

The Leaf Rider 8/5/85

(after the manner of the Eorlingas)

Where now are chopper and rider?
Cartridge belt gold gleaming,
Sunshower spray glistening,
A circlet of rainbow
Below the blades sweeping;

~

Out over the wire leaping,
Like leaves before the tempest reeling,
The greening blades of the paddies mirroring,
Bathed in the tropic heat, yet
In their ruffled blue fields shivering;

~

With the winds of war forward,
And childhood past remembering,
Is gone, as fast as the wind furrows
In the green-blue carpet glistening,
At first burst banished by bullets and blood.

~

Whither the windhover,
Above tangled green gliding, soaring,
The riders' glance sees not seeing,
The hurricane, the land overturning,
Their metal steeds' clacking racket calling;

~

So on down to the great grass jumping,
To tree line on tree line charging,
And always some never more moving,
And some bodies for a time limping,
While many minds and hearts hurt worse than they;

~

Yet new faces old places ever filling,
Steady as the monsoon rain's drumming,
As regular as its arrival,
The long hot months into years fading,
Till they all were gone.

* * * * *

So say men over a shot and beer drinking,
No knights in armor shining,
Who once were lads in the summer grinning,
And did their job of fighting,
Someone else sometimes scathed becoming.

- Gerald Alan Ney

The Haunted Dream - 4/23/970200 hrs

[Upon reading Internet posts triggered by the upcoming 22nd
anniversary in 2 days of the fall of Saigon & the RSVN]

Silent wings through the night,
Stealing into our sleep with fright,
Freighted with terrible weight,
And memory of loss.

~

Bolt upright we awake.
The stuttering sounds inside still quake.
You hear the cries of those forsook,
And remember their loss.

~

Hands raised, arms outstretched.
You can't span time and space
To pull them up, take them in,
And their loss is your loss.

~

"A thousand tears falling",
So wrote Yung Krall.
Their flow pursues us still,
Till forgiveness for failure
Is allowed to fill the loss.

- Gerald Ney

"Skip" Renshaw was in the same student officers' platoon for the Infantry Officer's Basic Course as myself from just after Thanksgiving 1967 to early February 1968. 60% of the class were Infantry and 40% were Military Intelligence Corps, who were attending "to get an appreciation of the problems of the infantry officer". MI didn't have it's own basic course till it moved from Ft. Holabird, Md to Ft. Huachuca, Az in 1970. Skip was one of the few who were married.

We didn't see each other again till running into one another at the Cam Ranh Bay Officer's Club on April 9 or 10, 1969. He was on his way back to the First Air Cav from R&R with his wife in Hawaii and I was on my way out to R&R in Bangkok. He talked about how they had to spend the first 2 days getting to know each other all over again after the combat he'd been through. I promised I'd write as soon as I got back; which I actually did.

There was no answer and eventually my tour was up in mid-July. I was just about to take my turn boarding a C-130 for Bien Hoa; where I would catch a flight to Travis AFB; when our detachment jeep came flying down the airstrip with our clerk half standing in the passenger seat, waving a large brown envelope. So everything came to a halt while they drove up and handed me the envelope. It contained my letter to Skip plus a cover letter beginning, "We regret to inform you..." He'd been killed in action April 13 on Easter Sunday, just days after we met. It put quite a damper on my return trip home.

