

DAVID K. VAUGHAN

Dak To II

Orbiting to the east, we could see
The dust rising as if God were beating
The field like a rug. A breathless voice
On field frequency, after the last mortar
Fell, said we could bring our ammunition
In. We landed in half the normal distance,
Stopped before we hit a mortar hole, dead
Center in the runway, taxied slowly across
Mortar fragments to let our cargo out. As
We departed, gunships fired rockets across
Our nose into the hills at our two o'clock
Position, the smoke marking their passage,
Striking the land like Ahab nailing the whale,
Speaking with an anger too fierce for words.

DAVID VAUGHAN flew C-130s in Vietnam in 1967 and 1968. After completing his Air Force career, he was a professor of English at the University of Maine and the Air Force Institute of Technology.