



Rolando Hinojosa was born in 1929 in Mercedes, Texas. He served two years as an enlisted man in the army in the late 1940s, then was recalled in 1950 at the outbreak of the Korean War, serving in Korea as a tanker with a reconnaissance unit. After the war, he earned a BS in Spanish literature from the University of Texas at Austin, then worked successively as a high school teacher, data processor and civil servant before earning MA and PhD degrees in Spanish literature from New Mexico Highlands University and the University of Illinois respectively. He taught and held administrative positions at Trinity University, Texas A&I University and the University of Minnesota before coming back to UT-Austin to accept a professorship in the English Department, a position he still holds. In his academic life, he uses the name Hinojosa-Smith.

Hinojosa writes in both Spanish and English, though he favors Spanish. *Korean Love Songs* is his only book of poetry. For his fiction, he has been awarded a Premio Quinto Sol, a Premio Casa de las Americas, a Southwestern Conference on Latin American Studies Prize, and induction into the Texas Institute of Letters. His books include:

Estampas del valle y otras obras, Berkeley: Quinto Sol, 1973.

Translated into English and recast as *The Valley: a Re-Creation in Narrative Prose of Etchings, Engravings, Sketches, and Silhouettes by Various Artists in Various Styles, Plus a Set of Photographs from a Family Album*, Ypsilanti, MI: Bilingual Press, 1983.

Klail City y sus alrededores, La Habana: Casa de las Americas, 1976. First published in a bilingual edition in the US under the title *Generaciones y semblanzas*, English translation by Rosaura Sanchez,

Berkeley: Justa Publications, 1977. Published in English only as *Klail City: a Novel*, Houston: Arte Publico Press, 1987.

Korean Love Songs from Klail City Death Trip, Berkeley: Justa Publications, 1978.

Mi querido Rafa, Houston: Arte Publico Press, 1981.
Published in English as *Dear Rafe*, Houston: Arte Publico Press, 1985.

Rites and Witnesses: a Comedy, Houston: Arte Publico Press, 1982.

Partners in Crime: a Rafe Buenrostro Mystery, Houston: Arte Publico Press, 1985.

Claros varones de Belken/Fair Gentlemen of Belken County, bilingual edition with English translation by Julia Cruz, Tempe: Editorial Bilingue, 1986.

Becky and Her Friends, Houston: Arte Publico Press, 1990.
Published in Spanish as *Los amigos de Becky*, Houston: Arte Publico Press, 1991.

The Useless Servants, Houston: Arte Publico Press, 1993.

As translator:

This Migrant Earth, English rendering by Hinojosa of Tomas Rivera's *y no se lo trago la tierra*, Houston: Arte Publico Press, 1985.

As co-Editor:

Tomas Rivera, 1935-1984: The Man and His Work, with Gary D. Keller and Vernon E. Lattin, Tempe: Bilingual Review/Press, 1988.

KOREAN LOVE SONGS

According to the Japanese, the Spring of 1950 had been the warmest in the island of Honshu since the Disaster of 1945; at the end of that Spring, the understrength 219th Field Artillery Battalion was completing its seventh month as part of the occupation force in Japan.

And, on August 3, 1950, a week before the 219th Field joined the Second Division at the Pusan Perimeter, Rafa Buenrostro, David Ruiz, José Vielma, and Rosalío Villalón, deposited eight hundred and seventy dollars in the Kobe Nihongo Bank; an additional one hundred and forty dollars were left in the care of Miss Toshiko Ogura of the Pages of Wisdom geisha in Tokyo.

The sum, \$1,010.00, was a gift for Hiro Watanabe, 9, and for his parents, Mr. and Mrs. Kazuo Watanabe, of the Boso Peninsula.

And Jehu said, What hast thou to do with peace?

December 1949

Good Times in Peacetime Japan

The Old Army Game

Talking about Ben Fletcher,
Our barracks sergeant at Sill;
The four of us marked him down as a son-of-a-bitch,
And he didn't disappoint us.

Three weeks before we finished the course, the talk was
He was up for transfer. Well, so were we,
But the brown-nosers took up a collection anyway:
 "One buck is all . . . Whaddayasay? Just a buck each
 for Old Fletch."

"Screw Old Fletch," the four of us said.

Now:

Guess who didn't get a three-day pass when the training
was over?

The world remains as round as ever, and
With any luck at all,

 One will run into old friends.

You see, there's just a set number of artillery outfits over
here,

And there's Old Fletch

Conducting a course on quadrants.

But you've probably guessed by now:

 He's due to be transferred in three weeks.

So, the four of us refuse again,

But this time,

Guess who got the shit kicked out of him

 As he left the noncom club?

June-December 1950

The Pusan Perimeter. Breakout. Crossing the 38th Parallel. The Drive North. Encounter with the Chinese. The Rush South. Caught in the Pass. Defeat of the Eighth Army. Holding and Delaying Actions. The 3000 casualties of the Second Division. Pyongyang Afire. Brief Stand at the Tae-dong. Loss of Seoul. Back to Pusan for Reorganization. First Rest and Recuperation.

Rookies Under Stress Acting Tough

"When I was at Chaffee . . ."

"Hey, shut the hell up over there."

"It was different at Lewis. At Lewis we . . ."

"And who gives a big goddam?"

"Yeah, knock it off, let's have some quiet around here."

"Blow it out your homesick ass."

The noncom breaks in:

"It's a long day tomorrow, boys;

You can talk all the way to the line then."

Fact is tomorrow they won't feel like talking.

There'll be a lot of crying, though.

They'll remember Mama then,

And Forts Chaffee and Lewis will be the last things on
their minds.

After a while, they'll remember Lewis and Chaffee

And the good times,

And they'll forget Mama soon enough, and then,

Those that are left,

Will brag about their good life in Japan.

Nothing new here: just some month-old rookies who
think Death

is not for them.

"Now, when I was at Fort Campbell . . ."

"Yeah, I know, but let me tell you something, that
Rucker's a bitch . . ."

Friendly Fire

Light travels faster than sound,
But sound travels fast enough for some.

The burnt hand caught the shrap direct and sailed off
As the abandoned arm shot upward
Looking for its partner
Now partly buried in the mud.

The hip, too, felt the smoking clumps
Which now don't have to be surgically removed:
That wire-laying signalman is as good as dead.

The spent shell
Bounces and clangs with the others,
As the hangman's lanyard sways and waits to reactivate
the howitzer.

Sometimes, however, sound doesn't travel fast enough:
"Raise those sights, Sergeant Kell,
The forward ob. says you're still short."

Still, sound travels fast enough for some
As it did for them
Who heard the first scream
In time to hug the sodden field.

The Evening Shift

(Moving North)

When the firing stops, and the noise dies
On the last click
Of the high trajectory gun,
We sit exhausted and high-strung
As unsatisfied bitches in Death Valley heat.

A fly zooms by, little knowing it risks its life
While it seeks the salty sweet sweat produced by work
and hot steel.

It's been a long fire;
We neither see nor hear what's before us:
We merely lower the sights or raise them;
Fire long or short; short and then long;
And then,
Success! Got ourselves a bracket, we have.
And they're catching hell, they are . . .
We seldom see them now,
But we know they are there, and when they fire
Sometimes they kill some of us.
It evens out. It all comes out in the wash,
As they say.
Two more cigarettes and then it's:
"Police the area, boys;
Let's keep our house and home neat as a firing pin."

The fly calls in some support, but it's too late;
The troops have settled down after someone passes the
beer around.
And now, those flies haven't got a chance;
The betting is on to see who kills the most.

