

Photograph - "Reflections" by Lee Teter




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### *Reflections on "Reflections" – Part I*

Slick black marble. As dark as the hearts of the politicians and businessmen who profited so much. A seeming lack of surface as easy to see through as the lies of the government. Yet, there is a feeling of power as the cold marble resists the pressure of my hand.

It is so good to see your faces. Ramon, amigo, when last I saw you your face was missing and Willy, a claymore took you away. We put your feet and boots in a bag, good thing you had a dog-tag in the laces.

Those two guys over there from the 101. One of you came home to be killed on the installment plan by Jack Black, the other by a mouthful of .44.

My friend, Larry, howls as he remembers the names. He could not extract, he could only end the pain. We stuff to survive and it returns in the night; brilliant flashes, unbearable noise, the stench, cordite, sweat, burned vegetation and flesh. As this pit opens, its cover flies off, not to be shut off, only to exhaust itself again.

Of course, my hair is thin and gray. Twenty-five years is hard on hair. It bleached out. There in the sun and green as long as we could get by the lifers. We were sinewy and nearly inexhaustible. Drive on meant just that.

So much has changed here and not a lot for the better. You guys wouldn't believe the cars, or what greed has done to sports. You guys wouldn't believe how I was treated by an old lady when I got back to the world. Maybe one of your grannies, shut me out cold, killed my hope and soul. I hope she found peace. Is she there with you?

Flares are really effective against a thatched roof. The button said "Sat cong" (kill communists) not kill churches. Twenty-one years is a long time to hate anything, especially yourself, that's longer than most of you lived. Xin loi (sorry about that).

They are starting to let us come home now. Still, some liberals suffer their own continuing grip on the past, not yet ready, to let go. They think they are right. No need to heal if you are right. Pain knows no right or wrong. Perhaps some day they will see our healing and come to ask us how and we will both heal more wounds.

Your parents know, my don't. They think I came back different, I think I died. My body came home intact. My mind still goes back.

Jimmy and Ron were at marble, too. Ron has gone back to the woods. We have no need for picture of the lost. Their images are indelibly etched in our minds. Kodak deteriorates. We only forget when we die.

How I miss you and wish we could be together again, young, wild and free, capable of such caring and love lost in pain and violence. My heart shrieks at the anguish of your eternal entrapment behind the glossy wall. When will we be reunited? When will we all know peace? How I envy you sometimes, I am shedding so many tears I cannot even see the page, stained with my pain, rambled and unfinished.

Until next time,  
Signed,  
"Puke"  
Written 6/21/1994

## ***Reflections on "Reflections" – Part II***

It's been a while and I still think of you all.

Near midnight, Christmas of 1994, I was sitting out on the front porch a few months after I wrote you guys I heard a Huey flying overhead to a local hospital. I remembered the Christmas eve night I set the church on fire and I asked for forgiveness. As plain as day, I heard God say to me "I forgave you long ago, now forgive yourself." I did some things to make amends by helping a church in town to make repairs.

I don't go to church. I am not into organized religion, but I have a Higher Power now that I talk with every day...sometimes several times a day. I have been sober for sixteen years. It took a while for me to get it though.

My life has changed a lot and I am finally at peace. A while back, my soldier (me at 23) came to me while I was at work (no, I hadn't been hittin' the bottle) and he told me it was time to put down my pack. I tell you, I cried. I was relieved. Now, I can be just a man. I have times where I am a soldier again, but they come less often. I haven't been to The Wall yet, just the one that came to our hometown. I was finally ready to say goodbye. As soon as I got there, a person came up and asked if I was a vet. I wasn't sure what they were up to. I said "yes" and they said "thank you for your service." I wasn't expecting that. I had to leave.

When I notice the picture on the wall now, I simply thank you all. I don't hurt now. I still can see the images of death if I try, but they don't haunt me anymore.

We've got another cluster-fuck going on now. I hope our new boys will get help sooner than I did. It hurts to see another group in the grinder. I have to turn that over, though, I will be here for them given any opportunity.

Thank you for being a part of my journey, my allies. Your picture acts like my mentor, for me to "earn" my survival. I am trying to be a good man.

Later...

Martin – "Puke"  
9/25/2006

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