

give him mouth-to-mouth." He wouldn't do it. He said, "Well, I'm going to tell them you let this pilot die." He just pulled a blanket over the pilot's face. Later that evening . . . a bunch of guys came in . . . to my hooch. One of them had this pilot's knife in his hands . . . and he came up . . . and gave it to me. They said, "We wanted to give you this knife in honor of the pilot you let die." That was my reception into the unit. I continued to fly missions, and I'd like to share something about one of the experiences I had with the wounded. And . . . uh . . . I never felt like I had enough hands. I remember working on so many with their arms and legs blown off . . . and . . . it got . . . I . . . it just began when they died. I . . . I . . . began to get bitter. And I prayed—I asked to take their pain. I flew close to three hundred missions . . . and uh . . . I remember picking up some wounded, and one had a jaw blown off . . . and the skull was exposed. And other wounded had their legs blown off—gunshot wounds—severe gunshot wounds . . . multiple shrapnel wounds. And I tried to put a compress on the jaw of the man that was exposed . . . and his hand grabbed mine, took the compress, held it . . . and pointed to me to work on the others. By the time I got back . . . it was too late.

BORIS VOLKOV

One of the commanders I was serving under was wounded under fire, and I was wounded, too, for which I received the highest soldier's medal. The commander was kind of—he had a great wound, which was very painful. He kept dragging me down as we were retreating. The commander kept telling me to go on, to leave him alone, because it was very painful . . . too painful to live. I got him back to safety, and we were flown back to the aid station. When he was well again, he came back, and there was no need for words. We just looked at each other, and that was it. We felt like there was a real Brotherhood there among us in Afghanistan.

Actually, my values were changed for the better while I was in Afghanistan. We were very young, so we didn't know what real Brotherhood was—what real friendship meant—until the conditions became very bad. After being in Afghanistan, I understand much more clearly that I am an individual rather than being a part of the masses. I started watching for the effects of my own actions, which I think I'll have to pay for. Although one individual is rather small, if he is allowed to think, by his thoughts he can influence other people into thinking of other things—thereby creating something out of nothing, so to speak. That's really

what I learned from the Brotherhood, plus being responsible for my own actions.

RON MITSCHER

You asked about the Brotherhood. What you're talking about is camaraderie. The camaraderie we had over there was like—there's no way to compare it—but you could probably compare it to a best friend that you had in growing up, only you have a whole bunch of best friends in a life-threatening situation. The camaraderie becomes something that you carry the rest of your life with those individuals. Sometimes you never get a chance to see those individuals again, but in your heart you know you'd do anything for them because they did that for you in a situation which could have gotten them killed. So that kinship is something that a Vietnam vet feels per se with other Vietnam vets. I think this is true for all of us who went. What happens now though, the war has been gone for so long and it's very hard to identify who was a combat veteran in Vietnam and who was a Remington Raider [clerk]. A lot of people like about what they did over there so the kinships can be stronger. I think for the most part when you identify with or belong to an organization like the Vietnam Veterans of America, you meet a lot of people, and those kinships are increased because you get to know the guys—especially in a program like this where you get close. You may get closer with some people than others, but that's just human nature.

As far as survivor guilt, I think that's very prominent in the one-year tours. I can't relate to somebody who came from a wealthy family, but I can relate to the idea that a lot of us kids were poor and didn't have much when we went over. Survivor guilt for me is that I have seen people over there who I felt had more to live for who died? Families . . . a decent, good family relationship—a wife, kids, and stuff like this to go back to . . . whereas I didn't feel I had as much to go back to. Also, there's the idea that there are some individuals who you just cared about so much that you would have rather you had taken their place and let them come back. I don't know if it's different than being in any other war, but it's a very strong feeling with us. A lot of us especially got very close to a very few people because we did not go over in large-scale units or come back in large-scale units. So once you found a friend in a situation like that, you hung onto him like he was your family.

PHILEMON PEARSON

Getting to the Brotherhood—the bond. We had fun over there, in the Brotherhood you could have emotions that the army wouldn't let you

Survivor Guilt

to three weeks, they'd get fluid in their cells so bad they'd drown. I really pined the women doing caskets at Dover when we went into Panama.

