

As You Were  
—  
The Military Review

*Volume 3*



# AS YOU WERE

THE MILITARY REVIEW

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# ***As You Were: The Military Review***

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## **Poetry**



# The Humble Dog



Chris Heatherly

*for Adgar*

The soldier's best friend  
Is not his rifle, or the man  
At his side.

The soldier's best friend  
Is and ever shall be  
The humble dog.

The dog is a noble beast,  
Dignified, loyal, intelligent  
But still possessing the wolf.

The dog and soldier pledge their lives  
And love to each other  
As one with the pack.

The dog and soldier share the burdens,  
The privation, the fatigue, the mud  
And the brotherhood of war.

The dog and soldier return home  
Changed and hardened and with  
An unbreakable bond.

The soldier, many years later,  
Remembers his dog  
And the bond they shared.

The soldier draws comfort  
Knowing his dog patiently  
Waits once again.

A dog's best friend  
Is and ever shall be  
The soldier.

# Casualties



John Saylor

“You’re as good as ten of them”  
The Recruiter said no more.  
It was “Good Bye” to mom and love  
And I marched off to the war.

I was the new replacement,  
They were so glad to see.  
No one cared to ask my name,  
They called me “F.N.G.”

I listened to the Sergeant  
As he rolled another “joint”  
He pointed to the jungle  
And said “You are walking **Point.**”

A new man has no value,  
No past, no history.  
The rest were close to going home,  
The “expendable” was me.

I struggled through the days, the weeks  
As the leader of the pack.  
I learned the trade of find and kill  
No thoughts of turning back.

Now as a combat veteran  
Though I was just a kid.  
In manly shoes, and face to face,  
With all those things I did.

Soon I became a witness,  
To reactions in the fight.  
Young men's faces changing,  
At the "**elephant's**" first sight.

Alive, surviving in the pack,  
No sign of victory.  
Counting days till I go home,  
No more the "**F.N.G.**"

War had taught me many things,  
Most would be left behind.  
My wounds will heal and life goes on,  
But what about the mind?

I'm puzzled by the image,  
I see each time I shave.  
Shouldn't life be happier,  
On this side of the grave?

Of course I recognize him,  
My conscience helped me see,  
For all I did to stay alive,  
The one I killed was me.

# Long Binh, 1969



Dennis Underwood

We'd been over-run,  
All of us killed.  
That was what the Times said  
In big HEADLINE letters.  
But they were wrong.  
We were fine, just fine.  
So they let everybody  
Make one call home  
From the one phone on the base.  
After almost an hour  
My turn came.  
The operator put the call through  
To make sure I talked to you.  
After several rings,  
The operator in the States said  
"I'm sorry no one answers,  
Maybe no one's home."  
Then I heard our operator say,  
"But someone has to be home  
This is a call from Viet Nam!"  
And you picked up the phone.

# Chiaroscuro: War



Dennis Underwood

## The Wife

The warlord has called you off to war.  
How long must I be without you?

How splendid you look  
    astride your fine horse:  
Prancing in the sun,  
Hair sleek and beard braided,  
Gold thread shining  
    in your robe.

The warlord has called you off to war,  
Will I be old when you return?

Will you come back,  
    with a new horse to ride?  
Walking through the street,  
Hair gone white, beard undone,  
A woolen robe held closed by a sash?

The warlord has called you off to war,  
Will I have died  
    before you come home?

Will you come walking back,  
    where the town used to be?  
Stumbling, through  
    the pebbled grass,  
Bald head scarred,  
    clean shaven,  
Wearing your defeat  
    and your disgrace?

The warlord has called you off to war,  
But I smile and wave  
    as you canter off.

## The Soldier

The warlord has called me off to war,  
Be proud while I am gone.

My horse is a big one  
    and good for war.  
My sword arm is strong.  
I am assured of victory.  
    When I return,  
I will bring gold ribbons for your hair.

The warlord has called me off to war,  
It will not be long before I return.

We will return  
    with banners held high,  
The streets crowded with celebration.  
I, at the lead, will sit tall and straight  
My horse laden with silks and wines.

The warlord has called me off to war,  
I will return  
    to harvest the rice.

The village will cheer  
    as we come from the west  
Bringing the fruits of the war  
    for all to share.  
That evening, hair flowing  
    down to my waist,  
You and I will celebrate  
    my glorious victory.

The warlord has called me off to war,  
Be joyous awaiting  
    my triumphant return

# Welcome Home



Dennis Underwood

Welcome home and thanks for your service.  
I hope this doesn't make you nervous.  
Everyone here wants to wish you well.  
The noises you hear are not bomb shells.  
You've spent all your time staying alive.  
But now you are home and you can thrive.  
There aren't any jobs for you right now.  
And school's not an option, anyhow.  
Here's your savings, so go find a place.  
I have already forgotten your face.

# Joined the Army



D. Cooper

Would have never joined the army  
I would have never gone to war  
If I hadn't struggled every day  
With my dreams and what they are

my thoughts were bold  
Too young and smart huh?  
time to move, to do  
do you think I am a fool?

I knew the line, time's on my side  
Three meals, health care  
Done in 20; college too!  
Be all that you want to be, yeah.

Girl, Are you fumbling about  
trying to find the grand plan  
Freedom for  
the fight to believe in.  
Opportunity.

join up! Get a bonus.  
See the world.  
Fool  
there's no backing out  
when you are standing on the dunes.

Girl you see those children begging?  
Running from the boom boom bomb  
Iraqi babies crying  
blood on the tanks.

The coldness of your heart  
Did you sell your soul for three a day



A cot, and what?  
Fool. Why are you here.

Women don't make war  
Women make peace  
Women save the babies.  
Oh god where is my soul?

# A Meeting in Amman



Farzana Marie

The list boasted benefits  
for 100,000 names—sons of a country  
whose leader proved as faithless  
as the duped-power who trusted,  
handed him the list,  
vanished.

Two men met in Amman  
even as the list bled, as it  
led the latest so-called caliphate  
to doorsteps of soldiers  
now called apostates.

The American colonel, retired,  
tired of excuses,  
could not open his mouth, once full  
of promises.

Instead, the Sahwa leader opened  
his pockets, vomiting dozens  
of U.S. military unit coins  
over the table and ground,  
his voice an earthquake:

*what good are these now?*

# LOPO Actual



F.S. Blake

A tiny dot on the horizon  
A speck on the water  
Inverted oblong lollipop  
Dangling below you a sweet pot of valuable meat  
Dangerous claws ... but you must be dumb  
Find your way in but not out?  
You deserve to be sold into my hot casserole of butter and  
    breadcrumbs  
Nothing lazy about this one  
The pot did all the work through its mere existence  
Don't hit it with your boat  
A tricky man-made iceberg of crustaceous death

# Quahog



F.S. Blake

Buried in sand and rock and ocean for years  
My solitude a trickle of salty tears

Hidden from sight and love  
Hard shell protects

My life gone in a flash like gunpowder  
Don't take me for your chowder

# Memorial Day Tribute



Kateri Walsh

*Today, on Memorial Day weekend, I think of my father in the depth of the enemy drenched jungle in Vietnam. I think of how his platoon took on fire and a fierce ambush from the*

*Viet Cong. I can visualize the fear and determination in these young Marines' eyes, fighting for their lives. I can only imagine the pain they endured when they realized life was slipping from their last breaths. In the arms of their brothers, calling for their mothers, their wives, their children who would never again have a night wrapped in their daddy's arms.*

*My heart bleeds for the horror my father's eyes have seen.*

*For his men to die, to be injured severely and fighting for his life, not knowing if he would ever see the light of day again. My father, a hero till the end—his life was spared, thank God. That's why I'm here. My father fought, and I thank*

*his men who died protecting him. Thanks to those men in the jungle and the Lord above, and can say amen to my life.*

*Something I will spend with great grace. I will not disgrace my father, his men, by wasting what was given to me. I will write till the ink runs dry of the pride I feel for all those who went before me, traded their lives for mine.*

*What greater gift is this? God grants us one life on this earth, and gives us the best of the best, the Marines. To defend us, our rights, our free beliefs, our freedom. Freedom is not free. So bend your knee and thank the Lord for those that died for our accord! Amen, Thank You Jesus, for the gift of life!*

**Fiction**

# Last Dance



Michael P. Lambert

The jungle slipstreaming beneath the inbound chopper was like an expansive garden, scented with the perfume of wild rhododendrons, bougainvilleas and rotting orchids. The chopper's blades were beating the syrupy air with a rhythmic *whump, whump, whump* that was somehow oddly reassuring.

The crew was scanning the horizon, looking intently for the yellow smoke that was to mark their destination landing zone (LZ). Spread out beneath them as far as they could see was an undulating sea of alternating darker and lighter green foliage. After an hour of tracking across the sea of green, the pilot spotted the yellow smoke, dropped to tree top level and raced towards it. The pilot centered his craft in the middle of the LZ and the chopper flared up and hovered a foot above the earth like a tipsy dragonfly.

Their mission was to collect and exfiltrate a two-man Air Cav forward observer (FO) team, Renaldo and O'Malley, who had been inserted in the bush two weeks ago.

The FO team was squatting at the edge of an LZ they had carved out of the jungle the day before. Right on time, they saw the chopper coming in at tree-top level, maybe two clicks away. O'Malley, the team leader, chucked three fresh yellow smoke grenades into the treeless LZ, making a second triangle of columns of spewing smoke that quickly enveloped the clearing.

“Jesus, LT, they can’t miss this LZ with the smoke storm you’ve puffed,” said Renaldo.

“Why fuck around about it?” O’Malley said. “We need to get the hell out of this place.”

O’Malley, a Second Lieutenant, was six feet tall, and had the lean, rangy torso of a fencer, pale blue eyes, an infectious smile and a shock of unruly blond hair atop a white-wall haircut. He had a craggy, deeply lined face of someone who spent lots of time in the sun.

Renaldo, a Spec 4, was a strikingly short man with coal black hair and coal black eyes to match, and comical, toothpick-sized legs.

“Here we go, pardner,” O’Malley yelled above the din of the chopper’s blades. “Last dance.”

The two men grabbed their M-16 rifles, radio gear and rucksacks, went into a low crouch, and started open field running in tandem toward the Huey, with O’Malley leading.

The chopper danced its drunken dance just above earth. The two door gunners were manning their M-60 machine guns, sweeping the tree line from side to side, firing what they called “recon by fire,” often a waste of valuable ordnance, but the din they generated was reassuring to the rescue team.

About twenty yards into the FO team’s dash to the chopper, shells from at least a half-dozen Soviet 82mm mortar tubes started exploding in the LZ. One round hit so close that it knocked O’Malley face forward, his ears ringing and his upper back burning white hot. He struggled to his feet and looked back and saw that Renaldo was sprawled on his back, a death mask gaze staring to the sky, a shredded mass of red, white and green splotched on the earth.



“The VC had all day to zero in on the LZ we cleared from the racket made by our damn chain saws yesterday,” O’Malley thought.

The door gunners in the waiting chopper had opened full up with their M-60 machine guns, pouring it on and shredding the tree line with hundreds of rounds per minute. The pilots were screaming at O’Malley: “Hurry the fuck up! We’re outbound now, with *or without* you!”

Everything went into slow motion.

Without hesitating, and thinking “no one left behind,” O’Malley ran back to his dead companion and threw his limp body over his shoulder. He staggered forward, lurching in a zigzag pattern, trying to avoid the mortar rounds that were now sprouting on the LZ all about him. As he got to the door of chopper, which was wobbling a few feet off the ground, he saw dozens of shrapnel chunks tear through its paper-thin olive drab metal skin. With the mortar shells exploding like drops of rain on a pond surface, and the staccato explosions of the chopper’s machine guns, O’Malley, tears streaming down his face, shoved the ragdoll body of his friend into the chopper’s cabin, and then collapsed at the door’s edge.

The machine gunner grabbed O’Malley’s bare, blood-slick right arm and yanked him aboard, and went back to emptying his belt of 7.62mm shells into the distant foliage, with seemingly no effect. Still, the mortar rounds rained down on the LZ without letup.

The chopper lurched up, its turbine engine screaming, and the smell of burning oil filled the cabin. The LZ slipped away beneath them, and suddenly the mortar rounds stopped raining down. The machine guns went quiet, and the smell of cordite hung in the air.

The only sounds now were the thud of the chopper blade beating the thick jungle air, and the ear-piercing protest of the engine.

O'Malley, now lying face up on the deck, rolled his head to the side and looked at his dead buddy sprawled next to him. "We never had a chance," he muttered to the lifeless form. "Not a fuckin' chance."

A chopper crew member knelt next to O'Malley and gently removed his fatigue shirt.

"How bad is it?" O'Malley asked, trying not to show fear.

"It's pretty bad, sir. But I think we can stop the bleeding for now. Don't think you're gonna check out today. But there's a nasty chunk of shrapnel lodged in your back. I am afraid to yank it out up here. You might bleed out if I do."

"It hurts like a bitch," O'Malley said. "Can you stop the bleeding?"

"Can do." The soldier expertly dosed, plastered, and taped the gaping wound around the shrapnel piece with antiseptic and gauze.

O'Malley was slipping into unconsciousness, but was suddenly jolted awake when, without warning, the chopper blades went *whump, whump, whump* and then stopped spinning, as if an on and off switch had been thrown.

Wind was rushing up through floor, ear-piercing warning alarms and flashing lights were going off, and one of the pilots was screaming something unintelligible.

The chopper spun listlessly downward out of the brilliant blue sky, a squat green metal and glass hulk tumbling gracelessly to the earth, crashing nose first into a swift-flowing brown river and sinking quickly below the surface.

Their war was over.

# The Lucky Penny



Daniel Charles Ross

rounds was zippin over my head at the speed of sound and bangin into the dirt all aroun raising little dust devils to mark the spots where you didnt wanna be a second ago. we was shootin the hell outta them but runnin low on ammo and the resupply chopper was still 18 minutes out but comin. it was gonna be close but if this job was easy any damn fool could do it. when a bullet nick the top of my helmet i drop behind the berm and duck my head. supposably too late for that but its a reflex you cant shake. war teaches you things like duck when you get shot at and put direct pressure on a suckin chest wound. so i took a little nick in my kevlar and i duck and when i got the damn dust out my eyes thats when i found the penny. a penny is one cent american and it was just layin there in the dirt and the stones fercrissakes. the damn bad guys dont spend pennies so where did it come from. i picked it up because i always found money back home in the world. i found a 50 once and we ate pizza that night biggern stuttgart livin large and a couple beers and paid on the light bill too. in school you find money all over if all yuz do is look down alla time and i found beaucoups of money in my life. so i pick the penny up and wiped it on my bdus and held it to the light and the damn bad guys i swear tried to shoot it off my hand. their bullets are not strong as my lucky penny though and when i shoot back it taste like beer.

# Whiskey Tango Foxtrot



Kama Shockey

The first time I fell asleep next to my wife after I got back from the ‘Stan, I put my hands around her neck and tried to choke her out. She smacked me across the face, woke me up, but the worst part is, I didn’t stop for a few seconds. I snapped out of it before I really hurt her, but what if I didn’t, you know? *What the fuck?* I was an unholy mess. If she had any sense, she would’ve left then.

As it was, Alex wouldn’t touch me the rest of the night, wouldn’t come near me. She looked a helluva lot like the scared, bag-of-bones feral dogs in-country. Wide-eyed and panicky, like I might hit her. The scary thing is, I might’ve. What the fuck did I know about what I was capable of?

Next day she comes in the bathroom while I’m shaving, suitcase trailing behind her. Subtle. “Where you going?” I wanted to know. I let the water run and stared at her face, all scrunched up. I tried not to look at the red imprints of my hands she couldn’t cover up with makeup. The rest of her skin was ghost white.

“My mom’s. Just for a while. Turn off the water; you’re wasting.”

“You gonna tell her what happened?” I should have been ashamed to ask, but shame did nothing for me anymore. I’d crossed a line way far back when it came to me giving a shit.

“That’s what you’re worried about, Hank? Really? Fuck you.”

“I’m not worried about your mom, I just think we should keep this to ourselves, Alex. Until I get my stuff figured out.”

“My mom’ll notice either way, don’t you think?” She pointed to her neck and my cheeks and neck burned in response, probably turned the same shade of red. How the hell did I let that happen? What if I hurt our daughter?

“I’ll pick up Bella on the way out,” she said, like she was answering my question. I’d only seen my daughter for five minutes in the last seven months and she was already being ripped away from me. I can’t say I wouldn’t have done the same thing though. I was fucked up. Unsafe.

“Call and let me know you guys made it.”

“Bye, Hank.”

\*\*\*

She came back a couple weeks later, knocked up and full of ultimatums. Yes, I’d go to counseling if she stayed. Yes, I’d try to change my MOS. No, I wouldn’t mind if she slept in the other room for a little while, until she saw that I was following through.

That was her catch phrase—*follow-through*. I washed out at MARSOC—I lacked follow-through, should’ve trained harder in the swim. I fucked up in the one English class I took on base—wouldn’t have happened if I had follow-through, studied harder. She had follow-through in spades, though.

“You ever gonna come back in here?” I called out from our bedroom three months later. She was still in the spare bedroom, wasn’t starting to show yet, but I could hear her throwing up in the back bathroom. She wouldn’t let me hold her hair back the first time I

went back to help, so I stopped trying. I heard the toilet flush and her soft *shuffle, shuffle*, making her way towards me.

She was standing outside my door looking like the walking dead—she isn't one of those girls who wakes up pretty if you know what I mean—a line of spit hanging from her chin. I pointed to it, and she wiped it off with the sleeve of her bathrobe. *Fucking disgusting*, I thought.

"No, I am not. I am just following through on my end of the promise, Hank."

"Oh, you mean your promise to be a blue-balling bitch if you don't get what you want the minute you fucking want it?" She didn't even flinch. I was a Class A asshole now, full of anger at all sorts of stuff I couldn't control. I took it out on her, of course, because no one else would put up with me. I kind of figured it was her fault for not having the balls to really leave. It was like a dare: *how fucked up will I have to be to get you to go?*

"Yes, that promise, the one we made to each other after you tried to kill me, but I stuck it out. If I'm going to stay, you're going to do the work. Follow through with your end, get a counselor, and we'll see."

Follow through. Fuck that. I went outside and smoked a cigarette instead.

\*\*\*

She moved out of the spare bedroom after she had the baby and we needed the space. Forget romance or forgiveness or any of that shit, we were practical about the whole thing. And I never followed through. Reenlisted and got ready to deploy as a grunt. Two more times.

