



Leg

VOICE

K. GORDON TIDBALL 


VIRGINIA TECH.
PUBLISHING


ABSTRACT

This poem is written by a servicemember who is a Gulf War era veteran, served as both enlisted and officer in the US Army National Guard, and after a break in service due to an injury, continues service in a State Defense Force.

CORRESPONDING AUTHOR:

K. Gordon Tidball

Cornell University, US
kgtidball@cornell.edu

KEYWORDS:

poetry; poem; patriotism;
survivor's guilt; military service

TO CITE THIS ARTICLE:

Tidball, K. G. (2023). Leg.
Journal of Veterans Studies,
9(2), pp. 11–13. DOI: [https://doi.
org/10.21061/jvs.v9i2.364](https://doi.org/10.21061/jvs.v9i2.364)

My clay mug is warm
hand-fired artisan
artifact
announcing the contented
contents
pretense
of a middle class
daze.

Mocha colored
sugared
and milked
of all that bravado
and hard-bitten life.
Sweetened
not cold
not black.

Guilt is sparse
parsed like powders
of saccharin
of simulacrum
substitutes
for mourning the minefield
of patriotism
paternalism
of patsies and privates
and platoon after platoon
of pretenders
in a drama
not
their own.

Dust on my bars
a tan on my scars
and a tentative air
of having been there
is all bullshit
when the news
turns from vets
to empty shoes ...

Boot
after boot
after boot.

...but in my ruck
is training
and a trust
and a portrait
of a long
lost
Leg.*

* A “Leg” is a slang term for a non-airborne qualified soldier.

ARTIST STATEMENT

I am a Gulf War era veteran. I served as both enlisted and officer in the US Army National Guard, and after a break in service due to an injury, I continue service in a State Defense Force. I am also an academic working with veterans and military families. I have taken great solace in the arts since my teens, and have been writing poetry and music for over 30 years. I am also a dabbler in and great supporter of the visual arts. This poem was inspired by a recent observation of ROTC (Reserve Officers’ Training Corps) cadets doing PT (physical training) and my reflection upon the more than 30 years that have passed since I raised my right hand in service to my country. It reflects deep tensions among a trio of perspectives. The first being a deep-seated patriotism and sense of service frustrated by feelings of survivor’s guilt and failing to meet personal potential. The second a broad sense of disillusionment with the outcome of post-9/11 wars and the attendant feelings of pessimism and discouragement regarding the manipulation and misappropriation by politicians of selfless service, honor, duty, and valor. The third perspective is that of the long view, of reflecting upon motivations for service today, and of how we can encourage our children to serve, given the first two perspectives, or if we can.

COMPETING INTERESTS

The author has no competing interests to declare.

AUTHOR AFFILIATION

K. Gordon Tidball  orcid.org/0000-0002-9856-8731
Cornell University, US

TO CITE THIS ARTICLE:

Tidball, K. G. (2023). Leg. *Journal of Veterans Studies*, 9(2), pp. 11–13. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.21061/jvs.v9i2.364>

Submitted: 16 June 2022 **Accepted:** 21 August 2022 **Published:** 14 March 2023

COPYRIGHT:

© 2023 The Author(s). This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC-BY 4.0), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited. See <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>.

Journal of Veterans Studies is a peer-reviewed open access journal published by VT Publishing.