

## THE EYES OF KOREA

I wanted to escape  
the eyes of POWs  
hunkered down  
resting from filling sandbags  
staring quiet hate at me.

I was afraid, dismayed  
shakily indignant  
what had I done to them?

The old man's eyes  
told me nothing  
as he stood under his huge  
A-frame load of sticks  
waiting for me to decide  
if he was enemy or not.  
Did he care? I couldn't tell.

The smiling prostitute's  
wrinkles overran her face  
without touching the eyes.

Contempt, brutality  
hard-cored the  
National Police Lieutenant's  
otherwise artless eyes.

He liked our trucks  
hated our drivers  
pursued his graft in secret.  
He gave me a big, big smile  
after shooting his own  
sleeping guard.

The eyes over the prisoner's  
split, swollen cheekbones  
flashed helpless rage  
with each impact  
of the Police Lieutenant's  
gloved and weighted hand;  
stoically dulled  
at the questions in between  
closed altogether  
when he passed out.

A young soldier  
killed his first enemy  
then talked too much,  
eyes convulsing  
as fear and triumph  
relief and shame  
took turns battering his future.

The sergeant's eyes were tired  
when he told him,  
"The choice wasn't yours.  
Forget it."

Another soldier's eyes looked within  
at specters unimaginable  
as he tried to tear away his face  
from shame, just shame.

My arms tired  
holding his down all night  
compassion stretched  
from talking reason  
to the unheeding ears,

of a casualty  
who would receive no Purple Heart.

Two boys frozen together  
in each other's arms.

I couldn't see the eyes  
I knew were in there  
looking at their last dreams.

One boy,  
hands on stolen wood  
to build his hut,  
stood wide-eyed, paralyzed  
trembling until half way through  
the heated C-ration.

Then he smiled  
all the way up to his eyes.

The farmer's eyes,  
humbly shadowed  
under downcast brow,  
were warmly grateful  
shaming us who could only bring  
money and things to support  
his compassion for orphaned children.

I wanted his eyes to find mine.

Wilson Powell -- 11/16/93