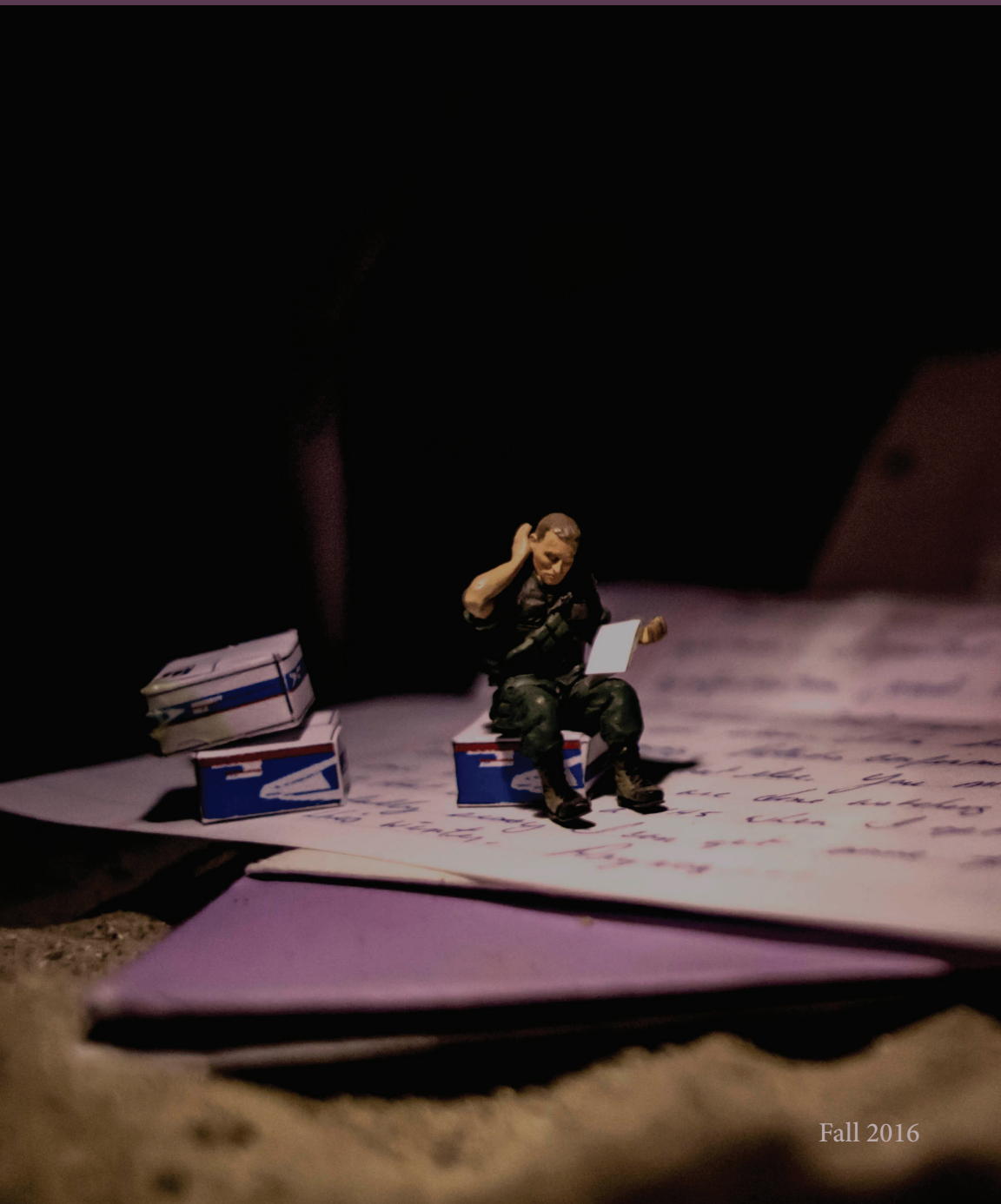
O-Dark-Thirty



Fall 2016

O-Dark-Thirty

A Literary Journal

Summer 2016
Volume 4 Number 4

On the cover: *Love Letters,*
from the Tour of Duty series of dioramas
in miniature, $^{1}/_{35}$ inch scale
by Roberta "Bert" Leaverton
United States Army, 1978-2005

Throughout her life, photography has remained Bert's passion.
Following her deployment to Iraq in 2003-2004,
she returned with hundreds of photographs
documenting history through her eyes.
Her current work, Tour of Duty: Iraq,
is a series of dioramas.

Table of Contents

O-Dark-Thirty Staff

Ron Capps *Publisher*
Janis Albuquerque *Designer*
Jerri Bell *Managing Editor*
Carmelinda Blagg *Contributing Editor*
Dario DiBattista *Non-Fiction Editor*
Michael D. Fay *Art Editor*
Fred Foote *Poetry Editor*
Jim Mathews *Senior Editor/Fiction Editor*
Bryon Reiger *Drama Editor*

ISSN: 2325-3002 (Print)
ISSN: 2325-3010 (Online)

Editor's Note

The war in Vietnam appeared every night on the six o'clock news throughout my childhood: grainy black and white footage of dirt-covered men in fatigues running across fields, marching beside rice paddies, or wading through chest-deep water to a background soundtrack of the whompa-whompa-whompa of helicopters, sobs of terrified women and children, and velvet-voiced news anchors calmly reporting on troop movements, statistics, and policy. Those clips evoked feelings for which I had no words then, and which I struggle to articulate even now. Fortunately, we have writers like William Crawford (fiction, nonfiction) and Dick Camp (this issue's interview) who can evoke those experiences and times with their words—and who explore in writing the meaning of those events and the emotions that accompanied them.

The Vietnam experience still resonates strongly today, and veterans of that war continue to capture their experiences, photograph, write, and help other veterans by remembering and sharing what they went through. Their experiences stand alongside those stories from present-day veterans of Iraq and Afghanistan, providing compelling parallels, echoes and perspectives on the experience of war. In this issue, veterans of more recent wars tackle the effects of war on the mind (Paul Mansfield, nonfiction), the inadvertent damage done by well-meant policy (Kathryn Campbell, fiction), and what it means to be a man (Ryan Smithson, fiction). Poets

continue to compress and distill worlds of high-stakes experience abroad and at home into their most fundamental essence.

