

To My Brothers From the 199th Infantry

Young but no longer innocent. Part man and part boy. Part human and part animal. You look almost angelic in some pictures because of the youth. You can revert from domesticated to feral in a heartbeat and you are no angel.

There is no hesitation, no mercy, no prisoners, no remorse, no regrets and no rejoicing. It is what it is. You have no options. You do it or you cease to exist. You pray that you will maintain the ability to convert back from your feral state. You know some who have lost that ability and it is heartbreaking.

Emotions run high 24x7. You learn the capacity of a man-child exceeds anything you could have imagined. You do not fight for a cause, you fight for your brother. You give each battle its due respect. It takes the edge off your fright. If it is your last act on this earth you want it to be your very best. If you die you hope you do it with dignity and honor because that is your legacy and you only have your brothers to tell the story. They will not lie.

Few rules and the ones established were not always followed but there are some lines no one crosses out of respect for yourself and your brothers. Sometimes ruthless and sometimes fun-loving. We saw the remotest parts of each other's soul and that is an experience that cannot be explained or shared because the words to do so do not exist. Even if you could explain it, those outside the brotherhood could not understand. Love, loyalty and respect is an understatement.

Our brotherhood is the strongest on earth. We look at each other and we do not have to ask what any one of us is thinking. We already know. We know when our brother is hurting and that is not acceptable. If my brother hurts, I hurt. If he dies a part of me dies with him which leaves room for him to be reborn within me. We no longer live just for ourselves, unfortunately we live for many. None die until the last one dies.

We laugh, we cry, we honor those who don't survive, we reminisce and we pray. Some subjects are off limits. They do none of us any good. We drink and act silly at appropriate times. We revert from a combat soldier to a high school boy every chance we get and we revert back to a combat soldier when we must. You quickly learn there is not much distance between a boy and an enemy's worst nightmare. It is a short but interesting journey.