Clean up time. The brushes are worked
Back and forth, the rags are introduced and rubbed
Until the barrels gleam. The guns are really cleaned for
 luck, you know.

A just in case-maybe-perhaps
There'll be no more firing until late tonight or
With any luck
Tomorrow.

A Sheaf of Percussion Fire (Moving North)

Death is alive and well in our zone;
Older, somewhat tired, yet up and around.

Early this morning, we opened up on Them;
Tit for tat, then,
They opened up on Us, and there was Death,
Out of breath,
Trying to keep the count. Death is badly in need of
assistants,
But the young and able are busy for the moment.
So, resourceful Death makes do
With a Burroughs for Us and an abacus for Them.

No matter; it's totting the numbers right what counts
At this stage of affairs,
And Death is having one hell of a time:

“You’ve no idea what I’ve been going through
with these children;
I mean, it’s enough to make you cry;
Hear them? They’ve been at it all day and half the
night.
And it’s all I can do to keep up.”

Eating on the run,
Twice chowtime’s come and gone,
And we’re still at it;
Pieces laid and relaid, sensings made and changed,
Lanyards pulled and the breechblocks clicking
Home towards the targets
Of opportunity.

There's some smoking white phosphorous.
Who the hell's firing that?
Alibi! Alibi! The gunners laugh;
The cooks and clerks are passing the ammo,
And they don't know H.E. from shit . . .

Death knows,
But did your mother,
That shrap from Heavy Explosive, at the instant of burst,
Leaves the case at an increased velocity
(and correct me if I'm wrong)
Of approximately 200 feet per sec?
And that if the One Gun doesn't get you,
The Two Gun will?

We're really laying it on now,
And Death, dragging ass,
Is being pushed to the limit.

It's so unfair.

The Eighth Army at the Chongchon

Creating history (their very words)
by protecting the world from Communism. I suppose
One needs a pep talk now and then, but what
Gen. Walton H. (Johnny) Walker said
Was something else.

Those were darker days, of course,
And the blinding march South
Cannot be believed
Unless you were there. But the point is
That the Chinese
Were stoppable, so Gen. Walker believed.

And he was right; later on he was killed
At one of the fronts, standing up
On a jeep. We understood.

This wasn't Ketch Ridge or Rumbough Hill
Or the Frisco-Rock Island RR Junction at Sill,
But then, it wasn't the Alamo either.

And those who survived
Remember what he said:
 "We should not assume that (the)
 Chinese Communists are committed in force.
 After all, a lot of Mexicans live in Texas."

And that from Eighth Army Commanding
Himself. It was touching.
And yet, the 219th
Creating history by protecting the world from
Communism,

Brought up the rear, protected the guns, continued the
mission,
And many of us there
Were again reminded who we were
Thousands of miles from home.

Chinaman's Hat
(Hill 329)

The word is out.

Quite early this morning, under guard,
The 88th Field was marched back to retrieve its guns.
For the battalion's own good and discipline,
It is said. Yesterday,
They cut and ran; worse:
They abandoned their guns and shells,
Their blocks and sights and every bit of equipment
To them issued and entrusted.

And where does one go in a retreat?
Well, the answers are clear: not far and not for long.

Yesterday, in the midst of fear and fire,
Officers and noncoms yelled themselves hoarse,
To no avail.

"Stop, you sons-of-bitches."
"Hold it right there, you bastards."
"For Chrissakes, hold your ground."

To no avail.

They ran, and worse,
They quit their guns. So,
For their own good,
They were marched right back
To the entrenched camp. From Kujang-dong, we had
supplied the fire
Which, along with that of armor,

Rid the Chinese and cut them to pieces. What we didn't
kill

The Air Force did, and those who were left,
Up they scurried to Chinaman's Hat
'Unto the utmost bound of the everlasting hills'
Abandoning their dead.

So, early this morning,
The 88th Field was herded up, fed, talked to,
And, as said, marched off
Under guard
To retrieve the guns.

Rear Guard Action I

Nov.-Dec. 1950

This much is definite: Crying won't help.
Praying doesn't seem to either; not here and not now at
any rate.

The Chinese have been driving hard,
And once again we find ourselves in familiar grid
coordinates.

It's crystal ball clear:
The Chinese want the boys to be home in time for
Christmas.

Moving South, picking up stragglers and other lost souls.
Yesterday evening, while we were busy
Checking, polishing, and babying the guns over and
over,
Hatalski brought in another straggler
With death written all over him.

"Here's another mouth to feed," he says.

A company clerk whose company
Abandoned him; he was left to guard
Cabinets crammed with shot, leave, and pay records
along with
the usual morning reports.
He carried an unloaded carbine, and there were no
rounds on his person.

"Well, Merry Christmas to you, Mr. Company Clerk,"
said Frazier.

And with this, he goes down to his knees.

To a man we turn away, and it's back to the guns.
After a minute or two, softly,
Frazier says, "When you're through, Chappie,
Give us a hand with the elbow grease."
He keeps crying, but he's willing to work.

"How long had you been there when the Sergeant found
you?"

"Since last night."

"And they just left you there?"

"They said they'd be back . . . Where we headed now?"

"We're going South . . . to Kunu-ri."

"But what artillery outfit is this?"

"The 219th . . .

"The 219th . . . you're attached to the Second Division."

Frazier laughs and says, "Assigned,
But not attached."

The clerk nods and reaching into his pocket,
He pulls out a Baby Ruth wrapper and takes a small bite
Off the frozen candy bar.

"We'll all eat soon," Frazier tells him.

He nods again:

"The Chinese saw me standing there
By the cabinets. They saw me,
And walked right by. They waved.
Some of them waved at me."

"Yeah . . . they're just ahead . . ."

"Ahead?"

"Setting up roadblocks, most probably."

"Jesus . . ."

"We'll get out; we'll just burn the hills
And them too."

"Jesus . . ."

Rear Guard Action II

The 219th, the 14th, and other parts of Divarty
Find ourselves in the curious position
Of bringing up the rear. From what we're told,
The Second Div is retreating along
A long, long road. This is old news:
 We can see the flames from here.

The trick, then, is to get through,
But the objective is to cover the infantry
 (hope to God we don't shell our own)
And to proceed southward along the main line,
Until we stop. And we stop continually,
And we move the same.

The wounded are now everywhere; some still carry rifles.
 Up ahead,
The 219th wreckers are moving equipment in and out of
 the way.

In garrison, 'hurry up and wait' is standard operating
 procedure;
No different here, although the reasons are.
And here's Hat, bringing in a Turk;
 The first I've ever seen.
And there's an old looking General who stops
To pick up a wounded man. He puts him in the truck by
 himself.
That old man stops and waves at us as he walks to the
 rear,
Which is really one of the fronts.
Hat and I put the Turk in the truck,
And then I slip on the ice.

I find I'm cold and tired, hungry and feeling sorry for
myself.

Hat knows.

"Here," he says, and he hands me my helmet, "you
may need this."

The old looking General returns with Col. Keith and
says:

"We'll move when we can;
When night falls, have your men deployed
And the artillerymen ready.
Intelligence says the woods are full,
So fire high,
And we'll save our infantry.
The sun's going down, Tom,
But we'll all get through.
Pass the word."

"We'll all get through," he says again,
And he waves at Hat and me
As we help one more wounded man inside the truck.

Rear Guard Action III

We're finally east of the river,
Above Kunu-ri.

My God, what a fire . . . Three thousand rounds.
The breeches were black; the paint peeled,
And, at the end, we had to thermite the guns.
No need to look back.
We had to.
Jesus, what a fire . . .