No statute of limitations exists on the need to make meaning from our encounters with other humans, war, and military service. The need is deeply human; viewed from this desk, it feels more urgent and compelling than the summer's lit-crit discussions over a "second wave" of war writing from the OEF/OIF generation of veterans and the question of literary maturity in their work.

And so the editors of *O-Dark-Thirty* have selected work for this issue that takes on questions of need, desire, and how we make and shape meaning from chaotic experience—stories and poems that we found urgent, compelling, and deeply human. We think you will agree.

Jerri Bell

Carmelinda Blagg

Non-fiction.

The 18-Minute Rule Throws Jimmy Pro For A Loop In Gotham City

By William Crawford

Jimmy Pro hit the subway turnstile at full tilt. We stopped for an impromptu bathroom break on the way to Chelsea's Milk Gallery. Draining your lizard is a priority at over seventy, especially when you are jammed tightly in the car of a lurching train.

We thought that we could just slide in and out of the station long enough to find a restroom. We were hauling some serious ass to hear a presentation by the big time *New Yorker* photographer, Platon, who was delivering a serious rap about some of his recent work.

Jimmy and I meet up a couple of times a year to work on our emerging photographic technique, Forensic Foraging. It focuses on plodding, throwback techniques that are mostly now eschewed by younger, techno-driven shooters.

We thrive on photographing the mundane using simple techniques highlighted years ago by Kodak in their *Brownie Hawkeye Camera Owner's Manual.* Our credo trumpets "straight out of the camera" with little computer manipulation.

Jimmy is seriously addicted to the *New Yorker*. He devours it weekly in his Sydney, North Beach haunts. As he swills his java, he especially venerates the toney writing and the twenty-page features on contemporary issues. He gravitates immediately to Platon's photographs, which differ immensely from ours even as his often flirt with instant immortality.

Platon has a big rep in the New York photog world while we labor in near obscurity being only ex-US Army photojournalists with a near fifty-year friendship going. Platon's stark images are so arresting that even hardened minimalists like us are drawn into his flame. We hoped to hear the great man in person if we could only speed through the rush hour underground to the famous Milk Gallery.

Negotiating the trains on the fly is a Gotham City survival skill of the first order. You have to pace yourself and not let multiple flights of stairs burn you out. Zig-zagging through the crowds is behavior usually restricted to water bugs. But the deft MetroCard swipe can make or break you. Getting through the turnstile on the first try is imperative. It requires soft hands and riveted concentration akin to that of an NFL wideout.

Jimmy, being an ex-Ivy League D-back, had the card swipe down to an art form. He raked his Metro Card through the slot in a single, smooth, steady movement. Then he rolled his thick body into the unlocked turnstile in a quick, flowing motion. I, on the other hand, often swiped my card only to encounter an immobile turnstile. My card swipe was herky-jerky and half-assed. I am from North Carolina, and big city finesse is way above my pay grade.

On this busy evening, the Platon lecture was at the top of our agenda. As writers, we were accustomed to rejection, but that night offered up full force rejection. Jimmy unleashed his usual slick card swipe, but as he glided into his infamous turnstile roll things turned to shit in a hurry.

The silver gate was unyielding. Jimmy hit the barrier like the proverbial ton of bricks. His body went vertical in a flailing downward jackknife. His head went over the turnstile and straight down to the pavement. On their way up, his heels missed my nose by a hair, as I trailed him closely anticipating another snappy subway entry. People behind me accordioned into my rumpus as I ground to a dead halt.

Jimmy's painful landing was caused by the MTA's legendary 18-Minute Rule. Enterprising New Yorkers often passed their MetroCards back over the turnstiles to give friends and family free rides. Moreover, professional hustlers bought multiple MetroCards to constantly be able to sell rides at deep discounts. The fraudulent entrepreneurs cost the MTA millions.

Our bathroom break in Bryant Park outside of the 42nd Street Station set the 18-minute, no reentry rule in motion. Our Metro Cards were disabled and Jimmy hit the gate with a dead card paralyzed by the MTA bureaucracy. The blessed relief that we enjoyed as we emptied out in the public restroom was quickly eclipsed by Jimmy's spectacular header as he rushed back to the platform.

A subway cop witnessed the melee that Jimmy caused at the gate. Nobody else was hurt, although several commuters behind me sprawled out on the pavement. The officer offered to call an ambulance, but Jimmy demurred as somebody handed him a cup with ice to press against his throbbing forehead. A street musician muttered something about the "damned 18-minute rule," and we looked at each other in stunned amazement. By now, more than eighteen minutes had passed, and our thoughts somehow turned back to Platon.

Jimmy was still very shaky, but we got on the train and we finally made our way to Chelsea. We eased into the crowded Milk Gallery, and we found Platon holding forth before a throng of photography devotees. We were pretty late, and he was winding down by chronicling the background about his "Service" exhibition, which was showing there now.

All of the images are quite well known. They offer stark insights into the aftermath of the Iraq War. One of the most famous pics shows a grieving mother draped around her son's tombstone at Arlington National Cemetery. He was an Islamic American GI killed in combat. The Qur'an and other Muslim artifacts are visible at the gravesite.

Platon vividly described his meeting with the mother to discuss his planned shot. In his clipped English accent, he related the poignant story of how the dead soldier's personal effects had arrived at the family home in a prim box. The mother eventually opened it to find that her dead son's clothing had been washed and neatly folded. Her most fervent wish to smell his body scent one last time was dashed by blind military efficiency. People in the Gallery openly wept at the pathos of this revelation.

I was shell-shocked by Platon's story and our earlier subway drama. As I reeled, Jimmy moaned and swayed precariously. He was obviously concussed and in need of medical attention. Moreover, Platon's anecdote triggered my memory to retreat back to a dreaded place.

It was December, 1968, and my infantry unit was pinned down in Antenna Valley south of Da Nang by crack North Vietnamese regulars. I hadn't flashed back in years, but Platon's chilling images and tender commentary proved to be a catalyst deep in my cerebral core.

