

## Screaming Sailor Glass 6"x3"x4"

I was in South Bend, Indiana at the time. A student and I were working late in the sculpture studio. I had to stay until she was done, so that I could lock up the building. Having completed my own projects I started to play with some clay. The fires within me began to burn; I lost all awareness of time. The fire in me continued to get hotter and hotter as a face appeared in the clay. I did not recognize it, I did not know where it was coming from. I only knew that as the battlefire raged in me, that the act of creating the sculpture was an excellent outlet for that intense energy. After a time she came softly behind me, asking why I was sweating and acting so strangely. I had no answer.

In the beginning she had been in another room, but for some reason I had attracted her attention. She had been standing watching me now for some time instead of working on her own project. With a bewildered look, she asked who that screaming sailor was. I was as bewildered as her. It had just come out of my hands. I did not get the answer until later that night when:

I remembered my 20th birthday party. It was Tet, 1967, on the Pacific Ocean several miles off shore where all day long the cannon fodder of the 9th Infantry Division had been getting ready to hit the beach in Vietnam. As I rode in an assault barge toward the beach with the rest of the 2/47 infantry, each man carried everything he owned. Except! but most importantly, WE HAD NO BULLETS! FOR ANY, OF OUR WEAPONS.

I was standing in the second rank from the door, which was the entire front wall of the landing craft. A door too large to see over, impossible to see around. The craft was a shoe-box-like thing with high walls, no top, and with a little tree-fort-like thing with a sailor in it who was

driving the landing craft. He was the only person who could see out or hear its radio.

He had a loud speaker and was screaming news reports that a battle was raging on the beach; that other floating shoe-boxes were being blown up, sinking with all the heavily loaded grunts like me. Into the Saigon sea. The screaming than when the door dropped open; we were all to attack the beach in full force. Screaming than the V.C. were ready to gun us down as we ran up the empty breach. With no bullets in our weapons to fight back with! Screaming the of course; we could use the bodies of dead GIs to block the V.C. fire. The fear was equally alive for all the hundreds of men packed in, standing shoulder to shoulder, asshole to bellybutton. Sardines in a open can. Tropical sun roasting us even more than our body heat.

I began to scream back, "They can't do this to me, it's my birthday. @#!?\*@#\*&!" Another man near me began to scream it was his birthday, too. @#!?\*@#\*&! That day was the first time in my life I met someone who shared my birthday within a few hours. That tall blond-haired California surfer became a close friend of the Italian from East Chicago Harbor, after all he did talk like me. Talking to him took my mind off the screaming sailor and the beach a bit. At least that was better than thinking about it.

Believing the sailor and wanting a chance to live, I set myself to think of ways to increase my survival odds. I surmised that when the door would fall forward, it's huge hinges would be at the bottom, a foot or so away from me. Remembering that when doors open there is a space at the hinge; I believed that a door that large and thick enough to keep out the ocean would have a space large enough for my entire body to pass through.

I took off my gear, listening for the barge to scrape the beach; that sailor screaming every second of the time. Everyone else prepared to run

out as fast as possible up the beach to the tree line. I took off my gear the didn't even notice me. The sailor was describing carnage to motivate us? Visions of the longest day movies danced in my head. My blood racing, a steam locomotive within my vanes, containing the explosion until the door dropped, trying to contain these forces until the door dropped. Sailor screaming, thousands of GI's dying on the other side of our thick, huge, safe door about to fall away.

It did! I could see out for the first time. The beach was vary large, men were falling to the ground near the tree line and not moving. I dived under the door, crawling in the mud and water of the Pacific Ocean, while others ran over my protecting roof. I peered out of my hiding place to see what was happening. They were met by a band and pretty young women in sexy exotic clothing placing flowers leis around there necks. They were laughing at me, calling me yellow, coward, and more. I sank below the door humiliated. Looking around under the door for the first time. I saw three other grunts, two of my best friends, and my blond birth brother. All had the same plan; happily I didn't feel so stupid. After all I was in good company.

Sheepishly we crawled out from under the door and out of the water and heard the sailor laughing louder than anyone else, over his mega phone yet! As he jeered and ridiculed the four of us, all our rage erupted, directed at the screaming sailor on top of the barge; he the only person who had known what was really happening. He had decided to terrorized us for fun.

All I wanted to do was get him, smash that laugh down his own throat. We scrambled up the tall wall of the barge. On top of the wall, the edge was wide enough for us to run single-file at him the length of the barge. His jeers choked off. **Yes!!** Laughter turning to terror as we closed in on his red sweaty rat face. **Yes!** He got out of his little steering booth and ran away on the edge of the same walls we were chasing him on, until he jumped into the ocean as thousands on the beach cheered us on. "KILL

'IM!" FUCK HIM UP! They obviously wanted a piece of him, too. He decided to swim out to sea not! To the beach. Prudent I would say.

Dozens of MPs stopped us from ever getting the chance to beat that jerk's sense of humor out of him. The MPs escorted us back to our gear. Picking it up we joined the others and walked to the trucks. The ocean was cool, but with each step we got hotter as we walked away from the ocean. I could see the men in front of me collapsing. Then I realized the men I saw from the barge sprawled on the ground, had passed out from the heat, as I collapsed from heat prostration myself. This sculpture let all that out of me. Funny, I guess, I didn't even know that was in me.