Firing and then moving on.
Firing some more and moving on again. Two days and
one night of this,
But what a night! Three thousand rounds
In twenty-two minutes of actual firing time
By the clock. Fire Mission
Can't believe it, and people wouldn't understand:
But, one field artillery battalion,
With two pieces removed, firing three thousand shells
In twenty-two minutes
Is just a lot of goddam good firing.
And the Second Div guys know it.

Resting up.
Out of the pass, and resting up.
We're moving south to Pyongyang to regroup,
Then south again to the Taedong, just north of Seoul.

The Second needs reorganizing bad.

Rest Due and Taken

General Walker is dead; killed in a road accident.

What a way to go.

No grudges about the Mexican crack;

We don't have to prove anything to anyone here.

I've not seen either Charlie or Joey since the Chongchon,

But we're all coming off the line soon.

January-May 1951

From Pusan to Wonju. January Chinese Offensive. The 30,000 Chinese Dead. Counteroffensive. Drive Northward. Retaking of Seoul and Recrossing of the 38th Parallel. Charlie Villalón has been dead since the Chongchon River Action. War of Attrition. American and Chinese Dead in the Days of Strong Patrols. The Daily Dead Count. Personal Losses: Vielma, Frazier and Hatalski. Brief Hospital Tour.

Possession for All Time

Back to Pusan for reorganization, and that took two weeks.

Joey and Sonny are breaking in the new gun crews
In Baker Battery. From there to Wonju, and
No more 155's for the 219th Field:
It's the stubby 105's now.

Cold. January cold. It's the day after New Year's
And not a drop to drink for anyone:
Officers or men; on strictest orders.

We're here at Wonju because we're here . . .

We
Have
Got
Supplies
Out
The
Rear . . . And, we've also got two Chinese Divisions up
front,
They keep telling us. Well, They won't be there long.

This Division's gone mad; we've changed,
And I don't understand it.

It's ugly.

The Division's out for blood. Literally.

Worse: It doesn't matter when Seoul is retaken:

Now the mission is to kill; we've been told to forget the
real estate.

It's people we're after,

Not land.

The January-May 1951 Slaughter

I'm sick. They didn't stop coming,
And we wouldn't stop firing.

At the beginning, in January,
It looked like the Chongchon action for us again,
But we stopped them.
Brutally.

I passed on the beer ration again.
Drink? I don't even want to eat . . .
Our counter-offensive started on January 21;
Happy Birthday, Rafe.

In February, it was just as bad. If possible: it was worse.
No one talks about the cold anymore, nor about the dead,
Theirs or ours, but mostly theirs.
Also, we never seem to run out of shells.

March, and Seoul's been retaken. We took our time.
I don't want to look at the Chinese dead.
There are hundreds of them out there. They died in the
city,
They died in the fields and in the hillsides.
They died everywhere.

At one point,
It was artillery against artillery in the city.

It's early April.

I am not going to talk about this again, and so I will say it
This once:

We fired twelve thousand rounds of 105 mm. in
twenty-four hours

In support of the Second Div.

I don't see how people can understand what
I am saying when I say
12,000 rounds of 105's in 24 hours.

It means this:

Seventeen of us were wounded. Minor wounds they
were,

And all wounds bleed, but we kept firing.

There was no pain . . . the blood caked and we kept up
the fire.

We're animals,

But then, so are they.

At the aid station, Sonny Ruiz said it best:

"They came at the infantry down there like pigs in a
chute,

And we just cut their necks off from up here."

The officers are now ordering us to eat,

But we notice that their appetite hasn't improved either.

May, and I'm overdue for an R&R; I'm one of the
medicals;

Personally, I think it's mental.

Until Further Orders the 219th Field is Firing Blind

And Sergeant Hatalski again reminds the rookies,
Keep that cotton in your ears or you'll wind up deaf, for
Chrissakes!

Hook Frazier says it doesn't matter much:
"They won't survive this shit anyway."

Through the binoculars I see a jeep headed our way;
"That the Captain, Rafe?"
"Yep; and he's alone, Hat . . ."

The Hook cuts in and says, "No forward ob. again."
So Sergeant Hatalski puts on his helmet and waits
For the Captain to give us the news we already know.

It's a well known litany, and to hear it is to believe it:
"No luck, Hatalski; they're fresh out back there."

And then,
"What are the men firing at?"

"A mine field, sir."

"Theirs or ours?" (and he really wants to know)

"No idea, sir. One of our shells just bounced in there,
and that's how we found it . . ."

Hook cuts in again, "Some of our people use that lane,
sir."

"It's all right, I guess . . ." And he heads for the jeep.
Turning his head, the Captain says:

"We'll be laying wire again later on this week."

And,

“How many shells you got, Hat?”

“The limit, sir . . .”

“I see . . . Well’p, see you tomorrow, then.”

Under his breath, the noncom says:

“It’ll be here when you get back,

And we’ll still be firing goddam blind.”

The reason is quite clear:

Back at old Fort Sill, you see,

They just don’t make forward observers the way they
used to.

Night Burial Details

It's been raining most of the day,
And our dead and their foolish grins
Are still out in the field down there.

The wind is blowing this way, but the stench won't drift
 over
Until the heat is upon us
And them.
And who's to pick up our noble dead?
Ah, the regimental dregs,
The deserters, the cut-and-runners, the awolers, too,
Malinguerers all of that screwed up regiment.

And so the night passes and with it comes the warm day.
The two and a halves motor in
Laden with canvas bags of the finest, heavy duty,
 waterproof material
Found anywhere in this man's army.
The hasps are also first-class, rustproof affairs
With shiny, yellow plastic tags that are toe bound.
In short, the best canvas bags that sealed bid contracts
 can buy.

The M.P.'s with side arms and with nothing to do,
Mill around and ponder: just what the hell did *we* do to
 deserve *this*?

Well, it's join the Army and learn a trade, I say.
Just then a chopper hovers over,
But it's waved away:
You're in the wrong territory, chop.

The laws of physics are then observed: Heat rises and
with it the diesel fumes,
And the smell of the friendly dead.
It matters not to them, of course,
But the Army's made arrangements some forty miles
away
For a pit that's half as much again the size of a football
field;
Neat as a pin it is and lime-caked, too.
Someone really knows his business there.
The job's unfinished here, and now it's starting to rain
again.
(It's the season, and you have to expect it.)

As always, rumors are that some of the dregs are officers
But this is wishful thinking;
Although officers must surely have their private little
hells somewhere.
This is just a work detail that needs to be done,
And done not your way, not mine, nor anyone else's,
save one:
The Army Way: tag and count, tie the bag, the wallets go
in that pile there,
And for Chrissakes watch what you're doing!
Out of the wallets dribble the pictures and the condoms,
and the money;
From the wrists and hands, the watches and the rings,
And out of the pockets, here and there,
A rosary, a GI missal, and a French postcard or two,
Printed in Asia and on the back of which usually reads:
In case of accident, notify the President of the United
States,
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue. (He's the Commander-in-
Chief, don't you know.

At home, it's usually a telegram from the Secretary of
Defense who sends
His regards,
And regrets he cannot attend.)

The trucks are now stuffed with close friends,
Tighter now than ever, rid of worldly cares,
Each encased, snug and warm, in his private GI womb;
From here they look like so many mail sacks.

