
WLA
WLA
War, Literature & the Arts
Fall - Winter 1999



War, Literature & the Arts:
An International Journal
of the Humanities

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William Schaff

A post–war generation has its own concerns and obligations: not just to look and mourn (although the need to mourn persists), but to grapple with the contemporary significance of the Holocaust, which is not the event itself, but memory of the event, the great distance between then and now, between here and there.

—Monica Bohm-Duchen, After Auschwitz: Responses to the Holocaust in Contemporary Art

I am 26 years old, and I find myself in the grip of Holocaust memory, the collected memories of the event. The images, testimonies, music, denials—all these combine in such a way that I am left stymied. How do I describe a loss I cannot comprehend, yet recognize as real? Indeed, my work does not try to directly illustrate the horrors of that time, but, instead, attempts to illustrate the horror I feel towards knowing that the Holocaust occurred.

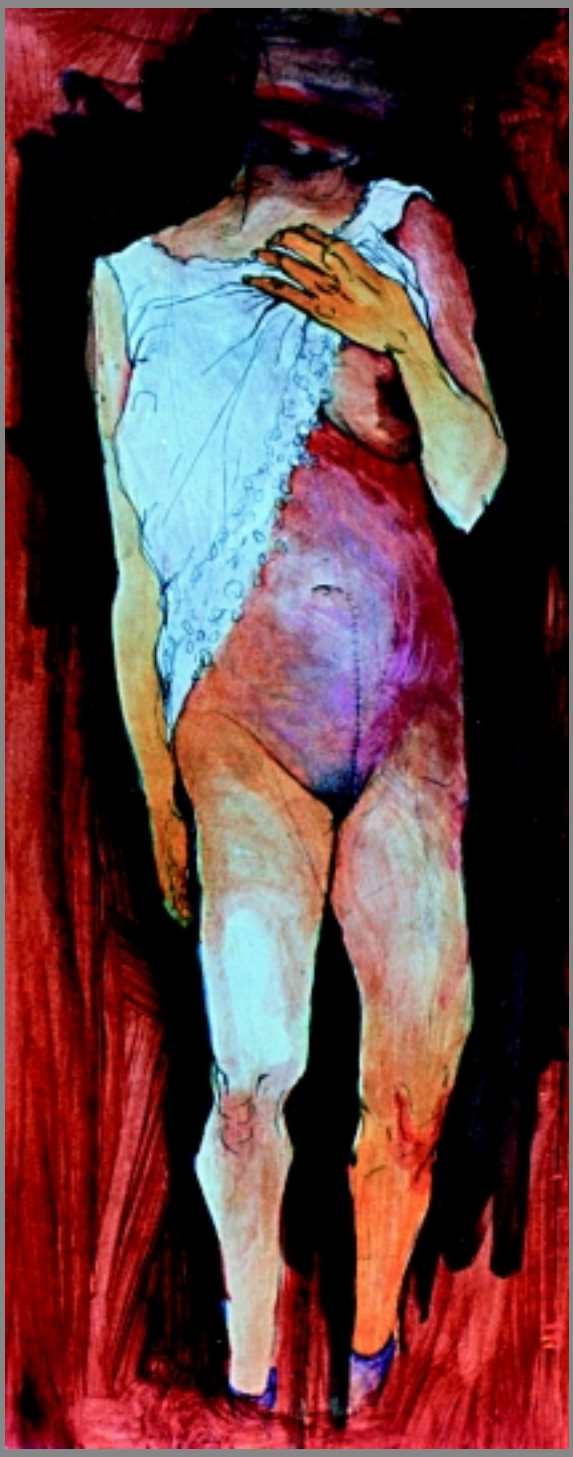
I do not fully understand why the fact of the Holocaust has changed how I view everything I experience. On some level my life is forever to be interpreted through the filter of countless pages, and endless footage. Voices of people I have heard but never met. Tears I have watched shed, but have no way to console. I had hoped that in learning more about the Holocaust, I would purchase a better sense of my feelings and what is becoming the principal topic of my art. But if anything, any new knowledge has brought me further and further into a wish to grapple with the issues of such a large-scale genocide. The more I learn, the more difficult it becomes to not seek still more information, a constant search for a conclusion to something I have come to realize has no conclusion available.

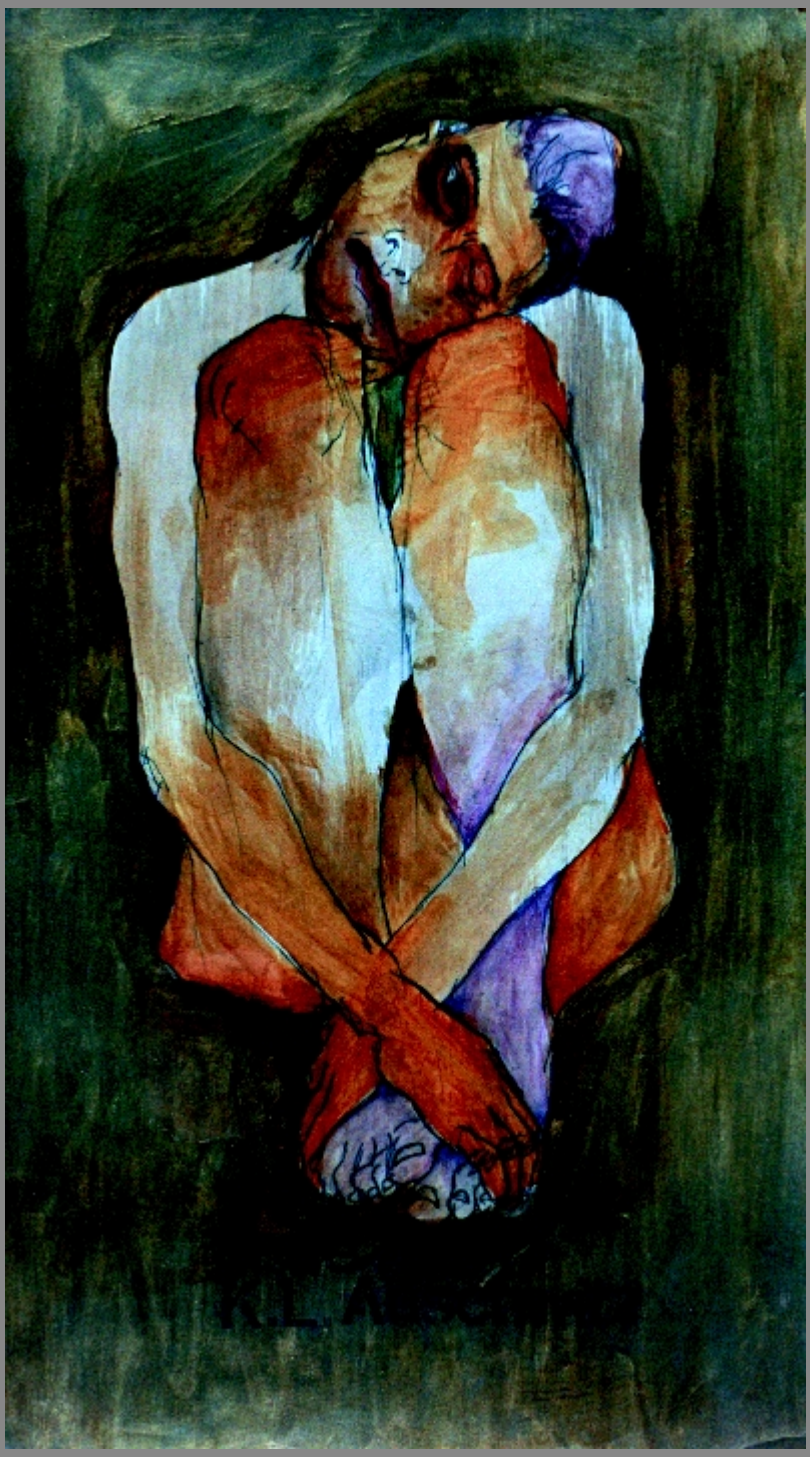
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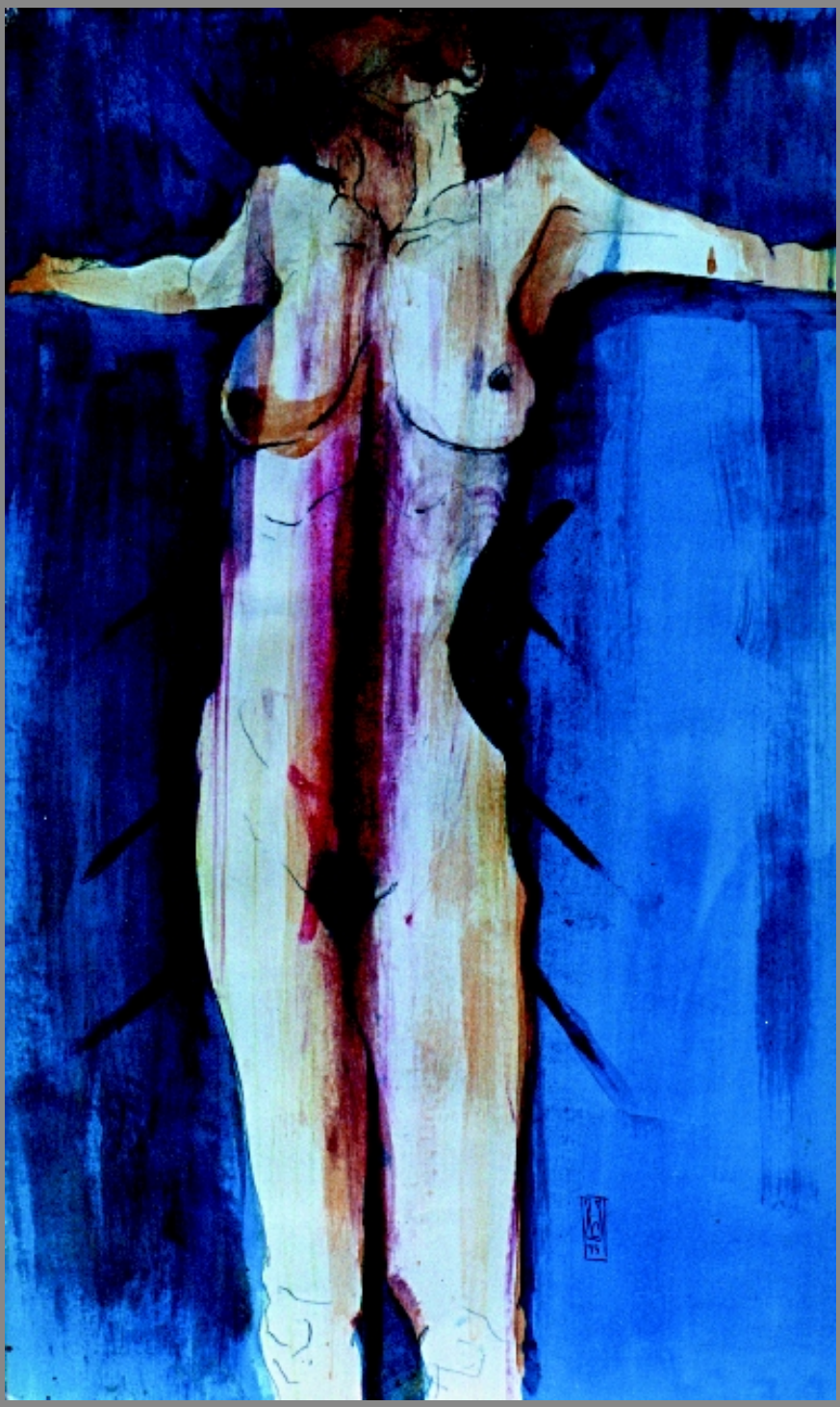









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William Schaff, a 1996 graduate of the Maryland Institute, College of Art, continues to explore, question, and create avenues of dialogue on the effects of Holocaust memory on himself and the society around him. Presented here is a selection from a body of work that now numbers over 200 individual paintings and drawings. Humanization and de-humanization are the central focus for Mr. Schaff's work—work that is a provocative and disturbing reminder of each generation's effect on the next. Mr. Schaff lives in Providence, Rhode Island.

All the works presented here come from a series studying Holocaust memory and were on display during a show at the Permanent Professors' Art Gallery at the United States Air Force Academy. An interview with Mr. Schaff follows.

A Conversation with William Schaff

Ashes: Art Inspired by the Holocaust *was a gallery showing of William Schaff's work at The United States Air Force Academy March 5-24 2000. While at the Academy, Mr. Schaff consented to the following interview.*

WLA: What drew you to Holocaust memory as a subject?

Schaff: A combination of things. I had a knowledge of the Holocaust growing up, due to my father being a military historian concentrating on WWII. Even then, though, it was nothing more than a "subject" to me. More important to me was being sure that I caught the television shows that night. In my teen years, the circle of kids I spent time with would at times cross circles with skinheads (I spent time with a lot of punks and kids who would generally be considered outsiders). I remember one time, driving with one of these skinheads, debating whether or not the Holocaust had actually happened. Even then, though, I was not approaching the event from a passionate standpoint—I was simply surprised that someone would debate its actuality when I had read and heard so much evidence that it had occurred.

I am sure that one of the reasons why I responded to the Holocaust, before learning what happened to the Armenians, say, or the Cambodians, is because of how well documented the Holocaust is in America. Living in Baltimore, Maryland had much to do with it too, I feel. How I felt in that angry city made what I was reading all the more potent, and it affected me more. That was the time I began to create the body of work we're talking about here.

WLA: Who are your artistic influences?

Schaff: I have many, but rather than list names some people would know and some wouldn't, let me say Expressionists—those who use their art not just to document or create aesthetically pleasing compositions, but to express their feelings towards the world around them, and about themselves in that world.

WLA: Over what time period was this body of work created?

Schaff: Between 1992 to 1997, with a very few pieces done during the beginning of 1998.

WLA: What do you mean when you say that your work is *not* an attempt to depict the Holocaust?

Schaff: It is important for me to have people understand this. Having not even been alive during the time of the Holocaust, I didn't feel that I could depict it. My work is, instead, an attempt to suggest how it is I feel towards what I have read and learned about the Holocaust. I've spent years studying and researching the Third Reich and what this regime did to those it victimized, and who, if they survived, have been so incredibly affected by it. I can only draw what I believe I understand. Although I don't know how to phrase all that I feel, I do feel it important to try and visualize it so as to create a form of discourse with others.

WLA: During this time of compostion, were there phases in which your models, colors, techniques altered?

Schaff: I tended to get more graphic and violent as I went along, constantly trying to find poses, colors, and techniques that worked within the realm I was using to describe these indescribable feelings.

WLA: Very few of your figures are clothed—why is that?

Schaff: Again, several reasons (there are really very few times that there is ever one reason for anything in this work). First off, I did not want to use recognizable backgrounds or scenery in the drawings, so I was limiting all my efforts to expressing my thoughts through the figure, feeling this to be all I needed. I started with the basic, human figure. At our most basic, this is what we are, without possessions. I deeply believe that life is beautiful in all its possibilities and capabilities. So it seemed important to show *that* beauty being destroyed.

Also, I recognize the level of discomfort people have with viewing the human figure, nude, in this way—naked, really. I wanted that. I want the viewer to feel uncomfortable, they *should* feel uncomfortable. There was no way I could have gotten the overall effect I was searching for with clothed figures. To strip the figures of their clothes strips them of a dignity we all recognize, and even when the viewer doesn't recognize that is what's happening, you can see that they feel that humiliation in their not wanting to look at it. So many people seem to want to give these people back their clothes. When I used clothing in any of the images, it was generally to heighten that feeling of humiliation. Considering what is happening to these people, they struggle to keep the clothes on they have, or are forced to expose themselves further. In showing the body, we see the beauty of the living, and all the potential it has, minus social identifiers we are used to. In showing the body destroyed we are forced to see what is lost, or being lost, and what is forever changed. I wanted to show that once such violence is imposed, we cannot do much to alter it.

I remember a friend of mine who had been abducted and raped. When she was finally able to escape her captor, she fled the car and chased down a police car, running down a main street with nothing but her t-shirt and shoes on. On top of everything she had just gone through, she was forced to expose herself in yet another way as she ran for help.

WLA: Would you talk about the disfigured or blotted out mouths on many of your figures?

Schaff: I'm suggesting the removal of speech, which is often how I felt approaching my work. What *could* I say? Studying the Holocaust and working to suggest my feelings was extremely frustrating and sad, and those responses were represented by the mouths of the figures. I would think of those who were not able to speak. I would think about the survivors; how could they explain what they have been through? And their children—how could they describe what they have learned about their parents, and what they have been through because of it? I would think about myself again—how could I explain my feelings? And then I would think of those who will follow—how will they explain their experiences and speak usefully about them? There is a strong feeling of the difficulty, even inability, to speak about anything important that's been robbed from us.

WLA: Most people's ingrained image of a Holocaust victim is an emaciated person—why did you choose to depict healthier looking bodies?

Schaff: I wanted to stay away from the images we *are* used to, because to most people my age such images mean very little, as sad as that is to say. Photographs of concentration camp prisoners—or even the piles of dead bodies—it's too easy for my generation to see these images, flinch and then move on. So I wanted to try and make the violation and violence I felt more palpable. By starting with the model, someone that looked like you and me, and then showing the violence—an uncontrolled crush of paint or violent pen marks—I felt such an approach would create more impact than if I drew an image of, say, a Nazi soldier shooting someone. Movies and media have done much to take the power out of such an expected image.

I often ask viewers how they would depict the horrors they have learned about the Holocaust? Not the event, which I believe all can agree may be beyond our ability to describe, but how to "feel" about the event. How do you describe something you recognize is not describable? How does you show violation? Photography can be very gripping, but can also lose its effect over time, as it has, I believe, with my generation—such as is perhaps the case with images of piles of dead bodies or groups of thin people behind barbed wire. I do not know many people who do not have these images burned into their heads. I have sought a more graphic way to represent my reaction to the memory of the Holocaust. A way that I hope will stay in a viewer's mind long after the commonly known photographs have left it.

WLA: You don't call yourself a "painter"—why?

Schaff: What makes the images work as well as they do, for me, is the line, and the line is *drawn*. Once finished, I will use paint to accent the line, and that which the line is describing.

WLA: Please talk about the words and diagrams that you superimpose on your figures.

Schaff: They are historical references. They are often in my mind as I am doing the pieces. While for the most part I try to stay away from having too many swastikas, or camp names, there are times I use them to keep the viewer in focus, as it were.

WLA: You mentioned that Baltimore—the city where you studied art—is a particularly angry city. Have the places you've lived in informed your art?

Schaff: Baltimore certainly did. I came from the Northeast, where contemporary forms of racism and segregation still strongly exist. I arrived in Baltimore feeling confident about myself and my beliefs. Baltimore is 70% black. That 70% is for the most part living in poverty and is extremely angry. After five years of living in the city, after multiple violent crimes happening to my friends, after constant confrontation and tension, I would find myself doing things I would never have imagined myself to do. Crossing streets because the guy coming the other way "looked" the wrong way. It was at times such as these that I realized I probably wouldn't be crossing the street had that person been white. It was extremely depressing and I was starting to notice things about myself that I didn't like. I no longer could simply say, "I am not a racist," but instead found myself having to struggle to be sure of that. Such reactions made all that I was learning about the Holocaust hit me all the more. The rapes, the killings that were happening, literally around me—the constant fear I felt walking the streets, the threat of violence—I can only imagine that they made what I was learning affect me more than if I had been learning about the Holocaust in some isolated, secluded comfort. My own feelings of fear and hatred were constantly surfacing, and my own prejudices slapped me in the face when I read of others acting or thinking no more fairly, kindly, or rationally than I.

WLA: Do you feel the palpable violence of your art lends itself to either involuntary or willful misinterpretation by some of your audience?

Schaff: Yes, I do. I have experienced this. I have been called everything from a neo-Nazi to a latent rapist.

WLA: There is a recurring image of the stitched-closed or split-open torsos of both the male and female figures—what does this image suggest?

Schaff: It suggests violence committed on the body—something that had been inside the person is gone, taken from them, and they are left hastily stitched back together, with no care for them, or left with the gaping wound.

WLA: You say that many of the works are, in a sense, self-portraits—how so?

Schaff: Well, they are *all* me. Male *and* female. As I have said, I am trying to show how *I* felt in learning and knowing what I now know, and I used each figure to do that. The figures also lend themselves to suggesting events and violence that took place during the Holocaust. Both violated and violator.

WLA: How do you answer people who accuse you of symbolically engaging in the violence you depict?

Schaff: Well, I would say that I want viewers to feel attacked. I want them to feel violated and as haunted by such atrocities as I am. The fact that I am making this point through art and a gallery puts things in a different light. I am not physically attacking anyone, nor do I want to hurt them in a physical sense. People enter galleries expecting to be affected emotionally, in some way or another, but still be "safe," as it were. Viewers will take with them only what *they* allow. I am utilizing that unique aspect of the gallery.

WLA: How has the Jewish community responded to your work?

Schaff: The same way the rest of the community has. There has been very positive feedback, as well as very negative. Varying reactions may have to do with how well I communicate to anyone that this work is not about The Event, but the memory that still exists, in my time and space as well as everyone else's. My experience has been limited mostly to Jewish Community Centers. Several have invited me to show them the work, having heard of it and wanting to consider it for their own galleries. In one case, it was flatly rejected, with the feeling that it was inappropriate. In another case, it was agreed that it would be perfect to show—but that is the nature of strong art.

WLA: Is it possible to make a living as a working artist?—especially an artist who deals with such a tough subject as genocide?

Schaff: It is if you're willing to hold down other jobs at the same time and not count on your art to support you. At this point in my career (for it is a career) I do not have the certain recognition and credentials to get the venues needed to afford a continuous living from what I create.

WLA: Are you through with Holocaust Memory as a subject?—if so, what are you working on?

Schaff: I'm not through with it, in the sense that it is not something I can put down, not even if I wanted to. One of the points I am trying to stress is that I will forever see life through a lens colored by these events I know happened. Due to that, things I do, ways I behave, they will always reflect that. The work I am doing these days varies. I am trying to look at things that happen both in my surrounding area, within the country, and outside of the country. Acts of intolerance and hatred—how people perceive each other.

WLA: Was a gallery showing at the United States Air Force Academy different from showings elsewhere?

Schaff: Yes, and it was great. A lot of people that otherwise might not have gone to such an exhibit came through. Getting to talk with them was wonderful as well. Usually such things only happen at the opening, and seldom would they be set up in the same manner as it was at the Academy.

WLA: What interested you most in your conversations with Air Force Academy cadets?

Schaff: An openness to the answers I gave. Here were kids not much younger than I am, going into a profession not known for encouraging individual thought, especially not ones that challenge the taking of life and how life is viewed, and yet they listened. Those who responded did so with courtesy and thought, something that can be found lacking in other settings that might be considered more traditional.

Paul West

A Boy's Blitz

There in the archaic light of a late fall afternoon, the field of dead search lights glinted a little and awaited the switch. At midnight, or soon after, Nazi bombers that had flown the forty-five minutes from their bases in northern France would arrive en route for the city and drop their so-called eggs. Huge lenses would eye the night, even the fog, and catch them, moths in the quiet flame. Or so we thought, eyeing the glass arrayed at regular intervals throughout the field, once a pasture or the big juicy bed of hay or barley. We had faith in the anti-aircraft devices of our country, little as we respected the anything of anybody. A little bit of each of us was Nazi to be sure, much as a little bit of each Nazi boy was pseudo-English. War was between adults, wasn't it, and boys just approaching puberty were entitled to smaller wars of their own making, in which no one took much interest or offered to help. Whether or not the search lights, flicked on in a big thunder of the lamp, spotted and trapped a bomber was beyond us. Somehow, we felt, being young and cocky, we would survive, our heads and hearts full of the vainglorious cheer of greenhorns.

After all, so far we had survived, even the landmine that landed a half-mile from our village and converted an entire field into a quarry with deep sides and enough water to drown in at its bottom, thirty feet down. This Nazi toy had floated down on a parachute, intended to do something more monstrous than shred a rural postbox, an ancient plow, and one decrepit outhouse in which women laborers from the nearby farm took hot tea from thermos flasks and told one another obscene stories about their Friday nights. Surely the Nazis were poor aimers, this far from the city that made famous steel, a good ten miles to the north.

What had they got against us? Had they somehow divined our futures, recognising the terrors both civil and martial, we were going to be, and decided to wipe us out before our time: gutsy little guttersnipes with less than Aryan blood, yet boldly inheriting our guts from Lord Nelson, the Duke of Wellington, even Sir Francis Drake, and more recent heroes, especially of the air war, already gone to an early grave, in the parlance of those times "buying the farm" or "going for a Burton," which we knew meant going down in the drink (the Channel). The expression meant, really, going for a bottle of beer.

We were staring at those big glass eyes, seen sideways on and therefore lopsided, deciding what *we* would do with them if the switch was within our grasp. The guns were nowhere near, of course, because anyone shooting down the long cylinders of white light would hit the gunners as well; so the anti-aircraft guns were a mile away, trigonometrically arranged to fire when the lights touched a target. We understood only too well.

What possessed us next I have no idea. It was surely no whim of pacifism, or even envy of the full-blown role of grown-ups in all this massacre. Playing marbles along the gutters, with glass alleys or steel ball bearings filched from the war effort, we knew what it meant to eye what shone or gleamed, almost like a model version of the big show. So too with our little war—bows and arrows in the bluebell woods, bow of yew and arrows of thin cane—in which we either imitated or parodied, whooping and yelping as Indians or the US Cavalry, who perhaps did not whoop or yelp at all. Indian women had captured the dead Captain Custer and shoved their knitting needles into his ears, through his brain, to make him listen better in whatever happy hunting ground he had gone to. We were, I see it now, little infidels: we had lost our loyalty, our faith, neither targets nor conquerors, but weirdly shoved aside so that adults could get on with their killing. Yet the war, certainly in those years of the Blitz, had readied us, we who were supposed to be marginal, restricted to the world of our school reading (*As You Like It*, the campaigns of Caesar in easy Latin) or adventure books we read by flashlight under the bedclothes: John Buchan, Eric Ambler, Leslie Charteris. The war had singed us after all, at least on the night of the landmine, when six other bombs had landed too, killing nobody, but wrecking the uncanny cross-plan of the village, an old Roman settlement with a Northgate, a Westgate, and a Southgate, these three being the old routes in and out of chariots. There was no Eastgate, for reasons unknown, it having been suggested

that the Romans quit England before they had a chance to build it, not having gone clockwise, which was to say (to us) they had derivatively timed themselves by King Alfred's old candles, on which he had scored the hours. He invented this. So: the Romans went away eastward, fed-up, not north, west, or south, before the English occupation struck them as too costly, too locally unpopular. What slowed our minds as much as the crescendo whistle of bombs, driving us to shelter under the kitchen table, or deep in the cellar down sweating concrete steps, was perhaps the clean retreat of the Romans, the little we were told in history lessons about their invasion and evacuation. The truth, I mean, not some easily memorized outline convenient for examiners. Did they itch? Had they scabs? Were they drunkards? What happened between them and local women? Did the Ella, Bella, and Della of those ancient times incite them amid the muck of urine and manure in the Gates? These were three streamlined, bosomy sisters who swung in step down the village street, farting behind them a brackish aroma of beer nobody could resist. I remember wanting to know. We all wanted to know, but we were no doubt going to be killed before we found out. War, like peace, kept so much of what really mattered away from us. We were growing up on rumor and soft soap, buttered up by genial parents and austere teachers, never having our noses rammed in what mattered, what had driven the Germans to occupy France and Belgium, and God knew what else. All I had to ballast my juvenile imagination was a picture of some poor slob of a German wheeling a barrow full of paper money, *pfennigs* (their word for penny. I'd thought), and this was what he needed to buy a loaf of bread. In such a world, where a loaf cost *us* tuppence, not a thousand million, wasn't something missing, some explanatory flash of light, or recognition, as in aircraft recognition (a "subject" already being taught at school to boys over fifteen, callow members of the Air Training Corps, which I had tried to join at twelve (the number of the Apostles, I said, and of scintillating noon). I was turned away, too much of a kid, though my mind reared on Caesar was hunting Marcus Aurelius, and ready for him, and I was arranging belts on my brown blazer to mimic the military belt called a Sam Browne (which supported your revolver holster by spreading the weight up over your opposite shoulder). Holster, I later found out, was a word for darkness, so the holster was where you nestled your gun in darkness like a baby kangaroo. A joey.

I am coming to it now, the moment of shame, brought into being by ignorance, lack of knowledge, and general impatience with a war that,

too much with us, wasn't with us enough. I had seen the wounded and battered from the Dunkirk evacuation sipping soup in the street and having their bandages changed, and heard them talking, grandly, about shoving impaled Nazis with their booted foot off their bayonets. They had escaped, but they had also lost, and so had we, excluded from the bloodshed and the infamous betrayal of the French, left to cope with the Nazi horde as best they could.

What, out of spite, we did, was to pelt the array of lamps or lights in that field with fist-sized rocks, pitching perhaps fifty in among the glass and doing some damage, though not as much as bombs. Could we be shot for this? Disgraced, certainly, and stripped of our medals, if any we had. Why did we do it? What did we gain? Was it an act of pure scorn, saying a pox on both houses, to hell with your war, down with all your flags. Include us in, to help, or expect only the worst from us, patriots nipped in the bud and cankered with Nazi caterpillars. What did the local crooners sing about? Ann Shelton and Vera Lynn? "When the lights go on again all over the world." Left to us, they would never go on again, and Churchill would condemn us to be bound in barbed wire and kept in the slop of a pig farm. We sabotaged the often-mentioned war effort, not from afar but on the spot, eager to be doing something crucial.

Sufficient unto shame is the occasion thereof. Or so we had been taught. Or had we read it in Shakespeare and was this the garbled version? The Romans were gone, wrapping their togas around them against the dank northern winds, but we were stabbing Caesar all over again. No, it was worse. What I came at last to understand, many years later, was that the glassy optics in that field were not searchlights at all, but a cunning device to foul up German radar beams conducting bombers to the city. A clever man called Jones, a boffin or "backroom boy," certainly no boy, had come up with a way of conning Nazi bombers with a false beam that led them several miles astray, and they were none the wiser, expecting a beam and following it almost blindly. The counter-beam was the stronger of the two, aimed up at the advancing bombers by a one-eyed king. So, we had not sabotaged the local artillery in its role of "ack-ack" or anti-aircraft, but, by destroying the exquisite symmetry and coordination of the apparatus in the field, exposed the neighbor city to appalling punishment night after night until repairs were made, and repairs were never made at speed in those days. Who would ever have predicted that a bunch of boys would mess up a clever spoof that saved thousands of lives, throughout the breadth and length of the land so often invoked in

hymns? We were never found out. We never confessed, not having done much amiss, as we thought. The night when the landmine and the other bombs fell near our village had been proof that Jones's decoy beam was working well. The navigator and bomb-aimer were off by ten miles or more. We lived on in a blaze of indolent glory as the war erupted, then slowed, and victory began to be talked of, colloquial standby long deferred. I winced only later, when the desire to get it out all in one lethal word took over, ousting any desire for precise, cogent explanation, so that I wanted to ram the *oh* of dismay into the *but* of shame, and the *if* of evasion: *ohbutif*, no more meaningful to me at that point than *Stuka*, *Zersplitterung*, or *shaduf*. It was as if we had left poor old clever Jonesy's magnificent erector set, all ten shiny boxes of it, from Beginner to Advanced, along with its batteries and neat electric motors, out in the rain, hoping he would blame the cows.

Paul West has two new works of fiction scheduled for 2000: *O.K.*, his novel about Doc Holliday, and a novella about Hitler as a failed art student in Vienna. His other book, *The Secret Lives of Words*, is Book of the Month Club selection for May. He was recently invested by the Government of France as a Chevalier of the Order of Arts and Letters. He visited the United States Air Force Academy two years ago to read from his work.

Karl Lindholm

Dickie, Nick, Varsity Jim, and Bye-Bye: Teaching a True War Story

I didn't serve in Vietnam, but many of my friends did—and I would have, if circumstances had been different, by just a few degrees.

On my way to the Peace Corps in Africa, I was diverted. A friend of the family, who knew, said of Vietnam, "You don't want to go there." This observation coincided with my own thinking. It was 1967 and I was a senior at Middlebury College in Vermont. I would be drafted before I got to Syracuse University and Peace Corps training in the fall: we were building up to half a million soldiers in Vietnam. So I joined an Army Reserve unit, a medical unit, in my hometown. It still had openings. I joined the Army and got out of the war—an irony typical of that confused time. Two weeks after graduating from Middlebury, I was at Folk Polk, Louisiana for Basic Training—and Fort Sam Houston for training as a medic after that.

I'm not proud or ashamed of my choice, but I don't pretend it was something it wasn't. Like duty. I do feel some guilt when I read in books like *The Nightingale's Song* when the author, and some of his military academy subjects, suggest that others may have died in my place. There's certainly enough guilt to go around. One friend, a Vietnam vet, said if he could do one thing he would eliminate all the guilt from the Vietnam experience—the guilt that men at the front felt, for killing; the guilt those in the rear felt for not being at the front; the guilt those who didn't go to Vietnam felt for not going; the guilt of women for not being men and facing these awful choices. So many people carrying around so much guilt. He thought, what a waste of time and emotion.

Here's my favorite story about getting out of the war: After my six months of active duty, I returned to my home in Maine and hung around

Bates College, playing a lot of pick-up basketball. I made some friends. One was a likable guy named Storey Fish (his real name: his parents had a sense of humor). He joined the Coast Guard, a five-year hitch, upon his graduation in 1968. The Coast Guard didn't go to Vietnam.

He was an officer at the Coast Guard station in Cleveland, Ohio on Lake Erie. One night when he was in charge, he got a call from someone telling him that the Cuyahoga River was on fire and that the Coast Guard better get over there and put it out. "Right," he said, "the river's on fire. A drunk," he concluded. Some hours later, he got another call, this time from his superior officer: "Where the hell are you guys!?" The river *was* on fire. A few weeks later, Storey Fish was transferred to the Aleutian Islands.

I was born in 1945 at the end of World War II; I was 20 in 1965 when the Vietnam War was widened, and 30 in 1975, when Saigon was evacuated and the war truly ended for us. So the Vietnam War was my era, a powerful, formative experience. As a Reservist, a weekend warrior, I didn't really feel a part of the military. Also, as a Reservist, I really couldn't be a part of the antiwar movement at home, so I lived on its fringes.

I got a job teaching high school, first in Maine, and then in Ohio. In the summers from 1968-72, I lived in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Every weekend I could go to a big antiwar rally on the Boston Common—speeches, rock bands, seriousness and frivolity. One Sunday, there was the prospect of trouble and the downtown was crawling with police. I was just hanging around, watching. Two cops in a police car were listening to the Yankees-Red Sox game. I'm a life-long Red Sox fan, war or no war. Every once in a while, I inquired of them the score. It was a good, close game. Finally, the cops tired of my interruptions and one commanded, "Get in the car." So I sat in back and listened to the last two innings of the game with two of Boston's finest. My agitated contemporaries would walk by the cruiser, see me inside, shout encouragement and give me a salute of solidarity with upraised fist or peace sign. That was the closest I got to being busted in my antiwar career.

I was a witness to the time, an engaged spectator. Outwardly, my story was hardly dramatic. Inwardly, I felt like a taut wire: on the spectrum of Vietnam War experience, I vibrated right in the middle between combat soldier at one pole and antiwar radical at the other. My friend, Jon Coffin, who served in the war, talks about the inward journey Vietnam inspired, and argues, "It's a jungle in there."

My most intense identification was with the soldiers my age fighting in Vietnam. When my friends returned from Vietnam, I didn't ask them,

"What was it like?" nor did they volunteer information. So I read. I read the stories of soldiers in Vietnam. For a while I read little else. Finally, in the winter of 1989, back at Middlebury where I started, where Vietnam first held meaning for me and my friends, I got around to teaching a class on the literature of the Vietnam War. In this way, as Robert Frost recommended, I got to make my avocation my vocation.

By 1989, America had gone through its decade of neglect and denial. Students were ready to take on Vietnam. Vets were ready to talk—and they opened up and shared their war experience with us in class, offering powerful revelations. They talked about visiting the Wall, the Vietnam Veteran's Memorial, and the healing they sought in its black granite reflections. That first class in 1989 was the most intense classroom experience I have ever had—or, I suspect, ever will. I have taught the course twice since then—and will teach it again next year.

Thank God for Tim O'Brien. I'm thankful he went to Vietnam as an enlisted man in an infantry platoon and I'm thankful he survived combat and made it back to write about it. I'm grateful for his gifts as a storyteller.

The title of my course at Middlebury, "Telling a True War Story: Vietnam," is taken from O'Brien's *The Things They Carried*. In this book, he tells stories of his year in Vietnam; at the same time, he offers a running commentary on which aspects of the stories he tells are true to the facts—and which are true to the experience, and maybe not to the facts. He explores that boundary in all of our stories between fact and fiction. He instructs in how we use "imagination" to get at "the essence of things," the Truth. There is truth in this book.

Tim O'Brien was President of his class at Macalester College and graduated Phi Beta Kappa in 1968. He describes himself as vaguely antiwar during his college years. As soon as he got out of college, he was drafted. In his story, "On the Rainy River" (from *The Things They Carried*), he describes the conflict he feels after he gets his draft notice. His main character, also named Tim O'Brien, heads up to northern Minnesota with the intent of escaping to Canada and escaping the war. Elmer Berdahl, a gentle old soul, takes him fishing near the Canadian side of the river:

> Twenty yards. I could've done it. I could've jumped and started swimming for my life. Inside me, in my chest, I felt a terrible squeezing pressure. Even now as I write this, I can still feel that tightness. And I want you to feel it—the wind coming off the river, the waves, the silence, the wooded frontier. You're in the

> bow of a boat on the Rainy River. You're twenty-one years old, you're scared, and there's a hard squeezing pressure in your chest. . . .
>
> I did try. It just wasn't possible.
>
> All those eyes on me—the town, the whole universe—and I couldn't risk the embarrassment. It was as if there were an audience to my life, that swirl of faces along the river, and in my head I could hear people screaming at me. Traitor! they yelled. Turncoat! Pussy! I felt myself blush. I couldn't tolerate it. I couldn't endure the mockery, or the disgrace, or the patriotic ridicule. Even in my imagination, the shore just twenty yards away. I couldn't make myself be brave. It had nothing to do with morality. Embarrassment. That's all it was.
>
> And right then I submitted.
>
> I would go to the war—I would kill and maybe die—because I was embarrassed not to.
>
> The day was cloudy. I passed through towns with familiar names, through pine forests and down to the prairie, and then to Vietnam, where I was a soldier, and then home again. I survived but it was not a happy ending. I was a coward. I went to the war.

I don't know if that precise sequence of events actually happened in the life of Tim O'Brien, the soldier/writer, but the sequence rings true to me. I remember well that "hard squeezing pressure in (my) chest," and I didn't even go! Like O'Brien, my friends who went to Vietnam, most of them anyway, went because they couldn't tolerate the shame of the alternatives. Not to go would have been a violation of identity—impossible. As for me, I know I would not have been able to face my father, or my mentors who had fought the Nazi menace in WWII, had I chosen to go to jail or to Canada. Tim O'Brien, then, to me and many other college boys who avoided Vietnam, is our brother who served in Vietnam, our brother who lacked our luck or guile, and who came back to tell us about it.

My anger about the Vietnam War is great and it lingers. The only real fight I ever had with my father was over Vietnam. Many sons, of course, had fights over Vietnam with their dads. In my case, I was watching Nixon on the news in 1971, and I lost it, called him terrible names, used obscenities, said he was killing people, and that I hated him, hated him

for his cynicism—bringing American boys home and increasing the killing by dropping bombs, indiscriminately, on Vietnamese from B-52s. My dad, the son of Swedish immigrants, said I couldn't talk about the President of the United States that way. I cursed some more and left the house.

It was no big deal in the long run—we got over it. But my feelings are still raw even after all the years. I will always have contempt for Nixon for lying about having a plan to end the war. I can understand the thinking, the mistakes, that got us into the war, but I'll never understand the thinking that kept us there so long after the handwriting was on the wall. Peace with Honor. Some honor: hundreds of thousands of Vietnamese deaths later, desperate people hanging off helicopters as they lifted off the roof of the Saigon embassy.

I ask students in my class to identify across our generations with their brothers and sisters from the Vietnam Era. I understand that this is backwards, that the passage of time is supposed to remove the subjective and allow for a dispassionate examination of volatile circumstances. It made sense for me, however, to accept the emotion, embrace it, and organize my class around narrative treatments of the Vietnam War. Isn't the purpose of literature, narrative literature, to get us outside ourselves, to live vicariously, to stretch, to understand, to empathize? The writer's gift is to take us there.

In this class, we get into what it was like at Middlebury College, my alma mater, during the Vietnam War. The former Dean of Students, now in her 70s, who was just starting her career here in 1968, tells us about the teach-ins and the protests, and the pathetic joiner who took at face value the protest rhetoric and burned down the ROTC building in an individual act which horrified his antiwar mates. Middlebury, in Vermont, was hardly Berkeley or Columbia, but no school was exempt from the disruptions of the war in the 60s and early 70s.

We meet my Middlebury friends who went to war, and hear their stories. Between the years 1965 and 1969, 15-20% of the men who graduated from Middlebury served in Vietnam. This number violates the idea that no college boys ever had to fight. While it is true that the average age of soldiers in Vietnam was 19, college boys, like Tim O'Brien and my Middlebury friends, also served. Middlebury College boys served because of ROTC, which was *required* at Middlebury for a minimum of two years. In the mid-60s, about half of Middlebury men chose to finish the program and graduate as second lieutenants in the Army. That choice sent them to Vietnam.

Also, in the first week of class, I hand out this photograph of my friends and me at Middlebury in 1966. There are 41 young men in this picture taken in front of their fraternity house. Take away the white socks and loafers in the front row and these boys look very much like students here at Middlebury now. Students in the class are taken aback that the photo was taken 33 years ago and that these vibrant young men are now middle-aged and gray (if not bald). I too am transported by this picture and easily bring back across the years moments in time and the strong emotions that connect to the attachments of my youth.

If I were to write my Vietnam narrative, my true story, it would be titled *Dickie, Nick, Varsity Jim, and Bye-Bye* and would tell the stories of four of my Middlebury friends, whose lives represent for me the truth of the Vietnam War. These four friends (three of whom are pictured) were all great athletes. That conformed to my values . . . the athletic crowd was my set. We belonged to the "jock house." I admired extravagantly those who were truly skilled and accomplished. I tell the following stories in my class on the first day.

"Varsity Jim" was a football player whose exuberance went beyond mere enthusiasm. His nickname was one of modest derision, earned in his freshman year and often shortened to "V.J." or "Veej." He was extremely bright and rambunctious—huge, physical, irreverent, and intellectually pretentious. He was born in Great Neck, New York, on Long Island and raised in relative comfort and security. That's him, standing the fourth from the right, with the thick neck, curly hair, and wise-guy expression, giving the finger to the camera.

All V.J. cared about when he arrived in 1964 was football, but that changed. The war frustrated him enormously, angered him, and eventually made him crazy, sending him into the most radical elements of the antiwar movement. It's unlikely that the absence of personal bravery was the source of his opposition to the war: he lay himself on the line like no others on Saturdays in football games. In his alienation, the drug scene also attracted him, and then enveloped him.

When he came to visit me, in the first year of my first teaching job in a boarding school in Maine in 1969, he was quite gone. His hair cascaded down to his shoulders, he wore leather from head to foot, and he drove a big motorcycle. He stayed a couple of days, visiting my classes and eating meals at my table in the dining hall. I had to wear a coat and tie. At night, we listened to Bob Dylan in my dorm room while I graded papers. He agreed not to smoke dope in my room, as that would get me fired, so periodically he would go for a ride on his bike and sit under a



pine tree somewhere and smoke. That this larger-than-life figure came to visit me made me a hero to my young mind-blown charges. When I asked Varsity Jim what he was doing with his life, he said darkly, "Blowing things up. You'll read about it."

We lost contact. People disappeared during the 60s and 70s, usually to resurface eventually. Not Jim: he stayed gone. None of his friends have seen or heard from him in years. I went to the cocktail party of his class at their 25th Reunion here at Middlebury a few years back. One of his old friends said, "He fried his brains." His best friend from college said he "evaporated." The only remotely direct answer to my questions about Varsity Jim's whereabouts was from another friend in the class of 1968: "I think he's in prison in Arizona." Nobody has seen him in decades.

Bye-Bye was the one who died in Vietnam. He is pictured second from the left in the front row in the white shirt with the sweet smile. Bye-Bye—a prophetic nickname. His real name was Bayard and he was from Peterborough, New Hampshire and had attended Phillips Andover Academy before coming to Middlebury.

He loved to work—hard, physical work delighted him. Tasks that we all worked to get out of, he embraced. My keenest memory is of him washing dishes and pots and pans in the frat house kitchen, white apron around his torso, tossing the dishes into the racks and loading them in the washer, steam all around, singing at the top of his voice. He loved training for athletics, but not so much reading books and writing papers. In sports, he was known for his "work ethic" and he was a terrific athlete and earnest teammate. He was an All-American soccer goalie, and when he tired of playing baseball in the rain in what passes for spring in Vermont (he was the starting shortstop), he transferred his interest to lacrosse and he became the starting goalie in that sport too. He was a good enough basketball player to play on that team, if he had chosen.

Army ROTC was too tame for Bye-Bye, so he enlisted in the Marine Corps Platoon Leader Program during his freshman year and spent two summers at Quantico in boot camp. He graduated in 1966 as a second lieutenant in the Marines and was ordered to the Defense Language Institute in Monterey to learn Vietnamese. In Vietnam, he was stationed in Da Nang, using his Vietnamese as a liaison officer. He hated it—he wanted action, a platoon to lead. He wrote to Coffin, "I won't sit in the rear and mind the gear." He got his wish, barely. On his way to his platoon, heading from Da Nang to Khe Sanh, he was killed in "hostile enemy action."

Dickie was the best of us. We all thought so, and when he went to Canada instead of the war, we knew it. He was not wild and exuberant like the others; he was calm and steady, sincere, strong, and apparently self-assured. He wore plaid flannel shirts, blue jeans, and hiking boots two decades before that became the fashion with some students. I thought he was Jesus. He's in the back row in the picture, in his plaid shirt, arms folded, smiling, two down from Varsity Jim. (That's me right behind him.) Dickie played three varsity sports: soccer, hockey, and lacrosse. He could run all day and skate like the wind. He was wiry, tough, and stoical. Every thing about him was deliberate: he spoke and walked slowly—and then on the playing field he exploded into action, continuous motion.

We admired him so. Amidst our own insecurities and daily identity crises, we found him rock solid. I think now that he was like the main character, Singer, the deaf-mute, in Carson McCullers' *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter:* all the other characters projected their own needs onto Singer and found what they wanted and needed.

At the end of his junior year, Dickie went into VISTA and was stationed in Texas working in community development. Once, while hitchhiking, he was picked up by two thugs, beaten and robbed, and left for dead on the side of the road. Miraculously, he was found, near death, and recovered fully. He finished his one-year VISTA term and then came back to Middlebury for his senior year, and graduated in 1968.

It was a quiet decision, typically enough, not going into the military. He applied to be a Conscientious Objector but was rejected; he appealed and was rejected again. In the spring of 1969 he was reclassified 1-A and he made the decision to go to Nova Scotia. Before he left, he and I took a road trip on my spring vacation for two weeks to visit our good friends in Buffalo and Cleveland.

He settled in Black Rock, a tiny village on North Mountain, and found work in the summer months as a carpenter's helper, building houses and barns. In the winter, he sat in front of his wood stove and read and smoked. It was an austere, solitary life. He met Claire, a schoolteacher from Halifax and they married. At the birth of his first son, Dickie lost it at the hospital, made a terrible scene, and was hospitalized himself. When his second son was born two years later, he again had a breakdown and his mental illness was confirmed.

Dickie has been diagnosed as paranoid schizophrenic. He left Nova Scotia in 1983. Claire divorced him and restricted his access to his sons because of her fears of his instability. He has lived for the past decade in

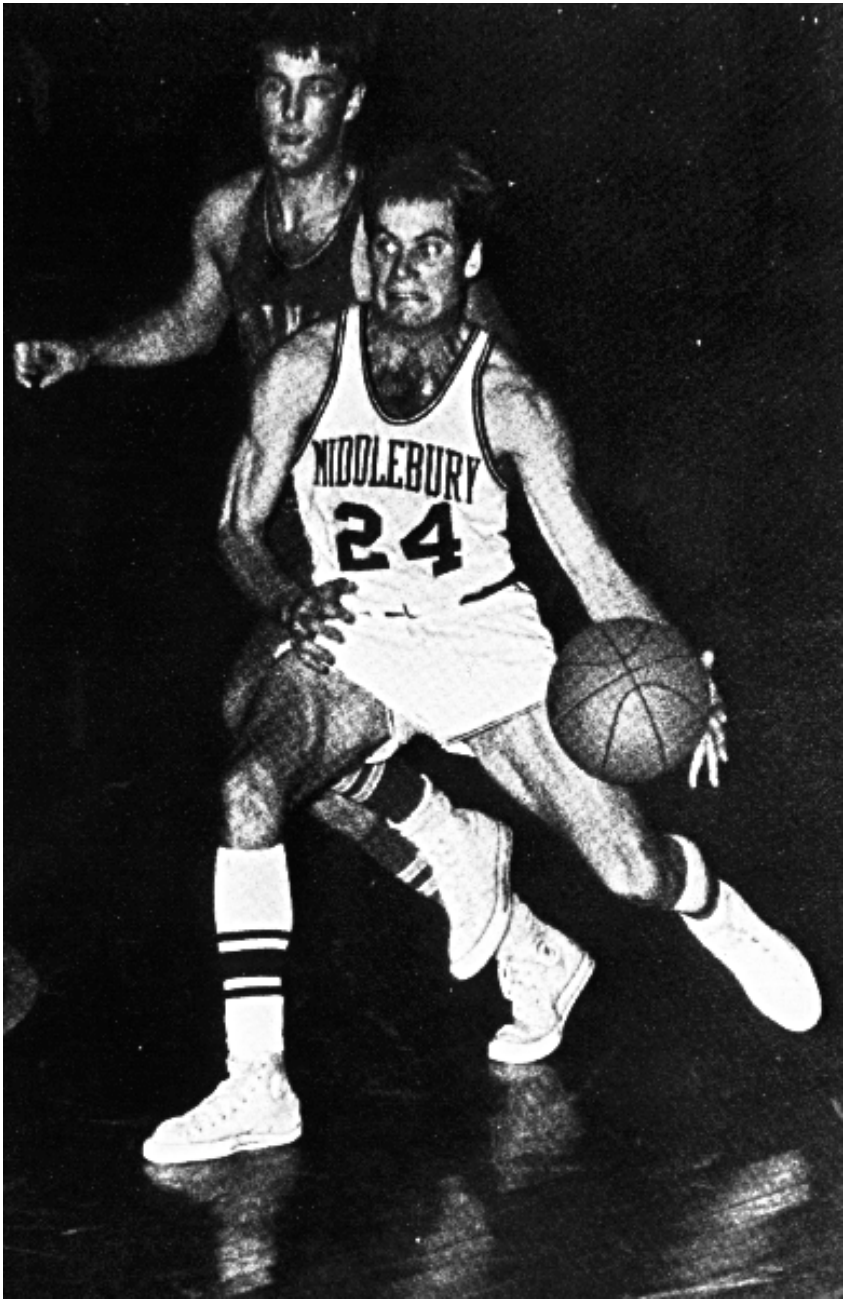
a supervised apartment in West Hartford, Connecticut, near his older brother. He has telephone contact with his sons. Most days, he goes for a long walk near his apartment.

