

R. S. Carlson

Footnote and Detail

After the headlines
became smudges on yellowed newsprint
lining an apple carton of knickknacks
on a back shelf of the garage
waiting for the yard sale
that never happens

and the film clips
faded into archives
his children would have to research
even to find the names
of bases and cities long since
cannonaded into the mulch of history,

he found The Book.
It detailed the last campaign
the other side carried across the line
a few months after
home soil gave him
life out of uniform.

Back then, of course, when
lines of possession across the halfworld
burned TV footage south on newsmaps,
he wondered . . .
but there were diapers to change
and books crying for close reading.

Now The Book told . . .

*The troop strengths, the units assaulting,
the units defending,
the commanders' and advisors' radio calls,
the advances, surrenders, retreats.
reinforcements and regroupings . . .*

. . . the metrics of hardware —

*M16, AK47, 60 mm mortar, 81 mm, 82 mm,
M79 grenade, M60 machine gun
51 caliber machine gun, 12.7 mm machine gun . . .
B40 rocket, 122 mm rocket,
105 mm howitzer, 130 mm . . . T-54 tank . . .*

He drifted from the facts back to
the voices in the old bunker
out on the hill . . .

*Hey Bro, extend!
Ashmore did, and for his MOS
he got 8 thou!*

*Look — ya sign,
ya bank 5, maybe 10 thou,
ya get an extra R&R
ya do another six months
and soon as ya step off the bird stateside,
you are FREE, man, OUT!*

His son yanks the mower
to growl across the front lawn.
In the kitchen, his daughters argue
over who washes dishes.
He counts six months — October to March —
on his fingers.

In his hands,
Chapter Two stories the old hilltop.
*The advisor to allied marines
ready to move his unit off the hill
powdering around them
under 130 mm shellfire,*

*low crawls from command post
to the old unit's bunker
to pull the intercept team:
he finds
a crater of wreckage
in flames . . .*

. . . and that paragraph
has a footnote.

At page bottom swim acronyms
for Killed-In-Action and
Body-Not-Recovered
— and two names.