Rooster
BY ALICE IN CHAINS

Ain't Found A Way To
Kill Me Yet
Eyes Burn With Stinging
Sweat
Seems Every Path Leads Me To
Nowhere
Wife And Kids And Household Pet
Army Green Was No Safe Bet
The Bullets Scream To Me From Somewhere

Here They Come To Snuff The Rooster
Yeah Here Come The Rooster
You Know He Ain't Gonna Die

Walkin' Tall Machine Gun Man
They Spit On Me In My Homeland
Gloria Sent Me Pictures
Of My Boy
Got My Pills 'Gainst
Mosquito Death
My Buddy's Breathin'
His Dyin' Breath
Oh God Please Won't You Help
Me Make It Through

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mailto:holliday@erie.net
There have been many songs written about the conflicts of war. Some of the songs have been written in protest, some in support, and many, like this one, about the experiences. The songs about the experiences of war are rarely about the person themselves, but about someone that they know and care about. This song is about the trials and tribulations of the *Rooster* during the Vietnam War. Jerry Cantrell, Jr. of Alice in Chains, wrote this song in honor of his father, Jerry Cantrell, Sr. Jerry’s father had told him the horror that he experienced during the Vietnam War and how he was given the nickname *Rooster* by the guys in his platoon. This is a song about the experiences of war and the deep feelings that come out of it.

The experiences of being in a foreign place, experiencing different cultures, different ways of living, different views of life, and being away from family and loved one’s is a stressor of life; especially for those in the military. These stressors are greatly intensified during times of conflict and war. The opening stanza of *Rooster* tells of one of the daily stressors that is experienced during a time of war, Cantrell, Jr. wrote: “Ain’t found a way to/Kill me yet.” This describes the almost daily experience that soldiers had to face while out on patrols during Vietnam; during any war for that matter. Being shot at and the possibilities of being killed is simply a fact of war.

Cantrell, Jr. also describes the environmental conditions that his father faced in the tropical climate. “Eyes burn with stinging/Sweat” describes the intensity of the heat and humidity found in a place that lies in a tropical zone. Cantrell, Jr. also tells of the threat of malaria in the verse: “Got my pills ‘gainst/Mosquito death.” Malaria is often experienced when one does not have a
build up of natural immunities to an area with poor water sources and heavy mosquito populations. The military is notorious for distributing pills that ward off the effects of malaria.

Military personnel, during times of conflict, do not have the many daily distractions that people do back home, such as: paying bills, running to the store, and cutting grass. This allows for a time of reflection and thought on their past, present, and future. Cantrell, Jr. reveals his fathers thoughts while serving overseas in this verse: “Wife and kids and household pets/Army green was no safe bet.” His father was trying to make it in the world and decided that joining the Army would provide a better living for his family. The Army then sends him overseas to fight in a foreign land away from that which he loves and is trying to provide a better life for. Jerry’s father’s thoughts of frustration are reiterated by Cantrell Jr., when he wrote: “Seems every path leads me to/Nowhere.” His father feels that every decision that he has made for himself and his family keeps leading them to nowhere, the opposite of what he is striving for.

Another aspect of military life that allows for reflection are things that are occurring back home while their away that they have no control over. The Vietnam War was a very protested conflict that did not have the support from many of the people from back home. The military personnel were rotating back home, from a year long tour in hell, and expecting to come back as heros; if not heros, at least respected for the hell that they had gone through. Cantrell Jr. captures this in a very emotional verse: “Walkin’ tall machine gun man/They spit on me in my homeland.” Here’s a machine gunner that is very proud of what he has done and endured for his country and for the South Vietnamese citizens. He is probably walking proud in his uniform and for this people that protest the war are actually spitting on him and what his uniform stands for.

The meaning behind the nickname Rooster comes from the repeated course as written by Cantrell Jr.: “Here they come to snuff the rooster...You know he ain’t gonna die.” Cantrell Sr.,
the *Rooster*, was a one of those men that walked with confidence and everyone knew that nothing would happen to them. Some people have the characteristic and stigmatism that projects confidence as if they can not be touched. This is how Cantrell Jr. portrays his father and how it is claimed that Cantrell Sr. received the nickname *Rooster*.

During times of war and conflict every person has a breaking point. Even the brave men that feel as if they are untouchable have their moments where they feel a loss of control. Cantrell Jr. wrote this as the last lines of the song:

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My buddy’s breathin’  
His dyin’ breath  
Oh God please won’t you help  
Me make it through
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This is probably describing his father’s, or any soldiers, thoughts during a fire fight with the opposing forces. His buddy is laying there taking his last breaths, there’s nothing that he can do, chaos is occurring all around them, and he’s begging God to get him through this mess. The *Rooster* has hit the limit of what he can endure.

This is a very powerful song about the Vietnam War, but these same thoughts, experiences, and emotions are felt during every war or conflict. Jerry Cantrell, Jr.’s lyrics masterfully capture the experiences that his father had to endure during the conflict and the pain that he had to return home to. Layne Staley, the lead singer for Alice in Chains, provides the haunting voice that captures these emotions. These lyrics were probably therapeutic for both Jr. and Sr., as they are for others that have experienced the torment of war.