

FINAL RECKONING

By Helen Rafferty

[To a marching beat]

They say it takes something
 'Way bigger than you
To straighten your head out and make you see true.
 And that's been my story, from the first Reveille
 'Til the last bugle sounded
 On that lonely last day.

I go back far, to World War Two
 Enlisted light-hearted a short tour to do
Was shipped with my buddies to far western seas
 And in the Pacific we were brought to our knees.

The enemy moves made things grim real fast
 I started to wonder how long I could last
On watch for torpedoes no one dared relax
 Then one hit our ship – I was stretched to the max
Around me my buddies were going up in flames
 I wanted to save them, I called out their names
They died but I lived, and grief hit me hard – still
 I kept on going, my world blasted and scarred.

Saw action at Midway, took a stand 'gainst great odds
 One hellish night – seemed like battling the gods
 The margin for error was too paper-thin but
Something inside me just rose up to win.

Got men who would trust me, they followed my lead
 A strategic position we captured and freed
At the cost of a dozen lives willing to bleed
 I carried one out – he had given his all
This brother, a hero whom I had seen fall

And as I was mourning him propped on my arm
His last words were, "Hey . . . no cause for alarm
I'm going where I hope I'll see you someday
My body will be dust
So play Taps if you must . . .
But then right away I want someone to play
Our bugle's bright wake-up call – *Reveille.*"

Well, fully enlisted I chose to stay
"Til honorable discharge stole me away.
That long stretch of life I will never forget
I've seen more than most . . . and now I'm a vet. Yep,
A vet with that faraway look in his eye
Which maybe you've never quite understood why?
No glorious medals, no pomp and glamour
No – the service I gave was rewarded 'way more
No kidding. You see,
It made a man out of me.

And now there is something
I'd like to request
When my last breath is done and you lay me to rest
My story won't end though my body'll be dust –
So the bugle should sound
(play Taps if you must)
A bright final note at the end of the day
Our spirited wake-up call –
Reveille.