

Bummer

Harry Chapin

His mama was a midnight woman
His daddy was a drifter drummer
One night they put it together
Nine months later came the little black bummerHe was a laid back lump in the cradle
Chewing the paint chips that fell from the ceiling
Whenever he cried he got a fist in his face
So he learned not to show his feelingsHe was a pig-tail puller in grammar school
Left back twice by the seventh grade
Sniffing glue in Junior High
And the first one in school to get laidHe was a weed-speed pusher at fifteen
He was mainlining skag a year later
He'd started pimping when they put him away
In jail he changed from a junkie to a haterAnd just like the man from the precinct said
Put him away, you better kill him instead
A bummer like that is better of dead
Someday they're gonna have to put a bullet in his headThey threw him back on the street, he robbed an A and P
He didn't blink at the buddy that he shafted
And just about the time they would have caught him too
He had the damn good fortune to get draftedHe was a-one bait for Vietnam
You see they needed more bodies in a hurry
He was a cinch to train 'cause all they had to do
Was to figure how to funnel his furyThey put him in a tank near the D.M.Z.
To catch the gooks slipping over the border
They said his mission was to search and destroy
And for once he followed and orderOne sweat-soaked day in the Yung-Po valley
With the ground still steaming from the rain
There was a bloody little battle
That didn't mean nothing
Except to the few that remainedYou see a couple hundred slants
Had trapped the other five tanks
And had started to pick off the crews
When he came on the scene
And it really did seem
This is why he'd paid those duesIt was something like a butcher going berserk
Or a sane man acting like a fool
Or the bravest thing that a man had ever done
Or a madman blowing his coolWell he came on through like a knife through butter
Or a scythe sweeping through the grass
Or to say it like the man would have said it himself

Just a big black bastard, kicking ass
 And just like the man from the precinct said
 Put him away, you better kill him instead
 A bummer like that is better of dead
 Someday they're gonna have to put a bullet in his head
 When it was over and the smoke had cleared
 There were a lot of V.C, bodies in the mud
 And when the rescued men came over
 For the very first time they found him smiling
 As he lay in his blood
 They picked up the pieces
 And they stitched him back together
 He pulled through though
 They thought he was a goner
 And it force them to give him
 What they said they would
 Six purple hearts
 And the Medal of Honor
 Of course he slouched as the chief white honkey said
 Service beyond the call of duty
 But the first soft thought was passing through his mind
 My medal is a mother of a beauty
 He got a couple of jobs with the ribbon on his chest
 And though he tried he really couldn't do 'em
 There was only a couple of things that he was really trained for
 And he found himself drifting back to 'em
 Just about the time he was ready to break
 The V A stopped sending him his checks
 Just a matter of time 'cause there was no doubt
 About what he was going to do next
 It ended up one night in a grocery store
 Gun in hand and nine cops at the door
 And when his last battle was over
 He lay crumpled and broken on the floor
 And just like the man from the precinct said
 Put him away, you better kill him instead
 A bummer like that is better of dead
 Someday they're gonna have to put a bullet in his head
 Well he'd breathed his last, but ten minutes past
 Before they dared to enter the place
 And when they flipped his riddled body over they found
 His second smile frozen on his face
 They found his gun where he'd thrown it
 There was something else clenched in his fist
 And when they pried his fingers open
 They found the medal of honor
 And the Sergeant said
 (Where in the hell, he get this?)
 There was a stew about burying him in Arlington
 So they shipped him in box to Fayette
 And they kind of stashed him in a grave in the county plot
 The kind we remember to forget
 And just like the man from the precinct said
 Put him away, you better kill him instead
 A bummer like that is better of dead
 Someday they're gonna have to put a bullet in his head

Songwriters

CHAPIN, HARRY F. Published by
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