

G. Hamid

The Boy I Never Knew Whose Name I Will Never Forget

It had been a week since I landed in-country, first Long Binh, then Pleiku, Da Nang, and finally Qui Nhon. I was checking into the hospital where I would be stationed for the next year. I had given my 201 file to the HQ staff and had walked a couple of hundred yards to the Emergency Room to give my medical records to the hospital staff. I entered the ER and saw a line of soldiers that stretched to a counter in the back of the room. I got in line. On the left side of the ER were soldiers and local civilians waiting to be treated. On the right were the wounded.

Right next to me was one of those soldiers. He was lying motionless, seemingly asleep. I looked for a wound but couldn't see one. I did see his name patch which said Racey. A nurse came to check the soldier and she removed his oversized plastic helicopter crew helmet. Behind his head I saw blood pooling on the stretcher. She brushed some hair off his forehead and gently squeezed his hand. Then she was called to another wounded boy.

After awhile I felt tapping on my shoulder and turned around. The guy behind me said "Wake up" and pointed to the counter where a nurse was calling me. I stepped up to the counter and the nurse asked me what my problem was. "Nothing" I said, "I'm assigned here and need to give you my medical records." She took my folder and said "I'll get someone to take care of you." Soon a Spec 4 named Dave appeared and took me through a door to the medical lab where, for the next year, I would work.

Dave introduced me to two Vietnamese techs working in the front of the lab. One handled CBCs and the other urinalysis and parasitology. We walked towards the back where four GIs were very busy. This was the blood bank and they were cross-matching blood units for the wounded soldiers I had just seen. There were two large refrigerators with glass doors; the left one for units matched to patients, the right one for unmatched units. In-between was the blood board. The blood board was a grid where the patient's names, blood types, and number of units were listed. Clear plastic covered the board and a wax pencil was used to write the information. On one line was written Brad Racey.

I was watching the guys work when I saw a nurse come to the bank with some matched units. She handed them to one of the techs who removed the paperwork from each unit and returned the units to the unmatched refrigerator. Then he went to the blood board and wiped away a name.

A long time has passed since then and I have come to the memorial to find his name. I walk down the path. I walk past many names. I find the panel, I find the row, I find his name. I reach out to touch it, but I cannot.

Someday, if this world can learn what these soldiers know, I will touch his name, and say "Yours was the greatest victory. Your legacy is peace on earth." And then I'll look through this black granite, into his eyes, and say

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"Brad, you did not die in vain."

But that time is not now. All I see are my own eyes. And all I can say to the boy I never knew whose name I will never forget is,

"I'm sorry."