Gerry

~~~~~  
 In Memory of Skip 3/8/99  
 {after seeing "Saving Private Ryan"}

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| <p>You always seemed a little older,<br/>       And it wasn't the two years<br/>       Time you had on us.<br/>       ~<br/>       A maturity perhaps found<br/>       In learning to be<br/>       A husband;<br/>       ~<br/>       While we were still<br/>       Half in half out,<br/>       Hobbitlike tweens,<br/>       ~<br/>       More carefree<br/>       Than we knew and<br/>       Not quite responsible;<br/>       ~<br/>       For all life ahead<br/>       Was an unknown path<br/>       Into the Wild,<br/>       ~<br/>       With dangers we thought<br/>       We knew something of,<br/>       From class and training,<br/>       ~<br/>       Barely beyond Toy<br/>       Soldiers<br/>       Mustering, but tasked<br/>       To lead real men<br/>       ~<br/>       With very real lives,<br/>       Both sturdy and fragile<br/>       Before the human storm,<br/>       ~<br/>       To beard Death<br/>       At his own hearth<br/>       And bring them back<br/>       ~<br/>       In one piece<br/>       After duty was done...<br/>       "Objective Secure, Sir!"<br/>       ~<br/>       So we slipped and slid<br/>       On the red clay mud,<br/>       Benning's best batch.<br/>       ~<br/>       And the wait-a-minute<br/>       Vines held us fast.<br/>       Looked good on the<br/>       map!<br/>       ~<br/>       And you took the BS</p> | <p>And messing around<br/>       With our minds<br/>       ~<br/>       With quiet good humor,<br/>       steady calm patience<br/>       Through it all.<br/>       ~<br/>       *****<br/>       Vietnam... In Country!<br/>       Fourteen months, or was<br/>       it<br/>       A lifetime later.<br/>       ~<br/>       Amidst eighteen<br/>       laboring<br/>       Air conditioners inside<br/>       The Cam Ranh Bay O-<br/>       Club.<br/>       ~<br/>       Talked of my R and R<br/>       To be, and yours just<br/>       past,<br/>       With the wife you loved,<br/>       ~<br/>       And how the combat<br/>       forced<br/>       Changes within yourself<br/>       Made necessary<br/>       ~<br/>       Painful reintroduction<br/>       To whom you had<br/>       become.<br/>       Hawaii would wait<br/>       ~<br/>       Till you knew each other<br/>       Again. Then back it was<br/>       to jungle, NVA and<br/>       battle.<br/>       ~<br/>       I promised I'd write<br/>       On return from R and R,<br/>       and I actually did,<br/>       ~<br/>       But never was there<br/>       reply,<br/>       And in three months,<br/>       Came time to go home.<br/>       ~<br/>       On the hot dusty<br/>       runway,<br/>       With duffel and my<br/>       thoughts,<br/>       Boarding beginning...<br/>       ~</p> | <p>The company jeep<br/>       comes,<br/>       Flying up to the plane.<br/>       A waved tan envelope<br/>       ~<br/>       In the clerk's hand.<br/>       "We regret to inform<br/>       you...",<br/>       Official notice inside.<br/>       ~<br/>       And my letter unopened.<br/>       Dead already four days<br/>       After Cam Ranh Bay,<br/>       ~<br/>       On Easter Sunday. Did I<br/>       Pray for you at Mass<br/>       in Bangkok's cathedral?<br/>       ~<br/>       No memory, but suspect<br/>       not;<br/>       Other things on my<br/>       mind,<br/>       Not all of them holy.<br/>       ~<br/>       A very sober<br/>       homecoming<br/>       From the start, but you<br/>       Never had even that.<br/>       ~<br/>       *****<br/>       Find myself thinking<br/>       About you more often;<br/>       As I grow older.<br/>       ~<br/>       Am double the age<br/>       I was then, and I wonder<br/>       Why you were the one<br/>       ~<br/>       Taken, and the rest of us<br/>       Allowed to further<br/>       continue<br/>       To make our marks in<br/>       life.