I spent every moment in the Army up to that long ago day with a young carpenter from Cincinnati, Mike Bach. We were drafted together at Fort Bragg, and we stayed in the same training units all the way to Alpha Company, the Nam, and combat. We then were placed in different platoons of the same rifle company. He was tall and strong, so he landed a job humping the field radio for his platoon leader. The long radio antenna made RTOs an inviting target for enemy snipers. Mike took a lethal round that day as we walked headlong into an NVA unit on the move off of Nui Chom Mountain.

I later visited the Vietnam Memorial in DC to pay my respects to the dead carpenter. When he died, I penned a heartfelt description of the printable details of his death to mail to his family. Now, the Islamic mother's gut wrenching lament for her dead son's body scent triggered long suppressed torment deep inside of me.

I could picture Mike's young, smiling face vividly, but I could not remember a single iota about his voice. No audio replayed in my mind. Once again, the Jungle War engulfed me when I least expected it.

Jimmy was concussed, and I lapsed into a disbelieving funk. For us, things screeched to a halt. I headed to the hospital with my head down to hide my tear stained cheeks.

Jimmy finally got checked out, and I eventually drank a couple of beers in search of sleep. The next day we gingerly continued shooting the city utilizing our throwback technique, Forensic Foraging. We captured every scene along the way in a funky, minimalist style. Maybe some photography mag might profile us before we hang it up? The odds are against anachronisms like us. Photo mags aim their advertising to young techno-driven photogs. Not much chance they will give us any play.

We hope to shoot again together soon. Jimmy always carefully lays out sensational venues for us to forage. I don't yet know where we will wind up, but the odds are extremely high that we won't see many shiny turnstiles.

I may well sleep again in Jimmy's favorite road haunt, the Motel 6. We might even experience escapades that will surpass the drama of the subway and the Milk Gallery. But if I awake with a start in the wee hours of the night, I hope to hear a missing voice from the Jungle War. The familiar video in my old, fading mind could really use a final audio track. Then maybe I could say a proper goodbye to a young carpenter I knew long ago.

William C. Crawford is a writer and photographer living in Winston Salem, NC. He was a grunt and later a combat photo journalist in Vietnam. Jim Provencher is a teacher, poet, and lensman in Sydney, Australia. They met at Fort Hood, Texas, where they were Army photo journalists, in 1970.

Mr. Camus: On Box Turtles and Being the Absurd Man

By Paul Mansfield

Not too long after the Department of Veterans Affairs decided I was crazy I began to notice some things that led me to agree.

One morning while driving home from buying groceries I spotted a box turtle crossing the road.

Box turtles aren't exactly rare in Virginia but they're uncommon enough for folks to set up websites to map sightings. I'm told the little buggers mate for life and once having established a territory, rarely stray from it. They also live up to a hundred years in the wild.

Consider that. For up to a century these creatures set up shop, find a mate and live in the same roughly football-field sized area.

A lot can happen in a hundred years, particularly when you move at a crawl and periodically hibernate. You could be off looking for some tasty earthworms, run into a foul tempered jay, decide to close up shell for a nap until he fucks off. By the time you wake up and start heading back to your sweetheart, some ass has gone and built a road through the middle of your little patch of forested heaven.

That's a hell of a thing.

Which is where I come into all of this. Driving home I watched as two cars in the opposing lane drove directly over this little orange and black shelled creature. Between the tires mind you, not under them. He just kept crawling, seemingly unperturbed by the threat of messy death rushing over him. I admired that sort of pluck, or obliviousness, or focus. Whatever it was, he was going to cross that street or die trying.

Of course I had to help him. The guy behind me wasn't too pleased when I threw on the emergency blinkers and put it in park. To be fair he did have to break pretty hard to avoid rear- ending me. I did feel that leaning out his window to announce his intention to kick my ass was a bit much.

The fellow, while certainly possessed of sufficient outrage to try and make good on that threat, would likely have had a heart attack in the attempt. His great belly strained against his t-shirt and pressed to his steering wheel. His face, livid and sweaty was spider-webbed with blood vessels radiating from a bulbous, gin-blossomed nose.

I picked up the turtle and turned to face the angry driver, intent on showing him and explaining the cause of my stopping and my reasoning for doing so. Instead, I rounded on him brandishing a no doubt deeply confused reptile rather like a pistol and declared loudly.

"I'm a goddamned veteran and I'm rescuing this fucking turtle!"

Which is crazy person for: "I'm an emotionally unstable combat vet with a broken head and it’s deeply important for me to protect this creature just now for reasons that are a complete mystery. Please stay in your vehicle and this weirdness will pass quickly and without further incident."

I watched the guy’s eyes as his brains translated it to "I will kill you over a turtle."

He got quiet and rolled up his window. I placed the turtle on the passenger seat and drove home. He stared at me the whole way. I don't know whether box turtles are capable of facial expression, or

if they all go through life with faces looking as if they had just been abducted by a crazy person. His scrutiny on the short drive was enough to make me self-conscious, though.

Upon reaching my house I hurried into the backyard, a woodsy open place filled with oaks, maples and a stately pair of cypresses, and set the turtle safely down. After some thought I went into my kitchen and returned with some lettuce, a carrot, and a small bowl of water. The turtle had reoriented himself westward and had begun his slow journey back towards the road, now roughly a quarter mile further away from his destination than before meeting me.

I named him Mr. Camus.

Albert Camus was a French writer and philosopher, an early albeit reluctant member of the existentialists. He's probably best known for his novel *The Stranger.* He also wrote *The Myth of Sisyphus,* which is why the turtle got his name.

In Sisyphus, Camus uses the Greek myth of a hubristic king cursed to eternally roll a boulder up a hill only to have it slip away back down the hill as emblematic of the futility and absurdity of existence.

For Camus the question was, once you recognize the futility and absurdity of existence, do you kill yourself? His answer was more or less no. You could, that's your choice and all, but it's not the only option. There's actual suicide. There's also intellectual suicide, where you just refuse to acknowledge the absurd and instead believe in God, or love or purpose or whatever.

Then there's option three: be the absurd. Dwell in the wasteland, build sand castles there, chase motherfucking windmills. If life is devoid of meaning and value, do whatever the hell you want. Just do it well.

