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Carry-On Luggage

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Carry-On Luggage Jack Frazer

What have you to declare? / asked the man at the window

Orders / next assignment / Ft. Wolters, Texas
Lieutenant's bars / aviator wings / medals
A duffle bag / dirty uniforms / old boots
Ninety dollars / fifty piasters / twelve dông
A Zippo lighter / engraved / *Skill not Luck*
A Seiko watch / from my R&R / in Hong Kong
A Montagnard sash / a Núng pipe / souvenirs
A P-38 / in case I / get hungry
Dog tags / in case I forget / who I am
A buck knife / to cut belts and straps/ if I crash
Scars / from friendly fire / on my right hand
Joe's last letter / from Gail / before he was killed
My Dear John letter / from Suzanne / now married
A song / *We Gotta Get Out Of This Place* / by the Animals
A book / *Street without Joy* / by Bernard Fall
Twelve months / or five days / or five years
An older face / at your window / going home

What's in your bag? / asked the woman at the VA

The fear of sudden movement / loud noises / and crowds
The smell of nuoc mam / human waste / and rice paddies
The feel of a cyclic handle / monsoon rain / and a poncho liner
The taste of canned bread / spiced beef / and apricots
The rhythm / of Huey blades / beating in my ears
The discovery / of a classmate's / prosthetic leg
The presence / of dead and wounded / in my dreams
The sight / of eight names / on a black wall
The prospect / of a visit / from Agent Orange
The support / of family, friends / and strangers
The rejection / of those calling veterans / losers
The camaraderie / of shared experience / and service
The knowledge / I was more lucky / than skillful
The memories / of things best / forgotten
The belief / that things change / for the better
The question / what do I do / now?