Double clutching, the two and a halves manage to get out
of the mud;
The drivers are very good at their jobs.
One more turn around, and the trucks will form a circle
And head for home in time for the night burial.
The regimental dregs stand guard over the bags,
And the M.P.'s stand guard over them;
They've all earned their pay today.
The last truck is finally out;
its fragile cargo shifts and is shaken up a bit,
But except for shattered nerves,
There are no visible casualties.
And then Hatalski says,

"Give it a rest, Rafe;
You've been at the binocs all day."

But I wave him off
And now the trucks are rounding the bend,
Lights on, thirty yards apart, all in step, and very proper.

"Take a break, Rafe, and say, Hooker,
See if you can raise the old man."

"No use, Hat, the trucks've churned up the wire by
now."

"Try 'im anyway, we need that right forward ob.
bad."

Hook goes through the motions,
And I find I need a drink; I check the canteen;
It needs filling and what must be for the very first time,
I take full notice of the Lister bag,
And judge it would do nicely;
Just right, in fact:
It too is heavy-duty and waterproof
And of the finest canvas available.

"No use, Hat; can't get a rise out of HQ."

"Keep trying, Hook."

And Hook shakes his head,
"Hatalski's becoming Regular Army,
And he wants us busy."

But that can't be the reason.

Since some of our dead are still down there
the trucks'll be back tomorrow.
The M.P.'s, fewer this time, will also be back.
Hook'll be at the phone; I'll be at the binocs,
Hatalski will fill shell requisition forms,
And he'll continue to look for our mystery man,
The right forward observer.

Hook says five will get me ten
That the dregs will skip early chow now that they know.
Hatalski spits and says,
"Okay, go down and check the guard."
Hook sets the receiver down and falls in with me
While I go see to the rookies.

The rookies are still shaken, but they'll survive this
Although tomorrow they and the dregs and the dead
Will all skip early chow.

Boston John McCreedy Drinks with Certain Lewd Men of the Baser Sort

We've come, Joey and I have, Charlie
To pay you our last respects again.
We've only just learned
You've been dead these past three months
And buried around here,
Someplace,
For the last two.
Your name's right up there, all right,
On a marker; in a sea of markers.
But neither Joey nor I,
Drunk or not, sober or not,
Believe, for one minute,
That the marker is reserved for you.
It's your plain vanilla, conventional, military cemetery;
In point of fact, it's commonplace:
 After all,
Cannon fodder is just good old Army chow.

What's left of the 219th
Is in Japan, in its third day of R&R;
But Joey and I have decided
To rest and to recuperate right here with you.

A chaplain named McCreedy came by
To watch us drink, and
By and by,
He had one or two just to be sociable.
For the last three days now
The three of us've gotten
 sozzled and sizzled,
 plastered and schnockered,

wall-eyed, pie-faced,
and pant fly open drunk
to the gills, as they say.

And now, drunk or not, or sober and not,
Boston John McCreedy keeps up with us,
And he keeps coming by
And by.

He's a Chaplain, Charlie;
One of theirs, and he's fat.

As Joey says:

A man of infinite heft.
He's from New England, Charlie;
A true descendant of our Founding Fathers
Who settled on a cape
Not ten thousand miles from this very spot.
Lately, Boston John's been wondering
What *he* is doing hee-ah.

The question is simple and direct,
But it doesn't compare to ours:
Chaplain Mac (and we point we do to this Korean soil)
What the hell's Charlie Villalón
Doing hee-ah?

And lie cries, does Boston John,
In his GI issue bee-ah.

After a pause, Lumbering Boston John McCreedy,
Descendant of whalers and traders,
Claims he knows whe-ah the responsibilities lie and that
Certain lewd men of the base are sought.

Man's drunk again, Charlie,
And Joey fixes him,
With his one good forward observer's eye,
And says:

O to be in New England now that the war is hee-ah.

And Boston John, bottle in hand,
Shakes his head and his side,
As he slips and slides back to base camp.
But he'll be back, Charlie,
Drunk or not,
Sober and not,
For he's Boston John McCreedy from Quincy, Mass.,
As fine a man as ever prayed
For the dead.

Incoming

I.

The radio guys are in pieces . . . in pieces of meat and bone.

They've been blown up and down

Into small pieces . . . Christ,

What am I doing here?

And dead. Dead to hell and gone dead. And yet,

We're still here.

II.

"We're in a bracket . . ."

"My God . . . it took them just two overs and a short and bam!

They got us cold."

"God, those guys are good . . ."

"Get down and stay down. Who got hit?"

"The radio guys."

"Anybody else hit? Anybody else? If you're wounded, speak up!"

"That left forward ob. Where was he?"

"Never mind that, stay down and keep away from the shell crates."

"There! See him? It's Lt. Brodkey . . ."

"Down . . . Stay down . . . nobody moves."

"Oh, my God, the radio guys were blown up . . ."

"Quiet now . . . Wait till they fire three sets of five.

Nobody moves. The phone on?"

"Wire's churned up, Frank."

"Rafe, you okay?"

"Yeah . . ."

"Wait for 'em, now. Nobody moves. Count 'em now: There! There! There!"

"There!"

"There!"

"Binocs okay?"

"Yeah, but no help's on the way . . ."

"All right, now: Everyone stay in place. We'll sweat 'em out.

No moving, and *No digging* . . . Rafe . . ."

"Yeah . . ."

"Keep lookin'."

III.

And we wait.

No one moves.

Some fall asleep and others just drop.

IV.

"Anything, Rafe?"

"Nothing."

"Everybody stay down; we'll give 'em another fifteen minutes."

V.

And then, across the plain, Lt. Brodkey, the left forward
ob., rises;

He begins his walk;

A lone figure in green against the burnt plain;

Helmet in one hand and telephone dangling from the
other.

"Hey! What happens if he walks this way?"

"Shut up, back there! Anything, Rafe?"

"Nothing, Frank."

"Sarge, is he hurt?"

"Stay down . . ."

And on comes Phil Brodkey, head down, uncaring;
And now he stops to pick up his helmet.

"Okay; we start the second fifteen minute wait . . .
Nobody moves."

Brodkey wipes his forehead and drops the phone;
He barely looks back as he tugs the line and reels it in.
And then the firing begins over to our old spot on the
left,
But there's no one there left to die.
Brodkey stops to light a cigarette, and he still isn't fired
on.

"What the hell's he doing?"
"Lit up a butt, looks like."
"Jesus."
"All right, hold it over there."

"Frank, jeep headed this way. A mile out, I'd say."
"Bracken you think?"
"I guess . . ."
"Okay, I'm getting up, now. Everyone else stay down.
How's it look, Rafe?"

"It a . . . it *looks* like him, Frank."
"You keep your glasses on him; I'm going to cross that
plain;
If they haven't fired on Brodkey, it means
They're through for the day."
"That's crazy. S'bound to be patrols down there.
Just hold up, Frank . . . Yeah; it's Bracken all right."
"I'm on my way, Rafe;
Tell him where I am in case he gets here first . . ."

VI.

I watch him go down the front of the hill as I hear
 Captain Bracken
 park the jeep on the back side.
Helmet on, carbine in hand, and the automatic at his side:

"We heard the shelling. What's the damage here?"

"Don't know, sir. Shelling started an hour ago . . .

 It lasted thirty four minutes,

 And we've been laying low ever since.

 If the Captain would like,

 We can start the count."

"Where's Hatalski?"

"Down there, sir. He went to get Lt. Brodkey."

"Brodkey wounded, that it?"

"I don't know, sir. The lieutenant just started walking
 Over here on his own."

"Why'd Hatalski go down there, then?"

"He thinks Lt. Brodkey needs help."

"I tried to raise you on the radio when we heard the
 fire . . ."

"They're dead, sir . . . the radios *and* the men.

