killed. There was dead silence. Then someone discovered a hole in the ground where a six-year-old girl had been hidden for safe keeping. She started to cry and would not stop. Several men suggested that she be left there as they had a mission to finish, and besides, it would not be a very smart or safe thing to do to try to bring her along with them. Where they were going was no place for a small child, and her presence could put everyone's life in great danger. One man even suggested killing her.

At that point, this six-year-old child walked over to a pair of dead people lying on the cold, hard ground that were presumably her parents and just stood there not crying. One man was heard to make the comment, "Why should we care what happens to them; they don't even cry for their own." At that point she turned to them and said in broken English that there was no need to cry for them because "my parents knew Jesus." One American started to cry and then it was contagious. Soon, 40 hard-core trained killers were down on their knees. The indigenous personnel, coming themselves from a spiritual background, had also recognized the spirituality of the moment and wept alongside the Americans.

For most of these men, their lives had been changed forever. The decision was made then and there to do the right thing despite the great risk to themselves. They took the little girl with them to a safe area.

The Promise

By Lynwood C. Hughes

—Palm Bay, FL

Not all promises that you make can be kept due to whatever circumstances block you from keeping them. It is also true that it might take a long period of time to fulfill a promise, but you do not let anything stop you from doing so. This is my situation, and although it took years—32 to be exact—I will try to condense my journey into a few pages.

So many events regarding who, when, where and the big one WHY come into play, it is difficult to leave any detail out because all are so important but I learned through this that nothing is impossible.

As of Dec. 14, 1967, I belonged to Uncle Sam—all five-foot-four and 120 pounds of me. I was at Ft. Bragg, N.C., for basic. It was my first time being away from home. Being raised by Mom, Grandma, and three older sisters in the projects and being so small was a challenge, but it made me a stronger person as I learned later in life. Basic training taught me how important teamwork was, and as a team we became one and were named honor platoon for eight straight weeks.

I did not realize how much of a man I had become and what was in store for me. After basic was AIT, then directly to Ft. Lee, Va., for the next eight weeks learning how to refuel helicopters. This was basically classroom work and hands on training, and I did not experience the teamwork and comradeship that I experienced in basic. Little did I realize what I did experience in basic would play a huge role in my life as time went on.

My first stop in Vietnam was Pleiku with the 4th Infantry Division. At Camp Holloway I did guard duties and whatever I was told to do—no choppers to refuel. Six weeks later I was sent to Darlac. I was now an E-4 and attached to the 5th Special Forces Unit. There was Sgt. James Warren Smith, a medic, who took me under his wing and began to school me on what was to come. This was Sgt. Smith's second tour in Vietnam, and he showed me what to do and what not to do and gave me advice for what situations might occur. We quickly became a team, and the bond and comradeship I felt in basic was back.

On Aug. 23, 1968, at around 5 p.m., Sgt. Smith and I were ready to sit down to eat when the first round of incoming fire from the VC hit outside of our perimeter. It was followed by continuous hits at different places. Sgt. Smith and I went to our designated area and began to return fire at the VC. We had gotten two rounds off from our location when there was this tremendously loud explosion. I do remember that Sgt. Smith was in front of me as

I was handing him another round to fire just seconds before the explosion. Realizing we received a hit right in front of the pit, Sgt. Smith turned and grabbed me and next thing I knew we were in the bunker.

I said something about being lucky to Sgt. Smith who was standing with his back toward me. Not realizing that anything was wrong with either one of us, I heard Sgt. Smith say "I be damned" and he went to his knees. My whole life changed at that very moment. Sgt. Smith received a chest wound, and he was having difficulty breathing. I eased him to the ground and took my shirt off to apply pressure to his chest to stop the bleeding and help him breath better. I kept telling him that he was going to be okay and yelling for help at the same time. The incoming fire did not stop, and it seemed like hours before help arrived. Sgt. Smith knew how critically hurt he was but was so courageous and strong. I kept telling him everything was going to be okay but we both knew otherwise. As they carried him out, I promised him that I would tell his family that he was not alone and how brave and at peace he was because he was not afraid to die and he loved his family dearly. As they carried me out I glanced back at the pit where we were hit; there was nothing left.

Sgt. James Warren Smith went home to be with our Lord that day, and I went to the hospital for 35 days, home for 30 days then back to Vietnam. Later I was wounded again and spent six months in a hospital in Japan before being sent to Ft. Hood, Texas, to be processed out and go home. Sometimes what you think might be the end of something might be only the beginning.

After 32 years. On Sept. 22, 2000, my wife and I flew to Houston to meet Mrs. Smith. I wish I could include all that took place through the years to get to this point, but it would be a book when I finished. I had spoken to her on the telephone and answered some of her questions to verify who I was and that I was with her son 32 years ago.

Nervous and excited, I said a prayer that God would be with me and that Sgt. Smith would act as my Guardian Angel to bring peace of mind to his Mother and loved ones.

After meeting Mrs. Smith, going to Ft. Sam Houston to the cemetery where Sgt. Smith is buried, sitting down and having meals together and talking into the early morning hours, I am so proud to call her Mama Smith. Upon saying our goodbyes, she hugged me and told me she loved me and thanked me for bringing peace into her life, and I thanked her for the same. For a long time I felt that it should have been me instead of Sgt. Smith, but Mama Smith also made me feel at peace.

It is now Jan. 5, 2020, I will be 73 in June and Mama Smith will be 102 years old in June also. We don't get to visit due to the distance,

but she lives in her own apartment and travels with her family. The effects of Agent Orange, compliments of Vietnam, keep me from doing many things but not from keeping Mama Smith in my prayers and thoughts.

Oh, one more thing I want to add. I also found another buddy of Sgt. Smith who was with him in Vietnam. Sgt. Jack Wesson and Sgt. Smith swapped items when one tour was finished. Sgt. Wesson had Sgt. Smith's Special Forces ring, and Sgt. Smith had Sgt. Wesson's knife. By my finding Sgt. Wesson, not only did he also get to meet Mama Smith, but he could give her Sgt. Smith's ring. She wears it on a chain around her neck to this day.



As a Sniper, Beardsley Was Good at His Work

*By William Paul Arthur
VA Medical Center—Minneapolis, MN*

My grandfather, Howard Miles Beardsley, was a big man. He stood over six feet tall and weighed over 200 pounds. So when he answered the “Uncle Sam Wants You” posters and went to enlist in “The Great War,” the recruiter in Anamosa, Iowa, asked him if he could run. “Well I’m not sure,” Beardsley admitted, “but I’ve passed quite a few people who said they were running.”

The Army took him at his word. They made him a sniper at a time when the average life expectancy of a sniper was between three and five hours.

Life in the infantry was basically catch-as-catch-can. The doughboys usually slept outside on the ground, regardless of the weather. Supplies were scarce and often delayed. This left them cold, wet and hungry most of the time.

Beardsley's unit once found an abandoned farmhouse. They were ravenous and searched it for something to eat. All they found was part of a carton of cottage cheese with a layer of mold on top. The other men wouldn't eat it, but Beardsley scraped the mold off and ate it himself.

Another time the men were thirsty and had no water. They came to a place where a horse had stepped. In the deep hoof mark stood stagnant water with green scum on top. None of the men would drink the water. But Beardsley scraped away the scum, filled his canteen, drank, and filled the canteen again. The next morning he woke to find the whole unit gathered around him. When he got up and proved the water hadn't killed him, the rest of the men finished the canteen.

The mission of the snipers was to go ahead of the main troops and clear out enemy snipers. As Beardsley's unit crossed a field one day, it was attacked by a lone German with a machine gun. He had climbed a tree and had a good vantage point to shoot from. Beardsley made a wide circle and came up in back of the German and killed him.