<br/>       ~<br/>       As husbands and fathers,<br/>       Employers or<br/>       employees,<br/>       As just human beings;<br/>       ~<br/>       Have our acts and<br/>       omissions<br/>       Improved our world,<br/>       justified<br/>       God's gift of time?</p> | <p>~<br/>       Have I lived my life<br/>       In a way that honors<br/>       Your life sacrifice?<br/>       ~<br/>       God knows I'm not<br/>       What I was created<br/>       To be... At least, not yet!<br/>       ~<br/>       So I bumble on,<br/>       An older dog still<br/>       learning<br/>       To become truly human.<br/>       ~<br/>       Rest easy, my friend.<br/>       We haven't taken ev'ry<br/>       hill,<br/>       But haven't given up<br/>       either.</p> <p>GERALD ALAN NEY<br/>       172nd MI Det.<br/>       173rd Abn Bde (Sep)<br/>       7/13/68 - 7/12/69</p> <hr/> <p>In Memory of -<br/>       ILT Anderson Neely<br/>       (Skip) Renshaw III<br/>       C/1/8, 1st Air Cav Div<br/>       (Air Mobile)<br/>       b. 12/02/43d. 04/13/69<br/>       listed on VVMPanel<br/>       27W - Row 71<br/>       =====</p> |
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Woke up last Friday morning during the VVA National Convention with the opening lines in my head and wrote the following poem between 7:15 & 7:45 A.M. This broke 2 years' writer's block.

8/1/03

Purple Leaves (to Paul Sutton)

It is in my mind still,  
The purple leaves,  
After all these years,  
Four and thirty,  
More than I had lived  
Back then. And  
It is in my mind still,  
The purple leaves,  
As far as my eyes  
Could see to the south,  
From my puttering perch  
In the Bird Dog's back seat,  
The purple leaves,  
Hard by Mang Yang  
And Mobile Group's demise;  
It is in my mind still,  
The lightly fluttering throngs,  
Chlorophyll all lost  
To the chemical demands  
Of the orange spray.

~

Notes:

1. Paul Sutton is the chair of Vietnam Veterans of America's National Agent Orange Committee. All 3 of his children have medical problems stemming from his exposure to herbicide in Vietnam.
2. Mang Yang Pass is where Highway 19 crosses the Pleiku/Binh Dinh provincial border through the Dak Pihao Mts. It is the site of the destruction of the French Army's Mobile Group 100 by the Viet Minh during June 24-25, 1954. Originally wrote Mobile "Two" due to memory glitch.
3. Was in a L-19 Bird Dog (a small Cessna) lazing along at approximately 8000' headed south from the pass along the province border in early June 1969. Can't remember why I flew that one and only mission in that area; since it was nominally in the 4th Division's AO (area of operations).

It is in my mind still,  
The purple leaves,  
Their fading, dying lavender  
Putting on their last show  
In the bright tropical sunlight.  
It is in my mind still,  
The purple leaves,  
A countless spraying carpet,  
Two hundred miles square,  
Still reaching for the sun  
At top canopy height.  
It is in my mind still,  
The purple leaves,  
Soon to fall,  
Baring their brethren  
In the understory  
To the next round of spray.  
It is in my mind still,  
The purple leaves.

On the Road to Ollie 11/13/03

On the road to Ollie,  
A pretty little temple  
Perched high on the right.  
Gotta get back by sunset  
Before the base buttons up  
Charlie owns the night.

~

We're a movin' out,  
Thirty five, maybe forty.  
Where were the bicycles,  
Impossibly piled bundles,  
Of charcoal destined wood,  
Behind the conical hatted  
Rider, putting Lambrettas,  
Darting chickens and kids  
And occasional ancient truck  
When Rat Patrol roared on.

~

But you in Vietnam, GI!  
Xin Loi and hit the brakes!  
Korean deuce and a halfs  
Have right of way  
Even when they don't.  
See that side road. well  
One's on fast approach  
At dust cloud's head  
Won't stop for God  
Or Gen'ral Abrams.

~

Ridin' shotgun 'cause  
They don't trust an officer  
To drive; though my driver's  
Most likely the better shot.  
In lack of roads country,  
Making the long dogleg  
An Khe to English via  
Nineteen and One  
Twisting down Phu Cu  
From highland to plain  
With a wave at Qui Nhon,  