We had to put up a wall. We didn't do it consciously, but we did it to protect ourselves. I think you're right. Every nurse has a "one guy" story. Mine was Larry Zwitloe, an E-9 Sergeant Major. He was hit in the gut and chest. Zwitloe was a real neat guy. I was prepping him . . . he was kind of special . . . but he was what we called a "seven-tube syndrome." When you got six tubes into a guy, he still had a chance, but a seven-tube will die, mainly from infections. He got worse a couple of days later. I went to see him every day, and I couldn't tell you why. He was just that special guy. He never got off the table. His name is burned into my memory.

It's important to remember that thirty-five hundred military women served in Vietnam. Twenty-five hundred other women were also there during the war. Three Red Cross women and eleven nurses were killed, most of them in the C-54 [jet transport] that crashed when they were bringing children out when Saigon was falling. There were 265,000 "Vietnam era" women in the military. At most, we've got fifteen hundred names for a memorial to the women at The Wall. But it tells you women did form that Wall, and it's still there, to one extent or another, in all of us. It's important to us to get a statue of a nurse at The Wall.

The Brotherhood for Vietnam vets is quiet. It's nonverbal. We have shared something. We have looked under the wall-to-wall carpet in the empty room and seen the horror. I respect others' experience. There are some things I will not share with you students. I do it a lot to protect you from what I know . . . what I experienced. If you don't have to feel the pain, I wouldn't want you to go through that. I'll never forget the feeling of Brotherhood in that hospital. I get that feeling now when I go to The Wall. I have to go back there pretty soon . . . I haven't been there for a while. I can't go during the day with kids yelling around. We go at night and sit on the knoll about a hundred feet away. We just sit there and feel peaceful.

DONALD NEPTUNE

I got to the 121st Evac. Hospital, and I got shown around the hospital, where everything was. Got checked in, and I was put in a hooch with a Canadian who had been drafted. He had been going to school or something down in the States. I don't remember his last name. I just remember his first name—Jaques. I always pictured a Canadian with that name, so it just fit him real well. He was kind of a small guy, kind of

skinny. And I remember walking down into the hooch—if had rooms down off to the side off the main corridor—and they had streamers going down the hall. Streamers—plastic streamers. Different colors—red, blue, green. And some had beads and what not. And in a lot of guys' rooms they had painted the walls with a Zig Zag Man, or STOP THE WAR—something of that culture or generation back home in the States—anything that was identifiable to the world.

I was transferred to a medivac unit to be a medic on dustoffs. I remember this sergeant. He was the senior medic—kinda had a weird sense of humor. Showed me to this hooch. There was just a bunk there and a mattress. I threw my duffel bag in there on the floor. I heard music coming from this hooch next door. So I just stepped in this hooch, and again the streamers—all down the hall. And I looked through the streamers into this bay, and there was some rock and roll music going. I saw people in there, and they had jungle fatigues on. Most of them had tank top shirts on because it was so hot.

One guy was sitting there with a mask over his face—it was a gas mask with a pipe sticking out of the end of it. And there was a footlocker lying there with a big pile of marijuana, about a foot high, piled there. Another guy was holding onto a rope tied to two beams that was used to hang clothes on that *mama-san* washed. He had a fifth of whisky in his hands, taking slugs off of it, and he was singing, "Ding-ding! How do you get off this trolley?" The rest of the people were just, you know, standing around listening to music, laughing.

And the next thing I knew, somebody grabbed me, and I had . . . a towel or rope around my neck. They had me pinned up against the beam and had a .45 up against my head and an M-79 grenade launcher shoved in my face. It was that quick. I didn't know what hit me. I saw this Indian guy . . . he had a thick Bowie knife . . . and his hooch was back around the corner. And I saw all these scalps nailed on the wall. They were questioning me about who I was, what I was doing there. Finally, I got so mad I told them that if they ever got out of there, I was going to kill them all. I was so mad because they were choking me, and I couldn't breathe. You know I had to do something. And this Indian guy got up, and—I later found out his name was Frank—he said, "Let him go." They seemed to do whatever he said. I never heard him talk much.

During that week, I had my first mission with Frank. We flew all day long, and we flew that night. We had to pick up a Cobra pilot that had been shot down. When they got shot down, they came down through the trees, and a rotor blade came—got bent—and came down and hit him dead straight in the face. And it mashed his face. From the bottom of his chin to the top of his face was depressed. Frank wanted me to give him mouth-to-mouth, and he didn't even have a mouth. I said, "You