\*\*\*

All of that was three years and two deployments ago, but for some reason it's all I've been thinking about the past two days as we sit like sardines in a flying tin can headed home again from the 'Stan. Same shit, different day, different lifetime it feels like. Time does anything but fly when you're overseas or gearing up to head back out. Somehow me and Alex have two girls, and I'm coming back from the suck for the third time. I didn't think life could get worse than Fallujah three years ago, but per usual I was wrong. There were a few minutes—like right after the donkey incident—when I thought we'd be okay, that I'd be able to be there for her. Looks like that's fucked along with the rest of it. I'm coming home to a wife who won't get a clue, and a dog—*my* dog—she sent to die at the vet's and keeps his ashes on the mantle like that'll fix making this decision without me. What the fuck? I leave to defend this country and I'm not part of the family anymore? Don't get a say in what happens? I throw back another pill doc gave me for my cheek. Plus an extra for good measure. Take out the photo of Chesty, my dead mutt, and rip it in half. Doesn't matter now, does it?

I'm on the C-130 next to Miller, whose head is buried in the same Stephen King book he's been rereading since his knee got blown out. When he's not reading, he's writing. Probably some pansy-assed feelings and shit. I'd be worried about him if I didn't have my own combat ghosts. My rifle is across my chest, making it impossible to get comfortable. Still, I don't know how I am supposed to turn it back to the armory in a few hours. I've lived with that hunk of metal like she was my wife for seven months and who knows how long working up.

“You excited to be the fuck outta here?” I ask him. We haven’t spoken much since Langford died.

“Mmm.”

What the fuck is “mmmm?” I want to ask, but I leave him alone. That boy’s a goner if he doesn’t man up, start working out whatever he’s got going on underneath that high and tight. I heard through Gunny that the Corps’s gonna medically discharge him when we get back anyway. Poor fucker.

This flying cesspool is filled with tan cammies that haven’t been washed in a hot minute and Marines that are just as disgusting. I look around and realize I don’t know more than half these guys and the rest of them I know too much about. Like Miller. The last conversation we had in country was pretty fucked.

\*\*\*

“What are you doing when you get home? First thing after a shower?” I asked him as I used my dull razor and bottled water to rape my cheeks. I expected him to say, *Kiss the kid, fuck the girlfriend. Maybe not in that order.* Miller is pretty quiet, but he has a wicked sense of humor when he lets loose. We were at the bottom of the pit, our “bunk” by the bridge we guarded. It was a couple days before the explosion.

“I dunno. Look for a job? I’m getting out.”

“The fuck? Didn’t you sign on for another go?”

“Nah, just an extension. To deploy, take care of the kid’s medical expenses, Sarah’s pregnancy bills.”

“So what’re you gonna do if you get out? Work at Home Depot or some shit?”



“Maybe.”

“Whiskey Tango Foxtrot? You know nothing’s gonna be like this. You wanna work for the man after all the stuff you’ve been through?”

“Won’t be so bad.”

“Miller, what the hell is going on? You alright, brother?”

He was quiet, staring at the dirt wall across from us, letting handfuls of the sun-baked sand run through his fingers. Normally this kid washed his hands every time he sneezed—hated germs, and especially hated the mercury-fine sand that bore into everything we wore, everything we ate, everything we touched. Something was up.

“Miller?”

“Yeah? Oh, well, Sarah left, took Johnny with her, so I’ll just work wherever. I’m not too worried.”

“Whoa, man. That’s some serious shit. You okay?” I didn’t know what to say. I knew Sarah, thought she was fine as hell—even caught her checking me out at the gym once or twice before she was knocked up, with her freaking killer brown eyes that made winking feel like an invitation for sex—but this was fucked. I wondered if Langford knew about Miller’s plans, about Sarah leaving. Those two were inseparable, so hopefully Langford could talk him outta leaving the Corps, where at least he had his brothers. Shit.

“Yeah, fine. Hey, wanna play some poker?” We did, and I never brought it up again. We got blown up by the donkey and kid two days later and Langford died. My fault. No one said it to my face, but I know they all were thinking it, could see it in the way they wouldn’t look right at me any more. Miller especially. All his little quirks turned into big ones, meant more than just combat crazy was going on. Sarah

leaving could've been something he worked through, but losing her and Langford the same fucking week was just too much, except no one knew it then. Just like everything else in the Corps, we were too late with Miller.

\*\*\*

The wife and I've been better since that first deployment, but I still can't understand why she stuck around. What the hell did she have to gain from being handcuffed to a guy who might finish the job he started three years ago? What if, after all this time, I couldn't just be slapped awake? Yeah, I hadn't hurt her again—not like that first time—but I wasn't any good to her either. Sarah left Miller because she was afraid of the same thing. Protected her kid. I couldn't help thinking about her all the time now, and not just those come-fuck-me eyes. She'd sent me a letter after the explosion, the first line apologizing for leaving Miller, like it mattered to me. I barely knew her, or him, it seemed.

*Dear Hank, Staff Sergeant Conner (which one?!),*

*I am sorry for leaving Adam, for what it must have done to him, but I couldn't stick around and watch him disintegrate in front of me, in front of his son. I'll bet you're wondering why I am writing you...*

I was wondering. She went on to ask me to watch out for him, blah, blah, blah, which I was trying the fuck to do, but Miller wanted nothing to do with me when we lost Langford and Lopez, then nothing to do with anyone. I'm gonna be in debt to her if he doesn't come

around? I'm pretty sure Alex would tell me that per usual I have no follow-through, that because I made the wrong call with Langford and he landed on a bomb, that I can't even take care of my own men, but she has no right to talk. She couldn't even keep my goddamned dog alive, and had the nerve to replace it with a yapping puppy the girls picked out. She hadn't done shit to keep this family together except not leave. Even Sarah had the good sense to realize that wasn't enough. I wasn't going to tell Alex. About any of this—Langford, Miller, Sarah—any of it.

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When we touch down there is applause and a shit ton of “Oorah!” from all of us. We're just so fucking happy to be off hajji soil. Germany's not so great from what I hear, but no one's trying to shoot our bird outta the sky, so there's that. The best part about Germany? We each get two drinks at the tiny airport bar.

“Hey, Miller. Wanna grab a drink?” We're taxiing now and I feel motion sick sitting sideways. I pop another pill.

“No, thanks. I'm gonna read for a bit. Maybe sleep.”

“Your nose has been in that book for three months, and you have the whole fucking Atlantic to crash. Come get a beer. You'll feel better being with the guys, letting off some steam.”

“I kinda want to be alone right now. Thanks, though.”

“Fine. Fuck it, you know where we'll be.” I think about asking him for his drink tickets, but he's being so fucking weird, it's not worth the hassle.

We don't get to leave the terminal, which is probably good since we're smelly as fuck, but we can toss 'em back. Gunny is passing out

drink tickets when the plane stops moving. “Two each,” he says, like we’re gonna be able to handle more than that right now anyways. Seven months without a drink and I’m gonna hit the floor after a couple G&Ts. I just want to get shitty so I can fall asleep on the way to Alaska. Then to California. Two more planes and a bus.

American soil again, won’t that be nice. I’m actually looking forward to seeing the girls again. I wonder, though, if Sarah will be at the homecoming. My stomach flips a little when I think about her—tan from running outside in JT Park, sports bra peeking out from her work-out top. Looking up at me from under those lashes. Maybe a wink. Jesus. I’m half-hard thinking about it. I need to get my head straight. Twenty hours till home. To Alex. Fuck. I walk to the front of the plane, put my arm around Benson, the resident Mormon in my squad.

“Yo, Benson. You’re not gonna use those drink tickets, are ya, buddy?” He pulls a headphone out of his ear, smiles—that shit-eating sheepish grin that makes him look like he’s ten—and hands his tickets over to me. “Whatcha listening to?” I ask him, trying to be polite. I really don’t give a fuck, but he was nice enough to ensure I won’t wake up till snow country.

“Something I picked up in Leatherneck,” he says, and pulls out from under my arm. “Have fun, Sergeant. Be safe.” Responsible to a fault, this kid.

“Will do, Benji, will do.” I look around, trying not to seem too pathetic, but I don’t want to drink alone. Too much has happened in the past two months, too much sand and blame and death I’m not

ready to sift through. I know there'll be plenty of time for that when I'm home. Plenty of need for that, too.

I catch Doc's eyes and smile, holding up my four tickets. "One for you, Doc. Join me for *ein bier*?" I ask, because I have no clue how to say "gin and tonic" in German.

"Hells yes. Let's do this. I'm ready to get fuuuucked uuuuup!" he shouts. Some of the guys look at him, most of them laugh because, shit, they're lining up to do the same damn thing. Detox. Unwind. Chill the fuck out and hope to God we don't try to strangle our wives when we get home.

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I got the usual packages from the girls while I was over there—drawings and books and shit. Same stuff every time. I was glad to get them, don't get me wrong, but there wasn't any thought put into any of it. I didn't read the books, used them to prop up my busted rack instead. They were the type of shit Alex reads, romances and happy endings. Fuck that. I only had walls for like three weeks out of the whole goddamn deployment, so where was I supposed to put up Bella's art, Nora's scribbles? But I got a few letters from Alex this time. She was trying, but we both kind of knew there wasn't anything left to save. I stopped calling her after the injury. Couldn't do the lies anymore. The last letter she sent just pissed me off.

*Dear Hank,*

*I understand why you won't talk to me, won't open up. I know something happened over there that you aren't willing to*

*dive into over the phone, but at some point, you are going to have to. If not for me, then for the girls. They need their dad...*

What the fuck? The girls had their dad. I just didn't know what to say that wouldn't sound like me covering up for killing Langford or blaming Alex for killing Chesty. I'm surprised she mentioned it, because she's got to understand by now I won't talk about anything that went on over here. I wasn't going to be guilted into telling her my sob stories so she could judge me too. Bitch.

I was sitting on my rack, ready to push out on another mission, pissed and hot and covered in fucking sand from my last ride. I tore up that letter and took the one from Sarah out of my cammie blouse, careful not to tear it along the edges where it was wearing thin.

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Miller shows up at the bar and asks to borrow my lighter, so I tell him where it is, in my blouse. He comes back a few minutes later, beet red, and shoves me.

"What the fuck?" My drink spills and I look at him like he's got one chance to explain himself or it's fucking on.

"I could ask you the same thing, Conner."

"That's Staff Sergeant Conner to you, Miller. Don't you fucking forget I outrank you. You're not outta the Corps yet."

"What is this?" He's holding Sarah's letter. *Fuck me.*

"None of your goddamn business, that's what." Dammit, why didn't I just throw that letter out? I need another drink.

“This is from *my* girlfriend. How the hell did you get this?” The way he says “my” makes my skin crawl. Doesn’t he get it? She’s long gone.

“She’s not your girlfriend anymore, brother. C’mon, let me buy you a drink.”

“Screw you, *Conner*. You are the most worthless fuck here. You’re worse than Hill. At least he didn’t kill one of his brothers.” I don’t even know I am on top of him before I am. I hit him once, in the nose, and one squirt of blood comes out, lands on the ground in front of me in a splatter. He stumbles back a little and the bar goes quiet. Miller’s eyes are huge. He throws the letter to the ground, but it takes forever to get there, just floating between us until he walks away towards his shit at the window. When I know Miller can’t see me, I grab the letter and tuck it in my back pocket. I turn back to the bar and Doc hands me a drink. It’s whiskey, which I don’t do, but I don’t give a fuck anymore. I toss it back and ask for another, plus ice for my fist that’s all kinds of lit up. Use the next one to slip another pill under my tongue when no one’s looking.

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So it turns out that I have truckloads of follow-through when it comes to drinking. I don’t do that shit halfway, and by the time we go to get back on the plane, I am stumbling, muttering profanity as I knock my shoulder into every goddamned seat on the way to mine.

We’re on a civilian flight this leg, and those of us that aren’t tanked are trying to bribe the flight attendants for either a lap dance or a shot of something they can hide in their cammies. The flight attendants are cute, those of them that are female and under sixty, but

I'm too tired to get my balls busted by Gunny for trying to cop a feel. Under different circumstances, maybe it'd be worth it, but right now I just want to pass the hell out.

When I get to my seat, way in the back of the motherfucking plane, for Christ's sake, I see Miller across the aisle. He's reading that *Gunslinger* book again and it looks like the cover's about to fall off. He looks up and I nod to him. His left eye is swollen and his nose is blue-black. He just puts it back in the book like he doesn't see me. Fine. Fuck him.

I'm sitting next to Doc, who somehow got three extra drink tickets and did back-to-back shots of Crown. His head's in between his knees and I kick him in the boot.

"You throw up on me and you're grassed," I tell him.

"Uuuuggghhhh." Right. Stupid fucker.

I close my eyes and wait for takeoff, which I never feel. I am out cold before the safety brief.

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I wake up to someone shoving my shoulder, which is bruised from stumbling on the plane before takeoff.

"Christ, *what?*" I ask, before I open my eyes.

"Get the fuck off the plane, Sergeant." Whiskey Tango Foxtrot. It's Gunny and he looks amused, which is never a good thing. Man is a sadistic prick.

"Sorry, Gunny, thought you were Doc."

"I said, get the fuck off the plane."



“Yes, Gunny. On it.” I grab my duffle and sling it over my good shoulder, careful not to take out Gunny because I know pushups would fuck me up right now. I still have a good buzz on.

When we get out into the terminal, we aren’t allowed to drink this time. Too many of us got wasted and puked on the flight here. No shit. What did the CO think was gonna happen when he let 300 Marines loose in a bar after seven months of sobriety and getting shot at? Sometimes, I swear, the stupid outranks the sane in the new and improved Corps.

I decide to brush my teeth because I taste like ass after drinking beer and eating whatever mustard shit they had for the pretzels in Germany. I can’t stand myself, so I know I’ll bowl over Alex when I see her.

I see Miller in the men’s head and want to fix things after sucker-punching him, though I’m not sure what good it will do. Maybe ask if he’s heard from Sarah, if she’s rethought leaving, but he won’t meet my eye. What a squirrely fucking dude he’s turning out to be. I think about the homecoming, all the families there in their best red, white and blue, flags and balloons and shit. I get that the only reason I’m into Sarah is because she had the guts to leave this shitty life, but it doesn’t stop the other part of me that wishes she will be there. I imagine her, arms outstretched for me, not Miller, but know deeper down than my libido that if she was really in front of me, she’d be just like Alex, unforgivable for staying. The wives will be dressed up, those who aren’t towing six kids behind them at least. The girlfriends in short skirts and no panties, I know because that used to be Alex. Not anymore. She’ll do her hair and makeup, but that’s about it. We can’t

fuck the minute I get home because we'll have the girls. They'll be so big now. I take a break from imagining Sarah in a tiny dress, her toned arms bare and still tan, to think about my daughters.

I've been messed up again since the explosion—angry and wondering if throwing Langford out of the way was the wrong thing to do—so I haven't been good about calling them, any of them. Gunny comes in and looks at my reflection in the mirror. He doesn't say anything, but he doesn't have to. His eyes tell me to hurry the fuck up, we're wheels up for home. *Home*. I hope I don't see Sarah there, that she is the only one with a clue, that she's long gone from this world where no one really gets out alive.

I spit in the sink and watch the toothpaste disappear down the drain. A sink, a real fucking sink where I can open up the tap and shave if I want to, don't have to dry fuck my cheeks in the desert anymore. It feels good, just knowing that.

# These Are Just the Normal Noises



Christopher Lyke

And this is how it went. Up one side, through the village, and then back down again. Set up, take down, wake the drowsy men. Squint into the mountains for movement, radio checks, get a grid, VS17 panels, a quick barber brush to your weapon, squeeze of peanut butter, water, water, cigarettes, check your magazine, check on the Afghans, some more water, pissing from a knee at a security halt and over and over again. Then back to base, clear your weapons, after action review, fuel the trucks, fix the trucks, cover the guns, smoke and joke, watch a movie and wait for chow, wait for the best outhouse, shower every ten days. Meetings for the sergeants and the LT: planning, manning, more grids, routes, water and holy smokes; for the soldiers it was dinner chow, Halo, talking shit, more Halo, beat off, beat off, beat off, talk to sergeant about tomorrow, clean your weapons, smoke, get chow and equipment for the morning, should get rest but more Halo and shit-talking until your guard shift, finish, pass out, and get woken up by CPL Kurt or the sergeant. And so it went: monotonous, exciting, exhausting dreams in a mountain paradise fighting bronze age warriors armed with Russian gear that thought you were the devil.

The *shura* in Uluk ended and it was on to the third village. We packed up and moved down, through the town, past our

friends, nodded to the LT, and moved across the road. We passed the trucks and the willow tree and the women farming with hoes. Their children played amongst the farming tiers that led down from the road into the valley floor. The kids always asked for our pens and pencils. Once we passed they shot slingshots at birds and each other and us.

The women spoke with one another as they farmed and seemed to ignore the twenty armed Americans as we wound, one after another, through the tall grass, over the tiny stone walls, along the irrigation ditches, and over ground we could not see until it broke to the open riverbed, and stone, and the bridge. The structure was only a plank of wood over the river, balanced on piles of rocks on one side and the muddy bank on the other. The water rushed beneath us as we crossed. Mostly no one spoke, only sweated, and swore, and stared, blinking through the sweat to see all around them. Sergeants counted their men from one side of the river to the other, placing them safely on the other side. The men behind them would then cross and push through them and take the lead up the next hill, to the next town. It was a smooth and practiced movement, the men passing one another and fanning out when terrain would allow. Sometimes a sergeant would whistle at a soldier and point and the man would correct his movement and the dance continued like water being poured from one shape to another until it halted and then disappeared, sinking into the terrain in front of the next town.

Kurt and I set the men in and moved amongst them

keeping them awake and watchful. When they were ready, I would look at the lieutenant and he'd nod or say "roger" into the radio and we'd wait for the word to move in through the town.

Everything was fluid and the men wouldn't remember much of what they did that day but they were aware of that moment and how it was much cooler at the river than here, in the dirt. They would remember how the grass smelled and how it mixed with the shit from the animal pens. They were there completely and also miles away, in dream. At home they'd gotten podium speeches by their company commanders about how they were sheepdogs, protecting the flock, but here, in Afghanistan, they were reptiles, moving only when necessary, tongues flickering, seemingly asleep, measuring the world, ready with fangs.

The word came. It was time for the next *shura*. LT gave the nod and we raised the men up with our hands. We were shaman, in control of the earth, levitating the dead back to life. They moved up through a stone ditch. It was all sharp rocks and overhanging trees and must have been there the last time the British were there, with Kipling and the Game. Water trickled down through the slough as we moved up through it and fanned out around the town.

The LT, his entourage, and half the men stayed in the town for the meeting with the village elders. Kurt and I took the men through the town and up, above the village to a hut overlooking the meeting. We cleared the hut and set up shop

all over again. Chris scanned the crowd of locals around the *shura* for weapons. He watched our Lieutenant and his retainers talk with sixty-year-old Afghans. He saw kohl-lined eyes and dyed-red beards listen to our truths and pleas for compliance. He watched our soldiers pass out human assistance packages while the Afghans served tea.

From above the village Kurt and I looked over the surrounding area, marking the routes from which the enemy could best approach and pointed men and weapons at them. I pulled out the map and we again, as if from memory, from a dream, plotted out those points with a protractor, measuring the angles and distances from us to what bothered us and writing it all down on paper. We checked the radios, flashed our panels, and told the trucks where we were, prepping our fire missions with the mortars in case someone tried to intervene with the Great-Bean-Giveaway that was happening down below in the village. It was rehearsal after rehearsal and done with the least amount of consciousness. These drills came from somewhere in our spines. It was the third one that day.