Beardsley was never injured during the war. But he had some close calls. One night he finished guard duty and woke a man to relieve him. Beardsley just got settled when he heard an incoming shell. He could tell that the shell was close, but he couldn't do anything so he just lay shivering. When he went to check on his relief, Beardsley found that the shell had blown him to bits. Another time the unit had to cross an open field and needed to know if there were any Germans in the area. Beardsley supported his helmet on the end of his rifle and raised it from behind a rock. Enemy bullets riddled it.

Hand grenades were a new weapon at the time, and some of the German ones hadn't been perfected. Once a German threw a hand grenade at Beardsley, but it didn't go off. Beardsley picked up the grenade, and it exploded when he threw it back.

When the war ended on Nov. 11, 1918, there were celebrations everywhere. Beardsley went to a dance with a buddy he had served with throughout the war. They had beaten the heavy odds against them and soon would be going home. Seldom were two men happier. But at the dance, a drunk shot and killed Beardsley's friend. As a result, during the rest of his life, he never went to a dance again.

He returned to Anamosa, got married and raised six children, including my mother, by working as a guard in a reformatory and doing some farming.

When World War II came and his sons wanted to enlist, he told them to join the Navy. “As long as your ship’s afloat,” Beardsley said, “you’ll have a warm bed and hot food to eat.”

In December 1944, with two sons in the Navy, Beardsley went downstairs one day to shovel coal into the furnace. Upstairs Grandmother heard the shovel drop and found her husband dead on the floor. His heart had stopped running.



I Am Still Standing, She Is Still Standing

*By Penny Lee Deere
VA Medical Center—Albany, NY*

She is still standing, though she has so many wounds—damage that just cannot be seen with the naked eye. It’s all so complex: her Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. There are the multiple personal traumas, the combat related trauma and then there is the military sexual trauma.

She has endured several types of abuse: mental, emotional, physical, sexual and child abuse which left deep scars within. She has suffered the loss of failed marriages. She grieves for her son who died in a horrible accident that she envisions over and over in her mind. Her losses to herself and those she loves are many; illness from toxins and other unknown sources ravage her body: cancers, streptococcus bacteria, septic bodies and near-death experiences.

Her body has failed her. It has turned against her with all her physical issues as well as the mental illness and lapses that plague her.

She tried coping by using alcohol but misused it; she made bad choices in her relationships with partners. She acted out with bad

temperament and became severely co-dependent, enabling more mistreatment. She has faced repeated, potentially lethal blows and has been knocked down, knocked down hard.

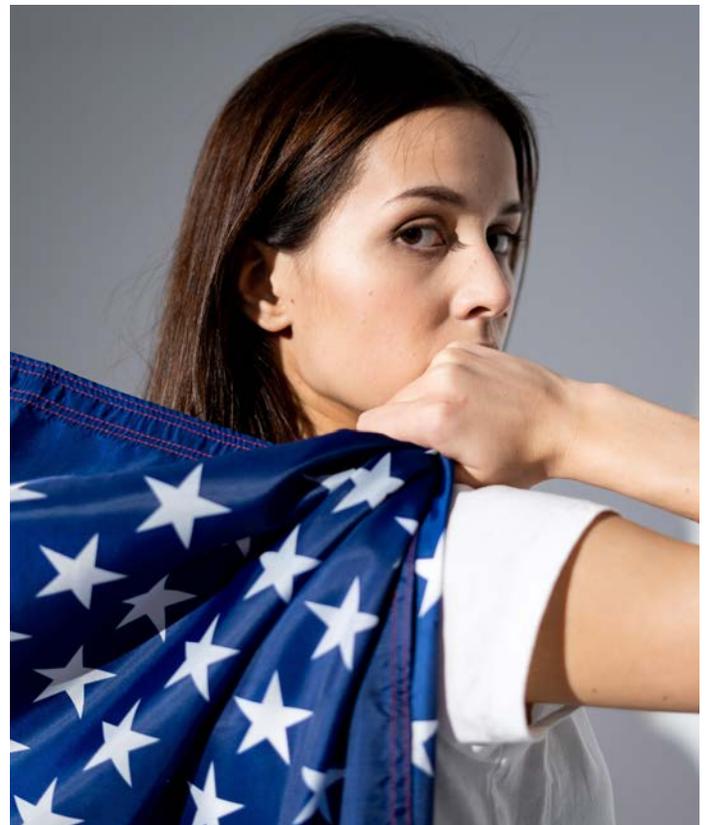
But... she is still standing!

Because she now has a firm foundation. She had to reach the very bottom but knew she wanted to climb up and out. So she dug deep and found herself. She found help mentally, physically and spiritually from many different people and places. She started over and is not looking back.

She stays positive. She is helpful to others. She gives back. She sustains gratefulness. She is an activist. She is constructive, not destructive. She is strong willed and spirited. She is a force to deal with. She is tough. She has ambition (or she is ambitious). She is resourceful. She is resilient and committed. She is determined. She refuses to be stagnant. She is durable. She is secure and independent. She is incredibly creative. She is versatile and willing to work toward a greater good. She tries to remain mindful and to be thankful for what she does have. She tries to be in the here-and-now and not dwell elsewhere.

She has built a firm foundation, and she is still standing.

I am still standing.



Visual Arts Initiative

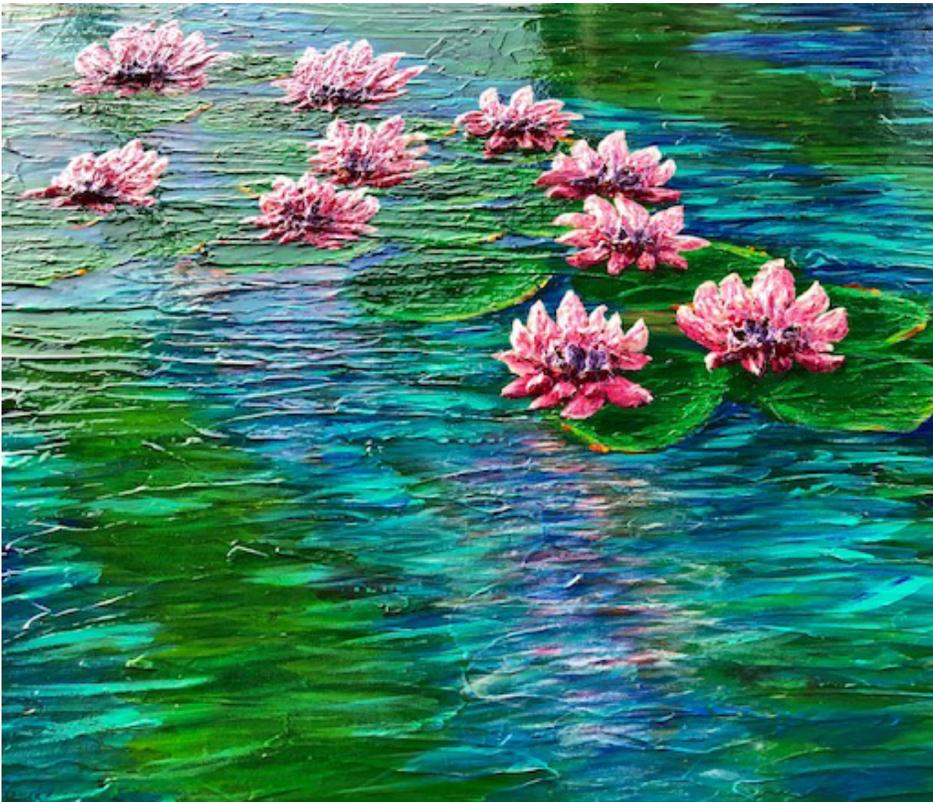


Covid19 Superhero: By Zeke Crozier
—Overland Park, KS

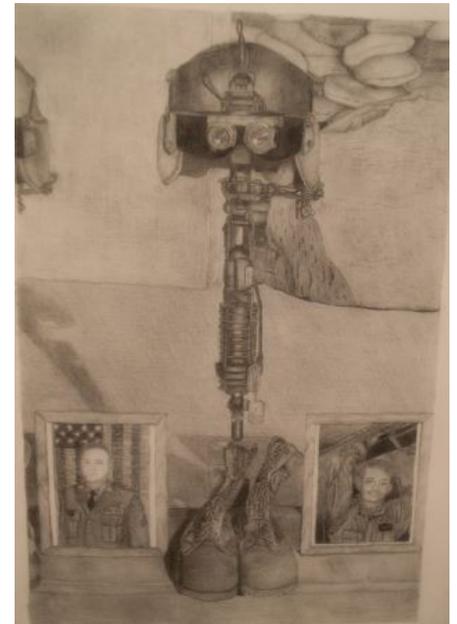
The editors of Veterans' Voices asked for your visual art and Dr. Robert Rubin, Los Angeles, Calif., promised to help us publish that art in full color.