Nick was little and fierce. He was a brilliant soccer player, an All-American like Bayard, a scorer who willed the ball into the net. He was also a talented basketball player, though in this sport he couldn't shoot a lick. I believe he invented the intentional offensive foul in basketball—that is, he "drew the charge" time after time in a game. He sacrificed his body (5'7", 140 pounds), getting knocked down by an offensive player in order to get his team the ball and a foul charged against the other team. It was a play that symbolized his combative nature. In one game against Tufts, he drew 16 charges.

Once against Norwich University, he drew a charge against their star player and the Norwich coach, a beefy ex-Boston Celtic named Bob Brannum, screamed at his player, "I told you the 'little rat' would do that every time!" Of course, we called Nick "the little rat" after that. In another game against Norwich, he attempted the same play against a large Cadet (Norwich was a military school) who knocked him down and then kicked him. This player was literally 10 inches taller and 100 pounds heavier. Nick got up, decked him with one punch, and a near riot ensued.

I was his teammate on the basketball team and his roommate on the road. Nick had trouble getting places on time; my job was to get him to the bus and the game on time (the blind leading the blind). Once, we both were late for the bus and the coach left us in Boston and we had to hitch a ride home. Discipline was not Nick's long suit. Sports were a release. Nick started in the class of 1965 and graduated eventually in February '68. He's not in the accompanying picture: it was taken during a hiatus. Sometimes he left school on his own; other times, he was asked to leave. Trouble found him. What I found out in quiet moments with Nick was that there was unhappiness in his life. He was the brother of three sisters and he came from affluence, but addiction ran in his family and affected its happiness and stability. By the time Nick left Middlebury, he realized later, he himself was addicted to alcohol and other drugs.

After graduation, he enlisted in the Army before he could get drafted. It was 1968: he went to Vietnam as a "grunt." He said he liked to walk "point," because "everybody depended on you." He was stationed in Phuoc Vinh, about 80 miles north of Saigon and flown in and dropped off near


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the Cambodian border to engage in "search and destroy" operations. His unit suffered many casualties. On March 8, 1970, his outfit was ambushed: a mortar fell within feet of him, killing his platoon leader and another soldier, and filling Nick with shrapnel in the neck and arm. He crawled away, and the bombers were called in: they dropped their napalm and destroyed the area.

Nick survived and came home. He managed to finish law school after Vietnam, despite living the bohemian life of the time. He met Dierdre, who later became his wife, came to Vermont, and hung out his shingle. He still practices law, by himself, defending clients the bigger firms with greater profit incentives tend to avoid. His life after Vietnam has not been an unbroken period of quiet contentment in Vermont. About 15 years ago, his life was unraveling, and he acknowledged his addiction to drugs. With the help of Dierdre and AA meetings, he has been successful in his recovery. At age 44, he had a son, Zack, now 9. He felt that he was finally mature enough to be a father.

Dickie, Nick, Varsity Jim, and Bye-Bye, this unwritten book of mine, tells the stories of four schoolmates and teammates who were forced to choose to go to war, or not. Two went to Vietnam and two didn't; all four were casualties in their own way. For me, their stories dramatize how slight the differences often were between those who went and those who avoided the military, one way or another. In college, these young men gravitated to one another, were friends, brothers in sports, yet they ended up taking profoundly different roads.

There are so many more stories. In our class, students read selections from the oral histories of the war (*Everything We Had; Bloods; In the Combat Zone; Hell No, We Won't Go; Nam;* and *To Bear Any Burden*) and get their own story, their own oral history. They interview, then edit and record on paper a first-person account of a Vietnam-era experience. They don't have to reveal a military life: they can interview anybody with a story to tell. These stories are then compiled into a booklet, which is an artifact of the course, a memento.

In this way, students get to know a veteran of the era and receive an eyewitness account of the material they are studying. Many students interview their fathers who served in Vietnam. Fathers open up to their children about their war experience as they never have before when this communication is required, part of a school assignment. Fathers tend to view their children differently, now that they are away from home, old enough for the truth.

Allison interviewed her dad, a platoon leader in 1969-70 with the 11th Armored Cavalry, cleaning out base camps in Cambodia in 1969, participating in search-and-destroy operations in war Zone C (near Cambodia), and working for the CIA and State Department in his last three months in Nam. Her father, who has gone on to a career in law and education, shared with his daughter his understanding of the politics of the war, his experience in combat, the tension of race relations in his unit, and his difficulty with "relevance" after he had returned home. "I had never talked to my dad before about Vietnam," Allison said of her experience recounting her dad's life as a soldier in war. "We were a little uncomfortable at the beginning, but once he started talking he had so much to say. One story led to another. He had thought so much about his experience. He told me stories he hadn't shared with anybody, not even my mother. This was really the first adult conversation I had with my dad."

Another student in the most recent Vietnam class, Matt, had a different experience. He did not interview his dad. He wasn't ready: his ambivalence was too powerful. In his first essay in the class, Matt described the disintegration of his father, a combat Marine in Vietnam, and the resulting devastation of his family. He wrote that he saw his father "snap, numerous times, triggered by a Vietnam memory." One night he was awakened by cries from his mother and went in the kitchen to see his father with a gun to his mother's head. "My father turned to face my weeping face," he wrote, "and he dropped to the floor holding his head in his hands."

After that episode, his father "vanished," and Matt grew up without him, "fatherless." Last year, he discovered that his father had spent the previous five years in a VA hospital. So he went to visit him. He wrote about *that* encounter:

> It had been 11 years since I had last seen him. Here I was, a man, the same size as him, and I was still afraid. A couple years earlier, I would have probably tried to hit him. I didn't know what to call him, so I called him "Ray." We started out with stupid conversation about what we both had been up to and ended with ways to become friends. "Friends," I told him, was all we were ever going to be, the father-son relationship had passed. I made terms for how the process was to be dealt with and he handed me a phone card. I still haven't called him.

For his oral history, Matt interviewed Phil, instead of his dad. Phil is Middlebury's public affairs officer, a father, husband—a man, unlike Matt's dad, who survived Vietnam with his faculties intact, or relatively so. He was a ROTC cadet from 1962-66 and worked for Armed Forces radio during his nine-month hitch in Vietnam. His main problem with Vietnam was that he *didn't* see combat. "I sort of feel I can't claim the title of Vietnam 'veteran' compared to those who went through combat in Vietnam," he said in his interview with Matt. "They're entitled to the honor of 'Vietnam veteran.' I should have been out there with them."

Matt discovered as he read narrative accounts of the Vietnam War, met Middlebury veterans, came to know Phil, and considered his relationship to his father, that the condensed language of poetry served him best. He had never written a poem before: he considered an appreciation for poetry a violation of his adolescent, masculine persona. Here's one of the poems he submitted at the end of the class:

> Purple Heart
>
> Your Purple Heart
> pumps cold Blood
> through your veins.
> The same Blood
> you gave me.
> The same Blood
> I will give
> to my son.
>
> Will it ever warm?

Jessie did her first-person profile on Nick, the same "Nick" introduced above. His account expresses the Vietnam veteran's ambivalence and confusion, his sense of duty and betrayal. It concludes thus:

> A lot of people were raised in a patriotic manner because the United States had a "save the world" attitude left over from WWII. If your country wanted you to do something, then you did it. By the time I came back, I along with millions of others was fairly disillusioned about the power of our nation. I had never thought about leaving the country when I was drafted but

I have a lot of sympathy for those who did. I didn't want to go to war but I had no choice when I was drafted. I had accepted the fact that this was not a great war before I left but by the time I got back I felt as if my country had made me live a nightmare.

It seemed impossible at first to relate to anyone who had not been there. The feeling of hatred and betrayal I had developed about our country overtook me at times. So much happened there that I just wanted to displace in my mind. Time has passed since Vietnam but the memories haven't.

I often think of Bayard Russ, the most gung-ho guy in the world. He was the goalie on the soccer team. When the team had to run laps he would do them with two bricks in his hands just for the fun of it. He was enthusiastic about anything and everything, including the war. He went into the Marines and stepped on a mine. His death represents for me the tragedy of Vietnam.

So there are my stories about Vietnam, and the motive behind and approach of my class on the Vietnam War at Middlebury College. The students I teach this year were born in 1981. The shattering events of 1968—the Tet Offensive, the assassinations of Martin Luther King and Bobby Kennedy, My Lai, Lyndon Johnson's resignation, the riots in Chicago, the Paris Peace talks—occurred 30 years ago, long before they were born. The thought of being asked, or forced, to fight in a far-off place is near-fantasy to them, unreal. The young men who fought in Vietnam—and the young men and women who fought against the Vietnam War are young no more. We are these children's parents. Hard to believe.

Times change. People mellow. They must. The angriest vets who came to the class a decade ago are now more inclined to shrug and allow that it all happened a long time ago. They've dealt with the pain, or largely so: that's why they're still here. I've changed too. I can listen to their stories without weeping. I can watch the movies and not turn away. I can sit on the grass and look at the Wall in Washington and not be overwhelmed with grief and anger. I can walk the Middlebury campus on my daily round and not see the ghosts of my friends who made such hard, life-altering decisions.

History generalizes and popular culture oversimplifies. I find that students these days are inclined to view young people during the Vietnam



War as members of two opposed camps: on the one hand, brave, young, exploited soldier-heroes, cruelly unappreciated, answering their nation's call—and on the other rich, young, college-student cowards dancing in the nude at Woodstock while their peers died in Vietnam.

While there is of course some truth to the polarities of this popular view, would that it were that easy to understand the choices young people made—and the shifting contexts in which they were asked to make them. In fact, most soldiers who went to Vietnam were neither rabid patriots nor baby-killers; most young people who didn't go never called a cop a "pig," spit on a returning soldier, or lived in a commune smoking grass. Stories like those of my Middlebury friends reveal that those who went, and those who didn't go, were the same people, very much alike. I talk to my students about the VVAW—the Vietnam Veterans Against the War:

warriors and anti-warriors in one person, soldiers carrying the antiwar banner in the 70s after Nixon had outlasted college protests and disarmed the protesters by ending the draft.

In the midst of post-Cold War plenty and security, I do worry about becoming a old-timer, mono-metaphored, living in the past with his old-fart friends, listening to the same Bob Dylan songs, stuck in the 60s. Be that as it may, I guess I'll keep teaching my classes, trying to bring that difficult time alive for each new group of students who enlist in my class. I can't help it.

As you were.

Karl Lindholm is the Dean of Advising at Middlebury College in Vermont and an Assistant Professor of American Literature and Civilization. In addition to the literature of the Vietnam War, his research interests focus on baseball's Negro leagues. He is working on a biography of William Clarence Matthews, a black baseball pioneer.

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Edward W. Wood, Jr.

Revisiting My Memoir: *On Being Wounded*

Fifteen years ago this September I returned to the place of my wounding in WWII at the first attempted crossing of the Moselle River in eastern France in the fall of 1944. Later that month, in 1984, I settled in Chartres, near the Cathedral, where I wrote the first draft of my memoir, *On Being Wounded*.

Now, a decade and a half later, and eight years after the book was published, I have a better sense of what my book is about, its successes, its regrets, the direction it has given my life and my writing.

In retrospect I understand that the most important act I performed in writing *On Being Wounded*, not even realizing it at the time, was *to write, without being pejorative or preachy*, a book both antiwar and anti-violence.

My book deals with the consequences of a serious wound received in combat, how it changed my life in ways I, at the time, neither understood nor expected. In the deepest sense, my wounding destroyed my relation to my parents, never to be made whole again. The wounding, certainly for years, inhibited my sexual life. It brought me under the care of a psychiatrist for as many years. It caused me to break irrevocably with my past, turn to other paths for career, avocations, pleasures. Finally, it led me to "give up the gun," seek gentler ways of living outside the frame of weapons and war in which I, as a Southern boy, had been raised.

My book details in what I hope is my deepest honesty the consequences of a wounding in war—the impacts of war on one individual, impacts seldom seriously considered in America, with its pervasive, shoddy worship of violence in its media and its video games. Yet, on another level, I also understand that my slim book scarcely penetrates the mysterious

skein of wars and woundings, scarcely penetrates what war did to me on the deepest levels of my unconscious, and how war hurt those close to me in childhood and youth.

I did not see when writing *On Being Wounded*—was I afraid to look at my darkness?—that, in my unconscious, coiled the terrible shame of combat. After a lifetime of struggling to understand war, I now am sure that every person in serious combat, under the terrible pressure of that pitiless place, does something for which they are always ashamed. For me, it was the simple act of being wounded after but four days in my Division and one day at the front. What kind of man was I not to have lasted any longer? For others "the shame of combat" may involve acts of commission, the simple act of breaking the commandment, "Thou Shall Not Kill," the more complex infliction of atrocities, sometimes, more often than we think, the betrayal of a friend. "The shame of combat" includes acts of omission, betrayals of all sorts, refusals to fire, realities seldom discussed in the literature of war.

So, as I say, I was haunted by the question: had I really been a man?—with all that may mean for an American male, particularly one with ancestors participating in every major American war, beginning with the French and Indian War of 1756. It took returning to my place of wounding forty years after the event, struggling to write a book, then years absorbing its most serious meanings to finally face this condition of shame, to recognize that what I had done—entering combat alone, a replacement—had actually been an act of immense courage: doing what I was told under fire without emotional support of any kind. The shame lay in the simple reality of being wounded, my flesh, my soma so badly hurt, not as a consequence of my actions at the front, but simply the result of war. Had I not written my book, I would have never made that discovery, never been as whole as I am today.

Regrets about the book I wrote?

Most of all I did not understand when I finished and published *On Being Wounded* how profoundly I wished I'd talked to my parents about my wounding before their death. And how I wished they had talked to me. My wound became a secret among us, a dark and dirty fact none of us could admit. My father, I have learned from letters written to his brother, always wondered why I was in combat for such a short time, though he never questioned me. My mother's deep and maternal compassion for my wounded flesh was more than I could bear: it threatened me, turned me back into her child, intensified my unconscious shame in

unbearable emotion. I fled from her embrace. The healthiest thing I could have done—*we* could have done—was speak of what had happened to me. It would have helped me see my father and mother with greater clarity. My father, a pilot in WWI, had cracked up, lost his front teeth, *but had never been in combat*. Were his Silver Wings the equivalent of my Combat Infantryman's Badge? Both symbols of what we sensed as failure? Did my father wonder about his manhood, having never been in air combat? Could we have shared the same story of human weakness, discovered our courage in adversity together, eschewed our shame? Oh, how much I would that we had!

If my mother and I had talked, could I have absorbed my mother's tears, cared for her in turn, then salved her wounds in those awful days when cancer wracked her flesh and it was too late to share our mutual pain? I most bitterly regret that I did not write my book before my parents' death. Had I, we might have talked. Had we talked, we might have loved, recaptured the joy of a family in the distant days of my youth and childhood. And, yet, by waiting so long, so many years, to write the book, then absorb its layered meanings, I've finally reached new understandings, richer and more complex than those in my memoir.

I finally begin to grasp how *woundings*, the weapons that cause them, are passed on from generation to generation, in large part because of an inability to talk of inflicted pain, the shame of men killing and being killed. I see that opening one door to such discussions, may well be the best contribution I may have made. And I understand that by walking through this door myself, I have stepped into a room much wider than I knew existed when I first finished *On Being Wounded*.

—Denver, Colorado, 1999

From *On Being Wounded*: Fulcrum Publishing, 1991

My loneliness, my sense of alienation, intensified as the members of the squad took their regular seats on the half-track in which we would roll toward Germany. Their words and laughter poured over me, around me, under me. Until I proved myself in combat, I simply did not exist. I had been told by fellow replacements at the repple-depple that this was the way I would be treated when I joined the squad. Replacements knew no one as their friends. Sometimes they were even given the tasks of greatest danger as guinea pigs, targets of opportunity, while the rest of the squad crouched in greater security.

Meat for the butcher.

We rolled toward the Moselle that morning, stopping only when great tanks at our side fired their artillery pieces high above barren hills. I marveled at the peasants who came up to the tanks and methodically seized empty shell casings (so they could later sell the brass), seemingly oblivious to German fire.

Twice we dismounted. Once at a rumor of poison gas. Then to penetrate a French village—a high brick wall at our side, five yards between each man, alert for the hand grenade that might come lobbing over the wall. At the edge of the village, we halted in the ditch at the side of the road.

"Put on those fuckin' bayonets!" the sergeant said when he ran back from crouching at the lieutenant's side. "We gonna cross the road and clean those motherfuckers outta that house behind the wall."

My fingers trembled as I fastened my bayonet to the end of my rifle.

We ran in little groups across the road and ducked behind the wall. Nothing happened. The Germans had fled.

My bayonet jammed when I tried to remove it from my rifle. The soldier seated on the ground next to me pulled it free, glaring at me with contempt.

Somewhere later that afternoon, north and west of Metz, the track halted near a road sign to Luxembourg. We lay behind it while shells from a German 88-millimeter artillery piece smashed into a farmhouse across the road. (The explosions lacked all the drama of a shelling in a movie; rather, they looked like dirty backfires from an old car.) We retreated back down the highway as a tank joined us.

At dusk we dismounted from the half-track. We walked at the side of the tank. Once we stopped, and the lieutenant talked fiercely to a Frenchman who then motioned us down a darkened side road, its trees forming great menacing arches above our heads. We moved warily into a forest where fog slipped through black branches and rain dripped from sodden leaves. As we penetrated deeper into that darkness, gravel suddenly splattered my leggings, stinging me. The pavement in front of me exploded with an orange burst of fire; a blue hole cut into the fog ahead. I scrambled toward the ditch, crawling on my hands and knees like a terrified animal.

The spectacle had just ended, the movie choreographed by Hemingway, starring John and Gary and Humphrey. I was no longer an observer; I was suddenly, instantly, peeingly, playing a part in it: SOMEONE OUT THERE WANTED ME DEAD, little ol' Eddie Wood, his momma's boy, dead!

I buried myself in the ditch, branches snapping above my head.

"WHO THE FUCK IS THAT?" the soldier behind me cried.

My teeth chattered so I could not speak.

"I goddamn near shot ya. Be quiet, for Chris' sake."

The lieutenant fired over our heads at a blur that suddenly popped up from the ditch ahead of us and ran; the silhouette sprawled back upon the road, its rifle clattering to the black pavement.

The lieutenant hesitated. He waved us ahead. I walked by the dead German, a boy no older than I, his blond hair plastered to his face with rain.

Whenever the lieutenant crossed a culvert, he leaned over and fired bursts from his machine gun into the opening. I shuddered, imagining myself trapped in a tunnel beneath the ground, bullets slamming from the concrete, shredding my unprotected flesh.

At dawn we stopped, mounted the track again. We entered another town, its streets deserted. The signs were in German. Nobody visible. Nobody. As if all human beings had disappeared. Shutters on the buildings slammed in the early morning wind. We parked in the middle of the square. Shells whispered over our heads, tearing through the gray sky. They should have been the ducks I shot with my father as a boy.

We left the village with its closed shutters and doors. The road swung to our left, then our right, a ninety-degree turn. We could not see around the corner.

The lieutenant and the sergeant dismounted. The soldier who had cursed me in the dark the night before jumped from the track. He shouted to the lieutenant, then pointed up at me, glaring ferociously. The lieutenant slowly calmed him, then jerked his arm at our squad. I clambered from the half-track with the other men, my rifle awkward in my arms. As we started around the curve in the road, expecting enemy fire at any moment, my mouth could not form words, my breath seemed louder than any shellfire. I hugged the ditch at the side of the road. When nothing happened, I stepped from the shrubs to the macadam pavement. The air was still. Fog hovered around the trees, masking the mansard roof of a French farmhouse that towered above the poplars to my right. For that moment, that small moment in time, though I did not know it, we were in front of the whole Third Army. The Germans had fallen back across the Moselle River ahead to regroup.

Up the road I could just distinguish the outline of a bridge. I walked toward it. With each faltering step I seemed to penetrate a great vaulted tomb of silence, a silence never known or experienced before—as if all

time and motion had ceased and I was the only living being in the universe. This was the silence I had encountered the day I first joined the men of the division—their refusal to help the stranger, the replacement, until he had proven himself under fire. Men did not support each other in comradeship as they did in all those movies I had seen. They entered a place of intense stillness where each lived alone in terror of immediate death. The silence deepened, hovering about me, palpable, almost as if I must soon slip into it and sink into eternity.

I sank to my knees when the lieutenant joined us. I could not speak, my throat constricted with fear.

Just ahead of us, on our side of the river, west of the Moselle, lay a barge canal twenty or thirty yards wide. Before retreating, the Germans had blown a bridge spanning it. Made of steel I-beams, the bridge had broken apart at the explosion and jackknifed into the green water of the canal, forming a V. Gingerly, we clambered down one side, holding the steel trusses with one hand, our rifles with the other. I feared I might be shot and tumble, helpless, into the canal. The gap between the two sets of trusses, just before they penetrated the water, was two or three yards. I tensed my legs. Jumped. One foot swung into the water. I yanked it up, climbed the slippery steel to the other bank. The lieutenant joined us there.

We stood beneath the abutment on the other side of the bridge. A machine gun fired, its bullets whining off the concrete. The lieutenant gentled us as if we were wild animals. He motioned us to the top of the abutment when the machine gun stopped its chattering.

In the distance, several hundred yards to our left, I could see another bridge, much longer, rising out of the mist over the Moselle. Little figures of men ran up the abutment.

"Fire, goddamn it!" the lieutenant cried. "Fire!"

I threw my rifle to my shoulder, settled on a running silhouette. I led it as I did the quail I had shot as a boy. I started to pull the trigger. The bridge exploded like a concrete geyser: rubble and steel and smoke hid the man at whom I aimed. I fired into the haze.

"Shit!" the lieutenant cursed. "We'll have to cross the fucking river in boats now."

He motioned us back down the slope and across the canal, not knowing we were the forward contingent of the whole Third Army.

The bank of the canal offered us protection from enemy fire. Our tanks were ranged below it. We dropped, exhausted, at the forward lip of the bank. The tanks fired over the rise.

I rolled over on my back and looked down the hill.

A great plain lay behind me. Though it was misty and gray, I could see for miles. The road was lined with tanks and trucks and half-tracks and jeeps and men who stood in little clumps like ants. Airplanes, small artillery spotters, buzzed overhead. Dirty smoke from shellfire drifted over the road and hid it for an instant like dark mist following a heavy rain. Men shouted at each other, gesticulated; I could not hear their words. The air snapped with the shriek of lightning.

One of the men who had crossed the canal with me stood at the bottom of the hill. He yelled commands to a mortar squad firing at a group of apartment buildings, just this side of the Moselle. A dirty puff of smoke suddenly exploded at his side. He spun as if a giant had slammed him in the shoulder, bouncing off the ground as he fell. A medic ran to him where he flopped up and down like a chicken with its head cut off, spurting blood from his arm.

Another puff of smoke dirtied the air. A piece of shrapnel slammed into the earth at my side. The grass around it curled. The lieutenant made hand signals to us to assemble at a stand of trees farther back, near the road that led to the farmhouse. I grabbed a box of .30-caliber machine gun ammunition and ran, understanding, for the first time, how to survive here: live for the moment. Don't think about the near future, not even the next few minutes.

We started to dig foxholes under the trees. I hit a root almost immediately. I struck furiously at it, using the edge of my metal entrenching tool as an ax. The blade was too dull; the root would not snap. At any moment I was sure another artillery shell would split the air above me, send hot shrapnel tearing into my flesh. I frantically slammed at the pulpy mass. My breath was choked. I could not breathe. Sweat poured from my face, though a cold September mist drifted through the grove of trees.

The men at my side had their holes half dug. They had moved farther out from the tree trunk where the roots were smaller. I scrambled over the ground to their side. No one spoke to me.

I started to dig. My blade met no roots. The shovel pierced the deep black earth, the sweet earth in which I would soon hide . . . and then, then, the slam of a sledgehammer lifted me high and I whirled up and up and up through a tunnel of green leaves toward the sky, my hands extended as if to grasp those leaves and the dark brown limbs rushing by me, halting my flight into eternity. My fingers brushed over them. They would not hold.

I flew higher into the sky and seemed to merge with the clouds, mix with their wispy tendrils, not knowing whether to continue this arc toward eternity or fall back to the sweet, sweet earth. With a falling, sliding swoop I tumbled out of the sky. Fell to my knees. I put my fingers up to my face. Blood, thick and red and dark, swiftly pumping, covered them. I reached up and touched my head. My helmet was gone. Blood poured from a hole on the left side of my skull. A hard lump protruded from my torn scalp. A piece of shrapnel was embedded in the bone. I looked behind me. My pants were ripped away, my right buttock was blown open. Beneath the yellow-white fat, I could see the raw, red meat, like the steaks my father had once fed me.

"Hold still, Wood! Hold still!" the medic cried, blood from the tip of his wounded nose spraying my face. "Stop wiggling, goddamnit! I gotta get this morphine in ya." The blood from his own wound sprinkled over me like spittle from a dying sneeze.

As he poked at my arm, I heard the whisper of the shells above me and wondered why their sigh sounded like the wings of the ducks my father and I had once shot in Mississippi bayous. Not yet in pain, I lay there, loose-jointed, until they tumbled me into a stretcher and ran with me toward the ambulance parked on the macadam road near the grove of trees. Once they dropped me, leaving me helpless, as an artillery shell slammed too close. I stared up at them as they hovered in the lee of the ambulance, their place of sanctuary.

When the shelling stopped, they lifted me into the ambulance.

"You didn't like it much up here, did you, Wood?" the lieutenant asked as they slammed the door.

My journey into the land of the wounded began in that ambulance after one day of combat, before I had proven myself, those men in arms still uncertain of my courage and my strength, the lieutenant's words my epitaph.

Being moved by ambulance from Battalion Aid Station into World War I bunkers, I smelled the cloying odor of blood, feeling it drip on me from the stretcher above. Here at the front, before there were forms and bureaucrats to describe and fasten to me some categories of wound and pain, I touched men who, for an instant, cared for me with greater compassion than I had ever experienced at any time or place in my life—men who lit my cigarette and held it in their fingers while I puffed, men who returned to me again and again, seeing if my paralyzed hand would

yet move, if my bowels were free, my urine not pink with blood, murmuring to me gently, even crying. I remember one boy my age who had ridden to the front with me, weeping as he cut off my bloody clothes in Battalion Aid Station. I remember the soldier I had watched being wounded visiting me in the field hospital, his arm still bloody in its sling, offering me a package of cigarettes.

Gentleness and compassion, a softness so difficult for the American male to express—always there but held back, contained by some impenetrable shell, breaking open now and warming me after I was wounded, as if love could be given only within the frame of violence and one must be expressed in conjunction with the other. The language of war and peace, violence and love, hate and compassion that I have sought to understand on my journey through the land of the wounded.

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Bruce Guernsey

Doublemint

"It cleans your teeth and breath," Gene Autrey used to tell us just after he'd emptied his six-shooter into some scruffy bad guy those Sundays nights I was allowed to stay up to watch my favorite cowboy show. Gene's dental advice had little effect on my mother, however. "No," was all she had to say, which meant in no uncertain terms, no gum for me, despite my pleading at the grocery store.

The memory of tugging at my mother's sleeve came forcefully back to me last year on the streets of Ho Chi Minh City when a rag doll of a child, this unwashed little girl, kept tugging at my shirt with her dirty hand, a green pack of clean-Gene's version of toothpaste in the other. "Don't buy it," John said. "If you do, she's yours for life." Little did I know at the time how true those words would be.

John is John Balaban, a good friend now, but then my experienced guide around the city where I'd arrived as a faculty member with Semester-at-Sea, the unique program of worldwide travel and shipboard study sponsored by the University of Pittsburgh. Viet Nam was our fourth port of call and Balaban had joined us in Hong Kong, our previous landing, as an interport lecturer. This was one of his many visits to the country. A specialist in Vietnamese culture, he'd been a conscientious objector during the war, courageously helping to find medical care for napalmed children.

"No," I told her, taking his advice and echoing my mother, but this kid with the smudged face was more daring and persistent than I was at her age. I kept thinking that had she a mother like mine to swat her bottom, she wouldn't keep after me this way, buzzing about like a fly. "Mister, mister," I heard wherever I turned, but I didn't give in.

That night, back in the safety of our ship, the SS Universe Explorer—nicknamed "The Great White Mother"—I heard similar tales from my colleagues about street children like "Double," as I had come to call my tenacious shadow by the end of the day. Over drinks and dinner, Balaban explained to us that these kids had no certain set of parents and were essentially homeless. "They do look out for one another," he went on to say, "a kind of extended family," but he warned that we'd continue something that had gone on since the war by buying the candy and gum they had to sell.

Later, in the snug of my cabin, I was struck by the pathos of a child trying to market the very sweets most kids beg for as I had. Thank goodness she vanished, I thought, but falling asleep, I saw her again, her thin, oversized dress slipping into the crowd outside the fence at the dock. Giving in to my guilt would be good for *me*, not her, I kept saying to myself like a bedtime prayer. Balaban is right and so was my old lady. And what would the equivalent of twenty-five cents really mean out there anyway? Yes, it's a good thing she's gone, but where I wondered, where?

I didn't sleep well that night. Dreams are the soul's home movies, someone once said, and somehow home and TV and images of the "American" war, as the Vietnamese call it, all got confused in my head. The next morning, at the old American Embassy where I'd gone with Balaban to take some pictures, was I sleeping or awake? Everywhere litter was blowing about, bits of paper and shredded strips of palm leaves from the whirring blades overhead, the chopper lifting, desperate hands reaching, trying to grab on, then falling back to ground, wailing faces wedged in the bars of the locked iron gate.

I stood now at that very place and it all came back to me, the last days of the war, the horror of that evacuation I watched with my fellow Americans in our living rooms as our country abandoned the many thousands of South Vietnamese who would surely die. The Embassy was sealed off still but hardly regal now, overgrown and falling in. "Mister, mister," I heard in my waking dream, and even John was amazed. How she found us I have no idea any more than I could explain how a lost dog finds its way home. Was she even the same child, I wondered, because today her hair was combed and her hands washed as if she were meeting someone special. She wore the same long dress, however, a gossamer hand-me-down from who-knows-whom that made her look even smaller and

younger than the eight or nine she probably was—that made her look almost transparent, more wraith than flesh. But in her fist there was the pack of Doublemint. She was back, and she was real.

By the end of the day, I finally gave in. Balaban, my version of Virgil, had gone into a shop and the little girl and I were alone. "Listen," I said to her as if she could understand, "if I buy some gum will you go away?" Resisting her salesmanship hadn't worked, so I thought I'd try the other, though something inside of me kept saying, no, no. But what was this voice saying "no" to, I wondered—to buying the gum or having her leave? "No, no, please don't, don't go," yet who was saying this, her or me?

I offered John a stick of gum when he came out. I thought he'd be miffed, especially when I told him about the extra quarter I'd given her for a tip, but he, too, seemed to admire her incredible persistence and maybe even missed having her around the way I did on our way back to the ship. While watching for pickpockets and dodging motor scooters, I couldn't help but search the twilight for my small friend, but like any shadow at dusk, she was nowhere to be seen. Was she only after my money, little as I gave her? I was strangely sad, felt somehow abandoned, and spent the evening with my children who were students on board.

They were wisely not taking any of my courses, but I wanted them to know about a Vietnamese story I'd just taught called "The Key" by Vo Phien. It deals with a family's having to leave behind a very old and feeble grandfather during the hurried evacuation. In that frenzy the narrator forgot to leave a key for the old man who is his father, to open a trunk where his valuables are stored. Having made it safely to America with wife and children, the narrator wears the key around his neck like a cross. No matter where he goes, even in the refugee shower where he tells his tale like a penance, he wears that key, opening his heart to all who will listen.

The Vietnamese have a deep tradition of ancestor worship. Despite how he cleaned himself in that hot, steamy water, the voice in Vo Phien's touching story can never wash away his memories. I couldn't get "Double" out of my mind either, and vowed the next day, after I visited the market, to find her. I'll buy every pack of gum that kid has, by God. Every stick of the stuff.

I happen to love markets and go to them each time I visit a new country. Some people claim that to know a culture, study their burial rights. I say instead, go to where they live, to the place they buy their food: to where the colors delight and the smells arouse, or don't. Then you'll

discover through your senses who these people are. My visit to this particular one made me realize even more how little we knew, and know, about the Vietnamese.

Arranged with the wonder of a child's eye, the central market place in Ho Chi Minh City is a coloring book of lively lemons and purple dragon fruit piled high against an orange sky, a dazzle of line and light. Wandering the web of aisles, it didn't take long for me to lose myself in vast deserts of rice tinged nut-brown to angel-white in dunes the size of pyramids. The aquarium I kept as a kid never swam with the motion of the fish in the chilly stalls I came upon, silver-pink and mooney-gold on beds of ice where tiger prawns the length of lobsters still crawled a coral reef.

I think I bought one of each, of the fruit at least. Stepping out into the hoots and horns of the city reminded me of leaving the shelter of the Saturday matinee, still dreamy, still riding with my heroes like Gene Autrey in the latest western and rubbing my eyes at the light. The traffic soon brought me back to my mission, and I hired a cyclo to take me around town. A shadow needs to eat, I said to myself. Good thing you bought all that fruit. It's bound to spoil, so you'd better find her.

A cyclo ride is exciting. The driver, the Vietnamese version of a gondolier, sits behind and slightly above his passenger, peddling deftly around the city's many flowered circles. A scary but aesthetic experience as carts and wagons, trucks and cars, merge with the flashing spokes of spinning wheels, meshing together in a myriad of colors. It's like being in a kaleidoscope.

Bags of fruit for company, I rode my hired tricycle wherever I pointed, much to the confusion of the driver in his cone-shaped straw hat. "Where go?" he wanted to know, but I had no answer, other than to wave my hand like a wand, hoping my missing friend would magically appear. "There was a girl," I finally tried to explain, almost an hour later, and he nodded his head. "Girl," he understood, and we took a right down a side street I'd not yet seen, to a bar where the hanging beads for a door swayed softly, seductively.

Sorrow came upon me in a rush. This, of course, is where she might someday be but not with gum to clean your teeth and breath. At that moment there was nothing more I wanted in the world than "clean," nothing more than to be a kid again, riding his trike down the block, but even the fruit beside me seemed to leer up luridly. "The zoo," I blurted out, "take me to the zoo." That's where kids go, and opening my map, I found the city gardens.

I paid him well, my driver, who departed shaking his head, confused by my lack of direction, baffled perhaps by my manhood. "Girls" were undoubtedly one of his typical fares, but what could he think of some lost guy interested in monkeys and elephants? And a humble zoo it was besides. I bought some peanuts to feed the sad-faced pachyderm that came snuffling toward me, its face full of flies. A group of small children all in school uniform came by but "Double," of course, was not among them.

Some older girls, too, in their late teens, wearing the emblems of their status: traditional white blouses, silky-long over their flowing pants, so beautiful. How ironic, I thought—no, how sad—that the same word in Vietnamese for "America" is this very one, "beautiful." I almost tried to say it—"mehi," or something like that, as I'd learned from John Balaban—so lovely were these young women before me, in procession like they were going to communion, but the chattering of monkeys woke me from my wanderings, and I made my empty way back to the "Great White Mother," needing the warmth of her sheltering arms but realizing at the same time how privileged we all were in her protectiveness. The ship was always there to welcome us back, to feed and tuck us in, her motion a cradle, forever rocking. And where does Doublemint sleep, I wondered.

We set sail the next morning early, long before anybody might be at the gate to wave good-by. I waved back anyway, climbing to the top deck at sunrise, a symbolic gesture to a country I'd first known as a time, not a place; not a country at all, in fact, but a war I'd done my best to stay out of. White and well educated, I had learned how to use the deferment system. I was lucky in the draft lottery, too, where to come in last was to win. But having now finally been to this haunted land, it was time to rethink what was lost or won. "If you do, she's yours for life." Balaban's words still echo. How did he know? Could it be that he, too, walked hand-in-hand with the same little girl? Is that why he keeps returning? Is this what he meant?

Fortunately, busy work with classes kept me busy. For a while, at least. My shadow still hid in the dark and tugged at my sleeve again a few days later out at sea. Some students I hadn't thought much of, the giggly and studly types, told in our daily "core" class of something they'd done in Vietnam. We were all required to attend these general meetings which were often a drag, but not this one.

"She was like such a mess, this little girl. I mean, she was like, you know, dirty." I was stunned at what I was hearing. So that's where she was, my Doublemint! These students, as they went on to tell us, had taken her out to buy some clothes. Amazing! Out of all those thousands of children on the streets, they'd dressed *her* up that last day. I felt relieved. No wonder we couldn't find each other: she was with them, being cared for, I at that moment believed.

And part of me still does. After all, as I was warned, she's mine for life, just like the country she'd come to mean.

Bruce Guernsey is Professor of English at Eastern Illinois University. His poetry and prose have appeared in *The Atlantic, Poetry, The American Scholar, Country Journal, Fly Rod & Reel,* and many of the quarterlies. In 1998 he was a Writer-in-Residence at Hawthornden Castle in Scotland, an international retreat for writers.

Travis Burton

Time In-Country

Three years after the Fall of Saigon, I was born into a nation whose era of greatness had gradually been swallowed up in the dark jungles of Southeast Asia. An unwinnable war had been fought by idealistic men, and their mistakes had been paid for in chaos and human lives. The America I entered into was trying to put more and more distance between itself and the Vietnam War everyday. Despite this, the ripples left by the war continued to spread.

My experience has been to bob among these ripples as they worked their way across American society. The most terrible of the American wars in recent memory did not mark me, but its aftermath has in ways that the war itself never could. I can't tell you that I carry a deep rage from seeing the American myth disintegrate before me, or that watching nightly body counts and peace protests on TV haunts me still. I never encountered such things; and yet the war has seeped into my life.

Twenty-three years after the Vietnam War came to its conclusion, I offer a story of how the war has failed to become just an enigma. The war is over, but as the collection of experiences that follows gives evidence of, the ripples remain.

My first encounter with the war came in-between the morning cartoons that my brother and I watched so devoutly. Always preceded by a trumpet's wail, the commercials for the *Time-Life* "Vietnam War" book series brought us images of a splendid feat of humanity. Huge explosions, dirty men with big guns, and fast planes filled the TV screen while a grizzled voice promised "The Vietnam War experience for only $19.98

in five monthly installments (plus shipping and handling)." The two of us were instantly taken by the commercial and the war it was selling. Vietnam soon entered into the mythical realm of our playtime, where we could escape to an exciting and dangerous land even our imaginations could not fully grasp. I remember the book series being on both of our Christmas lists that year, but neither of us got it.

As time passed, and my sense of reason gradually encroached on my imaginative abilities, I finally began to question what the war was really all about. My mother offered me a simple history as an explanation: the French were having troubles in Southeast Asia during the period



following World War II, and we (the U.S.) had gone in to bail them out. It all went back to the debt we owed to the French for helping us out in the American Revolution, she added. This put enough order into my thinking on the war for a time.

I recall a particular Halloween when I was ten or so and dressed up like I thought a U.S. soldier in Vietnam would. I wore my "A-Team" camouflage pajamas and a faded green plastic pot helmet. My brother was two years younger and went as a hippie, big Afro wig with the beads and all that. Maybe my parents noted the irony in that twenty Halloweens sooner we would have been making a political statement. However, to my brother and I the Vietnam War was still a novelty, and what we would remember most from that night is the royal haul of candy we made.

* * *

Following the Tet offensive in 1968, the eldest of my father's four brothers died in the fighting to retake the city of Hue. I am unsure of the exact circumstances of his death, but I do know that what was left of him did not constitute much. My father was a pallbearer and said that from the feel of it, most of what was my uncle was left in Vietnam. The casket probably contained just some cartilage and a few bones he said, nothing really of the man they had once belonged to.

For a while my father had harbored the hope that the man who had gone to war as Corporal John Burton was still alive somewhere, and that the war's end would bring him home. Five more years of war effectively killed this hope, and my father was resigned to accept his death. Uncle John became simply the brother who "died, over there in Vietnam."

These days my father rarely speaks of John, if at all. Since I joined the service I have asked him about my uncle more frequently, but I have always received the same response. He offers facts only: *John Burton, Marine, died 2 February 1968, a good brother who is missed.*

When I was twelve we moved out to the country, and Vietnam followed us into the woods behind our new house. Almost every afternoon I could be found in my little piece of Vietnam, with a lethal plastic survival knife and crimson red headband. I was full of the guts and glory of combat; I was closest thing to Rambo that my part of the woods had ever seen. By day I hunted through the jungle for commies and defended the brave "American way," by night I slept in a warm bed inside a safe home.

In retrospect, it seems that there was little difference between me and the children of the early 1960s who stalked evil Japs, emulating John Wayne in *The Sands of Iwo Jima*. We were warriors of the Cold War, building on the myth left by the soldiers of the generation before us. We saw war as a context for adventure, and nothing more. We fought for the right side always, and that right side was always the U.S. Our motives and intentions were impossibly simple: liberty, freedom, and justice that had to and would prevail. We taught ourselves to be warriors who knew only right. Vietnam did not change all things.

In high school my education on the war took on a more formal approach. I learned that the Vietnam War was really the Vietnam "conflict," and that the whole episode from the Gulf of Tonkin resolution

to the Fall of Saigon had been a real political nightmare for LBJ and Nixon. I also learned that the antiwar movement was a bunch of pot-smoking hippies who shook up the "establishment" and changed a troubled nation.

My U.S. history class dealt with the war quickly and in broad strokes. We spent weeks going through the battles and events of WWII, but only a day on the Vietnam War. Come the end of the year I could point out Okinawa and Normandy on a map and tell you what happened there, but places like Da Nang and Quang Tri were both unknown and unremarkable. I knew over 58,000 Americans died fighting communism in Vietnam. I would have to learn that over 2 million Vietnamese civilians and military had also lost their lives in their fight for independence.

Only ten people from my small hometown went to fight in Vietnam, and of those ten eight came back. The other two were KIA and their names are listed in the local newspaper every Memorial Day next to my hometown's other dead young men who died in uniform. One of the Vietnam dead was PFC Lawrence Brown, who graduated in 1966 from the same high school I did in 1996. For a Boy Scout project I wrote a report on who the guy had been and why he had gone to war.

Brown's yearbook picture showed a girlish-looking boy with a goofy grin and a buzz cut. Next to his name in quotations it said, "voted most likely to fall out of bed and break neck." I had to call his parents' home to find out more about him, and ended up talking to his mother. She said she did not mind talking about her boy, but her voice always wavered a bit when she said his name. She told me that Lawrence had been in and out of trouble in high school, and that he was bright but they had lacked the financial resources to send him on to college. Both she and her husband had believed that the Army would straighten their son out, plus give him a way out of the small town that had trapped so many of his friends. Unfortunately Lawrence had to give his life for his country, she said, and that was that. I remember her telling me to stay safe for my parents' sake if nothing else, the day that her boy's hopes and dreams ended, hers had too. I can't recall exactly how I replied to that, but I hope I promised her I would do my best to live a long life.

Lately when I ask my mother for her thoughts on the Vietnam War, she responds that she tries not to think about it. To her the war is something that is simply not pleasant to dwell on. It does not affect her day-to-day life; and it changes nothing whether she ponders the war or not.

Sometimes though, I can get through to her feelings on the war by asking her about her memories of life during the late 60s and early 70s. She was in junior high and high school for most of that time, and what she remembers are not facts about the war, but how it changed the society around her. To her, American society as a whole became cynical in the years of the Vietnam War. Although the nation has healed some, she says that much of the cynicism still remains.

One particular memory she has is of how her parents voiced strong support for the war in the early going of the effort, but as time went on and the losses increased, their support had become less and less apparent. By the spring of 1975, Vietnam had ceased to be mentioned in my mother's household. That was the way it was for a lot of people she said, the discussion of the war stopped and the pain it had caused was slowly covered up.

As I write this, I am twenty-years-old, and I know the Vietnam War better than I ever have before. I know it best through those who experienced it and those who wrote about it. Philip Caputo, Tim O'Brien, Tobias Wolff, and W.D. Ehrhart have told me about what happens to men when they go to war, and the toll that war takes on them. My second-hand knowledge of a war is enlightening and horrifying in ways only my innocence knows, but even the greatest knowledge of the Vietnam War changes nothing and certainly insures nothing.

The fact is that the Vietnam War still attracts me, and there is nothing I can do to change this. I keep praying for my uncle even though I know it makes no difference. I am sorry for Lawrence Brown's mother, but that does not mean I can tell mine I will always be coming home. I can't just bury Vietnam in the past, because regardless of everything I now understand, I remain a child of America. I know my past and maintain hope for my future.

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Tom Wolf

From *Ice Crusaders: A Memoir of Cold War and Cold Sport*

> Says he has been shook over hell. . . . Sometimes he is raving and excited, at others melancholy. . . . Very peculiar and excentric. flying from one Subject to another, and talking incoherently on all Subjects. . . . The subject of religion and his experiences in the army being paramount in his mind . . . [he] thinks all his enemies should be in hell.
>
> *—Inquest record for an inmate, Jason Roberts, after the Civil War in the Indiana Hospital for the Insane*

Maybe all history is merely personal history. But I hope not. As the 2002 Winter Olympics in Utah approach, I hope that this memoir, my personal history as an Ice Crusader or Cold Warrior, will help others see the mountainous way that leads from winter war to winter sport. Like the memoir of the 10th Mountain Division's E.P. Motley, I hope my personal Ice Crusade will offer something in common to the reader. I hope that it will offer access to the 10th Mountain Division's real legacy to us: a useable past. We Americans have always seen winter's snows as liberating forces, as challenges against which we define ourselves. This is especially true insofar as our roots trace back to the mountains of New England or Europe. But it is also true for the members of the Black Skiers Association.

Like any walk or ski in the mountains, the way to a useable past is not easy or straightforward. It is fraught with risk. In our time, when it is popular to disparage war and warriors, heroes and heroines, I propose a return to a more traditional path. The shape of this path is peculiar, for it is no more linear than time and memory are linear. Again, and again, it circles back upon itself, like the snowtracks of a predator in a winterscape, quartering its territory, searching for its prey, pursuer and pursued. Yet always the path returns to its source, to the mountains and to the 10th Mountain Division.

My Ice Crusade, my personal pursuit of the Holy Land, began as the 10th Mountain Division engaged the German mountain soldiers in battle

in winter, 1945. At about that time, my mother bore me into a Colorado blizzard, en route to the hospital. And so I was not a post-war baby boomer but among the last of the war babies, among the first of the Cold Warriors. My father said that my first vision consisted not of my mother but of driving snow. Then my second vision involved skis, whose tips rested on the dashboard, separating Dad from my older sister, while a partially-open rear window suspended the tails above my laboring mother. If the car slid off the icy road, Dad reasoned, they would ski to the hospital. I obliterated that possibility by sliding out early, always eager for first powder.

That I exist at all I owe to the 10th Mountain Division. In 1942, the Army in general and the 10th in particular rejected my father. They left him at home to beget cold warriors and to power the war effort against the Axis. The 10th was like a fraternity. A candidate needed an IQ of at least 115 and three letters of reference to qualify. These my father had, including a letter from a medical doctor who was also a ski buddy. But he didn't have the heart to fool the Army doctors. An adolescent bout with rheumatic fever had irreparably damaged his German-American heart, but not his love for skiing, for shooting, and for mountains. When he recovered enough to face his doctors, they told him and his parents that he would die young of heart failure, but that his precarious time might lengthen if he were to lead a sedentary life at sea level. It was a family joke that he immediately headed back to the hills, such as Highway 40 over Moffat Pass, where he and his younger brother could take turns driving to the summit and skiing down the long avalanche chutes to their warm and waiting Model T.

I was born to lead, or at least to steer. As oldest son, I learned to drive by sitting behind my father in the family Ford on trips to the mountains. Sometimes, as we gained altitude, his heart would flutter to a stop. Wordlessly, he would pass out and slump over the steering wheel. My role was to reach over his shoulders, grab the wheel, and steer us to a stop, where we hoped we could revive him one more time. It was after one of these collapses that my father taught me to ski at a little family hill near Evergreen called Filius Park. As close as death always was, that was a good day.

As if we were bred to labor for Rockefeller and Kubla Khan, moving the dirt around, engineering ran in the family. Before going to fight his cousins in World War I, my Austrian uncle, Harry Sallen, worked on the railroad bore that became Moffat Tunnel, which linked Denver with the

Western Slope and the ski area that would become Winter Park. Similarly, my father pursued his own Ice Crusades as a civil engineer. Instead of dying in battle against his fellow Germans, he lived to serve Uncle Sam in another way. He lived to fill Colorado mountain valleys with dams and hydroelectric powerplants. Snow-swollen rivers like western Colorado's Fryingpan (which drains the snowy backcountry between Aspen and Vail) he stopped dead in their tracks behind graceful arcs of steel and concrete. Then, Lazarus-like, his rivers rose at his command from their slackwater deathbeds. Mighty rivers (even the Colorado River itself!) turned about, and, following transmountain tunnels (such as Moffat Tunnel), they flowed east under the Continental Divide to water the dry plains around ever-growing Denver.

There along the strip (today's Interstate-25) from Fort Warren (near Cheyenne, Wyoming) to Fort Collins to Fort Carson to Pueblo, the federal government needed water to support its many military bases. These bases began humbly at Camp Carson, near Colorado Springs. Or at the Denver Federal Center (near I-70, the highway to today's ski country). The Federal Center had been a munitions plant during World War II, before its conversion to the headquarters for my father's outfit, the proud and mighty United States Bureau of Reclamation.

From such modest beginnings, the federal presence in Colorado soared to the glory of the Air Force Academy, which opened its temporary doors in 1955 a few blocks from our home in East Denver, near Stapleton Airport, Buckley Naval Air Station, and Lowry Air Force Base. We who lived there were acutely aware that we lived at Ground Zero, primary targets in a nuclear exchange with the hated, feared Communists. While the first Air Force Cadets began to prepare themselves to fight the Cold War, architects with minds like engineers designed the Academy's permanent home at the foot of the Rampart Range near Colorado Springs, not far from the 10th Mountain Division's World War II training site further west into the mountains at Camp Hale.

Did my father regret not serving in World War II? Did he wish he could be a member of the 10th Mountain Division? He could ski. He could shoot. He could climb. He had a college degree. When the National Ski Patrol and the Sierra Club and the American Alpine Club began recruiting members for the 10th after Pearl Harbor, any two of those qualifications would get you in—along with those letters of recommendation. At its birth, the 10th was intended as a guild of America's winter sports elite, a gung-ho, mountain version of Teddy Roosevelt's

Rough Riders from the Spanish-American War. Teddy Roosevelt's father had dodged the draft during the American Civil War. TR spent a good deal of his life making up for that. Camp Hale, where the 10th was finally based, was named after Major General Irving Hale, who fought for Roosevelt with the 1st Colorado Regiment of U.S. Volunteers. And who then went on to found the VFW—the Veterans of Foreign Wars.

