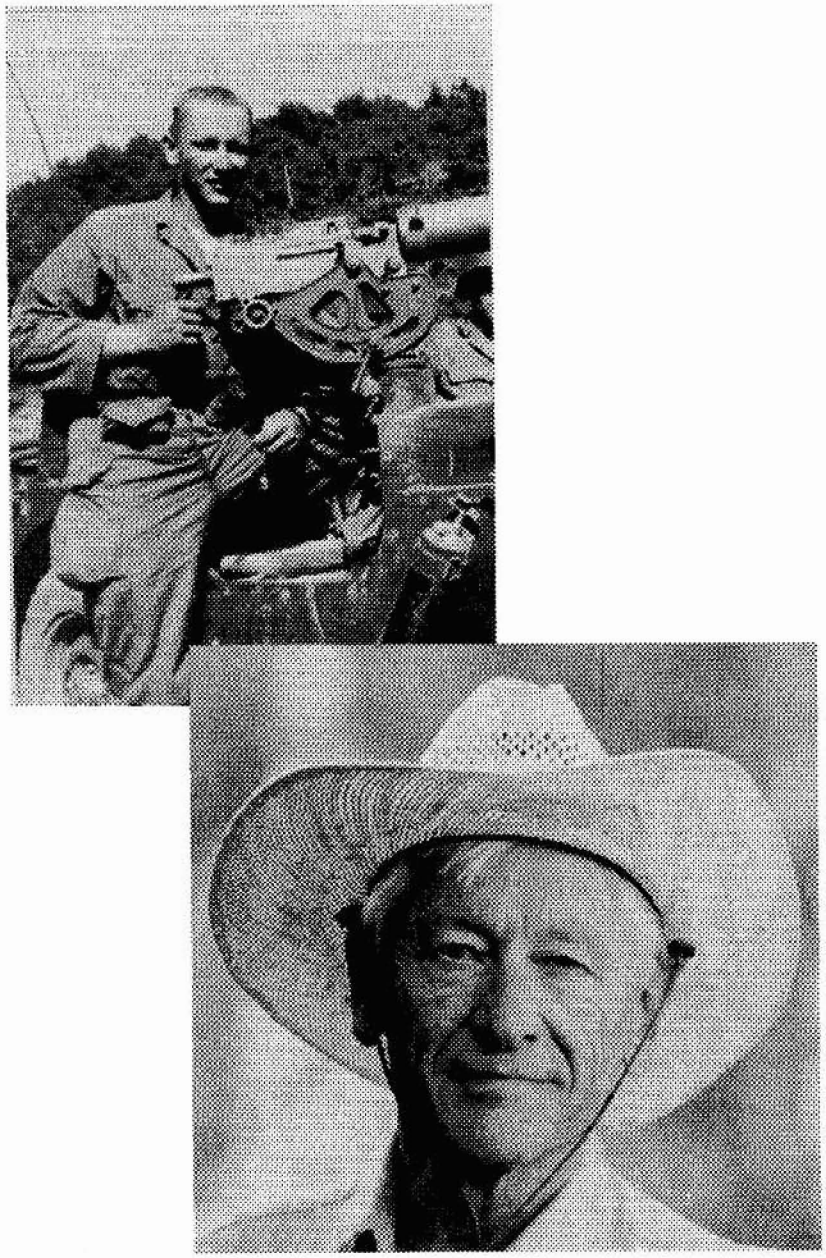

Reg Saner was born in 1929 in Jacksonville, Illinois. After graduating from St. Norbert College, he was called up from R.O.T.C. and served as a lieutenant in the army from 1951 to 1953, including service as an infantry platoon leader in Korea in 1952 and 1953, where he was awarded a Bronze Star. After his discharge, he earned MA and PhD degrees from the University of Illinois. In 1962, he accepted an appointment to the Department of English at the University of Colorado at Boulder, where he still teaches. He has also been a Fulbright Scholar at the University of Florence, where he studied Renaissance culture, and a freelance photographer.

Saner's poetry has appeared in such journals as *American Poetry Review, Atlantic Monthly, Carlton Miscellany, Georgia Review, Ironwood, Malahat Review, North American Review, Paris Review, Poetry, Prairie Schooner, Southern Poetry Review, Virginia Quarterly Review* and *Yale Review.* He has received the Walt Whitman Award, a National Endowment for the Arts fellowship, a Colorado Governor's Award for Excellence in the Arts, and selection for the National Poetry Series. His books include:

Climbing into the Roots, New York: Harper & Row, 1976.
So This Is the Map, New York: Random House, 1981.
Essay on Air, Athens, OH: The Ohio Review, 1984.
Red Letters, Princeton, NJ: Quarterly Review of Literature, Poetry Series IX, v. XXVIII-XXIX, 1989.
The Four-Cornered Falcon: Essays on the Interior West and the Natural Scene, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993.
Reaching Keet Seel: Essays on the Anasazi Experience, forthcoming from the University of Utah Press.