Kurt and I didn't think much of home at times like this. We were working. But the men, lying amongst the rocks with rifles pointed at nothing but stone and wood would flicker in and out of reality. When one turned off the others turned on and we sat there in the center, he and I, watching them, waking them, pulling them from the molasses sleep of the exhausted with endless thoughts of Chicago and the El and the weekend

festivals that they were missing. A soldier remembered the way a girl had spoken to him and how, even in the summer, she seemed cool and somehow like the river that glided through the valley below him, carving a deeper path in the mountains themselves. We pulled them from this and back to the mountain, to a path or a rocky outcrop at which to point a gun.

The *shura* ended, the aid passed out, pictures taken, and we prepared to go; folding the laminated map back into my pocket and checking weapons and equipment to make sure we left nothing, not even a peanut butter packet, for the assholes that were sure to come and see where we were now laying. They would come and see what we were seeing and try to figure out how to get around us next time. We picked up everything and moved back down through the town to the *shura* and, with a look to the LT, passed through everyone and kept walking back down, through the slough; we were the water, pouring again from a basin to a jar and then back again.

We crossed the plank bridge and spread out on the other side of the river, folding into stonewalls and boulders and looking back into the town and the hillside as our friends pushed across the plank. They moved silently through us, a noise here or there as rifle barrel clanged against a rock or boot crunched something underfoot. We moved past the riverbed, through the tall grass that covered the ground, and over the ditches and small stonewalls.

It took us a long time to cross the valley floor. The men were tired and not as fast as they had been that morning. They knew we were heading back to base and under the watchful eyes of

the gun trucks and their heavy weapons. The men had checked out. They glided from obstacle to obstacle, slithering on their rear ends over the three-foot stonewalls that separated the farm plots in the valley floor. Heads down along little berms that shored the irrigation ditches; if one man stopped suddenly he would run into the man in front of him. They sweated and their helmet's chinstraps, soaking, cut into their chins and their cheeks. They reached the women farmers and their kids. The women spoke with each other as they worked the hoes. The kids still played and ran around their mothers. The trucks and their weapons scanned the ridgeline over our heads as we climbed our way out of the valley to the willow tree and the road in front of Uluk. The men reached the road and laughed with their friends on the trucks. We drank water and lit cigarettes. The men climbed into the gun trucks and we got radio checks with all the vehicles. The lieutenant called the outpost and told them we were coming home. Return To Base. Perfect. We sank into the uncomfortable, green, gun truck seats.

I would've done it while we were stumbling through the riverbed, but for some reason they waited until we made it back to the trucks before they started trying to kill us.

A rocket slammed into the tier to the right of my truck. It exploded with a loud, two-syllable sound. Only a puff of white smoke was visible, a cloud the size of a man, floating just above the grass. The grass was a deep green and the cloud looked like cotton. If you are aware of the launch, if you hear it



fire, then there's a second or two when every breath eats itself and every muscle in your body is clenched, assholes puckered, as they say. And then the rocket explodes and you're either safe or you're not. This time it was only the cracking of the air and then the ghost. I stared at it out of my gun truck window.

Another rocket slammed into to the tier near us. Machine gun fire landed in the tier just below our trucks, too. The radio had come to life with the first rocket. Everyone spoke at once. Our machine guns started firing, too. The enemy was firing at us but was coming short, plunging their fire into the women and children farmers. I watched one of the Afghan women, her robes were purple and yellow and red, dash through the tall plants and gunfire to grab her children and hide behind a low stonewall that marked the end of her property, ten feet away. This all played out outside of my window.

Our gunner, Tristan, was firing the .50 cal., shooting across the valley floor to the ridgeline four hundred meters away. The sound of the .50 was comforting and masculine and hammered away from above and behind my seat. Tristan raked the ground with the large, armor-piercing, rounds. They were incendiary and terrifying, and sparks flashed every time one of them drove into a rock or a tree. Fear and anger hurtled across the valley from the road to the ridgeline and back again. Tristan kept firing until he burned through a can of ammo.

Everyone spoke at once on the radio. People cut each other off. The LT cut through, "Break Break Break! All vehicles push out of the kill zone. Move! Now!"

LT's truck, in the lead, started pulling forward. We had six trucks on the patrol and I was in the rear. The other four trucks, the ones in between the LT and my vehicle stayed in place.

I keyed the mic, "Move forward!" I tried to stay calm on the net but it came out like a shout.

Another rocket landed somewhere I couldn't see. The smoke from the first two rockets hovered over where they'd landed; more clouds the size of men. They were ghosts, placeholders for the lives they'd tried to steal.

We started to move when the right, rear, passenger door, the one facing the ridgeline and the violence, swung open. The doors on an 1151 are armored and heavy; a couple hundred pounds. It swung open and then bounced back. Al, who was sitting in that seat, grabbed the handle and slammed it shut but it bounced open again. The door wouldn't close. The trucks were weathered and battered and the door needed to be tied shut with cord to stay in place, but Al didn't like the idea of being trapped in case we got in a fight so he had cut it and had held it shut during the beginning of the patrol, holding it in place with the cut cord. Now it flapped open and shut like a kid's cape getting blown about as he ran down the road.

Tristan was yelling down through the turret hatch. "Ammo!" The interpreter in the back behind the driver was fumbling with the straps holding the ammo cans.

A higher pitched firing, very rapid, blasted out from behind my seat. I didn't know where it came from but I knew it had to

be the enemy in the Uluk, firing down from the village behind us.

“There’s someone firing behind us. From the village.” I shouted into the radio.

We would laugh about this later in the tents. Not only was it panicked, but it wasn’t the enemy hidden behind those short, wooden doors in Uluk. It was Tristan, again. He had become the shaman. He was awake and in tune with the mountain, he knew where the enemy was. He kept an automatic rifle in the turret with him and when the .50 ran out of ammunition he had transitioned to his other weapon almost immediately, spraying the smaller, lighter rounds across the valley into the ridgeline. I could see puffs of smoke from all of our trucks’ weapons arising all along the ridgeline as bullets slammed into the side of the mountain. It looked like a child throwing handfuls of sand into a pond, over and over and over, hitting everything. If the enemy was still there he was dead. It was more likely he’d crested the ridgeline and lie hidden behind a rock formation with his partners, smoking and praying before starting to shoot again.

Al fumbled with the door, grabbing the cut 550 cord with both hands-

“Fucking door!”

The SAW stopped firing and Tristan’s hands reached down through the turret.

“Come on!”

The interpreter, in the back behind the driver, had finally

wrenched loose the ammo can straps. He freed a case of ammo.

“I’ve got it. Here. Here. Fucking bullets!” The interpreter said this in his thick accent.

He passed the ammo to Tristan who began reloading the .50. We started moving forward. Kurt was driving and could only see the truck in front of him. He was leaned forward, staring through the windshield, both hands on the steering wheel. The guns kept firing. The men were awake. I was aware of everything. My entire body was there, sitting in the front seat of the gun truck. The only thing one can do from the front of a Humvee is talk on the radio and look out the window or at the computer map screen next to you. It’s a tight fit. It’s difficult to even slide the tiny, thick window open. And so I sat, staring at the ridgeline and at the trucks in front of us, cheering as Tristan fired into the mountain. We all cheered and cursed and yelled. Kurt smacked Tristan’s legs with his right hand, egging him on as he hammered away with the big machine gun.

The radio was silent except for the LT.

“Push. Push. Push.”

It must have only been two or three minutes since the fight began and now the column was moving forward, still firing into the ridgeline. Everyone was awake and aware of his body again. Al realized the 550 cord was cutting off the circulation to his hand as he pulled on the door. All I could do from my seat was monitor the radio and look through my bulletproof

window at the ridgeline getting beaten by thousands of tiny bullets. The mountain wouldn't notice any of it.

Our truck passed out of the kill zone and we were no longer in the ambush. Tristan stopped firing as we rolled. We passed the rock wall where the women and their boys were hiding, shrunken but alive, and one with the place where the stone touched the earth, pouring themselves into the base of the thing becoming as small as the rest of the human life that battled the mountain for existence. The interpreter asked for a cigarette. There was a pack behind the computer screen. I passed some to Kurt and the interpreter and lit one, handing it up though the turret to Tristan.

And that's how it ended. A flurry of violence and awareness that disemboweled the day's numb dream; the fights always erased the patrols, or the 3 AM guard shifts at the OP, or whatever else you'd been doing that day. An exchange of steel, and emotion, and "just wanting to kill those motherfuckers" that lasted for two minutes, or two days. It was time travel and separate from the laudanum of a hot spring day or a midnight barrage. It was a flurry and then there was nothing but the mountain and the river and reptiles. After a fight it was always like that, there was always a return to the quiet, eternal sounds. The men were tired but now they were exhilarated, and still alive, and by the time we returned to base were bickering about pulling guard that night and teasing one another. We were back to the routine, back to the dance, and it began again.

# Piss Bottles



Chris Whitehead

*Baqubah, Iraq*

*April 2, 2009*

Day 223. Here's how bored I am: a few minutes ago I busied myself by repeatedly banging my head against the metal frame of my bunk bed. I wasn't slamming my head into it or anything like that, just settling into a rhythm, lulling myself into a pleasant state of detachment. This lasted thirty-one seconds. Then I crawled back on my sweaty, plastic-covered mattress. At least I'm on bottom.

We're still in the communal wooden hut on FOB Warhorse, the one with air conditioners that blow air slightly less hot than the air outside. This didn't seem like a big deal when we first moved here in February, but right now it's seven at night, the sun just set, and it's 105 degrees outside. I could've sworn five years of being in the Army had long since erased whatever memory I once had of common sense, but apparently it hasn't. I'm sitting here watching the sweat from my nose drip all over this fucking keyboard, thinking yet again how fucking goddamn stupid the Army is. They want us to be "alert and vigilant" during patrols. They simultaneously expect us to fall soundly asleep at night whilst crammed into overfilled wooden huts with shitty air conditioners, in a desert climate in the summer. Am I wrong for wanting to be awake enough to possibly see the bomb that might disintegrate me? Trying to fall asleep in a pool of my own filthy sweat, combined with thirty dudes setting their alarm clocks to ring at

different times, beginning at 0430, equals maybe three hours of sleep, if the snoring and sleep-talking is limited.

Tonight's dinner was something the cooks chose to label "beef brisket." We get a variation of this meal about once every three days – the variation being the name. If it's not "beef brisket," it's either "roast beef" or just "beef" (the latter being the name I prefer, as it is defiant, not pretending to be anything it isn't.) Mercifully, the cooks slather this thing in enough barbecue sauce to prevent us from tasting anything else. We also get a clump of hard, dried-up mashed potatoes, and fresh-from-the-freezer string beans. Today's meal was especially disheartening because I have another 142 days before I'm back in civilization. The highlight of my day, nudging out the frosted blueberry pop-tarts we got for dessert, will be the DVD I'm saving to watch on my laptop later tonight: *Groundhog Day*. I'm watching it again.

My head hurts.

I've been suffering from a lack of oomph in general today, or at least since we got back from patrol. It took me twenty unsettling minutes of listening to the midget porno Wiggins is watching on the top bunk, twenty minutes of imagining the body movements of those shrieking midgets, before I could gather the motivation to pull out my laptop and cover my ears with headphones. This led me to my music, which stimulated me enough to do a journal entry. Right now Led Zeppelin's "Good Times, Bad Times" is playing on my iTunes. Thank you, Led Zeppelin, for rescuing me from my funk.

I'm gonna write about today, but first I need to write about my squad leader, who has a pissing problem, and this dude who rides in

our truck, Herschmuller. Right now my squad leader is three bunks over, belly down, his feet kicked up behind him, reading one of his *Muscle & Fitness* magazines. His lips are moving.

Sergeant Barnaby has this problem: he thinks it's physically impossible for him to hold his piss. I have a theory it's because, in his words, he "did mad steroids back in high school." Steroids supposedly shrink your balls; it seems reasonable to me that they might also distort other organs, such as your bladder. Perhaps, in a sick, *Monkey's Paw* twist of fate, the big muscles only precede the balls of a prepubescent boy and the bladder of an eighty-five-year-old woman. What I'm saying is that there's gotta be some explanation for Barnaby's problem. Barnaby, a massive hog of a man, a former high school wrestler who arm curls sixty pound dumbbells and brags about his supposed Harley Davidson and even more supposed former-model wife, holds his piss about as well as a grandmother drifting aimlessly around a nursing home in her diaper and fluffy slippers. The characterization is just too incongruent. Plus, I'm embarrassed for him.

This wouldn't be so much of a problem except that it's Iraq. Over here, we get trapped in Humvees during long-ass patrols. On a long-ass patrol, there's no such thing as just stopping, getting out and taking a whiz whenever we feel like it. Nope, we gotta "man up" and "drive the fuck on." We either piss in bottles or hold it till the next dismount, which could come in five minutes or five hours. It all depends on the mission. *The mission comes first*. Personal needs don't exist on a combat patrol. Fortunately, I've learned to distract



myself from the agony of having to piss by focusing on the agony of suffocating, triple-digit heat.

So there I am, six days a week, bouncing around inside the Humvee as it slams over potholes, weighed down in what feels like medieval body armor (I swear, all I need is a fucking lance and one of those visor things to pull down over my face.) It's occurred to me that I *should* be wincing in pain from having to piss so badly. If I did my job right, it means I pumped at least two liters of water into myself that morning and I'm working on my third.

Drinking large amounts of water throughout the day means I'm *staying hydrated*, another Army catchphrase. In the Army, staying hydrated is a euphemism for committing self-inflicted Japanese water-torture. Better to puke up a gut distended with liquid than go down as a dreaded "heat casualty." A heat casualty – someone who, at some point in their history, has fainted due to heat exhaustion – is a euphemism for a humongous pussy. Heat casualties must bear a mark of shame, usually a stripe of red tape affixed to the front of their body armor vests. The tape, which we're told is meant to alert medics to a soldier's "predisposition," ensures that wherever its bearer goes, any US Army soldiers in the vicinity will know that he fainted. In the Army, especially in a place as overflowing with testosterone as Iraq, a fainter is pretty much the worst thing you can be, other than dead.

Barnaby's pissing problem is twofold – he's got a weak bladder and he doesn't like to piss in bottles. He's done it a handful of times, but usually when he has to go and it's an "emergency," he orders our Humvee to stop. The gunner up in the turret swivels the machine gun around and pulls full-circle security while the rest of us peer out the

two-inch thick windows for anything suspicious. Barnaby lumbers out of his passenger seat and relieves himself against the front passenger tire. When he finally finishes – this dude takes the longest pisses of anyone I have ever known – he drags out the production a little more by patiently shaking it off (we know he’s shaking it off because he updates us), then huffs his way back into the truck with a big, triumphant grin. “Sorry about that, guys,” he says. “I needed that like you wouldn’t believe.” The rest of us in the Humvee – me and Shank and Hershmuller - can tell he’s not really sorry about forcing the entire platoon to stop. He’s smiling. He makes a half-hearted attempt to cover the smile, but we see it. He wants us to see it. The jackass thinks it’s all a big fucking joke.

We continue on our route. When we return to the base, the platoon sergeant, Sergeant First Class Rivera, takes Barnaby far enough away that the rest of us can’t hear the verbal evisceration. At least, I hope Rivera’s eviscerating him. I’m starting to wonder. Rivera can be a ruthless son of a bitch, but it doesn’t seem like Barnaby is trying too hard to change.

As much as I want Barnaby to feel humiliated and worthless because of his condition, I don’t hate him. The mere sight of his face bores the everlasting shit out of me and makes me never want to see him again for the rest of my life, but I don’t hate him. A lot of guys in the platoon hate him, and I mean with a passion. They think that 1) he’s a big dumb meathead, which is true; 2) he gets his panties in a bunch too easily, also true; and 3) he micromanages anyone under him because he doesn’t trust them to do their jobs, which I find funny. If the job doesn’t involve heavy lifting or brute force, Barnaby’s not

exactly Chuck Norris himself. The one time he rode as a gunner on patrol, he accidentally discharged the fifty-caliber machine gun less than fifty meters from an Iraqi Army highway checkpoint. Luckily, the muzzle was pointed into a field and no one got hurt. “Sorry guys, wasn’t paying attention,” he said. The platoon had to go through a full week of remedial weapons clearing classes, not to mention the weeklong 0200 wake-up/PT (Physical Training) sessions with the company commander, whose chiseled physique makes him look like he missed his calling as a gladiator on the 80s version of *American Gladiators*. Barnaby’s fatal flaw is that he sucks at Army skills: land navigation, rifle marksmanship, mounted and dismounted patrolling. Apparently, back in the States, he starched his uniform crisply enough and memorized enough procedure to get promoted to sergeant. Here in Iraq, outside the wire, the dude is *lost in the sauce*. Buried in it.

There’s nothing about Barnaby that makes me think he should be leading soldiers in combat; young Johnny Jihads here will sacrifice their mothers for the glimmer of a chance to lop off our heads and display them on TV. Still, his leadership shortcomings and character flaws don’t change my opinion of him: I believe Sergeant Barnaby is a decent guy. If our lives crossed paths under different circumstances, back in the civilian world, I’m sure I’d have no problem with him. He’s just a harmless doofus. Many things in this world are a lot worse than doofuses. Doofi, whatever.

Specialist Hershmuller definitely hates Barnaby - Hersh has confided to me that he wouldn’t care if Barnaby got waxed by an IED. The problem between them is what the Army would call a “personality

conflict.” Whereas Barnaby is a buffoonish man-child, Hersh is one of the two or three most squared-away soldiers in the platoon. To say he’s never done drugs is an understatement; the other day we convinced him that white tic-tacs were “steroid pills.” He told us to “get them away” from him, his eyes full of hilarious urgency. He’s an absurdly sheltered, straight-arrow Mormon from Utah who claims he doesn’t drink coffee or jerk off. I tend to steer clear of guys who say they don’t jerk off, but I respect Hersh. He doesn’t act like he’s better than anyone else, even though he is. I’m pretty sure he had the high score on the last physical fitness test, he always qualifies expert on his weapons, and, most admirably, the motherfucker’s got ice in his veins. When Barnaby had his AD (Accidental Discharge) on the fifty-caliber and me and Shank were freaking the fuck out cause we thought we were getting attacked, Hersh was calmly reporting over the radio that there was no threat, that Barnaby had simply thought he’d seen something and made a mistake. I don’t think Hersh hates Barnaby as a person; he hates the fact that Barnaby’s stupidity could get others killed. Hersh is no doubt equally frustrated because Barnaby is superfluous, a necessity of a flawed system that requires a staff sergeant or higher to be in command of a gun truck. Everyone knows Hersh would easily make the better truck commander. In all honesty, the guy should probably be an officer.

