

From Version 2007

That he had been a Green Beret seemed to him now more a fluke than anything else, an act of chance rather than choice. After graduating from high school, he didn't know what to do with himself, so he took a guidance counselor's suggestion and joined the army. Once in the army, he tried to do his best, as he always tried to do with everything, and ended up a paratrooper. Once he was a paratrooper, he was qualified to become a Ranger; once he was a Ranger, he was qualified to become a Green Beret. Along the way he progressed up through the ranks, to sergeant and then master-sergeant. When he was a Green Beret, they sent him to a little war that few people knew was going on in Southeast Asia. There he spent most of his time living on his own in the mountains with a tribe of Montagnards. He became so assimilated into the life of the village that the elders gave him his own tribal name; he collected, though he wore it only on special ceremonial occasions, when he knew it expected of him, a necklace of ears.

. . . his own thoughts drifting to a scene that happened to him years ago in the mountains of Vietnam when he was living with the Montagnards, a scene that had begun to occur to him earlier today but which he allows to come back fully to him now, After I had been there a few months and led them in their first firefight they invited me to climb the tall ladder and join them in the community house, they were all sitting around on the floor and made a place for me in front of the urn, it was full of rice wine with banana leaves floating on top and the one I called Toothy because his name sounded something like that and because he didn't have any handed me the straw and said "Drink, Green Pau, it will take your dreams away and make you strong," and later the shaman took off my boots and socks and placed an old axe head in front of me, placed the bracelet on the axe head and placed my bare feet on the bracelet and began chanting,

painting my feet and the bracelet and the axe head with rice wine and then I don't remember anything until I woke up the next morning in my own hut, and without realizing he is doing it leaves the kitchen in the middle of another of Sharon's stories and goes through the house to their bedroom, rummaging around in his sock drawer until he finds at the very back the dull brass bracelet and slips it on over his wrist, holds up his arm to look at it and wonders what happened to that young man who did all those exciting and dangerous things, where did he go...?