

Marching

With thanks to Gunnery Sgt. Jim, United States Marine Corps

The first Native American
I ever met and not one to forget:
Cherokee, dark skin, black hair,
muscles tight as banjo strings,
steel stern, shoes polished like ice,
uniform perfectly fitted with three rows
of combat ribbons parading across his chest,
all proclaimed quietly that he had marched
where I was afraid to go.

Although my name tag clearly said BUYERT
he always called me Biggun:
“Biggun, what the hell, you think that’s a salute?”
“Biggun, you dumb bastard, you’ll never learn to march.”
“Biggun, son-of-a-bitch, you got two left feet?”
“Biggun, damn it all, give me twenty-five pushups.”
“Biggun, have you never fired a god-damn gun?”

The week after my graduation,
we met by chance near the commissary.
He clicked his heels, came briskly to attention,
saluted me as I approached, and said,
“Good morning, Ensign Buyert, good to see you.”

His Purple Heart marches with me, still.

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