Hersh’s weakness is that he suffers from a mild case of germophobia. He’s not quite obsessive about it – he can touch door handles with his bare hands and he won’t flip if one of us sneezes without covering up – but he does have quirks. If we’re eating in the mess hall and he needs to get up during the meal, he does this thing

where he covers his food with layers of napkins so flies can't "poop" on it. He brings a bottle of Lysol into the bathroom trailer to spray down the sink before he brushes his teeth or shaves. Strangest of all, Hersh refuses to drink the bottled waters we get from a U.S. water-processing plant in Baghdad. He claims that any water filtered from the Tigris River is still water from the Tigris River, one of the filthiest, most polluted rivers in the world. He equates drinking this water with ingesting "raw sewage" and says the concentration of bacteria is high enough to "destroy the lining of an intestinal wall by the end of a deployment." In order to combat this imagined danger, Hersh drinks strictly Gatorade. He's so devoted to his Gatorade that he hordes his favorite flavors (orange and red) in his foot locker, just to be sure no one snatches one when he's not paying attention. If we ask him for one, he'll probably give it to us, but we can tell from his pained expression that he's doing it against his will.

There's one other quirk to Hersh's germophobia: Hersh cannot tolerate sitting in a Humvee with bottles of anyone's piss. He uses the little influence he has as a specialist to order me and Shank not to ever relieve ourselves inside the truck. Unfortunately, he's helpless against the higher-ranking Sergeant Barnaby. I don't quite get what Hersh's problem is. Maybe he's worried we'll hit a bump and the cap won't be screwed on tight enough; the piss might splash and infect him with a deadly virus. Maybe he's offended by having to be near anything freshly excreted from another man's body. Whatever the reason, Hersh's objection to standing urine leads me to believe that there's a part of him that doesn't mind Barnaby's pit stops. Hersh would never

admit it – he rails against Barnaby’s pissing problem as viciously as any of us – but that’s my hunch.

About a month ago, Barnaby dropped any pretense of apology for his weak bladder. Instead, he got cavalier about it.

“Better not hit any potholes today,” he’ll tell whoever is driving our truck. “If you hit a pothole, I’m gonna come around your side when it’s time for me to piss and piss all over your door handle.” He looks at the driver and then into the back of the Humvee, smiling, waiting for someone to start laughing with him. I guess he thinks we’ll like him more if he shows us his goofy side, that he doesn’t always have to be Sergeant Barnaby, the asshole who makes us do pushups till we can’t move, who spits in our faces unintentionally when he’s screaming about someone forgetting to check the oil or pack extra ice. I’ll admit that his pissing problem was funny – at first. It did make him more likable. I laughed harder than anyone else the first time the patrol had to stop for him, but that was a lifetime ago. Now I’m just waiting for an RPG to come screaming through the open passenger door while Barnaby’s out there pressed against the tire, carrying on about how pissing is better than fucking his wife, or singing mock-prayers to Allah for giving him the opportunity to piss on Muslim holy land. I’m starting to feel that my life is unnecessarily at risk and there’s nothing I can do about it. None of us in the truck can tell him not to get out and piss – Shank and I are privates, Hershmuller is a specialist. The lieutenant obviously doesn’t have the balls to demote him or pawn him off on another unit. No one else would want the guy anyway. As a result, my entire little sand-and-dirt shithole of a world

has been reduced to five months and two weeks—five months and two weeks until Iraq is nothing more than a headline on a webpage I’ll quickly learn to avoid. Until then, I’m left wondering whether a grown man’s ability to “hold it” is going to be the deciding factor in whether I ever get laid again.

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Goddamn, I just popped off my headphones for a few seconds and those midgets above me are giving it to that poor woman *hard*. Judging from the amount of masculine grunting, it sounds like a good old-fashioned gangbang. I’m sure I’ll get a full report from Wiggins soon. I won’t be interested in hearing it, but that won’t stop Wiggins. His eyes will get real big too, like a little kid describing a Christmas present.

Ok, headphones back on. Now it’s David Bowie’s “I’m Afraid of Americans,” the song we like to blast from the iPod speakers inside the Humvee during patrols.

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“Holy shit guys, holy fucking shit, I gotta piss. Bad. Oh man, I gotta piss...” This was Barnaby, of course. What I couldn’t understand is that he was telling us how bad he had to piss between chugs from the *fifth* one-liter water bottle he’d downed in the previous two hours. Given his problem, he normally doesn’t drink more than one or two bottles on a patrol, but today he was complaining about being dehydrated.

Hersh, who was driving, cast our squad leader a familiar look of disgust. Barnaby’s head was tilted as far back as his helmet would allow; he was chugging so desperately that some of the water was

missing his mouth and dribbling down the sides of his chubby pink cheeks.

“Sergeant, maybe you should stop drinking so much water,” Hersh said.

Hersh could not have expected an answer, but I guess he felt something needed to be said. I glanced over at Shank and we smiled. We both derive great pleasure from the tension between Hersh and Barnaby.

Up front, between the driver and passenger seats, Barnaby’s spent water bottles – four of them, and counting - rolled back and forth over the top of the Humvee’s power distribution box. Barnaby was riding shotgun; Shank and I were in back. Our truck was leading the four-vehicle platoon convoy. We were out in a rural area called Hady al-Sadoon, navigating twisty little dirt trails in what is supposedly “the heart of an Al-Qaeda supply zone.” In six months of patrols, I’ve never seen any Al-Qaeda, either in a “supply zone” or anywhere else. I haven’t seen shit in these supply zones, nothing except field upon field of dirt/sand. The only variety to the landscape is the occasional grove of date trees, which basically look like palm trees and remind me of some hellish, post-Apocalyptic version of Florida. According to the battalion intelligence officer, there are lots of things buried in the dirt near Hady al-Sadoon that could kill us: AK-47s and mortar tubes and artillery rounds for IEDs. We’re told that Al-Qaeda goes out there at night and digs that shit up, uses it to attack downtown Baqubah, and then reburies it.

Armed with this knowledge, I carefully studied the ground as it flew past my small, thick window. No matter how hard I squinted, I



couldn't tell if the dirt had been disturbed. It just looked like regular, flat, undisturbed dirt, like it always does. Even if the dirt *had* looked disturbed, I question whether I would've noticed. I've gotten so numb to the monotony of my surroundings that nothing really stands out anymore. This thought actually brings me comfort. It makes me feel like my death, if it happens, is unpreventable. Preordained.

We were in the dirt – off the shoddily-paved roads - because we were looking for the dismount team we'd dropped off with an Iraqi Army patrol that morning. We'd lost radio communication with the dismounts and didn't know where they were. It wasn't a good start to our first joint patrol with an Iraqi unit. The Iraqis are the ones who are supposed to be fucked up, not us. American soldiers don't lose communications. To make matters worse, we couldn't stop for my squad leader to purge his old woman bladder because the platoon was following an Iraqi general's Nissan pickup. We'd been told he was leading us to the dismounts. The general, whose name I think is Saddaam – no shit - never stopped for longer than it took him to hop out and pose for a picture with the Iraqi soldiers who were combing the dirt fields for buried weapons. It didn't seem to bother General Saddaam that the pictures would look laughably staged; in each one, he wore expensive sunglasses, no combat equipment, and pointed self-importantly into the distance, at nothing.

"I can't stop drinking," Barnaby said. "If I stop drinking, I'm gonna pass out. You know my body doesn't retain water well. I already got a headache, there's no fucking way I'm passing out." Barnaby shoved the bottle back into his mouth. Again, much of the water missed its target. He stopped the chug when he needed to catch his

breath. “Phewwww. God DAMN I gotta piss. It’s bad, man, it’s bad.” His face had gone from pink to red and he was wincing. He moved his free hand under his groin protector flap, pressed on his crotch. He was pressing down with such zeal that it looked like he was staunching a blood flow.

I felt kind of bad for Hersh. He didn’t need the distraction. He doesn’t usually drive, but Barnaby felt like rotating us today. Hersh was dealing with off-road terrain more suited to camels than up-armored Humvees—rickety wooden bridges over culverts, sinkholes, mud pits, steep drop-offs on either side of a very narrow trail. He also needed to avoid slamming into any oblivious Iraqi soldiers, not to mention anti-tank mines left over from the first Gulf War. He needed concentration, vigilance and luck. He didn’t need Sergeant Barnaby whining about having to piss like a “seven dick dinosaur.”

“Whoa, easy there,” Barnaby said as Hersh crashed through a ditch with enough force to bounce our asses a foot out of our seats. “You’re gonna make me piss myself.”

“Sergeant, seriously, could you just hold it for a little? If we stop we’re gonna lose the general.” Hersh swerved to avoid the next deep rut.

“Yeah, you’re right,” Barnaby said. “We can’t stop.”

My heart sank. I wanted Barnaby to fight back, to push the conflict to its limit. Listening to them was a zillion times more interesting than staring at dirt.

“Fuck it,” Barnaby continued. “I’m just gonna piss in this bottle here.” He reached down for one of the empty water bottles. I was

riveted once again. *Come on, Hersh, don't take that shit, don't take that -*

“Sergeant, are you sure?” Hersh said. “If you go really quick you can probably get out the next time the general stops.”

*So fucking polite.* Hersh was always so fucking polite. That was his real problem.

“No can do, Specialist Hershmuller. It's time.” He giggled. “I sound like I'm about to give birth or something, right? Anyway, try not to look. That might be hard since it's so huge.”

I turned to Shank and rolled my eyes. I wondered if he wanted to toss Barnaby out the Humvee as much as I did.

In a surprising show of modesty, Barnaby shifted in his seat so he was facing the passenger door. He started unbuttoning his trousers. Hersh angled his body the other way, toward the driver door, as if to gain every last possible centimeter of separation from Barnaby's exposed appendage.

An awkward minute or so passed. I turned up the volume on my CVC headset and focused on listening to radio traffic; Iraqi soldiers had discovered a small enemy weapons cache of mortar tubes a few kilometers away, inside one of the date tree groves.

“You done yet, sergeant?” Hersh finally asked.

“I can't use this,” Barnaby said, still hunched against the passenger door. “You suck at driving, Hershmuller. The ride's too bumpy and the opening's not big enough. I'm gonna piss all over myself. I need something with a wider lip.” He looked up at the ceiling. “Is there an empty Gatorade bottle back there?” he called out over the roar of the engine. Usually a few of Hersh's old, empty bottles

are rolling around somewhere in the truck, but there were none today. Barnaby had ordered Shank and me to clean out the inside of the humvee after yesterday's patrol.

"No Gatorade bottles back here, sergeant," Shank called gleefully.

"Fuck. What about up here? We got anything?" Barnaby began rummaging through the cabin. I prayed that he'd spot the thermos filled with Gatorade Hersh had wedged between his left leg and the door. It was Hersh's "special thermos;" in a private moment, he'd disclosed to me how his mom had used it to serve him juice or milk or whatever the hell else he drank as kid. It had a gorilla on it, and gorillas had been his favorite animal. I guess he considered it some sort of talisman. He didn't bring it along on every patrol, only when he sensed he'd need it.

"What about that? Is that a thermos you've got there?"

"Uh . . ." Hersh shifted about in his seat, as if to block Barnaby's view of the thermos.

"Yes! It is! That'll work! Here, let me see that." Barnaby stuck out his hand.

"Uh, sergeant, I'm actually still drinking it."

"Don't worry about it, you can have one of my waters. I need something with that kind of opening."

For a moment, Barnaby's sheer ridiculousness managed to pierce the situation and remind me, once again, how easy it is to see this war, this life, as a giant, asinine game played by a bunch of clowns. It's the running theme behind all my journal entries. It's how I deal. *Oh well, I died in a ridiculously elaborate joke that had way too long a setup.*

I didn't achieve this clarity until I came to a place where I understood my life could end.

Hersh shook his head. "Sergeant, I don't—"

"Come on, give it to me," Barnaby said. "I need it more than you, believe me."

Looking at Barnaby's stubby, beckoning fingers, I suddenly felt Hersh's attachment to his childhood thermos as if it were my own. That thermos was *his*, an extension of him. It reminded him of home, of a faraway, better life, one in which he possessed at least the illusion of control. He needed to nurture and protect that life, that illusion. He couldn't allow a beast like Sergeant Barnaby to violate it.

Hersh took his eyes off the trail to look directly at Barnaby. "Sergeant, I get it, but—"

"Listen up *specialist*, I'm not asking. Give me the fucking thermos."

Barnaby's stinging tone caught me by surprise. I felt like I'd been smacked in the back of the head. I hated that he'd resorted to rank, to intimidation. It wasn't right.

"Let him keep his thermos," I said.

"You heard me?" Barnaby said, still talking to Hersh.

"Sergeant, let him have the thermos," I said again, louder.

Barnaby twisted around in his seat. He looked like Medusa in sunglasses; tendril-like cables sprouted haphazardly from his CVC helmet. His mouth puckered into an ugly little snarl. "So now you're gonna tell me what I can and can't do? *You're gonna fucking tell me?!'*"

And then the fight just didn't seem worth it. It wasn't that Barnaby in any way deserved the thermos; it was that he had the power to

make our lives miserable if he didn't get it. My life was already miserable. Iraq sucked. I missed home. The satisfaction I might have gleaned from standing up to him would be erased quickly by a week's worth of early-morning PT sessions. Or so I told myself.

"Negative, sergeant," I muttered.

Barnaby turned back to Hersh and held out his hand. Hersh surrendered his thermos.

"Aaahhh YES, this is PERFECT!" Barnaby popped the lid and ran his finger along the wide circular opening. "What's this on here? A gorilla? Aw, Hersh, how cute. Your mommy get this for you?" Barnaby laughed, turned to face his door. Hersh's bottle disappeared under his groin protector flap. Several seconds passed.

"So?" Shank asked.

Barnaby shook himself off, buttoned up and handed the thermos back to Hersh. I imagined the bright orange Gatorade now dull, the color of pale flesh. "Look Hersh, I made you a new flavor," Barnaby said. "It's called piss."

*Non-Fiction*

# Iraq's Parting Shot



*Michael "Sudsy" Sutherland*

Forward Operating Base Courage sat on the commanding terrain on the north side of Mosul, Iraq, nestled on the east bank of the Tigris River. From the sky, it was part of an emerald sticking out in the bland desert sand. I was part of the 3rd Air Support Operations Squadron in February 2006, and had just arrived at the FOB after a six-month rotation in the city. We'd come back to get accounted for. We were about to go home.

When I first arrived in Iraq, it didn't take me long to understand why this region was the Cradle of Civilization: Crops grew along the Tigris, through the heart of the city and even into the FOB itself, a rough patchwork of lighter shades of green stitched by rows of darker green palm groves, tan dirt roads, and the bright blue river.

FOB Courage, one of Saddam Hussein's former gardens, was now a home for soldiers and airmen. Rows of container housing units, or CHUs, were surrounded by dusty ten-foot-high concrete T-barriers stacked like blocks side by side. Each compound was made up of ten to twenty of these CHUs, which were the size of shipping containers. Green sandbags lined the outside walls of each CHU and lay across the massive 4-foot-by-4-foot timber and plywood frames built on the roof. All of this was supposed to protect us from incoming rocket and mortar fire – protect us until we could get to the nearby concrete bunkers.



We were so close to leaving, but, as I'd soon learn, Iraq didn't let you go without a fight.

I sat inside a CHU in a threadbare Coleman folding camp chair with worn-out cup holders in each arm, reading a good book and letting my hot tea steep and cool. The tea filled the immediate area with the aroma of orange and clove spices. Next to me were half a dozen other camp chairs and few rusty and scratched metal folding chairs. They surrounded a beat-up particleboard entertainment center holding a dusty big-screen TV purchased at the Post Exchange (PX).

The other chairs were empty and the TV turned off. To me, this was a moment of serenity, a bit of the good life in the middle of the war. Iraq was like that sometimes: Hours of peace, occasionally boring days, ripped through by seconds of terror and chaos. I had these few minutes of quiet to myself before people would wake up and come into the day room we had made on this half of the container, before they would watch a DVD they had seen fifteen times already, or perhaps play on the dying, dust-encrusted X-Box someone had left behind. I relished such quiet, and enjoyed the moment of solitude. FOB life was crowded and noisy, and moments like this, sitting, reading a book and enjoying tea in the relative silence were quite rare.

Then: *THRRRIIIIIPPP! BOOM!*

A sound like ripping of cloth and paper tore through the sky and a mortar round impacted somewhere nearby. The ground shook. I froze for minute. I knew that my chances of survival were higher inside the building. Sandbags, concrete T-barriers, and even the CHU walls were better protection than the open air. Strangely, there was no adrenaline in my blood yet. I looked across the room to the door, less than fifteen

feet away. No chairs lay in my path across the granite patterned vinyl floor. I placed a bookmark in the book and set it down on the metal folding chair I'd pressed into service as a table for my hot tea.

I stood and grabbed the thin wire handles of my canteen cup. The silence ignited my curiosity, and I made my way carefully across the room. Even with an elevated heart rate starting to buzz in my ears, I forced myself to be calm by thinking about what sort of found had just landed outside. Likely, I believed, it was just a 60mm mortar round with a small kill zone. I controlled my breathing as I'd been taught in a shooting course.

"Breathe," I said out loud, to reinforce my thoughts.

I forced deep intakes of air, held them momentarily, and followed with controlled exhalations.

Short pause; repeat breathing. Controlled breaths, controlled reactions.

I turned the doorknob and a wave of heat and light washed over me. I stepped out into the dry air with my tan boots crunching on the gravel.

Through squinting eyelids, I saw nothing amiss in our immediate area. I went to look around. Three paces from the door, halfway to the T-barrier entrance and the door to the sandbag-reinforced concrete bunker, then: *THHHRRRIIIPP*.

Having observed the first round impact our FOB, Anti-Iraqi Forces—our generic term for any of the number of terrorists or former Ba'ath Party regime forces—had fired another round.

A blur of tan sand, grey dusty concrete, and droplets of spilled tea on the dirty white gravel. Heart pounding through my skull, I found

myself with my back against dusty concrete inside the dark bunker. My companions at this moment were spiders in their webs oblivious to the human activities outside. A shaft of sunlight poured through the entrance.

*BOOM.* Impact two.

*THHHRRRIIP-BOOM.* Impact three.

The attack lasted less than two minutes.

I shook involuntarily; my canteen cup wiggled in my hands. I marveled at the fact that there was still tea left in the cup to drink. I felt weak. I sipped and waited. If you have ever felt the drain of energy from donating blood, that is about what the sudden drop in adrenaline felt like. No further rounds came in. Nothing I could do would help eliminate the attackers. I was helpless in that regard and it infuriated the warrior in me.

But helping anybody hurt? Yes, that was something that I could do. I left the safety of the bunker and ran outside the T-barriers. I looked over the hood of a beat up old Humvee with chipped tan paint. I saw a CHU, which could house four soldiers, completely shredded and gutted from the inside-out. It looked like a pop can hit with an M-80 firecracker on the Fourth of July. The smell of burnt metal stung my nostrils, and I could see a plume of black smoke in the air over the top of the T-barriers. Soldiers wearing a mix of uniforms, shorts and t-shirts bucket brigade to assist the FOB fire department. A single soldier stood supported by his battle buddy leaned against the dusty T-barrier. Wheezing uncontrollably, he stood out from the crowd with a soot-stained face and upper body and would soon be attended to by the medics.

