

# Poetry from Dennis Etzel: “The War in Coming Out,” “The War in Men,” “The War in their Duties”



SELF-ASSURANCES FENCED IN / *image by Amalie Flynn*

**The**

**War in Coming Out**

Today we honor those soldiers who fought for our country against oppressing forces. It was a matter of showing up. Like Leonard said, *They gave me a medal for killing two men and a discharge for loving one.* Howard told me how it was a point-blank question in the draft line for Vietnam: *Are you a homosexual?* Howard didn't lie. The man started screaming, *We have another f-g here. We have a queer one here.* It was a matter of showing up.

**The**

## **War in Men**

When they enter, the guards strip them down and beat them. The guards shout, demanding compliance. They are shown their quarters. The guards continue, tell themselves, it's either us or the prisoners. They don't care why they are here. The guards didn't choose to be here. They say, *The prisoners must have done something, or they wouldn't be here.* As small as serving time to be sent back to the front or as big as waiting to face prison in the US. Little self-assurances fenced in and in solitary confinement.

## **The War in Their Duties**

My father joined the National Guard to avoid being drafted. When the draft came, the National Guard was sent over. Same old song and dance. Cliff said he saw the action through the helicopters. He saw the bullet holes and repairs needed, as his duty was to fix them. Cranked up I Can't Get No Satisfaction. Gordon told me he served in Vietnam, too. He played French horn. He played Reveille. He played Taps.