

HERBERT ENGLEHARDT

Futile Search

The ocean liner
Converted to troopship
Sped ahead

Sunny days we lined the rails
Looking for porpoises
And periscopes

Balmy nights
We searched the skies
For the Dippers

Til a passing sailor laughed
Said you can look forever
You won't find the North Star

Here on the Equator
We navigate
By the Southern Cross

First Sweet Taste

He was nineteen in the Army
The first time a woman
Stuck her tongue in his mouth

It tasted so good
He felt guilty
Enjoying the perfume

Of the pink-skinned blonde
Who said her husband
Was a sailor off on sea duty

Wait here she said
And she wandered off
To the ladies room

He waited years for another taste
You couldn't just
Walk up to someone and ask

Survival

Doesn't mean
You won't feel guilty
When someone else's luck runs dry

You tell yourself
Over and over
It's not your fault

Keep your head down
When you are being shot at
Make yourself small

Pull Harder

Suction holds the bayonet in a body
Training included tips
On how to get the blade free

Wrench it sideways
Put your foot on the chest
For leverage

Ignore the moan
Blink away the splatter
Of blood-flecked spittle

You can also fire the rifle
But noise can be dangerous
So just pull harder

Jungle Clearing

One middle of the night
Felix tapped my shoulder
Under my mosquito net

I followed his cigarette
Through head-high cane fields
To a small jungle clearing

Where several straw-hatted men
Squatted smoked
Muttered in subdued voices

I climbed the bamboo ladder
To the tiny hut
Perched on stilts

Inside the straw mat
Small basin of water
Scrap of towel

And the smiling young woman
Hardly visible
In the smoky candlelight

HERBERT ENGELHARDT served in the Pacific Theater from 1944 through the end of the War and then in the Philippines. A graduate of Harvard, he worked in business until he retired and taught briefly in the MBA Program at NYU. For the last ten years he has turned to writing poetry about his wartime experiences.