

In Zone, #1

David F. Freschi

Sitting in battalion aid station

Kibitzing, storytelling, bull shitting

As young men are wont to do

Four corpsmen wrapping up the day

Instruments clean, squared away for the dawn shift

A single muffled shot some distance away

Not a thought given, no problem

Breathless marine pokes a pale head

Through the entry flap, "Doc, come quick

A shooting, A Co. area! Now, now!"

"New guy, grab your kit and go, go!"

"Right behind you, we'll get the doctor."

Running, slipping, Unit 1 flopping

Burst through the tent flap, cards scattered on the deck

Pot of loose change, coins scattered

Some bright, others washed with red wetness

Empty .45 locked open on a bunk

Circle of faces, from shock to anger there

A pale corpsman kneels over a still figure

Clumsily, shakily trying to insert an airway

Shove him away, a growl rasping my throat

See the entry and exit holes, kneeling in spreading pool

Cap the holes, get the airway in

Smooth, just like it's supposed to be, just like practice

Start to breathe and mouth fills

With another young man's blood

**Race doesn't change the taste and
One convulsive, bubbling gasp
Death chuckles, closing eyes' light
Never a moment of combat fought
Gone in a card game, an "F.... in" card game
Shouts of anger, grief and rage spill
A poisonous cloud on the group
Gunny bellows, barks orders, caps things down
A strong hand on my shoulder, the Dr.
"He's gone, nice job son."
Nice job? Nice job?!
And a tour of duty starts
No battle, but still the taste
The coppery, salty taste and a light going out**