

“It”

by Blake Rondeau

“How was it?” They ask when you come back.
“I think it needs to sink in,” I respond.

It.

I don't want to say it is a relief
to come back from deployment, alive.
Unscathed.

Or that it was infuriating
to train for month after month
three separate times to prepare for “over there”
countless field ops, fire missions,
late nights cleaning bores in the dark after the gunline went cold
and the rest of the Battery was asleep
... all to not be in combat.
(But, also, thankful.)

It was heartbreaking to have missed four family funerals
because of my service.
To get each call from the Chaplain, see the red folder
and know:
Not only had another family member passed,
but I would have to endure it—all—
alone.

Confused because now I am back in reality, done
with everything I set out to do. Home.
And yet, I don't want to be here, or for it to be over.

It.

All the bullshit as a junior enlisted
some called it hazing:
digging holes, wrestling Marines,
to carry those water jugs farther than I could imagine
to earn the respect from my NCOs,
all for them to get out

and leave me once I “picked up.”

“It is what it is,” Marines around me
would say,
but I found it is what it wasn’t, too.

It’s not all so bad:
Enlisted. Active. Deployment. Civilian.

It was everything they told me it would be.
(And more.)

And there it is ...
What it is ...
... it’s not so bad.

Not all *esprit de corps*,
Oorah, Semper Fi,
YUT, Kill, motivation

Not all fuck-fuck games.

If I reexamine every experience
I am not sure I can tell you “How it was,”
because it changes every time.

And I am still letting it sink in.

Blake Rondeau is a United States Marine Corps veteran. His writing has appeared in the *Summit Avenue Review* and *Proud To Be: Writing by American Warriors*. Rondeau has led writer’s workshops for veterans transitioning into civilian life and finally learned to take his own advice. He’s happiest walking in the woods with his wife, daughter, and dog.