

JAMES GLEASON BISHOP

Sitting on the Veterans' Memorial at the
Corner of Main Street and Route 22,
July 3, 1972, Not Thinking About Walter Cronkite

Someone was lying.
On TV, shells burst in jungles,
body counts distorted nightly.
Police clashed with students
clashed with professors clashed
with blacks clashed with whites.
Drugs drugs drugs. I saw it all
on TV

But not on Main Street in Essex,
not in the softwood aisles
of Harold Tart's Grocery Store
amid pyramids of dusty cans.
Not on the granite memorial—
gray, unpolished headstone,
mass grave for three wars' worth—
which I sat on 'til a dark-eyed
man from the fire department
marched across Route 22.

*How would you like it
if someone sat on your memorial?
I don't think I'd care, if I were dead,
I said. He growled, Get down.*

So I watched the black and white screen,
heard the black and white screams.
Then Phil Tate came home from Nam
smiling beneath his leather
hippie hat with dangly strands.
The Tater didn't look scarred.
Someone was lying,
and I suspected Phillip.

Goodman Blodgett

Hot summer morning. I shot
baskets at the playground, beside
the Blodgett's house, where, trying
to rescue ourselves from ourselves,

we'd fling fistfuls of gravel onto his roof,
listen to it rattle like rain, then run
as the old man burst out to swear at us.
Blodgett walked with a limp, had a scar

we never saw on his thigh. He'd rescued
a buddy at Anzio. The man was drowning
in an inch of ocean. Old man Blodgett—but
he must've been young man Blodgett then—

dragged his buddy from the sea. On the beach,
got shot through the thigh. Blood slicked
his leg with each step. His buddy bled out
before Blodgett could find the medic.

I don't think he had buddies after the war.
Not Mrs. Blodgett. We'd hear their words
burst out of the house, rattle on the roof, then
die out early, like their cigarettes, their lights.

Blodgett shot himself the year I graduated.
Cleaning his gun, said the paper, said his wife.
Could've been true, for all we knew. Such a sour
life, no one questioned why he'd want it to end.

And no one gave a glance of a thought to our
shot, how we turned that lush village
ugly for him with a fistful of gravel.
We need so many rescues.

While Guppies Bay at the Moon

Crouched in a gray doorway, the soldier smells his sour sweat, feels it drip down his stomach, gather in his groin. You know this story: he left Cleveland, trained hard at Fort Dix. Waiting for the presumed terrorist. He won't miss. You know, have taken sides already? Tired hero or oppressed villager. Either way the dark man emerges, shivers, collapses. Blood dyes his white thawb. Eventually, the bent bullet falls free, flees the fight and finds you, sipping carrot soup in your living room, where you chip a tooth on this mass of metal, say *mother-fricker* and throw the bullet away, becoming aware as you dial your dentist's emergency number, that blood has begun to spread across your belly, and your guppy—suspended between green sword-plants, trying to blink—is baying at the moon.



LIEUTENANT COLONEL JAMES GLEASON BISHOP's work has appeared or is forthcoming in *The Connecticut Review*, *North American Review*, *Smithsonian*, *Yankee*, *The Boston Globe*, and *Christianity and Literature*. His poetry has been nominated for a Pushcart Prize. He is an assistant professor of English at the United States Air Force Academy.