

What They Carried

They carried P-38 can openers and heat tabs, watches and dog tags, insect repellent, gum, cigarettes, Zippo lighters, salt tablets, compress bandages, ponchos, Kool-Aid, two or three canteens of water, iodine tablets, sterno, LRRP-rations, and C-rations stuffed in socks. They carried standard fatigues, jungle boots, bush hats, flak jackets, and steel pots.

They carried the M-16 assault rifle. They carried trip flares and Claymore mines, M-60 machine guns, the M-70 grenade launcher, M-14's, CAR-15's, Stoners, Swedish K's, 66mm Laws, shotguns, .45 caliber pistols, silencers, the sound of bullets, rockets, and choppers, and sometimes the sound of silence. They carried C-4 plastic explosives, an assortment of hand grenades, PRC-25 radios, knives and machetes. Some carried napalm, CBU's, and large bombs; some risked their lives to rescue others.

Some escaped the fear, but dealt with the death and damage. Some made very hard decisions, and some just tried to survive. They carried malaria, dysentery, ringworms, and leaches. They carried the land itself as it hardened on their boots.

They carried stationery, pencils, and pictures of their loved ones - real and imagined. They carried love for people in the real world, and love for one another. And sometimes they disguised that love: "Don't mean nothin'!" They carried memories!

For the most part, they carried themselves with poise and a kind of dignity. Now and then, there were times when panic set in, and people squealed, or wanted to, but couldn't; when they twitched and made moaning sounds and covered their heads and said "Dear God", and hugged the earth and fired their weapons blindly, and cringed and begged for the noise to stop, and went wild and made stupid promises to themselves and God and their parents, hoping not to die.

They carried the traditions of the United States military, and memories and images of those who served before them. They carried grief, terror, longing, and their reputations. They carried the soldier's greatest fear: the embarrassment of dishonor. They crawled into tunnels, walked point, and advanced under fire, so as not to die of embarrassment. They were afraid of dying, but too afraid to show it. They carried the emotional baggage of men and women who might die at any moment. They carried the weight of the world, and the weight of every free citizen of America.

THEY CARRIED EACH OTHER

Author Unknown

Remember them this Memorial Day