 The first shells hit there . . .

 Then some mortars opened up over here."

"Mortar fire?"

"Yessir, I'd say they got fairly close up; they stopped
 after a while,

 And that's when the heavies opened up again across
 the way.

 The Captain want to start the count now?"

"Why aren't the men up?"

"It's the new batch, sir. Sergeant Hatalski told them to
 stay down

 Until he got back."

"I'm going over to the jeep and radio back that I got here
 okay,"

VII.

And he goes away, unwilling to take the dead count.
But here comes Hatalski now, and Brodkey *looks* okay.

"He's by the jeep, Frank."

"He take the count?"

"Shit, Frank."

"Hi, Rafe . . ."

"Lieutenant . . ."

"I'm okay . . . a little woozy, but I'm okay."

"You thirsty, sir?"

"Yeah, thanks. Jesus . . . (and then) I thought sure
you guys be dead by now."

"Listen here everyone:

Stay down until Hatalski gives the word;

When the count starts, give a 'yoh' "

VIII.

Bracken is now in the jeep; by the time I get there,
He'll be gone . . . Yeah . . .

There he goes . . . Ah, yes:

It's a wise child who knows his battery commander.

I can still hear the jeep as Hatalski and I go up to start the
count.

Above All, the Waste

Lt. Phil Brodkey up and shot himself two days ago;
We found his helmet, the binocs,
 The paper, the pencil,
Two packs of cigarettes and a Japanese lighter,
All in a row; We found him face down.
Half in half out of his forward ob. hole.

He used to say he was a Philadelphia Jew
Doing time; for once he was wrong.
He was a friend; he was resourceful and kind, calm,
 precise,
And something that most of us here are not:
He was very good at his job.
And yet, he cracked,
As I imagine many of us will,
In time.

My God, but I'd hate to see
The letter Bracken will send off to his family.
Maybe, just once, Bracken'll do the right thing:
He'll personally recommend him for the Purple Heart
 and the Bronze
And then leave the writing to one of the other firing
 officers.

New Battery Position

The earth reveals patches of green here and there,
But we'll soon fix that. What the guns crews don't
trample,
The shells and supplies will. And then there's the
kitchen truck.
It doesn't take long.

The dirt feels dry, too; it differs little
From that ten-fifteen miles southeast of here,
Although this one's rockier. What could grow here?
And what do these people eat?
It's a brown place Korea is; hilly, too.
And cold, but the summers can be
South Texas hot.

The new firing officers leave us pretty much alone.
They know we know, and it works out well for all.
Still, they play games. They say they don't know
How long we'll be here,
But the depth of the latrines lets us know well enough.
The maps call this hill three-two-eight;
The other one is three-oh-two.

There's a sharp and brown slope to our left;
In front, an uncluttered brown view
Of what look like old forward ob. holes.
Probably mined, and thus unsafe. So,
Someone was here before us. On the move, most
certainly,
When the fronts used to move.

We've got us a new forward ob. over on the right:
An E-5 who looks forty or around there.
Probably a regular who's been up and down the ranks.
If he drinks on the job,
He could get himself shot. There isn't a man or an officer
here
Who's above that. We'll know his name soon enough,
Although for now, he's Red George Three on the
telephone exchange,
And we're Badger Four.

The engineers are just about through here,
And the green, as it must, gradually
Gives way to the brown.

To our left,
One of the patrols is going out; through the binocs,
They look relaxed and at least three stop to light a
cigarette;
It's a marking patrol for us and the other gun crews
In the neighboring hills. Not much doing on the right;
(Which means) the tanks must be over there.

Time to ring up Red George Three:

"This is Badger Four . . . What's new?"

"This is Red George Three . . . Not much;
Who are those people to my left?"

"That's the marking patrol . . . We're pretty much
set up here;
How are you?"

"I'll be okay; I'll be sending some fixes later
on . . ."

"No need, that's why the patrol's out; this is
Badger Four."

The patrol is now straggling out and posting markers
Along the way; the gun crews are settling down. All we
need
Are the firing schedules, and we're in business.

"This is Badger Four . . . We're all set."

"This is Red George Three . . . Okay; nothing up
front;

That patrol to my left is coming back, but I
reckon

You can spot them from up there."

So Red George Three likes to talk.

Bad business saying 'up front' and 'up there' and 'to my
left,'

But still

Good forward observers are hard to come by.

We'll see.

Brodkey's Replacement

Red George Three's name is Louis Dodge.
He's Regular Army; in it, he says,
For the Big Ride: thirty years with nineteen to go.
He's made SFC twice, but he's lost the stripes,
And it's back to E-5 again.

Comparing notes on our forward ob., we found
He told Hatalski he knew machine guns; Frazier said
He told him mortars, and we all laughed for
Dodge told me he was an artilleryman.

Most of his sentences begin with
"Son-of-a-bitch. I remember one time . . ."
And then he's off and running. But it's no good;
He has a terrible memory and worse,
No imagination; he will usually include
Something that has happened to us since he's been here.
But he means no harm;
He's terrified and just wants to spend
(and end) his stretch in peace:

There he is again.

"This is Are Gee Tee . . . How are things up
there?"

"This is Badger Four. You got anything to
report?"

"This is Red George Three; just checking."

"Checking! Where in hell does he get off?"

"Man's lonely, Frank."

"I'll lonely him . . .

Son-of-a-bitch'll get us all killed, you know that?"

Hook and I both laugh,
And Hatalski walks away, shaking his head:
 "Remember what I've said, now:
 That son-of-a-bitch will get us all killed.
 You just wait."

One Solution

Early this morning, Louie Dodge jumped into the latrine,
Sat down, and refused to come out.

Threats and direct orders couldn't budge him,
And he stayed there all morning and well into the
afternoon until

Bracken drove in to check up on us.

Hatalski reported to the Captain, and,
Straight face and all,

Directed him to the latrine where

Louie Dodge has made plans to sit out the war.

Hook says Louie jumped up and saluted when he saw
the Captain.

Hatalski, without a word,

Ordered everyone else away; leaving him,

Hook, Bracken, and the firing officers looking at poor
Louie Dodge.

"What's the meaning of this?"

No answer.

"Just what the hell do you think you're doing?"

Still no answer.

"Get up here right now!"

Saluting once more,

Louie Dodge walked the length of the latrine,

Clambered up the side, and

Reported to Bracken:

"E-5 Louis Dodge reporting as ordered, sah."

Bracken could have delivered twins then and there;
He pointed to the jeep and said:

“Take off your boots and that uniform,
and wait for me over there.”

By this time, Hatalski had a blanket which he handed to
Hook;
Give this to him he says,
Until he goes and stands with the firing officers where
Bracken wheels and asks:

“Who threw him in there?”

It's explained that this was Dodge's own doing;
That we'd tried to get him out,
That he had refused to come out,
That he had been behaving in a peculiar manner,
And that he was probably suffering from fatigue.
The officers were explaining away with Hatalski and
Hook
Standing there at parade rest.

“All right, I've heard enough . . . Hatalski, radio
that I'm coming in with a casualty.”

Hatalski almost chokes, but off he goes to the phone and
says,

“Rafe, get Potter on the line; tell him Dodge's
coming
in with Bracken on casualty status. And, Rafe,
tell Potter to prepare transfer papers
on the son-of-a-bitch.”

Somebody got Louie a wool cap and
Wearing that and Frank's blanket,
He climbed into the jeep. Sitting there, looking straight
 ahead,
With his right hand shaking,
He begins to cry as the jeep
Makes its way down the hill,
And away from the war.

Liquor Ration

"All these months, you mean?

