

BRANDON COURTNEY

Malaria Tent, Pleiku 1964

Already my father unlearns the words, which make the world possible; he narrows their meanings: *They used to put wax*

on our foreheads to see if we had a fever. They meaning the villagers in Pleiku—the nurses who stuffed basil,

cilantro, and fresh mint into their surgical masks to ward off infection, to veil the stench of men flushed with fever.

They: the villagers who entered the river with ceramic bowls the way a bullet punctures the body, the villagers

who wrung mouthfuls of river water from a rag to slake the soliders' tongues, fragile flakes of wax placed on their

foreheads. *Wax:* slivers of paraffin shaved from a bone white candle with a razor blade. *Our:* sickbay soldiers splayed

on a mattress filled with rice husks. *Fever:* malaria, flesh torrid enough to melt the wax of a candle. *Fever:*

the only thing that breaks silently on the battlefield.

BRANDON COURTNEY served four years in the United States Navy's Maritime Interdiction Operations. He is the author of two full length collections, *The Grief Muscles* (Sheep Meadow Press) and *Rooms for Rent In the Burning City* (forthcoming, Sparkwheel Press), and the chapbook *Improvised Devices* (Thrush Press).