Our writers and readers responded with generous amounts of artwork and we are pleased to share it with you in this ongoing section of the magazine.

We believe that this promotion complements VVWP's writing as therapy mission and offers the veteran another means of healing through artistic expression. Please continue to send us your artwork as well as your writing.



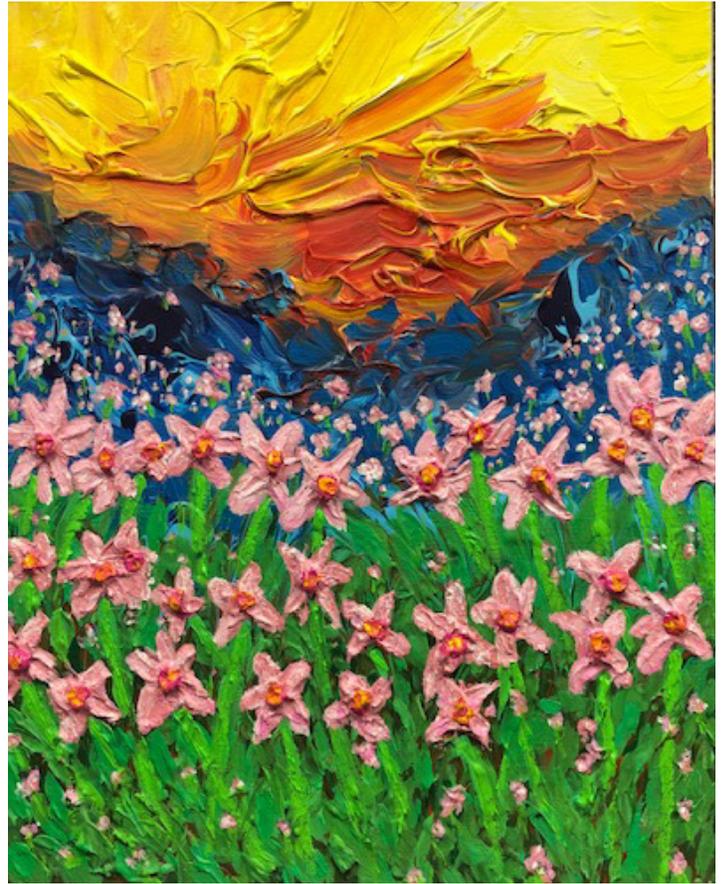
Water Lily: By Gary Walker
—Leawood, KS



Untitled: By Bryan Moore
—Kansas City, MO



Untitled: *By Rebecca Lynch*
VA Medical Center—Manchester, NH



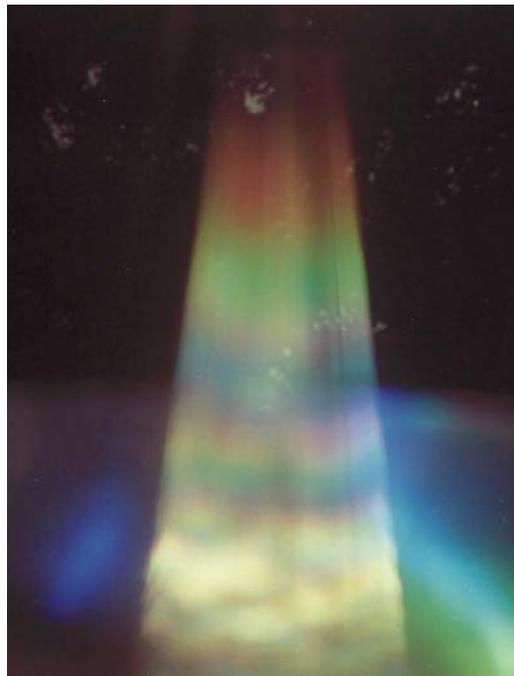
Eye Flowers: *By Gary Walker*
—Leawood, KS



Ready for Takeoff: *By Michelle Pond*
—Overland Park, KS



Is This Where I Just Came: *By Penny Lee Deere*
—Albany, NY:



Seeking: *By Demetrius Kastrenakes*
—Miami, FL



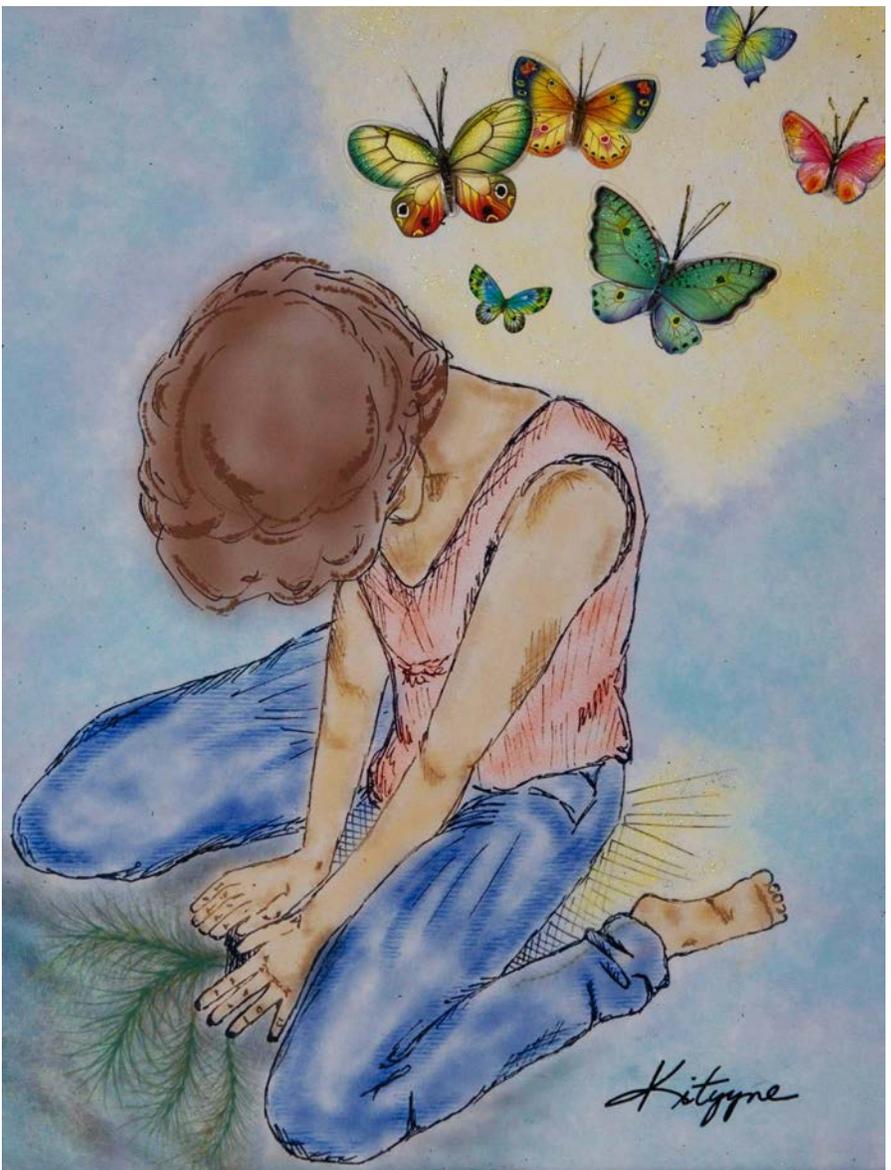
Untitled: By Donald Sherwood
VA Medical Center—Danville, IL