Before the turn of the century, about the time the Rough Riders were making Cuba safe for the generation of sportsmen led by Ernest Hemingway, my paternal grandfather left Germany to avoid the Kaiser's draft. Like empire builders everywhere, the Kaiser needed riflemen. My grandfather was not against rifles. He was a Prussian, after all! Nor did he frown on empires or empire builders. He just thought the Kaiser had entered the empire-building game too late to seize any land worthwhile—meaning any territory blessed with real mountains. (He hadn't heard of Kilimanjaro, which straddles the border between German-held Tanganyika and British Kenya.) Starting as a barrel maker in Chicago, my grandfather heard about the empire abuilding in Colorado, where a stroke of Teddy Roosevelt's presidential pen could create a Bureau of Reclamation to dam the rivers and a Forest Service to manage the mountains.

Always good with wood, Georg (later George) Wolf brought with him from Germany a pair of handmade bent-willow-and-rawhide snowshoes (which hang on my wall to this day), a pair of handmade hickory skis, a hunting rifle, and a shotgun with a blackcherry stock. When he had saved enough money, he rode the train from Chicago to Denver, where he saw the Colorado Rocky Mountains for the first time. He knew he was in the right place. He got a job as a policeman, married an Austrian woman, Catholic-to-Catholic—as people did in those times. And whenever he could, for the next half century, he took his sons with him to the play at war in the mountains.

Born in 1870, my grandfather was too old for service in World War I. But his new wife's brothers were not. They served, while my grandfather, now Captain George Wolf, kept order at home in east Denver out on the dry and (then) treeless plains that stretch from City Park east through the neighborhoods of Park Hill and Montclair to the little hill adorned even today by Richthofen Castle, which was Denver's easternmost border. My father was born in 1914, the first year of World War I—and named "William" for the German Kaiser Wilhelm himself—before anyone in our family dreamed that America would end up

fighting alongside Russia against Germany rather than alongside Germany against Russia.

Such ironies continued during World War II, when my father aided the war effort by designing military bases. One of these was Camp Hale. The Army started acquiring the land that would become Camp Hale in 1938, about the time it abandoned plans to send ski troopers south to Great Sand Dunes National Monument, on the west face of the Sangre de Cristo Mountains near the Colorado-New Mexico border. There, the Army had maintained, such mountain troopers as might be needed would get perfectly adequate, year-round ski training on the 700 foot high sand dunes, America's tallest.

Meanwhile, back at the future site for Camp Hale, it seems that the Army needed someone to take the Eagle River and straighten it out. The reborn Eagle would run through the camp in an orderly fashion, making room for 14,000 soldiers, 3,200 mules and horses, a sizeable canine corps, 21 streets, 1,022 buildings, a highway, and a railroad.

Later, on weekend leave from Camp Hale, some members of the 10th skied through the backcountry to Aspen, where they vowed to return if they survived the war. Others explored the remote, narrow valley where today's I-70 and Vail exist cheek-by-jowl. Similarly adventurous, some of the 10th's Pilgrims (Ivy Leaguers) would drive down from austere Camp Hale to Denver's swankiest hotel, the Brown Palace, where Colorado's empire builders have always congregated. There the Pilgrims would drink through the day to prepare themselves for their assault on the night. When the lights came on, they would wow the local belles, yodeling while belaying each other on climbing ropes and bedsheets from the upper floors that ring the venerable Brown Palace's spectacular atrium. Thus began another tradition associated with the 10th Mountain Division. While they swung from the chandeliers, there was a war on. Some earnest people did not approve. Then, as now, some people despise the 10th's fun-hog air, its insatiable appetite for self-advertisement, its strong emotional kinship with today's snowboarders.

In addition to me and Camp Hale, another of my father's war efforts was a naval base back in Virginia. When the 10th Mountain Division finally shipped out from Camp Patrick Henry, Virginia, for the war in Italy, my father was there to see them off. Then he returned home to Colorado, where his dying father lived long enough to see me arrive, long enough to know that the 10th had finally faced and fought the German mountain soldiers with distinction. My grandfather would have

liked what *Generalfeldmarschall* Albrecht Kesselring wrote in his memoirs about the end of the war in Italy: "To my surprise—in deep snow—the remarkably good American 10th Mountain Division launched an attack . . . which might imperil our whole operational plan for the spring."

So I grew up breathing Uncle Sam's power, playing at being a mountain soldier: skiing, snowshoeing, hiking, riding, fishing, and hunting the thoroughly dammed, railroaded, camped, tunneled, and highwayed Colorado mountains. To those same mountains, true to their oath, veterans of the 10th Mountain Division had returned from the war to found major ski resorts like Aspen and Vail with the eager assistance of Uncle Sam's Forest Service. So stories like the 10th's night assault on the crevasses and couloirs of the Brown Palace were food and drink to me. Like the engineers of my family, these soldier-skiers were heroes to me in a world where mountains were the holy land—the one thing worth defending. Like the Swiss Army, my boyhood sense of the defensible never even considered plains-bound, Kansas-like Denver. Only heavily-fortified mountains would ever count.

I also grew up into a world where the scale of warfare changed overnight, in 1945, from mountain combat I could personally reenact to thermonuclear holocaust no one could even imagine. Every boy has to hate someone. It happens. During those post-World War II years, the features of my enemy gradually clarified into implacable Josef Stalin, erecting the Iron Curtain, ordering the blockade of Berlin, grinding and crushing occupied Prussia and Austria under his steel heel, infuriated to find a re-vitalized German army blocking his way to the Rhine, crazed by the news that West German, Italian, French, Austrian, and Swiss mountain troopers were honeycombing the Alps with nuke-proof defenses.

One of my first memories is of Stalin deepening the chill of the Cold War when the Communists exploded their own version of our Fat Boy, in August, 1949. They called their atomic bomb "Joe 1." That stuck with me. (The "Joseph" of my middle name honors Austrian Kaiser Franz Josef, not Stalin.) Who would save us from this terrible Uncle Joe? General and now President Eisenhower had won World War II. But how could he win the Cold War? How could he deal with Stalin? How could he deal with the Cold War confusion and uncertainty of Korea?

Meanwhile, after my initiation at Filius Park, where we climbed for our runs, my father continued to teach me to ski on groomed slopes under the supervision of 10th Mountain veterans who were serving as

ski instructors. We started on wooden skis, snowplowing and stem christying at a little area called Cooper Hill (now Ski Cooper), located above Camp Hale, on the way up Tennessee Pass, where the 10th Mountain Memorial stands. Then we graduated to Aspen, Winter Park, Loveland Basin, Arapaho Basin, and finally to the open, ungroomed powder slopes leading from high altitude highways like U.S. 6 over Loveland Pass, or U.S. 40 over Berthoud Pass.

On the ski slopes, on the lifts, in the warming huts, I acquired a special set of uncles: talkative 10th Mountain veterans, clad in snow-white, still hewing powerful, arcing turns through the powder atop their massive, white wooden skis, much as one might bring about a battleship beset by heavy, foaming seas. Forever locked in tournament-like combat with German ski soldiers, they told and retold their story of the private duel of the snowgods. From a Colorado boy's point of view, the plot then considerably thickened. Here is the way I half-perceived, half-created the endless history of the 10th Mountain division.

> High in the Colorado Rockies, a not-so secret weapon readied itself to end the war. Not through a nuclear holocaust, but through the Germans' own blitzing tactics: swift, ski-borne iron fists. After training at home from 1942-44 (and fighting briefly against Japanese phantoms at Kiska in the Aleutian Islands west of Alaska), the barely-bloodied 10th Mountain Division strained for the chance to engage German mountain troops in the picturesque, tournament-like setting overlooking Florence, where a watching world would appreciate the frieze-like pomp and majesty, the pageantry and the chivalry of sporting men engaged in mountain warfare: the private duel of the snowgods.
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> Once through the obstacle of the Apennines, once across the Po Valley, America's fleet mountain troops longed to penetrate the Alps via the Brenner Pass, following in reverse the route Hannibal's war elephants had trod in their winter assault on the Romans millennia ago. Once over the Brenner Pass, their way would be open to capturing or killing Hitler himself. Only specially trained mountain troops could even consider such a task. Everyone knew that Hitler had vowed a fight to the death in the Eagle's Nest, his impregnable mountain redoubt in the Bavarian Alps.

With the 10th far away in America, General Kesselring had already earned Allied respect for his stubborn defense of his famous and mountainous "Winter Position" in 1943-44. Kesselring had been a Rhodes Scholar at Oxford. His Allied counterpart was General Mark Clark. Known as "the American Eagle," Clark struck warlike presidential poses and peered far ahead to postwar political battles with Eisenhower and perhaps with Patton.

Acting on a tip from General Marshall, Clark had a new commandant, General Hays, assigned to the demoralized 10th, then roasting in a new kind of hell at hot, humid Camp Swift, Texas, where it was rumored that the Army would turn its bastard child, the expensive, experimental 10th, into an ordinary, mechanized, flatlander infantry division.

General George Hays had served in Italy during the battle for Monte Cassino. He had commanded an artillery division on D-Day at Omaha Beach. He was fresh from fighting his way across France. Like a savvy athletic coach, he gathered the disheartened, overtrained 10th together into a huddle. As a veteran of the 10th later remembered, "It was most inspiring for all of us because he gave a picture of war which most people hadn't heard—that war was an exciting thing. He said we would look back on it as one of the greatest things that ever happened to us."

Late in 1944, Mark Clark plucked the 10th out of their endless hell of training and shipped them to Italy. He ordered General Hays to smash the Gothic Line by taking 3,800 foot Mount Belvedere and its outlying sub peaks. One of these, out to the west, is Riva Ridge. Part of the 10th's purely technical challenge was to find a way up the stratified cliffs and ice-glazed slopes of this snowbound spine. Steep on one side only, like so much of the Apennines, three-and-a-half-mile-long Riva Ridge gentles out to its north. There the Germans had dug-in artillery positions. There German mountain troops from the 51st Mountain Corps, including the Bavarians of the Fourth (Edelweiss) Mountain Battalion, had stymied all attacks by conventional Allied troops. To everyone's intense frustration, the Germans, commanded by *General der Gebirgstruppen* Valentin Feuerstein, stubbornly controlled the overhang, where they could direct artillery fire on anyone approaching from the valley below or attempting to flank the ridge and assault Monte Belvedere itself.

Absolute American control of the air was no more effective here against hardened mountain troops than it would be later that spring in the Alps. True, American airpower kept the Germans pinned down in their fortified positions during daylight hours. But planes and long-range artillery cannot dislodge experienced, dug-in mountain troops. For mountain soldiers, rough terrain shoulders forward as a powerful ally. Mountain soldiers learned about morale from the trench warfare of World War I, such as my Uncle Harry, who told of men scurrying like rats through muddy mazes dug into open plains. Only the swiftness and skill of mountain troopers can root out the snarling, badger-like, hunkered-down defenses of their comrades-in-arms. Only pure-bred mountain troopers remember what the dachshund breed did before it became a yapping lapdog. Burned-out Allied tank hulks on the slopes of Belvedere showed what German mountain artillery could do to the ordinary, mechanized infantry tacticians of earlier assaults. German forward artillery observers sat on Riva Ridge, where they also directed fire at the supply lines and reserves of Allied attackers.

The 10th's General Hays sent out a few flanking patrols on skis and snowshoes, to get a feel for the Germans' grip on the mountain. Later, Bud Lovett, a medic in the 10th, would write, "We encountered a German on skis, and he was standing on kind of a natural snow dam between two ridges. We ordered him to put his hands on his head and come on in. He stood and looked at us, and then he did a jump turn and skied right down that thing as if it were a headwall. Nobody shot at him; I think most of us were impressed by his skiing."

A patrol of 10th mountaineers scaled the northern part of the ridge, where they encountered a barking German Shepherd sentry dog and three German soldiers at the top. The Americans descended quickly under machine gun fire. But they had succeeded in mapping the first of their routes up the rock face. In the weeks that followed, more patrols mapped more routes, attaching ropes as they went for later use as handholds.

Invisible to the Germans directly above them on the overhang, daring 10th Mountain daylight patrols inched their way up the naked rock, looking for all the world (to their friends hidden below) like circus performers. They laid out four climbing routes with nylon camouflage rope. Pounding with muffled

hammers, they set these routes into stone, adding snaplinks and pitons.

Appreciating the specialized abilities of his mountaineers perhaps for the first time, General Hays saw that he must accept what the mountain offered him: a direct, frontal assault, mountain-soldier-style, but under cover of darkness. On the night of February 17th, 1945, and throughout the morning of the 18th, the Americans moved to the base of Riva Ridge and Belvedere, where they remained hidden from the Germans' view. On the night of February 18th, elements of the 10th started to climb Riva Ridge in preparation for a dawn attack. Given their choice of bedrolls and blankets or additional guns and ammunition, they chose the latter. "They told us if we could take Riva Ridge, they'd relieve us in twenty-four hours," Jim Hoff remembered. "After we got up there and took the ridge, I think we got relieved eight days later."

When the cold February night fell, the 10th floated up through the air with the greatest of ease. As if in a dream, like daring young men on a flying trapeze, they ascended the exposed routes in total silence and near-total darkness, pierced only by powerful searchlights bouncing off low clouds mixed with fog. When the climbers speared on up and through the reflective blanket of fog, they had to continue in absolute darkness. Even German mountain soldiers, the world's best, had never attempted such a feat. Guessing, a few nervous Germans raked the invisible climbers with rifle and machine gun fire, rolling hand grenades down on their heads. The imperturbable American mountain soldiers carried everything from 90 lb. rucksacks to rifles to disassembled 80 mm. mortars. Every rock above the climbers looked like a German helmet, but they had orders not to fire until absolutely necessary.

When one advance patrol topped the ridge, its three members took a few steps and hit ice. The 10th's Bart Wolffis remembered, "All three of us landed on our butts and started sliding down the German side of the hill. All I could think of was, 'We're going to slide right into the Germans.' We were using our rifle butts to try and stop us from sliding. As it turned out, there was a fairly shallow bowl and we slid to a stop." Isolated on top of the ridge, out in front of the other Americans, Wolffis

> said he felt like a spectator, above even the advancing and retreating morning fog.
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> As day broke, an even heavier fog rolled in. The fog helped to hide the remaining climbing Americans, while most of the Germans slept in their dugouts, wondering while dreaming (they would tell me much later) about the firing during the night.
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> Later that morning, the wind picked up. As if for all the world to see, the 10th had its dream come true: a firefight broke out. Mountain soldiers locked together at long last in combat. Meanwhile, down below, the 10th's engineers assembled an aerial tram, much like a ski lift. Supplies ascended, the dead and the wounded descended. Some of the fighting was fierce, but many of the Germans were so surprised that they simply surrendered. One of them told his interrogators, "We did not realize that you had really big mountains and that you knew how to climb." Another said to his captors, "You look at war as if it were sport. You are never tired."

If you scavenge bits of lore and legend, lying about, here and there, you will never tire of confabulating the legend of the 10th. No one ever said it was history. Later, at Colorado College, I would learn more about the difference between story and history from philosopher Glenn Gray, who had served as a frontline interpreter in World War II, interrogating German POW's. Truth is the first casualty of war, Gray said, long before the Vietnam War made him a bitter prophet.

At Easter, 1963, another prophet, Pope John XXIII, had issued an encyclicle, "*Pacem in Terris*," which raised questions for earnest young men like me. A few months before, I had registered for the draft on my eighteenth birthday. As a Roman Catholic, I was learning what was missing for my generation of wanna-be soldiers: that modern-day will-o-the-wisp, a just war.

Just a few years before, in 1958, Pope Pius XII had finally succumbed, opening the way for a new pope and a new, questioning attitude to accompany most Catholics' monolithic hatred of the Communists. Now we could finally ask out loud: Had Pius XII collaborated with the Nazis? If he had, did their shared anti-Communism justify his actions? The bluntness of his successor, Pope John XXIII, raised many such troubling questions. If you wanted to serve as a soldier of Christ, you could not serve Hitler. You could not say, "I am just following orders." And if you

wanted to serve as a soldier of Christ, you had better think twice about whether Vietnam presented you with a just war. In 1954, hadn't French Catholics already learned their own hard moral and military lesson in Vietnam? But then, didn't President Kennedy himself see Vietnam as an opportunity for continuing the Cold War's Ice Crusades against the Communists? And wasn't Kennedy a Catholic and a war hero?

Though I had left home and a Catholic high school for secular Colorado College, I did not go far, for I knew better than to leave the Colorado mountains. Colorado College's mountaineering and skiing traditions appealed to me. 10th Mountain Division veteran Bill Boddington was a CC coach, an old hand from the Berlin Olympics of 1936, whose American passport Hitler himself had signed. Boddington had returned home to tell Americans that they could not hide from Hitler. Most ignored him. Now he was mentoring my German language professor, a German-American named Horst Richardson, as a CC coach. Horst's own father had been an enthusiastic Nazi who died with his convictions intact, fighting bravely as a tank commander against the Communists on the Eastern Front. Meanwhile, Kennedy died. It was hard to know where to turn. Twenty years or so after Riva Ridge, in the summer of 1965, as the War in Vietnam heated up, I was still dying to die for my country. As Glenn Gray's student, I read and re-read his book, *The Warriors: Reflections on Men in Battle.*

Though I went away to school, I also knew better than to try to hide anything important from my confessor from high school days. Father Albrecht (not his real name) was a ruddy, round Swiss Benedictine, a good skier, a worldly, holy mountain man. He was happy that I was learning German. During World War II, when he himself was eighteen, he had interrupted his studies for the priesthood to serve as a mountain trooper in the Swiss Army. "We built our defenses on the western side of our country," he told me, speaking *Schwyzerdeutsch* and then translating into English. "We weren't worried about the Nazis. We planned for the next war, the one against the Red Army." Like most German Swiss, Father Albrecht was well-versed in the language of war, just or not. His was the uniquely Swiss wisdom of a well-armed non-combatant who carefully selects and defends to the death mountainous terrain. When I proudly registered for the draft with the Selective Service System on my 18th birthday, January 27, 1963, I was fresh from my sessions with Father Albrecht, who strongly believed in universal military service in war and in peace: "*Jeder Bürger ein Soldat*," he would say: "Every citizen is a soldier. Napoleon taught us that."

Father Albrecht understood young men. As our reward for tolerating his religion lessons about just and unjust wars, he would read to us from Hemingway's "Nick Adams" stories. "Emingvay!" he would exclaim to us in his thick-tongued, German-studded English, which dropped the "h" and "v'd" the "w". "An American who understands *den Krieg*—war!"

When even Nick Adams failed to grasp our attention, Father Albrecht would suddenly snap to attention, click his heels, and call us to order. Then he would silently troll the depths of his long black cassock's hidden pockets. Out would come one of his many red Swiss Army knives. As the knives with their numerous, shimmering blades made the rounds through our hands, Father Albrecht would recount war stories from his boyhood and mountain soldiering experiences in and around Andermatt, on the eastern side of Switzerland, where the Swiss Army has always trained.

"Why does the Swiss Army train in the eastern part of our country?" he would ask. Andermatt, we learned, is the site of the *Schöllenen Teufelsbrücke*, the Red Devil's Bridge, which controls access to Furka, Oberalp, and Sankt Gotthard, the three railroad passes that command the heart of the Swiss Alps. Here, also, the great rivers of Europe, the Rhine and the Rhone, rise in their glaciers and drive Swiss hydroelectric turbines.

"You Colorado boys should understand this. It's all about keeping your power at home," he said. The Napoleanic Wars, he told us, marked the last time the Swiss served as mercenaries in other countries. Since Swiss soldiers had joined in the French assault on Moscow, the resurgent Russians itched to return the favor, pursuing Napoleon (and the Swiss) all the way home, penetrating even unto to the Red Devil's Bridge.

"They drove as far into Switzerland as anyone has ever managed. Though heavily outnumbered, our mountain soldiers stopped them there, where the canyon narrows at the *Teufelsbrücke*. They were Russians, after all. And so they did not know how to fight in such mountainous terrain. But we Swiss learned our lesson: the threat to Christendom always comes from the East. That's as true today as when I was a boy your age. That's as true today as it was in St. Benedict's time. Why do you think we call it the Red Devil's Bridge?"

There remain, he said, only two exceptions to the general rule about Swiss soldiers remaining homebound. "One we inherited from the Romans," he said. "They learned early. Like the trustworthy Germans who guarded the Roman emperors, we Swiss guard the Holy Father in Rome."

And the other exception? "That's me, a Swiss mercenary and a Soldier for Christ. Guarding you like St. Michael the Archangel against the day when the Communists will try to cross your personal *Teufelsbrücke*!"

There was lots of time for wargames, whether spiritual or physical or both. There were also lots of crisp Catholic girls as ski-crazy as I was. "Life is long," Father Albrecht told our parents. "The war of good against evil will not end anytime soon. There's always time for fun, for sin, for skiing—and finally for confession."

That was 1959, before the Eisenhower Tunnel opened the easy way via Interstate-70 to Summit County and to Vail and Aspen. And it was long before the St. Gotthard Auto Tunnel did the same for the Swiss ski areas, opening them to armies of *Alpini* invaders from Italy. Every Saturday morning, a special ski train left downtown Denver's Union Station at 7:00 am, bound for the Winter Park ski area on the west side of the Continental Divide via the Moffat Tunnel. While we skiers flowed west, water from my father's west slope dams flowed east to Denver. Now, as then, the huge pipes that compose this system line the lower slopes at Winter Park and disappear into the mouth of the tunnel just beyond the ski area.

Those train rides were deliciously long. That tunnel was delightfully dark. Lots and lots of high school kids rode that train in the days when the Eskimo Ski Club promoted the new mass sport of skiing. Father Albrecht pointed out to our parents that the tunnel was indeed both long and dark. And that the Eskimo Ski Club was open to kids from the public schools. Surely, Catholic kids needed their own ski club. Call it the Saint Gotthard Club. Surely, Catholic kids in the Saint Gotthard Club needed a chaperone. Surely, the ideal chaperone could use his tunnel time well by hearing our confessions. If there wasn't an American patron saint for skiing, we young Americans would surely, in due time, breed one of our own. In the meantime, the Swiss would loan us Saint Gotthard, a good man for tunnel work, an ally for any sort of mountain fray.

Father Albrecht had done his homework. Sure enough, there was in our school a girl named Antonia (not her real name) whose wealthy father owned huge mountain ranches in Wyoming. During the 1930's, Antonia's father had fought in the mountains with the Nazis against the Communists in the Spanish Civil War. He liked Germans. He understood the advantages of an early match between ski-mad kids and mountains.

And so it came to pass that Father Albrecht held court in the dining car. At designated times, he retreated to his confessional, a compartment in one of the coach cars. As Catholics from big families, we were accustomed to following orders. So we lined up in the aisles outside Father Albrecht's compartment for confession. As for Father Albrecht, beyond the dining car and his own coach, he did not venture. Beyond that was indefensible terrain, no place for a mountain soldier. We were free to lurch our way through the other coach cars, where the compartments left opportunity aplenty to explore unprotected, even mountainous terrain with good Catholic kids like ourselves. Since we all knew some Latin, we had useful physiological terminology in place, such as *mons Veneris*, or "mountain of Venus." Following the customs of high school boys, that Latin term became our code word for Antonia. She earned it.

Safe in the arms of the Church, our system was both open and closed. "If you want to be Soldiers for Christ," Father Albrecht would tell us, "fight with St. Michael the Archangel against the Red Devil. Renounce Satan and all his allies. But be prepared to lose a few. Never pick a fight on low ground. Always fight with mountains at your back. Never defend the indefensible. Be like the Swiss Army! Cut your losses. Renounce lowlands if you have to. Defend the moral high ground. Defend mountains!"

"Be like the Swiss Army." What seemed simple in 1960 had become less so by 1965, when the lowland war in Vietnam turned its bloody face to me and demanded that I serve Caesar (in the form of President Lyndon B. Johnson), as a Second Lieutenant in the U.S. Army. I did my level best to flunk out of Colorado College's Army Reserve Officers Training Corps (ROTC) program. This was not easy. After World War II, a retired Army general had saved Colorado College by recruiting veterans to be educated under the GI Bill, along with young professors who had served in the war—and who taught us to think long and hard about war. Glenn Gray was the most prominent of these. When the Army demobilized the 10th Mountain Division immediately after the war, nearby Fort Carson nurtured what formal mountain soldier traditions remained. Meanwhile, much of the Army surplus equipment of the 10th went to the growing cadre of skiers and climbers who knelt at Colorado College before Professor of English Robert Ormes, dean of Colorado's mountaineers.

It was no wonder, then, that Army ROTC found a firm place at Colorado College. To be a freshman was to be a grunt. When a young man

enrolled at Colorado College, it was assumed that he was potentially an officer and a gentleman. Our neighbor and competitor (for the attention of local women) was the all-male U.S. Air Force Academy. When John Kennedy was elected President in 1960, it seemed like Catholics could do anything. By then, the 10th Mountain Division no longer existed, except in the tales of its veterans and in the imaginations of boys and young men. If I couldn't be a mountain soldier, my goal in life was to fly heavy bombers for the Strategic Air Command against the Communists. But in those days, when it could afford to be picky, the Air Force required 20-20 vision (without corrective lenses) for its future pilots. My appointment to the Academy disappeared in my cloudy vision, dooming me to Army ROTC.

In the fall of 1963, as an entering freshman, I joined the college ski club and the Colorado Mountain Club just as naturally as I signed up for Robert Ormes' writing classes, where Hemingway was God. To satisfy my natural need for violence, I played varsity football—and skied, skied, skied.

I signed a contract committing myself to at least two years of ROTC training, with the option of another two years that would lead to a commission as a second lieutenant in the U.S. Army. It took Kennedy's assassination in the fall of 1963 to begin to shake my faith in this American version of "Every citizen a soldier." Lee Harvey Oswald's connections with Moscow and Havana made it seem obvious that we should blame the Communists for the assassination of America's first Catholic President. Up till then, I had thought that Vietnam was simple: northern Communists vs. southern Catholics. Such simplemindedness did not last long under Lyndon Johnson's leadership. Johnson and his Secretary of Defense, Robert McNamara, began to commit significant numbers of American ground troops in Vietnam.

Back at home in Denver, where I went to visit my family and confess my sins to Father Albrecht, I learned that some of my high school classmates were returning from Vietnam in bodybags and wheelchairs. Those bodybagged included an old ski buddy who had recklessly chosen ski bumming at the new resort in Vail over college. He and I shared the same hungry draft board. If you didn't go to college, your draft board saw to it that you joined the Armed Forces.

In 1965, on Washington's Birthday, my Dad and I went skiing at Winter Park. In the afternoon, we took a long run on "Mary Jane," now a black diamond slope but then a leisurely backwoods powdertrap of a trail, with

plenty of turnouts where you could sit and visit in the sun. It was a chance to talk things over. My father was rising fast through the ranks in the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, at that time a strongly conservative, patriotic, and largely Mormon organization. My father was successfully locking horns with the 10th's (and the Sierra Club's) David Brower over Glen Canyon Dam. Some of our local draft board members were my father's friends and colleagues. "I may be a federal employee, but I render unto Caesar only what is Caesar's," he told me. "You listen to your conscience, and I'll back you. I have discussed this with your Uncle Harry. He and I agree. You listen to Father Albrecht." Skiing was good that day.

Back on campus, ROTC became so real that it was almost fun again. Working with topographic maps, we learned to compute firing angles for howitzers and light artillery operating in mountainous terrain. In spite of what the contours on the maps said, the Sergeant Major tried to convince us that there were mountains worth fighting for along the Laos-Vietnam border. But inevitably the rising casualty rates among junior officers in Vietnam became a hot subject. We learned that the Army no longer trusted us. After a break-in at our armory, the Sergeant Major permanently removed the firing pins from our World War II-vintage M-1 rifles. From there, things went downhill fast. I began to wonder, what did I have to do to flunk ROTC?

The Dean of the College called me onto the carpet. We sat in big leather chairs in his office. He smoked a pipe, silently. I thought about our previous interview, when he proudly told me that the College was grooming me as a soldier-scholar-athlete for a Rhodes Scholarship. We looked at the carpet. We looked at my feet. As an aspiring young gentleman, soldier, scholar, and athlete, I was wearing freshly shined brown wing-tips. It was the spring of 1965. The Dean said, "Mr. Wolf, you remember our conversation about Rhodes Scholars. We recognize your potential. Now, up until this semester you had compiled a perfect academic record here. Can you explain how one flunks ROTC?"

"It is very difficult, sir," I answered. "But I am doing my best. "

He said, "Mr. Wolf, when you enrolled here, you agreed to honor our ROTC requirement. As one gentleman to another, I now ask you whether you are acting in good faith."

I thought I had learned the art of disputation, so I said, "Generations of men in my family have graduated from Colorado College. I could simply have quit the course and/or the College, but I did not. I am honoring my gentleman's agreement by accepting, in protest against the unjust war in Vietnam, my failing grade."

"Mr. Wolf," the Dean replied, sternly, blowing smoke, "this is a grave matter. War is always here. We don't choose our wars. I have spoken with your father. I have found your father both a reasonable man and a gentleman. In light of your potential, the College believes you would do well to reconsider. We have arranged for you to go abroad for a year as an exchange student to Germany. When you return next year, we will revisit this question. *Auf Wiedersehen*!"

And so I left America in the summer of 1965. To those of us born and bred to serve mountains and combat Communism, it now seemed like Vietnam was strictly a civil war: all swamp, plain, and lowlands. In my last confession before going abroad, Father Albrecht surprised me. He agreed with me that to kill against my conscience in the Vietnam War would be to murder. He also agreed with me that reasonable men might come to a different conclusion. "You Americans don't want another civil war, do you? You fought your last one so brutally. No finesse. All organized butchery. And then there is your own personal civil war. You are angry and you want to kill someone. Beware!" In 1960, Hemingway had killed himself with his own gun. The best war for a writer, Hemingway had said, the most complete, is a civil war. What could he mean? I would follow Nick Adams to find out. I shoved off for a year of skiing and whatnot in Europe.

Because of the 10th Mountain Division, and because my old skiing girlfriend Antonia was already there, Italy seemed like the place to start. The cheapest flight to Europe was Icelandic Air. My prop plane, a DC-6 flying out of New York, stopped to refuel in Iceland, where I saw my first large glacier. Then we ground on to Luxembourg. As we approached the airport, I could see big mountains out to the south. Somewhere down there was Hitler's Eagle's Nest, now broken to service as a resort for the American army of occupation. On the long train ride down under the Alps through the St. Gotthard Tunnel, I longed for the simplicity of Moffat Tunnel ski days. We passed by night through the Apennine Mountains, so I lost my chance to see Mount Belvedere. As my train slowed into the main station in Rome, images of Hemingway's Italian women gradually appeared through the windows. Either nurses or whores, it seemed. But what was a skier like Antonia? As our high school's head cheerleader, how many times had I heard her intone the chant:

Action! Action! Action, boys!

You make the action! We'll make the noise!

I remembered chairlift and après-ski stories of Red Cross girls and Italian women told by veterans of the 10th Mountain Division. Either

nurses or whores. Or cheerleaders. Or were the mountaineers just remembering their Hemingway? How often had I heard 10th Mountain vets recite Hemingway on the chairlifts? It was Hemingway's works the Pilgrims read during the endless years of training; Hemingway they carried with them to Italy; Hemingway they found on dead or captured Germans. While the 10th fought in Italy, Hemingway himself was serving as a highly-paid citizen journalist, covering the real war in France. At one point, he seized a Browning Automatic Rifle and led a furious assault on a German position. He was too famous to punish.

Except through Hemingway's eyes, I had never seen a whore before. Now they lined the platform as the other passengers from my train began to disembark. I shouldered my vintage 10th Mountain rucksack and descended, one of the last, onto the platform. Antonia was supposed to meet my train. Where was she? What would the Swiss Army do? A heavily made-up woman approached me, walking with palm on outthrust hip, looking considerably more formidable in life than in literature, looking little like the cheerleader-style women I had known. "*Sprechen Sie Deutsch*?" she asked. "*Nein*!" I whispered. "*Nein*!" Then, as if I were skiing the most demanding moguls, I stutter-stepped through the shoals of whores and out toward the street, where I ran into Antonia's open arms. She did a little cheer, right then and there, complete with the sliding splits, to the amusement of passing Italians:

Two, four, six, eight!

Who do we appreciate?

There was always war. There was always sin. Right there in Rome, practically under the eyes of the Pope himself, Antonia and I practiced our form of Russian roulette, a high-risk form of birth control called the Rhythm Method. But what the hell? Fathers got draft deferments. The American colleges in Rome were beginning to fill up with draft-age young men like me, suddenly facing early fatherhood. At the Spanish Steps, where Americans our age gathered, the air was thick with a mix new to my nostrils: doubt, defiance, and dope. The only dissenter was Antonia. Her father was sure that Catholics had to take a stand against Communism wherever we could. Her older sister was married to an Air Force B-52 pilot who was already flying bombing runs over Vietnam. As I prepared to leave her to complete her studies in Rome, we uneasily agreed to disagree about Vietnam.

"When we get home, we'll let Father Albrecht arbitrate," I offered.

"When we get home, we'll let Father Albrecht marry us," she countered. She didn't look pregnant, but she had the last word.

I sought comfort and escape on the road, hitch-hiking, my 10th Mountain rucksack on my back, heavy with Hemingway. That pack was a beauty. Thinking reluctant fatherhood over, I worked my way through Rome, through the suburbs, and out toward the truck stops. What would Nick Adams do? What if Antonia were pregnant? In those days, as now, the Pope forbade the use of birth control but approved the Rhythm Method. So we sinned in synchrony. Married, college-enrolled fathers could kiss the draft goodbye.

Panicky, I thought of the pregnant and unmarried young waitress at the inn in "Cross Country Snow," the greatest of the Nick Adams ski stories. And then I thought again of a 10th Mountain skiing and drinking song I had heard many times.

I was a barmaid in a mountain inn;
There I learned the wages, the miseries of sin.
Along came a skier, fresh from off the slopes;
He's the one that ruined all my hopes.
[chorus]
Singing ninety pounds of rucksack,
A pound of grub or two,
He'll schuss the mountains
Like his daddy used to do.
[Sung to the tune of "Bell-Bottomed Trousers"]

I stuck my thumb up into the thick Italian air, meaning to hitch-hike the 100 miles or so to the 10th Mountain's battle sites in the Apennine Mountains north of Florence. But especially at the highway interchanges and truckstops, the whores thickened again.

My road led along the Tiber River, through the hills of Umbria and Tuscany toward Florence. At the next truck stop, I waited for a long time while the whores took turns casting hex signs and shouting insults at me in a sing-song way that suggested cheers I had heard. They reminded me of a bizarre 10th Mountain battle scene I had heard about. It occurred near the ruined town of Castel d'Aiano, as the 10th fought its way through the mountainous ruins of the Gothic Line and down toward the Po Valley. Years later, a 10th vet remembered it this way, pretty much as I had heard it back home on the ski lifts from others:

> The area was strewn with wrecked tanks and dead bodies. As we moved along, much to my surprise, I saw an American Red Cross

> girl in her little starched and ironed pin-striped dress, standing by the side of the road, jumping up and down, and cheering us on like a cheerleader. My first reaction was, 'How in the hell did she ever get here?' My God, people were getting killed within a hundred yards of her. There was still sniper fire and shell fire going on in the area. I remember thinking that she and whoever let her come up here is crazy as hell. She was all by herself, standing by the side of the road, cheering us on. She was a very spunky woman. I now wonder who this girl was and where she came from. At this late date, we'll probably never know.

At the *Mercato Nuovo* in Florence, on a square near the cathedral, I bargained my way to a U.S. Army down mummy bag, aluminum canteen, and messkit. They went well with my 10th Mountain anorak and rucksack. Waiting in line for mail at the Florence American Express office, I traded another American for his iceaxe. He wouldn't be needing it, he said. He was heading home. He had just received his draft notice.

When my turn at the window came, my first mail, forwarded from home, was from my Uncle Sam, informing me that my withdrawal from Colorado College had cost me my student draft deferment. I was officially classified I-A: cannon fodder, even lower than a Second Lieutenant. The Dean played rough. It had been only three weeks since I left college.

Iceaxe in hand, my first reaction was to climb something—anything—to escape my pursuers. An accompanying letter from Dad said, "You aren't treed yet. I'll help you fight the Army. Take this summer and make your pilgrimages like a good crusader. Enjoy your time with Antonia. Live with your 'I-A' till the fall. Then you should enroll as planned at the German university. I'll stall your draft board, and you'll get your II-S student classification back."

The extremely wet winter of 1965-66 would be a great one for skiers in northern Europe. I noted this in letters home, and my father sent me sketches of the sites in the Apennines where Italian engineers could build dams to avert catastrophic floods. He wrote me about an angry confrontation with the Sierra Club's David Brower, "the most obnoxious of all the 10th Mountain Division!" My father had just finished his masterpiece (and Brower's nemesis), Glen Canyon Dam on the Colorado River. By then, he stood close to the throne, next in line to become Chief Engineer of the Federal Bureau of Reclamation. Like any beaver,

Dad was eager to build yet more dams, but a new kind of environmentalist was trying to stop him. With a 10th Mountaineer's genius for manipulating the media, Brower had attacked the Bureau's plans for damming sites near the Grand Canyon in a full page newspaper ad in the New York Times, asking: "Would you flood the Sistine Chapel to get a closer look at the ceiling?" "Now," Dad had asked Brower, "would the Sierra Club dam the Arno to save the artworks of Florence?"

Similar rifts and crevasses were yawning in front of me, as Brower and others failed to see mountains the way men in my family saw mountains. But my heros were still engineers, mountaineers, ski soldiers: men to match the mountains, men at play, but with a purpose. I did not see the divisions coming between men at work in mountains and men and women at play in mountains. I did not see how the recreation-based environmental movement would grow out of the anti-Vietnam war movement. I did not see how some would come to pity mountains. I did not see how this pity would become a weapon in a strange civil war that threatened to undermine every authority, until we would all be declared victims, until everyone would be diagnosed as suffering from the insidious modern version of shellshock, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). I did not see how Father Albrecht himself would become a casualty in the developing cold war.

Notes & References

When Churchill realized what Stalin was doing, he delivered his famous Iron Curtain speech in 1946, calling the Free World back to arms against the Communist menace. Fittingly, he saw that the northern edge of the Iron Curtain fell in Germany at Stettin, the port city for Berlin. My German grandfather came from Stettin, now known as the Polish city of Gdansk.

A fine book on the cultural history of snow is Bernard Mergen's *Snow in America* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution, 1997).

The Jason Roberts inquest quote is from Eric Dean. *Shook Over Hell: Post-Traumatic Stress, Vietnam, and the Civil War* (Harvard University Press, 1998). Readers should also see Frederick Crews, ed., *The Memory Wars* (New York: New York Review Books, 1995).

David Brower's autobiography *For Earth's Sake* (New York: Knopf, 1990) and personal website are cases in point for the 10th's skill at self-glorification. Brower was already 30 when he joined the Army in 1942, fresh from editing *The Manual of Ski Mountaineering* for the University of California Press. Though unusual in his singleminded devotion to conservation, Brower is typical of the men if the 10th in terms of his genius for bringing the war back home with him.

Sand dunes: it wasn't until 1999 that the X-Generation discovered the right ski surface for sand. That turned out to be formica, a product of the 1930's.

Unless otherwise noted, the quotes of 10th Mountain veterans I use come from Flint Whitlock and Bob Bishop's authoritative account of the history of the 10th, *Soldiers on Skis* (Boulder: Paladin, 1992).

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Elaine Bander

On the Western Front

1. Passchendaele

Now it's a cheese. We buy it in the Nopris.
It is mild, like the cows which graze this sweet plateau,
and rich, like this soil drained by dyke and ditch.
Barn and copse, field and lane, all preen
in the bright sun. Nothing stirs except our car,
paused at a crossroad, puzzling out directions.
The midday heat clamps down. We want a beer.

Back in Ieper we sit in the Grote Markt
with plates of pâté sandwiches and beer,
watching the townsfolk go about their lives:
that woman walking home for lunch, those men
paving the square to make a larger car-park,
these young boys revving up their motorbikes—
a pleasant Flemish scene, quite Breugel really,
no sign of the Bosch hell which crushed these stones
to rubble eighty years ago. This
was the Salient: Ieper, Ypres, Wipers, one
with Carthage, Troy, the Cities of the Plain.

Eighty years ago it must have been
this peaceful and this prosperous, the ancient
Cloth Hall and Cathedral tower rising
solid and serene, the nearby fields
fertile and green, not yet raked and cratered,
not yet blasted into mud and blood.
(We know that story well: the infernal din,
the stink of rotting flesh and rusting iron,
and the pitiless drowning of the dead.)

The new Cathedral flaunts the tower Ieper
could not afford six centuries ago.
A thin skin of grass covers corruption
where unexploded shells await the plow,
and the canals which drain the sodden land
once more hold the waters back—for now.

2. Vimy Ridge

For every tree, a body smashed and rotted
beneath our feet. This wooded hill's a graveyard
for twenty thousand dead.

The larks know nothing of the dead. Their songs
spill and trill above us, foreign music
here amid familiar birch and maple.
Like the larks, the visiting school-children
sound foreign to our ears. Their French
is not our French, their English not our English.
Their youthful voices are subdued, respectful,
as long as teachers hover within hearing,
but out of sight in grassy shell-holes they
consume their bags of chips and talk in giggles.

A guide from Winnipeg conducts us down
beneath the flower-spangled grass: we enter
the chilly labyrinth where once young men
prepared to kill or die. Like Orpheus
we will ascend again to sun and sky,
but those boys climbed up into Hell and Death.

Tenderly our fingers brush damp walls,
tracing their names carved in the porous chalk.
Later we read those names incised upon
the limestone monument which crowns the Ridge.

A few more years and this site too will be
as strange as Agincourt, Thermopylae:
the victory, as always, meaningless,
but not the lives, never the bleeding lives.

Leaving, I pass our guide, boots off, relaxing
with the local *flic* who guards the car-park.
I hear him say in sturdy Prairie French,
"Nous sommes un peuple très discipliné."
That's all I catch, but it's enough, I find:
a fitting epitaph for butchered lads
metamorphosed into silent pines.

3. Beaumont - Hamel

She's sick of monuments, our daughter says.
She's staying in the car. But sullenly
she follows us along the gravel track
to stalk the brazen Cariboo, which stares
with blind eyes down the valley of the Ancre
where seven hundred Newfoundlanders fell
in twenty minutes, first day of the Somme.

"Fell" doesn't really tell this story, though:
bearing their heavy packs and staggering
across a churned-up trenched and cratered plain
that brimmed with bodies of the first wave's dead,
converging on the one gap in the wire
like pins for the machine guns to knock down,
those boys were felled like cordwood to the ground.

Today the valley's green. A young man riding
high upon his tractor mows the grass
in clean concentric circles, scything poppies
as neatly as the German guns cut men.

Our daughter climbs to see the Cariboo.
I lean against a trench wall, watch a few
tourists walking down to No-Man's Land.
Beside me an old man smokes a cigarette.
He says, "I hate these places." He fought hard here
in '44 and knows something about it.
After the war he took off for Australia.
He's touring Europe with his son this summer.
Let the young visit these battlefields,
he says. He's had enough. He's stopping here.

Our daughter's reached the top now, waves hello.
I photograph her by the Cariboo.

4. The Chemin des Dames

Golden fields of barley. Green fields of beets.
A few scarlet poppies splashed like blood.
A ruined sugar factory. A tasteful mausoleum.
The wind rules this ridge between the Oise and Aisne.

Sun shines on Champagne, cloud-shadows blow
across the valleys. Laon rides the horizon
on the north, her towers not quite visible.

Along the crest of the Chemin des Dames
this road runs straight and true. Here Buonoparte
stood to watch the Battle of Craon,
and here the *poilus*, angered by Verdun,
their Spring Offensive stopped by German guns,
mutineed in 1917.

Within a year some luckless British Tommies,
survivors of the Somme, were sent to rest
into this quiet sector of the Line.
That last big German push took care of them.

The Germans came again in '39.
Thousands stayed behind in '44,
their graves set high on the Chemin des Dames.
Only winds contend now where green beets
and golden barley host the scarlet poppies.

Elaine Bander teaches in the English Department at Dawson College in Montreal. She has published poems and stories in Canadian journals, as well a number of critical articles on detective fiction and on Jane Austen.

Lyn Lifshin

Nine Poems

Survivor

There were no tombstones. I didn't
know where my father was. It got colder.
Then we were rounded up. Cattle cars.
When we got to Auschwitz I was holding my
mother so tight. Then they told my mother
go to the left, sent me to the right. I
wouldn't go. Then a soldier came with a big
gun. I said I wanted to go with my mother.

He hit me so hard with the rifle I fainted.
I never saw my mother. Then, I'm with some
women. They tell us to take off our clothes.
We couldn't understand. What does it mean,
"take off our clothes?" Then they said they're
going to shave our heads. Nobody said anything.
They said "a shower. " Nobody talked, nobody
screamed or cried. We knew shower meant
gas. We took orders. Whatever they said,
we just did. We looked at each other. No
tears. Then, we saw water and when
water came out we cried, that's when we cried

Coco

I was in a sewing
workshop for the
Hiroshima maidens.
They were all
disfigured, their
faces and fingers
gone. But I felt
abandoned. My parents
were taking care
of the badly
scarred girls. When
I was 12, I stopped
growing. I was
examined every year
to see if there
was any damage. I
was already
developing breasts,
that was my
Hiroshima bomb

Hiroshima Maidens

When I was 15 I
lost eye lashes
with the bomb,
my face, my lips.
I had to be loved
for who I am, for
spirit. What would
you do if you
were a small snail
in the fire. I was
that ant, I was
outdoors in a clean
up program. A plane
came and I put up
my hand. My eyes
were saved but
my hands were ruined.
My hair burned off
but came back even
more lush but I am
damaged, ashamed

Going Back to Vietnam

As a child, I
was told if
didn't eat my
vegetables.
I'd be sent to
Hanoi where
Ho Chi Min
would gobble
me up or serve
me to prisoners
for dinner. I
was so young
I believed it
all but I was
not afraid. I
had my Chatty
Cathy doll
President
Kennedy sent
me but then as
I got a little
older, I'd slip
away. I saw
the Buddhist
protesters
burning them
selves in
gasoline in the
square. Even in
California, I
smelled their
burning flesh

Vietnamese Child, Air Lifted 1972

I grew up in a suburb of
Chicago, braces, cheerleading.
My adoptive parents sent me
to private camps. My real parents
I remembered as lips and eyes
in a dream.

After my own baby was born
I tried to imagine never
seeing her and knew I had
to find my parents.
Two years then luck.

I remembered my sister
being bigger than me.
Now she was small in my
arms and we didn't
speak the same language
but we held each other
cried and cried.

The drive to my parents
through elephant grass and shrub
trees seemed endless
I learned my father
searched daily in the jungle
for three years
for our bodies,
then tried to kill himself
he felt so guilty.

There were three of us
pulled from street rubble,
babies merely. Who knows
why we were saved,
weren't working in the fields.

All my family are skinny
their teeth crumbling.
I had braces, a good school.

I brought an old tape of me
when I was five
singing in Vietnamese.
As I look in their eyes,
I want to re-learn it.

Hearing of Reagan's Trip to Bitburg

as maples turn the size
of babies' hands the
last thing mothers
saw as the screaming
wriggling bodies were
thrown into fires hands
buried above some grave
as if waving goodby
or pulling you with
them. Suddenly I'm in
the yellow room color
of new willows, sun
tulips the daffodils
breaking down woke
up each night dreaming
of tunnels and fire,
the words whispered in
front of the apart
ment, rain of the
blue tattoos. The gas,
words like *cattle car*
charged as the word
camp so when I went
to Camp Hochelaga, I
waited for gas, held
my breath couldn't
sleep with lights off

Sarajevo: Two Voices

1.

It was in a
place that
was safe they
said. We were
writing a poem.
I heard a flash
then I saw a
boy collecting
his books in
a daze. The
teacher's head
was snapped
back, hair
and brains
on the black
board, every
night now in
my dreams.

2.

right after the shelling
people looked exhausted,
their faces grey.
No one went out.
Now people have
clean hair,
clean clothes.
It's better but
we're still
cut off.
Lights go off,
elevators don't work.
People are packed into
one room, there are
so few houses. A
man sets up shop:
one towel, two bars
of soap, one tin
of salmon.

Rapes in Bosnia

Before the local Serb
warlord took Merisha
away from her apart-
ment to rape her
on June 9, he told
her not to cry. Merisha,
a Muslim school girl
would be safe with him
he promised. Then
he ordered her, a
15 year old sister
and an 18 year old
friend into car and
drove them to a motel
in their home town of
Visegrad where the
girls were locked
in separate rooms.
Merisha heard her
sister, a few hours
later, sobbing. She
never saw her again.
The warlord, well
known locally for
years, came into
Merisha's room,
put a table in front
of the door and told
her to undress. "He
said if I didn't
do what he wanted,
I would never go home,"
Merisha recalled,
speaking in a nervous
but steady voice.
"Then he ordered me
to take off all my
clothes. I didn't want
to do that. He said
I must, that it
would be better to
take off my clothes
myself or else he
would do it and he
would be violent."
Merisha paused,
Tightened her hold
on the hand of her
older sister, stared
at a spot on the
table cloth and
resumed speaking,
"I started to cry.
He said I was lucky
to be with him. He
said I could have
been thrown in the
river with rocks
tied around my ankles.
But I didn't want
to do it. He got
angry and cursed,
said I'm going to
bring in ten soldiers."
And so Merisha who
said she never
had a boyfriend
tried to stop
crying as she
was raped

Bosnia

as others watched
in amusement Emi
Jakobovic was
forced to castrate
two other men.
"They forced me to
tear off their
testicles with my
teeth so I tore
off their testicles
with my teeth. They
were screaming
with pain and they
put lubricant in
their mouths at
first pierced their
lips with wire but
they were still
screaming until they
bled to death

Lyn Lifshin is an award-winning poet whose work has been praised by Robert Frost, Richard Eberhart, James Dickey, Alan Dugan. She has been called "a modern Emily Dickinson." Black Sparrow Press published Cold Comfort in 1997 and Before It's Light in 1999.

Michael John O'Donnell

Rifleboy

When I was nine years old, my father bought me a Daisy BB gun for Christmas. It quickly replaced my bow and arrow set from the previous Christmas. I tore into the holiday wrapping, flung the box open, held the gun in my hands. It smelled of fresh oil, plastic, and metal. It was light, but I knew it was powerful.

While the rest of the family continued unwrapping the holiday gifts, I recoiled to a corner as a carnivore would do with its fresh kill. I gently unscrewed the barrel cap, removed the metal tube that ran its length, and poured the copper-colored BBs down the gun's throat. I replaced the cap and tipped the gun back and forth, allowing the "insta-loader" mechanism to engage the BBs. I listened to the BBs race from one end of the gun to the other and imagined myself inside the barrel of the gun being pulled along with the other BBs into its internal mechanisms, each of us lining up, waiting our turn, then being shot out. I tipped the gun again. It felt heavier, alive. The sound of the BBs reminded me of the rainstick my parents bought for me during a south-of-the-border vacation, and the sound of the tiny beans traversing within.

Still in my pajamas, I raced outside and located my first target: a giant cactus, which stood like a sentry guarding the front driveway. With its extended cactus "arms," "head," and "waist," it looked human. I raised the gun, fired, and watched as the first BB hit one of the green fleshy leaves, penetrating the fibrous plant meat with a faint slap. A slow drip of cactus juice worked its way from the tiny hole, balled up, and descended over the smooth surface of the plant, negotiating the many spines in its path. The streak of juice appeared as a wavering dark line against the pale green of the plant. I shot again. This time, an edge was clipped

off the leaf. I wondered what it must be like to have a part of your ear shot off. A small wedge of the cactus hung off the plant, barely supported by its translucent outer skin. I shot the dangling piece and congratulated myself.

