

UNDER THE BRIDGE

The average age of the military man is 19 years. He is a short haired, tight-muscled kid who, under normal circumstances is considered by society as half man, half boy. Not yet dry behind the ears, not old enough to buy a beer, but old enough to die for his country. He never really cared much for work and he would rather wax his own car than to wash his father's, but he has never collected unemployment either.

He's a recent High School graduate; he was probably an average student, pursued some form of sport activities, drives a ten-year old jalopy, and has a steady girlfriend that either broke up with him when he left, or swears to be waiting when he returns from half a world away. He listens to rock and roll or hip-hop or rap or jazz or swing and a 155mm howitzer.

He is 10 to 15 pounds lighter now than when he was at home because he is working or fighting from before dawn to well after dusk. He has trouble spelling, thus letter writing is a pain for him, but he can field strip a rifle in 30 seconds and reassemble it in less time in the dark. He can recite to you the nomenclature of a machine gun or grenade launcher and use either one effectively if he must.

He digs foxholes and latrines and can apply first aid like a professional. He can march until he is told to stop, or stop until he is told to march. He obeys orders instantly and without hesitation, but he is not without spirit or individual dignity. He is self-sufficient.

He has two sets of fatigues: he washes one and wears the other. He keeps his canteens full and his feet dry.

He sometimes forgets to brush his teeth, but never to clean his rifle. He can cook his own meals, mend his own clothes, and fix his own hurts.

If you're thirsty, he'll share his water with you; if you are hungry, his food. He'll even split his ammunition with you in the midst of battle when you run low.

He has learned to use his hands like weapons and weapons like they were his hands.

He can save your life – or take it, because that is his job. He will often do twice the work of a civilian, draw half the pay and still find ironic humor in it all.

He has seen more suffering and death than he should have in his short lifetime. He has wept in public and in private for friends who have fallen in combat and is unashamed.

He feels every note of the National Anthem vibrate through his body while at rigid attention, while tempering the burning desire to 'square away' those around him who haven't bothered to stand, remove their hat, or even stop talking.

In an odd twist, day in and day out, far from home, he defends their right to be disrespectful...

Just as did his Father, Grandfather, and Great-grandfather, he is paying the price for our freedom. Beardless or not, he is not a boy!

He is the American Fighting Man that has kept this country free for over 200 years. He has asked nothing in return, except our friendship and understanding. Remember him, always, for he has earned our respect and admiration with his blood.

And now we even have women over there in danger, doing their part in this tradition of going to War when our nation calls us to do so.

Pray for Our Troops

Lord, hold our troops in your loving hands. Protect them as they protect us. Bless them and their families for the selfless acts they perform for us in our time of need. Amen