Kansas City: By Gary Walker
—Leawood, KS



Untitled: By Donald Sherwood
VA Medical Center—Danville, IL



Stay Patient and Trust Your Journey: By Kristen (Hesterberg) Vallinmaki
—Leawood, KS



Eyeballin' Me!: By Wayne Ince
—Sun City Center, FL



Untitled: By Frank Mattson
VA Medical Center—Spring City, PA



Untitled: By Bruce McClain
—Blue Springs, MO



Soldier: By Zeke Crozier
—Overland Park, KS



Untitled: By Demetrius Kastrenakes
—Miami, FL



Poppy Field: By Judith Guittar
—Louisville, KY

An Exercise in Fulfillment

By Daniel Paicopulos

VA Medical Center—San Diego, CA

I am done
with the big things,
trying to get
the meaning of life.

All that's left
is to try
to be kind
as often as possible.
Small tasks matter.

Do Me a Favor

By Michael D. Monfrooe

VA Medical Center—St. Cloud, MN

Hi! We are in the rear area for resupply, hot chow, showers and sleep. A lot of sleep. Haha!

How's that Challenger? I heard they're pretty fast. I'm thinking about a Chevy Camaro, jet black.

Don, could you do me a couple of favors? You can't believe how dusty and dirty it is over here.

Can you send me lots of pipe cleaners and a shaving brush?
We use them all the time to clean hard-to-get places on our weapons and gear. Damn sand messes up everything.

Mom sends me packs of Handi Wipes, and they're a lifesaver with the heat being so bad. Now for the big favor: Silly String. I know it's funny but we use it to find and mark trip wires on booby traps. Man, they're everywhere over here.

I ran into Chris last month. He told me that Ellen was seeing someone else; I guess it was stupid to ask her to wait. If you see her, give her my best.

Don, it's not bad over here, I guess, better than Dad had it over there in Vietnam. I get so tired of what we hear about the crap back home. You're over here fighting, and all we hear about are school shootings, gangs, KKK, our supposed elected officials calling each other names.

We talk about it but, Christ, it's hard to take. At least over here, we know what's going on. Sorry to unload on you, but it really sucks. Man, if you could send me those things, I'd appreciate it. I'll wash your car when I get home. Give your mom a hug. OK.

A Soldier's Life

By Keith Long

VA Medical Center—West Hills, CA

My name is "Soldier" and I'm very proud to say, my role in life has been to serve my country each and every day. From Valley Forge to Yorktown, I was always there; the cause was for freedom which all of us would share. Bull Run and Gettysburg are places I wish I had not seen; a civil war broke out within our nation, a very ugly scene. While the cause was just and the need was great, saving a nation was our duty; it was not a mistake. I have traveled the world over to many foreign lands, not for fame or fortune or to conquer other lands. I bring the gift of freedom and I do not wish to stay; my home is where I long to be, where I will return one day. From the shores of France to all of Europe itself, I did my duty and then some while saving others and myself. In the name of freedom, I fought while others died, and I came home with nothing but dignity and pride. From the islands of the Pacific to the Island of Japan, I fought an enemy that attacked us first and didn't give a damn. In Southeast Asia, two different lands are where I fought yet again; only this time one war was a draw, and one war I could not win. The lesson I have learned from all of this, just so you can see, is a "Welcome Home" or a "Thank You" is what matters most to me. It means more to me than any medals you may pin upon my chest, for the heroes are the ones who died, allowing freedom to exist.

Americans United

By Ronald Grella

VA Medical Center—Wilkes-Barre, PA

This pandemic is pathetic. To make sense of all the innocent lives that have died during this time, we have to ask God to be on our side. To carry on and come out of this together, we have to show compassion for one another. Pray for the families who lost their dear loved ones. Ask God to comfort them in this time of suffering. As Americans, we have to try to be resilient, and stay strong like we always are. Do not put blame on anything or you will feel overwhelmed. Rely on almighty God to relieve your burdens and anxieties. He will set you free to put your mind at ease. Always pray for all the front line workers to give them strength to keep going on as their jobs are extremely hard.

Remember, when you start to feel sad,
there is One that is always near.
Just ask Him and pray to Him
to help you with what you cannot bear.

Head in Books

By Anthony Ramirez
VA Medical Center—Augusta, ME

If it were not for books, I don't know what I'd do!
I'd never be the hero who made the tale true.
The dragon would still be hissing with fire in his breath,
while Lady Gweyn is sleeping and waiting for my kiss.

It's like each and every page feels like coloring my soul.
Each and every chapter takes me further into that hole
of murder, mystery and mayhem that only Alice knew
as she followed Mr. Rabbit to find out what is true.

So to those who say,
"Too bad, young man. You're wasting all your time
with your head in books. So sad.
Hey, look! The world is passing by!"

I say, "No thanks.
My world is here precisely where I lie.
One story begins; another ends.
This world is quite alright."

Lonely Hearts Online

By Melvin Garrett Brinkley
VA Medical Center—Tucson, AZ

When I saw you on the app *Houseparty*,
I thought I had met the right one for me.
I fell in love with you so easily.

In your blog you said you had a dark side,
That you're less like Jekyll, and more like Hyde.
But I was so in love, I let that slide.

On *Skype* you told me I might be your type.
I've learned since then, this is your line of hype.
I can't believe I fell for that old tripe.

I praised you on *Facebook*, come rain or shine,
But your opines of me were never kind.
Why did you treat me like I had no spine?

You were hot to trot on *Google Hangouts*.
That's when I found out what you're all about.
You like to mess around with lots of louts.

When I texted you late the other night,
You said that I must not be very bright,
That I'm like some dumb moth circling a light.

I used to follow you on *Instagram*.
You were my Mary, and I was your lamb,
But now I know you'd rather have a ram.

I guess I'll never be your groom on *Zoom*,
'Cause you need lots of space and lots of room.
I should've known that I would get the broom.

Since you dumped me, I've been reborn online.
My new profile puts me back in my prime.
Believe it or not, that's not a real crime.

My hopes now ride on an app called *Tinder*.
Re-made myself into a contender.
Who can resist my virtual splendor?

If only I could see you on *Tik Tok*.
Everything else, you've managed to block.
Lonely Hearts Online was a total crock.

See Me

By Reggie Greene
—Brooklyn, NY

Can you see me?
Hello!
I'm over here.
You just walked right past me
as if I wasn't there.
Hey, you,
I heard someone call.
As I turned around, I saw a crowd of men
who look just like me.
One person tells me I'm not alone.
We see you.
Can you see me?

Hello!
I'm over here.
You just walked right past me
as if I wasn't there.
Hey, you,
I heard someone call.
As I turned around, I saw a crowd of men
who look just like me.
One person tells me I'm not alone.
We see you.

Success

By *Wayne Goodling*
—*South Bend, IN*

As impertinent, irreverent death awaits;
I arm and steel myself with delusion's confusion.
Make myself a moving target which vile snipers
Can never, never contact, hit, nor kill.
I stand then leap beyond the forbidden entrance.