I became proficient at calculating the arc of the BBs, while factoring in the slight crosswind. I felt a connection with the BB gun as if it were an outcropping of my body—a newer, deadly appendage.

I made a game out of shooting the cactus. I pretended the plant was a burglar who had broken into the house to steal my army men. One of the cactus pears would be the burglar's head. I aimed for one of the pears that stood at the apex of the giant plant's leaves. They were burnt-orange in color and looked like the Christmas ornaments on our tree. I shot wildly, until the pear was shredded away. More juice streaked the length of the leaves. I shot again, this time pretending it was Mark Molera, the school bully. I saw Mark's grinning face plainly outlined against one of the pan-shaped leaves. First, I aimed and shot at his eye, nose, then his cheek. The BBs tore away the left side of his face and I envisioned Mark Molera begging for me to stop as the BBs hit in rapid succession. I practiced a few shots from my hip like I had seen Chuck Connors perform on *The Rifleman*. I punched so many holes into Mark Molera's face he became permanently scarred. Chuck Connors would have been proud.

I hit every leaf on the cactus, sinking it full of dripping holes, dangling cactus meat, shorn spines, ruined pears. I shot until the gun was empty, then walked back to the house, keeping my eye out for other targets. I felt reassured, confident. I was an expert marksman and I knew that my Daisy BB gun and I would continue our assault on the evils that surrounded our property and beyond. No one would dare venture too close. I would move beyond cactus, to cans, to glass jars, nearby neighborhood signs, to small birds. I picked out potential targets and affixed to them the names and faces of the people I hated, the people I knew would have to be punished. I put the gun away in its box and hid it beneath my bed.

The next morning I again raced out to the giant cactus, my Daisy BB gun drunk full with the coppery BBs just as Berta, our maid, pulled into the driveway. Her light blue Chevrolet Impala was missing a side panel, and had a huge tear in its vinyl top. She had to push the door with her foot to open it, then thrust her tiny frame back into the door to close it. She looked at me, smiled, looked at the gun, then looked at the giant

cactus. She looked back at me, in my nine-year-old body, with my Daisy BB gun, my Major Matt Mason pajamas, orange punch stain framing my lips, and leaned back against the hood of the car. She looked at the cactus: "El nopalàesta llorando," then walked to the house to begin cleaning up the aftermath of the holiday season.

Michael John O'Donnell is completing his MFA degree at San Diego State University, where he is at work on a novel that takes place in Shanghai, China prior to the outbreak of WWII.

Erik Jung

Behind the Lens: A Correspondent's Journey Through Vietnam

Editor's Note: These fragments were written in response to *Requiem: By the Photographers Who Died in the Vietnam and Indochina War* (Random House, 1997). Horst Faas and Tim Page, two photographers who worked and were wounded in Vietnam, gathered thousands of pictures by those who were killed. Their gathering resulted in a sequence of some 300 photographs which follows the course of the war through the eye and camera lens of war correspondents from many nations, including France, the United States, Japan, and North Vietnam. The list of the dead includes some of the greatest photographers of the century, such as Robert Capa and Larry Burrows. Each fragment Jung has penned corresponds to a specific photograph in the book. The page numbers refer to page numbers in *Requiem*.

***You!*, pp. 178-179**

"You! What're you doing here?! Get over here and help with this mess."

No military training. No boot camp for reporters, but all the same I drop to the ground and kiss the dirt. I crawl over to a crouching man holding an IV. He motions me to come closer and hisses into my ear.

"We can't do anything for this guy. He's been dead for 20 minutes."

"But *he* said…" I jerk my head in the direction of the captain.

"I know what he said, but he ain't ready to let go just yet."

I perform CPR on a corpse until the medics arrive.

All Alike*, pp. *78-79

"Get that piece of shit out of my face!" His eyes flashed death at me, but I knew what was really at stake. I was blocking his shot.

"Man, get that fucking thing away from me or I'll take your head off!"

I paused a moment, took careful aim and squeezed off a round. I didn't get cover quick enough and Huynh's fist impacted with the back of my skull. I rolled onto my side into the mud. I let myself sink . . . deeper . . . farther. The mud made my head feel better so I just lay there while fire rolled on without me.

"Sorry I hit you like that, but I missed my shot cause of you". I said I understood and I really did. Huynh was competitive about getting film into the AP, and so was I. In his shoes I would've done the same thing. Stupid reporters, we're all alike.

***Baby Killers*, p. 118**

I had been tagging along with the 2nd ARVN Battalion for a week or so with almost no action. We had been outside Ban Me Thuot for a little over a day when we came upon an abandoned village.

There wasn't a living thing left in the village. Even the jungle was holding its breath. It had been a VC base camp, and when they heard the ARVN was coming they decided to pack up and take off. The Vietnamese Marines secured the perimeter and cautiously filed to the center of the village.

Rustling in the tall grass caused the entire column to drop to their bellies. The column commander sent ten men to flank the position. The first man on the assault started laughing and soon after the entire group was rolling. He lifted up a child of about two and paraded it over his head. I half expected the baby to explode, raining shrapnel and fire. Instead, the soldier set the baby in the center of the village, fed it some peaches from a C-ration, and walked on. The baby stared up at him. The ARVN Marines moved out of the village. For the first time in weeks I watched Marines quietly leave a VC village without burning it to the ground.

***Johnson*, pp. 94-99**

"I never felt anything like it. Riding up here, nothing but sky and hellfire. I've got the wrath of God streaming from my hands right into the guts of every one of those dumb gooks. Gives me comfort to know that God is riding with us."

I didn't answer. The wind scream made my voice seem insignificant. The only things that had any power up here were the chopper blades and the two M-60 machine guns. It was no mistake that Bill Johnson

felt like God up here. I got the feeling that they wanted you to feel that way. The Marines aren't going to get people to hurl themselves at death unless you give them a feeling of superiority. Flying fast and high caliber machine guns were all it took for Lance Corporal Johnson.

Later that day I fell into a weed induced sleep and dreamt about hunting on the African Savannah. I had stalked a tiger for days, was ready to take *the* shot, when elephants stampeded onto my head and I fell from my cot. The roaring beasts had refueled and were heading out for another sortie without me.

I saw Johnson later that day. They got a call to rescue a downed pilot north of Da Nang. The pilot was in an area crawling with Viet Cong, and two gunships never made it back. All the VC had to do was shoot down one plane, wait for the search party, and get four more. He told me he watched the pilot die. They were 100 yards from the LZ when his gun jammed and a VC shot the downed pilot in the back of the head.

Back at Da Nang, stripped of his helmet, flak jacket, machine gun, and helicopter, Lance Corporal Johnson was human again. No god, just Bill.

***Super Chicken*, pp. 264-265**

"Super Chicken to the Rescue!"

"Shut the fuck up you dumb shit."

"Man, don't be talking that way about Super Chicken."

"More like Super Chicken shit."

PFC Mark Simpson had been pretty much all over, but he still wasn't catching on. He was a sucker for slogans and nicknames. They made him feel like anyone he wanted to be. On top of that, if a buddy got greased you didn't have to think about Mrs. So and So back home grieving for her husband. It was just, "Yeah man, Bloodhound got wasted out on Route 9." The man had special meaning for you, but you didn't have to think about all the extras tied to the man. Mothers, fathers, brothers, sisters, aunts, uncles, cousins, dogs, and cats they didn't matter cause only you knew Bloodhound. They knew Lawrence Caldwell.

So, Super Chicken was his *nom du jour*. He scrawled it on his flak jacket, his helmet, and even the back of the APC we rode in. It drove me crazy, but every now and then you had to forgive the occasional eccentricity.

***Richards*, pp. 146-147**

David Richards had been a star linebacker on his high school football team. He told me that colleges were banging on his door to get him to play for them.

"I tell you what, these guys just couldn't leave me alone. I told 'em they needed to talk to me when I was done with the Marines. My daddy was a Marine and never made it back. I owe it to him to finish what he started. There'll be plenty of time for football and college when I get back."

The Marines saw that linebacker physique and instantly knew they had a man who could hump a rocket launcher. He never complained, and the frustration that came from being attacked by shadows had not made him a cynic. He plodded along, bearing his load with the kind of understated duty that was always there even if you didn't know what it was. I knew what it was, and I knew it was the only thing that now kept him from running back to football and college.

***Road to Nowhere*, pp. 312-313**

I knew we weren't going anywhere the moment I stepped off the truck. Human waste was scattered along the path bearing witness to the louder carnage that passes through every so often. Paint cans, C-ration tins, shell casings, broken plates, the arm of a child's doll, and remains of a human spine. They all said the same thing, and they had been saying it all along. Turn back boy, this road leads to nowhere.

Erik Jung is a cadet second class (a junior) at the United States Air Force Academy. This is his first publication.

Alex Vernon

Desert Farewell

Katie has sandwiched her sleeping bag between her back and the wall of the crowded, unfurnished apartment. The pieces of her disassembled .45 pistol gather on a rag in her lap, lolling in the draw between her thighs.

The females in her Quartermaster battalion headquarters company share these third-floor quarters in a drab cluster of indistinguishable buildings that is Khobar Towers, Dhahran, Saudi Arabia. Operation Desert Storm is over; Operation Desert Farewell has begun.

Tomorrow morning the battalion's sortie will lift away from the King Abdul Aziz Air Base airfield. They are headed home. What the army calls redeployment, her fellow lieutenants call repatriation.

Tamam, *the Arabs say.* It is ended.

A lieutenant colonel friend of mine, shortly after my own repatriation from the Gulf War in late March 1991, told me that the Saudi government had built Khobar to provide Bedouins a permanent home. Its availability for American troops on their way home demonstrates the success of that program.

I didn't think anything in particular about Khobar during my short stay as I waited for the chartered commercial flight back to the states. Five and a half years later, on 25 June 1996, a truck bomb took out part of Khobar, killing nineteen American service personnel, injuring 260 more.

Lieutenant Katie Richardson, sitting on her desert camouflage uniform blouse, cleans the weapon for the last time. She puts down the rod brush and picks up the rag. She has cleaned it every day for the last six months, throughout Desert

Shield, the forty-day air war, the four-day ground war, and the few weeks after the war sitting in Iraq during the cease-fire. Always reassembling, always knowing that her weapon would fire but also that the sand had beaten her. Because she never could get all of it. Then she cleaned to protect herself. Now she cleans for the customs inspectors. The Saudis do not allow the smuggling of a single sacred grain.

Dust. Powder. Finer than talcum. Coats and lines everything. Vehicles, weapons, food, bodies.

She empties her three magazines to wipe off each round.

Earlier in the day she had commandeered the only bathroom on the floor for nearly an hour. In the past months her twenty-three year old body had changed. She knows she has lost weight, but she feels bigger, more substantial.

She never could get all of it. In her nostrils, in her ears, her saliva, and down there. For six months she smelled herself every time she bent to remove her boots at night. From when she first noticed it after being in country only a week, the smell gradually sharpened. Occasional bathing had afforded temporary relief, but the smell somehow deepened. It wasn't hers, but it was her.

Sand and sun and not much else. "Christ, sir," one of my sergeants said to me our first night living on our tanks in the open desert, "there's nothing to do here but die." Over the next few months we would see alongside the dirt and hardball roads in Saudi Arabia the carcasses of sheep and camels, of automobiles and machines, that had finally quit. We saw them later too, in Iraq, only these were tanks and personnel carriers either abandoned by Iraqi soldiers as a real enemy pressed, or evicted of occupants by sabot, HEAT, and 25 mike-mike rounds, and TOW and copperhead missiles. I even came across a Chevy Beretta, less one hubcap, in a dug-in position at a deserted Republican Guard field hospital.

And people too, or carcasses thereof. Soldiers like ourselves.

Tonight Katie Richardson dips her foot into the cool pool that is her war's end. She has finished her .45. It no longer shines. The bluing had faded long before she had first signed for the weapon—now the surface is worn, pocked, and flecked black. She returns it to the black shoulder holster. Steps away. Steps over sprawled bodies, duffel bags, Kevlar helmets, and flak vests on her way to the balcony.

* * *

She had a kid sister, didn't she? Because she certainly acted like an older sister. Determined and decisive, outgoing, and protective. She and I had shared one Engineering and two English classes at West Point. Our U.S. Military Academy class, only the ninth in history to have them, was ten percent women. Though she and I had been engineering lab partners, I did not know her well. She liked to sit in class with legs and arms crossed.

Lynn is the name of the younger sister I've imagined. The one with the looks, the natural talents, the attention. With the generous lips, the slight, boyish hips the boys admired. With hair falling straight down past the shoulders smooth and black and long against the spine. Who won the university scholarships. Who openly shared her dreams, teasing others, men and women alike, with their envy. Who always commanded a crowd's center like a Maypole, straight and sure. In a world that did not confuse sexuality with uniform and position.

Katie stares out from the balcony across the Khobar complex. The plunging sun makes a stark ripple of the horizon; the other apartment towers stand against yet another magnificently orange Arabic twilight.

Most certainly she had a boyfriend, or a fiancé. I've heard he was in the army also. Maybe he was a tank platoon leader, like me. Maybe he didn't deploy, and had missed the big one. Maybe he cheated on her. Maybe he was enlisted. As if that would explain anything.

I see her at the Academy. A professor has asked her to escort a visiting psychologist of some eminence around the barracks. She has brought the psychologist to a plebe room, having told the plebes that morning to ensure the room was spotless, in Saturday morning inspection condition even though it was only Tuesday. The plebes stand at attention in their dreary gray uniforms; she does not put them at ease. They answer the three polite questions posed by the psychologist with a "Yes, sir," one of their four permitted responses. On perusing the medicine cabinet shelves—with each cadet's half an exact copy of the other, identical items in identical places on the same of three shelves, even same-colored toothbrushes (blue) with their bristle ends pointing toward the room door—the psychologist asks, "Do all the medicine cabinets look like this? It's the largest obsessive-compulsive complex I've ever seen."

She reflexes a social laugh, holds her watch high to check the time, and hurries the psychologist out of the room: "We don't want to miss lunch formation."

"Be straight or be gone, ma'am," the plebes pop the cadet company motto after her.

"Be straight," she echoes over her shoulder. Be straight indeed. On their mirrored medicine cabinet door she had spied a smudge. A *smudge*, after she had *told* them *that morning* she wanted their room *perfect* for the visitor. Damn *boneheads*. If only she had inspected the room before meeting up with the psychologist. Walking to formation, she struggles to stay in the conversation him, her head too engrossed in the one-way conversation she's going to have after lunch with the two *smacks*. They won't dick her again.

Just now they pass her and the psychologist in that stiff-bodied, hurried pace required of plebes called pinging. "Be straight or be gone, ma'am." "Be straight or be gone, ma'am." They look like race-walkers frozen from the waist up in the position of attention.

"Be straight."

But this too is invention, because while she may have played escort for part of the day, I showed the psychologist, who was actually a woman, the plebe room. I heard the obsessive-compulsive remark, and noticed no smudge.

Sponge-like Katie had absorbed the roaring forces. Saturated and desiccated. For eight months she was tossed about by events, a bit of sand blown desultorily at a sultan's sneeze or a general's sigh; or a dust devil, formed, then suspended in its nervous whirlings, until finally dissipated on some tacit command. Tossed, jostled, and bruised. Anger and dismay and struggle at first (held inside so the soldiers didn't see), then submission. History, the desert, rolls and catches, pulling bodies under and tossing shells back up.

History.

My own division avoided Kuwait altogether and instead attacked into Iraq west of the Iraqi army's westernmost unit, bypassing our enemy's defenses by going around them to strike deep into his rear. Our envelopment severed all his supply avenues into, and escape avenues out of, Kuwait. The defensive positions we came upon were oriented southeast, toward Kuwait; we rolled him up from the west, sometimes from the northwest. He was facing the wrong way. Had no idea we were coming.

Mistook our artillery preps for yet another round of air force bombs. When we hit them, Iraqis abandoned their posts and fled into the desert, Iraqis surrendered to us, in droves. The units that did put up a fight had very little fight in them.

The ground war lasted 100 hours with a miraculously low number of U.S. casualties. The mother of all battles had become the mother of all routs.

I imagine her as a signal officer in my division, two days after the cease-fire went into effect on 28 February (though she might not have known the date, the days having blurred together in the unprecedented rapidity of our attack). Two days into the cease-fire—fire only if fired upon—and still in southern Iraq, she and her driver have been sent forward to deliver a replacement cable for an infantry brigade's TACSAT, a portable tactical satellite dish for maintaining communication across the vast desert battlefield. The brigade was expecting a fight; there was some urgency. A captain at the brigade tactical operations center where she delivered the cable told her she ought to stick around to "see the show." The scout platoons from the brigade's three battalions, he explained, had passed the night watching and reporting Iraqi convoys streaming north toward Baghdad, toward safety. Shortly after 0800 an Iraqi BMP realized it was being overwatched, panicked, fired a sagger anti-tank missile at a Bradley, missed, and was destroyed by return fire. Another BMP and two T-72 tanks fired. Missed. Were destroyed, by two M1A1 tanks. Five minutes later, four more BMPs, and two more T-72s. The engagement lasted eleven minutes—so the captain had told her while she swapped out the cables for the TACSAT. "Stick around and see the show." She declined. Had to get back.

After leaving she got herself and her driver L-I-D: lost in the desert. It should have been simple, just head south across the featureless three kilometers on the map, hit the secondary east-west road and turn west to her battalion's new location. Only those featureless three kilometers on the map hid a mess of wadis and berms, which turned them around and around until they didn't know south from northwest from south-southeast. Fucking 1:50,000 maps. Twenty meter contour lines don't show shit for terrain. Useless fucking maps. She flipped through the pages of her CEOI to find the infantry brigade's frequency and call signs, hoping that the tactical operations center could talk her back to its location or point her toward her own battalion; meanwhile her driver took them up a rise to gain a better vantage. On the way up, the thuds and ground vibrations of firing artillery usurped the air behind them.

She couldn't see everything of what was happening in the oil field below, but what she couldn't see she heard over the brigade's radio net.

A shot hadn't been fired for over forty minutes. The Iraqis had been streaming northward to gain a causeway to cross the canal when the first rounds fell. Scatterable mines from overhead bursts scattered along the causeway to block it, while arty fell on the vehicles bottlenecking toward the causeway and also on the southern end of the Iraqi formation. Vehicles in the south broke formation and crowded north. Vehicles in the north tried to make the single-lane mine-cluttered causeway anyway—none did—or tried to turn back south. Or east or west into the lowland marsh, where they got stuck. Or into one another, or those coming from the south. Or exploded. After the artillery, an Apache attack helicopter battalion swept the area one company at a time, until its last company expended its last Hellfire air-to-ground missile. Through her binos she watched Iraqis abandon their vehicles and scramble into the marsh, saw a T-72 turret blown off its hull and spin through the air to land atop and crush a truck 100 meters away. Vehicles flipped over. Caught on fire. Some turned southwest toward solid ground only to be stopped by direct fire from Bradleys and Abrams positioned to deny that egress. When the Apaches had finished their run, the brigade commander released the tank battalion waiting in the south, like race horses in the gate, who then burst up the east road toward the causeway destroying whatever wasn't already destroyed, and at the causeway turned around to come down the west road destroying whatever wasn't already destroyed, receiving no enemy fire whatsoever and losing only one American tank in the process, when it drove too close to a burning Iraqi armored vehicle, and its tread and the gear hanging off the turret caught on fire. The soldiers, the American crew that is, escaped unharmed.

"Astounding . . . astounding," the brigade commander broadcast.

Six hours from when the first artillery round left the tube to when the tank battalion resumed its original defensive positions and called for a resupply of fuel and ammunition. Six hours and nearly one thousand destroyed vehicles later. She remembered the division commander's words when he landed in his Blackhawk helicopter for an unannounced congratulatory visit to her unit the day of the cease-fire:

"I only wish we had had three more hours. In three more hours we would have met and annihilated his last operational division. Would have knocked the fourth largest army in the world back to the stone age."

She remembered how we had tried anyway, with an artillery barrage that began at 0400, minutes after she learned of the upcoming 0500 cease-fire, and concluded nicely at 0458. She would never, could never forget the streaking MLRS missiles' exhaust trails overhead stabbing like white-gold tines the dark morning sky.

A shot hadn't been fired for over forty minutes. Six hours and nearly one thousand destroyed vehicles later.

She remembered the Iraqi POW she had interrogated two days into the ground offensive, a captain who spoke in unhalting English. He had surprised her by asking where she was from in the states, then told her about his degree in sociology from the University of Oklahoma, about his dream of returning to Columbia for his next degree, and about how his superiors had cut his Achilles' tendon to prevent him from running away. This was the "fucking raghead" for whom she had sweated in her gas mask two hours every other day for the past six months? For whom she had spent Christmas day waiting in line for a phone three hours in a small sandstorm instead of lounging in her parents' living room? This was the enemy?

Forty minutes and six hours later. She had forgotten to eat her lunch. Her driver slid her an MRE across the Humvee hood. Dehydrated pork patty. She couldn't eat it. They knew where they were now, having oriented themselves and their maps on the wreckage below. They drove back to the battalion and maintained their direction by keeping the sounds of secondary explosions, the columns of rising smoke, and the glow of it all over their left shoulders.

What she had witnessed resembled less a battle than her driver's story of fishing, by dropping a hand grenade in the swimming hole. Throughout Desert Shield she had resented comparisons of fighting the modern high-tech war with playing video and arcade games, merely a matter of joysticks and buttons. But watching this battle she pictured a brigade commander a teenager who couldn't wait to enter his name in the machine's honor roll beside the game's high score.

It may be that her lover was one of the infantrymen directing the attack; maybe he was the one who called her for the TACSAT cable because he knew she could deliver it quickly, the captain who told her to stick around for the show. Maybe she learned something else from him, or about him, something she hadn't wanted to hear, something she couldn't bring herself to bear.

It may be that, at Khobar Towers on her way home, some news from home finally caught up with her. News that would keep her away.

Who can tell her story? History can't. I can't. Hearsay can't. She can't.

Katie inserts the magazine, chambers a round, and switches the safety. She places the weapon in her mouth, the nub sight hooked behind her teeth, the faded bluing meeting forgotten ruby red as her lips clamp tight. Her eyes close, all secure. She is remembering the penny drill from basic marksmanship instruction during cadet basic training: Prone position, with M16. When you achieve a good sight picture, your buddy places the penny on the flash suppressor at the end of the rifle. If you do it right, the penny won't fall when the weapon fired. "Don't pull the trigger," the upperclass cadet would coach, in his tight bright gold tee-shirt. "Breathe in, now hold it. And squeeze. Slowly. The shot should surprise you."

The horizon trembles away. The sun is submerged now beneath the sand.

I've been told that women don't traditionally use guns. Drugs, car exhaust, jumping, drowning, the occasional wrist slitting. But she wasn't a woman, she was a soldier . . . you know what I mean.

I am aware of three other suicide attempts by American soldiers in our war. Two happened before the ground war: a soldier, sex and rank unspecified, from a Military Intelligence unit, and a female lieutenant from a medical unit. Neither succeeded.

The third attempt occurred, like hers, after the war, on the way home. And like her, this soldier succeeded. He was an enlisted man though, and like myself a combat soldier. On his way home. An infantryman. *Hoo-ah*.

A female captain wakes to the shot. She goes to her own duffel bag for a blanket, on the way waking the nearest NCO to fetch the battalion commander where he sleeps on one of the men's floors below. She returns to the balcony and covers the body.

During the air war against Iraq prior to our launching the largest tank battle in history, I learned of a civilian, a friend of another officer, who had committed suicide back home in Georgia. The news interrupted my marking operational graphics on my maps for the upcoming ground offensive. The very word, *suicide*, had passed out of my vocabulary months before. In our simple world of meals and mail call and desert and the enemy, survival suffused everything. That Desert Storm night I concluded that only when a society forgets the fight for life, when it has

gotten what it wants, when it has forgotten that it isn't in control and so panics when forced to remember, can its people turn to suicide. The pause passed, the word flitted away again, and I returned to my maps.

On the plane the commander will try to write Second Lieutenant Katie Richardson's family. He won't know what to say. Several rows behind him meanwhile the captain, a staff officer, will open her green army notebook with its personnel and equipment data and operations orders, with its tick marks in the front inside flap for each day she had survived the desert, and, on a blank page, begin to sketch, a picture of the moment no one saw, of the woman, not the body, on the balcony.

That Desert Storm night I did not remember to think about my mother's father, who a year after his wife's death from cancer took his own life with a shotgun. My mother was well along in her pregnancy with me at the time; she has not forgiven him his selfishness, that he could not think beyond himself, to her, or to me. She has also credited me with her emotional survival and well-being—were I not on the way, and then had she not had my every need and absolute dependency occupying her days, she might not have held herself together. A born hero I was, lying helpless in my mother's lap. The minister at my parents' church issued her fair warning: because of her father's last act she too would always tote suicide in her bag of life tricks. He had made it an option. A possibility.

Several years after the Gulf War—a hero again, so people told me, told all of us when we came home—I learned how my father found the body. When no one answered the door, dad sent mom back to the car. Were my two older brothers there? He tried the back door. Eventually crawled through a window. And came out the front door. I was as surprised by dad's story as by his calling the grandfather I never met by his first name, Cay. Surprised because in my late twenties I had only known the man's family nickname, Papa, and had not known that from him I have my middle name. Cay. Indirectly speaking, my mother bore me to bear him.

That Desert Storm night I dismissed the notion with easy conclusion, the pause passed, the word flitted away again, and I returned to my maps.

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Janis P. Stout

The Making of Willa Cather's *One of Ours*: The Role of Dorothy Canfield Fisher

On March 12, 1921, when Willa Cather was well into the writing of her novel of male disaffection from Nebraska and rebirth in war, *One of Ours*, she wrote her first letter in five years to her longtime friend and fellow-writer Dorothy Canfield Fisher. Three days later she wrote again, urging that she and Canfield Fisher become reconciled after a long estrangement. (Sixteen years earlier Dorothy had successfully opposed Cather's publication of a short story that she believed would be unduly wounding to a friend to whom she had introduced Cather.) In this second letter Cather mentioned that she felt in need of Canfield Fisher's help with the novel, stating, indeed, that she was (in the words of Mark J. Madigan's summary of the correspondence) "the only person who could help her with it" ("Rift" 124)[1]. Why, one wonders, was Dorothy Canfield Fisher the only person who could provide that help? What could Canfield Fisher provide that no one else could? That is the question I want to take up here.

Madigan's essay on the exchange of letters demonstrates that *One of Ours* provided a structured ground, delimited by their professionalism, on which the two women could achieve reconciliation. The biographical issues he elucidates, relating to both the causes of their estrangement and the clarifications that led to their reconciliation, are of keen interest, particularly as they afford insight into Cather's sense of her own provincialism. They are also of keen interest in relation to the shaping of this novel that was of such great importance to Cather's career, winning her the Pulitzer Prize but eliciting a barrage of hostile criticism, both then and later.[2] In calling on Canfield Fisher's help with the novel, Cather specified that it was particularly the last section, set in France—that is,

the section that includes glimpses of battle as well of French domestic life—that had been difficult to write and was causing her uneasiness. Madigan refers to the letter in which Cather made this admission (dated February 6, 1922) as the "real breakthrough" in the process of reconciliation ("Rift" 124).

It is a follow-up letter, though, dated a month later (March 8, 1922), that makes the biographical link with the novel that is pertinent here. There Cather identified the model for her central character, Claude, as her cousin Grosvenor Cather, who had been killed in battle at Cantigny on May 28, 1918. Grosvenor, Cather explained, had for a time distanced himself from her out of resentment or envy of her intellectual and artistic abilities and the wide scope of her experience, compared to his own farm life in Nebraska. Later that same month (this letter, like so many of Cather's, is undated) she wrote again to thank Canfield Fisher for her reassurance and to respond to some of her specific comments, particularly her praise of a scene in which Claude's officer friend David Gerhardt plays the violin. In doing so, Cather admitted that Claude reflected not only Grosvenor's feeling of inadequacy, but her own. Just as Claude is overcome by admiration but also envy when he hears Gerhardt play, and just as Grosvenor had felt intimidated by her comparative sophistication, so she had felt intimidated by Canfield's "intellectual background" and cultural poise when the two were in France in 1902, during what was Cather's first trip abroad (Madigan "Rift" 126). After this late-March letter, with Cather's admission of her long-buried feelings of inadequacy and explanation for her prickly behavior in 1902 resulting from those feelings, the two writers were able to put old hurts and resentments behind them and renew their friendship.

Of greater importance for my purposes here, however, is the fact that the exchange demonstrates how central, in Cather's conception of the novel, was Claude's sense of cultural deprivation and how well attuned Canfield Fisher was to this set of issues. Her sensitivity to the plight of the young person from the provinces had demonstrated that in this respect she fully merited Cather's confidence in her as a reader of the manuscript.

Dorothy Canfield Fisher was peculiarly well qualified in other ways as well to provide assistance as Cather struggled to complete her war novel. Not only was she acquainted with midwestern life and its cultural constraints and able to sympathize with those who did not enjoy her own advantages (during the period she lived in Kansas and Nebraska she had

been among the culturally experienced elite), but she also possessed a thorough familiarity with France, its language, and its cultural traditions. In addition to this general knowledge, which her publisher called in 1918 "a lifelong familiarity with the French," and the fact that as a well-established (though not now well-remembered) writer she could understand the technical issues Cather was facing, she had direct knowledge of France during wartime. Unlike Cather, who pointed out in a letter probably written on March 21, 1922, that no, she had not been in France during the war, Canfield Fisher had spent two years in Paris and elsewhere in France actively engaged in war relief work. Her tasks sometimes involved driving a supply vehicle in the combat zone to gather foodstuffs for ambulance drivers in training (Washington 89).[3] Cather must have felt convinced that her friend could judge the accuracy and convincingness of the section of the novel set in the war zone, "Bidding the Eagles of the West Fly On," while also verifying such matters as French phrasing and descriptive details. Although Cather had also developed considerable familiarity with France by the time she came to the writing of *One of Ours*—a familiarity she did not at all possess in 1902, when she felt abashed by her friend's sophistication—neither her linguistic fluency nor her cultural understanding would ever equal Canfield Fisher's, nor did she have any experience comparable to her friend's direct observations during wartime.

Canfield Fisher's role in the making of *One of Ours* may, however, actually have predated their exchange of letters. Not only did she possess a familiarity with France on which Cather drew in personal exchanges, she had also written about wartime France in two books of stories or sketches based on direct observation, *Home Fires in France* (1918) and *The Day of Glory* (1919). She told her agent (and Cather's) Paul Reynolds that her aim in these two books was to be " 'perfectly and absolutely authentic' rather than sensational," to produce writing that would avoid the "vociferous quality" of much war writing and instead would "sound *real*" (Washington 89). Despite an occasional broadening of emotional tone that may evoke discomfort in today's readers, the sketches convey, in Madigan's judgment, "a genuine understanding of the French people, whose country was being ravaged by the war" ("Introduction" 5). Moreover, several of the pieces occupy that disputed ground at the borderline between fiction and nonfiction that Cather also, though in rather different ways, liked to occupy.

My point is that Dorothy Canfield Fisher's war writings anticipated, in several respects, what Cather was to do in the final section of her novel and that Cather may well have drawn on her friend's published works as she dealt with the difficulties she had set herself there. We can assume as a matter of course that she would have read them, since her letters indicate she generally did read Canfield Fisher's books. During the war and post-war period she was keenly interested in observations of this kind on the great issue of the day.[4] Textual comparison indicates, indeed, that her reading of *Home Fires in France*, published four years before *One of Ours*, was an especially keen one and that a number of particular images and ideas from both that book and *The Day of Glory* had impressed her profoundly enough to stay in her mind and re-emerge in her own novel.

In the thinly fictionalized opening story of *Home Fires*, "Notes from a French Village in the War Zone," the scene Canfield Fisher sketches resembles in several respects the village in which Cather's Claude is billeted when he first reaches France as well as a devastated town near the front that he visits while waiting for his colonel to return from Paris.[5] The unifying idea in Canfield Fisher's description is the great age of the village, its long cultural history, and its traditional way of life. She notes through the eyes of newly arrived American soldiers its "quiet gray street," its high stone walls lining the road, and the tranquil gardens behind the walls, "earthly Paradise[s] of green" with "superb nut-trees, great flowering bushes, a bit of grass, golden graveled paths" and "grapevines and fruit-trees carefully trained" against the inside of the walls (*HF* 1, 6). The unnamed narrative presence, whom we can confidently think of as the author herself, explains to a group of soldiers such matters as the reasoning of people who maintain the privacy of their gardens rather than opening them to the view of passers-by. She also explains such domestic customs as the keeping of rabbits as a food supply and the social custom of specialized rather than general food shops, such as bakeries.

Similar details appear in *One of Ours*. The first major incident after the *Anchises* lands is Claude's success in helping his men discover that different kinds of food (in this case cheese) are to be had in specialized rather than general shops. This incident occurs in an urban rather than village setting, but later, when Claude goes with David Gerhardt to find a billet while his company is assigned to a training camp, his first im-

pressions of the village are of its quiet "single street" lined with walls, behind which is found the Jouberts' "little sanded garden" (*OO* 280, 287). At a town nearer the front Claude notes "clean and shining" gravel walks, an espalliered pear tree, and a "shaven grass plot" (*OO* 309). During a week's rest at the town of Beaufort later on, he and his men are served rabbit.

It is scarcely surprising that Cather would note characteristics of French life that were, in fact, authentic. The use of rabbit meat in France was noted, for example, by Dr. Frederick Sweeney, whose wartime diary Cather used in writing the novel, especially for the crossing on the flu-ridden *Anchises*.[6] It is also scarcely surprising that the writer who said that the earth itself was the heroine of one of her novels (*O Pioneers!*) would appreciate the love of the French people for their country. Accordingly, when Claude meets a one-armed veteran who joins the beautiful and gracious Mlle. de Courcy in mourning for the "poor trees," which have had the "worst" of the bombardments, and who means to trim and coax back the ones that show even the least signs of life "still . . . in the trunks," he thinks, "How much it must mean to a man to love his country like this" (*OO* 312-13). Certainly it would not have taken Canfield Fisher's example to bring to Cather's mind that love for the soil. She might well, however, have been prompted to emphasize the idea by the example of her friend's stories, many of which stress the French love for their native soil.

In "The Permissionaire," for example, Canfield Fisher writes about a furloughed poilu who finds his home shattered and spends his entire time at home clearing debris, planting, and grieving for the destroyed trees—or as she puts it in "A Honeymoon . . . Vive l'Amerique!" the "carefully and expertly murdered fruit-trees and vines" (*HF* 237). When some of the pensionnaire's peonies begin to put up shoots, his wife exclaims, "I told you what was in the ground alive they couldn't kill!" (*HF* 49). We are reminded of the "sound" life still in the trunks of the trees seen by Claude—who would assuredly have been sensitive to the hope that cherished trees could come back, since one of his most troubling childhood experiences was his father's murdering of a cherry tree beloved by Claude's mother. Love for the earth and pride in careful gardening also appear in Canfield Fisher's "Vignettes from Life at the Rear" (*HF* 60-63), where attention is also drawn to such particulars of battle-

field experience as sheltering in shell holes and being cut off from food supply—both of which, again, appear in *One of Ours*. Canfield Fisher would likely have heard such stories directly from combatants in the course of her relief work, as the nameless "Madame" of the sketch does. Cather also spoke with returned soldiers, though at a considerably greater distance both of time and of space.

Parallels of a different kind occur with Canfield Fisher's well-executed though heavily propagandistic story "A Little Kansas Leaven," in which a mentally alert but otherwise ordinary young woman from the Midwest goes to France as a volunteer. The narrative development of the ordinariness of Ellen's daily life, then her growing awareness of the war and her desire to get involved, resemble Cather's account of Claude Wheeler's life in Nebraska.[7] Elements in common include the need to get out a map to see where Belgium is, the central character's groping toward a sense of fairness as she tries to make sense of early reports of German aggression, and the use of personalized analogies to explain support for the war effort. In "A Little Kansas Leaven," Ellen explains her admiration of the Belgians' doomed resistance through the analogy of resisting a burglar who wants to go through her own and her cousin's room in order to rob and perhaps kill their neighbor (*HF* 137-8). The "neighbor" she is actually talking about is, of course, France, and Belgium is the "room" the marauding outlaw is going through. Cather uses similar domestic analogies to comment on Germany's violation of Belgium. As Claude and his friend Ernest stand looking out over their fields, trying to formulate their feelings about the invasion, Ernest says that being a soldier in the German army must be like being "marched into a peaceful country like this, in the middle of harvest, and begin[ning] to destroy it" (*OO* 136). Shortly afterward, Claude exclaims that the world had been mistaken in its assessment of the German people: "It's as if we invited a neighbour over here and showed him our cattle and barns, and all the time he was planning how he would come at night and club us in our beds" (*OO* 139-40). Ellen, in "A Little Kansas Leaven," is so moved by her sense of the unfairness of Germany's invasion of Belgium and her admiration of French patriotism that she withdraws all her savings and goes to France to help. Similarly, as Claude and his mother read the news from Belgium and France, he feels inspired to wish that he could be "an atom in that wall of flesh and blood that rose and melted and rose again" in defense of Paris (*OO* 142).

Canfield Fisher's story of the plain girl from Kansas who gains heroic status by plunging into the war effort also seems to anticipate Cather's novel in its association of the Allies' war effort with a kind of spiritual glory and its rejection of pacifist or isolationist positions on the war—a note she sounded even more loudly at the end of "Some Confused Impressions," in *The Day of Glory*, where American soldiers go out "gloriously through the darkness to sacrifice" (132). It is notoriously difficult, of course, to decide Cather's "meaning" in her fiction; she is not a writer who makes overt statements. The interpretation of her attitude toward the war in *One of Ours* is no exception. To Blanche Gelfant, Claude's mother expresses an "impassioned advocacy of the war in Europe, which influences Claude to enlist in the army" (92); to Patricia Lee Yongue, Claude's mother and other women in the novel convey arguments *against* the war which go unheeded (145). My point is not to pronounce either of these diametrically opposed readings right or wrong; indeed, I generally find Cather's writing even more radically ambiguous than scholars have customarily allowed. Even so, it does seem to me, both from my reading of the text and from my reading of Cather's letters commenting on her writing of the novel (especially those to Dorothy Canfield Fisher), that she is at least partially invested in Claude's perception of the rightness and glory of fighting for France and its beautiful way of life and that she thus shares, at least to some degree, the pervasive attitude that Canfield Fisher expresses unambiguously—so unambiguously, indeed, that her story, unlike Cather's novel, serves as a call to action. Despite this difference in intentional purpose, however, it is clear that both writers were working with an idea of the war as an occasion imparting glamour or something that might be called glory to an otherwise humdrum existence.

Two more ideas in *Home Fires in France* that might have particularly struck Cather: First, the idea of interesting diversity, exemplified in French culture. In a story called "Hats," an American businessman who has come to France to continue his import of stylish hats praises a feminized France's skill in couture in terms that argue the value of difference or variety.

> I don't know whether it's because she's been at the business of running the styles so long, so much longer than anybody else so that she's got all her fibers settled together, just right to catch

> the note, the way the wood in an old violin trembles all over at sounds that leave the wood in the leg of a chair perfectly calm. Mind, I don't say the violin is any more important than a chair. As far as I'm concerned personally, if I had to choose I'd rather have the chair. What I'm trying to say is that they are *different*. And we've got to get used to the idea that *because things are different it doesn't mean one is better than the other and they ought both to be like the best one*. (*HF* 225)

We can imagine that this passage would have evoked a favorable response from the writer who celebrated, in a book published one year after her friend's book of war stories—*My Ántonia*—immigrants' diversity of customs at a time when calls for Americanization and cultural uniformity were loud (Reynolds 63, 73-81). In *One of Ours*, Claude similarly displays interest in differentness—of foods, of customs, of ways of feeling. Second, the idea of the strength and courage of women in wartime. This is indeed a primary motif of both of Canfield Fisher's volumes, appearing in various guises in virtually every story or sketch. We have seen the celebration of female strength and determination in "A Little Kansas Leaven." Similar tributes appear in "Eyes for the Blind" and elsewhere in *Home Fires*, which ends with "La Pharmacienne," whose central character is undauntable. The two strongest pieces in *The Day of Glory*, "On the Edge" and "France's Fighting Woman Doctor," are celebrations of "valiant" and "patriotic" Frenchwomen who exhibit skill and "selfless courage" (*DoG* 47, 44, 131).

Cather's celebration of women's achievements in the war is less overt than Canfield Fisher's, but in her characteristically understated and indirect way she too emphasized the strength and importance of women. Yongue has argued, in fact, that the women characters in *One of Ours* are the book's touchstones of value. From Mrs. Wheeler and simpleminded Mahailie to the hardworking teacher Gladys Farmer, Claude's undeniably unpleasant wife Enid, a woman pilot, and the quiet relief worker Mlle. Olive de Courcy, women go about their business, thinking their own thoughts and shaping their world. Cather was no self-proclaimed feminist—even if she did once say in an interview that the movement of women into careers couldn't help but be a positive thing (Bohlke 49). We would expect, then, that even setting aside the fact of personal friend-

ship she would not have manifested the interest in Gertrude Atherton's book of war essays, which celebrated women's wartime relief roles with a keen edge of feminist argumentation, that she expressed in Canfield Fisher's. Her friend's confidence in women's capacities, unelaborated with political argumentation, was one that we would expect to appeal to Cather, who repeatedly, throughout her career, created competent and independent-minded but generally apolitical women characters.[8]

When Cather asked Dorothy Canfield Fisher to go over the manuscript of her novel of a midwestern youth who glamorizes his life by going to war, she was not, then, merely drawing on her friend's knowledge of the French language and landscape, but on a very precisely focused set of experiences, attitudes, and modes of expression. So close are some of the parallels between *One of Ours* and Canfield Fisher's two books of wartime stories, especially *Home Fires in France*, that we might even wonder if, reading the manuscript, Canfield Fisher may not have been brought up short by the possibility of imitation on Cather's part, not with respect to the work as a whole (*One of Ours* is a very different kind of book from Canfield Fisher's volumes of stories and sketches) but with respect to those specific aspects of the novel that Cather had asked her particularly to scrutinize.

If so, she seems not to have raised the issue. One possible reason for her not to have done so would have been that she was not surprised. She would have known only too well from their controversy, years earlier, over "The Profile"—the very controversy that, even more than Cather's behavior in Europe, had led to their estrangement—how intent Cather could be on having her work take precedence over merely personal concerns.[9] She would have known, too, how prolonged a disruption in their friendship might result from raising an objection. They were women in their forties (Cather in her late forties), and Canfield Fisher must have shared Cather's hope that their relationship during their remaining years could be more amicable than it had been during the previous two decades. Another possible answer, of course, is that if she did notice the echoes I have pointed out, she may have simply been gratified and pleased that her respected friend had found in her work some of the seeds that grew into so impressive a novel as *One of Ours*.[10]

Notes

1. I quote the paraphrase rather than the letter itself because of the ongoing prohibition on publishing or quoting Cather's letters.

2. Ernest Hemingway's ridicule of Cather's depiction of battle in a letter to Edmund Wilson is well known; see Baker, 105.

3. Atherton (204) shows Dorothy Canfield Fisher's name immediately beside that of Edith Wharton in a list of American women whose names should appear on a "roll of honor" for working "as hard" for France "as if this great afflicted country were their own."

4. Among letters in which Cather commented on speeches, magazine pieces, or books giving accounts of the war are the following: to Elizabeth Shepley Sergeant, pm. September 28, 1914; to her Aunt Franc (Cather), November 17, 1914; to Ferris Greenslet, "Sunday," probably 1919.

5. Cather had seen considerable devastation in this area herself, during a 1919 trip to Cantigny to locate the burial place of her cousin. Letter to Charles Cather, July 7, [1920]; to H.L. Mencken.

6. A transcription of the diary is available at Love Library, University of Nebraska.

7. Parallels can also be seen between Canfield Fisher's Ellen and Cather's Enid, Claude's disagreeable wife in *One of Ours*. Ellen, a "plain, rather sallow, very serious" sort of woman, maintains her view of German guilt even in the face of her minister's pacifist sermon and a neighbor's explanation that the German army only wanted to walk peacefully along the roads of Belgium. She insists, "They'd promised they wouldn't" (*HF* 134-6). After the sinking of the *Lusitania* she withdraws all her savings from the bank and goes to France despite her employer's threat that she won't have a job when she returns. Enid, a moralistic Prohibitionist, "never questioned the rightness of her own decisions" so that "when she made up her mind, there was no turning her" (180). When she hears that her missionary sister is ill, she abruptly goes off to China to help, despite Claude's opposition.

8. Cf. Skaggs's succinct statement (24), "Cather has rendered the varied potentialities of women more memorably than perhaps any other American writer. See, however, Fetterley 43-59; also, Lambert 676-90, arguing that after *My Ántonia* Cather turned away from such presentations. Fetterley's and Lambert's arguments ask us to ignore not only many minor characters in *One of Ours*, but such a major figure as Rachel Blake in *Sapphira and the Slave Girl*.

9. The controversy over "The Profile" related to Cather's modeling of her central character, whose face is severely scarred, on a woman to whom she had been introduced by Canfield. As a result of Canfield's determined opposition, the story was deleted from *The Troll Garden*, though it was later published in *McClure's*. The dispute, long a mystery, was cleared up by the discovery of letters now in the Bailey-Howe Library at the University of Vermont. See Madigan, "Willa Cather and Dorothy Canfield Fisher."

10. According to her subsequent review in the *New York Times Book Review,* September 10, 1922.

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Sean M. Braswell

War Stories: "Truth" and Particulars

"How'd you like to hear about the war?" (O'Brien 163). The simple question that Norman Bowker wishes he could ask his town in Tim O'Brien's tale "Speaking of Courage" expresses the profound need of war veterans to share their stories with a willing audience so that somehow, through words, they might impress the impact of their experience on the very nerves of their listeners and make them understand what they felt. War narratives, like much of human discourse, involve communicating deeply personal experiences and uniquely individual ideas. All forms of expression, from the artistic to the mundane, face the fundamental difficulties of this process, for how can people truly understand something they have never themselves experienced? Every artist, writer, and communicator encounters this ultimate obstacle to personal response and understanding. In his autobiographical work *Ecce Homo*, the philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche warns the reader of the inaccessibility of his work:

> Ultimately nobody can get more out of things, including books, than he already knows. For what one lacks access to from experience one will have no ear. . . . This is, in the end, the originality of my experience. Whoever thought he had understood something of me, had made up something out of me after his own image. (261)

The use of particulars in war narrative is an attempt to give someone else an ear for the originality of one's own experience. Although this inherent obstacle to personal understanding can sometimes result in a

communicative impasse, it is not an insurmountable barrier. The most meaningful war stories succeed in reaching their audience, fostering a genuine understanding through the effective use of language and particular descriptive details that somehow resonate with the reader's or listener's own experiences.

Perhaps this factor more than any other explains why "true" war stories are seldom influenced by prevailing literary trends. These tales speak in remarkably similar ways across time despite the fact that they do not generalize but rather describe specific, unrelated events. The essence of war emerges from its details, and the stories that most effectively communicate that essence rely upon, as Samuel Hynes states in *The Soldier's Tale*, "only the things that the senses record and memory stores . . . because the truth is in the particulars" (27). This aspect of narrative, however, places the storyteller in a very difficult and paradoxical position. The theater of war contains acts and scenes far removed from the occurrences of everyday existence. To tell a true war story, the soldier must relive the sheer unfamiliarity of it as he first experienced it, and delve into its details like never before.

Nothing in life, no boot camp, no amount of training, can ever prepare a man for what he will encounter in combat. The complete otherness of war heightens the difficulty of sharing its story. O'Brien, in "Sweetheart of the Song Tra Bong," expresses the frustration brought out by the foreign nature of battle:

> . . . they'll never understand any of this, not in a billion years. Try to tell them about it, they'll just stare at you. . . . They won't understand zip. It's like trying to tell somebody what chocolate tastes like. . . . Or shit. There it is, you got to taste it. (123)

The soldier has entered an alien world so unimaginable that you must "taste it" to digest it. Regarding the soldier's attempt to capture the strange quality of combat, Hynes remarks that "war narratives, though they make war vivid, they don't make it familiar. Indeed, one motive for writing them seems to be to show how *un*familiar war is" (6). The sense of utter strangeness, the peculiar sense of isolation that is the initial response of many to battle, poses an interesting dilemma for the war narrator: how to make the reader or listener experience the unfamiliarity of it all at the same time that you are attempting to help them identify with your experience by appealing to familiar images and details.

The first and most famous Western battle narrative, the *Iliad*, deals with this complexity through the use of similes, descriptive comparisons and images that are not actually experienced by the participants in battle but that serve to elucidate the war for the poem's audience. Many of the similes used in the *Iliad* play upon peacetime images—scenes from natural settings, from domestic surroundings, or from the hunt—that are very different in nature from the activities of war. For example, the description of the Greek Army marching out to meet the Trojans:

> Innumerable throngs of buzzing flies
> Will swarm all over a herdsman's yard
> In Springtime, when milk wets the pails—
> Likewise the throngs of long-haired Greeks
> Who stood on the plain facing the Trojans . . .
> (2. 505-9)

The use of this analogy affects the listener in two main ways. First, the poet, by equating the flurried activity of the men in preparation for battle with a more familiar and particular sight, that of flies swarming around a milk pail, has provided his audience with a glimpse of what might otherwise be for many an unfamiliar scene (Lombardo xliv). At the same time, however, the simile is removing the hearer even further from the scene, excluding him from the experience. It is as if the poet were saying: "Here is what it is like, but if you haven't been there, this is as close to it as you're going to get, flies on milk in the Springtime!" Like the looks given by the returning patrol to their colonel in the story told by Mitchell Sanders in O'Brien's "How to Tell a True War Story," it says: "poor bastard, you'll never know—wrong frequency—you don't even want to hear this" (82-83).

Other war memoirists, such as Siegfried Sassoon, turn conventional literary style on its head to convey the dissonance involved in explaining the strangeness of war to those who have never experienced it. Sassoon, disillusioned with the First World War, ridiculed its glorification in works of Romantic prose and poetry in which a lofty and elegant diction was used to avoid the reality of experience and of death. Sassoon crafted his poems in the elevated style of traditional war romanticism but added a bitter twist, inserting an image or a statement told in a heightened fashion but which contained a subject not so gilded. In "Suicide in the

Trenches," he begins in an ebullient, sing-song tone, "I knew a simple soldier boy / Who grinned at life in empty joy. . ." (78). While maintaining the same jovial rhythm in the second stanza, Sassoon quickly changes subjects. We see a particular scene of war: "In winter trenches, cowed and glum / With crumps and lice and lack of rum, / He put a bullet through his brain" (78). By the third and final stanza the poem and its poet have performed an about-face. He bitterly rails: "You smug-faced crowds with kindling eye / Who cheer when soldier lads march by, / Sneak home and pray you'll never know / The hell where youth and laughter go" (78). Sassoon recognizes that the audience lacks the experience to wrest any meaning from his description of war, and thus feels the need to preach to them directly in a third stanza. Like Rat Kiley in O'Brien's "How to Tell," Sassoon experiences the frustrations of dealing with the ignorance of the "dumb coozes" (77) back home who do not respond to the sad truths he is attempting to share.