One War is All Wars

"There isn't enough.
Somebody must die for it."

And simply as that
the black rubber bags
zip shut
over the oatmeal brains
over the garbage faces
like official breath.

Line after line after
line regular as
domino theory turned
into dark weather

the white crosses
neat
as the masts of small ships
sailing deep.

Leaving These Woods to the Hunters

The carcass hangs by a grease rope,
head and legs hacked off,
but still big as a small elk.
Under sumac clumps a skirmish
of arctic jays redden breast plumage
nagging tufts from hide
stuck to one hoof.

The earth turns slowly as fog.

This son of a bitch has come prepared—
long-bladed kitchen knife, whetstone, steel!
He never heard of weight.
Lightly he strops at the pelt
and its meat side, a damp pearlescent gray,
falls of its own heft.
Through naked aspen
the October sun is a yolk.

Downstream kneeling to drink
I take in the smack of salt.
Deer's blood?
My pack harness creaks
as wiping my chin I glimpse a face
that shines like an otter's neck,
its sleek light rippling
distortedly in place. Poor creature
and merciful liar.

Yet I'll slog downtrail
leaving these woods to the hunters,
having never myself
killed anything
more beautiful than a man.

Little Rituals

Though nations tool up for it, most boys
take great pains with their own disappearance.
But all that is later. For now, the rainy season
and boredom. Day may answer day
like a long correspondence; he's looking only at twigs
in the amnesia of fog. A fingertip traces headlights
trickling down the pane, runny as an egg's
burst eye. Little rituals of the moment.

Beyond which the new script is being written: roads
that wander all over, men wearing guns,
belted jackets.

The kid staring past rain as it nipples
the birdbath doesn't see a truck
jolt and sway through long tunnels of dust,
nor how each truckload of troops in the convoy
lurches and lolls, passive as drunks
who keep looking back nonetheless
at everything. Watching a poplar, unshrapneled,
a farmyard whose horse pond grows small, then shuts
in the simple pressure of distance.

Re-runs

All that flying iron was bound to hit something.
His odd nights re-visit a stare, let a torn head
trade looks with him, though the incoming whine
was only a power saw. If what's buried won't cry
and won't go away, if in some field on the world's
other side all crossfire tracers burn down
to old movies whose re-runs he's sick of,
who's to blame then for what's missing?
Odd nights, a clay pit or two may waken him
still, alone inside a nameless grief holding
nothing: their faces, grass shrapnel—which some field
on the world's other side bothers with. Like seed,
the shapes that won't go away without tears.
They just lie where they fell, and keep going.

They Said

They said, "Listen class attention before sorting
your blocks put the red ones in the tray
and yellow in the bowl." So most got all but one
or two of them right and drank from paper cups
of pre-sweetened juice voting later to stuff
them nicely down the trash-clown on the way home.

They said, "Now color Holy Manger brown
the Virgin Mary blue the Christ child pink
and St. Joseph anything you like." So this one boy
colored him polka-dot but was allowed to try again
on a fresh sheet getting a green paper star on his
second St. Joseph he colored him pink a suitable choice.

They said, "Democracy is at the crossroads everyone
will be given a gun and a map in cases like this
there is no need to vote." Our group scored quite
well getting each of its villages right except
one but was allowed to try again on a fresh village
we colored it black and then wore our brass
stars of unit citation almost all the way home.

The white crosses alter whenever I move. Row on row, they realign precisely, geometrically: perfect as close-order drill. While I look for the friend I don't find, the arms on the crosses shift, so as always to focus and open toward me. They do it by night too; faces and places I start awake from, as if hitting a trip wire. Back where the past is mined.

❑

Once monsoons begin, the sky hangs dark and heavy as hides. Logs, burlap, rain. After the sixth straight 24-hours, anything wearable is sodden as bunkers and trench walls collapsing. Daytimes I choose some one patch of overcast to brighten on will power, while leather gear re-stitches itself with green mold. By week two, the only imaginable sound is rain letting up, and whenever I listen, I hear it.