Death pursues; I evade, evade myself.
Perpetual movement, lost my bearings,
Running stop signs, never knowing where I am.
I evade, evade myself.

Find one safe place just to the left.
But don't you go there!
Because it may be just a ruse
To trap me, lull me, get me to choose
Demolitions' detonation of the hidden IED.

Panic pushes, squeezes, presses all my time.
I cannot walk down a peaceful path,
For moving targets must keep running.

Crowd, group, congregation assembled here
To hem me in and hold me fast as death approaches.
Stupid bastards! Don't you know?
Untie, release me, let me go!
For I can always outrun death.

I'll not let thee make me the target.
I evade, evade myself.
And, in the end, I shall succeed!

In War We Fought

By *Thomas G. Manuel*
VA Medical Center—San Francisco, CA

In war we fought with
Thunder and steel
In a land far away.

We came through fire and fear
To be where we are today.
Every man was a hero;
Every enemy was a valiant foe.

Why did we fight?
Because we were soldiers,
And still are today.
Combat is our trade.

With courage and honor
We defend the nation.

But when we fight,
We also have compassion.
And when the heart is strong,
But the body wounded and weak,
We help each other.

It's the common soldier who wins the fight,
But the leaders get the glory.
And that's okay with us
Because
When the battle has ended,
And we know we did all we could,
We are just glad to still be alive.

When the guns are finally silent,
That is when we pause,
Stunned and exhausted.
We call out to our friends
And hope to hear their voices.

Yes, it's when the battle has ended
For victor and vanquished alike,
Life goes on—if they still live.

When the war is finally over
And life becomes "normal,"
What can we do?
Except
Grow old and remember
The days of camaraderie and friendship,
Of duty and honor.

When we were soldiers.

Today's Hero

By *Dan Yates*
—*Blue Springs, MO*

As I watch TV from my easy chair,
my hearing is going; so is my hair.
No stories of drugs or violence tonight,
America faces a new kind of fight.
COVID-19 has been shaking its fist;
the number of deaths elongates its list.
It's April 20 and we've passed 40K
with no end in sight; we live day to day.
People stand on the curbs, six feet apart,
applauding those medical with all of their heart.
They've been at it for weeks, say it feels like war;
they've never been pressured like this before.

They take a commercial, my memory flies back
to Tet '68, that horrendous attack.
My training acquired in Texas, Fort Sam,
a few weeks later there I was in 'Nam.
Casualties arrived by the tens and scores;
they lay on the ground, couldn't get in the door.
Sweat ran down our backs in that awful heat;
we worked fever-pitch as blood dripped on our feet.
Every nurse, every corpsman, medic and doc
worked with a purpose, never looked at the clock.
We did all we could to pull each man through,
but the public never offered a simple, "Thank You."

The news back on, a man steps to the mic,
says, "Before I go on, one thing that I'd like
to say to each person wearing a gown:
Thank you from us, every city and town."
I could be angry; what good would it do?
So I'm happy that docs are now getting their due.
With nurses and aides into battle they go,
not seeking, but earning the title, "Hero."

Flattening the Curve

By Penny Lee Deere
VA Medical Center—Albany, NY

What? It's here?
No, don't worry.
Wait, get ready.
It's bad. It will get worse before it peaks.

Yeah, maybe it's plateauing.
Oh, wow! Look, it's declining,
fast declining. Wow!
Flatline.



The Day Monsters Climbed Out of My Forearm

By Laura Lee Mahal
—Fort Collins, CO

The surgeon sliced a neat red line, wrist to elbow,
Continental Divide, east and west. Mountains of flesh rose up,
blood pouring to Atlantic and Pacific.

I was calm. The surgeon dropped the knife.
I heard the clatter because monsters are silent.
Claws long, tail jagged, teeth yellow, eyes red.

It was not like that.
The monsters were children.
The monsters were soldiers.

The monsters were me, a younger self.
Twenty-something, fearless, bold. Smiling.
The squad automatic weapon balanced in my hands.

I'd forgotten these things. My memories a sheet,
covering used furniture
in abandoned aristocratic houses.

There they were, monsters dropping from the table,
landing lightly by the scalpel—
rappelling warriors, stealthy and nimble.

The surgeon screamed, ill-prepared by training.
I reached for his hand with wide-open arm.
Leave the wound open. In case they come back.

The pulsing and thumping, a cadence of some
things I cannot forget,
though that's what I've done.

Endless Despair

By Williams Kurrle
—Chewelah, WA

Like night and day,
They—the military—took away
All of youth,
All that was to stay
Made by youth, uncouth,
Taken on that deadly day.
Rain, mortars—Insane, mixed into rain,
Accelerated the pain,
Exacerbated the drain.
Steel rain--
mortars, rockets, small arms fire.

The Way I See It

By Arvell L. Duckworth

—Oskaloosa, KS

When God made the world, he looked at it and smiled.
He said, “This time I have made something really worthwhile.”

Then he made all the birds and animals of every kind.
But he needed someone to keep them in line.

So he said to his son, “Let us make man
and let him have rule over all the land.

“He is better than the cattle and better than the sheep,
so I think he will need a place to live and sleep.

“We will plant him a garden so beautiful and fair,
and let the man dress, keep it and live there.”

His son said, “Father, he looks so lonely and blue;
he has no one he can talk to.”

So God put Adam to sleep and opened his side.
He took out a rib and made him a bride.

God said to Adam, “From your side she came.
You love her and keep her and give her a name.”

“I have run out of names; I have none up my sleeve.
So the woman you gave me, I will call her name Eve.”

“Everything in the garden is yours that you see,
But in the middle I have planted a tree.

“Don’t eat of it, don’t touch it, don’t ask me why.
As sure as you do, you will surely die.”

They ate of that tree from the garden and had to leave.
That was the downfall of Adam and Eve.

Lonely Vet

By Jason Kirk Bartley

VA Medical Center—Chillicothe, OH

Lonely vet,
mumbling under your breath,
“Ask not what your country can do for you,
ask what you can do for your country.”
Those days long forgotten.
You lie on the street corner
or in the VA homes all long forgotten.
No one remembers
as you take down your military dress and put it on.

You relive those moments that you treasure in your heart.
Some lie in the VA homes, missing limbs
or wanting a new start.
War has robbed them of their sanity, their dignity,
their freedoms that we enjoy.
We just cast them aside, put them on medicine,
say everything will be alright.
We need to continue
to lift up the forgotten constantly in prayer.
Maybe pay them a visit,
let them know you know they are there.
Most of all thank them for your freedom
and the prices they paid that we all share.
Some of our brothers and sisters didn’t make it home.
In a flag-draped casket, they’ve been laid.
Let us give them reverence
for the ultimate price they paid.
Gone, our brothers and sisters but never forgotten.

Letters From a Slow Road

By Kimberly Green

—Fort Smith, AR

She hobbled outside
Just as the snow began.
She thought no one saw
What she held in her hand,

A bundle of letters
Tied with a string.
She made her way to an old tree
That held a rickety swing.
No one would have guessed
Or would they really care
That once she was young,
No grey in her light brown hair.

This woman of 90,
So light on her feet,
No person around
Would know she was really 93.

What could these letters
Have possibly said?
Were they letters of joy?
Were they good or were they sad?

And I watched
As behind my curtain I hid.
I watched this old woman
Burn her letters. That she did.

All the while I watched. No sounds I made
As she reread each letter
And burnt them all.
None she saved.

I never saw her again
But I heard someone say
That the woman was a widow.
The Great War made her that way.

And as the years have gone by,
I, too, was made a widow in the blink of an eye.
My war letters
Sit in a bundle by my side.

And though I didn't understand
Back when I was just a kid,
I now know why the old woman
Did what she did.

