

Gregory L. Abbott



VIET NAM VETS

We sent a generation of young men to Viet Nam to protect vital American interests on the other side of the world by keeping Southeast Asia out of Communist hands and, as a side issue, defending the freedom of the South Vietnamese.

We bravely defended the South Vietnamese by dropping tons of fire bombs, napalm and poisonous defoliants on their farms and villages; young men reared to lovingly care for pet dogs and cats were ordered to shoot old women and little children on sight because they might turn out to be guerrilla fighters.

A generation of young men who could not forget the terrible acts they had been ordered to commit in the name of their country returned to the United States; as a final escape from unremittent, unbearable suffering more of them have chosen suicide than were killed in combat.

Today, the Viet Nam vets ask of us only the most basic assistance that most of us, citizens who never risked life in service of our country, take for granted — care for their illnesses and disabilities caused by torturous memories and exposure to damaging chemicals.

Can the government which sent a generation of young men to the other side of the world in defense of its vital interests do anything less for these citizens who are injured physically, mentally and spiritually as the result of carrying out the orders they were given?

— Mary Jane Brewster



The Ceramic Art of
Kersti Hamann and
George Kettlewell
of Ocean Pottery, Cannon Beach



John Fekete

LAST ONE OUT

by R. Powers

The first time I ever saw Bernie was in basic training, in the chow line. He and several of the brothers were in front of my partner Preston, and several behind. "Hey, Powers!" "What?" "Where's your daddy live?" "My father's dead." "Yeah, well your father may be dead, but your daddy's living in South Louisville." Snickers and laughs all around. What the hell?

We finally got in the chow hall, got our food and sat down. Preston asked, "You know what they were saying to you?" "No, sounded like bullshit to me." "They're saying you're a bastard and your real father lives in Louisville. It's a big joke to them."

My ears got red, and I said, "I'll kick his black ass all over that parade ground!" "No you won't," Preston replied. "He's twice your size." You'll have to sucker punch him, he said, and hope you don't break your hand on his head. I got my punch in the next day when Bernie came around the door into the chow hall. Bam! Boom! I woke up on the floor. He had fought Golden Gloves in Louisvilles since he was thirteen, the same place Muhammed Ali came from.

Bernie and I got along fine after that. He would pick me up and throw me over his shoulder and say, "I'm going to give this whitey the fastest fuckin' mile he ever run." I was from Iowa and I had never seen a Black until I was sixteen. Prejudice was a word that was seen in Time magazine and never used in polite conversation. The term "Afro-American" was in vogue at that time and one night while on firewatch Bernie and I shot the shit around. I asked him what it was like to be an Afro-American. He looked me hard in the eye and said, "I ain't no Afro-American, I'm a nigger. And I'm proud of it. Don't give me any chuck bullshit about it. You dig?" "I hear you, Bernie." "Let me tell you something else, white boy with pretty green eyes. There's going to be a revolution in this country, and when it comes either you're with us or you're against us. No middle ground. You dig?" "I hear you, Bernie." "Right on. Now, some of the brothers and me are gonna be sailing out'a here like a

George L. Skypeck



"GOING HOME"

flock of badass crows and we're gonna smoke up some good herb. You comin?" "Man, I'm on firewatch!" "What they gonna do, fool, draft you and send you to 'Nam?"

Basic training was finally done. Bernie called me whitey and I called him nigger for the last time. No addresses were exchanged, but he said, "If I ever see your sorry white ass again, I'm gonna whup it again."

Going through military training you meet and snow a multitude of skinheads like yourself. Some you detest, others are okay. Some you never forget. I never forgot Bernie. Many times, sharing a bottle of Ripple wine or passing around joints, I told stories about him.

I got orders for Viet Nam. My first taste of the straight stuff, the real piss in the pants. Bullets, mortars, artillery and rockets, Cobra gunships, Phantom jets and Puff the Magic Dragon. Strange days in the life, but not so strange they wouldn't become commonplace. In a screaming frantic rush to stay alive and maintain, the most bizarre occurrences achieved the mundane — I've been here before and it's a mile away from how bad it can really get. The men who taught me jungle warfare would laugh at my shakes and wet pants and say, "Old Luke's out there and one of these days we're gonna have to get serious about our vacation in the sun. Gotta get that old asshole pucker factor up to ninety-nine-point-nine."

Nixon was in power, General LaVelle was illegally bombing Camdodia and Laos, and after several months of wading through the war my unit was getting ready to stand down. The first sergeant said we would all be sent to different line units, no more brotherhood, no more taking care of each other. I had just extended in 'Nam for four months to get out of the army six months early. Part of the bargain was thirty days leave in the states — back in the "world." "Why don't you and me team up and get a cushy slot in MACV?" one of my partners said before I left. I was shocked. Me a rear echelon motherfucker? No way. I had pride. When I got back to 'Nam I was assigned to MACV. But not as a Remington Raider or any kind of clerk. I was, as a senior advisor to the ARVNs said at a briefing, to run small unit incursions into indian country. Lucky me. The job would take a firm hand and discipline was everything, he said. I was already up to my stacking swivel with Mickey Mouse, but some shitbird colonel telling me to be firm with South Vietnamese troops was pure hallucination. Those poor bastards were more pissed off than I would ever be — I was at least getting out of the crap in one hundred and nineteen days.

While in the MACV rear, the fairytale world of the U.S. Army in Viet Nam, I scored a pound of Cambodian Red, very, very serious stuff, fit for the most jaded hemheads. I was righteously stoned one day on patrol when we uncovered a cache of Viet Cong weapons: AKs, B-40s, a recoilless rifle and a fifty-one caliber Chicom machine gun. Everything went out to MACV on the pick-up bird except for the fifty-one. I traded it for a case of Jack Daniels to help me through my last one hundred days.

After a few drinks of JD with companions back at the rear I put on my Ho Chi Minhs, wrapped a towel around my ass and got underway for the shower hootch. I was just hanging up my towel and preparing to get wet when a voice I hadn't heard in a year started right away insulting me. "Lordy, lordy, bless my soul, I just seen a whitey with a black asshole." It was Bernie. He was standing in the doorway, grinning at me. The army had made an armorer out of him, he said, then in its wisdom sent him out to the ARVNs. "I'm going out on ops like the rest of you sorry-ass grunts," he said. "I got some good CBR," I said. "Let's go get high, brother." "Don't call me brother. Call me anything but brother. That shit's all done with. You dig?" "I hear you, Bernie."