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Poetry

by Darl Wise

Southern Cross

Morris our RTO, calls me
his pale-skinned brother.
To rest of recon team, mostly black,
I'm the *White Rabbit*.
told it's a suburban white boy
scoring drugs downtown.
They liked me,
what choice did they have?
I was their squad leader,
mother all rolled into one.

They wore black braided
wrist bands, they gave me,
their cracker, a white one.
In the bush, skin tone
becomes irrelevant.

Read each other's letters
from home.
Spoke of going back
to the world,
sports, school,
sex, surviving...
but most talk was food.
Mom's baked beans, corner deli,
breaded channel catfish,
grits, me, New York pizza.
Arguing for hours,
almost coming to blows.

Descending, by chopper,
into LZ Buzzard
the mortar platoon below
sun bathes, drinking 3.2 beers
under the Confederate battle flag.
It flutters from their radio antenna,
a racist blue cross, white stars,
red background.

Later their Lt, Alabama boy,
fell, head shot, single
high velocity round,
mysterious sniper never found.

We returned to the bush,
a tighter team and never
spoke about it again.

Lt: Lieutenant, military officer

LZ: Landing Zone

RTO: Radio Operator

Ode to Boots

You covered my feet,
weathered over time,
a badge of battle.
No spit shine tip to look into,
no reflection of that lost child.
Your laces always tight,
A mother's knot.

How far did we travel
before they cut you off?
Others came home,
not you, discarded
like a pair of unwanted slippers
piled in a bloody heap
of clothing and bone.

Vietnam Revisited

Bringing medical supplies to hospital in Ha Tan – 1997

A man my age lies on a cot,
his brown face exposed to the wall.
Leg wounds a week old ooze.
A 30 year old mine went off, I'm told,
he was gathering wood.

I'm asked to take his picture.
He turns with narrowed eyes,
I aim, focus,
hate fills the lens.
I close my eyes and shoot

Dayl Wise was drafted into the US Army in 1969 and served in Viet Nam and Cambodia in 1970. He lives part time in the Bronx and Woodstock, New York, with his wife, the poet Alison Koffler. His poems have appeared in *The Veteran*, *Home Planet News*, *Universe at Your Door – The Slabsides Poets*, *Chronogram* and *More Than a Memory, Reflections of Viet Nam*. In his spare time, he runs Post Traumatic Press (PTP) and is the author of *Poems and other stuff* (PTP) 2004 and *Basic Load* (PTP) 2009. He is the editor of *Post Traumatic Press 2007* (PTP), an anthology of work by three generations of veterans.

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