Michael Herr, in *Dispatches*, also uses literary technique to convey the unfamiliarity and disorganization of the war in Vietnam, cultivating an idiosyncratic style to match the disjointed chaos going on around him. Herr grounds much of his scattered account in particular and accessible images like the rotations of a ceiling fan and the faces of the fighting men "serious beyond what you would call their years" (16). Herr imposes no rational order or organized analysis on his narrative. He constructs no framework that a civilized reader can use to put the experience of war in perspective. Instead he allows the images and the soldiers to speak for themselves, bringing a surreal intensity to the events. Although not a soldier, Herr, like Sassoon and Homer, counterbalances his detailed description of events with the sentiment that the reader is still never going to get it. Describing the time that he asked a grunt for the rest of the story of a patrol that went up the mountain, Herr states that "he just looked like he felt sorry for me, fucked if he'd waste time telling stories to anyone as dumb as I was" (6). Like the platoon in Mitchell Sanders' story, Herr's grunt feels isolated by his experience and consequently alienates his audience. As William Broyles explains in his article "Why Men Love War," for many veterans "the purpose [of the story] is not to enlighten but to exclude; its message is not its content but putting the listener in his place. I suffered. I was there. You were not" (61). This is the sacred aspect of the soldier's experience, and it stems from a powerful encounter with the forces of life and death.

> The presence of death and danger has a strange way of bringing you fully awake. It makes things vivid. When you're afraid, really afraid, you see things you never saw before, you pay attention to the world. (219)

As O'Brien here describes in "Ghost Soldiers," many soldiers return from war having had a peak experience, a love of their lives that others will never understand. "To tell the truth I've never been happier in my whole life. Never," the displaced teenager Mary Anne remarks of her Vietnam experience in O'Brien's "Sweetheart of The Song Tra Bong" (110) Through her story, O'Brien delves into an aspect of war not often expressed—its attractive side, which can overwhelm even those like Mary Anne who enter it the most innocently. What many who have not been to war do not understand is the very ambiguity of the experience, the fact that it can be both horrifying and attractive at the same time. One of the hardest feelings for veterans to explain is the bizarre attraction they possess toward an event that while horrific, also exhilarates them like nothing ever before. William Broyles describes it this way:

> . . . the love of war stems from the union, deep in the core of our being, between sex and destruction, beauty and horror, love and death. War may be the only way in which most men touch the mythic domains in our soul. (61)

The depth of emotional contact to which Broyles alludes cannot be understood by those who have not had such a heightened experience of danger or close brush with death. In "How to Tell," O'Brien makes a similar point about an encounter he had with a woman who, after hearing a reading of one of his stories, approached him and praised the tale's tragedy. He states that she will never get it "because she wasn't listening. It wasn't a war story. It was a love story. But you can't say that" (90-91). Men return from war not only having experienced its hell, but its beauty as well. "The awful majesty of combat" (87) as O'Brien calls it and the heightened state of awareness it brings are most eloquently expressed in war narratives through the use of particulars.

By bringing men so near to death, war makes them aware of the little details that constitute life, especially the small impulses and responses that compose their own living bodies. Norman Bowker hears the valves

in his heart, and Mary Anne regarding her combat sorties remarks, "When I'm out there at night, I feel close to my own body, I can feel my blood moving, my skin and my fingernails, everything. . . . I know exactly who I am. You can't feel like that anywhere else" (O'Brien 121). Often, it is the profound immediacy of these physical sensations that soldiers wish to have equaled in the emotional response of their audience. "A true war story," says O'Brien, "if truly told, makes the stomach believe" (84). In other words, an effective narrative brings out a tangible, physical response in its hearer, it brings him as close to the action as a second-hand account can get. This, of course, is no easy task for the storyteller. Rat Kiley in telling his story "wanted to heat up the truth, to make it burn so hot that you would feel exactly what he felt" (O'Brien 101). O'Brien here likens the potential impact of the narrator upon his audience to the physical sensation of burning, because no other way of experiencing the narrative will suffice.

Frustrated at not achieving this effect, the soldier will keep returning to the perception that haunts him, hoping to finally impress it upon his listener. Kiowa, in O'Brien's "The Things They Carried," cannot shake the picture of his buddy Ted Lavender dropping suddenly dead to the ground. He returns again and again to what he saw: "The poor bastard just flat-fuck fell. Boom. Down. Nothing else. . . . Like cement. . . . The guy's dead. I mean really" (13). In his brief, disjointed remarks Kiowa extracts what he saw. He forms from them a story, a complete narrative of war contained within a single, compelling image. Through his story Kiowa is coming to terms with himself and his own experience, pinning down its meaning in his mind. While this tactic may not help others to ever fully understand the experience, it does reveal a lot about the nature of human memory and its ability to get at the "truth."

"What sticks to memory, often, are those odd little fragments that have no beginning and no end," (38) O'Brien comments in "Spin," and indeed his circular narrative style in *The Things They Carried* reflects this non-linear quality of memory. O'Brien readily admits of his own Vietnam experience that "much of it is hard to remember," (36) an observation common in war narratives because of the fact that the physical and emotional sensations get mixed up through time. Many were never very clear in the first place. Whether in a trench in France or a jungle in Vietnam, it is difficult for the soldier to distinguish anything but what is going on directly around him, his attention being focused upon "other,

closer, mortal things" (Hynes 14). This confined perspective, combined with the nature of memory, makes an accurate vision of war difficult to construct. As O'Brien describes his own attempt in "How to Tell":

> The angles of vision are skewed . . . the pictures get jumbled; you tend to miss a lot. And then afterward, when you go to tell about it, there is always that surreal seemingness, which makes the story seem untrue, but which in fact represents the hard and exact truth as it seemed. (78)

All that remains then is this "surreal seemingness" and the disjointed fragments of sense data, the meaningful particulars somehow still contained within the porous human brain. Part of the function of stories then is to fill in the blanks left by memory and to join the past with the present and the future. What then is to be considered the truth, and how do we recognize it? How many details are required to make a story true?

Robert Graves once commented that war stories were "true but not truthful" (Hynes 21). Indeed, all war narratives are in one way or another simply fiction manufactured out of the jumbled perceptions of reality. Concerning this cloudiness of memory and its effect on truth, O'Brien remarks, "In a war you lose your sense of the definite, hence your sense of truth itself, and therefore it is safe to say that in a true war story nothing is ever absolutely true" (88). Paradoxically, however, war stories often can come far closer to the truth by way of fiction than through factual accuracy. Such stories possess an ability inherent in all myths, they are vehicles that refer past themselves to a greater reality, which like an Impressionist painting can supersede any reality achieved through photographic precision. Their expression depends on portraying what is real, not generalities or abstractions, and truth must ultimately be extracted by piecing the particulars together.

In the title story of *The Things They Carried*, the truth of the Vietnam experience is contained within the thousands of little details involved in being a grunt in the field. O'Brien puts the reader into the shoes of the grunt, making him feel the weight bearing down upon him. The truth of this weight encompasses everything from personal items like jungle boots and flak jackets, to forces and entities like atmosphere, gravity, and fear. This is, of course, an attempt to get at truth through factual detail—what the soldiers really carried and what they really felt. It is a catalogue

of particulars constructed in an attempt to truthfully render an experience through story. In "The Man I Killed," however, O'Brien's thoughts about the enemy do cross over into the domain of fiction. In order to make the man he has killed more real in his own mind and to understand what his death signifies, O'Brien personalizes him, building a fictional profile of what he must have been like while alive. In doing so he also projects his own characteristics onto the man. O'Brien is using here the two main methods we have for sympathizing with another person (even an enemy): personalization, realizing that the other is an individual human being; an outward projection, identifying characteristics in that person similar to our own. By constructing a fiction around the reality of the corpse, O'Brien provides a model for his own audience on how a war narrative must operate, and, how it must be read.

Finally, there is that truth that cannot be successfully expressed by building a profile of particulars around it or by casting it within any sort of conceptual framework. Sometimes stories are "just beyond telling" (O'Brien 79). Sometimes the true story is better represented outside of words, as in the case of Herr's grunt with the ocean-floor eyes. As Herr reports, the men in his team would say: "All's you got to do is look into his eyes, that's the whole fucking story right there" (6). Here lies no narration of events or experiences but a description of a single reflection of human response, an image that reveals more than words about the experience of war. It is not alone.

"If in some smothering dreams you too could pace / Behind the wagon that we flung him in . . . ," Wilfred Owen begins his vivid description of a gassed soldier whose image haunts his dreams "guttering, choking, drowning" (55). The force of Owen's entire message in the poem rests upon the incredible sub-marine image of that single dying man. "How to Tell a True War Story" centers on O'Brien's recollection of Curt Lemon's sun-drenched death and his assembling of the parts of the image over and over in an attempt to recapture the meaning of a moment in words:

> Twenty years later, I can still see the sunlight on Lemon's face. I can see him turning, looking back at Rat Kiley, then he laughed and took that curious half step from shade into sunlight, his face suddenly brown and shining, and when his foot touched down, in that instant, he must've thought it was the sunlight that was killing him. (90)

Although Owen's and O'Brien's images are different in nature, both attempt to communicate through words the shock of watching a man die. Such an indelible mental and soul-piercing image contains no moral. A true war story is extracted from experience and perception. It does not instruct. It simply "bears witness" (Hynes 32). Herr tells of one such story told to him by a grunt: "Patrol went up the mountain. One man came back. He died before he could tell the rest of us what happened" (6). There is no moral here, no smooth finish to the story, just a statement as cold and empty as the deaths it describes.

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Ed Sikov

Billy Wilder's World War II

An Air Force Humanities Lecture, delivered at the United States Air Force Academy, April 7, 1999

Let me thank the United States Air Force Academy for inviting me to speak on the subject of Billy Wilder's World War II. I am greatly honored. Since I'm currently teaching at Colorado College, I admit that it does feel as though I've ventured into enemy territory this morning, and since I'm well aware that the Air Force Academy takes no prisoners, I'm wondering what's going to happen to me if you don't like my presentation. The Geneva Convention is quite clear on this point: you are not allowed to torture me. I'm sure that you do, however, have other effective ways of dealing with insurgents, and I can do nothing but throw myself at your mercy. That's the first problem. The second is that my own alma mater, Haverford College in Pennsylvania, which is also the other place I tend to teach now and then, is run by the Quakers, who as you probably know are pacifists. A little of that has rubbed off on me, I'm afraid, so let me just say that I disapprove of everything you stand for here at the Air Force Academy, and if you shoot me for saying that, please understand that my noble sense of nonviolent morality will be the only thing preventing me from shooting back.

All of this is just my ludicrous way of saying that, in fact, I'm really rather embarrassed to be lecturing you on the subject of World War II. The fact is, I know next to nothing about World War II. I'm certain that everyone else in this room could bomb circles around me on the subject of World War II, so I won't even try to tell you much of anything about the reality of that bloody and, to my very ambivalent nonviolent mind, very necessary war. I may be a pacifist at heart, but I'm also born of Jewish parents, and I'm acutely aware that if it hadn't been for the Ameri-

can military, I wouldn't even have the chance to be speaking German now, because my parents would have been gassed and burned in a death camp long before they had even had a chance to meet, let alone get married and have me.

Now if you think I'm conflicted about World War II, imagine the highly ambivalent perspective of Mr. Billy Wilder. He was born to Jewish parents in a remote outpost of the Austro-Hungarian empire in 1906; he moved with his family to Vienna during World War I; he started his career as a newspaper reporter there before moving to Berlin in 1926; he rose to become a successful and well-paid screenwriter there in 1931 and 1932. And then Adolf Hitler was elected Chancellor in 1933. He left Berlin a matter of weeks after Hitler's election, heading first to Paris and then to Hollywood. (Mr. Wilder is still alive, by the way, and living with his wife of many years in a lovely art-filled penthouse on Wilshire Boulevard in Los Angeles.)

Wilder went on to make write and direct such films as *Double Indemnity*, *The Lost Weekend*, *Sunset Boulevard*, *The Seven Year Itch*, *Some Like It Hot*, *The Apartment*, and many others. But he could scarcely see into the future and know that his professional life would ultimately be enhanced by his having run for his life. At the time, he was simply running. Wilder, always shrewd and calculating, saw the writing on the wall right away, and he ran for his life–*right away*. He was paranoid, but correctly so. His father had died, but his mother was still living in Vienna. She had remarried, and although Billy tried to get her to join him in America in the mid-to-late-1930s, she saw no reason to panic. So she ended up gassed and burned in a death camp while her son became a famous and very wealthy film director living in splendor in Hollywood. Wilder is a survivor, in all ways, but I think he's paid a tremendous price in guilt, ambivalence, and extended culture shock.

It should come as no surprise, then, to see that World War II occupies a central place in Wilder's always conflicted imagination. Let me jump to almost the end of his life story and tell you that it was he, in a way, who convinced Stephen Spielberg to direct *Schindler's List*. When the novel on which the film was based was published in the early 1980s, Billy tried to buy the movie rights–he wanted *Schindler's List* to be his final film project. It would have been perfect for him–a cynical opportunist, a man who lives only for himself and will do anything to make a few bucks, or Deutchmarks, or movies. In any event, the opportunist becomes heroic, almost against his own will, and ends up saving the lives

of some Jews. Billy was an old man at that point, however, and it would have been nearly impossible for him to direct such an expansive and difficult movie. Moreover, Spielberg had already bought the rights. But Spielberg still credited Billy for prodding him, in a moral sense, to actually get the picture made: "He made me look very deeply inside myself," Spielberg said, "when he was so passionate to do this. He tested my resolve."

Billy's own resolve, I think, was the product of nearly fifty years of self-loathing. Here is a man who rode out the war in the lap of luxury in Southern California. While his own mother and grandmother were being rounded up by the Nazis, forced into the Jewish ghetto in Krakow, and probably transported to Auschwitz and incinerated–I say probably because they really just disappeared; there are no records of the dead with their names on them–while this was happening to his own family, Billy was earning lots of money, buying and selling houses and paintings and sculptures in Beverly Hills, getting nominated for a couple of Oscars, screwing a beautiful starlet behind his wife's and four-year-old daughter's backs, screwing a beautiful big band singer behind the starlet's back, and generally having a swell time in Tinseltown.

This is not to say that Billy Wilder was oblivious to the war while it was happening. On the contrary. He's always been a newshound, and he followed the war closely in the papers. And as an Austro-German refugee in Hollywood he was personally active in committees organized to help fellow refugees make their way out of hell and find a place to stay and work in California. In addition, he wrote several very good screenplays that used the rise of the Nazis as well as refugee issues as a backdrop–I'm thinking of the romantic comedy *Ninotchka*, the war romance *Arise My Love*, and the refugee romance *Hold Back the Dawn*. In 1939, he even wrote an unproduced script, a romantic comedy, called, believe it or not, *Heil, Darling*. In this film, a cynical opportunist, a reporter who's only out for himself–are you seeing a theme developing here?–a cynical reporter falls in love with a beautiful blonde Nazi doctor in Vienna. The Nazi doctor measures people's skulls as a way of determining their racial background. The reporter's skull corresponds to that of a monkey, which is one step higher on the doctor's chart than the lowest of the low–the skull of a Russian Communist. At first, Josh, the reporter, simply tries to sweet-talk Wilhelmine, the Nazi doctor, into signing his racial certification, but when they get to know each other better in Josh's car on the way back from a pilgrimage to Hitler's birthplace, they begin

to fall tentatively, awkwardly in love. She explains Nazi theory to him–the uses of the rubber blackjack, the virtues of *lebensraum*, the return of German colonies. And here let me quote from Wilder's long-lost treatment itself, which I unearthed in my research: "But she really warmed up when she started on the holy mission of the Nazi empire to save the world from the Russian plague. The moon had risen nicely and Josh gave out with a swell impersonation of Chamberlain and Donald Duck. In return, she recited for him the second chorus of the Horst Wessel song. They had a good time." *Heil, Darling* would have been a very, very strange comedy.

In 1942, having directed his first picture, a screwball comedy called *The Major and the Minor*, Wilder took on the war directly when made a ripped-from-the-headlines combat film called *Five Graves to Cairo*. He and his screenwriting collaborator Charles Brackett began sketching *Five Graves to Cairo* at a time when the outcome of the battle for North Africa was still in doubt. The Nazis and their Italian Fascist allies were storming across the Egyptian desert in the spring and summer of 1942. The British troops trying to hold the territory were getting pounded by German and Italian troops led by Erwin Rommel, a brilliant military strategist who sometimes took orders badly and thus stood in constant danger of proving his superiors wrong–rather like Mr. Wilder himself in that regard.

In late May of 1942, Rommel's Afrika Korps, consisting of two armored divisions and one motorized infantry division, together with eight Italian divisions, rolled across the desert and successfully repelled the British. Tobruk fell on June 21. Rommel was soon at El Alamein, only sixty-five miles from Alexandria, poised for the total seizure of Egypt. The consequences for the Allies were dire. From Egypt, Rommel could advance unimpeded through the Middle East and the Caucasus and meet the German armies on the Eastern Front for a vast offensive into Russia. It was at this pivotal moment that Hitler awarded Rommel the title of "field marshal." Even the Allies couldn't help but marvel at the Desert Fox's skills, and he became a kind of dastardly folk-anti-hero in the American press.

But in June, Rommel's imminent triumph began to fade under the onslaught of American and British fighter planes. At the end of August, Rommel launched a last offensive against El Alamein, but his troops hadn't the strength they once did, and Hitler continued to allocate most of the Nazis' military resources toward the capture of Stalingrad. By late

October, the British Royal Air Force controlled the skies over Egypt, and the Nazis' battle for El Alamein was lost. Rommel attempted a full retreat, but Hitler himself ordered the field marshal to hold fast. In the beginning of November, Rommel risked court-martial by disobeying the Fuehrer's direct order: he withdrew his troops seven hundred miles to a position behind the Libyan port of Benghazi. This retreat marked the Allies' most decisive victory in the war to date.

On Tuesday, November, 3, 1942, while Field Marshal Rommel was still in the act of retreating from his positions in the sands of North Africa, Billy Wilder took the 9:45 Sunset Ltd. from Los Angeles to Yuma, Arizona, the closest town to where the first location shooting for *Five Graves to Cairo* was scheduled to commence later that week. Imagine, if you will, the way this film's opening sequence might have looked in a brand new 35mm print:

In the endless desert sands, a dead body hangs out of a lone tank's turret, its head thrown grotesquely back, one of its arms hanging lifeless to the side. The camera stares for a moment before another dissolve leads to a closer shot of the corpse, its eyes fixed and open and pointing to the sky in a death stare. At this point Wilder cuts to a shot of the dead man's feet swinging helplessly inside the tank. As the sequence continues, the tank's dead driver lurches back in his seat as the tank heads up the side of another sand dune. When it reaches the crest and tips down the other side, the cadaver falls forward again, slamming against the steering mechanisms. This is an exceptionally morbid opening sequence–especially for a contemporary war film.

Wilder introduces his hero as an inadvertent survivor, a man who finds himself alive without reason. And still, the sequence is so breathtakingly beautiful that the art actually threatens to overwhelm the revelation of character, a rarity in Wilder's career. These are shots of extraordinary, luminous despair: a man staggers into consciousness, climbs halfway out the turret, passes out in the brilliant sun, is hurled from the tank when the vehicle tips over the crest of a dune, and snaps back into consciousness just in time to see the tank rolling away, leaving him alone in the scorching desert. Only in this moment of utter futility does Wilder give his character an identity.

Let's fast-forward now to the spring of 1945. On April 30, with the Red Army advancing into the heart of Berlin, Adolf Hitler ended the war–not to mention his life–by shooting himself through the roof of his mouth. He left instructions for his body to be incinerated–orders spe-

cifically designed to deny the Soviets the pleasure of mutilating it. One week later, when the Red Army finished pounding through what remained of the streets of Berlin, Germany officially surrendered. By that point Wilder had already left Los Angeles on his way back home. The U.S. Army had hired him to help in its de-Nazification program as well as to supervise filmmaking activities in occupied Germany.

According to Billy, a world-class storyteller, he was made a colonel. He was in New York on VE day (May 8), he says, where he reported to a paper-pushing functionary who became annoyed at Wilder's sudden appointment to the rank of colonel and demanded to know how much he was earning as a civilian. $2,500, Wilder began to reply, whereupon the foul-tempered official berated him for taking a huge pay increase–all the way up to $6,500 per year, though of course he wouldn't be working that long. No, Billy broke in, he had been earning $2,500 *per week*. The idiocy of bureaucrats is always a pleasant topic of conversation and story telling, but there is something wrong with this particular anecdote. Billy may have been paid and billeted at a colonel's rank, but Army documents inevitably refer to him as Mr. Wilder, not Col. Wilder. And, perhaps needless to say, rank is everything in the military.

Whatever his role with the Army was, one of Mr. Wilder's tasks was supposed to be the direction of a documentary about the death camps. As early as the summer of 1942, American, British, French, and Russian intelligence officers knew that the Nazis were systematically killing the Jews of Europe. It was nevertheless a shock to most of the world to discover that fact in the spring of 1945. Once Allied cameramen began recording the barbaric physical realities of each of the death camps as they were liberated by Allied soldiers, it required no more proof. They filmed the crematoria and the ash piles. They filmed skeletal corpses, piles of shoes, lampshades made of human skin. They took motion pictures of mass burial pits, ovens made to burn vast numbers of people, dead babies, bones. Inhuman horror, previously unimaginable in scale, was recorded on celluloid. They shipped some of this footage to London, where it was waiting for Wilder upon his arrival there.

He began viewing this footage in London in mid-May, and he continued viewing it during the weeks the Army kept him waiting for his eventual posting in Germany. Whatever else he did in Europe, Billy wanted to use this footage as the basis of a documentary. He wanted to show Austria and Germany, and the world, what the Austrians and the Germans had done; they were his countrymen, after all. And these particu-

larly horrifying images for Billy Wilder because he knew that his mother's and grandmother's bodies might well have been in those acres of twisted, grimacing corpses. Every new frame of raw footage he saw thus held the potential of revealing his mother's fate. Every corpse might have been hers, but no corpse actually was. And I believe that since she did not appear in any image, each new frame of film led to an accumulating sense of failure and despair and guilt.

Because Wilder knew his way around the German film and theater communities, he was particularly qualified to oversee the Army's de-Nazification program as it involved the entertainment industry. At the U.S. Army camp at Bad Homberg, Wilder and others supervised the interviewing of former Nazis to determine, in the critic David Freeman's turn of phrase, "which ones were the least undesirable." Wilder knew or knew of many of these actors, directors, and other personnel. He remembered some personally and had heard about the exploits of others from fellow émigrés. One of the men Wilder interviewed was the actor Werner Krauss, known for his knack for doing horrible Jew impersonations in Nazi films. Anton Lang was another. Before the war, Lang had played the role of Christ in the Oberammergau Passion play. By the late '30s he'd removed his stigmata and joined the S.S. The Oberammergau's director asked Billy to re-certify Lang, who hoped to be able to dust off his cross and return to Golgotha. Wilder told him yes, Lang could act again, but only on one condition: "that in the Crucifixion scene you use real nails."

The documentary about the death camps did get made, but not by Billy. The production history of *Todesmullen*, which translates as *Death Mills*, is necessarily murky; there were too many people and too much footage involved–and, frankly, too many governments and military officers. The Allies recorded and collected at least 600,000 feet of film taken by American, French, British, and Soviet correspondents, newsreel photographers, and cameramen. By December, 1945, six separate versions of *Death Mills* had been assembled in various locations. Wilder did work on at least one of these versions, but his was not the one that was finally released. At the end of June, 1945, General McClure expressed his eagerness to see *Death Mills* completed, but–and please forgive me for this snide remark–for reasons that only someone attuned to military logic could ever comprehend, McClure remained convinced that Wilder's time and expertise were better spent on other activities for the Film section–managerial activities unrelated to filmmaking. The comple-

tion of *Death Mills* was once again postponed. Handed one of the world's leading film directors, a man supremely capable of making a stinging anti-Nazi film specifically for a German audience, the United States Army put him to work pushing paper.

What he did accomplish was some pre-production work on a romantic comedy he wanted to make–it would be set in that most romantic of locations–bombed-out Berlin. He finally got to film it in 1948; Wilder and his Paramount crew were among the first filmmakers allowed in to occupied Berlin–or what was left of it. The film opens with a Congressional delegation flying over bombed-out Berlin on a fact-finding mission. "Look at it," one of the Congressmen says–"like pack rats been gnawing at a hunk of old moldy Roquefort cheese." This, after all, had been Billy's home for seven years.

A Foreign Affair concerns the appropriately named Congresswoman Frost (Jean Arthur), who is sent on a moral mission: as she puts it, "12,000 of our boys are policing that pesthole down below . . . and they are being infected by a kind of moral malaria!" "Fumigate the place!" she demands.

But curiously, Wilder is clearly on the side of the moral malaria. His protagonist, an American soldier, is having an affair with none other than Marlene Dietrich, who is playing a sort of glorified Nazi whore. In one sequence, he successfully trades a homemade cake, brought to him from back home in the States by Congresswoman Frost, for a crummy and decidedly used mattress, which he intends to give to the whore. A fine, cynical Wilder touch is the tune on the soundtrack as our soldier rides through the horrifying piles of ash, stone, and rubble that constituted the heart of Berlin after the war: it's that great old chestnut, "Isn't It Romantic?"

It's important to stress that Marlene Dietrich herself was no Nazi. She was, in fact, an ardent anti-Nazi who worked very very hard to get refugees out of Germany and to support the troops–in any number of ways. She was also a close friend of Billy's. But onscreen in *A Foreign Affair*, she's a Nazi–and Wilder finds her particularly alluring as such. This is where Billy Wilder's World War II starts to get really perverse. In the end, of course, our Johnny ends up in love with Congresswoman Frost–Hollywood convention compels him to. But Marlene, clearly, is where the real action is.

In retrospect, then, one realizes that Wilder treated Rommel in *Five Graves to Cairo* in a very similar way. Franchot Tone is appealing enough as J. J. Bramble, the film's hero, but the truly intriguing character, the

one with pizzazz, is Rommel, especially as embodied by the great Erich von Stroheim. It's Rommel to whom Wilder most strongly responds; it's the dynamic German anti-hero, not the Allied soldier, who commands his respect.

It seems to me that Billy Wilder has long seen himself as a cynical, one might even say despicable opportunist, and he has tended to create any number of onscreen surrogates in this regard. His films are littered with sell-outs, hustlers, whores, and pimps. In *A Foreign Affair*, Marlene sings a song about hawking her wares on the black market. Look at the lyrics: it's a song about trading. There are no morals; it's all about selling out to the highest bidder. Wilder, having himself lived in Hollywood for almost fifteen years at that point, knows precisely what she's talking about. Referring to the fact that the black market sets no limits on the prices one can get for things, Marlene sings, "No ceilings, no feelings–a very smooth routine."

Let's fast forward again–this time to 1953, when Billy made his second film set during the war itself–a comedy about a Nazi prisoner of war camp in Austria. Yes, you read that correctly: it's a comedy about a group of Americans stuck in a squalid prisoner of war camp in Austria, and it's called *Stalag 17*. (It was the precursor to the Sixties TV show *Hogan's Heroes*.) The hero of *Stalag 17* is played by William Holden, and he is–guess what?–a cynical opportunist, not a hero at all, but rather somebody who trades with the enemy. There's a group of American soldiers–disparate ethnic types, just like in *Saving Private Ryan*, only these guys are stuck in a Nazi prisoner of war camp. Wilder does present images of bravery and heroism in the form of two men trying to escape from the camp, but he concentrates his attention and imagination on anti-heroism in the form of Sefton, the William Holden character. Like so many Wilder protagonists, Sefton is a man who sells out to the highest bidder. He's cold, calculating, cynical–a total realist and pragmatist who sees through everything and everybody and cares only about saving his own skin and, hopefully, making a little money–or in this case cigarettes–on the side.

"Did you calculate the risk?," asks Sefton at one point. That's a key line for Wilder, who inevitably calculated the risks on every transaction he ever conducted. Notice how hard-bitten Sefton is here: not only does he bet against his own comrades, but he offers to double the bet for anybody who doesn't believe the guys are really dead. He might feel a

little bad for the two dead guys–you can see it on his face–but that doesn't stop him from taking all the cigarettes when he wins.

Through the course of this film, Sefton does develop a certain strain of heroism, almost against his own will, when he discovers the identity of the Nazi spy living in the barracks and posing as an American POW. He then offers to take on the dangerous mission of escaping from the camp in order to escort a genuine hero to safety. Contrast Wilder's vision of military heroism to Steven Spielberg's in *Saving Private Ryan*. There, the Tom Hanks character behaves admirably, honorably, and heroically, despite his personal misgivings about the nature of his mission. There is no doubt that he's a great leader of men, and we respect him for it; we particularly respect him at the end of the film for his bravery. As the German tank advances on him, he doesn't give up–he keeps firing his pistol. His persistence itself is heroic. And, of course, in his dying breath he gives Private Ryan a piece of moral wisdom–one which Spielberg certainly invites us to endorse.

Consider in contrast the parting words Billy Wilder gives to *his* hero. Sefton remains a cynical smart-ass to the end. He makes it clear that he's performing his heroic mission–to help another prisoner escape–as much to save his own skin as for any patriotic reasons. He remains, to a great measure, only out for himself. He begins by telling the very likable guy who has asked about how to get into the Russian women's compound (a task Sefton has already achieved), "Tell you what to do–get yourself a hundred cigarettes for the kraut guards, then get yourself another face." His final, nasty words to his mates became infamous in the 1950s–exemplary of Billy Wilder's cruel selfishness and cynicism: "Just one more word–if I ever run into you bums on the street corner, just let's pretend we never met before." He disappears down the tunnel, pops his head back out and gives a sarcastic little salute, a final *screw you*, and leaves.

Now, I read the ending of *Saving Private Ryan* as being a great deal more conflicted than it's generally given credit for being, but even *I* have to admit that there's a level of sentimentality there along with the ambiguity. Specifically, I think Tom Hanks' advice to Matt Damon ("Earn it") is more a curse than an uplifting morale, and I think that the tragic expression on the elderly Ryan's face in the framing segment indicates that he's not at all convinced that his life was really worth saving in the end. Still, Hanks' advice to him is a sentiment I think we can all endorse:

Earn it. Make the saving of your life mean something. Again, consider in contrast Sefton's parting shot: "If I ever run into you bums on the street corner, just let's pretend we never met before." I suspect that if Steven Spielberg had ended his film on such an overtly sour note, it would never have been the blockbuster it ultimately became.

One can only imagine, then, what Billy Wilder would have done with *Schindler's List*. Who can really say what a work of art would have been like if it had been made by someone else? I suspect, though, it would have lacked some of Spielberg's sentimentality; I suspect it would have been a harder-edged film; I suspect it wouldn't have been such a big hit. I could be wrong. Wilder himself adored *Schindler's List*. But judging by Billy Wilder's World War II as represented in *Five Graves to Cairo*, *A Foreign Affair*, and *Stalag 17*, and judging also by Wilder's entire career, it would likely have been a great deal more conflicted–a lot more attuned to the director's own feelings of complicity–a lot more personally guilt-ridden–and, yes, to me anyway, a whole lot more interesting.

Ed Sikov is the author of *On Sunset Boulevard: The Life and Times of Billy Wilder*, which was recently selected as a "Notable Book of 1999" by the editors of *The New York Times Book Review*.

Will Harris

Remembering Heaven's Face: An Interview with John Balaban

John Balaban is the author of ten books of poetry and prose, including four volumes which together have won The Academy of American Poets' Lamont prize (*After Our War,* 1974), a National Poetry Series Selection (*Words for My Daughter,* 1991), and two nominations for the National Book Award (*After Our War,* 1974, and *Locusts at the Edge of Summer: New and Selected Poems,* 1997). His *Locusts at the Edge of Summer: New and Selected Poems* won the 1998 William Carlos Williams Award from the Poetry Society of America.

In addition to writing poetry, fiction, and nonfiction, he is a translator of Vietnamese poetry, and a past president of the American Literary Translators Association (1995-1997). Perhaps his crowning achievement in this capacity was to transcribe some 500 poems from the oral Vietnamese folk tradition known as *ca dao.* Most of these poems had never been written in Vietnamese, let alone translated for a Western audience.

His books on Vietnam include *Ca Dao Vietnam: A Bilingual Anthology of Vietnamese Folk Poetry* 1980; *Vietnam: The Land We Never Knew* (with the photographer, Geoffrey Clifford), 1989; *Remembering Heaven's Face*, 1992, a memoir; and *Vietnam: A Traveler's Literary Companion*, 1996, which he co-edited with Nguyen Qui Duc. In 2000, Copper Canyon Press will publish his *Spring Essence: The Poetry of Ho Xuan Huong*. Balaban is currently Professor of English at the University of Miami.

This interview was conducted by email over a one-week period, the last week on June 1999. I caught John Balaban between a return from a one-month trip to Romania, and an engagement with the Port Townsend Writers Conference in Washington. In view of his time crunch, he was most gracious to focus on my persistent questions and to give very heart-

felt responses. What I found most absorbing about our discussion was his refusal to embrace the easy, all-resolving answer. What may seem the essence of contradiction is in fact, I believe, a profound sort of moral courage.

Harris: Let me begin with a personal anecdote that leads into a question. I attended a poetry workshop with Reg Saner a few years back. And I'd also developed a correspondence with the poet Keith Wilson, before I lost contact when I attended graduate school, then had a military assignment to Saudi Arabia during "the bombing season" a few years back. Anyway, through those conversations, poetry exchanges and letters, I never knew until the **WLA** issue a few printings back that both these men were considered "Korean War poets"—I was acquainted with altogether different works of theirs. So my lead question is do you consider yourself a "Vietnam" writer, or a writer who has been very interested in the Vietnam War at times in your past?

Balaban: Well, in a not-too-exaggerated sense, I am a writer who grew up in Vietnam. I went there at 23, opposed to the war, a conscientious objector who volunteered to do alternative service first as a linguistics teacher at a Vietnamese university (through the International Voluntary Services) and then, after the University got bombed and I was wounded in the city's siege at Tet, 1968, as the Field Representative for the Committee of Responsibility to Save War-Injured Children. I could have sat out the war at Harvard where, as a graduate student, I had started to publish both poetry and scholarship (an article on the Middle Scots poet, Blind Harry). But the moral agitation on campuses in 1967 obliged me, it seems in retrospect, to volunteer. So, like a lot of Americans, I came of age in Vietnam.

Harris: I had an opportunity to teach our department's "Literature of War" class this past Spring, and was pleasantly surprised to discover that a significant number of my students—I'd guess at least a third of my 30 or so students—had already read some aspect of your work, most frequently *Remembering Heaven's Face.* And it was very clear to me from the way they mentioned you in class that they held you as the moral standard by which to judge our actions in the Vietnam War. Whether they agreed or disagreed with you, they felt your work raised essential questions that any military member must consider when thinking about the Vietnam War.

Balaban: Good to hear. Anyway, it's not agreement but the taking of individual responsibility that is important. In the way the military academies now encourage questioning and individual responsibility, it's clear some lessons were learned from our failures in Vietnam. When my memoir came out, I was surprised by how many combat veterans wrote to say they liked the book, although some, like your students, had their disagreements. I even heard from no less than three CIA agents who worked in Vietnam. All this is a pleasant surprise and instruction for me.

Harris: How do you feel about being held as a moral standard by fledgling members of the very service you found most morally at fault in the Vietnam War?

Balaban: I don't really think that they take *me* as a moral example. I think that I may have made the place and its circumstances come alive for them so that they could see a young man about their age, placed in warfare and trying, as best he could, to make moral judgments. Military academy cadets are bright young men and women and they should be drawn to problems of personal accountability. The *Tao Te Ching* tells us that "the sword is a cursed thing." The best soldiers know that.

Harris: Almost every review of your work emphasizes your conscientious objector status, and your in-country service during the war. But I found myself repeatedly encountering the "you" in *Remembering Heaven's Face* as the man some twenty years later, looking back upon the stances and happenstance of your youth, and ultimately reevaluating your status. I don't think you question the rightness of your choice to oppose the killing in this instance of war. But I think your memoir contains this agonized weighing of situational choices versus ultimate outcomes, ethical choices made within morally uncertain circumstances. For instance, when you take the gun and grenades to resist being killed as your friend Gitelson was, or when you stand guard at the field hospital during the Tet Offensive, or when you battle with the street punks rather than turn away. You praise your CIA friend Richard's ethical clarity on the one hand. You lambaste the majority of ineffectual do-gooder organizations on the other hand. Perhaps the larger questions inherent in the seeming inconsistency between acts and stances still aren't fully resolved by the end of the memoir—to your credit, I think.

Balaban: Well, I am not sure how to answer the question. Weighing ethical choices made within morally *clear* circumstances isn't much of a

task. When I went to Vietnam, things seemed simple, black-and-white. As I learned more, things got more complex. This does not change the simple truth for me about the wrongness of the war and its misuse of our military. Then, I might have seen the military as a force of evil; I don't anymore. Today, I think I would trust the testimony of an average soldier, more than the testimony of an average academic.

But to go back to this issue of re-evaluation: The moral questioner doesn't pre-select his evidence, or keep his or her replies prepared and tucked away, all typed-up in a hip pocket. You play it as it lies. This doesn't mean you become an ethical chameleon. Recently I gave a poetry reading in Berkeley. The war in Kosovo was under way and a woman in her 30's who had read *Remembering Heaven's Face* came up to me and said how much she admired the book and what did I think of the war in Kosovo. I said I was for the bombing and I think she was disturbed by my response, but I don't see the problem, or an inconsistency. I am against the slaughter of innocents which warfare always brings. But, given the failure of American foreign policy to avert the crisis, what was one to do? Stand by and witness the ethnic cleansing of Kosovars, or bomb to stop it as well as the future bloody plans of Milosovic? Difficult moral choice comes when you have to choose between two evils, not between good and evil. I suppose I was never the kind of absolutist conscientious objector that one admires so much among the Quakers. Sometimes the sword, although "a cursed thing," saves us from greater evils.

Harris: Some of your "background" and transitional paragraphs have a startling, compact clarity. One instance I can readily recall is when a South Vietnamese truck full of soldiers and their wives and children passes you, "hurtling along the bumpy road to a base camp somewhere off in the nowhere, to be mortared by the Viet Cong." In the introductory passages describing your move to Can Tho, you capture how the advent of Free Fire Zones in the surrounding countryside will inevitably destroy the farmers' and villagers' lives. I think passages like these led my students to compare you with Tim O'Brien—the seeming frustration, or absence, of moral outcome. Yet they recognize in your voice, as opposed to his, a "clearly stated moral intent," and tend to fix on that.

To try to crystallize the implied student question—do you see your own memoir and poetry as a "voice of moral intent," and do you see that voice as distinct from the background of Vietnam War literature to which yours is being compared?

Balaban: Sir Philip Sydney, at the beginning of the English Renaissance when many of our modern views of individuality and selfhood were formed, says, "virtuous knowledge results in human action." This must be a derivation from Aristotle's injunction to judge a person (or a dramatic character) by what he or she says and does. The moral effect of a writer like Tim O'Brien comes through making the scene so alive you think you are there, making the character so real, you think you have met him. Once, the fictional or aesthetic aims are realized, the moral aims are realized too. This is why *The Things They Carried* is so powerful. Some years ago in *The New York Review of Books,* Milan Kundera (in response to a stupid book by John Gardner entitled *On Moral Fiction*) said that fiction is immoral only when it fails to tell us something new about the human condition. A well-made story or poem is moral in itself, in its true making lies a moral gesture.

Harris: I have another background question—this one of a more political nature. Early in your memoir, you mention that you can't "fathom how values like freedom, justice, and individual dignity—values that I had fixed as universals in my young American mind—could mean anything" among the mass of Vietnamese peasants who had no direct experience of or concern with democracy. Yet by the book's end, you clearly suggest that "regulated freedom" and unity under Communism—presumably a reflection of the people's will—may be insufficient as well.

Do you have any ideas of what sort of system might conform to the Vietnamese people? Do you see a fundamental error in the American mandate to "make the world safe for democracy" (a more euphemistic way or saying spread American-style democracy and capitalism, "by any means necessary," throughout the world)?

Balaban: Freedom, justice, individual dignity must be important to everybody on the planet. The sentence you partly quote comes early in the book, I think, when I was describing the culture shock in my first glimpse of huge numbers of people in British Hong Kong and South Vietnam. As a young American who had never traveled much of anywhere, these prospects of peasant culture made no sense to me. Later I learned that Vietnamese have been debating their rules of society for thousands of years. Recently in Vietnam, General Tran Do, a hero of the war, declared Communism a dead end, and was kicked out of the Party. Let's leave it to the Vietnamese, and to other peoples, to decide their own forms of government and society. American crusades are smug and dangerous. If we offer a valuable model, we shouldn't have to hard sell it.

Harris: It seems to me that race is an inevitable subtext of most Vietnam writings. Yet you're one of the few popular writers I can think of to openly address this issue. One usually sees justifications such as "our buddy/buddies got killed, so we leveled the village." Or race is obliquely considered through My Lai-like cases, but the focus in on the moral horror that American soldiers could do such things, rather than on the policies such as Free Fire Zones that ultimately encouraged such massacres. In introducing the subject of evacuations of children injured in the war, you also include those breath-catching figures I'd not seen elsewhere in print—those Department of Defense estimates that we were conservatively producing 100,000 civilian casualties a year in that War, 60% of whom were children. Do you think our "racial intelligence" has improved since the Vietnam War, or do you think we still tend to respond to difference in other cultures through ignorance and even violence?

Balaban: There are over 200 million speakers of Arabic in the world. Do you think Americans have much of a sense of what they are thinking, or why? There are 76 million Vietnamese, more than the populations of England, Ireland, Scotland, Wales, and Canada thrown together. Isn't it the obligation of great empires (ours being one at the moment) to know the rest of the world? Isn't it risky not to? In the 9th century, when the Chinese T'ang empire extended its reach as far as the Caspian Sea, it also brought to its capital Nestorian Christians, Jews, Jains, Hindus, Zoroastrians, Moslems, etc., because China knew it needed to know the rest of the world. So, yes, I do think "we" are generally wiser about the rest of the world than, say, 30 years ago, but that's not saying much. Our characteristic American inability to speak foreign languages, the general indifference among American publishers to publish translations from contemporary foreign literatures, the dumb-and-dumber force of television and the Internet on the young, the general illiteracy with anything longer than 500 words, are all among the many factors which, at our peril, isolate Americans from the rest of the world. And so, we stumble forth blindly and sometimes with unforgivable violence.

Harris: One of the things that amazes me about discussions of the Vietnam War is that whenever we speak of what we may have learned as a consequence, even pundits from the general public lapse into "militarese." We immediately begin an abbreviated, outlined "lessons learned" discussion that centers on how much more effectively we've

learned to deploy force, support that force logistically, and rally the hearts and minds of our own people as well as the "host nation" around our use of force. What NON-MILITARY lessons do you think we should have—or perhaps did—learn from the Vietnam debacle?

Balaban: If we had known anything about Vietnamese history, we would have been aware of their 1000-year struggle for independence from Chinese domination. This would have ameliorated our Cold War fears of long term Chinese/Russian influence in Vietnam, and it might have set us in a different direction with the Vietnamese at the end of WWII. Was Ho Chi Minh more a nationalist than a communist? I suspect the former, as did the American OSS officers who worked with him to fight the Japanese in Indochina. So, let's suppose that this is true. Then, the whole war might have been avoided. We might have had an ally in Southeast Asia instead of an enemy, as well as the destruction of millions of lives, and the setting of the world against "American imperialism." Our blunder in Vietnam gave added years to communism in the Soviet Union and elsewhere. So, to go back to my earlier suggestion, we need to learn the histories and literatures of other cultures. We need to understand their aspirations and struggles. Learning these things of course is also a lot of fun. Whole worlds open up. One's own world opens up by comparison.

Harris: Early in your memoir, you mentioned being motivated to action by "a sense of injustice," and the realization "of another, possible society." Could you expand upon what you meant then by that better America? And in the twenty-five or so years since you first had that dream, do you think we've approached that goal, or are we receding from it?

Balaban: I must have been thinking of Lyndon Johnson's Great Society. Instead of putting our national treasure into a better, more equal America, he squandered it in Vietnam. Something like 500 billion dollars simply lost because Johnson had to pay for the war, but did not dare raise taxes to pay for it. And the bill, of course, keeps adding up in the annual costs of caring for soldiers after the war. Huge tragedy. I think Johnson really had a great vision for America. And squandered it.

Harris: You capture a bit of anecdotal history that I'm very interested in having you elaborate, if possible. You refer quite matter-of-factly to virtual communities of black AWOL soldiers throughout your book.

Can you say a bit more about your "common knowledge" of these areas and communities, since their mention is fairly unique to your book? I discovered a similar situation with some African American expatriates in Saudi, to my great surprise.

Balaban: There were black G.I.s who went AWOL, lived with Vietnamese women, had large families, and often had enterprises behind locked gates. I remember one restaurant/whore house that served "soul food." Long after the war, I asked a Vietnamese General if he knew what happened to these men because it was clear they had cut all ties to the U.S. and weren't coming home. This was General Tran Kinh Chi, now retired. He said that indeed they were very hard to extricate but that they were all put on planes out of Saigon and deposited in Bangkok. Beyond that, he didn't know what happened to them. One wonders what happened to their Vietnamese families.

Harris: I think I've nearly "questioned you out" on *Remembering Heaven's Face.* But I'll ask you a few more questions, mostly dealing with differences in cultures, before moving on to some of your other works.

The first is about your visit to Hanoi in the late 1980s. When you mentioned that you had no fear of moving down Hanoi's streets alone as a Westerner, I had this shock of recognition. Even in the midst of "the bombing season" in Saudi Arabia, I had the overriding sense as I walked the streets of Riyadh in civilian attire that I was actually safer there than I would be walking the streets of Houston, Chicago, New York, Washington DC. I guess my question is WHY IS THAT SO? Why is it that our idealism and democracy can produce such unsafe environments, while we can experience such ease of soul and safety in "foreign," and even presumably hostile, cities?

Balaban: Beats me, but we are violent sons of bitches. Cormac McCarthy is the guy to read on this, especially *Blood Meridian*.

Harris: You contrast America's inability to get over the Vietnam War, with Vietnam's own success at putting the War in its past and getting on with its progress. Do you think you can put your finger on why we have such a problem "getting over it," while the Vietnamese apparently don't have as much of a problem?

Balaban: They fought for their independence. Why would they have a hard time getting over that? We killed over 1 million North Vietnamese

and Viet Cong soldiers and perhaps 2 million civilians (North and South, men, women, and children) and we lost nearly 60,000 Americans. What did *we* fight for? Harder to get over. Furthermore, it was our longest war. And we lost. They won. Beyond that, there are the simple facts that for us Vietnam is a war; for them, it's their country with a long history. Over half of the 76 million Vietnamese alive today were born after the war. They have other things to worry about.

Harris: From your work preserving the *ca dao* folk poetry from war eradication to your return to address the Institute of Literature in Hanoi some twenty years later, your literary efforts are infused with the underlying belief that poetry has moral and political force, precisely because it has cultural significance. And yet you point out Philip Freneau's death as a pauper, and your "recent look into the [Vietnam] Institute's card catalogue, where the only American entries are John Steinbeck, Jack London, Mario Puzo, and assorted mysteries left behind" after our evacuation of the country. Given these circumstances—our country that still gives scant attention to its poets, and a recognition of more "transfer value" in American fiction than American poetry—how does American poetry function as a moral and political force?

Balaban: *Somehow.* Like everybody else, I can't read most of it, but when I find something brilliant, it seems like it's all that counts. Just recently I have been knocked out by a reissue of Carolyn Kizer's first book of poetry, *The Ungrateful Garden* and an odd, highly original book that I haven't made up my mind about: Arthur Sze's *The Redshifting Web.* Two years ago, I heard W.S. Merwin read his update of William Dunbar's "Lament for the Makers" and then last year I heard Robert Fagles read in Greek and in English a passage from Homer's *Odyssey.* In moments like that, all the indifference to poetry is meaningless, all the bad poetry is forgotten.

Harris: You point out that the Institute of Literature in Hanoi was formerly the Temple of Literature, where gifted men from all social classes were trained with the intent of becoming mandarins, or provincial governors. You also note that this tradition continued until 1919.

Balaban: Anyone interested in the values of the Vietnamese mandarinate should read a new book, a memoir of her family by Duong Van Mai Elliott entitled *The Sacred Willow* which I reviewed for the *Washington Post Book World.*

Harris: This approach to governing is obviously a radical departure from our own, which has become largely "class-ist," technocratic, and business managerial. Are these differences merely cultural, or do you think there's an abiding advantage to expecting our governors to be humanists? I have to admit that being an American, a soldier, and (currently, at least) a skeptical academic, I find my own question to seem almost ridiculous—a continuation of the "Why we need the arts and the National Endowment for Arts" morass. Still, I think it's important to raise the issue for a militarily oriented audience.

Balaban: Actually, Thomas Jefferson was aware of this system of selecting civil servants through examination in the Classics and advocated it for Americans. Besides creating a civil service imbued with humanistic values, it created a civil service free from class privilege because anyone, no matter how humble, could rise to the top of Vietnamese governmental affairs according to how well he placed in the Imperial exams. To the degree that contemporary Vietnam has departed from this in favor of Communist pedigree, *nomenclatura,* its management has suffered.

Harris: I'll transition into other concerns with a mention of the poet you introduce at the end of *Remembering Heaven's Face,* Ho Xuan Huong. Do you intend to produce a full volume of her translated poetry, or will you continue to include selected translations of particular poems in your own volumes of poetry?

Balaban: After ten years of trying, I have indeed finished a book of translations of Ho Xuan Huong, complete with an introduction describing her work and amazing life, endnotes on each poem, and a "tri-graphic" text, i.e. poems in contemporary written Vietnamese, my English translations, and also the *Nom* calligraphic writing system that she wrote in. Through some miraculous help from Vietnamese linguists, mathematicians, and computer experts, this will be the first time *Nom* has ever been printed—even in Vietnam it was published either by woodblock or by hand. The book will appear in the fall of 2000 from Copper Canyon Press, one of the last two presses in the U.S. to publish only poetry.

As an offshoot of this project, I am helping to start a foundation to preserve the 1000-year literature in *Nom* that is in danger of extinction. We will be calling ourselves the Vietnamese Nom Preservation Foundation and will be a tax-deductible charity. Look for us on the Internet.

Harris: Both Carolyn Forché and Keith Wilson mentioned to me years ago that winning a major poetry prize, or even getting a book of poetry seriously considered by a major press, took more than simply writing enough good poems to fill a text. Both poets said you have to have some unifying and relevant theme to ultimately hold the poems together (even if loosely) and attract a reading audience. Both also mentioned that you have to be a good reader of the prospective editor's publications. As a winner of both the Lamont Poetry Selection (*After Our War,* 1974) and the National Poetry Series (*Words for My Daughter,* 1991), do you have any additional suggestions for prospective poets?

Balaban: I've also won the William Carlos Williams Award and two nominations for the National Book Award, but I can't say that it's changed my life much. I keep thinking that if I won some real money, I could write more, both translations and my own writing: for instance, a novel I have started, set in Romania, and a book of poetry based, but not overtly, on Buddhist precepts. As for prospective writers: forget awards; worry about the writing.

Harris: More than many writers I know, your poetry and prose are intimately entwined. Would you say that your poetry—which was published first—served as the impetus for your prose pieces such as *Remembering Heaven's Face*? Or that your collection of letter copies and journal entries, gathered with the intent to ultimately write a memoir, fed your poetry?