❑

"At ease, gentlemen. Let's keep it brief. This map gives our share of the ridge: markings in blue, our howitzers and 8-inch pieces. Lacking radios the enemy's greater numbers are noise: bugle signals, hand-sirens, even bells. We own the air. That means night attacks, with only their first two waves coming armed. Their third and fourth waves may carry scythes, hooks, farm tools, sticks. Their fifth waves carry nothing. Remind your men Eighth Army is in full support if needed. Later today my G4 will have details on the R&R we're awarding every five kills confirmed."

❑

When it comes to a .50 caliber machine gun, single shots call for technique. And for tripod legs sandbagged against kick. They call for a boxed belt full of fat nails, and this flat trigger: the butterfly switch. But because any bullet that misses will crack the air overhead like a cattlewhip, my first shot could drop him from view and back under cover, leaving the eye unsure what's been hit. Here where everyone's next breath can depend on ballistics mixing with windage, my forefinger has traveled seven thousand miles by water to poise over this bit of gunmetal blue and fire at a difference in cloth. I wait till he sets down his ammo load; half standing, looking my way. Then, soft as a penis kissing an apple, my finger gives one quick, accurate tap.

❑

At Graves Registration two clerks young as I am act like old hands: "This is your first KIA, lieutenant?"

"Yes."

Whereupon, with almost a flourish, they unzipper a dark rubber bag to show a slashed head like Barnett's, the country boy who'd bragged he screwed goats. North Carolina? Possibly Georgia. It's him, but I face the remains of his face by saying inwardly, again and again, "This isn't him, he's not here. He's elsewhere." Then I sign two certifications small as cards, for sliding into the book of the dead. Outside a PFC pulls the pin on 3.2 beers we suck lather-warm from cans, talking Red Sox and Yankees under summer shreds of something once like an orchard.

❑

"Despite problems last night, mainly we held. These map-changes update our positions. Division Rear is doubling artillery. During the breakthrough, Tyler kept his head and called in fire on his own bunkers. We killed ten to their one, but their later waves picked up rifles and handguns, advancing. Temporarily, Battalion Medical will regroup back to Wonju. Stop your men shooting rats by explaining that the fever spreads when vermin desert the carcass. With perimeters fluid, be sure all squads get late changes in password. Tyler knew none of our officers has ever been captured. I'm putting his name in for a Silver Star. Now G4 has one or two changes on ammo and food."

❑

Patrolling the river by night our cover is chestnut trees. Near the south bank we snort and choke as we drink from the stream, like hogs at trough. Luhan sits back on his haunches, dark hair dripping, the butt-plate of his rifle grinding on rock in the shallows. A moon, large and low, rises through leaves as one by one other faces tilt, look toward it, blinking streamwater off lashes. Stagner lifts his eyes, forehead still streaming: "Fuck the moon!" And watches the moon go up.

❑

In Battalion HQ, from commo wire looped between tent poles, a skull swings as a joke, though nobody can say whose side it was on. Because of that gunk they soak into the army's tent canvas, daylight barely penetrates; yet the sergeant-major and I can see well enough to feel we're growing into our jobs. He gives me a grin like the pearl handles customizing his gunmetal hip as he

twists the skull round to show off its eyes, green crabapples plugged into each socket.

❑

"Word on the fever seems good. Eighth Army says close to a cure. Warn units that self-inflicted wounds equal refusal to serve. And appoint someone from each crew to make sure men don't fill their canteens out of your water-cooled .30 calibers. Our flares last night lit up their dead by the hundreds along the major assault routes, though by daybreak the bodies were gone. With so much ammo showing corrosion, check boxes for date. Take names of men who pocket those leaflets offering soft terms for surrender. Remind each man that First Battalion has never abandoned its wounded. Later, possibly even today, a member of my staff will outline the new situation on water."

❑

Fresh bursts. Against the night sky, more parachute flares ignite, float smoking down, oscillating like pendulums. As the stadium audience applauds like rain, rice farmers go poking along muddy ox-roads, into the usual drizzle. Far south of the MLR by now, traveling perhaps by dog.

And still on the 4th, every 4th of July, after the municipal sunset, after applause for each name on the committee, the skyrockets rise and die beautifully, the white-hot shrapnel spurts, furrows the air, each burst. Aerial salutes report to the eye as muzzle flash and sheared jaw, red teeth, clay dirt on the brains. Or maybe with one long zipper pull some corporal exactly my age throws open a dark rubber bag, there yet, in any such zipper I hear: a metallic hiss taking my breath, taking it

back through tanks gutted and rusting like fire, through cratering in fields and roads, through stump forests reseeded in shoe mines that end legs at the ankle.

A stadium anthem can do it, or flag at a ballpark, its vague sidle, stirring in breeze over one or two rows of empty seats. The flag slowly dipping, lifting, over nobody there. Explaining. Trying to explain.