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▶▶ July 2014 ◀◀

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If Veterans don't help Veterans, who will?

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China Beach

11/26 & 12/02-03/03

It was not in my war,
China Beach; just a name
Slapped on a series I rarely
Had time to watch.
Where you were,
When you were,
What you were,
Mattered.

NVA or Viet Cong,
ARVN, Ruff Puffs or Allies
Sea, Rivers or Land
Paddies, Plateaus or Mountains
City, Boonies or Base
The muddy Wet or dusty Dry.
Same country,
Same label,
Different setup,
Different war.

The uniforms look right
And so do the tents,
Yet know not the place,
Location unknown
Nor knew the name...
Had my own spots to mind.
An Nhon, An Khe, Phu Cu, Phu Cat
Qui Nhon, Phu My, Binh Dinh, Bong Son
Tuy Hoa, An Hoa, Bao Loc, Bien Hoa,
Quang Ngai, Chu Lai, Cam Ranh, Saigon
Mang Yang, Song Ba, Song Lai Giang
Nha Trang, Phan Rang, Nui Hon Cong.
The Cordillera Annamese,
The Camp Radcliff Golf Course
And the Cav's high horse,
English, Uplift, Illinois, Ollie
The Cham temple ruins
Korean antennas sprouting
Off One 'tween Nineteen
And the Qui Nhon spur.

China Beach, miles from me
Might have been in Tibet.
I cared not a whit.
For where I was,
When I was,
What I was,
That mattered.

Pouring over rolls of film.
That a foxhole there, or

Just a charcoal oven?
While slow cooked inside
Our own oven of a van;
Roast a bit more burning
Used film with diesel fuel,
Stir stick in the oil drum.
Your tax dollars up in smoke.
Then up and away, dangling
Telephoto lensed Pentax
In a bouncing Bird Dog
Or chattering chopper.
And on odd days playing
Perry Mason in fatigues,
A full fledged member, M I
JAG annex barracks lawyer
Keeping some accused kid
From time in Long Binh Jail,
No "six and six" in LBJ,
Loss of pay and busted rank.
Trial counsel next week;
Board member next month.
AWOL, asleep on guard,
Possession of pot or worse.

Casper platoon's gunships
Revvng in the morning,
Routine wake up for war
To start the day. And twilight
Volleyball, jungle rules,
To end it. Forefinger
Forever jammed at the net.
Ev'ning three salvo sixty
Millimeter mortars to follow.
Always missing the avgas,
Counter fire hits them not.
Ad nauseam the game goes on.

The boys at Corps HQ
A white colonial villa
They had; with hot and cold
Running water and hot
And cold running women,
A bedmate at night to protect
You from the sea breeze chill.
And they could usually go
to the beach for lunch.

Flush toilets, shade trees,
Sidewalks and air conditioned
Private rooms for pilots,
Equipped with fridge;
Squadron messes with food
Enough to feed the country,
Sufficient beer and booze

In the PX to float it; all,
With no liquor tax applied,
At your local Air Force base.

Tents for half a year
At English; then tin roofed
Shacks, assembly required.
Australian showers come
With a hoisted bucket
Sprinkler head fitted;
But better off by far
Than the grunts in the bush.

For better or worse
My own war was
In a faroff place
Not called China Beach.

~Gerald A. Ney~