Past Phu My's pepper fields  
And Uplift's notch, then  
Straight at the Tiger's main peak,  
Till the last turn north  
By northwest toward Bong Son  
And my temp tin roofed home,  
With LZ Ollie on guard,  
By it's thatched hut village  
And elegant tiered pagoda.

~

On the road to Ollie,  
A pretty little temple  
Perched high on the right.  
Gotta get back by sunset  
Before the base buttons up.  
Charlie owns the night.

~

Over the Song Lai  
Through Bong Son town,  
And up to the gate...  
Ten more minutes  
And the barriers are down.  
Ollie, Ollie Oxenfree.

Nothing Uplifting About Uplift 11/13/03  
{AKA: The Armpit of the Armpit}

[Was defense counsel for a 19 yr old kid with a 7th grade education that was always wandering off - 19 times. General discharge in exchange for a guilty plea. They were afraid he'd get someone killed someday.]

There's nothing uplifting  
About Uplift - You see  
As barren an LZ  
'Long the length of  
The South China Sea  
You can find.

~

The margins are green  
On Nam's number one;  
As the highway plays tag  
With headland and beach;  
Tall are the grasses  
And taller the palms;

~

Save at Uplift...  
A grayness to the green,  
A dimming drab dullness  
Of scraggly scrub surrounds  
The neutered notch  
Between the two cones...

~

And tents sprawl their khaki  
In the smothering dust  
By the steep barren sides  
Of the mini mounts' bases,  
Antenna sprouting shacks  
Adorn the taller peak.

~

And I'm led to wonder  
'Bout the boy I'm to defend  
Why in hell would he go  
AWOL... 'round here  
Of all places - just wandering  
In the wastes that fill my sight.

VIETNAM LOWDOWN IN-COUNTRY BACKSTABBIN' BACKSIDE FRAGGIN'  
COOK CUPPA COFFEE BLUES 11/16-17/03

It's quiet tonight  
At the mess hall  
With the great sunset view,  
And only God knows  
All the wherefores  
Of who did what to who.

~  
Now I'm a guy who'd rather  
Have coke instead of coffee...  
No, not that white stuff!  
But lip ticklin' liquid  
Straight from Atlanta  
Back in the world.

~  
But most O's and E's  
Want no more than a  
Decent cuppa Joe  
To jump start the bod  
But it wasn't to be had  
For months on end.

~  
They loved their Mary Jane,  
The guys at HQ mess,  
Much better than making  
Morning meals with muffins,  
juice and powdered milk...  
And real Army coffee.

~  
Three sergeants came  
And three sergeants gone  
In five months time;  
While they partied on,  
Till number four brought  
Forgotten rules back.

~  
They cooked and they worked;  
Then scrubbed the pots all clean.  
The food turned out fine.  
Thanksgiving, never better,  
But someone had a grudge,  
And a desire to get even.

~  
To Sarge's field phone  
Was wired a grenade

And so when he went  
To get something  
Needed in a hurry  
From out of his tent;

They rang him up, right  
When he went inside,  
But over he had bent,  
Chest, arms and head  
In foot locker shield,  
With scarcely a dent...

~  
Yet they fragged  
The boss's ass  
And both legs too.  
A medevac home,  
Sarge's tour was over,  
But what for the crew?

~  
Suspicious aplenty,  
But no solid leads.  
Not one cook charged,  
And the war's still on,  
With Charlie to fight,  
Our men to be fed.

~  
Untrusted by all,  
Forced trade is made,  
Rifle and pack for  
Food and utensils;  
The no longer cooks  
Scattered through Nam.

~  
It's quiet right now  
At HQ mess  
As I go jogging by  
One crew's going  
Another comin' in.  
The war doesn't care why.

[ The incident above actually took place  
as related. I regret that I never did  
find out how the mess sergeant fared  
after hospitalization back in the US ]

Dali Dayze in the Wilted Watch Zone 11/19/03

They weren't up front  
And close, hanging out  
For all to see  
On Mamasan's clothesline  
Or bedecking the trees  
Like so many misplaced  
Lianas and strewn among  
The bamboo thickets  
Beyond the dike  
Bounding Papsan's paddy;

~

But in the mind's eye.  
Beckoning beyond sight,  
And you didn't need  
Mary Jane or Uncle's  
"I've got this just for you"  