This bundle of memories
Of our love, sacrifices and war
Holds a place for no one else,
No one else's eyes but yours.

And just like her,
One day when I'm very old,
I'll take my letters outside.
I shall reread them in the cold.

And when I'm done,
I shall light a flame

And burn our letters of love
For our eyes only. This shall remain.

Mother's Day

By Tanya R. Whitney
VA Medical Center—New Orleans, LA

She sits all alone thinking
Of her family back home,
Wondering if they miss her
As much as she misses them.

Here, it's just another day—
Work, eat, sleep and back to work.
The hours that pass by are
One hour closer to home.

Trying not to think about
What she's missing on this day.
Wishing she could call home just
To hear their voice for a time.

Each holiday that passes
Makes it harder to stay here.
But today of all days is
The most painful and aching,

Because today she misses
Her mom and being a mom.
For here on this Sunday it
Is Mother's Day...in Iraq.

Gemini Queen

By Michael Moslander
—Moberly, MO

A wandering heart nevermore
After June fourth, two thousand and four.
Soaking up the sunshine just after May
On a surreal summer day,
Eyes waited in anticipation,
Skies of blue, perfect for elucidation.
Transpiring through leaves of green
Came the most beautiful princess I've ever seen.
The most luscious legs to ever lark the land,
Glittering gems, eyes of emerald and sapphire.
Lollipop lips like pink rose petals,
Yellow hair bouncing in the air,
Floating like an angel down that hill on Old Twenty One,
I knew then, she was the only one.
Pink thongs, blue jean shorts, white shirt,
Golden glowing skin,
Midwest glamour, her love I had to win.
A young Missouri man from the Heartland,
Blood beating with the pulse of passion,
Drunk in delight, I could barely stand.
All the world faded away, everything frozen in time.
Slow motion turned a moment into myriad memories of mine.
This thread of fate was divine,
I'll give her all my heart to make her mine.
Under a heavenly expanse of firmament,
Our fairy tale became permanent.
Soft fingertips meshing,
Over face and hair caressing.
Like Romeo and Juliet in a dream.
Words of woo and solar smiles beam
By the spellbound vision of moonlight
And the romance of midnight.
Whispering will tell, beneath the stars,
Never a lie under the night sky, never to part.
Intertwined and entangled in celestial destiny,
Constellations of Gemini and Aries traverse the galaxy.
Crossing together in a spiral knotting,
Union of the Gemini Queen and Aries King.

Labyrinth of Life

By Robert John Valonis

—Stuart, FL

The lonely road
That takes us home
Is hard to find,
Remains unknown.

So many roads,
Which one shall I take?
This way or that,
Will I make a mistake?

Afraid I am
To make just a turn.
Will it end up good,
Will I crash and burn?

Oh, now I'm stuck.
I don't want to move,
But I know that I must
Or I shall not improve.

Does it matter the road
Or direction we take?
Does it really matter
If we make a mistake?

I know I must move,
I cannot stand still.
Sometimes the answer is
Just over the hill.

I've made my decision,
I'm taking this turn.
I don't really care
If I crash and I burn.

Onward I go,
It looks rather dark.
In the distance I hear
Faintly a bark.

I pick up my pace
As the sunlight appears.
Birds are now waking,
Bring joy to my ears.

Flowers now blooming,
Surrounded by green.
The bark is now clearer,
My feelings serene.

I trek on my way
To that sound of despair,

Wanting to help.
There's trouble, I fear.

The bark sounds like panic
The nearer I get.
The poor dog is tangled
In a rope and thicket.

I cut loose her bindings,
She's trembling with fear.
I calm her with words
As freedom is near.

A shiny red nose
With big brown eyes.
She's red in her color
As she pants and she cries.

She runs for the woods
As I set her now free.
A red shiny blur
As she sprints right past me.

I continue my journey,
Sun starting to set.
I wonder of her
And about her I fret.

Night is now coming.
A rustle of leaves,
Faint steps behind me,
I turn and I freeze.

The little red dog
Comes straight to my arms.
Feels free, she is safe,
Safe from all harms.

The joy of life
May be only one turn,
So don't be afraid
If you crash and you burn.

A List of Love

By Charles S. Parnell

VA Medical Center—Pittsburgh, PA

A pot of gold, a lilted smile,
A happy life on the Emerald Isle.

More shades of green than you can know,
I've seen it all, so here I go:

Time and tide on Galway Bay,
The Dublin pubs, the Gaelic way.

A lad and lass and wedding bells,
A country farm, the Book of Kells.

Songs by bards and plays by Shaw,
Tin-whistle tunes and Common Law.

Galway—girls and drinking guys,
Books by Joyce and green-white lies.

Lambs and goats and farms and fields,
Soda bread and jigs and reels.

The River Shannon, the Irish Sea,
These words and more come back to me.

Come and see this Emerald Isle;
Spend some time and stay awhile.

Peace

By Helen Anderson Glass
VA Medical Center—Tucson, AZ

We who are born here take for granted
the freedoms we enjoy.
The Pledge of Allegiance has become just words
repeated by almost every man, woman, girl and boy.
We should respect our flag,
stand and salute as it goes by,
and stand and salute our national anthem,
singing it proudly and knowing why.
Then why does it take a disaster or war
to bring patriotism to light?
For flags to be flown, songs to be sung,
and peaceful people ready to fight?
Be proud to be an American living in the U.S.A.
Free to go to school, work, vote
and worship in your own way.
We must cleanse our hearts of hate,
prejudice and suspicion,
so we may once again go back
to being a united nation.
Peace begins right here at home,
with you and with me,
and we must vow to uphold it
or we will never be free.
There are many “Peace” sayings
that remind us every day
how much it means to us
in what we do and say.
“Peace be with you.” “Go in peace.”
and “Peace is when wars cease.”
But best of all is,

“When the power of love
overcomes the love of power,
the world will have peace.”

Faith, Family, Friends

By Gene Allen Groner
VA Medical Center—Prescott, AZ

Faith, family, friends,
These three above all else.
My life, my love, my all,
The purpose for my birth.
Faith in my creator
And in his steadfast love
Led me to my family
And daily leads me on.
My family keeps me faithful,
My love, my life, my all.
Without them I am lost,
They are my only home.
And what about my friends,
The ones who stand by me
In good times and in bad.
Good friends all help me see
The purpose of my life,
The reason for all three.

Little Car New

By Scott Sjostrand
—Hallock, MN

Little car new, come blow your horn.
Paul's on the phone; a new sales day is born.
Sean's on the radio with a sales pitch.
Increases in sales made all of them rich!
Ole's at the body shop priming and painting.
He just got a raise! He feels like fainting.
Another President's Award for Customer Service.
Richard might work overtime; he looks a little nervous.
Josh is in the office looking up credit scores.
In the mornings, Jon helps Paul open up the business doors.
I'm a satisfied customer for many a year.
I've bought many a vehicle without doubt or even fear.
Dependability is Job #1; I hope they like this poem.
Writing it was fun!

The Other Hero

By Benjamin J. Williams
—Biloxi, Mississippi

He wore medals earned
For deeds of valor and bravery.
His PTSD was gained in Vietnam
On the fields of battle.

Now down on his luck,
Homeless with his life
Now in decline,
Nightmare creatures feast
At the core of his mind.

He's forgotten the good times
Shared with family
And with friends.
Times now lost,
Times long gone.

He lost his focus
Followed by the loss
Of family and home.
He salutes the flag,
Is no longer fierce
With services
Still in demand.

Now this hero,
Who served his country
And now at the ending
Of his days,
Needs a helping hand.

A Million Miles Away

By Sam Rathbone Nahins
—Harrison, NJ

When you fought your binds
There was only silence.
When you fell to your knees
There was only silence.
When dust penetrated your eyes, your mouth, your ears
There was only silence.
When blade met contact
There was only silence.
When you screamed
There was only silence.
When you looked at God
There was only silence.
The silence is still with me.

