

It Don't Mean Nothin

We drifted around the Vietnam countryside like a caustic mist blown by whatever winds chose to move us across rice paddies, through valleys or up into the mountains. Within this mist our reality was in razor sharp definition. We were surrounded in colors that could never be captured. We became tuned to every nuance of sound. Some so loud they would envelope you, toss you about in their wake. Others so slight, a leaf being brushed a click away.

There were days when the horrors were upon us, when the most unimaginable would be rewound over and over again, and still a drop of rain could be heard falling to the ground amid the screams and pleadings of the wounded, the dying.

We would hear one phrase over and over again, when no sorrow, anger or hysteria made any difference. When all you had left was to pull inside and wrap yourself in indifference and accept what fate is bringing you. Whether it was going on watch when you were so numb tired you couldn't think. Or a sunset off the South China Sea so intensely beautiful you hadn't the words to describe, or holding the body of a young man as his life faded away in your arms. You might say it to yourself in silence, or out loud, or hear it muttered by another soldier... "It don't mean nothin".

Even now, so far removed from that place by distance and time, the sounds still echo. A smell, a sound, a glint of sunlight off a metal object and it comes back in a torrent of disorientation. You never left. You've just been daydreaming of being back in "the world," a moment of panic that you don't have your weapon. That you'll blink and find you never left the jungle, that you're vulnerable, exposed. You stop breathing.

PTSD you think to yourself. That's what they tell you you're experiencing. Breath. Breath in, out, slowly, in, out. You're home now and it don't mean nothin.