Numbah one best  
Poppy juice product  
To tell you that  
The World, as in REAL,  
Is back that-away!

~

A freedom bird flight  
Of nineteen hours  
And a date change  
Over miles upon miles  
Endless blue above  
And below. Are there  
Really waves down there?  
But this yearlong dream  
Brings no waking,  
Just rules of its own.

~

At twilight there's  
No need of Rod  
To bark, "Don't touch  
That dial!" CICV's  
Got your horizontal,  
And Charlie's at  
The vertical. And  
Ev'rybody but you  
Is messing with  
The sound.

~

So you warily watch  
The madness unfold;  
As Charlie duels  
With land mines and wits.  
An ambush on One  
And the tanks roll out,  
Treadmarks twinned  
Through the rice.  
What now, Papsan?  
Pissed mind and heart?

~

At district HQ,  
The police chief's  
Only without  
A fancy lettered sign:  
"Damage claim assist,  
And clearances sold  
Fronting fee for sure  
And certain my take  
Off the top - maybe  
Some left for you."

~

So I needn't watch  
old '50s TV, or go  
to MOMA or Louvre  
To scarily soak  
In the surreal.  
Vietnam's war gave  
Serling and Sal a run  
For the gold  
But had considerably  
Less fun appeal.



Despite napalm and shells;  
Spooky's distant red rain  
Shuddering "brrrrt!"  
In the night;  
We really, really tried  
To keep the Nam green  
Shoveling the cash,  
Bushels on end,  
Of scrip down low,  
Greenbacks up high,  
By Charlie preferred  
To piasters depressed  
Far below par  
Black market pariahs,  
And loans guaranteed  
In dollars U.S.

Local business supported  
Contracts galore  
Cleaning, shoe shining,  
Barbers on base  
And neck realigned  
A freebie add on; while  
Displayed for your view  
Color splashed landscapes,  
Sakura framed Fuji,  
Sunset, sampans and sea  
By in-law Nguyen.  
And off base laundry;  
Ice cream shipped in;  
Both Qui Nhon based plants.

Clean undies are great; when  
The living's all grubby.  
And ice cream's nice  
At a hundred in the shade.  
But never I divined  
Pedigree and taste  
O' cold concoction  
Coconut called.  
So why on One  
In daylight broad  
Must Charlie choose  
The laundry truck?

China Beach  
11/26 & 12/02-03/03

It was not in my war,  
China Beach; just a name  
Slapped on a series I rarely  
Had time to watch.

Where you were,  
When you were,  
What you were,  
Mattered.

NVA or Viet Cong,  
ARVN, Ruff Puffs or Allies  
Sea, Rivers or Land  
Paddies, Plateaus or Mountains  
City, Boonies or Base  
The muddy Wet or dusty Dry.

Same country,  
Same label,  
Different setup,  
Different war.

The uniforms look right  
And so do the tents,  
Yet know not the place,  
Location unknown  
Nor knew the name...  
Had my own spots to mind.

An Nhon, An Khe, Phu Cu, Phu  
Cat  
Qui Nhon, Phu My, Binh Dinh,  
Bong Son  
Tuy Hoa, An Hoa, Bao Loc,  
Bien Hoa,  
Quang Ngai, Chu Lai, Cam  
Ranh, Saigon  
Mang Yang, Song Ba, Song Lai  
Giang  
Nha Trang, Phan Rang, Nui Hon  
Cong.  
The Cordillera Annamese.

The Camp Radcliff Golf Course  
And the Cav's high horse  
English, Uplift, Illinois, Ollie  
The Cham temple ruins  
Korean antennas sprouting  
Off One 'tween Nineteen  
And the Qui Nhon spur.

China Beach, miles from me  
Might have been in Tibet.  
I cared not a whit.  
For where I was,  
When I was,  
What I was,  
That mattered.

Pouring over rolls of film  
That a foxhole there, or  
Just a charcoal oven?  
While slow cooked inside  
Our own oven of a van;  
Roast a bit more burning  
Used film with diesel fuel,  
Stir stick in the oil drum.  
Your tax dollars up in smoke.  
Then up and away, dangling  
Telephoto lensed Pentax  
In a bouncing Bird Dog  
Or chattering chopper.

And on odd days playing  
Perry Mason in fatigues,  
A full fledged member, M I  
JAG annex barracks lawyer  
Keeping some accused kid  
From time in Long Binh Jail,  
No "six and six" in LBJ,  
Loss of pay and busted rank.  
Trial counsel next week;  
Board member next month.  
AWOL, asleep on guard,  
Possession of pot or worse.

Casper platoon's gunships  
Revvng in the morning,  