Balaban: I think genres have individual properties: they offer or deliver different insights. I kept learning from experiences in Vietnam by looking at them in poetry and, again, in prose. Once I wrote about the same event (the death of Steve Erhart) in poetry, fiction, and nonfiction, each time seeing something new that the obligations of the genre revealed, or so I'd like to think. Poetry might be powerful in imagery or rhythm, but it's not very effective with dialogue or plot, so the same remembered event, first addressed in poetry, might yield something different in prose.

Harris: When **WLA** editor Donald Anderson first asked me to interview you a year ago, I encountered your edited work *Vietnam: A Traveler's Literary Companion.* Yeah, yeah, I thought—since Balaban edited this work, I'll read the Foreword and move on. After reading the Foreword I thought, well, I'll read a couple of the stories. I was stunned by Thiep's

opening tale, "Salt of the Jungle," and read the first three stories before looking up. I was later struck by the aphoristic power of Ninh's "A River's Mystery," and realized how much I had missed by my general ignorance of Asian writers.

Balaban: Well, the same thing happened to me as I saw the stories come in. (This is what I mean about the surprise and delight of discovery of a foreign culture). Thiep is world class. He's like Borges, as I said in my introduction, and I was right that he had never heard of the Argentine master. This is Vietnam beyond the war: Vietnamese who are funny, Vietnamese who are sexy, Vietnamese who are alive in a brilliant universe.

Harris: I wonder whether you could say a little about how this collaborative effort with Vietnam writers developed.

Balaban: I just got asked by the publisher. My name comes up in regards to translating from Vietnamese. That's also how I ended up working with Geoffrey Clifford, the ex-chopper pilot who took those exquisite color photos for *Vietnam: The Land We Never Knew*, which, by the way, is going to reappear next as a traveling exhibit from the Smithsonian Institution.

Harris: In *After Our War*, you set numerous traditions side by side in comparison (or perhaps competition?)—medieval Christian, Confucian, Buddhist, Hindu, Greek heroic, Vietnamese oral. What did you want your reader to carry from this montage of cultural exposures?

Balaban: I'd hate to think of such references as comparison or even as montage. I revere the great literary traditions of the West and East Asia. Whatever allusion is there in my writing is there because it was a means of making sense. I didn't have a program of cultural contrasts.

Harris: *Words for My Daughter* brings us back to that opening question of whether you consider yourself as a Vietnam writer, or a writer still interested in your Vietnam experience. Only five poems, I think, directly mention the War ("Words for My Daughter," "Thoughts Before Dawn," "For the Missing in Action," "The Water Buffalo," and "Mr. Giai's Poem"). I guess we could add your two Huong translations ("Tavern by a Mountain Stream," and "Spring-Watch Pavilion") as indirect Vietnam poems. But arguably the whole movement of the book—the need to travel the "desert wastes" ("Peyote Villanelle") of the American

West in order to find "Moments . . . that . . . you can love this country" ("Passing Through Albuquerque")—suggests a parallel journey into your own interior, to address the remaining wastes of the Vietnam War. Is this an "overread" on my part, or would you say that post-Vietnam spiritual and cultural reconnection are the underlying themes of this book?

Balaban: Your reading is dead on. When I came back from Vietnam I hitchhiked all around the U.S.A. trying to see if it was home. I spent a lot of time totally alone in the high deserts of New Mexico: Bandelier Canyon, the Garapata Plateau, Cebolla Canyon, Albuquerque, Taos. The empty landscapes were great respites after the drone and bumper glare of the big highways where I had to talk and listen to inane and insane people just to get where I was going, which wasn't very clear anyway. I remember hitchhiking to Boulder, Colorado to see my friend John Steinbeck, IVth, now dead, and he was talking about post-traumatic stress syndrome, then a new phrase, and, sort-of thunderstruck, I asked him, "John, do you think *we* suffer from PTSD?" He looked at me like I was stupid, reminded me of my work in "the burned baby business,"—children burned by white phosphorous and napalm, their chins glued to their chests, children with their mouths blown off, children shredded by our cluster bombs—and said, "*C'mon*, Balaban," just as we nearly were run down by cyclists from the Red Zinger Rally.

Harris: In 1998 in **WLA** ("War, Poetry, and Ethics: A Symposium"), you mentioned that you discover the full depth of love, friendship and virtue in the midst of war—admittedly a partial paraphrase on my part. In *Words* I felt I encountered a maturation of those loves and friendships begun in the midst of war. For instance, you re-envision your relationship with Mary Bui Thi Khuy (*After Our War*, "For Mary Bui Thi Khuy, 1944-1969") in "Thoughts Before Dawn," especially in your last five lines of "Dawn"—a haunting recollection of "For Mary." And I read "Estuary" as a beautiful, more intimate revisiting of your earlier love poem to your wife (*After Our War*, "Having Discovered a Snail Shell, the Poet Presents It in the Metaphysical Manner"). Perhaps you'd like to say a bit more about these poems, or other re-envisionings that I didn't recognize. My central question here is an extension of both the poems and your comments at the 1998 War, Poetry and Ethics Symposium. I agree—and I think most soldiers would—that relationships formed within the press of war and prolonged deployment have an intensity perhaps unparalleled in a peaceful civilian environment. Do you think its possible

to hold that love without holding the trauma of war in which the relationships were formed? It seems to me that your re-envisioning may in part be attempting to do this, or at least arrive at some other suitable reconciliation with a painful shared past.

Balaban: The full quote is from Dante's *De Eloquentia Vulgari*: "The proper subjects for poetry are love, virtue, and war." My strongest friendships were formed in Vietnam: with John Steinbeck, Steve Erhart, David Gitelson, John and Alex Clarke. I've written poems for all of them; the first three, all dead, in *Locusts at the Edge of Summer.* For Alex and John, I wrote a marriage poem in *After Our War.* Clarke, a British surgeon, and Alex, a British nurse, cared for the children before we evacuated them to the United States for extended surgery and rehabilitation. War really lets you know who your friends are. Even if people are noncombatants, you can tell an awful lot about them by how they behave in the proximity of slaughter. This leaves one with a problem on returning home. I went from a war zone to a college campus. My academic colleagues, if you consider this, are mostly people who went from high school, or prep school, directly to graduate school and then to the classroom. The battles waged on the contemporary college campus are bizarre. As Dante suggests, where can love and virtue be tested more strongly than in warfare, where we see angels spring up and devils dance on our heads?

Harris: I think "Walking Down Cebolla Canyon" (*Words*) brings us full circle to the general issues we discussed earlier, about the possibilities of knowing what is "true" or "moral." It seems to me that you're saying these values don't exist in some objective form outside us, that we create them as we make our choices and experience their consequences.

Balaban: On the contrary, you could almost say that the exterior world, regarded by an open mind, is nothing but a moral instruction. This is why I have stayed a poet.

Will Harris, an associate professor of English at the United States Air Force Academy, edited the Academy's research journal *Discovery* for three years. He has published poetry and essays, with a forthcoming essay on the evolution of Zora Neale Hurston's literary style in *The Zora Neale Hurston Forum*.

Kathi A. Vosevich

Conversations with Joseph Heller

On December 9, 1997, I had the pleasure of interviewing Joseph Heller in New York. I tried to ask questions that teachers and students of Catch-22 *would find most helpful. In addition, because I had edited his 1986 interview at the United States Air Force Academy, I wanted to follow up on a couple of his responses to see the progression of his ideas.*

The first conversation was between Heller and me, with James H. Meredith recording. The second conversation transcribed here, which I edited with Heller's approval to complement the New York interview, occurred between Heller and a group of undergraduates at the United States Air Force Academy, Colorado Springs, Colorado, in 1986, during a commemoration of the 25th anniversary of Catch-22*'s publication. Both conversations appear in* Understanding the Literature of World War II, *compiled by James H. Meredith and published by Greenwood Press, 1999.*

From an Interview with Joseph Heller, New York City (1997)

Heller: You can ask me anything you want. I'll answer as honestly and thoroughly as I can. Go ahead.

Interviewer: The first question I hope you take as a compliment. My students always said that they could tell *Catch-22* was very carefully written. In fact, they used to say, "You can't read it fast," and I took that not as a complaint, but as evidence of their admiration. Was the book hard to write? What was your method of composition?

Heller: Everything I write is hard to write, including factual material. The method of composition was first to conceive the book, which hap-

pened very quickly. The idea of the book really, truly came to me overnight, and I wrote the first chapter the next morning. At that time and to this day, I write in longhand. And now I'm resigned to the fact that when I write in longhand, I can write for only one hour or two, and I hope to get the equivalent of one type-written page down at the first pass. I work on a lined pad—not legal-sized—letter-sized, and I try to get three hand-written pages done. I rewrite sentences. Then when I have a batch of these pages, for fear of losing them in a fire, I put them on the word processor, and I rewrite that. Then when I have a chapter done, I rewrite that chapter on the word processor, then I rewrite it again. It's very slow and tedious. I used to get infuriated with myself, and *Catch-22*, because I would work only evenings—I had other jobs and no time to write—but it was still the same thing. I would only write two or three pages a night. I would try to speed it up, and then write ten pages a week, then I wouldn't like it. I would have to rewrite, so it averaged to a page a night. Then when the book was done, *Catch-22* was about 60 or 80 pages too long, and I had to cut it.

Interviewer: I think it was in a *Playboy* interview you said you cut about 100 pages. And the interviewer said of what, and you said, "adjectives and adverbs."

Heller: Yeah, almost no incidents. There were two chapters that were cut—each of them was first published in *Playboy*. Neither one was a significant incident. The cutting was done at the suggestion of an editor. They interrupted—they were merely funny or satirical and not contributing to any flow of the action.

Interviewer: Do you write every day?

Heller: When I'm writing, I like to write every day. I've never had a compulsion to write. I'm easily distracted. I can stop to go out to dinner or go to the movies. That's always been true. What's happened since the second novel, *Something Happened*, I haven't had to work at anything, and I have days free. I am happiest when I'm writing, and I have something to focus on.

Interviewer: Are you working on the sequel to *Now and Then* [Heller's memoirs published in 1998]?

Heller: That's misleading. The reference to a sequel [in the memoirs] was intended to be jocular. I don't know what else to write that's worth writing about myself.

Interviewer: You said that writing isn't a compulsion or obsession for you (like it was for Hemingway who seemed obsessed by writing). Is it more of a business?

Heller: Well, I wanted to write this memoir. I had something to write about, I felt. I can't think of much I left out. I've not had an adventurous life, and certainly not since World War II, but that's known. There are very few adventurous experiences I've had. In my memoirs, I tried to deal with my experiences that are unknown and with my closest friendships.

Interviewer: Your friendships do come out in the book. Beside yourself, they are the stars of the book.

Heller: Yes, the fact that a lot of my friends are big celebrities, like Mel Brooks, isn't all that significant to me because they are great friends and that's all that matters.

Interviewer: I haven't seen you answer this question anywhere. Which writers do you think have been most influenced by you and which use you as their model?

Heller: I would not say that about any writer I know of. What did happen with *Catch-22* was a movement, in this country and in Europe, to change the traditional form of the novel. These writers were acting simultaneously, those in this group, without having contact with each other. Thomas Pynchon who was writing *V* at the time was one of those writers. Although we had the same editor, he did not know about me, and I did not know about him until after that book was published. Ken Kesey was another. I'm not sure I would influence anyone. The effect that *Catch-22* had was to make publishers bolder in bringing out unorthodox novels.

Interviewer: Did your teaching during your early professional years in Pennsylvania help or hinder your writing?

Heller: It neither helped nor hindered my writing. It was work. It was a job. I had to do something. I didn't write much when I was teaching. I wrote one short story in those days.

Interviewer: The next questions are more specific to *Catch-22*. One question my students ask constantly is what really happened to Dunbar?

Heller: I don't know.

Interviewer: You don't know?

Heller: I don't know, and I never thought about it. He's disappeared. People do disappear in the novel. Major de Coverly disappears. There was that theme of people just going out of existence.

Interviewer: In a 1986 interview at the United States Air Force Academy, you said you consider Milo Minderbinder an innocent that embodies the Puritan work ethic. Do you still consider him as such today?

Heller: Yes, of course. He's like so many other big business people today. We have models for him today, like Ted Turner and Bill Gates. He's not consciously evil. He may create bad things as a by-product of what he does, but he is unaware of it. He's not a show-off; he's not greedy. What is good for Milo often is good for the country. The troops did get fresh eggs.

Interviewer: Do you consider *Catch-22* to be an antiwar novel?

Heller: It is more anti-traditional establishment than antiwar. To say it's antiwar doesn't say much to differentiate it from other stories about the war. I used the military organization as a construct, as a metaphor for business relationships and institutional structures. Of course, it was antiwar. I can't think of any good American fiction that is not antiwar. But I don't think anyone in *Catch-22* raises the question whether we should be fighting the war.

Interviewer: A lot of the criticism on *Catch-22* is divided on whether Yossarian is a hero or anti-hero. In your view which is he?

Heller: I'd say yes to both. Yossarian has heroic qualities, but he acts anti-heroically as well. I don't know if I say it in the book or if I've ever said in any other interviews, but military heroes of antiquity are kind of oafish—Samson in the Bible, even Don Quixote. By a lucky coincidence of timing, when I published the book, much intellectual thought

was coming around to share the views I expressed in *Catch-22*. It has been often called a novel of the 60s, but it is really a novel of the 50s because I wrote it between 1953 and 1960. I've been anti every war ever since World War II. Conceivably, I could be an isolationist—conceivably.

Interviewer: Most of my students think Yossarian is amoral and that his move toward responsibility at the end of the novel—to help Nately's whore's little sister—is too little too late. Do you agree and if not, how would you counter this argument?

Heller: I would never think of him as amoral. It seems to me it would have been immoral to think any other way than the way he does then. He has done all the 70 missions otherwise required during the war, and he thinks that's enough.

From a conversation with Joseph Heller at The United States Air Force Academy (1986)

The Department of English presented "Yossarian at the United Air Force Academy," a conference to celebrate the 25th anniversary of the publication of Joseph Heller's *Catch-22*.

Moderator: The Department of English and the United States Air Force Academy are honored to have with us this weekend the world-renowned author Joseph Heller. In 1961, Mr. Heller published *Catch-22*, so this year we celebrate the silver anniversary of the first publication of the novel. Mr. Heller, it is truly a pleasure to welcome you here today. Let's begin.

Student #1: You served as a bombardier on a B-25 during World War II. I was wondering how much of your personal experiences come through in the character Captain Yossarian?

Heller: Nothing of my personal experience comes through in the character of Captain Yossarian. I think he's a much better person than I was when I was a bombardier in World War II. He's older. Yossarian was, I believe, 28 in the book—I was 21 or 22. That part of my experience I did use in the novel had to do with the mechanics of missions by B-25 bomb groups stationed in Corsica in that particular war, so I knew the procedures. . . . [P]resenting my own experiences was not at all the purpose of anything in *Catch-22*.

Student #2: Mr. Heller, in view of the war presented in *Catch-22* and especially the less-than-positive perspective of your Yossarian, how do you feel that we, as members of the armed services, should feel towards our duty to defend this country?

Heller: When it comes to duty to defend the country, I think you should feel no different than I did or Yossarian does in the novel—if the issue is as specific as that and as recognizable as that, and I believe it was in World War II. I believe World War II was a clear-cut issue between this country and Fascism, represented by Germany and Japan. This country was not in the war until the attack on Pearl Harbor, and after that attack, I believe . . . all respectful opposition to this country's participation in this war disappeared, and there was no controversy about it. In *Catch-22*, unless I miss my guess, there is never an objection raised to the involvement of this country in World War II, and there's never a protest raised on Yossarian's part, and perhaps on anyone else's part, on the legitimacy of being involved in that war. The conflicts that I try to present had to do with individuals in conflict with each other, about individuals underneath the authority of leaders who were either neglecting or were indifferent to their responsibility, or who were maybe not up to that responsibility. I tried very hard to set the fictional conflict in *Catch-22* at that point in the war when Germany was virtually defeated. I do remember this line in the book when Yossarian says very truthfully, "The country is not in danger any more, but I am."

Student #3: In the movie version of your novel, Milo Minderbinder was portrayed as somewhat of a Fascist leader. . . . I was wondering if in the book you had intended to show some of the leaders as comparable to some of the Fascist leaders the U.S. was fighting?

Heller: No, the Milo Minderbinder portrayed in the movies was not at all similar, I feel, to the Milo Minderbinder portrayed in the novel. That was a decision made by the people making the motion picture. My Milo Minderbinder tended to be a very moral person, a very innocent person—innocent to the extent that he is either unaware or indifferent to the consequences of his activities. . . . At one point, I believe he is even described as good to his children and faithful to his wife. . . . I was trying to portray my Milo Minderbinder as the essence of the materialistic ethic. . . . He is just motivated by profitable opportunities, and there is nothing externally malevolent or destructive about him. He has no real motivation towards power—towards domination. That is not true about

the Milo in the movie. The movie people made an effort to acquire the actual old Mercedes Mussolini used to ride in Rome, and that scene of Milo in that Mercedes was Mussolini's actual automobile. My Milo wouldn't even be conscious of that.

Student #4: Mr. Heller, I was wondering if you consider *Catch-22* a satirical novel?

Heller: I consider *Catch-22* to be a novel that employs satire to a considerable degree. . . . I personally think of *Catch-22* as being a very serious novel, using humorous satire and irony as part of the techniques in making the novel effective. It was not intended to be a comic novel, although I was aware at the time I was making very much use of comedy in it. It is an irreverent novel; it is disrespectful; it is iconoclastic. It is also, I like to think, unopinionated because there are so many questions raised I can see both sides to and to which I have no answer. . . . But certainly there is nothing funny about death; there is nothing funny about the death of a young man, and the fact I often in *Catch-22* present the death of somebody in a flippant or disrespectful way was not only intended to have almost a contrapuntal effect—to avoid sentimentality—but also to make it perhaps more effective by dismissing the seriousness of death briefly as well. I think of all the people dying in *Catch-22* the only one whose death I described in detail is a character who is really unknown, Snowden. . . . Rather than dwell on the death of Nately (which I personally regarded as particularly painful to me in conceiving), it is dismissed the second two planes collide—almost as an aside. . . . In writing *Catch-22*, I was mainly interested in writing an effective novel, and I thought it would be more interesting to deal in detail with the death of somebody who was an absolute stranger to both the reader and to the people there as well. Even in describing the death of Snowden, there's a line I believe from "God's Plenty," and from *King Lear* ("ripeness is all" used in a different context)—those are flippancies on my part, but those notes of irony are put in not to diminish the effect of Snowden's death, but perhaps to make it more effective.

Student #5: Mr. Heller, you used a lot of déjà vu in your book. I was wondering if you could explain why you used it so extensively and how you were able to keep track of all the events.

Heller: Keeping track is the hard part, and I didn't succeed entirely because I still get letters from people who point out certain things as impossible in the book. There's a chart that I made, which used to be my

desk blotter, in an effort to keep track of the events and of what the characters were doing. . . . There were several reasons for using déjà vu . . . . It is the suggestion that things that are happening have happened before and will happen again, unless somebody—an individual or society—makes some effort to break that chain of events. And the event that happened or was happening and has happened is a war. The idea of déjà vu in the novel was intended to broaden the circle—to circumference what was happening—to go beyond the specific event, the specific month, the specific year. It was a fictional intent rather than a philosophical one.

Student #6: While reading your book, I noticed your characters share a very dim view of women. I was wondering if you share this view, and perhaps, why you made this characterization?

Heller: Well, why I did it or whether I shared that view are two different questions. The view of women presented in the book is pretty much the view of women by men or young boys at the time. It's remarkably mad to view servicemen as being men. I think of myself at 19, 20, or 22 years old as an adolescent. . . . To an extent, that was an accurate portrayal of how men thought of women then. In *Catch-22*, the narrative is told through the consciousness of a male person. Late in the book, in the Eternal City chapter, . . . Yossarian's taking [a] walk and he's wondering why Nately's whore is always trying to kill him. At one point, Yossarian remembers that he thought so little of her he never even bothered to find out her name. So he himself is aware, the attitude is there. Do I approve of it? No. Did I approve of it then? I didn't approve or disapprove. I was oblivious to that situation, that condition. At this period, I suppose I would say most men were and also most women then were oblivious to the situation. . . . But it's definitely there in the book because that is the way it was.

Student #7: Mr. Heller, in your book, a lack of communication seems to play a prominent role in many events, such as the mission when Captain Yossarian kept yelling, "I'm wounded, help me." But all Aarfy could say in response was "I can't hear you" or "I still can't hear you." I was wondering the meaning, if any, of the seeming lack of communication.

Heller: The meaning in the book is that the people of different characters or different sensibilities do not talk to each other, do not understand each other. . . . Yossarian is there bleeding, and it's not just Aarfy

saying, "I can't hear you," because if Aarfy had any sense at all, he could look down and see Yossarian was wounded. So the lack of communication there is not only verbal. . . . Aarfy is also deaf to the bombs exploding all around him. So the man is completely unaware, although he's educated. . . . Other parts of *Catch-22* I wrote consciously and deliberately with what might be called the perversion of language or the manipulation of language in different ways in which phrases can be interpreted by people who want to use them that way. . . . Language is being manipulated, misused to the advantage of the person; it is very much what I was working on very consciously in *Catch-22*.

Student #8: Mr. Heller, I noticed you used the word "crazy" a lot, and I wondered if you used that word in particular so repeatedly to emphasize actual insanity, or if it was meant to condition us in understanding to be crazy really meant a kind of sanity?

Heller: You noticed something very few people have, which is undoubtedly there. From the very beginning, I would deliberately use the idiomatic word "crazy," which was used to say you're wrong or you're impractical. In a less literal way, I was trying to raise one of the several questions somebody else asked me about a character's behavior in a certain situation: are you crazy to obey orders you know are irrational or are you crazy to disobey them? At one point in the novel, Yossarian asks, "You mean to say I'm to let Colonel Cathcart decide when and where I'll be killed?" The Colonel's point of view would be that we're in a war, and if it were up to every individual to make such a decision, more lives would be lost. I think from both points of view they're right—it's one of those situations in which I do not have the answer. Other dialogues I think might show it is unmistakable whose side I am on. I do think so much that goes on in the world is crazy, but I'm using crazy not in a critical sense, which is the reason it is used very, very often.

Student #9: From your own experience during the war, was the environment as chaotic and insane as you portrayed it in *Catch-22*?

Heller: No, my own experience in World War II was, I'm ashamed to say, extremely beneficial—from the time I enlisted to the time I was discharged with the exception of a few months towards the end of my tour of duty when I was scared. It was very orderly, very beneficial. I also think most of the Americans—except those who were wounded, killed, or taken prisoner—for most of them, it was one of the most meaningful,

delightful experiences in their life. . . . I was not aware of anything on my level, as an enlisted man or as a low-level officer, of anything corresponding to *Catch-22*. . . . Yossarian's protest and indignation at the choices presented to him came to me as part of the American era that followed World War II. It brought up what I think was the awful, ugly, dangerous Cold War period that followed. I can remember that I was thinking of this country—this society—being in the state of civil war, except it was not a shooting war, and the sensibility in *Catch-22*—the questions raised—come out of the post-war period rather than of the war itself.

Student #10: There seems to be only one element of hope throughout the book and that's Yossarian. Are you, as the author, expressing your own disappointment in human nature?

Heller: I would say that everything expressed in the book would be my own view, so to the extent there's disappointment in human nature, that's certainly there because I would say about half of the characters I disapprove of, and the readers tend to disapprove of, would be individuals who would be reprehensible for one reason or another. Whether if it's my view of all mankind—of all American civilization—I really don't know. I haven't thought about that. I will say this about *Catch-22* and about every other book of mine, as much as I like to fool around and exaggerate and deal with fantasy, I cannot see myself ever professing an attitude that I myself did not genuinely feel.

Student #11: Who was your favorite character?

Heller: My favorite character in *Catch-22*? It would have to be Yossarian because he is a central character, and he is also not a person I approve of uncritically. When he moves the bomb line, and he sees the planes coming back—he is conscience-stricken about that. When Nately's whore is trying to kill him, she represents many things. One thing is his own awareness he has been less than perfect. . . . I did think that the Chaplain would be much more interesting and sympathetic to readers than he has been. When I started reading papers or hearing conversations on *Catch-22*, Milo Minderbinder was the person they would speak of most often, even more than Yossarian. The chaplain is almost never mentioned.

Student #12: One recurring theme in *Catch-22* is the questioning of the existence and nature of God. . . . [W]ere you really trying to develop

the story or were you trying to express your own personal doubts and questions about whether there is a God?

Heller: I was trying to express my own personal doubts about the existence of God and also, in a way, to dilute the arguments of those who feel more dogmatically about it than I do and than other people do. I'm kind of surprised more people haven't picked up on that, the religious aspect. There is a tremendous amount of skepticism on my part. I am an agnostic. I tend to resent people who are dogmatic about religion; I tend to resent people who are dogmatic about anything. The discussion between Yossarian and Yossarian's nurse does have the intention to raise that question and to treat it almost as an absurdity. I, on the other hand, take the Chaplain seriously; he is a sympathetic character. I have my own private joke—although it's public once it's published—that the chaplain begins to doubt the existence of God. As he looks around him, he finds his faith restored by this vision of this naked man in the tree, and he never finds out that the naked man is Yossarian, although the reader knows it's Yossarian. Of course, there are sections dealing with the manipulation of the concept of God for private gain or private ambition: for example, when Colonel Cathcart calls the Chaplain and wants him to say prayers only so he can get his picture in *Life* magazine.

Student #13: What was your purpose in repeating the scene of Snowden's death?

Heller: That is an artistic purpose. I thought rather than having somebody die and describe the death in its entirety when it's taking place, I thought there would be a more powerful, more perplexing, more mystifying literary effect in having Snowden die throughout the book. So earlier in the book, you know Snowden is dead and has died and that Yossarian took care of him. I thought the image of this man dying the way he does throughout the period of ten months—the time span of the book—would be more effective.

Student #14: Why did you name the novel *Catch-22*?

Heller: Well, the novel was called *Catch-18* for the eight years it was being written and edited. The first chapter was published in 1955 under the title "Catch-18." The number had no significance to me whatsoever. Then, the title was changed the same year a novel by a much better known novelist at the time was being published called *Mila Eighteen*,

and publishers felt readers would not want to buy two novels with the number 18 in the title in the same year. Given the choice, they would choose his. [Leon Uris was the author of *Mila Eighteen*.] So, it was changed to 22. I can justify 22 in the repetitious patterns of *Catch-22*, but the choice of that number was really circumstantial based on the events I just told you about.

Student #15: Mr. Heller, do you see the old man in the whorehouse as kind of a prophet?

Heller: The old man in the whorehouse is really a representation of Satan, and if you go back or when you go back to the adjectives which describe him, you'll find words about satanic and diabolic cleverness—he's in opposition to Major de Coverly. If you look at the adjectives in which de Coverly is described, he's a deity. That Major lost his eye and it's the old man in the whorehouse who did it. So, I'm setting those two characters up in opposition, but not too obviously. I don't want it to be a recreation of *Paradise Lost*. The philosophy of the old man, expressed on a logical basis, is almost irrefutable historically (about civilization declining). He says in the book that "winning a war is not as important as losing war, it's knowing which wars to lose." He also says, "Italy is doing better than you are. Italians are not dying any more and Americans are." He is presenting a philosophy of history that I think is almost flawless—the only flaw in it is that he dies at the age of 107.

Moderator: I especially thank you, Mr. Heller; you have added a great deal to our understanding of the novel. Thank you very much for joining us this afternoon.

Heller: The questions made me think about one of my very favorite novels.

Kathi A. Vosevich is currently a writer at Microsoft Corporation, after teaching Shakespeare and Chaucer at universities both in the United States and Europe. She has received numerous awards, including an NEH Fellowship to study Lady Mary Wroth and Sappho. Her latest work on the education of Mary and Elizabeth Tudor will be published as an essay in *Women, Writing, and the Reproduction of Culture in Tudor and Stuart Britain*.

Donald Anderson

Visions of War, Dreams of Peace: A Conversation with Joan A. Furey

In 1991, a collection of poems, subtitled "Writings of Women in the Vietnam War," was published by Warner Books. This book of poetry by women who had served in Vietnam—most of them as battlefield nurses—was aptly titled *Visions of War, Dreams of Peace*. In a foreword to the book, W.D. Ehrhart (an editor himself of two acclaimed collections of Vietnam War Vet-Poetry) praises Lynda Van Devanter and Joan A. Furey for their persistence in assembling women veteran's voices:

> When Lynda Van Devanter first told me about this book in July 1990, just about the first thing I said to her was: "I wanted these poems. I tried to find them for *Carrying the Darkness*. Why didn't anyone send me anything?"
>
> "Of course they wouldn't send you their poems," she replied. "You're a man."
>
> "But I'm not that sort of a man," I protested, wounded by her reply.
>
> "Yes, but they don't know that."
>
> What they [the women vets] know . . . is that the U.S. government, to this day, can't even say how many of them actually served in Vietnam. What they know is that the Vietnam Women's Memorial Project has met with stiff resistance from people—men—who keep insisting that The Wall and the three male figures cast in bronze beside it is recognition enough for women.
>
> Small wonder that these women wouldn't send me their poems. Thank God or whatever you believe in that they've been willing to send them to Lynda Van Devanter and Joan

> Furey. . . . These are voices that need to be heard. These are voices we need to hear. The experience of Vietnam in particular and war in general cannot be complete without them.

That the editors and publisher of *Visions of War, Dreams of Peace* turned to a male poet-editor to validate their book in a foreword only punctuates the difficulty women veterans faced in getting their voices heard. Sadly, *Visions of War, Dreams of Peace* is out-of-print, as is Lynda Van Devanter's fine Vietnam memoir, *Home Before Morning*.

Joan A. Furey, the subject of this interview, followed up her Vietnam tour with a full career in government and nursing and has long been recognized for her expertise in the effects of and treatment for Post Traumatic Stress Disorder in Women Trauma Survivors. Named Director of the Department of Veterans Affairs' Center for Women Veterans in 1995, Ms Furey is the primary advisor to the Secretary, Department of Veterans Affairs on all women veterans' issues.

This interview took place at the United States Air Force Academy during March 1999.

Anderson: Where and when did you serve in Vietnam?

Furey: I served in Vietnam January 29, 1969–Jan 27, 1970, in the 71st Evacuation Hospital in Pleiku.

Anderson: How long after Vietnam did you resign from the Army?

Furey: I had four months left. I returned from Vietnam and was stationed at Kimbrough Army Hospital at Fort Meade, Maryland. Then I got out.

Anderson: I don't think it's been written about much, but in some of the reading I've come across, women in the armed forces serving in Vietnam not only had the enemy to fear, but there was trouble with our own soldiers. Women were vulnerable to assault. How much of this is true?

Furey: Certainly what I can say outright is that during the time I was in Vietnam I don't recall any incidents where people were assaulted. Women—American women—were very few in number. We were surrounded by thousands of men who were very interested in developing relationships with us so that there was tremendous social pressure on us

to be entertaining, caring, or to get romantically involved. That, in and of itself, was a degree of stress that most women found by the end of their tour as being something they wanted to remove themselves from. I removed myself early by going on permanent nights. I figured out if I worked nights I didn't have to deal with all the other demands that were around. I should say, though, that some people developed relationships, very solid, caring relationships. It may have been an effective mechanism, too: if you belonged to someone, other people left you alone. Then again, we have to remember it *was* the 60s and we didn't talk about issues like sexual harassment and date rape. I can't deny that such pressures didn't exist, but these concepts were not in our social thinking at the time. If women were sometimes pressured into experiences such as I've mentioned, they probably wouldn't have interpreted it the way we might today.

Anderson: Not only were women fewer in number, but I would think generally you were outranked as well.

Furey: Absolutely. The majority of women were 1st and 2nd Lieutenants. I think there has been some writing about the fact that sometimes we were asked by our superiors and then actually helicoptered into parties. To be "the female companionship," or whatever. I think what happened, and, again, we have to remember we are talking about women in their early twenties who might have seen such requests as part of their duties; on the other hand, when you have spent twelve hours in a surgical or intensive care unit dealing with people who've been blown up, or have lost limbs, or are dying, bleeding, crying, screaming—sometimes the last thing in the world you may have wanted to do was to be sociable, to be nice and smile, or to even *be* with other people. Although to have that kind of attention—I suppose there is an element of attraction to it as well. I don't think there is any easy way to describe social pressures in wartime. I suspect most people who went through it would share my ambiguous feelings.

Anderson: The point I was trying to get to was that I think women, their experience and the level of stress they may have experienced in Vietnam is very, very often overlooked, with a kind of Clara Barton veneer.

Furey: I'm one of those people who believe, once a nurse, always a nurse. And you bring nursing with you. I think I believe all that I have learned over my years in nursing is a significant part of what I do now. I still do actually have a lot of veteran contacts, help people deal with issues, so that my nursing knowledge, my medical knowledge, my interpersonal skills, are really credible. I don't think I could do what I'm doing without the background I have.

Anderson: How long have you been Director of the Center for Women Veterans?

Furey: Five years.

Anderson: Is it an appointment position?

Furey: Yes it is. It didn't start out that way. Originally I was career VA. The position I now hold was originally a career position that I was promoted into, then it became an appointed position, when Congress passed a law creating a Center for Women Veterans. I had been the director of the Office of Women Veterans.

Anderson: Do you read Vietnam War literature?

Furey: I do so less now than I have in the past, but I've read extensively. There was a time when Vietnam War literature was *all* I read. I've tended to move myself away from it more in the last couple of years.

Anderson: Can I put you on the spot and ask you your two or three favorite pieces of art from the Vietnam War experience?

Furey: My most favorite is Tim O'Brien's "How to Tell a True War Story" from *The Things They Carried*. Hands down, it's the one—I don't even have to think about it. For me, the story captures the war experience an individual might have and then the way that person might be moved to interpret the experience later. Phil Caputo's *A Rumor of War* is way up there too, though my selection of *A Rumor of War* may be shaded by the fact that it was the first piece of Vietnam War literature that I read.

Anderson: It was the first piece a lot of people read. Can I say you've named two pretty "male" books?

Furey: Yes, but I was about to mention another one. One by a woman. Elizabeth Scarborough. *The Healer's War.* It's a science fiction book.

Anderson: Science fiction? About Vietnam?

Furey: Yes, I read a review about this book, then bought it. Elizabeth Scarborough was a nurse in Vietnam. She is now a well-known science fiction writer. *The Healer's War* is about a nurse in Vietnam and the metaphysical journey she experiences while there. The parts about Vietnam are so authentic that as soon as you read them you know this woman has been there, that she is real, that she has caught it all. Even in the science fiction part of the book which has to do with her journeys through the jungle with a GI. I was attracted to Scarborough's book because I really felt it *was* a psychological journey that most of us experienced with the soldiers.

Anderson: How is that science fiction?

Furey: The characters were on a quest. The nurse goes into the jungle with the GI and they have some magical metaphysical experiences.

Anderson: That doesn't sound much different than O'Brien's *Going After Cacciato.*

Furey: Actually I was going to say, it's a lot like *Going After Cacciato*, from a woman's perspective. The thing I liked about *The Healer's War* was that it drew me into some of the existential dilemmas we faced as nurses in a war.

Anderson: Why are there not more Vietnam War memoirs by women?

Furey: I really don't know why. When Lynda and I were compiling *Visions of War, Dreams of Peace*, we were surprised at all the poetry that became available. Most of the poetry had already been written, but the poets had not shared their work with very many people. They would share it with other women veterans, but that was all. When we decided to assemble the book, we were calling everybody, and since Lynda and I were part of this inner circle of poets, we were calling to say we wanted to create the book. We called to say, "We want to use your poems," and the poets would say, "Fine, just don't use my name." At one point Lynda and I thought we'd end up with a book of anonymous poems. We struggled with that, because we had struggled with owning our own work. I should say that none of us had the idea that we were writing great poetry. We just knew there was a tremendous catharsis and expression of pain we couldn't express any other way. And I think the emotions in the poems were so strong that they scared us. I believe we felt other

people would just not accept our perspectives, would see us as being meek or not capable. This is why I think, early on, so many of our poets did not want to be associated publicly with their work. And this is 1989-1990 that we're putting together this book—not 1975. This is *after* the war.

Anderson: Fifteen years had passed since the war had ended for most of the poets, twenty in some cases.

Furey: Exactly. We spent hours on the phone with some of the contributors. Encouraging them, and sharing other poets' work so that the more timid would see that they really weren't alone in their feelings, in their experiences, in what they were trying to express. Our emphasis was that nothing was out there, and there needed to be something. Lynda and I had gone looking and the only book we found was from World War I—*Testament to Youth*—by a nurse who'd served in that war.

Anderson: How did you know who was writing poetry?

Furey: Somehow or other we became part of this underground network. Lynda, of course, had published her memoir, *Home Before Morning*. So she was a key figure. Lynda and I had served together in Vietnam and we had kind of reconnected in 1982. I hadn't seen her since Vietnam. I had been writing poetry for some time and I shared it with Lynda

Anderson: But never publishing it?

Furey: No. I didn't show it to anybody. I didn't even show it to my family.

Anderson: These feelings you're talking about in Vietnam War women vets strike me as parallel to the men from World War II who, when they came home, refused to talk about war, *their* war. "Get on with life," seemed to be their slogan. Vietnam vets, in the eyes of WWII vets, are whiners. I've heard numbers of WWII vets say, "They talk too much." In the reticence of Vietnam women vets I see this parallel to the WWII male combat soldiers.

Furey: I think that a big part of it was that the majority of women were nurses. Nurses in the sense we were from a very traditional kind of nursing education background. Most of us were graduates of three-year hospital schools of nursing. People don't always appreciate what this means. We were indoctrinated with professionalism, the tradition of nursing, the honor, the self-sacrifice—all this stuff was part and parcel

of what was engrained into us during those three years in hospital student nursing. One of the things that I think most of us believed was that if we were having any difficulty, it made us less of a nurse—somehow we weren't good enough, or that we somehow hadn't learned all that we should have. We couldn't own the very human emotions of being exposed to high levels of trauma. We couldn't get comfortable with feelings. They were very frightening to us, very confusing. We had expected we would have a degree of detachment and in no way were prepared for the experience of being a nurse in a war. It's *not* gall bladders and heart attacks. It's young men—your own age or younger—and, again, I would like to point out: we're talking about *young* women, I was 22 years old, and I wasn't the exception. Most of us were 21, 22, 23. We didn't have a lot of experience, and, all of a sudden, we were dealing with our peer group of young men who had devastating injuries—had been blown to bits! We were doing things we never thought we would have to do, seeing things we never thought we would have to see. In some ways the experience was incredibly empowering, in others, so incredibly destructive.

Anderson: In Vietnam, as in all wars and especially in modern wars, a majority of soldiers never see the frontline, yet nurses experienced the consequences of the frontline all the time. So the Vietnam experience, considered proportionally, was far more traumatic for a nurse than for the average soldier.

Furey: I think it took us a while to really understand that. I know now, having worked for many years in the field of PTSD, that one of the things we had to get nurses to understand (and I had to come to understand it first for myself) is that when you're exposed to a war environment, one thing becomes clear to you and that's your mission and your goal: to take care of injured soldiers, to get them better. What we understood was that our patients *had* given the ultimate sacrifice. When you've been dunked in that fact, and *believe* it, you cannot own your own pain because it seems to diminish theirs. "Nothing wrong with me, look at this guy," you want to say. "Look what happened to him." To heal, you have to get to a point where you recognize and realize that owning your own experience diminishes no one else's. It's a big transition to make. Because somehow or other you feel that you are not worthy of finding relief because you constantly compare yourself to the patients you care for.

Anderson: Survival guilt?

Furey: Exactly.

Anderson: What was it like to come back to nursing in the United States?

Furey: It was awful. Probably one of the most difficult things that I ever went through, to come back to nursing. All you thought about when you were in Vietnam was coming back to the world, real life. But as soon as you came back and went to work, you realized you were no longer *in* the real world. Vietnam was your *real* world. In spite of all the awful things in Vietnam and your incredibly negative feelings about that war, it was, nonetheless, the most meaningful work you had ever done. There was a real mission in Vietnam. There was a tremendous commitment to what we were doing in terms of care for young Americans and the Vietnamese, these victims of an awful catastrophe. *That* was real. You pulled out everything you had and you did things that you had never been able to do before. All of a sudden you come back to the States and people start putting limits on you, on your practice. In Vietnam, for instance, we would put in jugular catheters because there weren't always doctors available. They were in the operating room. Back home, I was to start an IV and I was told, "You can't start the IV, you have to get the doctor." "Doctors to do this?" I said. It was people not responding when you made assessments that grated—this denigration of your skills and authority. In my first six months back, I kept having these kinds of experiences. I had a patient—I could laugh now!—she was younger than I am now, probably in her forties, who had had her gall bladder removed. I had to get her up to walk. She was moaning and groaning, and my reaction was, "Get a life, lady, get real." In Vietnam, I got people up who had no arms. *They* walked. I got to the point where I couldn't tolerate patient complaints about what to me was minor. At the same time, I knew there was something really wrong about my feelings. I knew that on some level I'd become warped in terms of my measurement of pain and discomfort and a patient's right to not be well. I mean, in order for a patient to legitimately complain he had to lose two legs and an arm? On some level I knew that wasn't right, but I couldn't quite shake it, couldn't get things quite back into place.

Anderson: Did it ever get closer for you?

Furey: It did, but it took a long time. I left nursing for a time. I think a lot of people did that. What triggered it for me was I was working in a community hospital and was called to ER because a bunch of teenagers had been in a car accident. I went to ER and they brought in these eight kids. It was Vietnam all over again.

Anderson: It felt normal to you?

Furey: I did what I had to do. There was blood everywhere; I was covered with it. We did what we had to do. And when we were done, I just collapsed behind this curtain. I didn't want to see it anymore. I didn't want to feel it. I didn't want to know what was out there. The night supervisor was a nurse who I knew had been a World War II nurse. She was working that night. She saw me. She said, "I just want to tell you one thing. When I came back from World War II, I thought I was going crazy. I thought I was going to have a breakdown. I didn't want to do it anymore. I just want you to know that you're going to be O.K." I decided to quit right then. After my shift, I quit.

Anderson: What did you do?

Furey: I went to school. Again, this was at the time the whole world was dropping out and being hippies, but if you came from my background you didn't do that. I had the GI Bill, and I figured I could do that. I could go back to school. I wouldn't have to work in a hospital. I had the GI Bill.

Anderson: Was your father in World War II?

Furey: He was.

Anderson: Have the two of you talked about this?

Furey: It took a lot of years. We did talk about it a little bit. He's dead now. He died in 1989. He was never that forthcoming about his own experiences.

Anderson: Where was he?

Furey: He was in Germany and France.

Anderson: During the bad years?

Furey: Yes. In fact I'm pretty sure he had PTSD. My mother always told the story about him being diagnosed, but this was before I knew anything about PTSD. When he came back he couldn't hold a job.

Anderson: Was he married before he went?

Furey: Yes. It was in the 80s when he finally talked to me about his war. We ended up in the most intense conversation we ever had. I finally was talking about what I felt when I left Vietnam—how much I wanted to leave, yet how much I felt like I was letting others down, how difficult it was to make the adjustment. My father had been wounded and had to be evacuated from the front. And he talked about—actually teared up—started talking about how he felt that in being evacuated he was letting comrades down, because by then he was an experienced combat soldier. He'd been wounded and was leaving these war guys—he was choked up about that. That was the most we ever talked about it.

Anderson: The combat soldiers I've known personally, that have been affected by war, dealing with authority remains very difficult for them, holding a job remains difficult, relationships remain difficult. I would think that would be true of most war nurses.

Furey: I think we see that. I think the data is kind of interesting in terms of formal study, that women in Vietnam are much less likely to be married when compared to their peers. They have fewer children. They do tend to hold more jobs. It's all they have. They may stay in nursing, but not in direct nursing. Nurses from Vietnam are much better educated than their non-vet counterparts. They dropped out, like I did, and went to school.

Anderson: Are there organizations for the nurse-veterans population?

Furey: The biggest organization for women who served in Vietnam, and it's not really an organization per se, was the Vietnam Women's Memorial project. It was a project that brought a lot of people together, most for the first time. We dedicated the memorial in 1993 and the ceremony was overwhelming. We got to talk to other people. There was a recognition of the work we'd done. I think this was, and is, a need in general, for both men and women vets. In fact, I have come to see it as being a real key issue. Regardless of whether you feel pro-war, antiwar, or whatever, I think most of us—certainly those of us in the medical nursing profession—felt very good about what we did, about how hard we worked, about how we saved lives. That we were in Vietnam to help people and that we did that, beyond even what we thought was our capacity. When we left Vietnam, we could take pride in having done a good job. Except you felt like you should feel guilty that you'd been

there. One of the things we had to work through was that feeling good about what we did didn't mean that we felt good about the war. And yet back then, it was, like, if I'm proud of what I did that means that I'm proud of having been in this war and there was so much confusion about the war and the purpose of the war that it just seemed like it wasn't O.K. to feel that way at all. So my heart goes out to a lot of veterans, men and women. I suppose most of us ended up feeling guilty about doing a good job.

Anderson: It's very complicated

Furey: Very. It's less complicated now than when I was 23 and coming back and trying to work through all of this on top of having this really fresh and damaging experience. I was so against the war when I returned that I joined Vietnam Veterans Against the War. This was in New York and they invited me attend a rally at a local high school gymnasium. I was to be one of the speakers. As I got up to talk I was overwhelmed with the sense that I was betraying soldiers.

Anderson: But you see now that that's not true.

Furey: I see that now. I got through my speech and then I just felt bad. I couldn't take a stand one way or another because I couldn't get to peace with anything. It was a real struggle. I understand today how all those competing feelings can exist in one person, but it was a very difficult time, those first couple of years back. Trying to work through your feelings about the war and your feelings about what you did in the war. The feelings about what the war did to you and to all these other people. I'm always amazed that any of us ever survived to go on. I think it does speak to the resilience of human beings. Though, unfortunately, not everyone can rebound.

Anderson: It seems to me that, given your experience, it would be pretty difficult for you to be other than antiwar. Did the war change your politics?

Furey: Absolutely. I consider the Vietnam War for me a life-changing and life-defining experience. I became a very different person after the war than I was before. I think that the person who went to Vietnam would probably not be sitting here having this conversation with you if the war had not so readily changed my politics. And it changed me dramatically as a human being. I believe, and hope, that it made me a

better person. I guess I believe I'm a better person because of the experience, although I wish my gains, whatever they are, had come in a less painful way.

Anderson: I think for a thoughtful, thinking, feeling person, it would be impossible for it to be otherwise. What advice would you have now for yourself at 22?

Furey: One of the things that has happened to us vets is that we get stuck back there, and we judge *that* person by the values and ideals of *that* 22-year-old. When I was working through my stuff in my thirties, I said to myself, "You have to get this 35-year-old to look at what the 22-year-old went through. To not be stuck in time and also to realize that what you went through was in fact an aberrant, horrendous experience. That you were placed in a situation that few people ever are. How to mediate the effects of war is the important issue for all individuals who have experienced war. Some people don't ever manage it. Simple as it sounds, we have to recognize that war is an incredibly dramatic and traumatic experience. What you see is extreme, what you're exposed to is extreme, what you feel is extreme, and what you do when you stop feeling is extreme. At some point, the experience has to be mediated. It probably can't happen while you're *in* the experience. It has to happen when you come back, but it can't wait too long. And it's not necessarily going to be short-term.

Anderson: What was the most effective coping mechanism for you?

Furey: I was a workaholic.

Anderson: Was?

Furey: Well, I probably still am. When things got really bad, I did self-medicate with alcohol, then realized that over the long haul that road would prove too destructive. The best coping mechanism for me came when I finally decided to sit down and talk with somebody about what my experiences had been.

Anderson: Friend? Or professional?

Furey: Professional. I went to see a therapist—a woman in her sixties. I remember walking into her office thinking, "Oh yeah, right, this woman'll understand me." But she was terrific. I would describe my experiences and she would look at me, then say, "You really think you weren't supposed to be affected by that?'

Anderson: Did such acceptance seem new to you?

Furey: Yes, it did.

Anderson: And how long was this after the fact?

Furey: 12 years.

Anderson: That's a long time. Was it important that you were talking to a woman?

Furey: For me at that time, I think it was. But I think even more important is that in 1982, I started to hook up with other women who had been beat up by the war. Up until then, from the time I left Vietnam, got on the plane and came home, I had never talked to another woman who'd served. People who knew me didn't know I had been in Vietnam. I was a head nurse—that's what I was. That I'd served in the war finally came out when I did an interview in a newspaper. I arrived at work the next day, and my colleagues just said, "Why didn't you tell us?" It was the publication of Lynda's book that had precipitated my interview and my "coming out of the closet," so to speak.

Anderson: When was Lynda's book published?

Furey: 1981, I think.

Anderson: So in the meantime you'd been reading about Vietnam?

Furey: I had started to read. I think I had read *A Rumor of War*, and I went to see *Apocalypse Now*. It was kind of out there, and I did have this obsession about Vietnam. I read Stanley Karnow's *Vietnam*. I was trying to get some mastery over my experience, so I was reading all this stuff.

Anderson: Hemingway talked about that. The notion that when you come home from war, you start to read about it and look at the maps.

Furey: Right. After I started to read, my ability to wall off memory weakened. And when that happened, I began to make contact with other women. That was key. When we sat down, just a group of vets—women vets, not male vets (because with the male vets it was always us and them, and they'd been *in* combat and we *hadn't!*)—we started talking and found we'd experienced so many similar things in our isolated worlds. By then Lynda had become the central spoke, and we went up and spent a weekend in her house.

Anderson: Where was this?

Furey: In Virginia. We would get together at Lynda's house. Lynda had this big, hundred-year-old house. We would get together, but it wasn't like we knew each other. People had responded to Lynda's book.

Anderson: Women mostly?

Furey: Lynda became this focal point of bringing women together. And then the whole PTSD movement started. We started to go to PTSD conferences. There would be other women. I remember the first conference we attended—The International Society for the Study for Traumatic Stress. It was at King's Island, Ohio, and it was in 1982. Five of us went there. We didn't stop talking. I think I got about three hours of sleep that week. Everything felt so true. Of a sudden, our experiences felt valid.

Anderson: I'm thinking of two books. First, Jonathan Shay's book, *Achilles in Vietnam.*

Furey: I actually have that book. I haven't read it yet. I bought it when it first came out. The book that ran for me was *Trauma and Transformation* by Arthur Egendorf.

Anderson: Is the author a vet?

Furey: A vet psychologist who did a lot of work on Vietnam vets. The other book that helped me was *Out of The Night: The Spiritual Journey of Vietnam Veterans* by Bill Mahedy, who was a Catholic Chaplain with the U.S. Army in Vietnam. Have you ever heard of it?

Anderson: No, but it's good to get them mentioned. Another book I think may speak to women is Kali Tal's *World of Hurt.*

Furey: I'd like to talk some about PTSD. Prior to my present job I actually was a driving force behind opening up the first PTSD treatment program for women.

Anderson: Where was this?

Furey: Palo Alto, California, at the VA. The *New York Times Magazine* made it a cover story in 1993. "How to Bandage a War," was the name of the piece. Laura Palmer wrote it.

Anderson: I read it.