You mean that all these months . . . we've been fighting for *that*?

"No, not *that* exactly . . . But for what it stands."

"Stands? Jesus, Hatalski, we never leave *anything* standing."

"Don't be literal, goddamit. . . For what . . .

For what it represents . . . Yeah . . . that's it,

For what it represents. Ain't that right, Hooker?"

Frazier gives us both the finger, and then I turn to Hat:

"Oh Christ, I've been here too long."

"We all have, Rafe."

"Except for some . . ."

"Yeah, except for some . . ."

"The war's over for them, you know."

"Yeah, it's over for them."

"Quit repeating everything I say . . ."

"I'm drunk, Rafe."

"And so say all of us, Hat, for you're a jolly good fellow . . .

On which none of us can rely . . .

Here's another can, Hook; catch."

"And I'll have one more, Rafe."

"Just in case?"

"Just in case."

"And there you go again . . ."

"If I could only write, I'd transfer you . . . you

Son-of-a-bitch . . ."

"And if the Captain could only read . . .

And speaking of which, I think I'll have another one, too."

"Just in case?"

"Just in case, Hat, just in case."

Jacob Mosqueda Wrestles with the Angels

Mosqueda doesn't believe it for one minute,
but it's true;
And although he swears he'll never forget it,
he will
As we all do, as we all should
and do.

The scraps of flesh on Mosqueda's sleeve
Belonged to Hatalski or Frazier,
one of the two;
And when they splashed there, Mosqueda screamed and
fainted
And soiled his fatigues. And yet,
Unhurt and all,
He was carried off as if a casualty, and maybe he was . . .
But he'll forget it, in time;
In time we all do, and should.

On the other hand,
If Mosqueda had lost an arm or a leg or an eye, a nose or
an ear,
He'd not forget it nor would others let him, but
One man's meat is not another's souvenir,
And so, Mosqueda will forget;
If not, he'll become a bore, and a bother, or a public
nuisance.
But Mosqueda will forget;
His skin wasn't even pinked, let alone charred or burned
Or blasted into someone else's clothing
When the rocket burst. And,
When the rocket burst, Mosqueda was between the gun
And Joey Vielma, a casual visitor who came calling,

But this proves little except, perhaps, a law of
probabilities.

The burst took off Hatalski's face
And Frazier's life as well; Joey Vielma caught it in the
chest and face,
But Mosqueda was unhurt . . .

He screamed anyway,
And the other gun crews froze for an instant.
Some came running in time
To retch and gag and vomit over the dead
As the fainting Mosqueda screamed and cried and
sobbed
And yet

He was unhurt
When the rocket burst.

As for me, my hand was nicked a bit, my eyes and face
peppered,
When the sun glasses broke in half;
Later, in a stagger, I came upon the binocs
Some fifteen yards away.
But, as I've said, Mosqueda was unhurt, and,
Given time,
he'll forget.

Visiting Hours

The Captain, coughing politely, and meaning
Not to intrude, does so anyway.

He brings old news:
Hatalski's dead, so is Frazier and Joey Vielma.

"You're l-l-lucky to be alive."

So is he; half the battery would've killed him
Gladly enough. As for Hat, Hook, and Joey,
I knew they were dead; known it for years.

"The doctor says you'll be out soon."

I've no inclination to acknowledge, or to smile or cry.

Here comes that nurse again. What *is* that smell?
No temperature, she says.

The Captain coughs again, and then:

"You'll be up and about in no t-t-time."

We have nothing in common and thus nothing to say.

He walks away; when he turns his head

(I Swear I know what he'll say)

"Well'p, see you tomorrow."

The nurse looks up and says, "So that's Tex Bracken."
She smiles and shakes her head:

"My, my, but the things you say when you're asleep."

I look at the ceiling and say,

"Maybe I'm not asleep . . ."

Then she laughs, and the Army's far away.
Still shaking her head, she says:

"There goes the jeep . . .

Want to sit out in the sun for a while?"

Fit for Duty

Fit. The doctors say I'm fit, and
Due out Monday next.
It's certain that the 219th won't be the same,
But then, neither will I; replacements come and changes
are made,
When people are shot at and hit.

Sometime and somewhere, I read what driven steel could
do to a body,
And what it would feel like.
The description was apt and drilling enough,
But there was no account of the screaming fear,
And of the crying, or of the swearing, and the sniveling
begging
For mercy and redemption and salvation and Jesus
Christ Almighty Himself.
The rest was there,
The hammer punch driving a hot nail,
The broad red paint strokes on the green fatigues,
That free fall slam to the ground,
And the smell . . .
It was there, every bit of it.

For me, there was the thought of home and friends, and,
Strangely enough,
Of an Easter picnic near the river
Where I met a girl named Nellie
Now long dead and, I thought,
Quite forgotten.

It's now Monday next,
And before I rejoin the 219th

It's two weeks of R&R
In some well-appointed, hygienic, bug-free,
US ARMY APPROVED and designated brothel
Where the orchestra,
Always heavy on the saxophones,
Plays for the enjoyment of its customers,
That old favorite, *China Nights*.

The hand looks okay; the pieces in the face were small;
Easy to remove, they said.
The only hitch is in the shoulder,
But Major Berman says:

"You're lucky to be so young; the shoulder will be fine;
It's just stiff, that's all."

Here's the nurse, Susan Harris from Poplar Bluff, Mo.,
All innocence herself:
"I understand you're leaving . . . Well, stay out of trouble,
now."

Another smile, and she starch-marches away,
Knowing full well I'm looking at her.
When she nears the door,
She turns and wags her index finger and says:

"Rafe, Rafe, Rafe . . ."

And then she's gone, for good and forever, this time . . .
And Berman says again that I'm lucky to be so young
And we both laugh this time.

It's Monday next, release papers in one hand,
Book and bag in the other, a stroll through the gravel
walks,
While I work on a not too faithful reproduction of Nellie

In her white dress,
And a yellow flower hat . . .
No, it was a bow,
And her hair was short; yes.

There was a softball game . . .
No, there wasn't . . . But still,
The dress was white, and yes,
It *was* an all yellow bow . . .

September 1951

Second R&R in Japan. Friends at Shirley's Temple. Sonny Ruiz. Promises Kept. Nara.

Old Friends

In Honshu, the bigger island,
The southern Japanese businessmen call their
 whorehouses
Emporiums. Off Baron Otsuki Boulevard,
In Southeast Kobe, are five emporia, all in a row.

The nominal owner of Shirley's Temple of Pleasure
 Emporium
Is middle-aged Tomiko Sambe.
She prefers to be called Shirley,
And when she says it, it doesn't sound anything like that.

(Here, on an earlier medical R&R,
Tomiko replaced my lost dress Army shoes,
For a week or two, with black navy shoes of proper fit.)
My good acquaintance here, Mosako Fukuda,
Has a brother named Hideo who's a medical student in
 Nagoya.

Mosako, native to the Kobe-Kyoto-Osaka Triangle,
Visits her parents in Nara every ten days or oftener, and
 always

When the cycle comes and lays her low.
There's no pretense here:
Her parents know where she works,
And I, learning the ways of the world,
Do not add insult to their injury
By visiting their home. I know of them and of Hideo
 through her.

And, like the popular song now,
 'She's never been to Tokyo,
Hokkaido is out of the question.
She's been once to Kyushu, but never to Shikoku.'

She loves to walk, and she loves the parks.
We go and stay until the familiar shimbun!—enough—
Enough, she says, and we walk back to Shirley's.