Routine wake up for war  
To start the day. And twilight  
Volleyball, jungle rules,  
To end it. Forefinger  
Forever jammed at the net.  
Ev'ning three salvo sixty  
Millimeter mortars to follow.  
Always missing the avgas,  
Counter fire hits them not.  
Ad nauseam the game goes on.

The boys at Corps HQ  
A white colonial villa  
They had; with hot and cold  
Running water and hot  
And cold running women,  
A bedmate at night to protect  
You from the sea breeze chill.  
And they could usually go  
to the beach for lunch.

Flush toilets, shade trees,  
Sidewalks and air conditioned  
Private rooms for pilots,  
Equipped with fridge;  
Squadron messes with food  
Enough to feed the country,  
Sufficient beer and booze  
In the PX to float it; all,  
With no liquor tax applied,  
At your local Air Force base.

Tents for half a year  
At English; then tin roofed  
Shacks, assembly required.  
Australian showers come  
With a hoisted bucket  
Sprinkler head fitted;  
But better off by far  
Than the grunts in the bush.

For better or worse  
My own war was  
In a faroff place  
Not called China Beach.

\* Gerald Alan Ney

An Honest Man 11/26 & 12/04/03

I often wonder what  
Became of the man  
Though I can't remember  
His name, and his face  
Fades in my memory.  
Still alive? Or maybe dead...  
At home in his bed?  
Or by the conqueror killed  
Because of their dread  
Of an honest man.

You can arrest corrupts  
And stage a huge trial  
To trumpet their crimes  
And sentence them strict  
Teaching the masses  
That justice you bring,  
So don't kill the crook,  
He's worth more alive,  
A vivid object lesson  
Held before all to see.

But an honest man,  
An official at that,  
A great real danger  
Just by being,  
And gives the lie  
To your claim,  
Only your way  
Is all there is.

Village chief, but first  
A good and fair man.  
His country it was,  
Yet let pass my speaking  
Only a foreigner's tongue,  
Enough English he had  
To get our job done.

So when memory nags;  
I pray he be blessed  
Wherever he is  
Though I can't remember  
His village's name, but  
His unassuming steadiness  
Is present in my mind.

- Gerald Alan Ney.

Christmas Eve 1968

Christmas Eve at Shitfield Tower 11/26 & 12/04/03  
{ a memory of 24 December, 1968 }

'Twas the night before Christmas  
And all through the Nam  
Nothing hostile was stirring  
Not even nuoc mam.

~

And I on our tower,  
With two other men,  
Watched over the shitfield;  
All fragrant as a fen.

~

The airfield behind us  
Was deserted and dark.  
Not even a mouse  
By the Bird Dog park.

~

The village was silent  
Beyond field and wire;  
Charlie reaped too many taxes  
To start something dire.

~

The problem wasn't keeping  
Ol' Charles outside,  
But our guys in and away  
From a young girl's side.

~

Just stars slowly moved  
High above us they wheeled.  
When all of a sudden  
Loud laughs echoed and peeled.

~

Round 'bout midnight  
In the company jeep  
Some crazy carolers  
Crooned both high and deep.

~

So our watch was lightened  
And lonely no longer.  
The more off key they sang,  
Their voices grew stronger.

~

So we held out till morning  
With spirits renewed.  
An hour or so more  
Our vigil to conclude.

~

And then out the huts  
In pajamas they came,  
Halfway to the wire,  
All squatting the same.

~

And when they went back  
The bucket man scooped  
To gather the treasure  
In the field they pooped.

~

That was our signal  
Our time there was up,  
Back to the unit and  
Shithead our pup.

~

And the man with the bucket  
Covered the paddies right nice,  
Ev'ry morsel spread out  
To nourish the rice.

- Gerald Alan Ney

Here There Be Dragons - 02/10/04

Like the maps of old  
When no one knew better;  
The blank spots we filled  
In our wondering minds,  
Whether conscious and dreaming,  
With dragons both bad and bold.

Few knew where Vietnam lies,  
Its place in the worlds of nature  
And men; with what voices it spoke.  
And fewer still its culture and past  
Or cared. But rarest the number  