I'm pretty sure the turtle was absurd. I also suspected that saving Mr. Camus may have landed me in the wasteland as well. Unless I had been there all along.

Watching Mr. Camus make his way through the cypresses, I resolved to take him to the far side of the road so that he could

continue on his way. I swear the poor bastard let out a little sigh of exasperation when I picked him up again.

The far side of the road toward which he'd been heading was a green space with a Confederate war memorial, next to a little white chapel. I parked the car and gently lifted the turtle out, walked onto the grass, pointed him west, and prepared to bid him a fond farewell. That little bastard turned around and headed for the goddamned road. Three fucking times I picked him up pointed him west and watched him head right back to the road.

Mr. Camus it seemed had chosen option one: actual suicide. Dickhead.

On the drive back to the house he seemed genuinely irritated. He wouldn't look at me and attempted a rather lazy but nonetheless noticeably spiteful bite when I picked him up.

Last I saw of him he was heading between the cypress trees in my backyard. Joke was on him, though. Just past those trees the property sloped down to a creek and past that was a quarter mile of more woods. Mr. Camus might make his way back to the road but it wouldn't be easy for him or quick. He might find a nice lady turtle down by the creek, might find a lot of things between the cypresses and that road.

You can never really stop a person from going to hell their own way. If you're lucky, you might manage to confound them long enough for something to change their mind to come along.

Damn turtles.

Paul Mansfield is a student and full time dad in Anaheim, California. He served as an infantryman in the US Army from 1997-2001 and in the Virginia National Guard from 2005-2010, including two tours in Iraq. He has published two stories in sequential art form with Medium.com *and* So What? Press*, and won an Award of Excellence at the 2013 MoCCA Arts Fest.*

Fiction.

Narzona

By Kathryn Campbell

You know they're going to kill her, right?

I'd only been in Marjah for six months but our linguist, Z, didn't need to tell me that. I was fully aware, and so it felt surreal to be sitting across from a girl, alive and well, whose face would be nothing but a bloated, bloody pulp by morning.

What could I do? Wrap my arms around her bony frame and refuse to let go? Hold on until deployment ended and the wheels on our C-130 lifted from Leatherneck's runway? I mean, some guys get to bring kittens and dogs back to the states, so maybe I could—

Sir, I can't let her go unless you promise she stays with me. I've got an Ikea pull-out couch at home that she could sleep on and I know some basic Pashto, enough that we could make it work. Please, please, pleeeease . . .

Sure, Lance Corporal. Sounds like a solid plan!

Her name was Narzona and she had sprinted to our outpost from her husband's compound, less than a mile away. No older than fifteen, she told Z she was tired of the beatings and abuse from her spouse and mother-in-law. She knew there were American women here. Could we help?

What do you say to someone who will cease to exist soon? What's the etiquette? Is it weird to offer a Tastykake from your care package stash? How about this weather? Hot, right?

It was late in the afternoon and the sun was getting softer. Her eyes were a piercing green with flecks of hazel brown, a pair of scars passed down from when the Russians toiled here before we toiled here.

Um, would you like some Utz Cheeseballs?

I was called to the gate to do another search. Her mother-in-law had arrived along with the village elders, all male. Narzona had dealt an unforgivable strike to the family's honor and word was out.

The mother-in-law clucked her tongue and pointed at the girl.

Nyah! Nyah! Click, click, click. Nyah!

And then talked to me through Z.

She says the girl is a liar, dramatic. They got into an argument and she ran away. She says they'll be taking her home now.

I looked at Narzona. She looked at me.

I need to speak to my leader first.

My leader in this situation was a captain who was in a separate area talking to the elders.

The head of the group says the girl will stay with his family until they sort it out. They'll take her and make sure she's safe.

Sir, the whole village knows. No one is going to keep her safe. The family is going to "want its honor back."

Look, I'm sorry but that's the decision. It would be a disaster for us to do anything else.

Yes, sir.

Hearts and minds. Endear yourself to the people. Respect the culture. Don't turn down food they give you; it's rude. Don't go in the mosques; they're sacred. Don't keep one of their married teenage girls on your outpost. Yada, yada.

You know they're going to kill her, right?

Yes, I know.

I did not look up when I told Z to tell her she had to go with the elders. Brave Marine—can't look at someone, the same age as her own little cousins, in the eye. I don't remember what happens next except walking away with my head down, boots stirring up moon dust, rifle slung across my back.

That night I lay on my cot and hoped. Maybe I was wrong. The elders would look out for her, send her back to her parents. Her family would be sorry they ever married her off so young. They were going to pool their resources and send her to university in Kabul. Doctor Narzona. She'd move to America. Back in the states we'd meet up. There we are, running over the grass like they do in the *Full House* intro, music playing in the background. Laughing as we try on outfits in our walk-in closets with a glass of wine in hand like Samantha and Carrie. Best buds. And our children would grow to be best buds too . . . and—

The next day I made my way to the COC for a morning briefing, desperate for a bit of news about

Narzona!

As he said it the ANP officer dragged his index finger across his throat, excited to be the one telling me the ending to this Pashtun-wali soap opera. Beaten to death overnight. Honor restored. End of story.

Well, they said I couldn't keep her with me but I do anyway. She sits on my Ikea couch when I'm curled up on it hung over, and she holds the trash bag open and keeps my hair out of my face. When I go into the bathroom stall at work and stand with my head resting against the cool metal door, she's in there too, rolling her eyes but patting my back anyway. We ride the subway and explore the city on weekends and nobody stares at the dents in her skull. I took her to the 9/11 Memorial once but she didn't get what it was for.

I took her to the Persian rug market on Fifth Avenue and the smell inside made us stop in our tracks.

Sometimes it's a little much and I want to be alone, but I can't let her go.

Kathryn Campbell is a Marine Corps veteran living in the Bronx. She graduated with a degree in communications from Fordham University and works as an executive assistant. In her free time she writes for Duffel Blog *and enjoys all things comedy.*

"I Hear You Lima Charlie—How Me?": A Radio Transmission From The Jungle War

By William Crawford

The electric crescendo overhead went strangely silent as the thunder and lightning gave way to the drumbeat of rain on the rusty tin roof. The Hawk feverishly spun the dials on his old field radio trying to escape the crackling static. This storm was seriously interrupting his obsessive nightly ritual.

