

The Anderson Memorial Bridge

Lost at home on the last leave in 1969
out about, cast adrift
a drafted now a soldier with orders for Vietnam,
when I rediscovered the Anderson Bridge
I had crossed this drowsy little bridge many times
in buses, cars and now once more
aimless on my solitary motorcycle,
one hundred yards long
arching across the shallow dark silent River Charles
from Brighton my home town
to Cambridge my doorway to the world
two lanes wide each way and high in the middle,
forthwith today was apprehensively unlike any other
so long and lonely
on a shadowy cold pale November afternoon
starting across ...*not yet a quarter across*
abruptly I yielded to the bite of rattling dog tags
my barking incessant companions about my neck,
in the open caught in a crossfire
no cover nearby, it was time to surrender
into my future whatever it be
I had loved, felt the gentleness of a young woman
kissed in passion,
been caressed by her tender personality,
felt her touch my soul and I hers
what more could living bring
if I died 10,000 miles away in the jungles of Nam
...*not yet a half across now*
it could happen, it might happen
then this would be the last time
I crossed my bridge
I was not ready to die, I wanted to live
I knew that when I reached that distant shore
a bullet, booby trap, mortar round,
knife or bare hands, so many ways to die
so many ways to kill
...*nearly three quarters across now*
exhausted, I gave in helplessly
the conflict over came me to an empty end,
yes... , it may not be
to return, to fall into the totality of love again
to cross this little bridge to everything again
just twenty-one, so young, sinless
...*all but full across now*
riding down a descending treacherous slope
into a murky heartless faithless future.

First Night In Country November 27, 1969:

My first night in country, South Vietnam
all the fiery stars were out
marching across the depth
of the divided cosmos
i lay trying to sleep, gripped in private thought
soaked in humid steamy perspiration
on a replacement battalion barracks's cot
listening to the labor of distant jets and helicopters
when suddenly a unyielding medic
interrupted my still contemplative solitary insomnia
demanding immediately all O positives
to save an ambushed shredded
Frist Infantry Division grunt
six of us, drafted fresh infantry GI meat, FNGs
just across the big pond now in country
from that other world we called the States
to begin our one year tour of duty
we rode off as strangers into that desperate moon-less
ebony foreign first midnight
caught in a black hole dream
falling through an eerie twisted tunnel
of dimmed truck head lights
to a solitary field medical hut
with lamps that pushed out a lonely glow
stinging back a dark creeping suffocating
forbidding sensation of apprehension,
inside a desperate melancholy doctor overworked
painted a mess in deep wet psychedelic scarlet
impatiently looked at us six young bodies
and called for pints of our ruby young thick blood
a hurried nurse stuck our arms
quick as she could toil
she did not dare look into our eyes
though we were desperate for that simplicity,
from nowhere a vengefull torrential rain
began to fall with no remorse
throughout the remainder of that first night...
it beat the roof unforgivingly
it stabbed the ground relentlessly
it shouted in riotous unholy cascading voices
it drowned out our senses
it wet each and every earthly thing
and one and all the still and moving shadows too
it ran grotesquely downward
and puddled outward creeping slowly around us
all awhile we six waited and waited
trapped in placidity, mute, and numb
ready to give and give,

our blood brother died just before the dawn
without a name
wasted, not even a whimper of any kind
his tour complete
he was finally homeward bound
we six road off wet with sweat
baptized now to smell of death
silent into the sunless gloom we moved
into morning's colorless shadowy twilight haze
we went retreating the way we came
for our assignments
to division, battalion, company, platoon, squad
each privately preparing to meet almighty Mars
at his sacrificial alter
to learn more about the intimacy of death,
our humanity, and living our
sorry haunted lives.

Back Home From Vietnam

two days back home, ...in Brighton walking down a street
again i feel the ghost of my M16 rifle in my hands
my haunted empty sun burned hands at my sides
i don't want this,
four weeks back home, ...in midday downtown Boston
again i pull back a phantom M60 machine gun bolt
my possessed hands hold a newspaper
why can't i stop this ?
six months back home, ...in twilight Cambridge
again with my hallucinatory surrealistic M16 i draw a bead
on a screaming street light and softly squeeze
off a fictitious round
my obsessed cold blooded hands
shake in my pockets
will there be no end to this ?
dreaming, ...three years home,
again suddenly an intense vivid AK47 mussel is in my face
an inescapable flash explodes instantaneously toward me
i wake to my silent startled apartment again
draped in dark covert shadows again
and stare at the tranquil inert ceiling
again
what will come of me
is there no escape ?
it was not safe being back home
but..., but now those ghostly evil reflexive demons are banished
four and a half years being home
and a woman's true love
chased away those tactile spontaneous
moody primal possessed fitful instincts
now my hands hold hers, my eyes see hers
and in the night i fall to sleep holding her
finally i made it back home
"done with the compass, done with the chart"
safe at last, i made it all the way back home.

Arlington

Rows of still endlessness
white stones for eternity standing at attention
all becalmed
to the four somber horizons
when i found Jimmy
in that great pale dead sea
unbecomingly was he
waiting for me patiently
resting quietly
James Conrelius O'Reilly Jr.
Massachusetts
USNR
Vietnam
June 20, 1948
September 4, 1967
we talked while i cried
trying to make peace with the past

"So... What Was It Like In Vietnam?"

I counted the days until I would go home...

It's a wonderful experience to be able to suck in a breath and feel it fill my lungs

it's a beautiful country...

poverty is a brutal human quandary to behold, smell, and taste

the mosquitoes never rested...

war is a haunting, lonely, beastly occupation that mercilessly tortures, slashes and scars the soul,

it was hot, it was rainy, the nights were long...

i felt desperately alone, i barely survived my own self.

I liked to stare at the moon knowing it was the same moon over the states.

i was emotionally exhausted.