Who had seen with their eyes.

So in learned ignorance we went  
To teach; got toasted and taught  
Having much to learn and paying  
For the privilege a seller's price;  
For indeed there were dragons,  
And they collected our rent.

- Gerald Alan Ney

This is actual incident. Was sent out to take a picture of a dead VC for ID.  
They thought he might be a main province VC honcho.  
Capt Hurley, the brigade S-2 came along.  
We choppered out to a Montagnard force w/2 US advisers.  
The poem covers what ensued.

Pass the Pipe and Sugar Cane...  
Light on the Shrapnel, Please. 11/10/04

Life is good,  
Such as it is;  
The dead body  
Forgotten in the rear;  
Photo on film  
For I D on remains  
All we need.

~

Middlin' warm,  
Some wind. clear and  
Zero chance of rain,  
A hundred percent  
Chance of Charlie  
With light to moderate  
Intermittent small arms...

~

Great day for  
A picnic by the paddies  
And between return shots  
The Yards go for it...  
Puff on a pipe  
Chaw some cane and  
Maybe kill some Cong.

~

Gunships, tubes  
Put on quite a show;  
Rockets from the west,  
One O Fives from south,  
Erratic round lands  
'Midst seven of us  
And no one hit.

~

The captain  
Claims the shrapnel chunk,  
Just missed my head.  
What's left of Charlie  
Slips slowly away  
While the potshot picnic  
Has a final fling.

~

Our chopper  
Returns; as the heat's  
Now off. The nasties gone.  
So it's back to base  
Hot chow with cold drink  
Twilight Volleyball after.  
Life is good.

\* Gerald Alan Ney

The Original Cherry Lieutenant  
 { non apologia pro vita sua }  
 12/26 & 12/29/04

Attention to orders:  
 ~  
 To the Nam he was sent;  
 Fresh fledged boy-man greener  
 Than an Irish Meadow\*  
 After the rains of Spring.  
 ~  
 With his head stuffed full  
 Of lectures and books,  
 Army training and  
 The best intentions.  
 ~  
 A term appointment  
 With daily duties for  
 A sometime student  
 In Southeast Asia  
 ~  
 School of Guerilla  
 Warfare's sprawling South  
 Vietnam campus,  
 Binh Dinh Department.  
 ~  
 To "beautiful,  
 Bright" downtown An Khe,  
 Showing the newbie  
 The lay of the land.  
 ~  
 A lesson: "You can't  
 Go when you gotta;  
 If the john's a wall  
 Along an alley,  
 ~  
 And you feel their eyes  
 Watch the lieutenant  
 Curious to see  
 Just what he will do.  
 ~  
 Another: 'Do nerds

Have hormones?' 'Yes,  
 but don't know how  
 Or when to use them.'  
 ~  
 And this one knew naught  
 Or little of love,  
 Of women or sex,  
 A clueless densoid.  
 ~  
 So an old warrant's  
 Solution was find  
 A female to lift  
 Him from Virginville.  
 ~  
 That mission accomplished,  
 But jury's still out  
 On how much he learned  
 Or still needs teaching;  
 ~  
 About things that matter,  
 And the forgotten  
 Most relentless now  
 Retaught and retained?  
 ~  
 Learned so very much  
 Finding out he knew  
 So little; wisdom  
 And understanding,  
 ~  
 Took a holiday,  
 PX run to parts  
 Unknown, so it seemed  
 From watching the war.  
 ~  
 Quaint rustic quarters;  
 Either red clay dust  
 Or mud, mold and slime  
 Gets on all his gear.

~  
 Few amenities:  
 Cold Australian  
 Showers, three holers,  
 Cheap soda and beer.  
 ~  
 And when days' work done,  
 Unit volleyball.  
 "Jungle rules", the finger  
 Still shows being jammed.  
 ~  
 An unexpected role,  
 Buffer between men  
 and Dear John'ed sergeant,  
 Then the major says,  
 ~  
 "You're way too friendly  
 With the enlisted."  
 The fine line then walk,  
 Ever get it right?  
 ~  
 Came replacement of tents  
 By tin roofed hooches,  
 "Please take a walk, Sir.  
 And leave that hammer."  
 ~  
 A fortunate son  
 Though; spared the worst wrath,  
 With a ringside seat  
 To the surreal storm.  
 ~  
 With head in the clouds,  
 Both meanings apply,  
 Somehow survived to  
 Live and ponder why.  
 ~  
 - Gerald Alan Ney

NOTES:

\*In an interview about the filming of Ryan's Daughter, on Ireland's Dingle Peninsula, David Lean stated that they had to "tone down the green" in the film.