An all-too-familiar feeling of helplessness and anger filled me, and I knew the other men and women there felt it too. We'd experienced attacks before and had talked afterwards about how frustrated we were to be helpless after an attack. It's like being an eyewitness to a tornado or hurricane, when nature sweeps in so fast and furious, and all human endeavors seem to be in vain, swept away in the chaos.

Fear lingered within me, as I'm sure it did for many, though that fear was mitigated and controlled by our military training kicking in. After six months we had learned that fear is inevitable. Courage is merely continuing to go on through the fear.

After the attack, we gathered back in the day room so we could be counted. There was a somber air over the room in the silence. I looked at my friends' faces and could read their minds. We all were thinking the same thing: 'It happened again.'

Someone had to check in with the Tactical Operations Center to let them know we were all okay. The TOC was run out of Sword Palace, one of Saddam's former personal vacation spots. I volunteered, pulling on my hat and heading down the hill and to the north of our housing area.

I passed by the impact site. The fire was out, but the smell of burnt metal, cloth, and rubber still lingered in the air. The firefighters and medics had almost all left.

Such attacks didn't really excite this crowd so much after six months.

Hours later, back in the day room, one of our officers strode in. Airmen sat electrified listening to this final report of the very last attack any of us would experience on this rotation. "The CHU that was

hit belonged to an interpreter,” he said. “It was completely shredded and destroyed with everything in it. However, the Interpreter was ‘outside the wire’ with his unit on a mission and wasn’t hurt.”

He relayed the story seriously, then cracked wide grin and continued: “The only injury was one of the soldiers who was sleeping. He kicked down the door after the attack to drag anybody who was inside out. He’s being treated for smoke inhalation.”

No matter how many times this kind of attack happens, it is always a relief when nobody gets hurt. I’m sure all of us had the image of twisted and burning steel tinsel containing the roasting remains of a person we knew.

You could not leave Iraq smoothly. It is almost military tradition that when you are returning from deployment, something almost gets you right at the end. This was my first deployment, and my first departure from Iraq. This attack, Iraq’s first parting shot, was a small event in the scope of the deployment, and not even the scariest, but it stands out.

I never felt traumatized by the memory – in fact I still laugh at it today, much the same way I laugh at the many other scrapes, bruises, and broken bones I experienced growing up, humorous only after the pain and excitement had faded. I know my sense of humor has certainly darkened since serving in Iraq. That, I know, is just a coping mechanism for the deeper pain I have felt.

I’m home now, but when I watch the news, I go right back to Iraq in my mind. Watching ISIS seize Mosul left me heartbroken and full of rage enough to kill again. Watching the Kurds fight back when the

Iraqi Army flailed filled me a pride that made me wish I was back there fighting with them.

War never leaves us, no matter how long ago we may have left the war behind.



*(Illustration by Michael Sutherland)*

# Ray's Wrecked Eggs



Joyce H. Munro

This story needs music. Something mellow with a dash of mischief, kind of like Ray. Read while listening to “Memories of You” by Roger Kellaway and Ruby Braff (Track three on *Inside and Out*, Concord Jazz, 1996).

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Ray may have been a pretty good short-order cook when he was a kid, but later on, his best work was done outdoors over an open fire. Breakfast in the park. Cookery and camaraderie in such high demand, it turned into an annual event with family and friends. Potatoes O’Stoney is a lip-smacking dish that’s always on the Breakfast Club menu. Directions are simple: make it like regular Potatoes O’Brien the night before, then, the next morning, once the wood fire is nice and hot, crisp it up in a skillet. Use the battered, blackened skillet torched by many campfires. Slather salsa on top before serving—that’s what makes it O’Stoney.

Salsa tells you a lot about Ray Stone. Self-proclaimed Chef of the Breakfast Club, Ray was one of those Mad Men back in the 1960s. Back when he commuted from South Salem to midtown Manhattan and churned out big ideas for mass media. Back when he won a CLIO award and sundry awards from various advertising associations for slathering zest and spiciness on projects.

Before that, Ray served in the Navy during WWII, and was awarded a Victory Medal and a Campaign Medal and seven Battle

Stars for his stint as a radar man on the *USS Intrepid* aircraft carrier. Back when radar was so new it was considered a secret weapon. When the Navy was worried about how radar might affect radar men, so they sent them to a shrink to find out if sitting below deck in the dark staring at pips on screens the size of dinner plates was damaging their psyches. When personal diaries were not permitted (beware the spying eyes of the enemy), but Ray kept one anyway. And got yelled at for wearing non-regulation penny loafers and plunking his “Dixie cup” on his head at a saucy angle.

Unflappable, saucy Plank owner. A veteran who ripened into a Bertram Cooper type CEO, ever so slightly eccentric, crafty as all get-out. An ad man on Madison Avenue, creating image and hype for magazines and newspapers, doing his best to keep priorities straight, and oh, those one-liners he thought up.

At some point during his hectic advertising career, Ray thought up the Breakfast Club. And its *chef-d’oeuvre*—Wrecked Eggs, short-order recipe filed only in Ray’s head. One of his friends, a magazine editor, figured out the recipe and published it in the *New York Times Magazine* (“The Breakfast Club” by Abbott Combes, September 1, 1991):

1/4 pound sweet Italian sausage  
 Butter for cooking the eggs  
 3 to 4 tablespoons bacon fat  
 16 large eggs  
 5 tablespoons medium-hot salsa



1 large green pepper, chopped  
 4 tablespoons grated Parmesan cheese  
 Salt and freshly ground pepper to taste

Anyone who has a problem with cholesterol or meat shouldn't bother reading any farther—it only gets worse. And don't try this recipe at home on the stove; it must be cooked out-of-doors. That's imperative! First, you have to get to Ward Pound Ridge early with all the fixings to stake out a table and build a fire. Now heat the butter and bacon fat in the skillet. Break the eggs right into the skillet. Don't worry about bits of shell getting in there; tell everyone it's supposed to be crunchy. Add the rest of the ingredients and cook away, chatting all the while with guests about how this park is such a treasure, how you've been coming here for decades, how your three kids used to wade in the creek and annoy everyone with their squealing. Oops, forgot the Parmesan cheese. Oh well, who cares; it's about camaraderie, not cheese.

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It was always about camaraderie for Ray. During the war, he learned what togetherness really meant. With fellow radar men, with fighter pilots in the air, with other ships. And with girls in every port. But the girl he fell in love with at first sight was a twenty-seven-thousand-ton aircraft carrier. Turned out to be the romance of a lifetime. Although he set romance aside while he got another education, at the Art Students League, on the GI Bill.

Then came stints at This Week, the Newspaper Advertisers Bureau, Newsweek International. Generating huge ideas, priming the

pump over two-hour lunches, pulling all-nighters, beating heads against the wall, creatively speaking. All those feature stories and photos and ads to cram into twenty-four pages. Plus what should the centerfold be that week—no, not that kind of centerfold. These were family magazines. Decency ruled the day. In later years, Ray went independent with a few fellow ad men and repeated the same process, only for different clients. So what did it take to be an ad man? Thick skin and a block head, he would say. That, and finding clients who wanted your brand of sizzle. And sometimes it took getting away from work with family and friends for lawn parties and breakfast in the park.

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Hear that sizzle? Bacon, sausage, steak. A sound more enticing than the creek, not nearly as annoying as the geese overhead. And their honking signals you: tell the guests about how radar men would sometimes pick up mystery pips that turned out to be geese, not enemy planes. Nothing like sizzling meats to announce breakfast coming up. There's no recipe for Mixed Grill—just plop everything in the skillet and fry to crispy perfection, while you talk about this cookbook you're writing. Every dish made with a can of beer. Not the kind of dishes your dad had on his "dinner de luxe" menu at the Willard Grill in the thirties. What an elegant place it was, with original art, music; the kind of place the Mayor frequented.

Then you moved and Dad bought that all-night diner down in Cedarhurst, where regulars went after bars closed. Where you started slinging hash, Dad's bulky apron wrapped around your waist. Helping out until you could join the Navy. Rustling up omelets. And one day,

you got tired of ham and cheese. Baby food. In went onions, tomatoes, plus a couple of meatballs and some sardines and a few dollops of something from a pot. Flipped it on a plate, set it on the counter and said, with all the cheffness you could muster, “Now try this. I call it my Sweep Up the Kitchen for a Sucker Omelet.” Oh, those one-liners you thought up.

Damn! Sorry, the meats are a little on the charred side.

While all this business is going on at the fire pit, someone needs to gather wildflowers for the centerpiece. No vase? Just grab a champagne bottle (there’ll be an empty by now). Fill it in the creek. Yes, a centerpiece for the breakfast table. And heavy-duty paper plates, mismatched silverware, those clear plastic cups that look like glass, and ceramic mugs for coffee that’ll make eyes bug out. Paper napkins—some nice ones. Even a fancy-schmancy tablecloth—another imperative. This picnic is nothing if not outdoorsy elegant. We are nothing if not resourceful picnickers.

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It’s 2012 and this is the umpteenth gathering of the Ray Stone Breakfast Club. Four of us attend this year; some years have been eight or more. In fact, this is the first time the club has met for many years. I guess I’m to blame for resurrecting it, by emailing Ray, spur-of-the-moment:

*Ever since I read about your breakfast club in the New York Times Magazine in 1991, my husband and I have had our own version of the club—in our backyard in New Jersey, South Carolina, Virginia, and now Pennsylvania. I kept Abbott Combes’ article to remind me of the menu and the*

*collegiality of your group. The page is stained and full of notes about our own breakfasts to say goodbye to summer.*

*My husband and I are retiring in August and our first trip after retirement is to Ward Pound Ridge over Labor Day weekend. We want to be where it all started, cook up a batch of wrecked eggs and raise a toast to you and your club members through the years.*

One email leads to another and before long, Ray decides to host another breakfast and he invites us. We're going to meet the toastmaster, whose toasts never burn, according to his friend Kit.

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The eggs are just about done. Hope everyone likes them wrecked beyond recognition. A few adjustments to the recipe this year: halve the recipe, substitute bacon for sausage and waive the green pepper, but not the salsa—use as much salsa as for sixteen eggs. Just don't call the glop in the skillet glop. Many breakfasts ago, a child called it glop and you, spatula dicing the air, growled: "You're going to eat that glop!"

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At idle in the bucolic woods of Westchester County, NY, the Breakfast Club foursome has gobbled up every bite of that glop and all of the champagne. Plus Danishes and fruit. We're mellow and so is our chatter. I've been telling Ray and his pal, George Konow, also an Intrepider, about my dad's service in the Navy, though not onboard a carrier in the Pacific Theater. No, Dad—a skinny kid named Fred Huth—was trained in electronics in Washington DC, then in a highly-

selective program in Chicago. He was assigned to operate a shore-side brain center at Norfolk. No kamikaze hits or torpedo strikes like Ray experienced, but nerve-wracking in other ways. Ray and George nod knowingly.

Meanwhile, my husband is over by the creek trying to earn the Order of the Floating Cork, tossing champagne corks midstream. For my efforts in table decor, I've earned Best Floral Arrangement on the Gallery Deck. And Ray awards both of us Oak Leaf Clusters (tugged off a tree branch overhead) for longest distance traveled to the club meeting. He's local, we're Philly suburbanites. George, a helicopter pilot deployed aboard the *Intrepid* in the sixties (with real awards of his own), earns the Supply Systems Deployment Award, as well he should for shoving so much picnic gear into Ray's Chevy.

In the afternoon, when it's time to go home and take our naps, we pack up, hug, and part ways. Promising to do this again, maybe in the spring. We'll come back and visit at Elmwood Road, gaze at photos, *Intrepid* memorabilia, maybe the CLIO statue. Ask for an autograph on the flyleaf of *My Ship! The USS. Intrepid*, the book Ray wrote. Maybe in the spring.

Next morning, Ray emails before I had a chance. *He* was thanking *us*, inviting us to come back, spend the night this time, cook up another champagne breakfast. Quipping:

*The brook was not babbling.*

*Shafts of sun were missing.*

*But the people were shining and blabbing blithely.*

*It was a glorious morning.*

He reminds us of our only disappointment of the day: the dog didn't catch a fish. Then he wishes us a retirement of beautiful happenings and signs: *Ramon—the old salt with lots of pepper*. I respond, it was our pleasure, maybe when he is in NYC for an event at the Intrepid and reconnoitering at Landmark Tavern, we'll drive up and buy the first round for everyone; we have so many questions to ask, but they'll keep. We'll return. In the spring. But retirement can be so busy.

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I've watched your speech at the Retired Men's Association of Greenwich, and I watched you that day at breakfast. When you talked of the war, tears came to your eyes. That's what battle life and death does... it makes a survivor emotional. Fortunately, it never made you despair. Maybe it was because you served on a ship called Intrepid. Gutsy, audacious, and a tad mischievous, that ship and her crew. Back when you were fighting the second war to end all wars. When you went through heaven and hell together. And you were gallant to the end.

(Sound of the Boatswain Mate's pipe)

*Flight Quarters.*

*Flight Quarters.*

*All hands stand by.*

*Now hear this:*

*Raymond Thomas Stone, Intrepid Plank owner, departed on eternal patrol 05 March 2015.*

(Sound of eight bells)

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For fifteen years, I lived in New Jersey, not far from the *USS Intrepid*. It was the landmark I looked for whenever I traveled the west side of Manhattan. But I never knew a growly-voiced radar man named Ray Stone was aboard back when a kamikaze plane crashed on the flight deck, setting it afire. And five minutes later, the second kamikaze struck, leaving a trail of flaming gasoline from stern to stem. That was when Ray and his buddies started helping their ship earn the moniker “*The Fighting I.*”

I wonder if he’s the one who thought up that one-liner.



*(Ray Stone)*



*(Ray's Wrecked Eggs)*

# Test Fire



Mark Manibusan

They loaded us up in cattle trucks.

Twenty deep along three wooden benches and the rest on the floor of the flatbed. Powdery dust quickly filled the air and crept into every open crevice. I wore tinted goggles and wrapped a torn tee shirt across my nose and mouth. Few talked; most slept. I nodded off, but woke occasionally to readjust my body armor or when we rolled over rough road.

We drove off-road for a while, and unsecured rifles clanked against helmets with dull thuds at every bump, and then we were there.

No one was giving any orders, and we had nothing to do until the ammo arrived, so we milled about on the packed sand surrounding the trucks: Two hundred identical green-gray uniforms against auburn dunes, pistols in holsters, some with rifles slung at the ready, and some not.

Set back against a jutting rock face, a wooden corral and a couple of trellises made of warped two-by-fours comprised the range. Black half-silhouettes dangled from the interlaced boards and flapped against the wind. Two days, maybe three, until we'd touch down on Iraqi dirt. This was the last hurdle, a final weapons check.

I ate my MRE because no one told me not to. Chili Mac for breakfast with jalapeno cheese and wheat bread. I traded my M&Ms



for chocolate pound cake, but each bite crunched with sand and eventually I gave up.

Daniels shot-gunned his M16, separating the barrel from the butt-stock. I sat next to him to help block clouds of swirling sand from clogging his gutted rifle.

“You’re going to make it worse,” I said.

He shot a load of gun oil into the bolt and lubed the chamber with a ragged cloth.

“It doesn’t matter,” he said.

I agreed with him but didn’t say as much. Some were sleeping again, Kevlar vests for blankets, faces nuzzled into helmets. I extended the bipod on my machine gun and lay against it, watching as others posed for pictures. Rifles propped up on their shoulders, in full-battle-rattle they threw up peace signs, or middle fingers, or draped arms across one another. Others walked off into the desert to get a shot without the rest of us. The sun was halfway up the horizon and, even though it was just Kuwait, I had to admit: it made for a decent photo op.

Daniels and I played war but the wind carried off cards when we weren’t careful. Eventually we only had half of them left, so he buried them “for the next unit.”

Someone yelled “Formation” and we lined up by platoon, two-hundred strong. The range controllers pulled up in a white armored SUV. Two bearded civilians stepped out. “You’ll be firing your rounds, into those targets,” one said, and pointed to the corral, “and when the ammunition is expended you’ll collect the casings and convoy back to Camp Virginia. Any questions?”

Daniels raised his hand and asked about the likelihood of seeing a camel. Someone expressed interest in shooting one. My squad leader said, “I just wanna ride one.”

The civilians ignored us.

They lined up the machine-gunners first, each of us posted in front of a black silhouette. Belts of ammunition were broken down and divvied out. I raised the feed tray cover on my M249, gently lined up the thirteen-round belt with the open chamber and slammed down the cover, locking the rounds in place.

“Three to five round burst until all ammunition is expended,” one of the bearded men said. “Fire at will.”

The soldiers beside me didn’t hesitate, but I held tight and waited. The rat-tat-tat of their gunfire echoed as dull thuds against my plugged ears. I took aim at my black silhouette and tried to pretend it was a real person. I imagined him jumping up from behind the dune with an RPG, scoping me and the other gunners. I could see in his eyes a kind of certainty, the kind that wouldn’t hesitate like I did. I squeezed my trigger and shot him in the chest, again and again until I was spent. I had a vision of blood seeping out of the holes I put in him, and I was happy. Years and years of paper targets made me yearn to engage an enemy, to prove that it wasn’t all for nothing. I thought that time might actually come.

I cleared my weapon, stood, and walked off the range smiling with the thoughts of broken bodies and exploding trucks. I was delighted that my machine gun functioned like it was supposed to; all of those intricate parts singing in unison, sending rounds out in precisely timed succession wherever I pointed my muzzle.

Back at camp I disassembled my weapon and carefully cleaned the carbon and dust from every piece. We would enter the war soon, and I wanted all of my gear to be as ready as I was.

I would be issued six-hundred rounds that weighed heavily on me and my weapon. They spent a whole year strapped to my chest, accompanying me from camp to camp. I didn't fire a single one. I thought I would regret it, but never have.

# One Table-Many Wars



Thom D. Balmer

As we break for lunch my wife and I retrieve our food from the serving line and find two open seats at a table. With quick introductions I learn we are three Vietnam veterans, the spouse of a Vietnam veteran, and two buddies from the Iraq and Afghanistan wars – six warriors living with injuries that only war can inflict. Just judging by the precise way we've all laid out our plastic wear and napkins, we seem more alike than different.

As volunteer disability service officers for groups like the Veterans of Foreign Wars, the American Legion and Disabled American Veterans, we are front-line resources for veterans applying for benefits for service-related illnesses and injuries. This training conference, hosted by the Oklahoma Department of Veterans Affairs, helps us keep up with changes in the rating system, but it also provides us two days of rich conversations and heartfelt fellowship. To my left sits a retired sergeant major with two deployments to Vietnam in the mid-1960s. “I made the mistake of drinking a beer before retiring last night,” he tells me. He points at the scratches on his neck and recounts the dream that came to him: The enemy had him by the throat, choking him; he pulled his hands to his neck to release this invisible grip. “That’s how I got the scratches,” he says, adamant that “beer and nightmares occur together.” He looks down at his food, sips his diet soda and looks at me again. Only this time he

seems younger, different. He has clearly found a part of himself that still walks the jungles of Vietnam.

