

Combat Vet: Vietnam

Wave your flags at
Veteran's Day parades
wear red, white and blue
Your way of showing respect
to grandfathers, fathers
fading fast; they deserve it,
they do.

When you pass me
slumped on the street corner
reach out your hand,
look in my good eye,
say anything,
acknowledge me,
i've been in war, too.

Had you visited my mother's,
looked on the wall
faded photo of
Dress Blues,
serious face,
"ready or not, here I come"
stuffed deep inside, the eyes
looking back at you
answering "or not."

Index finger long gone,
scarred leg, extracted soul,
you want to ask
"did you kill anyone?"
"how did it feel?"
i abstained from
feeling when
i
came home.

My story is complicated,
30-second sound bites

leave undigested
fragments for you swallow
whole.

Now you try to call me a hero,
i won't buy that packaged word
the sacred psalm flooded
through my ears when i survived
and my battle-buddy didn't,
worshiped revenge
when i splattered the
slayer's blood on my chest,
saw a crumpled photo of a toddler

girl and woman in the pool of life
ebbing in his helmet—
it's complicated
it's complicated

trees ringing villages
whisper our names
when west winds stir,
remember, remember
rocks stained with our blood
crack open under the weight of
memory
don't forget, don't forget
our skin and sweat
mixed with mud and humidity
our fallen, their fallen
ghosts dancing when the moon is full

so come to the parade
wear red, white and blue,
appreciate it, we do
but don't just remember
the glory that makes you feel whole
or keep graves hallowed
with small plastic flags,
listen deep to stories,

listen to hard truths,
don't ask questions that
will make your gut roil
if you are decent

don't judge me,
my brothers,
my sisters,
we did
what you
asked
simple
complicated
complicated

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