

## 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.*