Ode to the Sun

By CJ Reeves
VA Medical Center—San Francisco, CA

Each morning in the eastern sky
The sun comes shining through.
And with the magic of your touch,
You melt the morning dew.
Across the blue dome of the sky,
You shed your beams of light.
And in the warmth of those beams
We bask in pure delight.
No painter has such works of art
You spread across the sky.
You put the moon and stars to shame
Whenever you pass by.
At night, in all your splendor bright
With banners broad and gay,
You sink to rest there in the west
To rise another day.

United We Stand, Without the Rhythm of the Band

By Paul David Gonzales
VA Medical Center—Albuquerque, NM

My country sent me to a far off land to fight a war
we did not understand, but we followed your command.
You gave me an order, a weapon to shoulder and said, "Go use it,"
but you never admitted that you abused it.
Your orders were few and incomplete; what fate would I meet?
"United We Stand, Without the Rhythm of the Band"

We flew in a jet across the ocean;
where it would land, we hadn't a notion.
"United We Stand, Without the Rhythm of the Band"

Somewhere in Vietnam my orders did read,
but how will I leave? Alive or with a flag my mom receives?
Three days I traveled from Fort Lewis to Cam Ranh Bay.
No action, no commands, no direction,
yet you asked me to fight for our protection.
"United We Stand, Without the Rhythm of the Band"

I was a medic, proud and bold, but my country left me in the cold.
"United We Stand, Without the Rhythm of the Band"

Our cadre ordered our weapons locked up to protect us
from each other, brother against brother.
"United We Stand, Without the Rhythm of the Band"

We lost our focus on what was a priority.
Was our homeland the real story?
“United We Stand, Without the Rhythm of the Band”

College students cried and screamed and called us names.
Were we to blame?
“United We Stand, Without the Rhythm of the Band”

Assassins shot the President, his brother, too.
In Tennessee, shots did ring and silenced M.L. King.
“United We Stand, Without the Rhythm of the Band”

We did our duty for the 365, wondering if we would ever survive.
We did what was commanded, but in the end we felt abandoned.
“United We Stand, Without the Rhythm of the Band”

My brother Joe and I did the 365.
We came home, but Joe did not survive.
He sprayed the “Orange” on trees in the valley and the gorge
and succumbed to that chemical called Agent Orange.
Joe was a Seabee with a can-do spirit.
“Thank you, my son.” He never did hear it.
“United We Stand, Without the Rhythm of the Band”

Many years have passed and no one ever asked,
“What was your cost, my son, to carry our gun
and free others in their land?”
“Who cares?” I say. A price to pay.
We never asked for a party, yet you never said you’re sorry
for the dirty names we were called. We carried on
and never stalled to build a life free of strife.
“United We Stand, Without the Rhythm of the Band”

My sweetheart said she would wait,
but I came home to an empty gate.
“United We Stand, Without the Rhythm of the Band”

John Kerry threw his medals down,
made the rest of us look like clowns.
Soldiers are coming home to an empty hand and—
“Without the Rhythm of the Band”

Memories of the Night

By Lawrence William Langman
—Portage, IN

I lay alone at nights. I’m dreaming,
Reflections of the way I’m feeling.

Visions dance throughout my head.
At times I’m living, times I’m dead.

I’ve played a hero, fighting crime,
And then a ruler of changing times.

I walked alone in a desert barren.
I’ve raised from the grave, for people I’m scarin’.

The dreams I like best to recall
Are the ones of you, most of all.

The memories of you I like to savor.
In hopes and dreams, may they last forever.

Can’t Touch This

By Neal C. Morrison Jr.
VA Medical Center—Hampton, VA

There’s no collusion
Hocus-pocus.
It’s all smoke and mirrors,
Nothing more than a Witch Hunt.
It’s all lies;
They don’t know what to do with themselves.
They’re wasting the government’s time
And the government’s money.
They’re holding me back from building
The Great Wall of China in the United States.
I must make America great again!

The great deceiver
Is more slippery than any snake,
Only protected by his position.
The Department of Justice
Clearly stated
We don’t have the power,
Ability or authority
To charge anyone
Holding this office
Of any crimes committed.
If there were
No crimes committed,
We would have clearly stated so.

I don’t need
A Get-Out-of-Jail card.
The joke is on you, America!
You Can’t Touch This.
Four more years
Will keep me out the joint.
I guess I better run,
Make sure I win
Like I did before.
Maybe I’ll get the Chinese
To help me this time.
Russia is played out.

Can’t do the time?
Don’t commit the crime.

Hello, Hello America

By Anthony Coccozza

VA Medical Center—Los Angeles, CA

Where have you been, my friend?
We miss you so much, and I can't
Forget you until the end.
It's good to be at home sweet home,
Where I belong with you.
Home sweet home, my friend, to carry on
My life, my love for you.
Hello, Hello America.
It's wonderful to be here.
This is my country—America,
My life so good, my life so dear.
We'll build our future, you and I,
We'll rebuild us together.
Our land, our dream, you and I,
To live in peace forever.
Hello, Hello America.
I'm proud to be a Yankee
And carry the American flag
To show my patriotism as a Yankee.
This is our America.
What are we all fighting for?
We are all true Americans
And bring peace and justice for all.

Through the Flowered Fields We Play

By Charles Carey

VA Medical Center—Martinsburg, WV

Though the mingled butterflies play
We dance upon the merry month of May
Through the harbor channels of flowered dust
And the bumble bees hover and thrust.
As the flowers sway and nod
Beneath the watchful eyes of God.
Forget the myths of stories told
That quiver and shake the old.
In the garden of the evening eve
As we twinkle toed beneath the garden breeze.
Up the path with our passionate feet,
Through the honeysuckle so sweet.
We lift our eyes to a dandelion's surprise
And clutch our hands together to watch the blue clouds fly.
Then the echoed sea rings through the air,
Between rose petals and rhododendron so rare.
Then the murmur mist splashes upon the still rocks
Which repeats its ringing as a grandfather clock.
We ran so playfully through the flowered fields that day,
With singing laughter through the flowers at play.

Cumulus Clouds

By CJ Reeves

VA Medical Center—San Francisco, CA

Cumulus clouds sail in the sky
Like ships on the ocean blue,
Around and around like birds in the sky.
Where is the port they sail to?

Like a magic carpet, they sail away
And drift to distant lands,
Over castles in Spain, France in spring.
They sail, but never land.

I would like to be as free as cumulus clouds
And sail over the ocean blue,
Over rivers and vales, mountain and dales,
Searching for something new.

Don't Be Afraid

By Karen A. Green

VA Medical Center—North Las Vegas, NV

God, your Father,
will never leave you.
He has promised
to see you through.

Perfect love
casts out fear.
Our God
sees every tear.

Don't be afraid;
God has set you free.
His love for us
is so plain to see.

God didn't give you
a spirit of fear,
but of love.
He sends it from above.

It's a waste of time
to always be afraid
when, in that time,
we should have prayed.

God is
forever with us.
In Him
we can always trust.

Every Day Counts

By John E. Jones

VA Medical Center—Milwaukee, WI

Living every day, spirit kept alive,
People reach and seek everywhere to survive.
Seeing the sunshine is helpful every day;
Life is a struggle even trying every way.

People have thoughts of a destiny undefined;
Everyone needs to make good use of time.
Surviving every day, hope ever building anew,
Helping one another, one by one, two by two.

Watch every day among all of society
Those with faith and strength working quietly.
Life is growing as the days bring changes;
Time is passing as nature rearranges.

Awaken every morning at your daily time;
Life starts to pursue what's on your mind.
Every day counts, every day sublime
With the Holy Spirit and the great Divine.