"Break!—Break!—Break! Any aircraft this net! I have air warning data. Out of Lima Zulu West on a direction of 240 degrees, max ord 3600, impacting grid 926324. How's your copy?"

The Hawk was a forward artillery observer in August, 1969. The whole fucking North Vietnamese Army Second Division had secretly bunkered into the Que Son and Hiep Duc Valleys south of Danang. It was an unholy 120 degrees and the stench of death was everywhere. US infantry units were getting chewed up by disciplined communist forces which had gone undetected for months. The ferocious combat and relentless heat combined to produce hell.

The Hawk was desperately trying to save Bravo Company from being overrun. The dinks had them caught in a blistering crossfire

near the Old French Hooch. Air strikes were on the way, but he had to drop some arty in there ASAP to buy time until the jet jockeys could drop their shit. Bravo already had six KIAs and nine more badly wounded. What he did in the next three minutes would decide how many grunts would be left alive after the F-4s unloaded their ordinance.

He was feverishly puffing on a Winston as sweat boiled under his jungle fatigues. AK-47 rounds buzzed around the makeshift company CP. Eighty-two-millimeter mortar rounds were chopping up the earth as the NVA walked their fire into the perimeter. An RPG crashed into the already badly pocked wall of the Old French Hooch. Bravo was about to be overwhelmed by well-trained NVA regulars who were now chattering just inside their sagging company perimeter.

The Hawk's voice was shaky as he called in the coordinates. "Red Leg 3-0, this is Red Leg 1-0. I have an urgent fire mission. Unit in heavy contact about to be overrun," he bellowed into the hand set. "Grid 926324. Fire for effect."

That done, he tried to think of things he might have overlooked. Moments later four white phosphorous artillery rounds pounded into the valley floor near the Old French Hooch.

The problem was, without a defined perimeter for Bravo Company, the rounds found an unintended mark—the chaotic Bravo Company CP. Molten chemicals spewed over the Hawk and the other GIs. Several grunts ran screaming in agony toward the advancing enemy as their sweat-soaked fatigues melted along with their flesh. The Hawk was knocked senseless by the blast, but he was spared a deadly chemical bath by the shelter of a large pile of old bricks left from the dilapidated Hooch. Cries of flaming human anguish blended in with the cacophonic sounds of the firefight.

The Hawk never recovered from that ghastly incident which defined his tour in the Nam. He was exonerated for the misfire

by his company commander and the battalion CO. Battery C shot white phosphorous rounds reflexively because they were already locked and loaded.

Back in the world the Hawk—a previously free spirit from California—became a heavy smoker, drinker, and drugger. He drifted from job to job, never quite fully taking hold, before eventually settling in the ancient Uwharrie Mountains of central North Carolina. There he lived in solitude on an isolated twenty-two acre farm, surrounded by the National Forest. A three-mile, pot-holed, dirt road kept visitors to a minimum. The Hawk thrived on isolation.

He lived on VA payments. He was thirty percent disabled due to earlier exposure to Agent Orange and his near death at the French Hooch. Heart and lung problems sapped some of his strength, but nightmares from the errant Willie Pete rounds consumed him. He eventually journeyed east to enroll in the gunsmithing program at a tiny community college.

As much as the Hawk was haunted by the Jungle War, he was surprisingly fascinated by its artifacts. He hoarded combat memorabilia—helmets, dud grenades, jungle boots, c-rations—anything the grunts used in the jungle. His old farmhouse was clogged with stacks of US Army surplus equipment. Sprinkled amid this clutter were scores of empty beer cans and ashtrays overflowing with piles of rancid cigarette butts.

In an odd way, this chaos provided a psychological crutch for the emotionally shaky Hawk, who was always just a thin thread away from unravelling.

During the burning summer of 2014 he was ferreting out surplus gear in one of his favorite local haunts—the Uwharrie General Store. Nestled hard by NC 109 in the National Forest, the store was crammed with hunting and fishing gear, groceries, and beer.

The proprietor was retired First Sergeant, Hoss Gonsalez, who relocated his family from Texas so he too could enroll in the gun-

smithing program. Hoss sold refurbished fire arms in a back corner of the store, and he was the Hawk's only real friend. Gonsalez was plump and jovial. He served in the same battalion in the Nam but at a different time. When things got especially rough with the Hawk, Gonsalez periodically performed impromptu suicide interventions.

Hoss was a procurement genius! He plied the Internet locating and buying old combat gear from the Nam—most of which he sold to his friend for a song. That helped to keep the Hawk fixated on something other than the grim events of 1969. This summer Hoss performed a coup de grace. He located an old PRC-25 field radio. It even had two barely functioning batteries which still held a modest charge.

The Hawk was elated! He placed the relic radio smack in the center of his living room, clearing out piles of musty jungle fatigues in the process. He used an old pickup truck battery with frayed red wires to recharge the radio cells. It was a jack-legged setup. Sometimes sparks flew and acrid smoke hung in the humid air. Damned if that sketchy old radio didn't work after all!

He spent countless hours clutching the battered handset, and he was mesmerized and maybe a bit haunted by the hissing sound produced by the empty radio freq. One late drunken night, amid much static, some military chatter crackled out of the speaker. The Hawk instantly surmised that the transmission was coming from Ft. Bragg troops on maneuvers in the National Forest. They came every summer, and he had just seen GIs in desert fatigues in the General Store loading up on beer and cigs.

The Hawk became an enthralled if silent participant in their radio transmissions. He hung on every word as he spent hours keeping the PRC-25 charged. This August produced searing heat, often reaching 100 degrees. The ancient Uwharries were not totally unlike the Central Highlands surrounding the Que Son and Hiep Duc Valleys. No lush rice paddies in the vals, but steep enough to be a bitch for GIs to hump up carrying a full rucksack.

The intense summer heat was suddenly punctuated by daily afternoon thunderstorms with intense electrical ferocity. At the Hawk's isolated farmhouse, his favorite nocturnal pastime of fondling and listening to the forty-five-year-old PRC-25 was disrupted by explosive lightning bolts which in turn produced unbearable static.