To my right sits a Vietnam veteran who served as a helicopter mechanic during a tour in Dak To in 1969. He tells us of the twenty years he has worked with civilians and veterans in the Texas and Oklahoma prison systems. With sadness and anger he recounts the many veterans behind bars because of events caused by their post-traumatic stress. He tells us of one inmate who was in Vietnam the same year he was. “The only difference is my wife stood by side during my sleepless and violent nights,” he says. “This young man journey following Vietnam was filled with alcohol and self-abuse until he was sent away by his family and his spouse. He received no help from mental health providers, ended up on the street, and now he is saddled with a twenty-five-year sentence for attempted murder.” He pauses, then continues, his voice softer now: “That could have been me.” He stops talking and shifts in his chair, his mood now heavy and sullen. I use this time to scan his body. He has scars on his arms, head, and neck from surgery to remove skin cancer caused by Agent Orange exposure. He also suffers with diabetes, and heart disease, also effects from Agent Orange, he says. He begins to speak again, but now he is more distant, as if speaking from a far-off place.

The conversation spurs memories of my own service with the 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne. Our missions included searches in Southeast Asia for prisoners of war and those missing in action, and humanitarian deployments to the Panama Canal Zone and to Boston during the school riots. I ponder the parts of me that may be missing—innocence,

playfulness, relaxation, hope for the future – the parts left behind, or the parts just too scary to integrate into who I am today.

Seated across from me are two buddies who joined the Oklahoma National Guard, together, two days after the 9-11 attacks. John and Jim. They trained together, deployed together, and are healing together. Both wear military-issue desert-tan shirts. Both lost friends to IEDs and ambushes. Both had been "blown up" multiple times during convoys, and both struggled with coming home early because of their injuries, while their unit remains deployed.

John, the extrovert, makes jokes while he shifts back and forth in his chair due to severe and chronic back pain. Sometimes, when he speaks about the convoys, his face goes blank. He stops blinking, the color drains from his face, his energy dims, and he appears to fade in and out of the room as he recounts stories from Iraq and Afghanistan. Jim, seated to his right, keeps his head down. He listens intently to his battle buddy, and chews slowly with a jaw clearly affected by a war injury. I watch Jim intently; he is processing his own pain silently, yet he does not lose contact with the story his buddy tells. When he struggles to swallow his food, I wonder if part of his pain comes from his jaw injury and part from hearing the stories.

Next to me is my wife of thirty-nine years, my best friend, my "battle buddy," and the one person who has heard, felt, and experienced my recovery. Her war came second hand, through me and through her father, who served in Korea and Vietnam. With a smile and inquisitive questions, she draws out the men at our table. She has a soft and tender way about her. She invites them to tell their stories,

and listens intently, mindful that in speaking about their experiences they might find further healing.

This feels like group therapy, not with a paid professional, but built on the spontaneity of the moment. It feels good and awkward at the same time. I'm off guard by the impact of our sharing, and I suspect the others feel the same.

As I listen to these stories, I wonder: Do most Americans know of the daily struggles these battered warriors experience? Do they really know the daytime, nighttime, all-the-time costs that are paid and the weight that is carried for their freedom?

We begin to wind down, having told some of our story and connected for a few moments. Lunch ends and the two days of training resumes. We have come to learn how to better serve our brothers and sisters. We have come to give back, just as others had given to us. We have come to heal, in fellowship and solidarity, to march on with new missions and new orders.

# Recollections of My Life in the U.S. Navy, 1944-1946



Archie S. Mossman

**Editor's Note:** Archie Mossman was born in Madison, Wisconsin on February 5<sup>th</sup>, 1926. He joined the United States Navy in 1944, the day after his last final exam as a freshman in the pre-med department of the University of Wisconsin. His "motivation for study was not very great," he said, "under the circumstances." After faking his way through his physical (he has a moderate level of red-green colorblindness), he chose to serve in the Navy—better to "die clean than dirty" he said. He was trained at Farragut Naval Base in Idaho and served for two years as a corpsman in the Hospital Corps. After being discharged in 1946, Archie earned his bachelor's degree in zoology from the University of Wisconsin, a Master's degree from the University of California-Berkley, and a PhD from the University of Wisconsin. He worked as a biologist for the Alaska Department of Fisheries and taught botany at the University of Wisconsin-Green Bay, zoology at the University of Wyoming, and wildlife management at Humboldt State University. He also taught a graduate wildlife management diploma course at the University College of Zimbabwe. Moreover, during a two-year Senior Fulbright Research Scholarship in Zimbabwe, Archie helped establish the scientific, social, and financial feasibility of game ranching as a management tool to promote the conservation of habitats, species



*diversity, and traditional cultures. This collaboration resulted in game ranching becoming an important form of agriculture and conservation in Southern Africa. When he retired from teaching in 1996, Archie said that many wonderful students had helped make his life very rewarding. Archie also fathered four children and now has four grandchildren and two great grandchildren. He currently lives in California with his wife, Sue.*

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A hot, sooty train ride to Farragut, Idaho came immediately after my induction. Our bunks were at least three high. They were in a converted boxcar, and it was very hot, so we rode with the mid-car doors open. I think there was a rope or pole across to reduce the chances of falling out. The engine was coal-fired, so we gathered lots of soot in our lungs and our hair and clothes. We were quite black by the time we got to Farragut Naval Base.

At Farragut we showered and may have slept. Then we were all given haircuts and issued our Navy clothing and hammocks and bedding. We mailed home (for free) the clothing that we had traveled in. We were taught how to wear the uniforms, how to fold, roll, and tie them with short sturdy cotton cords called clothes stops. We were responsible for our clothing and were issued a small allowance to get replacement clothes when necessary. For me the allowance was more than adequate.

Our dress pants had the traditional thirteen buttons for the thirteen original states. We soon learned to unbutton and button them with both hands at the same time. One's natural urges ensured the

quick learning of that skill. We also learned to tie our neckerchiefs and were issued “dog tags”—metal identification tags with our serial number and blood type on them. We had to memorize our serial numbers, and if captured, we were told to give only our name, rank, and serial number. We were issued a 13x17x30 inch wooden box (I still have mine) with a hinged lid called a “foot locker” that we kept our clothing in. It was kept at the foot of our double-deck bunk. We were also issued a heavy canvas hammock and a mattress stuffed with straw or cotton. Mine was cotton. I donated it to a homeless person in 2006. We got the last of the excellent white wool blankets.

Subsequently, new conscripts were issued olive drab ones, which were far safer for life ashore in a combat zone. We slept in our issued cotton underwear. The mattress cover was cotton sheeting and was called a “fart sack”—quite appropriate if I do say so. We slept under one or two blankets. We had no sheets, but we had a small pillow and a couple of pillowcases. I think we had two fart sacks, a couple of wash rags and a couple of towels. We were issued a very well-made pair of black leather shoes, some socks, a couple sets of blue dungarees, two sets of whites, and the single set of woolen dress blues along with a set of everyday woolen blues. We also received a dark blue cotton belt and a white cotton belt. I think we got two white hats. The woolen pea coat was of really excellent quality. All of the clothing was top quality.

After we were issued our gear, we were assigned to companies of about 100+ men. Mine was company 618. This was the beginning of our training prior to our assignment to duty stations. Farragut Naval Base was located on the shore of Lake Pend Oreille, which was famous

for its big Kamloops rainbow trout. Almost daily, we had a “sweep and swab down fore and aft” in the barracks, which was followed by inspection by the chief petty officer. All 100+ of us lived in that one building and slept in that big room, about 25 or more bunks on each side. Our heads were toward the wall when we slept. There was also a big bathroom with showers and a much smaller utility room with sink, brooms, mops, etc. The whole barracks was first swept and then swabbed with mops and hot soapy water. The swabs were long-handled, and the cotton cord-like material was fastened directly to one end of the round handle so that they were usually swished from side to side rather than pushed and pulled like most civilian mops are. There was a time I developed a bad cold, and the steam from the hot water in a deep sink seemed good for it, so I became a swab washer for my fellow “swab jockeys.”

Our company’s chief petty officer was not loved by we apprentice seamen. Rumor had it that he had been a high school athletic coach. I remember his name but won’t use it here. One guy couldn’t get his right and left feet sorted out when marching. The chief petty officer grabbed the guy’s fake wooden rifle and cracked him across the shin with it yelling, “Now remember that’s your left fucking leg.” It must have hurt like hell. I was marching next to a big, raw-boned logger. He growled, “If he ever does that to me, he’s dead,” and I believe he would have been. Perhaps that is why he never tried such a thing on any of the really tough guys.

One big, rather fat guy in my company was constantly baiting a somewhat smaller Jewish guy. He finally went too far, and the Jewish guy went for him. I didn’t see much of the actual fight, but I did see

the Jewish guy come back from the bathroom where they had ended up, and I did see the fat guy washing his own shit out of his underpants in the bathroom. He had literally had the shit scared out of him. Fortunately, nobody got killed or seriously hurt, and the Jew-baiting was over with. One has to realize that there were American Nazis who were in full support of the German Nazis and their atrocities in Germany, Poland, and elsewhere.

As far as I could figure it out, the main purpose of boot camp was to break your spirit via overwork, shortage of sleep, and constant meanness. Not surprisingly, my fellow apprentice seamen became very bloody minded during those eight weeks. No real outside contact, no sex, and no privacy also added to the bloody mindedness. It was not difficult to understand what boot camp was going to be like. All one had to do was look at the fence around the base. The barbed wire supports at the top of the chain-link fence faced inward. The fence was designed to keep us in, to prevent our escape. The people who ordered its construction viewed us as prisoners, and they were right. In retrospect, I suspect they may have been lying to us when they claimed the reason why we were training with dummy rifles was that there was a shortage of real rifles at the front. Whether it was a lie or not, lots of people were probably safer than if we had access to real firearms. It probably did reduce lethal attacks on chiefs and fellow draftees. It always seemed the essence of stupidity that we stood guard all night with wooden rifles around our company compound, while the fence around the camp was clearly meant to keep us in and not to keep enemies out.

Later, while I was at Hospital Corps School at Farragut Naval Base, one could look through the perimeter fence and see Italian prisoners of war working on the gardens at the main entrance, outside the fence and with no guards present. They had more freedom than we did, though, of course, the European campaign was over or nearly so by then. Nonetheless, they were more worried about keeping us in than they were about keeping POWs under their thumbs. They seemed to want us to jump when told to do so, out of fear or broken spirits. I went in patriotic, but within a week or two they had gotten rid of all that stupidity in me. I don't know if that was more generally true of draftees or not—probably not.

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One night I was standing guard with my little wooden gun, and I fell sound asleep, awakening only a fraction of a second before my face hit the ground. That woke me up! Perhaps that's why one stands rather than sits guard. I started shooting a rifle when I was big enough for my father to rest it on his shoulder. I've used firearms ever since. That surely colored my attitude to the wooden rifles we trained and stood guard with.

We did get some training with real firearms. Twenty-two caliber bolt action rifles were used. Needless to say, that was old stuff for me, but not for a lot of the sailors. We also shot .22 caliber pistols a few times, but not .45s or .38s. After this we went out on the range and fired a .30-06 Springfield at 100-yard targets. Shooters took turns in the butts to haul down, score, and patch the targets before raising them again into view of the firing line. Springfield stocks are made more for battering down doors or opponents' chins than for shooting,

I think. If you disagree, compare how the .30 carbine and the Springfield handle.

We also had classes in high-speed identification of friendly and enemy aircraft. We were shown photos of the aircraft headed mostly toward us and overhead. The photos were flashed on the screen for shorter and shorter periods until there was just a flash of the photo and we were to decide friend or foe. I can certainly see why errors were made in the heat of battle. There were our torpedo bombers, fighters, etc. as well as Japanese bombers, torpedo bombers, and zeros. This would help to prepare us to man antiaircraft guns aboard ship. Kamikaze pilots were flying their explosive laden aircraft into our ships by that time in the war, so quick accurate fire was essential to survival.

They had a really neat training aid that consisted of a huge screen on which they projected actual movies of incoming torpedo bombers, kamikazes, and so on. We had a .50 caliber antiaircraft machine gun mock up with the plow handles one used to control where it was pointing and a trigger to fire it. I'm fairly sure there were also sound effects, a tic tic tic sound when the tracers were hitting the incoming aircraft. There was no aiming. One watched the simulated tracers arching out toward the incoming plane and adjusted so they would hit it. All fine and dandy except the "machine gun" stuck and could often only be moved by whamming it with a hip or shoulder. I hope the real ones were not like that. If so, only muscle builders would have a chance of hitting the enemy consistently. I never found out because I was never sent to sea. It was fun, and at least we learned to keep our heads up and use the tracers to direct our fire.

We didn't spend much time on bayonet drill or on anything for that matter that had anything to do with actually fighting the war. We were told how to jump on an opponent's chest when he is down in order to kill him, and we were told and shown especially effective places to bayonet and stab a person.

There was also an attempt to reduce venereal disease rates by making us watch a movie. The part that sticks in my mind was a segment on crab lice. It showed a highly magnified close-up of crab lice crawling around through pubic hair. Almost everyone was scratching his pubic area before that movie was over. Ugh!

The weather at Farragut was a new experience for me. Once we were in the laundry shed area where we scrubbed our cloths by hand. A small twister or very big dust devil came toward us between two barracks. It soon got to the wire cloths lines where everything was tied on with cloths stops. Almost everything was ripped off the lines and joined the whirling dust and debris rising higher and higher. Slowly the funnel moved toward our left and peeled back the corner of the roof of the barracks. After that it slowly moved onward to our left and eventually dissipated. We then started the retrieval process for our fart sacks, pillow cases, dungarees, shirts, etc. Little was lost. The use of stout cords to tie on clothing makes good sense shipboard in wartime. Floating clothing can be used by the enemy to track and attack ship convoys. Other debris could also be used for the same purpose, so things are kept on board.

Then there was the food. In the chow hall, wrapped loaves of soft white bread were broken in two and stacked with the broken ends up (there were no plastic bags then). We would grab a couple of slices as

we walked by in line. I tried to grab immediately after someone else and before the exceedingly numerous cockroaches had a chance to do the shuffle on my slices. We were supplied with white sugar in cylindrical glass containers with screw-on pouring tops shaped like inverted funnels. Overnight, every sugar container succeeded in trapping at least one cockroach. Our method to mitigate this problem was to unscrew the cap and dump out the cockroach and the top one to two inches of sugar before using the remaining sugar in our coffee. We were also fed breaded veal cutlets. Mine had about three small mouthfuls of meat on it under the breading. The rest was bone, and we were hungry! Going out the other direction to the officers were T-bone steaks. One didn't obey because of patriotism or respect for officers, that's for sure. There were three or four days during boot camp, however, that they gave us enlisted men very green and completely inedible apricots for desert. Another apprentice seaman and I kept ours and those being thrown away and carefully wrapped them in paper and hid them in our foot lockers. We both got away with it and had delicious ripe apricots in our ditty bags for the trip home on boot leave before returning to Farragut.

Scuttlebutt had it that Farragut was located in a valley known as fever valley by the local Native Americans. The rumor was proven true while we were there. Crowded, sleep-deprived people fed poor and dirty food are sure to get sick. I suspect the cockroaches running, skipping, and jumping on and in our food helped keep us running, skipping, and jumping to the head. One fellow apprentice seaman had an anatomically improbable term he used just before he dashed to the toilet. He'd say, "I just felt a hot rush of shit past my heart!" and off



he'd go. Sometimes on that stupid nocturnal guard duty the relievers, also a bit loose, didn't make it back in time to relieve a guy standing guard, so he involuntarily relieved himself doing cleanup duty later.

All the really good sanitation where it wasn't all that important—the sweep and swab downs—was completely negated by the poor sanitation in the food department and the run down condition they kept us in. Looking back, though, I realize that the squalid conditions may have helped save my life. During Corps School at Farragut, I contracted scarlet fever. In those days that was a serious disease. There was no really good treatment, at least not at Farragut. Many sailors got a rheumatoid heart condition from the disease, but I didn't. I was on a ward full with perhaps fifty sailors all with scarlet fever. My bed was at the far end of the ward, farthest from the head. I would have to hang onto a bed at least once going to and once returning from the head in order to regain my strength for the rest of the trip. Eventually, as I was getting over the disease, the skin on the palms of my hands and the soles of my feet peeled off leaving a very, very tender pink colored skin covering. It hurt to pick up anything, and it really hurt to walk. They of course put me to work doing clean up with those extremely painful hands and feet. In my case at least, it didn't cause a relapse. It did help me to see what I could do in spite of pain, which has been useful. And, while all of this was going on, so was the war and so was the work of the physicists at Berkeley, Chicago, and Los Alamos. My delay in the hospital may have kept me state side just long enough. Who knows?

At one stage I was so pissed at the Navy and boot camp that I considered going AWOL. I'd have done it on my own and headed into

the mountains of the Idaho panhandle. It was never acted on for several reasons, one of which was that there was no destination that was really secure, and also, the repercussions were potentially pretty serious. Getting required supplies would have been an almost impossible task without doing things that I wasn't prepared to do. At least it provided me a mental out of things in the present, so I wasn't completely a prisoner, at least not mentally. I was sure I could get out.

Before going home on boot leave, one of the guys in our company was showing off a pack of condoms he had just purchased and bragging about the good time he was going to have when he got home to his wife. While this was going on, another sailor took one of the condoms and blew it up into a really big balloon, stretching it to uselessness. That really upset the bragger because he thought his wife would think he had used it with another woman.

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Corps School was fun, at least by comparison to the rest of what was going on. The instructors there had an especially boring, yet very effective, teaching method. A petty officer second class or similar stood at the front of the class and read slowly from the teaching material provided to him. We were required to write down verbatim what he said. As long as we could stay awake, the hearing, writing, and seeing of the written material made it stick well in our memories.

One of our instructors was as kind as our boot camp company commander was mean. During one of the read and write sessions, I noticed the sailor ahead of me starting to slump. He started listing to port and soon fell right out of his chair onto the floor in the aisle. We were sure he was in for a vicious tongue lashing and worse. Instead,

the instructor sent him out to get a drink of water, and while he was gone, the instructor told us that the sailor was embarrassed enough and that we should be kind to him. Wow! We were amazed. That petty officer probably gained, rather than lost, our willingness to obey.

I used to tutor other students, which is one of the best ways to really learn stuff. One day in anatomy class our instructor, not the same one as above, said, “Mossman, name all the bones in the human body and tell their locations and type of bone.” It took me about half an hour, but I did it. After I finished, the instructor turned to the rest of the class and said, “You all should be able to do that.” Strangely, I caught no flak from my fellow students. Perhaps medical types during wartime have a different mindset. Our job was to save lives, not take lives. In retrospect, I wonder if the logic behind what we were learning was what made the difference. We were not competing for grades, and we knew that we were soon going to have to put to use what we were learning. We either passed or we didn’t, and we knew that we all were really needed to pass. It makes me wonder if we might be able to similarly tailor our present educational systems and get better results with better social consequences. Dealing with doctors who were officers was, of course, different than dealing with other kinds of officers.