Furey: I'm one of the nurses mentioned in the essay. The essay captures the issue of healing in a way that the general media had not done before. At least to my mind. Let me say something about Lynda's and my book. When you're looking for validation one of the places you go is to literature. Well, there was none. Because there was no where to go, we started searching out women vets who were writing. Although we were interested in literary quality, what was more important to us was that readers would see that women had served in Vietnam, bravely and honorably. Further, we wanted women vet readers to know they were not alone in their ordeals. One of the more touching experiences Lynda and I had with the book was at the ground-breaking of the Vietnam Women's Memorial Project. General Colin Powell was the keynote speaker. In preparing for his speech, he'd read our book. He mentioned that, then he said, "And I was there. You cared for me." General Powell, as you may know, was awarded two Purple Hearts in Vietnam. In his speech he talked about war for the average soldier being calm, even boring, with episodes of fire and terror. He then talked about the relentless stream of casualties that nurses like us had faced and dealt with.

Anderson: It was war everyday.

Furey: It was everyday. Wherever the battle, the casualties were shipped to us. So if one soldier wasn't fighting, another one was. Most people probably can't imagine the incredible, incredible carnage that war creates. Even a big-city emergency room doesn't come close to what you face in a war triage area.

Anderson: Big cities don't deal in napalm and cluster bombs.

Furey: Or Bouncing Betties and B-52s. People have no clue. I look at the stuff going on in Yugoslavia, Bosnia, Africa. Whenever I give a public speech, I try to remind Americans that for the Vietnamese it was "The American War," and that the battle was on *their* soil.

Anderson: Yes. And we buried some 2 million Vietnamese, as opposed to our 58,000. Since 1941, our blue skies have been unmolested.

Furey: The truth is, the people have no clue.

Anderson: Final thoughts about women Vietnam veterans?

Furey: When the Vietnam Veterans Memorial was first built, the original design called for only a wall. And the wall represented many things to many people. It had the names of everybody who died in Vietnam, including women. There was great controversy over the design, although, I think, most everyone felt it was right. Then some folks decided we needed a conventional statue. When the statue was placed, it consisted of three men. I think most women had accepted the wall as an appropriate statement, but once the male-only statue was placed, it required a response.

Anderson: The Vietnam Women's Memorial, like the men's statue and the Wall, was manufactured and erected by private funds?

Furey: Yes.

Anderson: Were you part of the fund raising?

Furey: I was. Diane Evans, who was the President and the driving force behind The Vietnam Women's Memorial served at my hospital in Vietnam, as did Lynda Van Devanter. People have said, "What the hell was it in Pleiku?—the water?" It wasn't the water. It was the level of activity. We had a very busy hospital.

Donald Anderson is editor of **WLA**.

Editor's Note: Royalties from the sale of *Visions of War, Dreams of Peace* were donated by the authors to the Vietnam Women's Memorial Project. For information on the now completed Vietnam Women's Memorial, please visit the web site at <http://www.nps.gov/vive/index2.htm>.

Commentary by
Donald Anderson

Vietnam and Korea: W.D. Ehrhart's Continuing Journey

Ordinary Lives: Platoon 1005 and the Vietnam War. W.D. Ehrhart. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1999. 334pp. $29.50.

In a 1996 special issue of **WLA** focusing on the work of W.D. Ehrhart, I make, I hope, a strong case for his Vietnam War autobiographical trilogy as being among the best such accounts published. In fact I call *Vietnam-Perkasie*, the first of the trilogy, "the best single, unadorned, gut-felt telling of one American's route into and out of America's longest war"—a claim I believe down deep in my bones. In addition to completing his trilogy with *Busted* in 1995 (*Passing Time* was first published in the mid-80s and *Vietnam-Perkasie* in the early 80s), Ehrhart has published two other nonfiction books about his Vietnam experience: *In the Shadow of Vietnam: Essays 1977-1991* and *Going Back: An Ex-Marine Returns to Vietnam*. Both of these volumes are available from McFarland Books. The trilogy is newly available from the University of Massachusetts Press. To this impressive list, Ehrhart now adds *Ordinary Lives: Platoon 1005 and the Vietnam War*. What makes *Ordinary Lives* different from Ehrhart's previous nonfiction publishings is that this work is not a personal memoir.

> *Ordinary Lives* is not a book about me. It's a book about the other seventy-nine men of Platoon 1005. And it's a book I could not have written even ten years ago, let alone fifteen or twenty. None of these men, at least among those I've had the opportunity to sit down and visit with, shares my perspective on the war or the depth and breadth of my knowledge about its origins and causes and history. And for a very long time I was

> so angry about the war, and so impatient with anyone who didn't see things my way, that it would not have been possible for me to sit for three or four or five hours in the same room with someone who thinks we could have won if only the politicians wouldn't have interfered, or if only we had invaded North Vietnam, or if only any of the other myriad ideas and beliefs Americans hold about the war. Yet in the course of doing these interviews, I spent a lot of time with people who didn't see things my way, and rather than arguing, as I would have done without hesitation a decade ago, I just kept my mouth shut and listened (21).

In the summer of 1966, Platoon 1005 was the platoon young Bill Ehrhart joined as a brand-new recruit at the Marine Corps Recruit Depot on Parris Island, South Carolina. For eight weeks, eighty young men trained for war. *Ordinary Lives* is one man's attempt to trace and catch up with seventy-nine Marines a generation after their war. With ingenuity and doggedness and considerable personal expense, Bill Ehrhart has done just that. Ehrhart makes the point that when he set out in search of the other men from Platoon 1005, he had no idea what he might find. He did, however, believe that each man's story was a relevant part of history.

> For if history is shaped and moved by huge forces like capitalism and communism and powerful men like presidents and secretaries of state, the nameless millions who suffer the consequences of those huge forces and powerful men do in fact have names and lives and stories to tell. (26)

Ehrhart's book contains those stories, unvarnished by his own voice:

> What can I say about a person who has a personal relationship with Jesus but thinks we should have blown North Vietnam off the face of the earth? What can I say about a person who is convinced the United States could have won the war if only the military had been allowed to fight to win, but who has never read a book about the American war in Vietnam, or the French war in Vietnam, or the long history of Vietnam and China?

> About a person who believes someone's a hero just because he's dead? About a person who wishes he'd served in Vietnam from the comfortable position of never having done so? (27)

Ehrhart allows these soldiers their say and gives them over 300 pages to speak. To listen to their voices is to hear what must be a representative cross-section of late 1960s and early 1990s America. I found the book sobering and imagine that you might, too. I also found myself re-steeled to my obligations as a professor at the United States Air Force Academy. It's a daunting responsibility to teach embryo warriors, for soldiers ought to know what they are capable of destroying at the same time they are learning about following orders. In a military career, the highest humanity may sometime depend on questioning authority or examining myths. The artless voices in *Ordinary Lives* more than imply this necessity, they prove it.

Retriving Bones: Stories and Poems of the Korean War. Edited by W.D. Ehrhart and Philip K. Jason. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1999. 225pp. $22.00 paper.

In 11 years of editing **WLA**, with the exception of Bill Ehrhart's special issue on the "Soldier-Poets of the Korean War," I've received and published only one piece on Korea—an essay about the 1950s comic book treatments of that war. Nearly any reader is aware of the big books to come out of WWII—*The Naked and the Dead*, say, *From Here to Eternity*, *Slaughterhouse-Five*, *Catch-22*, not to mention books like Styron's *Sophie's Choice*, Hersey's *Hiroshima* or Wiesel's *Night*. "The Good War" remains a lively source of art today. Witness Spielberg's *Schlindler's List* and *Saving Private Ryan*. Just last year *Private Ryan* and *The Thin Red Line* vied for Academy Awards. Think of the stir caused by the Smithsonian's exhibit of the Enola Gay. I could go on, but let me stop by suggesting that Picasso's *Guernica*, painted after the German and Italian Air Forces bombed the Spanish city in an early sideshow of WWII, remains the single most powerful war art of the century. World War Two is with us. Similarly, the Vietnam War ("The Television War") has spawned and continues to spawn high art of all forms—drama, film, fiction, memoir, poetry, sculpture, dance, photography, painting.

It might be easy to explain why so much work came out of "The Good War," if only to say it's a case of sheer numbers. World War II was, after all, the greatest war in world history, with fronts in Western and Eastern Europe, Africa, the Pacific, and Asia, resulting in nearly 60,000,000 military and civilian casualties and enormous destruction—a conflict which perfected firebombing and introduced atomic war. It was a war that involved over 16 million American soldiers, resulting in over one million U.S. casualties, with 407,316 recorded deaths. By contrast, there were some 54,000 American deaths in Korea and 58,000 in Vietnam. Further, the geographical fronts for these two later wars were also much diminished from the multiple world-wide fronts of "The Good War."

"The Television War" was just that—available to all America daily. In Vietnam, we insinuated ourselves into someone else's civil war at the same time we were fighting our own civil wars—racial, sexual, gender, socio-economic—at home, and not much of this larger picture was lost on a self-aware, activist, and informed generation. Maybe it makes sense that a "small" war falling between a war involving the world and a war more protested than supported would be "forgotten" by the public, and consequently by its artists. But if Korea is "The Forgotten War," Ehrhart's and Jason's book, *Retrieving Bones*, works to remedy this inattention.

A character from James Drought's excerpt from *The Secret*, the final selection of the twelve fictions in *Retrieving Bones*, offers a reasonable summation of American reaction to a pittance of a war after the big "good one," and is worth, I believe, the length of the quotation:

> The unfortunate thing that I discovered next, in the years of the Fifties, working like a slob for the finance company, not much different from the slobs I was trying to pump some money out of—was that the fat-cats are not content to exploit us, bleed us, work us for the rest of our lives at their benefit, but they want us to win them some glory, too. This is why every once in a while they start a war for us to fight in. Like everybody else, I suppose, I read about the North Koreans invading the South Koreans, and just like everybody else—including the South Koreans it turned out later—I just didn't give a shit. Somebody was always invading somebody in our God-forsaken world and I couldn't keep up an interest in who was taking over who. And I can tell you this: I sure as hell didn't think this invasion was a

threat to me, my family, my country, or even the whole goddamn world. But Harry Truman did. He decided that Americans—under the age of twenty-five of course, which left out him and the Congress and the businessmen and doctors and teachers and scientists and ministers—that we were going to defend South Korea. "We'll teach those bloody Communists!" Harry said, waving goodbye to the troop-ships; and Congress agreed and began appropriating all kinds of money to pay to the businessmen for weapons and war materials—plus a profit, of course. It's a funny thing, but a lot of the experts say we were surely headed for a Depression if it hadn't been for the Korean War; and the shot in the arm that this war gave to production, to business, and even to religion—since right away everybody returned to church to pray for their brave sons overseas—was something that the fat-cats had to have or they might have gone under and suddenly become poor folks like the rest of us—a situation they are quite ready to try anything to avoid. So suddenly we were at war, although the term applied was a little more subtle—"a police action" Harry called it; but still it was the same old thing, the flag-waving in the newspapers and on the movie-screens, the speeded up draft, the processing centers, the crazy uniforms, the guns, the firing ranges, the squad-training, the troopship—and then war, death, murder for all under twenty-five, while Congress resounded with virulent speeches, much chest-thumping, and the artists began to "soul search," and the businessmen pocketed the profits, as did the elderly war workers, the housewives, the physically unfit, the "professional patriots," and the grey-haired ministers who gleefully led their flocks again in something worth praying about. Again the fine and free Americans were being inflated with death. Oh, there was much band-playing and march-tingling and "we'll-kill-them" shouting, and everyone including General MacArthur predicted the war would be over in a few weeks. The military journals explained "Korea will be a useful testing ground for our young field commanders," and everyone expected to gain something—except, that is, those under twenty-five. And even for these younger souls, slipping into their uniforms provided them at a tidy profit, there were voices like old Ernie

> Hemingway's which told them that war gave them a one in a million chance, a way to test their manhood, their courage and all that was in them. You can tell how great you are, the young were informed, by how willing you are to give up your life, to charge the blazing guns for your buddies and for your country; and when it is over you will never be afraid again, because you will have discovered yourself. Nobody mentioned what those would discover who lay ripped open after the battle, bleeding, dying, dead from monstrous wounds. (146-7)

Of course the twenty-five-year-olds were the most aware. The older veterans from WWII were attending college (the GI Bill) or buying homes (with VA loans) or pretending major wars were forever ended. The children of WWII vets *were* children during Korea, which may account for their remembering only their fathers' war, with their next attention to war on hold until their own in Vietnam. I know that my reading of *Retrieving Bones* makes me think immediately of the Vietnam War literature I read and teach. The parallels are strong. Consider the following, also from *The Secret*:

> We had been placed deliberately in an intolerable situation for no reason that we could understand, and the very best we could hope for was someday to get *OUT!* It was telling a boxer that he had to step into a ring and fight fifteen lousy rounds to a predetermined draw, during which time he and his opponent would try to kill each other, and when he asked, "Yes, but what for; what do I get" you tell him that if he does well and survives then he won't have to do it anymore. When the fifteenth round is over, you ask him to fight five more, and when these are finished you say, "Don't worry, it will all be over soon, just a couple of more rounds." Well, as you can imagine, long before your boxer ceases counting the rounds, and he stands in the ring dull and uninspired, hammering away at his opponent, who thank God is just as dull and uninspired as he is, and if some slob yells from the sidelines "Give him a good one in the gut for the freedom of mankind,"—well, my friend, you have the very picture, the allegorical image, the representation of all that was the Korean Conflict. I hope that it grinds in your gut as much as it grinds in mine. (154)

Ehrhart, most recently, has been working as a research fellow of the American Studies Department of the University of Wales in Swansea, United Kingdom, where he has focused on the literature of the Korean War. One consequence of this focus has been, as mentioned earlier, a special issue of **WLA**: *I Remember: Soldier-Poets of the Korean War*, (9.2, Fall/Winter 1997), nearly 250 pages of poetry. A selection of that poetry appears in *Retrieving Bones*, along with twelve fictions (short stories and novel excerpts), maps, a graceful framing introduction, author notes, a chronology, and a bibliography of Korean War texts and films. *Retrieving Bones*, which Ehrhart co-edited with Philip K. Jason (a Vietnam War literature scholar and Professor of English at the U.S. Naval Academy), is a well-wrought primer for all students interested in the recollection of a disremembered war.

Donald Anderson is editor of **WLA**. He's editor, too, of *Aftermath: An Anthology of Post-Vietnam Fiction* (Henry Holt, 1995).

Commentary by
Thomas G. Bowie, Jr.

Still Counting the Days of Our Longest War

One Day Too Long: Top Secret Site 85 and the Bombing of North Vietnam. Timothy N. Castle. New York: Columbia University Press, 1999. 370pp. $24.95.

Hanoi, Saturday, 13 March 1999. It's another gray day in Hanoi, a damp misty fog shrouding the city even as the sun struggles to rise. Hanoi is a city caught in contradictions, caught between generations, caught—as is the entire country of Vietnam—between past and present. It's a short jog from the Ministry of Defense Guest House where we are staying—and enjoying the modern conveniences of indoor plumbing and electric heat—to Hoan Kiem Lake, or the Lake of the Returned Sword, a lake rich with myth, one steeped in glories of the past. After repelling Chinese invaders in the sixteenth century, King Le Thai To begrudgingly yielded his powerful sword to a turtle swimming in the lake—with Vietnam free, the sword had to be returned to the gods. In 1999, Vietnam is again free, and once again the gods have exacted a price. Jogging through the mist you see Vietnamese peddling their way to work on one of the million or more bicycles in Hanoi, you see breakfast being cooked on the sidewalk—over open coals—and chamber pots being emptied into the gutter. You see squalor and misery, then turn the corner to witness the opulence of the Hanoi Opera Hilton, newly opened just last year.

The contradictions are everywhere: Our tour of the Temple of Literature, which celebrates a millennium of Vietnamese culture and education, ends on a busy corner where street urchins hawk pirated copies of Duong Thu Huong's *Novel Without a Name*, a book the *New York Times* calls an "unflinching look at the reality of war and of life under a totalitarian regime," and a book officially banned for sale in Vietnam. As we walk past a long line of school children, a nine-year-old boy calls out, without rancor or hostility, "me Viet Cong." In the quarter of a

century since the fall of Saigon, Americans have continually asked what we lost—as a nation and as individuals—in Vietnam. The Vietnamese, no less puzzled, wonder what they've won.

George Herring, in *America's Longest War*, puts it this way:

> For Americans, coming to terms with the war remained more difficult. The anger and bitterness were subsiding and the war seemed to be passing into history, but the process was slow and painful. The United States was spending $100 million per year in a persistent effort to resolve those MIA cases that seemed to be the remaining obstacle to peace. That effort appeared unlikely to succeed, however, and in any event did not address the real problem. "The American people stubbornly refused to make peace with the Vietnamese," journalist Joseph Galloway observed, "even as they mourned the fact that somehow the war wouldn't go away and leave them alone. . . ." Embittered and trapped in denial, they could not see that "peace is *made*, not found." (321)

Perhaps, but how do you make peace with a nine-year-old Viet Cong? How do you make peace with a totalitarian regime that bans "unflinching" looks at the reality of its past? How do you make peace with the Western entrepreneurs who operate an opulent Hanoi Opera Hilton just a block from Hoa Lo prison? Most importantly, how do you make peace with a country so mired in myth that such obvious contradictions aren't even noticed, much less discussed?



Witness the traffic in Hanoi—a sea of motorcycles, bicycles, pedestrians, one that literally moves in waves, one alive with incessant honking—and you begin to sense just how complicated it all is. It's almost impossible to think over the din, and perhaps it's best not to think at all. Our 40-passenger bus somehow parts this sea and we cross the Red River on our way to the 371st Air Force Division—we're visiting the Dragon Division, one of the most decorated fighter units from the Vietnam War. Our guides proudly lead us through their divisional museum, carefully cataloguing the powerful sword wielded by these air dragons during the war. Much of their history, their story, their myth, strikes a hollow chord with me—a former B-52 crewmember. It's hard to make peace when memories still war. But the reaction of my colleague, author Tim Castle, is almost visceral. We pause in front of a large picture of one of the glorious exploits of this air division—one commemorating its aerial bombing of Lima Site 85 on Pha Thi mountain in northern Laos on 12 January, 1968. In his book on the loss of



this top-secret site to communist forces, Dr. Castle argues that "the PAVN air attack against Site 85 was unprecedented in the history of the Vietnam war" (79). And yet, less than two months later, when Site 85 actually fell in March of 1968, no official in the Vietnamese hierarchy claims to have any knowledge of what happened on March 11th—and most particularly no knowledge of the eleven U.S. airmen missing since that day. Pausing in front of the picture, the contradiction be-

tween the attack depicted and the complete lack of information—despite over twenty years of research by Dr. Tim Castle—about the ultimate fate of nine of the eleven servicemen clearly troubles Tim. Making peace, putting the past in the past and looking to the future, will be harder for all of us after visiting the Dragon Division. Perhaps we've stayed one day too long in Hanoi.

The story of Site 85, of course, is far more complex than this, and the contradictions and duplicity prevalent in both Vietnamese and U.S. government accounts of the event. In his preface to his powerfully presented account of the loss of Site 85, *One Day Too Long*, Tim Castle calls this tragedy "an especially agonizing event" (ix). Indeed it is. It's a story as complicated as it is compelling, and in Tim Castle's telling of it, as well researched as it is finally elusive. This is a tale told by an expert, yet still full of sound and fury. The elements of the plot are those of a spy thriller: a top-secret radar bombing site, political intrigue, lies and deceptions, cover stories and "official accounts." But Dr. Castle's book is no spy thriller, nor does it pretend to be. *One Day Too Long* is a meticulously researched account of a very sad day in the history of a very sad war. Carefully, perhaps even painstakingly, documented (Castle appends 75 pages of notes to the 250 page text), this story also has a human dimension, and Tim gives it a very human face. Interviewing hundreds of people associated with the loss, from the families of those killed and missing, to the commanding officer of the site, to high government officials—U.S., Vietnamese, and Lao—Dr. Castle has done his homework for this gripping account.

And Tim Castle has the appropriate credentials to tell this tale truly. After serving two tours in Southeast Asia during the war, Tim also has been a close student of the war's aftermath. He served as a researcher and senior investigator for POW/MIA cases in Laos, and currently is a professor of National Security Studies at the Air War College at Maxwell Air Force Base, Alabama. He knows the POW/MIA issue from the inside, and he's studied it carefully from the outside as an academic. He knows personally the tension between public policy, on the one hand, and the pain of personal loss—in the absence of any real accounting for it—on the other. Most of all, he knows the murky atmosphere, a ghostly fog of sorts, that has settled over the whole POW/MIA issue, and he sets out to penetrate it—as completely as possible—in this text. Given the magnitude of his task, given the formidable forces arrayed against his investigation, and given the thirty-year history of prevarica-

tion and duplicity that he hopes to set straight, we can forgive him the 75 pages of notes. Indeed, we should applaud this precise and unequivocal record of what he calls "the ultimate betrayal" of American servicemen.

Dr. Castle's insightful analysis invites consideration of a number of key issues surrounding the loss of Site 85. How important, for example, was the mission to use the radar at Site 85 to guide bombers into the area around Hanoi? What were the real stakes in this strategic bombing campaign? One thread in revisionist histories of the Vietnam War maintains that an unfettered bombing campaign earlier in the war would have brought the war to a swift close, say in 1967 or 1968. This is not the place to rehearse the arguments for and against such a reading of history, but Dr. Castle's insights on the specific role Site 85 played in such a strategy are revealing:

> The leadership of the U.S. Air Force, and particularly those at 7th AF responsible for managing Rolling Thunder, faced a dilemma. Tasked with a politically driven air campaign against North Vietnam and, therefore, unable to use the bombers most suited for such an operation, the Air Force attempted to carry out the mission by using a jury-rigged ground-directed bombing system flown by F-105 fighter-bombers. This need to demonstrate a war-fighting competence compelled the Air Force to embark on a bold initiative that quickly developed into a meaningless exercise, in which bombs would fall on targets of questionable value. Nonetheless, confronted with an embarrassing lapse in capability, the Air Force had "done something." (247)

What we had done, as Castle's story makes clear, is consign more than a dozen airmen to their death in order to be seen as doing something. The jury-rigged system was based upon the radar at Site 85, and the "Sky Spot" system of guiding F-105s into targets was the mission the men at Site 85 signed up to do. They did so believing that their contributions would dramatically shorten the war; they did so believing in the rightness of their cause. What they were never told is that they were merely pawns in an elaborate chess game between services, a game where bombs usually fell on questionable targets and where the real stakes focused on doing something rather than doing the right thing.

And doing the right thing quickly becomes the major focus of Dr. Castle's revealing text. As he states in his opening chapter,

> This book's goal, then, is to provide an authoritative account of the Heavy Green [code name for Site 85 operations] program. What emerges is a covert operation conducted within the framework of a duplicitous and unparalleled American foreign policy—the presidentially directed introduction of American military men into neutral Laos to improve the effectiveness of U.S. bombing in North Vietnam. (6)

How this could ever be construed as the doing the right thing perplexes Castle; that it was allowed to continue at least one day too long outrages him. But the outrage doesn't stop with the loss of the site because our government's duplicity was just beginning. As in so many stories of the Vietnam War, the aftermath of this experience invites its own telling. And what a sordid aftermath it was: "When disaster struck Heavy Green, perhaps due to official negligence, U.S. representatives embarked on an immediate and decades long coverup. Senior Air Force officers with extensive knowledge of the Site 85 operation and loss have misrepresented the facts in official written accounts and during a lawsuit filed by a Heavy Green family" (6). How do you set such a record straight? What meaningful accounting of the losses at Site 85 can ever atone for such duplicity?

These issues suggest the next level of investigation Dr. Castle pursues in *One Day Too Long*. Knowing that his careful scholarship can do little to right the wrongs of the past, he still hopes that telling this story fully and accurately—providing his own full accounting for these missing men—might sooth some of the pain of the past and might help future military decision-makers make better decisions. And it's in his review—and pointed criticism—of our extensive national efforts at full accounting for our MIA's that Dr. Castle's book makes its greatest impact. Few authors have better credentials to thoroughly review the process; few researchers have done their homework so well. And few critics of the process have been so unsparing in their indictment of what politicians proudly tout as our "highest national priority" in restoring Vietnamese relations. Carefully documenting the "cruel misrepresentations" and outright "lies" promulgated by our government, Dr. Castle outlines a very specific indictment of our accounting process for at least the 9 MIA's of Site 85:

> Counseled by the Air Force to strictly abide by their secrecy agreements, the wives were forced into a world where they had no rights and no guardians. Dealing with women under great stress and mostly unaccustomed to questioning authority, the Air Force found especially vulnerable targets. In a military system where the families should have found protection and trust, they were instead abused and written off as part of an idea gone bad. (158-9)

The rush to judgment, the lack of conclusive evidence in the presumptive findings of these men's deaths, the contradictory stories told by senior Vietnamese and Lao officials involved with the attack on Site 85, not to mention the contradictory reports rendered by the few men successfully evacuated from the site, all come under scrutiny in Castle's probing study. In the face of so many contradictions, it's easy to see why "over the coming years the pain of not knowing the truth would continue to haunt many of the Site 85 families. Hope and anguish would clash as additional information, both accurate and false, would emerge on the fate of the eleven men left on Phou Pha Thi" (187). Sensitive to this pain, fully aware of the anguish these families faced, Dr. Castle works to remain an objective witness to events, withdrawing when necessary into the comprehensive notes following each chapter to validate this objectivity.

But after 200 pages of scrupulous testimony, Dr. Castle can't help but interpret some of the evidence for us. What, for example, of the "help" offered by the communist Lao and Vietnamese governments? How genuine is their desire to forge lasting relationships with the U.S.? How genuine is their desire to make peace?

> What of the U.S. perspective? Many Americans working in the POW-MIA accounting effort seem to forget, or choose to ignore, that Laos and Vietnam remain communist countries run by wartime veterans with considerable animosity toward the United States. There is today a great deal of pragmatism in Vietnam and Laos, and one often hears "the war is behind us." For those under thirty this is undoubtedly true. The leadership in Hanoi and Vientiane, however, are not friends of America. The United States wreaked tremendous havoc on their countries and all have relatives killed by U.S. bombing attacks. If not

> for the collapse of the Soviet Union and their forced search for economic survival, the Lao and Vietnamese probably would not have been very receptive to U.S. POW-MIA initiatives. (211)

Having visited Vietnam less than a year ago, I must confess that something rings very true in Dr. Castle's interpretation of the climate of cooperation. The economy was at the root of every conversation we had with government officials, and it certainly seems to be the motivation for their cooperation with our accounting efforts. "American naivete," says Castle, "in dealing with Lao and Vietnamese colleagues is primarily based on ignorance" (211). And it is precisely such ignorance that he hopes to erase through his book.

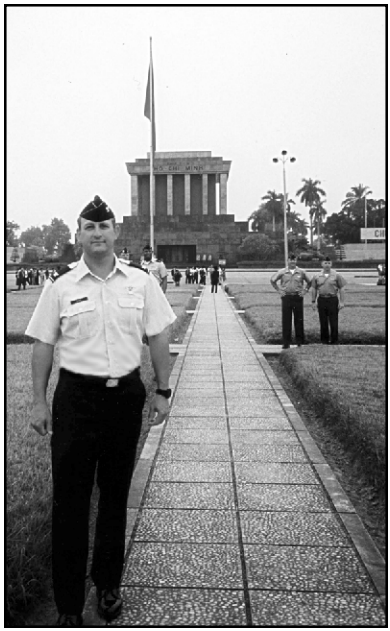
Using Site 85 as a test case for our POW/MIA accounting efforts, Castle concludes:

> Clearly, a review of Vietnamese efforts related to Site 85 shows a consistent pattern of stalling, distortion, manipulation, and equivocation. These delays and lies, all in Vietnam's national interest, will continue as long as the U.S. government allows this highest national priority to be controlled by politics and dishonorable people.
>
> The breach of trust continues. U.S. government officials on March 12, 1968, decided to declare all the men dead and destroy Site 85. They did so to prevent the exposure of a major American violation of the Geneva agreements which, in turn, would have caused serious political damage to the U.S. Southeast Asia war effort. Ironically, the fullest accounting for these eleven Air Force men is now being blocked by U.S. officials intent on bringing their own closure to the Vietnam war. (245)

Joseph Galloway may indeed be right, the United States may indeed need to work harder to make peace with Vietnam. But Tim Castle wonders about the disconnect between full accounting for our missing and our efforts to make peace, about the obvious duplicity of Vietnamese officials regarding the past and our promises to jointly hold hands into the future. These are complex issues, and Dr. Castle poses no easy answers.

But he does ask important questions. What of the nine airmen presumed dead at Site 85? What of a process publicly committed to full

accounting for MIA's, yet one so mired in bureaucratic and political imperatives that such accounting may be impossible. If this is a "shameful episode in U.S. history," one "which all Americans, particularly but not exclusively those who have worn the uniform or watched their loved ones go off to fight our wars, should find especially appalling," how do we truly make peace? And with whom? The Vietnamese? Our own government? With the nine-year-old VC? The questions are important, the answers evasive, the issues real. If you're interested in understanding the long road to peace in Southeast Asia, read this challenging book by Timothy N. Castle.



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Recall Roster by
D.A. Boxwell

Recalling forgotten, neglected, underrated, or unjustly out-of-print works

Rose Macaulay, *The World My Wilderness*. London: Collins, 1950 and Boston: Little, Brown, 1950.

British novelist Rose Macaulay's life-long commitment to pacifism was severely shaken in the aftermath of Hitler's invasion of Austria in March 1938. The event prompted her to resign her sponsorship of the Peace Pledge Union. Like her contemporary and rival, Virginia Woolf, she was forced to concede the inevitability and necessity of war as the only means of resisting Fascism. Nazism, Macaulay stated at the time of the Anschluss, made "pacifism impossibly difficult. I hate it" (qtd. in Babington Smith 145). Imagining "what an awful England it would be under the Nazis," (qtd. in Babington Smith 152) Macaulay supported her country's war against the Axis powers and as early as March 1939 had joined the London Auxiliary Ambulance Service as a volunteer part-time driver. Nonetheless, she gave her support on her terms: she decried the War as an occasion for tub-thumping militarist and nationalist sentiment. As one of Britain's most visible literary figures and weekly pundits, she vociferously fought against the delusion that the War was an ennobling experience for the British people. In 1945, for example, as the war was drawing to a close, she offered a critique in the journal *Time and Tide* of political speeches on the B.B.C. which included

> too much self-praise. 'You did not flinch,' etc. But of course we flinched. Why not? One gets tired of this myth of absolute fearlessness that we are building up about ourselves . . . We [have] also blackmarketed and looted bombed houses . . ." (qtd. In Babington Smith 152)

Macaulay's refusal to glorify the War prefigures the thesis of critic Paul Fussell's book *Wartime*, which attempts "to balance the scales" toward a more realistic assessment of the "psychological and emotional culture of Americans and Britons during" the Second World War (Fussell ix). Fussell castigates the "misconstruction" of reality "useful to the rationalizing intellect unable to confront the messy data of actuality" of war (19). This war, in particular, was actually a "savage, insensate affair, barely conceivable to the well-conducted imagination" (132). Most recently in print in Britain by Virago, Macaulay's twenty-second, and penultimate novel, *The World My Wilderness*, is an important, yet now largely forgotten, expression of at least one British woman writer's alienation from the self-satisfied, high-minded, conventional attitudes which prompted Fussell's condemnation. Macaulay's 1950 novel, sombre and questioning, is a potent cultural critique of patriarchy, war, and the capitalist underpinnings of militarism. Another of Macaulay's literary contemporaries, Vera Brittain, described Woolf's suicide in the autumn of 1941 as an "escape from the disorderly barbarism of contemporary life" (qtd. in Fussell 216). By contrast, Macaulay directly confronted the moral and social decay left in the wake of the War's destruction by imagining redemption through a mother-daughter relationship in *The World My Wilderness*.

The novel takes its alliterative title from a poem by that prolific writer Anon, who has encapsulated the central protagonist's existential situation: "The world my wilderness, its caves my home, Its weedy wastes the garden where I roam, Its chasm'd cliffs my castle and my tomb . . ."

Barbary Deniston is seventeen years old and, like the Allied victors she comes to symbolize, is unable and unwilling to adjust to the end of war. Her passage into adult maturity in Macaulay's novel reflects her society's difficult and painful search for a restoration of order and a return to peacetime mores and values. Barbary comes back to a ruined London in April 1946 after spending the duration of the War in blissful rural Provence, thereby leaving her mother, Helen Michel, to rejoin her father, the eminent barrister Sir Gulliver Deniston, for the first time since her parents' divorce in 1940. The delinquent and aimless product of an atomized family, Barbary has spent her entire adolescence in wartime France on the fringes of the Resistance, performing minor terrorist acts. She also has secret accessory knowledge, as it is revealed at the end of the novel, of the drowning death of her French stepfather, a Vichy collaborator. Barbary is "stunted" in every sense of the word: she is physically underdeveloped, an "irregular-featured elf," (Macaulay 17) who

has "something defensive, puzzled, wary about her, like a watchful little animal or savage" (14). A truant from school, she has lacked formal education, spending her days with her French stepbrother Raoul, in "anarchist" activities (20). Barbary's emotional growth has been hindered by the conscious repression of her rape by a young German soldier who had ordered her beaten after her gang of cohorts had been captured in the Forêt de Sorède. The young woman spent the War "on the margin," (109) undisciplined by her mother, a woman preoccupied with her second marriage and youngest son, as well as her ambitions to be an artist and writer. The novel's plot is set in motion when Barbary's father insists on her return to England, where she can become "civilized" and re-integrated into the center of respectable, upper middle-class society under her father's control and oversight.

Thus, Macaulay places the aptly-named Barbary between two starkly oppositional forces in two very different settings: the cold, rigidly conventional father at home in London and the warm, artistic, and unconventional mother who is associated with the lushly fertile landscape around her villa in the South of France. The novel alternates between the two settings as it depicts Barbary's conflicted efforts to come to terms with the ending of war and the uncertainties of peace. Unable to adapt herself to a life of scheduled art classes at the Slade School and the clockwork discipline of her father's household, Barbary spends her days in the ruins of East London, manifesting her continuing truancy and rebellion by painting postcards for the occasional American tourist and painting surrealistic frescoes on abandoned walls with titles like "Dies Irae," literally creating apocalyptic art outside the confines of the respectable academy. She suffers from "culture shock:" after the abundant warmth and freedom of Collioure, the "London streets all seemed very dull and ugly . . . Urged on by a desperate nostalgia [she] could barely endure the meaningless grey city streets and the dull, respectable smoke-dark houses" (50). She only begins to feel comfortable in London when she roams around the tangled wilderness of the bombed-out parts of the city which serve to remind her of her formative years in war-torn France. Of the destruction wrought by the Blitz, she remarks that yes, "it would be nice to see a picture of all this as it was—all houses and offices and shops and streets. [But] I like it better like this. One belongs more" (59).

The ruins of East London, still a landmark on the cityscape as late as the 1960s, take on a strange life of their own in Macaulay's novel. They become, as they do in Elizabeth Bowen's short story "Mysterious Kôr,"

a modern-day avatar of the Gothic, fantastic, moonlit landscapes of Ann Radcliffe and Horace Walpole. The ruins are an inverted world where Barbary can roam to her anarchist's satisfaction: "the broken habitations, this stony rubbish seemed natural" (52). Prompted by T.S. Eliot's famous poem, Macaulay writes:

> Barbary wondered what the ruined waste lands looked like after dark, with the night lying over the deep chasms, the pits, the broken walls and foundations, the roofless, gaping churches, the stone flights of stairs climbing high into emptiness . . . It had familiarity, as of a place long known; it had the clear, dark logic of a dream; it made a lunatic sense, as the unshattered streets and squares did not; it was the country that one's soul recognized and knew. (61)

Macaulay's novel is set in actually documented bombed-out locales, such as the area around St. Giles Cripplegate, however phantasmagoric they become in Barbary's imagination. Associating with petty criminals—black marketeers ("spivs"), military deserters, "fences," shoplifters, and looters—who evade the established legal order in the labyrinthine ruins and tunnels of the bombed sites, Barbary is able to maintain the sense of herself as a renegade *maquisarde* which she is supposed to relinquish, at her father's behest. The most striking denizen of Barbary's wilderness is Father Roger, whose insanity was induced by seeing his church bombed in 1940, and who wanders among the ruined churches, shouting, with a kind of divinest sense, "We are in hell now . . . Hell is where I am, Lucifer and all his legions are in me" (166-7). Thus, post-war London is, in Macaulay's portrayal, a "wrecked and flowering wilderness" (253) of lawlessness, theft, madness, and moral and familial decay. The city has ultimately reverted, in the final paragraph of the novel, to a state of Nature, described thus:

> The questionable chaos of broken courts and lanes lay sprawled under the October mist, and the shells of churches gaped liked lost myths, and the jungle pressed in on them, seeking to cover them up. (254)

Macaulay's vision of post-war England is so bleak that even established religion seems unable to provide its traditional redemptive power;

and capitalism is also inevitably relegated to the dustbin of mankind's destructive history in *The World My Wilderness*. "Eight centuries of property and substance" (193) were obliterated by aerial bombardment, she points out. The commercial neighborhoods of East London are now solely inhabited by

> the ghosts of the centuries-old merchant cunning [which] crept and murmured among weeds and broken stones, flitted like bats about dust-heaped, gaping rooms. But their companion ghosts, ghosts of an ancient probity, honourable and mercantile and proud and tough, that had lived side by side with cunning in the stone ways, and in the great blocks of warehouses and offices and halls, had deserted and fled without trace, leaving their broken dwellings to the creeping jungle and the crafty shades. (159)

The only real economic energy suffusing the background of Barbary's failed re-integration into British society is the decadent and perverted capitalism of Mavis, Jock and Horace, the petty criminals of the ruins who become her friends and lead her into a new life of crime. This dark vision of outlawry in postwar Britain is present, too, in contemporary British film noirs like *They Made Me a Fugitive* (1947), *Brighton Rock* (1947), and *The Blue Lamp* (1950). "Commerce, begun in peddling and piracy, slinks down into peddling and piracy, slinks guiltily among the shadows of the moon," Macaulay writes of their petty thievery (183). Hence the secure foundation of Britain's imperial and national glory is astutely and presciently called into question:

> Poor merchants, poor agents, poor warehousemen, where are they all now? Blown sky high, burnt up by that horrid, malicious flame, many have seeded themselves again elsewhere, struggling against extinction. (182)

In such vivid and probing prose, Macaulay presents a sustained and powerful evocation of the truly apocalyptic force of the Second World War on British society, bourgeois capitalism, as well as the resultant moral corruption and confusion which the expediency of war fosters.

The World My Wilderness, therefore, is a sombre, yet not completely nihilistic, work of post-war fiction. The one significant recuperative force

offered to the young female protagonist is the certainty and primacy of the mother-daughter bond, a conflicted relationship at the center of the narrative, which is, alone of all the forces rent by the war, restored to cohesive unity and order at the novel's end. Barbary's actual reunification with Helen Michel at the denouement signifies the feminine values by which, Macaulay strongly implies, British society can recover a securer sense of itself from the havoc and exploitation of war and its immediate aftermath. The primacy of the mother-daughter bond is the one certainty, then, offered by Macaulay's novel about the aftermath of the Second World War.

Strong mother figures are at the heart of all Rose Macaulay's novels about war. Daphne Sandomir in *Non-Combatants and Others* (1916), the pacifist and suffragist activist of Macaulay's World War One novel, provides the enabling force for her cynical and disillusioned daughter Alix's commitment to helping end war. Dr. Kate Marlowe, the intrepid protagonist of Macaulay's Spanish Civil War novel, *And No Man's Wit* (1940), travels through Franco's brutally repressive Spain, searching for her son, missing among the defeated International Brigades. Helen Michel in *The World My Wilderness* continues this succession of powerful, and fiercely independent, matriarchs. Helen is a willfully unconventional, yet symbolically restorative, force—as a mother figure, she is interestingly problematic. She accedes to her former husband's desire to re-acquaint Barbary with her native country, openly ignores Barbary's needs as an adolescent daughter, and is, by traditional standards of motherhood (what Sara Ruddick calls the "myths of matriarchy" [345]), a "bad mother." She abandoned her marriage to Sir Gulliver by remaining in France on the eve of war in 1939, now openly lives with her murdered husband's brother, and unethically indulges her creative ambitions by translating her own forgeries of medieval Provencal troubadour poetry. Helen Michel is, according to her eldest son Richie, someone who "always did precisely what she liked" (34). She is an independent and self-confessed "lotos eater" (89). Even more remarkable, according to the third person omniscient narrator:

> She was one of the rare women who are almost as highly sexed as a man; yet she took sex casually in her stride; it was not an aim of existence, but a pleasure by the way, to be taken simply, directly, frankly, then laid aside for some other pleasure . . . (36)

Men admire her "enormously, finding in her a woman's beauty and the mind, grasp, and wit of a man . . . a masculine freedom and sensuousness . . ." (36). She is a woman who loves with her senses and not her sentiments (37). Helen Michel is, in short, an androgynous and powerful life force, one with redemptive qualities. Her eventual retrieval of her daughter from the "hell" of a London in physical, economic, and moral ruins recalls an important feminine mythic archetype: namely, the story of Demeter and Persephone.

American poet and critic Adrienne Rich regards the myth of Demeter and Persephone as the story of the mother-daughter bond, a relationship which, she asserts, has been "minimized and trivialized in the annals of patriarchy" (226). Rich speculates on the purpose and origins of the story in these terms:

> Each daughter, in the millennia before Christ, must have longed for a mother whose love for her and whose power were so great as to undo rape and bring her back from death. And every mother must have longed for the power of Demeter . . . the reconciliation with her lost self. (240)

Macaulay's novel suggests many of the elements of this myth, from its very opening which clearly establishes Helen Michel as proprietor and ruler of her own domain. The garden of the Villa Fraises "was crowded with shrubs and flowers and orange and lemon trees, and pomegranates and magnolias and bougainvillea and vines" (7). In contrast to Gulliver's embodiment of post-war Austerity Britain and its continued rationing and shortages, Helen Michel is fertility incarnate. She has three children by three different men. Her youngest child, by Maurice Michel, was born when she was in her early forties. This Demeter-figure has a "lost" daughter whom she must rescue, and Barbary's unceasing yearning for a return to France and her mother's warm, fertile domain is at the root of her unhappiness in London. The complete primacy of the mother-daughter bond is affirmed by the interfusion of their psyches. Alone of all the characters in the novel, Helen comes to realize "How much at home Barbary must have felt, hiding and being chased about the ruins with . . . spivs and deserters: the *maquis* is within us, we take our wilderness where we go" (210).

Early in the novel, Helen had willingly allowed Barbary to return to London, but by its close, she resolutely tells her daughter: "I'm not

going to let you grow up without a mother" (232). The two return to France, leaving Sir Gulliver with the startling revelation, and confirmation of every patriarch's worst fear, that he is not Barbary's father and that his efforts to assert control over her, therefore, have been completely misdirected. At all events, Sir Gulliver was never able to establish a bond with the young woman, insisting, "You know, my dear child, you'll have to learn sometime to fit into the society about you" (135). He tells her, "I think it's best that you should stay here [in London] . . . learning to behave like a properly brought up young woman" (136). Barbary rejects these educative efforts, and matters are brought to a head when she is seriously injured in the bombed-out ruins, falling into a cellar while evading the police on a shoplifting charge. Under this adversity, Helen comes to recognize, fully, the depth of her maternal feelings for her daughter and flies to London. There she rescues Barbary from the legal and familial constraints of conventional patriarchal control—from Sir Gulliver's attempts to teach her to be what he calls "a normal, nicely got up, pretty mannered girl" (39).

In psychoanalytic terms, then, the secure relationship between mother and daughter in *The World My Wilderness* is marked by intense "positive cathexis." That is to say, Helen and Barbary both fully invest their relationship with such a concentration of psychic energy and mutual ego identification that the intrusive paternal figure is simply excluded from it—this a reversal of a child's normal development. For example, Sir Gulliver's efforts to force Barbary to reveal details of her war-time rape to the eminent psychologist and family friend Sir Angus Maxwell are, in the terms of the novel, as powerful an indictment of Establishment medicine's insensitivity as anything in Virginia Woolf's writings. Barbary responds by fearing

> the searching eyes that looked into her mind, trying to read it, questioning and surmising, dragging her thoughts as with a deep-sea net . . . Things would be dragged up that must lie forever in the deep, secret pools of the sea . . . (109-110)

Barbary's intense and cathected desire for reunification with her mother is an oppositional force, valorized by the novel's resolution of its plot, against Sir Gulliver's enactment of the Lacanian "Nom du Pere." In Jacques Lacan's influential post-Freudian theory, the "Name of the Father" is a law which stands outside of the mother-child dyad, until a

point in time when it interposes itself forcefully, creating a third term in the family, linking the family to the established patriarchal social order. According to Carolyn Burke's lucid definition of this concept, the Law of the Father "intervenes in the mother-child relationship to establish difference [via the Oedipus Complex] as a concomitant of identity, to initiate the child into the culture of patriarchy" (110). This Law, in theoretical terms, forces the child to situate itself in reality through the recognition of relational differences, and an identification with the parent who is not-Mother. In terms of Macaulay's novel, however, Barbary's rejection of the dominant culture of patriarchy, to be "a normal, nicely got up, pretty mannered girl," as Sir Gulliver insists, is a paradigm of her rejection of the dominant culture which has created and sustained the ideologies of militarism and bourgeois capitalism, and the post-war ethical and moral vacuum they have created.

Instead, Barbary longs for a pre-Oedipal world of sameness, not difference, and a reunion with the mother's body. Early in the novel, the narrator informs the reader that, as an infant, Barbary had been a nervous sleeper,

> waking in terror, screaming at shadows, then, when her mother arrived, hiding her face in her breast, and clutching her with both arms. Barbary had been a wild baby, a nervy excited child, her mother her tower of refuge. (19)

Significantly, this "tower of refuge" rejects the dominant culture's conventions, remarking of her "desire not work . . . As to one's country, why should none feel any more interest in its welfare than in that of other countries?" (142). Such a heretical remark closely parallels Virginia Woolf's now famous declaration in *Three Guineas* (1938) that as a woman, she had no country, and no need or desire for one. Helen's rejection of nationalism, the bourgeois work ethic, and even the traditional myths of ideal motherhood—every last one a patriarchal construct—is presented in the novel as attractive and compelling. Helen's last words in *The World My Wilderness*, after a sly remark about the frailty of "male virtue," express her ironic, yet maternally protective, resolve that Barbary would not, and could not,

> make a fit inhabitant of the rarefied air that Gully breathes. She would freeze in it and wither up. She must have sunshine,

> geniality, laughter, love; and if she goes to the devil, she shall at least go happily, my poor little savage. (251)

This post-war Demeter has triumphantly reclaimed her Persephone, albeit in an ironically inverted manner, characteristic of much of Macaulay's fiction. Helen muses to herself at the novel's end, "I am taking my child away from the higher to the lower . . ." (250-1). Of course, the novel asks the reader to see the irony in this: the mother makes possible the daughter's return to a feminist utopian state unencumbered by the destructive forces of male chauvinism, capitalism, nationalism, and imperialism.

Barbary's retrieval from the post-War "underworld" is the one significant redemptive act in a culture fragmented by war and its inability to recover from war. The primacy of the mother-daughter relationship in *The World My Wilderness* represents one possible way to save, as Macaulay urged in 1939, "some few frail strands from the rot, that they may in the end be woven into a cord which shall lift us to some sanity above the howling bear pit" of the Second World War ("War" 539).

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Reviews

Understanding the Literature of World War II: A Student Casebook to Issues, Sources, and Historical Documents. James H. Meredith. Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1999, xix + 250 pp., index. $39.95.

Reviewed by Stephen J. Rippon, United States Air Force Academy

At one point in James H. Meredith's book, poet and WWII veteran Richard Wilbur tells an interviewer about his generation's response to WWI literature: "It may be that the literature of World War I, which told of so much beastliness and stupid waste of lives, prepared us to be not altogether surprised [about World War II]" (69). If that is true, then how much more will Meredith's *Understanding the Literature of World War II* and the works it introduces be useful for teaching students today? I recommend Meredith's casebook for anyone who teaches at the high school or college level and is looking for provocative material to engage students with literature—and not just the literature of WWII. While the focus of Meredith's book is WWII, the literature he covers has a larger, timeless vision. As he mentions in the first chapter, "the intensity of combat compresses a lot of life into a small amount of time (the essence of poetry and fiction itself)" (14). Meredith, in turn, has compressed much into 250 pages, while preserving the richness and ambiguity of real life questions.

As part of the Greenwood Press "Literature in Context" Series, *Understanding the Literature of World War II* is the fruit of Meredith's balanced and wide-ranging research. In each of the five chapters, he starts with summaries of pertinent literary works, then goes on to provide historical background. Interviews, historical documents, journalistic accounts, memoirs, and questions designed to help students explore their own WWII connections supplement his discussion. The many-faceted approach succeeds in establishing a broad context.

In negotiating among the diverse materials, students will have to deal with questions that resist easy answers. For example, Meredith states in his opening comments to the chapter "The Combatants," "The one common characteristic of these works is a de-romanticized view of war:

war indeed is hell" (1). "War is hell"—is it really that simple? In a conversation with several undergraduate students at the Air Force Academy in 1986, transcribed in Meredith's book, the late Joseph Heller recounts his own experience in the war and brings that common sentiment about the hellishness of war into question:

> No, my own experience in World War II was, I'm ashamed to say, extremely beneficial—from the time I enlisted to the time I was discharged with the exception of a few months toward the end of my tour of duty when I was scared. It was very orderly, very beneficial. I also think for most Americans—except those who were wounded, killed, or taken prisoner—for most of them, it was one of the most meaningful, delightful experiences in their life. (52)

At this point, a student working through the book might ask, "How can war be hell, and at the same time be remembered fondly?" Such counterpoint—one view raised, followed by a contrasting view—is typical of Meredith's method here, and captures war's ambiguity economically.

When Heller passed away in December 1999, I heard *Catch-22* described several times in the media as an "antiwar novel." But in a 1997 interview conducted by Meredith and Kathi Vosevich (and included in this volume of **WLA** as well as in Meredith's book), Heller goes beyond the superficial popular understanding of his work as simply antiwar. In response to the question "Do you consider *Catch-22* to be an antiwar novel?" Heller remarks,

> It is more anti-traditional establishment than antiwar. To say it's antiwar doesn't say much to differentiate it from other stories about the war. I used the military organization as a construct, as a metaphor for business relationships and institutional structures. Of course, it was antiwar. I can't think of any good American fiction that is not antiwar. But I don't think anyone in *Catch-22* raises the question whether we should be fighting the war. (57)

Heller's response might cause a student to ask, "How could Heller say that all good fiction is antiwar, and yet [as he clearly asserted elsewhere

in the 1986 conversation] not question America's involvement in WWII?" Educators have long been challenged with the task of helping students get past simple dualistic, good-versus-evil judgments about events and characters in order to notice underlying complexities. Through Meredith's juxtaposition of Heller's interviews with the other voices from the war, students might come to appreciate the resulting tension: the worthiness of the United States' WWII involvement—and the terrible fact that the war had to be fought. Furthermore, Heller's use of the military as a metaphor for human institutions may encourage students to perceive how war literature can shed true light on many other aspects of human existence.

In addition to the fascinating new insights into Heller's life and work, "The Combatants" provides summaries of other works by several other authors, including Martha Gellhorn, Kurt Vonnegut, Norman Mailer, James Jones, and Irwin Shaw, as well as poets Wilbur, James Dickey, and Randall Jarrell. Complementing the summaries is a thorough background into the major campaigns and events of the war.

