

To my Vietnam Brothers on this Veteran's Day

Long ago life's journey led me through a netherworld where men were feral, days had no start or end, blood was our currency and the bizarre and unthinkable became ordinary. You played the hand you were dealt and the wager was your life. Our emotions became all but barren. Joy and sadness, good and evil, miracles and bad luck were so bound by misery they became indistinguishable one from another. "It don't mean nuthin" became our mantra. Whatever the situation you "sucked it up" and moved on without discussion or reflection. There was no time for such nonsense.

Each day it was an eye-for-an eye, will against will and stink on stink. My determination to survive and my love for my brothers was stronger than any virtue I ever possessed. My soul became somewhat stained but I can live with it just as many thousands before me have done. I feel no self-reproach as I had no viable alternative but that does not change how I became who I am.

I am not the boy I once was or the man I envisioned myself to be. So be it, I'm not complaining. If you were ever a warrior, you still are. If you are not, you never were. I once took long strides but now I am not as nimble and I take smaller steps. I'm not as bold or aggressive as I once was. I am irascible at times and tranquility is elusive, but I am still standing and my resolve is strong as ever. Do not fear me and most of all do not feel sorry for me. I am a proud veteran whose work is done and after all, "it don't mean nuthin."

SSG Cates '69-'70