Even though we were not in boot camp anymore, we had to do guard duty for four hours per night, which meant we got a bit less than four hours of sleep each night. In the daytime, petty officers conscripted anyone they could find into work details, picking up cigarette butts and so on. Sleeping in the barracks was not an option. Some tried sleeping in the dirt under the barracks, but that suited the

mentality of the petty officers, so they were soon found out. I and another sailor had another idea. The last place such types would ever set foot was in a library. We had a small one not that far from the barracks. We went in and told the civilian volunteer librarians our problem, and they never ratted on us. We would find a really big book and prop it open on a table to serve as a screen toward the door where someone might look in. Then we would put our heads down behind our books and sleep for a couple of hours. We were never caught! See, a love of books, especially big ones, is very practical.

During Corps School, when we went off base on liberty, we usually went to Coeur d'Alene, Idaho. Sand Point was closer, but about all you could do was walk around the streets and say howdy to the friendly people, most of them well over draft age. By then the draft age had risen so that men well in their thirties were being drafted, as well as those just reaching eighteen. Some enlisted at seventeen, and others younger claimed they were seventeen and enlisted even earlier. If we had had to invade the Japanese home islands, I wonder if they would have started drafting women way back then. We obviously needed more cannon fodder than a simple complete draft of males becoming eighteen years old could provide.

I had a first double cousin once removed (brothers married sisters in my father and mother's generation) who was an army photographer in the Pacific Theater. When he visited us once, I remember how yellow he was. That was a side effect of Atabrine, the anti-malarial that was used at that time. He then and later said two things that stuck in my memory: "The armed forces are designed by geniuses so that they will function when run by idiots." And the second was, "The

Marines will take an atoll in two days with the loss of two-thousand men while the Army would take the same atoll in two weeks with the loss of two-hundred men.” The actual figures may not be correct, but the idea is spot on. The high demand for corpsmen can be understood when one realizes that the Marines are a branch of the Navy. If a Marine can be hit, so can the corpsman trying to go to his aid. We understood that corpsmen had the highest mortality rate of any job in the Navy.

Getting back to liberty: Mostly what we did was lots of drinking, USO dances that were very carefully chaperoned, and in one case a family dinner in Spokane, Washington. I had a girlfriend back home and stayed true to her, a fairly unusual situation I suspect. It aggravated us that we were old enough to be trained to kill and perhaps get killed ourselves, but we weren’t old enough to be allowed to drink alcohol. Needless to say, older sailors supplied younger ones at cost. Sometimes we went as far as Spokane, which was usually referred to as “Spokaloosa.” There was also another even smaller town near Farragut Naval Base called Athol, Idaho. The scuttlebutt was that it had been named by a “lispering Indian.” The town had a couple of gambling machines—“one armed bandits.” I’ve never had any interest in using those machines, so it was no entertainment for me.

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After my time in Corps School was over, I was assigned to be corpsman at Oak Knoll Naval Hospital in Oakland, California, where I spent the rest of the war. How did I luck out? Chance? Or were there people higher up looking out for me? I don’t know. My first assignment was on the Eye, Ear, Nose, and Throat (EENT) ward. If

my memory is correct, at one time we had 13 patients on the ward who were completely blind. Most of them were Marines who had been wounded in the Pacific. Shells and grenades that explode in coral cause lots of damage. The explosions send little shards of coral far enough to blind and cause suppurating wounds in any exposed skin. To put things bluntly—the Navy way—those who were wounded in that way would constantly have to mop up puss running down their faces.

We held patients long enough that they would get sufficiently well to travel by train to other naval hospitals to the east for further treatment, such as Great Lakes Naval Hospital. Many traveled in caskets for burial in their home towns. I escorted a couple of servicemen in caskets and also went along with other corpsmen with large groups of ambulatory patients to Great Lakes Naval Hospital and once to a hospital at Astoria, Oregon near the mouth of the Columbia River.

My next assignment was on a plastic surgery ward. There were no nose jobs or breast enhancements. The ward I served on mostly repaired severe burn and blast wounds. The approach was to take skin and some underlying tissue in some cases from one part of the patient's body and replace the missing tissue with it so that the wound sizes were small enough that they could heal with just scar tissue around the edges.

Suppose a large piece of skin and muscle had been blown off the top of a Marine's thigh. The first surgery would perhaps consist of two parallel cuts across the Marine's abdomen, about four inches apart. The tissue between the cuts would be lifted up, and the two edges

would be sutured together, while the opposite sides of the resulting four-inch wide wound were pulled together and sutured. After it was clear that these wounds had healed, another surgery was performed. One end of the roll of skin and flesh was cut free from the abdomen and sutured to one end of the blast wound on the Marine's thigh in such a way that it was likely that his body could establish circulation. Of course, the new abdominal wound was also sutured shut. The Marine's thigh was now attached to his abdomen by the roll of tissue. This was usually the crucial period, because it was essential that circulation be established between his thigh and the roll of tissue. Sometimes other surgeries were necessary to get the circulation established.

When good circulation had been established, another surgery took place. The proud flesh was removed from his thigh down to normal tissue. Proud flesh forms in large open wounds. It consists of large blood-filled cells that remind one of the "cells" of a pink grapefruit. They bleed at the slightest touch, but there is no pain because there are no nerves in the proud flesh. After the proud flesh had been removed down to normal tissue, the roll was opened out flat again, the end was cut free from the abdomen, and the open roll was sutured to the Marine's thigh. Of course the abdominal wound was also sutured shut.

After these surgeries were complete, the wounded Marine would be able to stretch out for the first time in two or three weeks or more. If all went well, and it almost always did, the Marine would have closed wounds and could live a more or less normal life. He could now

be moved farther east after his sutures had been removed. Often that was one of my jobs. I pulled lots of stitches.

Another one of my jobs was to change bandages. One of those jobs was unforgettable. The Marine had arrived by ship and had refused to let anyone change his bandages. Fortunately, I had a pretty strong stomach. Everyone at all mobile cleared out of the ward, and all of the windows were opened wide as I removed the bandages. The odor was overpowering. He had been in a foxhole when a Japanese soldier dropped in a hand grenade. The explosion blew off the backs of his legs and some of his buttocks, but very fortunately it did not blow off the bottom of his spine or his anus.

With the Marine lying on his back and his leg bent, I started removing the bandages as gently as possible. As the last came off, lots and lots of puss ran down, and in it were two squirming fly maggots. The odor was amazing. I later learned that he probably would have been in better shape if he had had many more maggots of the right kind to help clean his wounds.

Another Marine wasn't so lucky. Similar to the first, he had been wounded by an explosion. The difference was that this Marine had the lower end of his spine and digestive tract blown off. Lying on his back, he more or less constantly oozed fecal matter. Special watch corpsmen tried to keep him reasonably clean. His pain must have been severe. I don't know what happened to him.

As you can imagine, there was lots of mental trauma also, but it wasn't acknowledged very often. We had a good nurse of Asian extraction on the EENT ward. One patient said just seeing her really bothered him. I suspect others also were upset just by her looks,



considering what they had just been through. Hopefully they eventually learned to see the world differently, but probably many have not.

I was also assigned a special watch on a survivor of the Bataan Death March who was full of tuberculosis, which had made him deaf. He had material oozing from his ears, as well as the usual lung involvement. One day, I heard him frantically ringing the bell that he used to summon me when he needed something. It was one of those metal dome-shaped things with a plunger up through the middle. After I burst through the door, I found him holding the bell up to his ear. With a big smile on his face, he continued ringing vigorously. “I think I can hear it!” he said. What a wonderful relief for both of us.

I had another special watch with an extremely sick sailor. I don’t know what was wrong with him. A higher ranked corpsman who should have briefed me refused to give me any information, even though I specifically asked for it. I was told that it was my responsibility to do routine care and that was it. While I was there that evening, the mother of the sick sailor arrived. She came in, saw him, went back into the corridor and cried, composed herself, reentered and let that officious corpsman know that she was now going to be in charge of his care. That corpsman tried to give her the same doctor-knows-best-we-will-answer-no-questions-treatment he had given me, but she wouldn’t have it! He was probably just spouting the party line that was then current in medical circles. The same tendency exists today and is not good medicine. If they won’t level with you, get another doctor quickly. Sins of omission by doctors are

apparently not punishable in our medical system. They are probably more frequent than sins of commission by doctors, and just as lethal.

One of my favorite fellow corpsmen was an older black guy. We took a patient draft back east. He had such a wonderful, intelligent sense of humor that it was a really fun trip for everyone. And it wasn't just humor. He was a really thoughtful, intelligent person. I also used to spend quite a lot of time talking to a black patient on the EENT ward. It was really interesting to get his perspective on things, including interracial attitudes.

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I once had a leave long enough to hitch hike home to Madison. The trip started from the Oakland Naval Air Station on the eastern edge of San Francisco Bay. I was able to hitch a ride on a DC3 Navy cargo and troop plane. It had wooden benches along the sides, and the benches were scooped out a bit like some wooden chairs so as to be a little more comfortable to sit in. We sat with our backs to the side of the plane and had seat belts. It cost us nothing because we were riding a plane that was going our way anyway. So there I was in my dress blues with my ditty bag and that's all. This was my very first airplane ride!

An airfield near Reno, Nevada was our destination. From there I started hitch hiking along what has now become I-80. At the time, gas and tires were rationed, many males were overseas, many people were attached to the military or were working long hours in factories, people traveled less, and there were far fewer people living in the United States, so the traffic in the wide open spaces of the Great Basin and the Rockies was very light by today's standards. I finally got a ride

with a drunk. He had some sort of overdrive he was proud of and would wait behind another car until someone approached from the opposite direction on the two lane road. When they were quite close, he would gun it and pass the guy in front of us. Thanks to the alertness of the other drivers, we survived. He wouldn't let me out.

The he saw some lights from a bar just off the highway. I was able to get out of the car after he parked, but he wouldn't let me have my ditty bag out of the back. Fortunately, when I asked for help from the others in the bar, they forced him with threats to let me collect my gear. Most civilians really supported us, and that was one excellent example. I really appreciated their help.

It was really dark when I started walking back up to the highway. There was no moon, but the sky was crystal clear, and the stars were really bright. When I was up close to the highway or soon after I got to it, that drunken twit roared really close past me in his Ford.

I continued walking eastward and stepped a bit heavily to warn rattlers of my coming. The road was very flat and very straight. When a car or truck would come from behind me, perhaps for thirty seconds to a minute their headlights would illuminate the road so I could see what was on it. It was alive with small mammals, and as the light brightened, they flowed off both sides of the road well before the vehicle got to me. As far as the drivers knew, there probably wasn't a rodent within a hundred miles of the road they traveled. That was a really neat experience for me. I got a couple of rides, one from a nice military couple who were headed east to a new duty station. I was also picked up by a guy driving a big long sedan, probably a Buick or a Cadillac. It had a broad shelf back from the rear seat to the window.

He had a young, very small puppy that stayed on that shelf. It had an old piece of blanket that it scratched up into a lump and was continually humping. Quite a rear window ornament! Another guy that picked me up was a semi-truck driver in Wyoming. He had two gear levers that allowed him to shift through 12 forward gears. He tried to get me to stay in Wyoming and go poaching pronghorns with him. At that time they were still recovering from very low numbers. Needless to say I didn't do that.

After getting to the airport in Cheyenne, I hung around waiting for a flight eastward to somewhere near Madison. In the process I had the opportunity to watch one of the huge new B-36's take off from that high altitude air field. It was a good thing that the runway was really long. Another DC-3 (C-47) was my next aircraft, and it was going to Des Moines, Iowa. This was summer and we were required to wear our tightly woven, wool dress blues. As we started descending in our approach to the airfield at Des Moines, I started feeling hot and thought I might be getting sick. We landed, and when the door was opened and we started to get out, it felt like we were walking into a blast furnace.

Again I started hitch hiking. A traveling salesman picked me up and delivered me to Madison. He was an excellent and careful driver. What a contrast with that other looney! I walked quite a way and finally arrived in the wee hours at my girlfriend's house, and after an hour or so of much missed togetherness, I went to my folks house and got them up early. More affection, food, and then sleep.

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Most of the doctors at the hospital where I worked were young and rather inexperienced, as were we of course. On the EENT ward they decided that one of the patients needed to have a spinal tap. To do this, the patient was to lie on his side in the fetal position, and my job was to hold him around the neck with one arm and around his knees with the other arm. Supposedly this was to prevent him from straightening out if they hit the wrong nerve with the needle. If he did that, he might capture the long needle between his vertebrae and perhaps cause damage to himself. The doctor, one of two present, got the needle in and gave the anesthetic for the spinal block to allow some sort of surgery. I don't remember what it was to be. Just before the patient lost the ability to breath, the doctors suddenly realized that they had not elevated his chest and head, so the anesthetic was moving toward his head. It was supposed to anesthetize only from the injection site toward his feet. I didn't know any better, but they did. I don't suppose any of us made that mistake again, and in this case no harm was done, but it was close.

Table tennis was part of the therapy for patients on the EENT ward. Patients with only one good eye were encouraged to play. We would occasionally play with them if another patient was not available and we had time. They got pretty good at judging distances with that little celluloid ball. I'm sure that helped a lot after they each received their glass eye and returned to civilian life.

You can easily imagine how depressed a person who was recently completely blinded must be. The suppurating coral wounds made it almost impossible to shave, but after they had healed up enough, it was time to clean up. As a corpsman, I shaved some of them for a

while. Some claimed that shaving themselves was impossible. I therefore went through the entire process of shaving myself with my eyes tightly closed, and I found that I was able to do a good job of it on my very first attempt. I then told those guys so, and they finally shaved themselves, which would be essential later. I suspect they were so depressed that they had just given up and needed a prod to get moving.

On the plastic surgery ward I saw a show put on by a visiting group. These were attempts to motivate the sailors and Marines to not be stopped by their recently acquired disabilities. The star of that show was a guy with no legs at all. They were off right up to his hips. He walked in on his crutches. Finally, in time to dance music, he danced with a female partner and then performed some one-crutch handstands, still in time to the music. He was amazing.

Another patient sticks in my mind. He was a chief who had been below deck on a ship that was on fire and sinking. His only escape route was up a metal ladder that was red hot. He took that climb and survived, but he did so without the palms of his hands, which had been burned off. Our job was to give him new palms for his hands so he could use them again. The doctors did and we helped. I'm sure the results were far from perfect, but they were a lot better than what he had before the surgeries.

One time I was called to go out and help lift a pregnant sailor's wife out of a car to get her on a gurney and into the hospital. The Navy provided hospital care for immediate relations of sailors. She made it into the hospital, but her baby didn't, at least not in the womb. It was aborted across my left hand and arm, which I was using to support

her bottom. The fetus was clearly too small to be viable, at least not in those days. I don't know what happened to her either. I suspect she was OK, but very unhappy.

In those days, following hemorrhoid surgery, it was thought that healing was improved, and perhaps it was, if the wounded rear end was exposed to the sun. I guess we'd call it mooning the sun now. That was quite a sight, and being the Navy, you can imagine the irreverent joking by patients and others alike.

By the way, corpsmen were referred to as "cock docs" and for pretty good reason considering the venereal diseases acquired by sailors and Marines. I gave lots of penicillin shots into the buttocks of patients. The needle was big and long, and the amount of fluid was considerable. By slapping them with the back of my hand near the alcohol-swabbed injection site, and by being sure to have a really sharp needle with no burr, I could sometimes get them injected and the needle out while they were still wondering when they were going to get the shot. The sting of the slap got their attention away from the pain of the stab and injection.

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There was a memorable pair of Marines (gyreens) that came through the plastic surgery ward. One was named Jack H. and the other Jack A. They both had lost the backs of their hands, but I don't recall how that had happened. The problem was that about the time the grafts were on and had started to heal nicely, the powers in charge would let them go into town, to Oakland, San Francisco, wherever, on liberty. Each time those two nuts would pick a fight in some bar and would return to base with their nice new grafts peeled back as a result

of the fist fight. By the way, they showed me how to take the belt they all wore, wrap it around my hand several times, leaving the heavy brass buckle loose to serve as a weapon in a brawl. They told me doing so would protect my hands if I ever needed to hit someone.

The real tour-de-force of that pair happened one night when the local police were transporting them back to Oak Knoll. (The police were pretty lenient with returned servicemen.) Both, of course, had quite a lot to drink. I don't think they had got into a serious fight that night. As they were driving up onto the Oakland hills nearing the base, a jackrabbit froze in the headlights. One of them wanted to get out and catch it, and I guess the police must have thought that ought to make for some fun, so they let him out. He sneaked in the dark toward the jackrabbit and kicked it in the head, which killed it. The police were astonished by the Marine's skill. The rabbit, I assume, was not. When the two Marines were delivered to the entrance gate, they pranced through shouting Jack H., Jack A., and Jack Rabbit had arrived.

As they were trying to figure out what to do with the thing, one of the Jacks got a bright idea. They decided to help out the Marine I mentioned above, the one with the maggots in his wounds. He had been complaining a lot—he was probably psychologically troubled—and was doing as little as possible to help himself or others. The three Jacks made their way to his bed, and Jack Rabbit was shoved under him as he awoke. According to the story from the other two Jacks, that guy was out of bed like a shot, quite capable of locomotion he had been unknown to perform since his arrival. I guess something warm, fuzzy, and big-eared was not his idea of an ideal bed partner. Needless to say, that story went round and round.



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Another of my jobs was to work in the area that I think they called Central Supply. Needles were re-used back then, as were the glass syringes and surgical tools. After they had been cleaned, they were wrapped in an orange-colored cloth square and autoclaved. Our job was to clean out all of the needles and syringes and sharpen the needles before wrapping the set in the densely woven cloth. After we had autoclaved them, the packages were placed in reserve for use as needed. The needles and syringes were washed in soapy (probably tincture of green soap) water. The syringes were used to force the water through the needles. Then the needles and syringes were washed in a tray of alcohol using the same methods. I would get almost drunk from an hour or two over the fumes from that alcohol. I often had to de-burr needles that someone sharpened poorly or not at all. Every needle I got I inspected for sharpness and honed and de-burred on a stone if at all necessary. Believe me, you don't want to be injected or have your blood drawn by someone using a dull needle with a burr on it. It damages on the way in and then hauls out a string of flesh on the way out.

