

Such Rippling Flags

Robert Lowes

As a kid, I once saw old man Starsinger,
a veteran of the War to End All Wars,
doze off in his easy chair. He had been gassed,
but survived to strong-arm a drill press.

Now my father's D-Day brothers are retreating
in ambulances and hearses. Men once straight
as their rifles teeter as they stand for applause
at Veterans Day concerts, their white shocks

of hair like cotton bolls on spindly stems. Men
I could topple with a nudge chased Nazis
across France, tossed chocolate to orphans.
Every year fewer of them rise from the seats.

In their tracks are grunts whose frozen fingers
squeezed triggers in Korea, and after them,
the class of 'Nam, which rocked to Purple Haze
like I did, a few safe years behind.

Too many boys love explosions on screens.

They answer back with raspy roars. What should

I tell them about the march that begins

with bugle calls and such rippling flags

and ends with a wheelchair's hiss? I've outlived

the man who waded onto Omaha Beach,

glinting at me from an Army photo, without

a wrinkle, hat cocked, still mum about it all.

Robert Lowes is a writer whose first collection of poetry, *An Honest Hunger* (Resource Publications), was published in 2020. His poems have appeared in journals such as *The New Republic*, *Southern Poetry Review*, *December Magazine*, and *The Christian Century*. His father, Army private Marvin Lowes, swam ashore to Omaha Beach under enemy fire on D-Day after his half-track sank in the waves—a story told by someone else.