An Khe and environs are no longer in Binh Dinh Province. Pleiku, Phu Bon provinces and western Binh Dinh now constitute Gia Lai Province. Binh Dinh's western boundary is now along the mountain ridge from the southwest corner of Quang Ngai to the northwest corner of Phu Yen.

Watching Windmills in the Rain:  
Vietnam Monsoon Movie Memories - 11/21-22 /06

[Thanks to Jean DeBelle Lamensdorf for triggering the memories in Write Home  
for Me]

The main theme mingles with  
The sibilant shurrsh from  
The silvery pinpoints  
Of earthrushing raindrops  
Muting the images  
And music of the night's  
Feature, a transparent  
Ever falling curtain.

~

I watch the windmills  
Internal; stroke, counter.  
Crown and the lady fair  
Matching motives and wits;  
As I quiet my own  
Constant comment clockwork,  
Time out from work and war;  
Warm and halfway dry  
Under the poncho. Only  
My eyes, nose and boots  
Elementally exposed.

- Gerald A. Ney



Lighting Up the Twilight at Charlie's Behest  
or  
The Perimeter Duty Officer's Out of the Loop  
and the Battalion CO Gets a New One 07/27-28, 30/07  
[Guitar noodling in Country & Western manner in background]

Chorus:  
Up on a little bitty hill  
He was, Victor Charles,  
Long 'bout evenin' time,  
Rifle or two in hand,  
Harassment fire in mind,  
And maybe a bonus  
Plus size propaganda coup  
Afore twilight's over.  
Ay-yup! Ah-ha.

~ ~ ~ ~ ~  
V.  
Foot sore, back ached,  
Bruised and sweat laced  
Beyond dog tired,  
Second Bat troops  
Hunkered in Bunkers  
Mad more ways than one.

~  
V.  
Watching the wicked wire,  
Waiting on the night.  
Wondering what's out there,  
Wanting a release.  
No movie for them  
To mute the memory.

~  
V.  
No caissons rolled on  
That dusty tangled trail  
Of fruitless filing over  
Bonebreaking rocks.  
And booby trapped paths.  
Not even shadows to shoot.

~  
Chorus:

V.  
A long range prod  
Over intervening ville.  
The locals scramble  
Underground in a trice.  
An answering roar  
From the American line.

~  
V.  
At thirty feet below  
The base's central height  
The peace of ignorance;  
Not a mote of static  
The radio's silence to mar,  
Nor hint of storm.

~  
V.  
Will the major release  
The required jeep before  
Someone asks; the D.O.  
Thinks. his worst worry  
But bliss blown away  
With a clatter down the  
ladder.

~  
Chorus:

~  
V.  
What the hell's going on?  
Inquiring minds begin to  
sound  
Off from the general on down  
Through brigade CSM, Bat  
C.O.

To the secreted silver bar  
In his insulated sanctum.

~  
V.  
A soft answer to "Sir"  
Just delays the coming wrath.  
An oak leafed thunderhead  
Rumbles down range. Alert  
To sector butter bar:  
End mad minute or else.

V.  
"You want me to hold  
Their hands?" "If need be,  
Yes." The colonel's coming.  
"And why didn't you call?"  
A tense silence ensues  
While jeep and driver arrive.

~  
Chorus:

~  
V.  
The general's displeasure  
Downhill ran through C.O.'s  
Venting rained on the D.O.,  
Lowest ranked responsible  
For forty-five minutes  
Till drained and spent.

~  
V.  
No humans were harmed  
In this provocateur  
production,  
But property aplenty,  
From a hamlet's huts to hogs,  
Bullet blasted buffalo  
And chewed up chickens.

~  
Chorus:

~  
V.  
And before next day's dawn,  
Had their sarcastic say,  
The VC, to the field folk,  
"See what the Americans  
did!"  
And melted into morning  
mist  
Unscathed and untouched.

~  
Chorus:

- Gerald A. Ney

An Ode to an Old Jokester 12/05/06, 05/23/08  
[In memory of George Jessel's visit to LZ English]

An ancient apparition in khaki,  
Swagger stick at the ready, straight  
From First World War casting;  
Armed with jaunty jokes  
That creaked and groaned  
Before someone ever thought  
To plant rice in a paddy.

If the dust and heat  
Made him long for the chair  
With Gleason and their coffee  
Not one sign he showed  
And treated the troops  
Like New York first nighters  
Who'd bought hundred dollar tickets.

- Gerald A. Ney