Speaking of needles, there was one patient on the scarlet fever ward that was constantly being a pain in the neck for the attending corpsmen and everyone else. To appreciate this story you have to know that there was scuttlebutt going around that treatment for certain diseases consisted of "shooting you in the left nut with a square needle." So, one day when that guy was being especially obnoxious, the corpsmen decided to have some fun at his expense. They got the biggest spinal tap needle they could find and put it on the

largest syringe they could find, and then filled the whole thing with tincture of green soap, which really is green. When the corpsmen arrived at that guy's bedside with that apparatus nearly 15 inches long and oozing greenish froth from the needle, the poor bastard started almost pleading for his life. "No! NO!! You're not shooting me with that!" he yelped. The whole ward had a good laugh over that, even the victim when he realized that his left testicle was safe.

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I was really naïve back then. I knew virtually nothing about homosexuality, but I learned almost all the wrong way. We went on liberty mostly to San Francisco, and a guy there befriended me. Things that should have tipped me off way happened, but because I just thought he was trying to be friendly, I nearly got myself into a real pickle before the penny dropped and I left for good. They seemed nice enough until I finally realized the unsaid messages. Nice or not, that wasn't for me. I was also solicited by a guy who picked me up while I was hitch hiking in the San Francisco Bay area. Even then homosexuality seemed more open there than elsewhere. I remember one sailor was discharged because of his homosexuality, which he was no longer hiding.

I was also propositioned by the opposite sex, but at least I understood that. For example, one time, a young and pretty woman asked me to go bed with her because she had found out that her husband had cheated on her. I demurred, partly because I didn't want to get involved in that mess, and also because I was staying faithful to my girlfriend at home.

A few months before my discharge and a few more since Hiroshima and Nagasaki, there was a call for personnel to volunteer to attend a nuclear test at Eniwetok Atoll. I decided against it and again I lucked out. Those who went were really military guinea pigs or lab rats. They were not informed at all. They were irradiated at substantial dosages. So much for patriotism. You serve your country, and that's how it treats you. They haven't changed at all for the better as far as I know.

When the war was finally over and the Japanese capitulated, almost everyone got leave to go into San Francisco, or Oakland or wherever to celebrate. I didn't try hard to get leave and was one of the few to stay on the base. I went up on a hill in the yellow grass and gave thanks that it was finally over—the killing and maiming would stop—and that I had survived it. How do we ever stop these wars? Could we identify the psychology of people prone to start wars and promote wars and somehow ensure that they cannot hold or control a public office? We need to do something like that and soon before we humans pull the plug on the human species, the warmongers included.

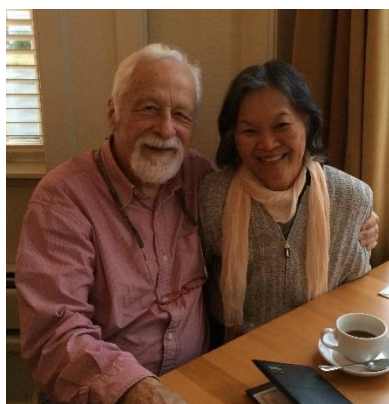
When it was finally time for me to be discharged, I was a Pharmacist Mate 2nd class, a petty officer myself. They didn't just discharge us, though. They made us go to a discharge center. There they held us for about ten days. They tried mightily to get us to sign over as regular Navy enlisted personnel or Navy reserve. At the time they were saying things like if there was another war—things were already heating up with Russia—they would come and get me anyway. Might as well enjoy the pay and higher rating of staying in, they said. My response was that all may be true, but it is a little harder for them

to come get me if I am all the way out than if I am Navy reserve. Again I lucked out. Those who went into the reserve got to fight in the Korean War also. People like me didn't, thank goodness.

The day I got home after being discharged from the Navy, I was at my folks' house in Madison. I remember being on the metal-sheathed deck above the sun room, where the large catalpa tree had branches almost touching the house. It was in full bloom. Both the sight and the smell were beautiful. I was home.



*(Archie Mossman, 1946)*



*(Archie and Sue Mossman, present day)*

# Life in the Field



Luis Perez

The time is 1845, and you're more than seventy-two hours into a week-long, continuous training exercise. You've slept fewer than six hours since it started. Though precipitation is rare where you're training, you just happen to be here the one week the rain is unrelenting. Nothing and no man is dry, everything is doubly heavy due to the water it has absorbed, and you struggle to get from place to place in the ankle-deep mud. The fog is so thick you can't see the next hillside over, and the temporary relief provided by the sun during the short December days has been replaced by a bone-penetrating chill. You've received orders to move out, but all the trucks and tents are stuck, and most of the men have predictably gone internal, save for a few hard-chargers who somehow manage to pull strength from a deep inner reservoir of fortitude. Where this determination comes from, I'll never know, but these few undefeatable men manage to keep pushing those around them forward—one slow, sloshing step at a time—through forceful commands and by steady example. You, my friend, are experiencing a time-honored tradition that every military man in history has endured; you are in the middle of just one of myriad possible compilations of circumstances known as life in the field.

The field is a unique place, both familiar and unknown. The emotions you experience are hard-wired from previous visits, and you know exactly what you're in for even though you haven't yet lived it. No man *wants* to go to the field, though he fully recognizes the

importance of the endeavor, for going to the field means leaving everything behind: your family, your comfortable bed at home, your predictable daily routine.

Life in the field means discomfort, and every man prepares for this differently. Some joke about it, while others pretend it's not going to happen. Some embrace it and confront it head-on, while others try to soften the blow by bringing as many creature comforts with them as possible; no matter how heavy their packs may get, this group simply cannot survive the field without their beef jerky, instant noodles, gourmet coffee, excessive cans of dipping tobacco, camp stoves, fold-out chairs. Some are so busy with final coordination that they don't have time to think about the upcoming discomfort, and a handful don't yet know what they're in for. Regardless of how each man prepares, all return from this encounter a little more hardened. All are equally relieved it's over.

The field lets you — forces you — to identify with your inner animal. Socially-induced propriety gets put on hold. Clothing is still important, but primarily to protect you from the elements, rather than to maintain decency. Since the field requires each man to do whatever it takes to maintain the bare minimum level of personal hygiene, it is not shocking to see a man completely naked, stealing a precious bath from a lukewarm “solar” shower bag, changing into cleaner or dryer clothes, or letting body crevices air out for a little while. Your surroundings become your commode. You focus more on survival — adequate food, water, and shelter—than you do on being clean, upholding good table manners, or maintaining a healthy diet. The field has its own way of making you feel alive.

You bond with the earth, the flora, and the fauna. You sleep on the ground. The stars become your roof at night, unless you're unlucky enough for it to be rain instead. It's up to you to adjust to your new habitat. You must respect the force of nature around you, lest you become subject to some unlikely, yet catastrophic, collision with it. Dangerous animals are found far too frequently for comfort. One can only hope that they're more afraid of you than you are of them. Nevertheless, men always seem to find a way to tempt chance by amusing themselves with deadly snakes, scorpions, and spiders. The threat of fire is abated for now, but in the dry season you can never let down your guard entirely, and one careless cooking fire or unextinguished cigarette could create havoc in an instant. Trees offer shade, yet at the same time hide many critters; some dangerous, some simply a nuisance. It's not hard to find your place in the field, but you still breathe a sigh of relief when life goes on after this very personal encounter.

The smells. The smells are what really let you know that you're in the field. The first one to hit your nostrils is the familiar scent of field rations: the vapors rising from an activated chemical heater, a whiff of peanut butter being squeezed onto a cracker, and the artificiality of processed cheese. You're also sure to experience the pungent odor of a porta-john utilized just one time too many. You may sense the aroma of a recent fire, the carbon of a spent cartridge, or the piercing fragrance of burning petroleum, precious in that it keeps everything running in the field. Always, there is the overwhelming bouquet of a man who's seen too many days since his last shower. This particular smell is everywhere and slowly grows stronger with each passing day.

Sleep matters in the field, yet valuable time is squandered during the day, leaving staff officers to scramble throughout the night.

It is easy for a man to succumb to his vices in the field: tobacco, caffeine, cakes and candy, cards. There is reading—a good military professional always has something meaningful to read available—but in the field, it is surprisingly difficult to put all else aside and simply read; though the distractions are fewer in the field, and the hours more abundant, it is difficult to avoid gathering with other men. There is satisfaction—which exists, I think, primarily for evolutionary reasons—in sharing with other men in the field: whether sharing laughter or misery; arduous assignments across miles of treacherous terrain or instances of idleness before the next task; intense dialogue or peaceful silence; a picturesque scene at sunset or a destitute landscape of nothingness; late-night planning sessions or early-morning mission rehearsals; a plentiful hot group-ration meal or a small sip of lukewarm instant coffee; gorgeous sunshine or harsh weather; or simply the reality that you're all experiencing life in the field together. For better or worse, camaraderie is a certainty in the field. The good leaders know how to harness this into action, the less ambitious into friendship.

And at night, when it all slows down, you have time to ponder, to absorb the vastness of the immeasurable, yet stunning, universe gazing down at you. With normal day-to-day distractions on mute for the moment, you can truly appreciate your existential place in life. Your mind inevitably wanders, usually to somewhere, something, or someone *other than* the field. This is a welcome change of pace, as the field is ubiquitous. At minimum, you'll think of what you'll do when



you leave the field. You'll picture your first meal, your first drink, your first shower. Never before have you so craved your wife's homemade chicken dish, or so clearly pictured the juicy ribeye at your local steakhouse. Never before have you been so eager to feel the refreshing splash of ice cold hops and malted barley colliding with your taste buds. You're certain that, regardless of brand, flavor, or size, your first beer after a stint in the field will be the best damn beer you've ever had. If you're lucky, you'll think of those you love; you'll endeavor to remember fond memories as vividly as possible; and you'll imagine brilliant new experiences to be had. Simple, everyday pleasures seem so fulfilling now that you've spent quality time in the field, and the important things in life have now come clearly into focus.

The field brings with it emotional highs and lows, feelings of yearning and reflection, and, almost by definition, a change to the status quo.

But invariably, if you look in the right places, it brings with it newfound appreciation for life outside the field. It is both a curse and a blessing, and we are both cursed and lucky to live it.

*Artwork*

## Psychotic Disorder NOS



**Artist:** Travis Martin

**Medium:** wood, canvas, acrylic, papier-mâché, wax, polyurethane, artifacts, mirror

**Size:** 45" x 45"

**Description:** Symptoms within the "psychotic" spectrum are poorly understood and, due the unique experiences of each individual, hard explain in terms of their phenomenological, epistemological, and

teleological roots. In other words, for the veteran who progresses beyond the standard symptomology of “Post-Traumatic Stress,” it is likely that the structure of his or her mental suffering will become more difficult to define, accurate diagnoses will come and go with the ebbs and flows in type and extremity of experienced symptoms, and the timeline previously used to understand the cause, emergence, and expectations of that individual’s struggle will need to be completely reinterpreted.

This work of art, entitled “Psychotic Disorder NOS,” or, “Not Otherwise Specified,” attempts to isolate and define the early symptoms of what was later diagnosed in me as “Schizoaffective Disorder.” This work is meant to be viewed from the “eye-to-eye” perspective; viewers staring directly into the pupil at the work’s center will see a mirror which reflects what the brain exposed behind that pupil sees, and that scene should be shared with the viewer. However, it is at the pupil’s threshold that the similarities between the viewer’s experience and the subject’s ends.

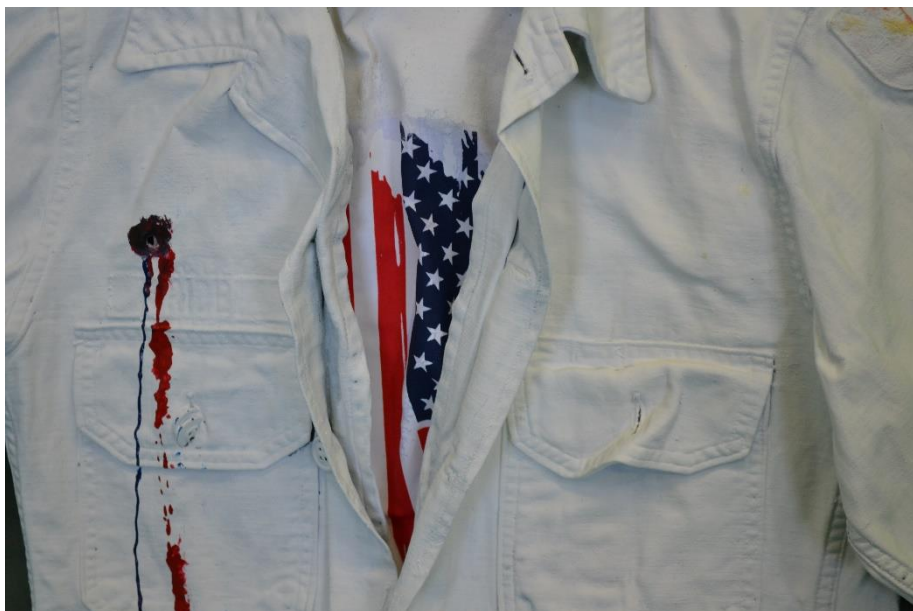
Proceeding further back within the three dimensional work, one sees the beginnings of a whirlpool, first surrounding the eye, then filling the background with vivid colors running counterclockwise, colors indicative of sensory input amplified by hypervigilance. In short, what enters into the brain through the pupil—reality, because it is always moving and increasingly intense, is incapable of being understood normally.

Emerging from this whirlpool, but not extending beyond the pupil’s threshold, first, is a number of cogs. These cogs represent paranoia as a machine, and it’s one that takes the reality reflected by

the pupil's mirror and reinterprets it using delusions and fear. Solidifying those false interpretations are the whispers of auditory hallucinations, visualized here, and experienced by me as, a black, lascivious demon of a creature whose primary goals are to provoke hostility, self-doubt, and suicidal ideation. It is this "puppet master" who attempts, continuously, to use my symptoms to force me into isolation.

Also trapped within the whirlpool are a series of items whose duality allows them to work for or against the paranoid machine: a mold of a gun owned by my father represents both heritage and suicidal ideation; molds of my dogs' paws are sources of comfort but also an ever-present fear of loss; a prescription pill bottle might represent drug abuse or it might represent ameliorated symptoms; and, finally, a heart-shaped box representative of my girlfriend is always there for me to draw upon for strength, but often accessible only after I have silenced the whispers and reduced the paranoia enough to trust.

## Bleeding Red, White, and Blue



**Artist:** Doug D'Elia

**Medium:** The undergarment is a tank top with an America flag logo. I covered the tank top with a used a fatigue jacket that I painted with white paint. A hole was punched through the garment to resemble a bullet hole, and red, white, and blue paint was dripped from the bullet hole.

**Description:** "Bleeding Red, White, and Blue" was inspired by my experiences as a medic, and perceptions of combat wounds. The oft used expression is used to denote patriotism, but the reality of war is that each soldier regardless of uniform bleeds the same color.

## Tears of Blood



**Artist:** Hank Robinson

**Medium:** Engraving on Aluminum

**Size:** 18" x 24"

**Description:** I wanted outsiders to see some of the emotions that combat veterans deal with on a daily basis, from up close scenarios in combat to losing loved ones and the after effects. All images are hand engraved on black painted aluminum with only a Dremel.



## DD2765-1



**Artist:** David Gianfredi

**Medium:** Acrylic on Canvas

**Size:** 4' x 6'

**Description:** This piece is a part of a larger exhibition titled "DD2765-1." Back in my Army days I worked in supply, and the form DD2765-1 was used to order more soldiers to replace casualties of war. The realization was not lost on my that human life was treated no different than beans or bullets.



# Disabled



**Artist:** Darrel Black

**Medium:** Pen and Ink on Paper

**Size:** 11"x 8"

**Description:** This piece represents the inner emotions and feelings of many vets who return home only to find massive delays in receiving VA benefits and the lack of opportunity in general society for disabled veterans.

## Platoon



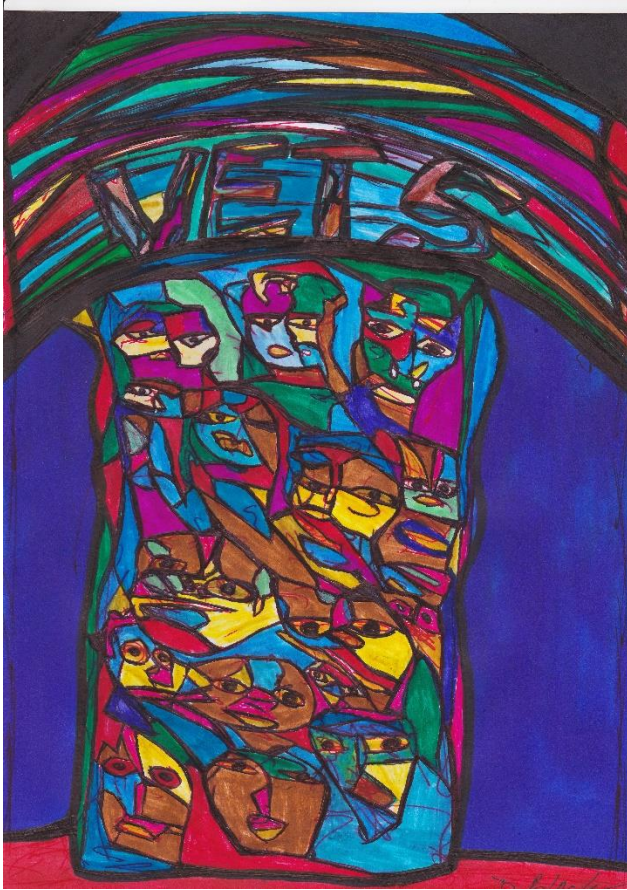
**Artist:** Darrel Black

**Medium:** Pen and Ink on Paper

**Size:** 11" x 8"

**Description:** This piece represents a military team that fights together and forms an unshakable bond that gives way to lifelong brotherhood.

# Vets



**Artist:** Darrel Black

**Medium:** Pen and Ink on Paper

**Size:** 11" x 8"

**Description:** This piece represents the hole or abyss that many veterans find themselves in when it comes to good representation within government and the lack of support from the VA.

## The Barrel of Diplomacy



**Artist:** Darrel Black

**Medium:** Pen and Ink on Paper

**Size:** 11" x 8"

**Description:** This piece represents the military attempt to seize oil and the oil producers' struggle to protect it.



# Cathedral Head



**Artist:** Mark R. Fettig

**Medium:** Pen and Ink

**Size:** 12" x 22"

**Description:** I feel strongly about the effects religion can have on individuals, both positively and negatively. In this drawing, the obese man is literally wearing his religion to mask his "sin" of gluttony.

## Vampire Lust



**Artist:** Mark R. Fetting

**Medium:** White Pencil on Black Paper

**Size:** 16" x 20"

**Description:** I love horror films and there is a certain appeal to the old black and white classics. I wanted to do a version of that here. It's a classic vampiric succubus, drunk with her fresh kill.

## Zombie Snacks



**Artist:** Mark R. Fettig

**Medium:** White Pencil on Black Paper

**Size:** 18" x 18"

**Description:** I'm a fan of horror and its unsettling connection with its viewers. With this being a square-shaped cut of paper, it forces you into the drawing. This drives the feeling that you have just discovered this creepy thing while searching an old graveyard with your flashlight.