And now, midday of the sixth day of R&R, and
Despite what Berman claimed,
The shoulder's stiffened up again, thus
Making this just one more of Mosako's love duties.
As she starts on the shoulder,
She hums and sighs, and
When she tickles *me*, *she* laughs. I laugh, too,
And after this, the usual bath and mat and bath again.

We're a likely pair, we are, and I'm certainly no
Pinkerton
To her Butterfly, but I *have* come to say goodbye. Later
tonight,
We'll go shopping and then I'll leave with nine days left
on my R&R.

Early next morning,
The World War II vets sweep the Temple of Pleasure
Emporium
While we enjoy a quiet breakfast of pastry and tea.
Tomiko, who prefers to be called Shirley,
Comes in and we shake hands, Western style. After her
tea,
We take long, full bows just like the old friends that we
are,
And Mosako will walk me to the K-K-O Railway less
than three block away.
She holds my pass, my ticket, and the money;
She puts them in my pocket, in a flowered envelope, and
then
I surprise her with yet another fan (which she needs like
a hole),

But she takes it, and her eyes close when she smiles.
Then her eyes and mine open wide when the train
 surprises us, and we watch
The rushing crowds.
 Gently with her fan,
 She pushes me away, and
 again her eyes close
When she smiles. She turns,
Walks away, carefully opening and studiously closing
 the fan
As the train rears back before
Moving on. I look for a familiar patch or face,
And finding none,
I remove my cap in time to catch the last
Faint smell of the tea and pastry
Prepared by my old friend.

Kobe Station

As usual, in this run,
The porter hands out a card familiar to all servicemen:

These trains, kind sir, that ply
The K-K-0 Triangle
Are fast and prompt.
They are too muchly crowded
And very often cleaner so there
For sakes of convenience they are.
Bon voyage indeed!

Indeed.

The porter smiles and passes on.
I open Mosako's fruit basket which proves to be very
popular

Among the children in the compartment.
Their parents, heads inclined,
Give their consent.

One of the children breaks out in giggles
As she presents me with an apple.

I produce a pear for her father
Who passes it on to his wife.
I pass one for him again, and he thanks me
Tipping his hat.

The youngest child returns; she hops in my seat,
squirms over
And nestles into me.

We're all Nagoya bound; feeling safe
Among this Japanese family
I drop off to sleep,
Despite the shoulder
Which begins to ache again.

Nagoya Station

Nagoya Station.

The children arrange my belongings,
And the fruit ritual is repeated. Graceful bends to the
waist,
And they're gone.

Many uniforms around, but again no familiar patch or
face.

It's eight forty, and the Tanaka Tea Gardens, a mile off,
Is where I'm to meet Sonny Ruiz,
Who these many months
Has been AWOL (and reported missing sometimes, and
dead at others).

They'll never find him; to begin with,
To Americans he looks Japanese; For another,
No one really gives a damn, one way or another. The
Army,
For all its pretense,
Is not led by divine guidance.

Sonny, of the *old*, old 219th and twice wounded, made
corporal and stopped;
One day he filled out and signed his own Missing-in-
Action cards,
Just like so much equipment;
He personally turned them over to battery HQ,
Then simply walked away to the docks.

Army efficiency being what it is immediately produced a
replacement
Who promptly went mad during practice fire,
And that was the end of that.

Not long after, cards started to arrive from Nagoya and
signed
By Mr. Kazuo Fusaro who, in another life,
Had lived as David Ruiz in Klail City,
And who, in this new life,
Was now a hundred and ten per cent Japanese.
There he is, punctual as death: Business suit, hat, arms at
his side,
And as I approach, he fills the air with konnichi wahs,
As he bends lower and lower, arms still at his side,
smiling the while.

He and I are the only ones left:
Charlie Villalón, Joey Vielma, Cayo Díaz
And a kid named Balderas
Have been erased from the Oriental scene.

When the tea and the spinached eggs are served,
It's time for the remember stage:
Remember when Joey humped that girl against the truck;
And did I ever find my shoes at Shirley's Temple;
And where and how
Did Charlie put away all that beer? And didn't we,
As Cayo said,
Make out better with Japanese girls because we were
Chicanos?
And on, and on . . . until we turn to his side of things:
Business is fine, and he is marrying later in the fall;
A schoolteacher, no less.

And home?

"This is home, Rafe. Why should I go back?"

He has me there. Why, indeed?

And then:

“Can you stay at least two days, like the last time?”

Walking out, he turns and asks:

“What happened to your face?”

He helps me with the basket and says: “Don’t answer.

Injured on the job, I’ll bet.”

Again we laugh, and I follow him

As we walk out to a cool, crisp day in Nagoya, Japan.

Brief Encounter

Two M.P.'s deep into their jobs, stop my uniform;
It's nothing to do with me:
The uniform's a good target, and when it moves,
They aim.

"Let's see that pass, Corporal . . ."

"Medical R&R, huh?

The face part of that?

Where you staying?"

But I'm an old hand. Despite the right questions,
By the looks of them, they've only been here a few
months,

So I counter:

"What do you recommend?"

It isn't the answer they expect, but it does give them time
To see the ribbons.

"Says here you got eight days left . . . Plenty of time."

Just then, Sonny Ruiz passes by and ups his hat,
showing,

As he carries, the biggest, the loudest, the most glorious
bouquet

In the whole of Honshu.

One of them grunts and says:

"Pipe the gook and them flowers, there.

Damndest place I've ever seen."

I fold the pass as they tell me about the Golden Flower
Hotel which,
According to them 'is good because it don't get raided
much.'

Kazuo Fusaro crosses the street, twirling his bouquet,
And I follow the course set by him,
While the M.P.'s drawing a bead, stop another uniform
headed their way.

At Sonny's and Tsuruko's

I admire the porcelain in the corner, and Tsuruko
explains

It's Belleek and not Japanese;

She points out the hows and the whys in the differences:
Subtle and yet not so, if one knows where to look.

Distance and subject being relative, it's like directing fire
from a hill:

Simple, if one knows where to look.

Sonny, kimono-wrapped, pours the tea; Tsuruko says,
In her precise Spanish for secretaries,
That the piece is her favorite: a gift from Sonny.

On the same nook, next to the cloth bag,
Is my new fruit basket: a present from them.

On top of the basket, a photograph of Sonny and
Tsuruko at the beach.

And, on top of the table, my pass, my ticket, and the
money.

I'm bound for Tokyo, specifically to the Aoyama
Cemetery

Where, in biting cold, in the month of February
Before the war, the ashes of Natsuko Watanabe were
buried

A matter of some eighteen months ago.

It was a small fire near the Ernie Pyle Theatre, and yet
Ample enough for some seventy people.

The trip is for her,
for Charlie,
and for Joey
Who learned to love this land
Which Sonny Ruiz, with increasingly good reasons,
Calls home.

At The Aoyama

It's expected of me to be light-hearted and gay,
But I can only manage a smile
Before the death pillars. I join a group that's come to
 pray for its own dead.
I then clap my hands to awaken the spirits;
I find I do this
With no sense of embarrassment.

It may be that I'm too late:
Natsuko must surely know by now
And thus be in concert and union
With Charlie and Joey.

Incense burns, and I lower my head.

Time to go. Next stop: the Pages of Wisdom geisha
Where the aged Yoshiko Ogura keeps some more of the
 money.

A table for six and its sake before and tea with
Followed by sweets. I'm given space for me and my
 belongings.
First, a bath and then
To turn over the money that belongs to young Hiro
 Watanabe.

Hiro Watanabe

I'm introduced as an old friend;
Hiro nods, and he bends as I do,
Handing his cane to the woman.