The Hawk tried to compensate for these interruptions by chain smoking more Winstons, drinking extra beer, and puffing a fat joint here and there for diversion. He proudly rolled his own reefers with Uwharrie Gold, the local cash crop. The federal land surrounding his old farmhouse was sprinkled with marijuana patches carefully tended by gun-toting local entrepreneurs riding powerful ATVs. Forest rangers burned some of the tall green stashes, but there were too many to eradicate completely. The local grapevine also hinted that there were protective payoffs to the underpaid Feds.

As August wound down the Hawk spiraled into one of his periodic depressions. The anniversary of his Bravo Company disaster loomed, and it took a sinister grip on his psyche. One night a near tornado ripped through the Uwharries. Torrential rains and soaring winds threatened to rip the rusty tin roof off the old farmhouse.

The Hawk sprawled on his living room couch drunkenly clutching his cherished handset. The empty push crackled with static from the electrical barrage overhead. The Hawk should have been terrified by this meteorological maelstrom, but he was totally numb with eternal, overpowering guilt.

A lightning bolt found his old brick chimney. Loose bricks and mortar clattered down on the tin roof. Suddenly there was a lull in the tempest not unlike the coming of a hurricane's eye. Then the Hawk heard the unimaginable! The raggedy speaker of his PRC-25 crackled to faint but unmistakable life.

"Red Leg 1-0, this is Parker Pen 1-0, over." Hawk's long dormant call sign once again echoed out over a military freq.

"Red Leg 1-0, this is Parker Pen 1-0, unit in contact! Gooks in our perimeter. Emergency fire mission!"

The Hawk's body went rigid. His bloodshot blue eyes popped out of his head like laser darts. The old handset snapped up to his mouth as he barked, "Parker Pen 1-0, this is Red Leg 1-0. I have you Lima Charlie, how me, over?"

The bedraggled jungle vet trembled with fear as the pace of the radio chatter escalated to a frantic tempo. "Red Leg 1-0, request an urgent fire mission, saturation on grid 926324. No markers! Fire for effect now. The gooks are so close I can hear them whispering to each other and their safeties are clicking off right in my ear!"

Nearly fifty years of torment ebbed in the Hawk's mind. He sat up tall on his patchwork sofa and instantly tuned back into the Jungle War. Decades of PTSD and guilt gave way to a soldier's duty and training.

"Red Leg 3-0, this is Red Leg 1-0. I have a fire mission. Unit overrun at grid 926324. Fire for effect! In another minute they will be wiped out!" The Hawk was operating on pure adrenaline as he relayed a repeat fire mission to LZ West and the 155 mm howitzers of Battery C. The big guns boomed. Their incoming rounds sounded like a fast-arriving train on the Chicago El.

It seemed like an eternity before Hawk heard Captain Gayler's sharp Texas twang spit out from his old speaker. "Red-Leg 1-0, Parker Pen 1-0. Your shit came in on the dime! The gooks are pulling back. You got some G's out here that want to hug your neck when we get back up on the hill. Tell the boys at Red Leg 3-0, good shooting!"

Dawn seeped into the Uwharries like a foggy stream of cold mercury. The day promised more summer heat. The Hawk struggled out of his front door into the weed-choked yard. The PRC-25 now stood stone cold silent in his living room, the battery long since exhausted. George Hawkins was completely spent, but for the first time in forty-five years he felt no responsibility for anything. His long

neglected body and mind felt strangely cleansed. Had it been a drunken dream? Or had a long lost radio transmission from the Nam finally arrived, bringing redemption?

Late September found the Hawk pedaling west up the eastern slope of the Blue Ridge. He was riding a shiny Schwinn Paramount outfitted with bulging pannier bags. He was bicycling home to California where he would join an old buddy to open an arcade on the funky Santa Cruz Pier. On weekends they planned to enjoy a 1950 Packard Super 88 Victoria. His buddy got it for a cool thirty-eight grand on eBay. Strangers along his homeward route often asked about the medal with a multicolored ribbon carefully pinned to his pannier. It was the Bronze Star, an honor secured for him by a grateful infantry captain, William Gayler, from Mineral Wells, Texas. They would speak often by telephone over the years ahead.

The Hawk was finally free. He often lay awake in his sleeping bag gazing up at the comforting stars. Sometimes sleep would finally creep in like a blackened gook sapper. Then he would suddenly snap awake to the sound of his own strained but calm voice: "This is Red Leg 1-0, I hear you Lima Charlie. How me?" Tears would be streaming down his weathered cheeks.

William Crawford lives in Winston Salem, North Carolina. He is a social worker, writer, and photographer. He was an Army photojournalist in Vietnam.

Box

By Ryan Smithson

"Are you sure?" said Carrie Borden's recruiter, typing away at the million-page army entrance paperwork. "MPs deploy a lot."

"Why be in the army if you don't want to get deployed?"

"Fair point."

"Is Military Police a combat MOS?" she asked.

"It's not."

"What's with that rule anyway?"

"Nothing personal," he said. "It's more of a moral code society has. You don't knowingly send your female population to the front lines. Men are expendable."

"I guess you'd really only need one guy to repopulate the country."

"Technically, I suppose." He shifted in his chair.

"Luckiest man in the world, right?"

"I knew I liked you, Borden. You're funny."

He meant funny *for a girl*.

"Besides," he said. "In a heavy combat environment, a female in the ranks has a way of affecting unit cohesion. You can't take it personal."

"Like a bad breakup," she said. "It's not you, it's me."

The recruiter laughed again and straightened his back in his chair. That's how you can tell if a guy is into you: he stands tall. Women, they groom themselves. Watch for it. Notice who a woman is looking at when she tucks her hair behind her ear. It's just biology.

Even after she signed "Carrie Borden" on the dotted line and shipped off to basic, she wondered why her recruiter kept assuming she'd take the women in combat thing personal.

Then, after getting deployed and seeing action on her very first convoy, she just thinks it's funny. The whole thing.

Running so many operations out of OP Valentine makes her realize that a rule banning women from combat roles doesn't mean much in a war where the enemy hides among women and children. Which isn't funny, per se. But it's ironic. Just another part of America having to be the bigger man.