Freedom Within

By Charles L. Carey

VA Medical Center—Martinsburg, WV

Total confusion rippled throughout
The wares of time
And brought forth the truth that
Must stand beyond
Reproach.
Never to be broken,
Never to be
Taken away,
Nothing to be
Added.
Reaching into inner darkness
To bring forth
Everlasting light
That will never
Fade.

Circulating through
One's true heart
To rain peace and
Everlasting joy with
Promised gifts of eternity.

The Phantasm

By Frank Mattson

VA Medical Center—Spring City, PA

The hallucination
The phantasm
The illusion
From the top
Of your head.
Circuits For a real space.
Dreaming
Awake
And in dreams.



Keep Supporting *Veterans' Voices*

We hope you enjoyed this special issue of *Veterans' Voices*. Watch for a print copy of the Fall 2020 issue of the magazine, complete with all its usual features.

Publication in *Veterans' Voices* Qualifies Writers for Special Prizes

Please note *Veterans' Voices'* prize structure includes three Founders' Awards honoring Elizabeth L. Fontaine, Gladys Feld Helzberg and Margaret Sally Keach. Contributors to *Veterans' Voices* receive \$10 for every published story, poem, artwork or photograph. Published submissions also qualify for special awards made possible by generous donors. Those awards are listed below.

*Medical Center staff
is encouraged to
reproduce this page in
patient publications.*



FOUNDERS'

Elizabeth L. Fontaine Memorial Award:

Story expressing compassion and understanding (Perpetual) \$ 50

Gladys Feld Helzberg Memorial Award:

Best Poem (Perpetual) \$ 50

Margaret Sally Keach Memorial Award:

Story or Poem about What *Veterans' Voices* Means to Me (Perpetual) \$ 50

STORIES — *Fact or Fiction*

David A. Andrews, Jr. Memorial Award: Prose reminiscing about learned values by Kathy Andrews \$ 25

Gladys M. Canty Memorial Award, by Northern Virginia Chapter 33, WAC Veterans Association \$ 15

DAVA, State Dept. of Kansas Award (Story) \$ 25

VFW Auxiliary, Dept. of Kansas Award: Personal Story (Perpetual) \$ 25

Pallas Athene Best Story Award, by National Women's Army Corps Veterans Association (Perpetual) \$ 25

Robert T. Rubin Award: Restoring My Mental Health (Perpetual) \$ 35

POETRY

BVL Serving My Country: What It Means to Me Award \$ 50

DAVA, State Dept. of Florida Award \$ 30

Sally-Sue Hughes Memorial Award (3 Poems) Each \$ 15

TH Norton Award: Editor's Choice \$ 25

WOSL Members' Appreciation Award: Editor's Choice, by Doris Cobb \$ 15

SPECIAL CATEGORIES

Joseph Posik Award: Given to a veteran who encourages other hospitalized veterans to write.

Medical center administrator nominates; publisher approves \$ 50

Larry Chambers Spirit Award: "How Meditation and/or Prayer Helped My Recovery

by Anthony J. Williams (Story or Poem) \$ 20

Heal Through Visual Art

Watch for your artwork in a future issue!

This issue of *Veterans' Voices* includes a special section featuring art from military veterans. We already showcase your writing, now the editors will highlight your art!

Dr. Robert Rubin, M.D., Ph.D., a military veteran and V.A. staff psychiatrist, is the inspiration for this initiative. He is convinced the arts can heal. He has observed how veterans heal by writing their thoughts and feelings on paper and he knows other art forms possess the same potential.

Validate Dr. Rubin's confidence in the healing power of art. Send us your drawings, paintings and photographs. Follow the Submission Guidelines below and help fill the pages of *Veterans' Voices* with colorful art!

Artwork Submission Guidelines

For more than 65 years Veterans Voices Writing Project has provided an outlet for military veterans to experience solace and satisfaction by sharing their stories, poems and artwork. Send your submissions today!

- Entries must be submitted as a digital file, either online or by U.S. mail.
- All art must be original and submitted by a military veteran or active service member. (List branch of military service and years served.)
- Media may include: acrylic, airbrush, assemblage, casein, charcoal, color pencil, graphite illustration, drawings, ink, oil, pastel, printmaking, tempera, watercolor, and traditional and digital photography.
- An artist statement is preferred to convey the artist's inspiration behind the artwork.
- Image requirements for entries: JPG files (Please try to keep the file size under 5MB to ensure proper uploading). For publication these files should be 300dpi when saved at approximately 8x10 inches (2400x3000 pixels), ideally, and 5x7 inches (1500x2100 pixels) at minimum.
- Submissions will be considered on an ongoing basis for subsequent issues.
- If you have questions, contact us at support@veteransvoices.org or (816) 701-6844.



Submit Today!
For a Future Issue

Calling for
Photographs,
Drawings and
Paintings



Artwork Submissions

Online or by mail.

www.veteransvoices.org

Veterans Voices Writing Project, Inc.
406 West 34th Street, Suite 103
Kansas City, MO 64111-3043

Please reproduce this announcement to encourage others to enter their art!

Submission Guidelines for *Veterans' Voices*



Any military veteran or active service person may submit original writing or artwork for publication consideration by the editors. Material previously published in a VAMC publication is ACCEPTABLE; copyrighted material is NOT ACCEPTABLE for the magazine. Once work has been submitted, **please do not resubmit** the same story or poem. Instead, wait and watch for the material to appear in the magazine, on the VVWP web site, and/or on Facebook. Be patient and remember that editors work up to six months in advance of the magazine publication date.

Instructions for Writing Submissions.

To submit writing online, go to www.veteransvoices.org/user-registration/ or www.veteransvoices.org and select **Registration**.

Once on the page, complete the registration form by typing your name, username, password, and email. Scroll down and click **Open Section** under and choose your branch of military service and how you served. Continue down the page and select **Open Section** under *Your Details* and fill out your contact information. Your address is required. Now click **Register** and you will be directed to a login page. Log in by entering your username and password.

Once you have successfully logged in, start by adding your submission headline. This will be the title for your writing. When you have finished adding your headline, click **Add New** and you will be directed to a new page. Click **Open Section** under *Writing Type* and choose the type of writing you are submitting. Then click **Open Section** under *Writing* and use this area to add your written piece by typing or copying and pasting into the text box.

Once you have finished scroll down and click **Open Section** under *Notes* to type additional information, for example you might add details about someone who is helping you as a writing aide or the name of your typist. If you are uploading a file, select **Open Section** under *Upload File* then click anywhere inside of the dotted box, or drag and drop your file. You can upload a Word file to submit your writing. Also you can submit artwork using *Upload File*.

Once you have uploaded and completed this section, click **Submit For Review** and your work will be successfully submitted. You can click **Save For Later** if you would like to save it and submit at a later time.

SUBMIT ONLINE:

www.veteransvoices.org

SUBMIT BY MAIL:

Veterans Voices Writing Project, Inc.
406 West 34th Street, Suite 103
Kansas City, MO 64111-3043

QUESTIONS:

support@veteransvoices.org or (816) 701-6844

Mail Submission Sample.

When submitting creative work by mail, attach an 8.5" x 11" sheet of paper and type in the following information:

Author Name _____

VAMC Name _____

VAMC City, State _____

Author's Permanent Street Address _____

City, State, Zip Code _____

Phone Number _____

Email Address _____

Branch of Service _____

Conflict or Era _____

Approximate dates served _____

I certify that I served in the U.S. military.

Date Submitted to *Veterans' Voices* _____

Title: *Example: What America Means to Me*

Text: *Example: I consider the United States of America "My Country." This is because I have spent at least 14 years in Europe and in the Far East.*

Writing Aide: _____

Typist: _____