I then take his hand in both of mine, and Hiro rubs
My forehead, my nose, chin and mouth.
Nodding, he steps backwards, and he grins.

"He remembers you well," she says,
Obviously proud of the handsome youngster.

I then ask if he still likes ice cream;
She asks, and he laughs as we cross the street to stop
The first vendor we see.

The remainder of Hiro's money goes to his parents
As Natsuko wished. Tradition is strong and out of
courtesy

She asks a hundred questions for which no answer is
expected. Still,
She deserves to know,
And Hiro, I say, can explain.

I take his hand in mine, we bend low for our goodbyes,
and
Hiro rubs my face again and then he waves
As I call out my goodbyes to them.

South to Nara

Money disbursed, and the boy Hiro seen to,
It's time to call on Hanako Kokada:

'Small and round of eye and body, Her teeth
Occlude; set for perpetuity in an understanding
smile.'

Two orphans, she and I
On a train trip to Nara, her favorite, and now mine
Because of her who sits with index finger crossing my
face

Counting purple pits.

She counts twelve, but only three are of consequence;
The rest will be erased in time,

Much like this war
And those it took.

Nara is light years from Korea,
And if the Christians were Christian, and I one of them,
I'd take them to Nara
(to show them where Adam trod in search of Eve).

The Last Day

Awakened by the whisper-soft palm
Of Hanako's hand pressing my temples, I rise
For the toilet and then the bath where cup in hand
She rinses my back and
Chest, and she catches me
Catching her staring at my purple shoulder.

No, it doesn't hurt, and yes, you can sponge there . . .
Soaked and rinsed and soaped
And rinsed again: She covers me with hot towels;
She walks away, and I stare: I always do.
She turns and walks
Toward me, teapot in hand, and then she pours
While I barely notice
The sun working its way through the cracks
Of the Nippon Sun and Bath House
On Yomuri Avenue
In Nara.

January-March 1952

Korea Redux. Taking Care of Tina Ruiz. More Dead. End of the Road. Back to Texas.

Up Before the Board

The Board of Inquiry wishes to ascertain
Facts relative to
The matter of Cpl. David Ruiz's death
In battle action in the summer of 1951.
On a Government Issued bible, I swear
That, to the very best of my knowledge,
Cpl. Ruiz is dead.

At parade rest,
Before the Board,
I think of old, mad Tina Ruiz, the widow of Ortega,
Who lost another son, Chano,
On a sixth of June, a few years back.
She's Sonny Ruiz's sole beneficiary, and she's worth a
howitzer or two;

And so I lie.

You see, I'm what's considered to be
"A good man." In their view,
One who won't cry, carp, complain, cower, or crap in his
pants.
A good man. Yessir. One of the best.
And so, I lie.

If you're a well-fed monk
Who's tired of womanizing, and who's happened to hit
on the idea that
No man is an island, well and good.
But, Tina Ruiz needs something to eat and to live on.
As for every man's death lessening me,
John the Good was right on the button on that one:

Not counting the hundreds of the unseen enemy
In the plains, vales, glens, hills, and mountain sides of
this garden spot
 called Korea,
The violent deaths of Hatalski and Frazier, Brodkey and
 Joey Vielma
 and Charlie Villalón,
Have diminished not only me,
But my own sure to come death as well.

The Board could hardly be interested in anything
 resembling sense,
So I continue my starring role as "A good man,"
Who's believed; and well he should be, you see,
He's been hit twice,
And he's back for more.

A Matter of Supplies

It comes down to this: we're pieces of equipment
To be counted and signed for.
On occasion some of us break down,
And those parts which can't be salvaged
Are replaced with other GI parts, that's all.

And so, in the 219th Field at least,
On another burial day,
The *newer* newer officers stay away, being busy on more
important matters
Than seeing to the junking of replaceable parts;
And tomorrow or the day or the week following that,
A two and a half or a weapons carrier
Bringing the shell supply will dump other replaceable
parts
On our doorstep:

"Sign right here for the shells and equipment.
Anything to take back?
No? See you in a couple of days, then; oh
And by the way,
Here's a past issue of *Time*: It says,
Among other things,
That we're winning the war . . . Isn't that nice?"

"Yes, isn't it . . ."

And one signs for the shells, and
The men are received and made welcome,
For tomorrow's another day, and one must earn one's
bread;
And what's that that the Chaplain just said?
Was it something about violent hands upon themselves?

No matter; he's reading it from a book,
And I suppose anyone of *us*,
Could have done *that*,
Except
For the fact
That we don't belong to the same union;
Our guild furnishes the bodies;
And his, the prayers. Division of labor it's called.
But why the long face, Man of the Cloth?
Truthfully now, aside from us,
Who cares?

This is Where We Came In

Gun barrels don't talk, and they won't listen.
They don't do much except fire
And sometimes
At the wrong people. But I should care . . .
I work for the State,
And it pays me well, it gives me twenty one squares a
week, and
All the lanyards I can pull.

The Director

Ahem! Boys,
The target for today
Is well marked,
And the forward observer
Will keep us in touch.
Ahem!
One more thing . . .
We'll fire at will
And in tandem: Baker, Charlie
With Able right behind.
And, by the way,
We may need to call upon
Some volunteers.

The other batteries need
experienced men.

We've looked high and low,
And it looks like we'll take 'em.
from the 219th
Oh, and by the way again
The beer rations
Came through,
And the two and a halves will bring
'em up today.

The Choir

Yesterday he called us men.
Some soggy patch.
Another first!
Drunk, dead, or mad.
Words and music to live by.
Now what?
Incoming, everybody down!
"O Earth,
What changes
Hast thou seen?"
Now it comes . . .
Not from the 219th, you bastard!

There's that word again.

High and low, but mostly here.
Who the hell's side you on ?
Delayed time fuse:
What was that?
Is he serious?
Way to go, Cap!

(There, that ought to hold
these bastards.)

(Hey, the Cap's okay!)

Stage direction: Curtains at Fast
Fire.

Vale

It's over. Or it is for me, anyway;
I'm leaving; through, finished, and done with:
I've hit retirement age, give me my watch . . .
For the last four months I have forced myself
To think not to think about this day,
And God knows I've thought of little else.

No more deaths and no more killing; not by these hands,
At any rate. That's for those who stay.

No need to thermite my one one four model
Of my one five five gun;
Just remove the blocks and sights.

'Leave artillerymen alone, they're an obstinate lot.'
But, I'm through here, and I'm through with skull in
place.

In time, the U.S. Army will tell us how many men
It lost here; for now

I'll tell you how many friends I lost:

Chale Villalón and Pepe Vielma,

Cayo Díaz and a kid named Balderas;

Frank Hatalski and Hook Frazier,

Boston John McCreedy from Quincy, Mass.,

(As fine a chaplain as ever punched a can)

And, Phil Brodkey . . .

Oh, and there was Louie Dodge,

Who though not really a member of the chorus,

We later learned that another outfit

Had sent him to us: Knowing full well he was mad to the
core.

Others died as well, strangers when they came
And strangers when they left;

A field full of men mowed down who were later stuffed
and crammed
Into trucks by other men who committed Army sins
And thus paid dearly for them. Not quite dearly enough,
Of course, having gotten away with their lives,
Which is more, to be sure, than can be said for the
sad-faced Company Clerk
Who finally found a loaded carbine.

And there were others: Not friends, no, but just as dead.
And now, for a good while at least,
It's back to Klail,
And home. Home to Texas, our Texas,
That slice of hell, heaven,
Purgatory and land of our Fathers.