OP Valentine is located just west of the Tigris. It's triangled by Kirkuk, Samarra, and Mosul, and those are three cities you don't generally want to be stuck between.

At first, there aren't even latrines there. They go on the ground behind sandbags, and that's fine. When the engineers bring latrines, though, that's when the line becomes visible the way it is stateside. See, Borden is the only woman with her MP unit, so when it's just them and the cavalry—which is a combat MOS—she's a lone wolf. When the engineers come, though, they bring a handful of women. The commander designates one trailer with a hand-written sign that reads, simply, "FEMALE."

Every time she goes, it reminds her that she doesn't like how the army does that. That word for women: female. It sounds so . . . medical. It's just the army's way of being objective, she guesses. Dead accuracy is important. She gets that. Just kind of irks her.

The cavalry usually does the patrols—Tikrit, Mosul, Qayyarah. The MPs mostly hang back and question their survivors. Sometimes

they question them first, "lump 'em up," so to speak. If they seem like they had some real intel, like AQI knowledge, they take them over to Kirkuk West to the guys at Psyops or even Abu Ghraib to have fun with the CIA.

The handover from the MPs to the cavalry is messy at first. One of the detainees sneaks in a suicide vest once. The cav scout who misses it during the pat-down is a little guy, Gino, and he's a nice guy as far as army guys go. Borden knows he pulled a twenty-hour shift the day before, so she can't blame him. As they're doing the handover, even though he's popped his seventh stick of caffeine gum, his eyelids keep falling.

Sergeant Cruz and Sergeant Borden are the first checkpoint for the OP. At the next are about twenty soldiers, all ranks, waiting to interrogate the shit out of these AQI fuckers. Gino lets the bomber pass through, and that's when Cruz notices the trigger in the guy's hand.

Without thinking, Borden lunges at Haji. She hits him in the kidneys, and the trigger goes flying. Talk about proving yourself as a woman in the army.

After that close call, they start to work the bugs out. They get used to the people and the way they move. They get used to the weather and the eerie whisper before a sandstorm hits. They get into a routine. They even get bored.

Back at their main post, Kirkuk West, this huge airfield about twenty minutes northwest of OP Valentine, there's a ton to do. There's a swimming pool, a movie theatre with a Baskin-Robbins, an MWR building with a weight room, big screen TVs, and ping pong tables. There's a library and a bazaar run by Filipinos where you can get a handmade, Egyptian cotton suit for $200 or a legit hookah and all the fruity tobacco you can smoke for $15. They hold volleyball tournaments at K-West. There's horseshoes, a basketball court. You can buy a bicycle to get around, or take the bus transit instead of walking.

It's all kind of unsettling to Borden, to be honest. After living outside the wire for so long, all that American Way of Life stuff seems . . . political. But at least it's something to do.

If there's one thing the higher ups hate worse than casualties, it's boredom. All sorts of problems start popping up when soldiers aren't occupied, especially fraternization (that's the army's objective, dead accurate word for sex). Borden is sure that when that engineering unit is at OP Valentine, there is plenty of objective, dead accurate sex going on. The rest of them, though, when they aren't interrogating haji or pulling guard duty, they're bored. At least the scouts get to run around in the cities rounding up the MP To-Do list.

That engineering unit leaves a bunch of their supplies behind, so somebody thinks it's a good idea to take all that lumber, rope, and chain and build a makeshift boxing ring.

The highest-ranking officer at OP Valentine is a first lieutenant, and he also happens to be a fitness enthusiast. His platoon sergeant is almost the complete opposite. He's not fat, but he sure looks fed well. And his teeth are yellow from the unlit cigars he chews on all the time. The one thing they agree on, though, is the sheer thrill of punching other guys in the head. They decide that weekly boxing bouts will solve a couple problems. For one, it's PT. For two, it keeps the boredom at bay. Bloody noses can be great for morale, so long as the participants are willing. Boys are weird.

So every week, a sign-up sheet is posted in their chow hall—to use the term loosely; it's really just a tent with a few tables and pallets of MREs. About once per week, they spring for hot chow, but that requires a less-than-safe round trip to Kirkuk West.

There are only a couple names on the signup sheet the first time Lieutenant Gage posts it. After the ice is broken, people flock to the ring to test their manhood.

"You're light on your feet," one of the cav guys, Sergeant Thatcher, says to Borden once. "And you're strong." He means strong for a girl.

Sorry, "female."

She laughs it off at first. Then a scout she works with a lot, Charles Main, asks her.

"Show 'em what you're made of, Sarge," he says.

"You don't think saving their asses on the ECP was enough?"

"Sure it is," says Main. "They all respect you. Now make them fear you."

She laughs and tells Main she'll think about it. He's a cool guy, has this smoothness about him. She heard he was a pickpocket before he joined the army, but that seems a little far-fetched. Though, if anyone could pull it off, it would be him. He's the kind of guy who's smarter than the people in charge of him, but doesn't care enough to take their place. He'd rather sit back and chuckle at the irony.

When Main comes to Kirkuk West where you don't have to wear armor all the time, he throws on a Stetson cowboy hat and spurs—parts of the cavalry's dress uniform. Borden doesn't think he does it for any other reason than to mess with the Fobbit brass who love to ream people out for uniform misconduct.

Once, he's walking around in his desert camo and army green Stetson, and this big, nasty Sergeant Major stops him cold. The guy's got a look on his face like someone's already pissed in his morning coffee.

"Private!" he yells. "You have got to be fucking kidding me."

Main locks into parade rest and says, calm as hell, "What seems to be the problem, Sar'nt Major?"

"You will not walk around on my post with a cowboy hat on, Private. Where the hell is your headgear?"

"This is my headgear, Sar'nt Major. I'm a cavalry scout!"

The rest of Main's crew walk away, trying not to laugh. Borden's not sure how long the Sergeant Major runs a verbal tirade over Main, but they don't see him until two hours later at dinner chow. Guess the Sergeant Major took him back to headquarters to have a one-on-one with their commander.

When Main shows up at dinner chow, he's still wearing his Stetson.

Main gets Borden really thinking about boxing. But she still refuses.