The next four chapters broaden the war considerably to include the experiences of those on the United States' home front; the deceptions involved in occupation, resistance, and espionage; the Holocaust; and, finally, the use of the atomic bomb against Japan. Resonances emerge. For example, while I had been initially unimpressed by Meredith's appropriation of the cliché "war is hell," his final chapter on the use of the atomic bomb reprises the "war is hell" metaphor in a grand way, with a thorough discussion of John Hersey's *Hiroshima*. In describing Hersey's narrative, Meredith alludes to Dante's *Inferno*, and I sensed that Meredith himself had patterned his casebook in the same way—as a journey through the fiery underworld of WWII. Those layers of hell also include the incarceration of Japanese-Americans on the U.S. home front, buttressed by a discussion of David Guterson's *Snow Falling on Cedars*; the U.S. military's discrimination against African-Americans; and the Holocaust, including discussions of Elie Wiesel's *Night* and William Styron's *Sophie's Choice*. Meredith enhances all of these areas with sections of personal accounts. As a result, the seemingly trite statement "war indeed is hell" begins to ring with more nuanced meaning.

Perhaps the most important idea Meredith promotes in this book is that students should explore their own connections to WWII. In his introduction, he reflects on the way he became curious about the war:

> I distinctly remember in the 1960s sitting on the spacious front porch of my grandmother's Greenville, Mississippi, boarding house drinking cold, southern-sweet iced tea out of ample glasses. On that porch I listened to my uncles talk about their experiences during World War II. These two men were reluctant storytellers about their combat experiences. My father had to fill in the details later. (xiii-xiv)

Now it is Meredith who provides students the details, just as his father did for him, with an excellent selection of historical documents ranging from transcripts of President Roosevelt's "fireside chats" to Ernie Pyle's dispatches to the actual instruments of surrender signed by Germany and Japan. The interviews Meredith includes are not with reluctant storytellers, but with Heller, Wilbur, and with Robert Ellis, who wrote an extensively researched memoir about his combat experience entitled *See Naples and Die*. He also includes Paul West, whose novels *The Very Rich Hours of Count von Stauffenberg* and *Rat Man of Paris* depict the German resistance and occupation, respectively. Meredith's colorful interview with former Air Force Academy English Department head Brigadier General Jesse Gatlin, who had been directly involved with nuclear bomb testing, allows the student to imagine living in the wake of World War II, as the Cold War began. All of the interviews serve as models, preparing the students to fulfill one of the most valuable goals of the book—learning to ask their own questions about the war.

Meredith's chapter-closing "Topics for Written and Oral Discussion" aim to move the student from a provincial frame of reference to a broader understanding of human nature. Meredith starts locally on his grandmother's porch, and having done so, emphasizes to students that their investigations can begin right where they live, right now. For example, after Meredith's chapter on the Holocaust, students may be uncomfortable with what it reveals about the negative potential of human nature. How, then, should students deal with the tragedy of the Holocaust? Meredith's solution is appropriate. In his chapter-closing topics for discussion, he challenges students to interview a Holocaust survivor, to find out more about how anti-Semitism may be prevalent in their local community, and to visit the services of a religion other than their own. As a result, students may integrate new insights with their existing

personal commitments. They may even be compelled to write a story, as Meredith suggests in another chapter-closing topic.

Understanding the Literature of World War II fulfills an urgent need. As Meredith writes in his introduction,

> The World War II generation is dwindling. . . . Soon only those will remain whose connection to the war, like mine, will be what they have either heard or read. It is important to get the story right. The lessons of World War II are so great and weighty that we cannot afford to repeat them. (xiv)

That generation is indeed passing away; since the publication of Meredith's book, Joseph Heller himself has died. But Meredith, who also has a book devoted to Heller's fiction coming out later this year, has learned well from Heller's own ability to present an enigma, as he did most famously in *Catch-22*. *Understanding the Literature of World War II* distills the war's complexities into ideas the students can apply to their own WWII connections, and ultimately to the world they are already inheriting.

Black Hawk Down: A Story of Modern War. Mark Bowden. New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 1999, 386 pp., maps, photos, sources, notes, index. $24.00.

Reviewed by Jeff Collins, United States Air Force Academy

In an interview with Noah Adams, author Philip Gourevitch converses about the "shadow of Somalia" that, seven years after the event, still "falls heavily" on decisions made at the United Nations. This shadow has helped solidify our nation's thinking about war in a way exemplified by Kosovo, a war, as George Will puts it, "waged on the principle that there are values important enough to fight, meaning kill, for, even if they are not important enough to die for."

For students of modern war, understanding the shadow created by the 3 October 1993 incident in Mogadishu—during which 18 American soldiers were killed and some 70 wounded—is essential. Mark Bowden's book, *Black Hawk Down: A Story of Modern War* is, foremost, an exhaustive presentation of the events that took place in Somalia that long day. Fortunately, the book propels the reader through the events with a tremendous narrative drive and an almost breathless attention to the physical and emotional details of what took place. Take this scene, for example, as Delta Force medic, Sergeant Kurt Schmid, attempts to save one of the wounded Army Rangers:

> Corporal Smith was alert and terrified and in sharp pain. "Give me some morphine for the pain!" Smith demanded. . . .
>
> "I can't," Schmid told him. In this state, morphine could kill him. . . .
>
> The wounded Ranger bellowed as the medic reached with both hands and tore open the entrance wound. Schmid tried to shut out the fact that there were live nerve endings beneath his fingers. It was hard. He had formed an emotional bond with Smith. They were in this together. But to save the young Ranger, he had to treat him like an inanimate object, a machine that was broken and needed fixing. He continued to root for the artery. If he failed to find it, Smith would probably die. He picked through the open upper thigh, reaching up to his pelvis, parting layers of skin, fat, muscle, and vessel, probing through pools of bright red blood. He couldn't find it. Once severed, the up-

> per end of the artery had evidently retracted up into Smith's abdomen. The medic stopped. Smith was lapsing into shock. The only recourse now would be to cut into the abdomen and hunt for the severed artery and clamp it. . . . (Bowden 211-14)

Such gripping, detailed descriptions make this book a cinematic read and help the book portray an authenticity more often found in memoirs or fiction than in after-the-fact accounts written by non-participants (Bowden is a reporter for *The Philadelphia Inquirer*). According to the Afterword, the author conducted interviews with participants from both sides of the fighting to "corroborate" the happenings and avoided secondhand anecdotes altogether (351).

The book's cinematic qualities are further accentuated by a rapidly changing point of view. Some of Bowden's best scenes come on the Somali side; here, for example, is the description of an attack on a meeting of clansmen:

> That day in July, the leadership had gathered to discuss how to respond to a peace initiative from Jonathan Howe, the retired American admiral who was then leading the UN mission in Mogadishu. Men of middle age were seated at the center of the room on rugs. Elders took chairs and sofas that had been arranged around the perimeter. . . . Behind the elders, standing against the walls, were the youngest men. . . .
>
> They were the best-educated members of the clan. Ever since the collapse of order and government in Somalia there was little work for intellectuals. So a meeting like this was a big event, a chance to argue over the direction of things. . . .
>
> Farah was on the perimeter of the room with the younger men, but instead of standing, he had set himself down on one knee between two sofas, which probably saved his life.
>
> The TOW missile is designed to penetrate the armored hull of a tank. . . . Equipped with a shaped charge inside its rounded tip, on impact it spurts a jet of plasma, molten copper, which burns through the outer layer of its target, allowing the missile to deliver its full explosive charge within. The explosion is powerful enough to dismember anyone standing near it, and hurls deadly sharp metal fragments in all directions.

> What Farah saw and heard was a flash of light and a violent crack. He stood and took one step forward and heard the *whoosh!* of a second missile. There was another flash and explosion. He was thrown to the floor. . . . He tried to move forward, but his way was blocked by bodies, a bloody pile of men and parts of men a meter high. . . .
>
> There was another explosion above him. Then another and another. Sixteen missiles were fired in all. (72-74)

As vivid as these scenes are, however, this book clearly comes off as an American tale—a tale with at times, a not so subtle narrative bias for the American soldier on the ground. From the prayer Army Ranger Matt Eversman recites as his lead Black Hawk heads into "Indian country" (3-6) to the photo of an uncomfortable-looking President Clinton visiting with Ranger Scott Galentine (350) whose hand was sewn inside his stomach to aid healing, it's clear the reader is supposed to side with the common soldier doing the bidding of his military and civilian leaders who are, in varied measures, clueless, incompetent, unqualified, or uninformed.

Perhaps this bias toward the common American soldier is intentional or unavoidable, given the proportion of interviews Bowden conducted with wounded ex-Rangers (351). Unfortunately, the pervading narrative bias overcomes Bowden's withering efforts at objectivity. One of my students told me the book made him feel "bad." As our discussion continued, it turned out he was using "bad," as students sometimes do, to mean full of pride and he was talking about this scene where Bowden provides a Somali description of the Americans' routine "profile flight" (39) tactic, designed to keep the Somalis guessing about when actual raids would occur (21-22):

> They all stepped out to see. Yusuf, too, saw the legs dangling and knew it was the Rangers. They all despised the Rangers, and the Black Hawks, which seemed now to be over the city continually. They flew in groups, at all hours of day and night, swooping down so low they destroyed whole neighborhoods, blew down market stalls, and terrorized cattle. Women walking the streets would have their colorful robes blown off. Some had infants torn from their arms by the powerful updraft. . . . The

> residents complained that pilots would deliberately hover over their roofless outdoor showers and toilets. Black Hawks would flare down on busy traffic circles, creating havoc, then power off leaving the crowd below choking on dust and exhaust. (75)

Clearly there was some disconnect here with the student's reading, but taken within the context of the rest of the work, his reading would not be unlike the view of Bowden's narrator at points in the text. For example, "War was ugly and evil, for sure, but it was still the way things got done on most of the planet. . . . If the good-hearted ideals of humankind were to prevail, then they needed men who could make it happen. Delta [Force] made it happen. . . noble, silent, and invisible" (33-34). Like the narrator in *Thud Ridge* or *The Green Berets*, Bowden's narrator is unconfused by the moral dilemmas faced by combat soldiers in heated action—a stark contrast to the narrator's careful appraisal of the broader moral considerations of sending soldiers to war.

Despite these inconsistencies in narrative texture, the book is instructive and worthwhile. It apportions blame for the incident's outcome among the military participants and its civilian leadership. More clearly than most analyses of war, this book makes explicit how assumptions and mindset affect decisions at all levels, from the decision by individual rangers to leave their night vision equipment and canteens at home, since it was to be a short daylight raid (which wound up lasting all night); to the decisions by the generals about how to mount a rescue convoy; to the decision by the National Command Authority to be involved militarily in Somalia at all. In this book, Bowden makes clear how what we believe affects what we decide to do.

Thus, we see a reason we should pay attention to the "shadow of Somalia." If nothing else, we need to recognize that this incident has affected the American mindset about war; perhaps *Black Hawk Down* is one step toward analyzing what we are to do about it.

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The Vietnam War and Postmodernity. Edited by Michael Bibby. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2000, 238 pp., including chapter notes and notes about contributors. $50.00, cloth; $16.95, paper.

Reviewed by George Luker, United States Air Force Academy

Anyone interested in seeing the Vietnam War in the context of the postmodern should first read this set of essays. *The Vietnam War and Postmodernity*'s editor and contributor, Michael Bibby, has perceptively chosen and structured the readings in such a way that audiences should come away with clearer historical, cultural, and aesthetic impressions of the Vietnam War and the attendant complex concept of the postmodern. Generally speaking, the contributors view the postmodern as a positive, liberatory project, both historically and aesthetically, and both in critical modes and in contemporary artistic narrative. Most offer the more prominent postmodern theorists—Jean Baudrillard, Michel Foucault, Francois Lyotard, and Frederic Jameson, to list some of the major figures. Jameson and Michael Herr get plenty of attention, in tandem and separately, throughout these works. And rightly so. Michael Herr's *Dispatches* is often canonized as an icon of postmodern literature (along with his filmic representations in *Apocalypse Now* and *Full Metal Jacket*); Jameson gets credit for defining the Vietnam War as postmodern as early as 1984 (44) and even cites Herr's *Dispatches* as a prime example of a text that reflects the difficulties in representing that war. Frequently glancing at the major iconography of the postmodern, then, Bibby's collection strongly advocates "the recuperation of the war's significance in any account of the postmodern" (xv) and serves as a fine introduction to the representations of the Vietnam War in the context of postmodern culture, literature, and film.

As editor, Bibby organizes nine chapters thematically into three sections, metaphorically taking the reader from initial luminosity to a suggested fire fight and then to a view of "post/Vietnam" argumentation. Section One, called "Illumination Rounds" (clearly referring to the famous chapter of the same name from Herr's *Dispatches*) includes truly insightful essays by Philip Beidler, Michael Clark, and Cynthia Fuchs. Beidler's "The Last Huey" synthesizes literature's pervasive image of the UH-1 helicopter with Lyotard, Herr, and others, to help locate many of the Vietnam War's postmodern attributes: its fragmentation,

its spectacle, its recurring metafictional character. Acknowledging the myriad of Huey missions, Beidler reminds us of the final irony of the Huey's many techno missions: although it was an advanced air machine, the Huey often led troops to disaster, the "thwak-thwak-thwak" of its rotor blades always giving away the element of surprise. The self-subverting Huey, Beidler says, stands as a dominant icon for this postmodern war.

Michael Clark's essay, "The Work of War in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," puts together Walter Benjamin's concept of "representational technologies" (qtd. in Clark 25) and films such as *Apocalypse Now*, *Universal Soldier*, and *Jacob's Ladder*, and reveals some troubling thoughts about the Vietnam War as more "specular" than real. Clark argues that in representations of the Vietnam War—well before the Persian Gulf War—we see the conflation of doing and spectating. In " 'What do we say happened here?': Memory, Identity, and the Vietnam War," Cynthia Fuchs compares and contrasts representations of post-Vietnam War films, predominantly focusing on four films—*Universal Soldier*, *Jacob's Ladder*, *Boyz in the Hood* and *Dead Presidents*. All four, she argues, are postmodern narratives that critique the traditional Vietnam film's nostalgic search for redemption, a linear story "about going back in time to recuperate a national identity, pride, purpose, and survivable memory" (54). For the white male protagonists in *Universal Soldier* and *Jacob's Ladder*, Fuchs shows that "temporal stability and fixed identity seem forever remote, pretty-to-think-so fantasies" (71). The two African-American films, *Dead Presidents* and *Boyz in the Hood*, remind us that there is no nostalgic return for black vets. Vietnam was an extension of the pre-war racist hegemony at home, and in these films the "war has never been over, it just comes back to the hood" (74). Although Fuchs' seems to favor *Presidents* and *Boyz* as postmodern representations, her discussion of the four films shows them all to be provocative interrogations of national identity and memory in the postmodern era.

Section Two, "Tracers," begins with what is perhaps the most challenging piece in the collection, Brady Harrison's " 'This movie is a thing of mine': Homeopathic Postmodernism in Michael Herr's *Dispatches*." In it, Harrison resists Baudrillard's more pessimistic postmodern theory in favor of Jameson's therapeutic brand of the same to illuminate the therapeutic power of Herr's "filmic" approach. In Baudrillard's postmodernism, simulacra (representations which we come to experience

as reality) lead to cultural ennui or paralysis. Herr is acutely aware of the dangers of simulation and his homeopathic description is powerful:

> in the back of every column of print you read about Vietnam there was a dripping, laughing death-face; it hid there in the newspapers and the magazines and held to your television screen for hours after the set was turned off for the night, an after-image that simply wanted to tell you at last what somehow had not been told. (qtd. in Harrison 99)

Herr's language is homeopathic in that it inoculates itself against ennui or paralysis and creates a text with progressive power. Harrison argues that Herr homeopathically employs his own simulacra—images of the "freaky-spooky, otherside-of-the-worldness of the war . . . as if on film, but in words" (99) as a kind of therapy, a therapy that involves telling what somehow had not been told. Herr's desire to explain the unexplainable, Harrison says, by "turning simulacra against simulacra" is what brings homeopathic engagement to *Dispatches*; he "uses simulations not to erase history but to achieve a clearer, deeper sense of it" (103). What Harrison labels a "homeopathic" approach, postmodern theorist Linda Hutcheon might call a historiographic metafiction (105-23). Whatever label we want to assign to Herr's fragmented memoir, Harrison's final analysis is compelling. The way that Herr's text frequently folds back on itself, suggesting that truth and falsehood may not be the right terms for assessing the Vietnam experience, offers a more profound historical understanding of the Vietnam War. What Harrison offers is a deeper understanding of Herr.

Looking to Jameson, W.F. Haug, and Arnold Van Gennep, Tony Williams's Marxist reading of Phil Caputo's *Indian Country* and Bobbie Ann Mason's *In Country* fires tracers point blank at these narratives to expose their shortcomings as postmodern texts. While both novels show signs of postmodernism, says Williams, they are in reality quite reactionary because they ultimately recast complex stories involving troubling racial and gender components as master narratives of male regeneration (through traditional literary formulas like the bildungsroman). They elide the complexities and painful memories of the Vietnam War's history. Both novels, Williams argues, "promise a mythic incorporation back into the community" (113). Williams relies

on the Marxist concepts of "use value" and "exchange value" to make clear why such novelistic closure is unsatisfactory. In a novel with *use value* the protagonist would grapple with the painful past without glossing over social problems of race and gender that contributed to the pain of that past. A novel of mere *exchange value* allows its protagonist access to personal redemption without dealing with larger underlying social concerns. What reduces the novel to exchange value is that it resorts to familiar narrative formulas and recycled genres, for once we enter that realm of formula, we lose contact with lived history. In Williams's mind both Mason's and Caputo's texts "eventually move toward a dangerous transcendental exchange value" (124). One could argue that all contemporary American texts participate to some extent in the exchange system that is the literary market place of today; nevertheless, Williams' tracer rounds cut sharply and illuminate *Indian Country* and *In Country* in interesting ways.

As if responding to Williams's thesis about Vietnam narratives disguised as postmodern texts that lack the postmodern courage to interrogate history, Eric Gadzinski's essay, "Bruised Azaleas: Bruce Weigl's Postwar Aesthetic," provides some equilibrium. Focusing on the postmodern sensibilities of Bruce Weigl's Vietnam War poetry, Gadzinski finds in it not a desire for incorporation but a "rhetoric of apocalypse," a term he borrows from Julia Kristeva. This sort of rhetoric, Gadzinski asserts, dares to look deeply into the horrors of war and recreate with devastating clarity the memories of those horrors. Even though some would say Weigl's poetry reflects an archetypal masculine experience, Gadzinski shows that his poetry's "affinity" (137) with Holocaust and Hiroshima survivors' accounts helps stake Weigl's claim to postwar and postmodern aesthetics. Gadzinski offers a composite description of postmodern schizophrenia from Baudrillard and Jameson to represent what Weigl's poetry shares with Holocaust and Hiroshima survivors' narratives:

> "the absolute proximity, the total instantaneity of things, the feeling of no defense, not retreat"; an experience of "heightened intensity" in which "isolated . . . . material signifiers" bear a "mysterious and oppressive charge of affect" and where there is a lack of a sense of "the persistence of the 'I' and 'me' over time." (qtd. in Williams 137)

As an apologist for Weigl as a postmodern Vietnam War poet, Gadzinski levels effective cover fire and finishes off Bibby's "Tracers."

Michael Bibby, himself, begins the last section, "Post/Vietnam/Modern," with his essay entitled "The Post-Vietnam Condition." In it, he takes up an ontological debate over the relationship between the postmodern and the Vietnam War. Bibby's argument with Frederic Jameson—that the Vietnam War helps construct postmodernity, rather than merely appearing as a postmodern side-effect—ably reveals that the war made a tremendous impact on world history and that an "organized discourse on postmodernism was not widely available until after the war"; thus, he maintains that postmodernity is more accurately situated as a post-Vietnam condition. To be sure, Bibby's argument is compelling. After some reflection, however, readers may ultimately come away thinking that Jameson and Bibby are both right—that the Vietnam War can be seen as an expression of postmodernity, and that the concept of postmodernity owes a great deal to that war. Still, Bibby's reminder is helpful: discussions of postmodernity should more frequently acknowledge the presence and consequences of the Vietnam War.

In the next essay, Chris Hables Gray extends Bibby's argument. In his "Postmodernism with a Vengeance: The Vietnam War," Gray believes the war signals a crucial historical break from "modern" warfare and that all wars since Vietnam's are clearly postmodern. By outlining the postmodern attributes and painstakingly drawing up a list of the contradictions inherent in contemporary warfare, Gray proves the soundness of his case with a vengeance: his essay becomes a strong warning about the dangers of fragmented, technological postmodern "little wars." Toward the end of the essay, as if he wants to demonstrate a postmodern paradox of his own, Gray undoes his efforts somewhat when he remarks that "despite the dying children of Iraq, despite the massacres in Bosnia and Somalia and the Caucasus mountains, I can be optimistic" (192) because he feels the Vietnam War era taught us how to better raise our voices in protest. Although Gray believes he can put little faith in the Clinton administration, he argues that the "discourse [on contemporary wars] is open more than it's ever been." While his essay concludes with a series of paradoxical assertions, Gray nevertheless succeeds in situating the Vietnam War and subsequent wars in postmodernity and forcefully reminds us that warfare has changed. Furthermore, he believes that because of technology, warfare will be mutable in the future. Undoubtedly.

The final essay in the collection, Douglas Kellner's "From Vietnam to the Gulf: Postmodern Wars?" questions the validity of calling the Vietnam War postmodern at all. Instead, from a historical position, Kellner views the Vietnam War as "a highly modern war that showed the pretensions and flaws of the project of modernity" (200). Likewise, from an aesthetic standpoint he argues that Michael Herr's *Dispatches* should be considered a modernist narrative. For many of us who are intrigued by the debate over whether *something* should be called "modern" or "postmodern," Kellner's coda, reflects the slipperiness of both terms. Even while Bibby's collection of postmodern advocates are convincing, Kellner too makes a cogent case for modern influences in culture and art, post-Vietnam. Kellner initially admits that the Persian Gulf War perhaps has more attributes to be called postmodern—as a war of spectacle and simulacra—but in the end Kellner believes the Gulf War was actually an extension of our modern project in the Vietnam War. Technology, he says, moves us closer to a concept of the postmodern, but finally, while humans remain integral to warfare, warfare remains modern.

As mentioned above, Michael Bibby's collection of essays is required reading for anyone wondering how the Vietnam War and subsequent wars might be situated aesthetically and historically in the postmodern. Certainly, there are times when postmodern theorists can become trapped in their own language when trying to describe these ironic, paradoxical, and outright contradictory concepts. This collection of essays is no exception. On the other hand, when writers push language to its limits, as these writers do, we should expect this. Only through a studied interrogation of warfare and the postmodern—traps and all—will we yield insights into the future of warfare, and this reviewer thanks Michael Bibby and his selected essayists for challenging readers with the language and for making us face the future with one eye fixed in the rear-view mirror.

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Forging the Sword: Selecting, Educating, and Training Cadets and Junior Officers in the Modern World. Edited by Elliott V. Converse, III. Chicago: Imprint Publications, 1998, xiii + 393 pp., bibliography, contributors, index. $39.95, paper.

Reviewed by John Clark Pratt, Colorado State University

Thoughtfully arranged and edited, *Forging the Sword* contains 27 essays that consider the differing ways that military officers have been trained (not always successfully) in numerous countries of the world in the twentieth century. Primarily a compilation of papers read at the United States Air Force Academy's 1996 Military History Symposium, this book offers an eclectic, wide-ranging examination of officer training and education in such disparate countries as the USSR, Germany, Great Britain, Mexico, France, Italy, Morocco, Japan, China, and the United States, among others. The concluding essays make suggestions for future programs

Some of the essays are scholarly and data-filled, some are passionately personal, and while most suggest that readers listen carefully to all the distant drummers, a few quite obviously beat their own. No author attempts to be definitive on his or her subject, but each one considers questions and situations that military planners must take into account in order to design effective officer training and education programs for the future. Only by understanding where, how, and why so many well-intentioned programs went wrong, this anthology shows, can we successfully achieve a proper balance between "military" and "non-military" academic courses, incorporate the rapidly expanding demands of new technologies, solve the continuing race and gender problems, determine what the ethics and ethos of the 21st century military officer should be, and create a curriculum of education and training programs that will incorporate the best elements of both the liberal and scientific/engineering disciplines.

Rather than attempt to summarize each essay, I would like to note in passing some of the elements that stood out for me, a former faculty member at the Air Force Academy and a graduate (one of the few with a college degree) of the Aviation Cadet pilot training program. My initial assignment at the Academy was to have been what D'Anne Campbell calls a "strange [military] way of doing things" (238), a three-year teaching appointment following the acquisition of an MA. I was then fortunate to be selected to return to school for the PhD and

spent the rest of my military career (with the exception of what we then called a year-long "Vietnam sabbatical"), teaching and flying at the Academy.

I certainly did not fit the profile of what Tim Travers shows to be that of the early twentieth-century British officer who had to have been "born, not made" for the profession (23); nor did I experience what some of the authors characterize as the varied and sometimes incomplete ROTC programs. I certainly saw no Air Force units that were "exclusively the preserves of the nobility," as Holger Herwig notes was the norm in pre-WWI Germany (35). Unlike E.C. Keisling, who identifies no "sense of common cause"(60) as the greatest single detriment to the French training between the wars, I usually found dedicated young colleagues, most of them then rated officers, who were determined to integrate military and academic instruction in ways that had not been done before. Malham Wakin's essay on the USAFA's Core Curriculum (217-224) deftly shows how this program differed from those at the other service academies, yet he does not mention the highly demanding Honors program that for a few years produced as many Rhodes, Marshall, and other graduate scholars as did Harvard and Yale.

I also saw few examples of what Mark von Hagen defines as a major flaw in the Soviet military, the attempt to politicize trainees "virtually from the start " (85). I can well remember the looks on my first-year students' faces when I would tell them that they were taking a course in the Humanities and that unlike their experience in military training, I was ordering them to think for themselves. Those cadets who saw the irony and smiled first usually turned out to be the best. And I totally support the views of Josiah Bunting and the others who lobby in their essays for an amalgamation of the Liberal Arts, Science, Military, and Engineering courses in service academy programs, in opposition to the view of David Smith who decries the inclusion of liberal arts courses in the curriculum (375, passim). What Smith overlooks is what Wakin articulates, that current graduation credit requirements at service academies far exceed the normal 128 semester hours in civilian universities. At the Air Force Academy, for instance, because of the large core requirements in science and engineering, an English or History major graduates with a B.S. degree, a rarity in academic circles.

Finally, I can also attest, as does John Flanagan, a USAFA graduate, to the often coincidental value of taking a foreign language. As he found in Vietnam (369), his ability to speak French became crucial to the

good relationship between his unit and their Vietnamese counterparts. I, too, used my rusty French in Laos and helped some senior Lao and American officers better understand each other.

To approach *Forging the Sword*, I would suggest reading from cover to cover. Although each essay is an independent study, by going chronologically through the book one begins to see the increasingly significant flaws in the military training and education programs that either stood on a prescribed tradition or ignored all that had gone before in their attempts to reorganize the future. This collection, I suggest, should be incorporated into military academy curricula so that future officers can better understand not only *what* they are learning—but also, and more important, I think, *why*.

Loving Arms: British Women Writing the Second World War. Karen Schneider. Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1997, 182 pp., notes, bibliography, index. $34.95.

British Women Writers of the World War II: Battlegrounds of Their Own. Phyllis Lassner. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998, x + 252 pp., notes, bibliography, index. $55.

Reviewed by D. A. Boxwell, United States Air Force Academy

Two books examining the response of British women writers to a war still comparatively neglected by literary historians: one concentrating on a limited selection of writers who best embody many of the ideas originating in Virginia Woolf's 1938 pacifist, anti-militarist tract *Three Guineas*, the other breaking newer ground by inscribing a larger matrix of creative figures who did much to question Woolf's foundational discourse.

As a feminist revisionist of British cultural history, Karen Schneider forcefully and convincingly argues against Paul Fussell's contention in *Wartime* that, in contrast to the Great War, the Second World War yielded very little literature, but instead, as he asserts, "something close to silence" (qtd in Schneider 35). Rather, the rich and extensive body of work produced by the authors she examines in depth—Stevie Smith, Katherine Burdekin, Elizabeth Bowen, and Doris Lessing, as well as Woolf herself—challenges that supposed "silence." These women's vocal critique of militarism before, during, and after the war, served as a way of articulating desire for the social transformation of patriarchal culture. But Schneider insists that these women spoke about war from substantially different perspectives: "they never speak univocally, for each seems to be in dialogue with herself, struggling to reconcile conflicting impulses triggered by the often contradictory pressures of war" (26). Moreover, "their own vexed positions as women within a patriarchal, militarist culture externally threatened by an overtly fascist one seems to have catalyzed both an acute ambivalence and, perhaps consequently, a significant literary response" (6). In her coda, Schneider argues that the experimental alternatives of British women writers had a lasting effect, if not necessarily to dislodge the militarist nation-state, but to inform the frequently essentialist feminist discourse since the 1960s which has been concerned with the interconnections of gender and war. Karen Schneider refracts these writers through the lens of second wave

feminist theory, whereas Phyllis Lassner is more insistent on allowing these writers to question the limitations of such theory.

Phyllis Lassner, like Karen Schneider, scrutinizes the works of Woolf, Burdekin, Bowen, and Smith in her account of British women's literary engagement with the justness of a second world war. But Lassner does valuable cultural work in her more readable and nuanced investigations of numerous figures who have been awaiting the kind of rediscovery needed for a fuller account of the literary landscape of Britain in the 1930s and 1940s. Lassner pays due attention to such compelling women writers as Storm Jameson, Naomi Mitchison, Ethel Mannin, Lettice Cooper, Ann Bridge, Betty Miller, and Phyllis Bottome. Some of these women's novels have been reprinted in the last decade or so by the Virago Press of London, but it is only now that Lassner comprehensively surveys how these other, once popular writers questioned "whether Britain was ever justified in its claims to moral rectitude" (6). These writers, Lassner argues, not only challenge patriarchy, but also preemptively challenge important feminist scholarship since the 1970s which has too readily taken Virginia Woolf as the most authoritative voice of the 1930s and assumed, "that women are only passive war victims, war protesters, or complicit with the power of a masculinist war machine" (4). Lassner is concerned to show how other voices besides Woolf's in the 1930s complicated the gendered discourse which too readily associated men with war, women with peace. Rather, women's complicity and resistance were not discrete, but overlapped (9) and while some remained lifelong pacifists (Mannin, Woolf, Vera Brittain), many changed their attitudes as the 1930s turned into the 1940s. Storm Jameson, for example, came to believe that pacifism was a conservative and escapist position. Stevie Smith, while critiquing fascism in her novels of the 30s, argued for the necessity of fighting it as she critiqued Brittain's *England's Hour* (1941). In sum, Lassner shows, "within the dramatically disparate combinations of war attitudes among and within British women writers, many linked their arguments to their ideals of social justice and their constructions of their nation" (46). In essence, "some saw the war as subverting those ideals and yielding to tyranny while others found the war itself a ground on which tyranny was defined and social justice could be affirmed" (46). The complexities of a multivocal female response to the war are done justice in Lassner's finely wrought and comprehensive account of "the moral and political victory enacted by the individual and collective voice of so many" (252).

The Eyes of Orion: Five Tank Lieutenants in the Persian Gulf War. Alex Vernon with Neal Creighton, Jr., Greg Downey, Rob Homes, and Dave Trybula. Kent, Ohio: Kent University Press, 1999, xix + 330 pp., maps, photos, appendices, notes, bibliography, index. $35.00.

Reviewed by Mark S. Braley, United States Air Force Academy

The Gulf War, one of America's shortest, was in many ways fought in the shadow of America's longest war, the Vietnam War. *The Eyes of Orion,* written by Alex Vernon with the contributions of four of his comrades in arms, subtly acknowledges the historical presence of the earlier conflict in its dedication "to our fellow 24th Infantry Division soldiers who made the supreme sacrifice while serving in Southwest Asia" (v). While literally accurate, the geographical designation "Southwest Asia" for the Persian Gulf echoes "Southeast Asia" in a way that makes the Persian Gulf War on some level a metaphorical extension of the Vietnam War. For many, including, as Vernon points out, George Bush, the nearly bloodless (for the allies) knock-out punch that was the Gulf War signified America's recovery from and redemption for the national humiliation that was Vietnam. As Bush put it, the Gulf War "closed the book on Vietnam" (281). To his credit, Vernon resists such simplistic thinking and makes the case for the Gulf War being its own distinct conflict, with its own challenges and lessons learned. Still, there is something to be gained in reading the Gulf War in light of Vietnam. There is also something to be gained in reading Vernon's book in light of an earlier one, James R. McDonough's now classic Vietnam memoir, *Platoon Leader*. Both the texts and the wars reflect back on each other, giving us a clearer understanding in each case.

Published in 1985, McDonough's book is one man's account of his tour in Vietnam as a platoon leader for the 173rd Airborne Brigade. In 1970, just one year after graduating from West Point, McDonough found himself in Vietnam protecting the village of Truong Lam in the Binh Dinh province, a district notorious for its heavy Viet Cong presence. For most of the next year he oversaw an ever-changing group of about 20 men. For McDonough that time was his education in war and leadership, the main goal of which was to keep his men alive. He was mostly successful. Several incidents he recounts are riveting. In one instance, a replacement to the platoon takes a warning shot at McDonough's back with an M-79 grenade launcher and claims to have dropped his weapon. McDonough responds by sticking the barrel of

his M-16 under the private's chin and saying loud enough for the whole platoon to hear, "You son of a bitch. . . . Drop your weapon again, and you'd better pray to God it hits me square in the back. Because if it doesn't, you bastard, I'll blow your brains to kingdom come" (74-75). Although he doesn't lose anyone to combat, two of his men drown when he makes them take time at the beach for rest and hygiene. What McDonough provides is a glimpse at a young man's struggle to become a leader and a decision-maker and a sense of how tough in the midst of a real war that struggle is. Following the climactic and failed defense of Truong Lam near the book's end, he remarks, "In an instant the insanity of war was revealed to me: people die or people live without rhyme or reason" (182).

The Eyes of Orion is at once more ambitious and more superficial than McDonough's work. *Orion's* ambition lies in its attempt to present the Persian Gulf conflict beginning with the Desert Shield deployment through the aftermath of Desert Storm, from the perspective of five different lieutenants. Each of them is a tank commander and platoon leader under the 24th Infantry Division. Four of the five (Vernon, Neal Creighton, Rob Holmes, and Dave Trybula) are 1989 West Point graduates, second lieutenants during this period. First lieutenant Greg Downey has found his way to the army and the Gulf through ROTC at the University of Nebraska-Kearney. The five lieutenants play a variety of roles. Downey holds the respected position of the battalion's scout platoon leader. Creighton gets the unenviable responsibility of leading his company from the port to the assembly area in the middle of a shifting desert with the benefit of only a compass and his tank's odometer. Vernon's platoon is initially attached with the Delta Company of the 3-15 Infantry to the 2-4 Cavalry Squadron, which served, during Desert Shield, as "a screen position for the entire theater—the most forward American unit" (33). During Desert Storm both Creighton and Holmes lead their respective companies into action. Trybula leads the battalion's reserve tank company. Vernon helps round out the force in between. In short, the five lieutenants provide a good cross-section of experience in both Desert Shield and Desert Storm. The considerable challenge for Vernon is to orchestrate his own and the contributions of his fellow novice leaders. He proceeds chronologically, interlacing the testimony of the five lieutenants.

In part, the book's feel of superficiality is a product of this fragmented structure. McDonough's narrative is a traditional, straightforward one,

with him as the first-person narrator, telling his own powerfully affecting story of trial and survival. Were Vernon to have focused solely on his own experiences, he might have achieved something similar. Instead, the jump between voices produces an uneven stylistic quality and varying emotional impact. Vernon's sections are the most reflective and literary, and of all the lieutenants, we get the best sense of him as a person. And yet to account for the differences between *Orion* and *Platoon Leader* simply by referring to structural distinctions is to miss the inherent differences between the two conflicts each grapples with. At the risk of sounding dismissive, the Gulf War *was* superficial in comparison to the Vietnam War. Instead of ten years, the Gulf War—including Desert Shield—lasted less than six months. The ground war, from kick-off to cease-fire, lasted four days. Instead of over 58,000 American casualties, the U.S. lost fewer than 300. Instead of confronting a determined, ideologically invested enemy, the Gulf War forces found a conscripted, demoralized group, many of whom were "barefoot with bloody feet some with cut Achilles' tendons. They had no choice but to fight; they could hardly walk" (227).

That said, Vernon and the others remind us that different wars yet have much in common. For those who would say with cultural critic Jean Baudrillard that "the Gulf War did not take place," *Orion*'s firsthand testimony demonstrates that even a short "easy" war inspires the same fears and doubts on the parts of the combatants, generates the same terrible exhilaration of battle, produces the same mortally tragic mistakes, and—debate about the justice of the cause aside—creates the same regrettable end: violent death for what is always an unacceptable number of people.

Vernon's own hesitations entering the conflict as a fledgling platoon leader help give the book a refreshing honesty. He admits early on feeling inadequate to his leadership responsibilities:

> Having gone through West Point, through Air Force Survival Training, two trips to the National Training Center at Fort Irwin, California, and several other field and simulation exercises, I knew I did not have the stuff to lead soldiers in combat. Within minutes in the chaplain's office I was bawling. I had myself convinced that soldiers would die because of me, that I would panic, think too much, seize up, make a critical mistake. I did not want to go. (12)

Of course he does have "the stuff" to lead soldiers in combat and does so. The lesson may be that there is no mystery to what that stuff is. Ordinary young men placed into extraordinary circumstances with good training and equipment rise to the occasion. Still, Vernon's story isn't about conquering fears and becoming in the end a supremely competent and confident fighting man. Almost immediately following the war, the Army offered early outs for Alex's 1989 year group. After serving for three years, he left the military. He writes, "I resigned because, having trained for years and fought in combat, having witnessed others doing the same, I knew I did not have the stuff to command troops. . . . I remain a soldier, but I never was, never could have been, a warrior" (287).

Despite the ease with which the Allies brought about Iraq's capitulation, Vernon experienced things in combat that unsettled him. Greg Downey offers some insight on that account in speaking about the aftermath of a skirmish on the second day of the ground war. Having suppressed an enemy position by calling in an artillery barrage, he speaks to a surviving Iraqi captain, who tells him that

> he was in the Republican Guard 26th Commando Brigade and that there had been 650 men in the brigade. When I asked him how many more men were alive, he said, "This is all . . . this is all." He started weeping. Only forty-nine Iraqi soldiers remained, all standing before me with horrified looks on their faces. They had just glimpsed hell.
>
> I had called the artillery that erased the lives of over six hundred human beings. In forty-five minutes, I had killed more people than what lived in my hometown of Merna, Nebraska. Combat is a series of contradictions. One moment you're trying your best to kill the enemy, the next moment you're doing your best to save him. I looked at the shock in the Iraqi's eyes. For the first time during the ground attack, I felt guilt and sorrow. (205-6)

These moments in the book give it a bit of the heft that is sustained in McDonough's account. But again, what may seem to be a flaw in *Orion* in reality represents the fortune of not having had to fight a protracted war in which such moments would be multiplied beyond bearing.

A longer conflict most assuredly would have had other negative consequences as well. Of the five lieutenants, Rob Holmes is one of the more interesting. Rob is the most vocally patriotic and the most dichotomous in his way of thinking about the war. At one point he reflects,

> As I walked around while we refueled, I had on my game face like never before. I didn't jump around like at a pep rally, didn't want to go "kick their ass" or anything like that. I just felt intense and focused. My world was very simple. We were about to attack a heavily defended objective that threatened the lives of my men. Get in my way, and I will kill you. (207)

At various other times he reveals the kind of attitude toward the Arabs (even his own allies) that might have, over a longer, more frustrating combat experience, produced the kinds of atrocities we saw in Vietnam. "Saudi Arabia was clearly the most bizarre place I had ever been" (54) he says. And later, "Arabs never cease to amaze me" (194). When his gunner deliberately misses an Iraqi scout truck, he remarks, "I'd like to think that I never had any bloodlust," but "I almost looked forward to our next engagement with the enemy, so Downing could destroy a target and restore my confidence" (203). In highlighting some of Holmes's remarks, I don't intend any harsh criticism of him personally. The life-and-death reality of war encourages the dehumanization of the enemy. The more like us the enemy is, the harder it is to do the job of killing. For those entering the conflict predisposed to think of the enemy as "bizarre" and "amazing," it's no surprise that the strain of battle might exacerbate and harden those attitudes. In war we create "gooks" and "ragheads" so that we can maintain our sense of our own humanity. Fortunately for those fighting this war, there was not time for morale to degenerate or frustrations craving violent release to mount.

The Eyes of Orion does a number of things well. It demonstrates for the Gulf War the truth of McDonough's claim about Vietnam, that "it was different for everyone involved" (1). As Vernon puts it, "no war is the same. The wars of two veterans of the same war are not even the same war" (284). The book, like the war itself, also gives us virtually the entire arc of war from build-up to aftermath in a condensed form. Perhaps most importantly, it shows us that this made-for-TV war was not

just high-tech simulation. Soldiers killed other soldiers, killed other civilians, even killed their own. And those doing the killing were changed. The stories of Alex Vernon, Neal Creighton, Greg Downey, Rob Homes, and Dave Trybula are, like the story of James McDonough, the same stories that need to be retold with each new war in hopes that they may help prevent the next one.

Please send book review inquiries to Lt Col Mark S. Braley at mark.braley@usafa.af.mil.

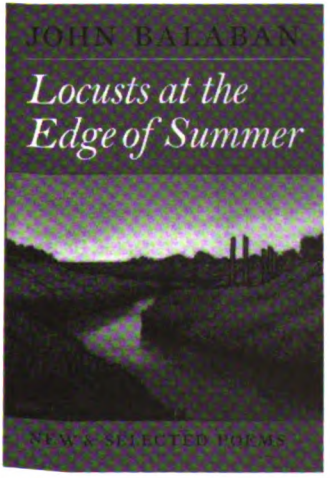
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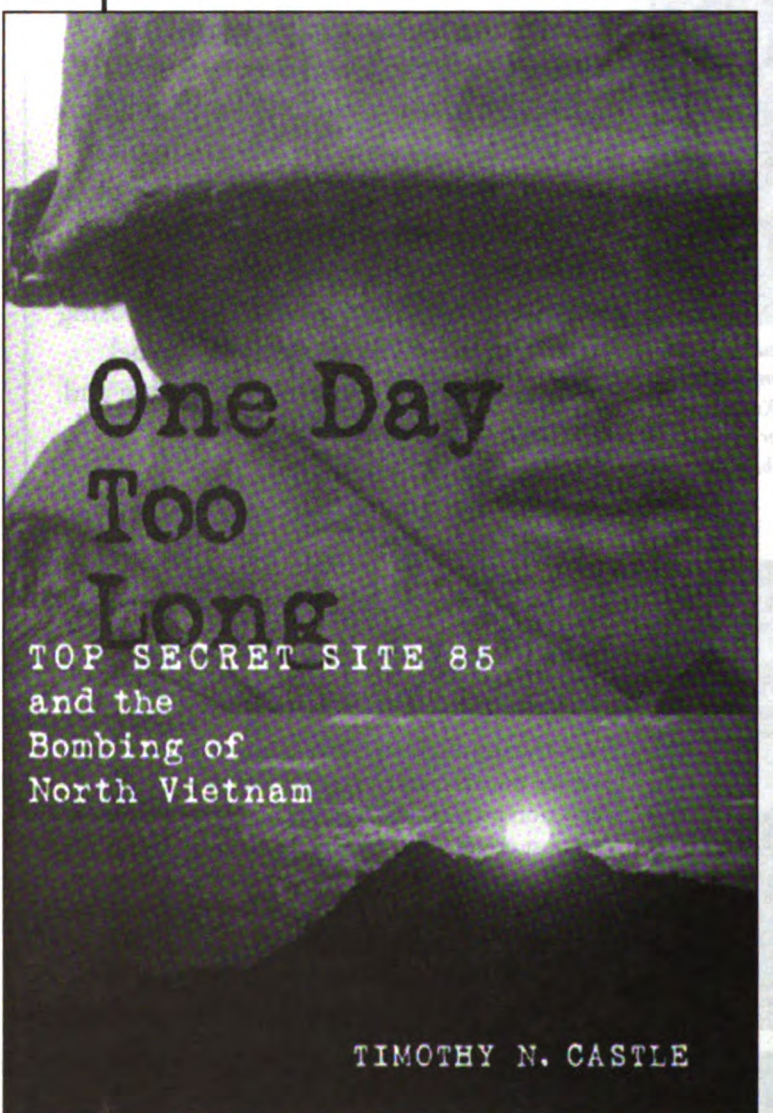
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Korean War Children's Memorial

by
Sheila Gazlay

The Korean War Children's Memorial honoring the humanitarian aid the American armed forces rendered the children of Korea during the war will be constructed in Bellingham, Washington, and dedicated on 11 August 2001. This is a call to all veterans who served in Korea during the war years and immediately following (1950-55), asking them to share their stories and photographs of military personnel interacting with the children of Korea so this loving bit of the history of the Korean War is not forgotten.

The children were found lost, hungry, sick and homeless, wandering the streets and by-ways of Korea as the war moved up and down the peninsula four times. American servicemen and women, moved by the plight of the war waifs, gave all they could to save the children. Are there any individuals you know of who should be singled out and recognized for their special efforts on behalf of the Korean war child? Send us their names and stories. We want to recognize them at the memorial banquet. We need the names of all units that supported an orphanage or orphans and copies of any newspaper clippings from "back home" seeking support for the Korean children.

Submit your photos and written comments to George F. Drake, Coordinator, Korean War Children's Memorial at 1421 Cornwall Ave., Suite B, Bellingham, Washington, 98225. George can be contacted by email at <gdrake@koreanchildren.org>. For more information on the memorial and the dedication ceremonies, see the memorial's web page at <http://www.koreanchildren.org>. New material is being added weekly.

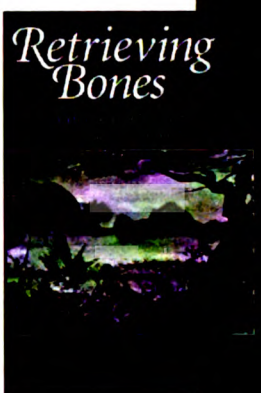
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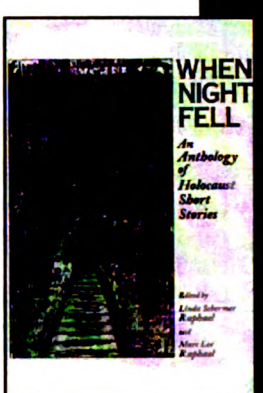
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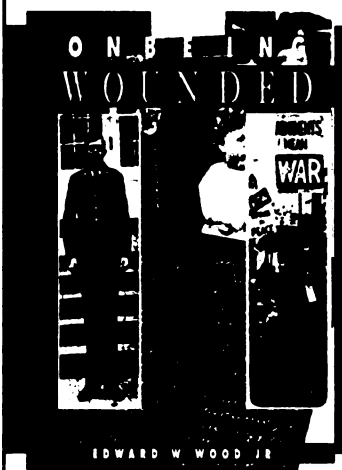
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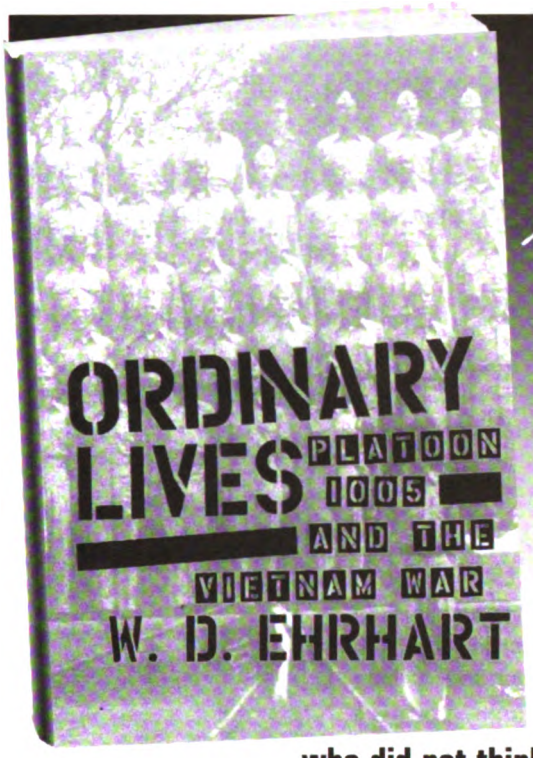
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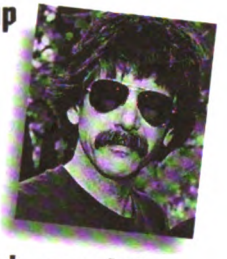
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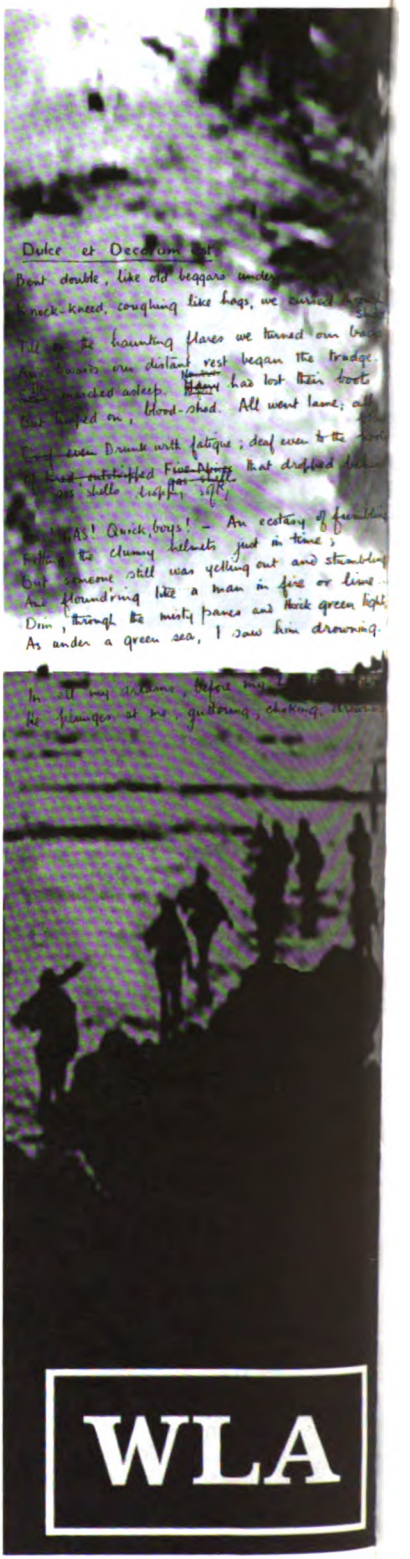
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I am 26 years old, and I find myself in the grip of Holocaust memory, the collected memories of the event. The images, testimonies, music, denials, all these combine in such a way that I am left stymied. How do I describe a loss I cannot comprehend, yet recognize as real? Indeed, my work does not try to directly illustrate the horrors of that time, but, instead, attempts to illustrate the horror I feel towards knowing that the Holocaust occurred.

— William Schaff, page 72

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