What I Lost in the War

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Available at: https://ir.uiowa.edu/iowareview/vol45/iss1/34

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Small things: pocketknife with three blades, a good knife, although I’d broken one of the blades.

Cassette of the second Blood, Sweat & Tears album, purchased on R&R in Sydney—almost worn out anyway, so not a great loss, and I could hear “Sometimes in Winter” in my head anytime I wanted.

Socks. A poncho liner. Packet of pre-rolled joints I bought from a mama-san on a road near Phu Bai, but I think they were stolen by Stephenson, that pothead, so they probably don’t count.

Larger things: 35mm camera purchased through the PX. Bought another camera, but ten years later lost all the photos I’d taken in Vietnam when my office burned during a summer fire that swept down the San Bernardino hills, a brief, hot exhalation that left the building next door untouched but took my office to the ground, transformed wood, glass, floors, typewriters, and all those sentences created on typewriters into piles of ash and debris.

Lost friends, of course, and abstract things: faith, certitude, the future. The Army sent me home after 13 months, 10 days before I turned 21, but they wouldn’t release my discharge papers till I turned in my field jacket—wouldn’t even let me keep the damn jacket—couple of weeks before Christmas, 1970.