And then her partner, Sergeant Cruz, says, "You shouldn't be scared."

"I'm not, Marco, and I'm honestly a little pissed you'd suggest it."

"They all think that's why you won't do it."

"I don't care much what they think."

"Do you care what I think?"

"Of course."

"I think you should stop accepting the second-rate box the army wants to put you in. When you saved mine and Gino's life out on that ECP, did you even get a thank you from the CO?"

"I don't need thank yous."

"Their scout Boomer got a Bronze Star for jumping on that grenade in Mosul."

"That's different, and you know it," she says. How could he even compare the two? "Besides, I don't want medals."

"You don't get medals because you want them, Carrie. You get them because you deserve them."

"Is that a Batman reference?" she says, punching his shoulder.

"If you're not going to take me seriously—"

"Fine, Marco," she says. "If it'll make you happy, I'll box."

What Cruz doesn't know is that their commander did give Sergeant Borden a medal, a Bronze Star actually. She told him she didn't want to make a big thing out of it. They never held a ceremony, and that was fine with her.

Also what Cruz—and the rest of them—don't know is that Carrie Borden has taken boxing lessons since she was ten.

She's not big, even for a girl, but from watching the amateur Valentine matches every Friday, she knows she can beat even the biggest, meanest men who step into that ring.

After she agrees to box, she goes from an invisible spectator no one notices to the one people whisper about as she walks by.

"Are you really doing it?" they ask with boyish smirks.

"Sure," she says, wondering if they ask that question of everyone who signs up. To be honest, it makes her giddy with excitement. No one can tell. Besides boxing, she is also very good at poker. But inside she's beaming like a girl about to get revenge on her first boyfriend, the one who broke her heart and left her in the dirt. Then she sees the lineup.

She has to fight Gino.

On fight night, Sergeant Shields fires up the generator to power the construction spotlight hanging over the makeshift ring. When you step into the ring, that light blinds you to everything but the man in front of you. The spectators are ghosts in the shadows.

Sergeant Shields lights his cigar and steps into the spotlight while Gino and Borden bounce and stretch in their corners to warm up.

"As usual, I'd like to begin tonight with a prayer," says Shields, blue smoke billowing around his head. Everyone around the ring hangs their heads. "Dear Lord, we thank you for this wonderful space and time. We ask that you keep any and all bastard towelheads from mortaring us as we gather here for this time honored, American tradition.

"We ask that you bless the Army Corps of Engineers for leaving behind all this extra plywood, two-by-fours, and chains so we can spend our nights doing something besides sitting in the dark playing with ourselves.

"We ask that you bless Sergeant Trejo for providing this wonderful boxing equipment.

"We ask that you watch over all the brave warriors who will step into this blessed ring tonight. We pray for your grace and mercy as we root for them to beat the living snot out of each other. May you keep them bloody and ruthless but safe—and ready to report for duty promptly at 0600 hours. Amen."

Borden steps out from her corner and gets her first good look at Gino. It's like she's never seen him before. He wears this ornery scowl she doesn't recognize. He's a guitar-playing, easy-going kid. Not even when he speaks of his second-greatest passion, avenging 9/11, does he look this angry. And Borden instantly remembers the reason she doesn't want to fight—before Cruz got into her head with that deserving medals nonsense.

When you get right down to it, a girl has nothing to lose stepping toe-to-toe with a boy. But the boy, he has everything to lose. His whole rep is on the line, and in a hyper-masculine place like the army in wartime, a small man with a lot to prove is dangerous. Not in the ring; she had Gino in the ring. But after. The fallout from this could ruin a lot more than Gino's pretty, rockstar face.

"For our opening bout tonight," says Sergeant Shields. "We have, in this corner, Michael 'Haji Hunter' Gino."

Shields made them pick nicknames. She laughed at Gino's; kid has a good sense of humor. He narrows his eyes at her, though, and she realizes laughing is the wrong move.

"And in this corner," says Shields, giving Borden the eye. She nods for him to continue. "We have Carrie 'The Female' Borden." He pulls their gloves together. "Clean fight, soldiers. Keep it above the belt," then, to Gino, "Especially you."

They go to their corners. The bell is an empty 155 shell, and Shields rings it with his pride and joy, a battle axe his grandfather used in WWorld War II. Gino and Borden start dancing. He seems pretty athletic. No boxer, but he's quick and light. He's tense, though, and he comes out defensive. Then Borden can see him realize that defensive is the wrong approach. You don't become the top wolf by standing back on your heels.

So he comes forward, throws a couple jabs, and she blocks them. She lets him land one on her face. He has decent weight behind those punches, but she can feel him holding back a bit. He knows to turn

his hips into the punch, but the one he lands, his hips stay square. There's that moral code society has about women. And Gino's a good man.

They dance, and when he goes for another jab, Borden ducks and hits him with a double body shot. The crowd reels. It's funny the way non-boxers react to a hard rib shot. Knocks the wind out of them, not because the punch is so terrible, but because all their focus is in their head and hands. You can tell they forgot they even had ribs.

She entertains Gino by letting him take a few more jabs. She can tell he's thinking uppercut, so she lets him, only she pulls her head back at the last second and lands a hard jab through his open left side. She catches him square in the jaw, and he stumbles back. The crowd reels again, but Gino keeps coming. He's a scrappy fighter, but he's not fired up. That's good. He's keeping his cool.

She lets him get in close so they can lock up. Before Sergeant Shields separates them, she tells Gino he owes her.

He says, "What?"

"The ECP," she whispers. "You owe me."

He grins as Shields breaks them up, shakes his head. He comes out strong, actually lands one by himself across her chin. She gets him back with another couple of body shots, and his weight goes on his heels. She lands a hard right hook, and he tumbles to the ground.

"Oh snap!" yells Trejo.

She locks eyes with Cruz, and he looks shocked and amused. She winks.

Gino pops up immediately and comes at her with a fury, which is his biggest mistake. She sidesteps and catches him in the side of the head. That humbles him, so he squares up and stays low.

She motions to him with her own gloves to keep his up. He does. Then she steps left, and he goes the opposite way. She shakes her head, steps right. He goes the right way this time. She moves forward, and Gino inches back. She jabs, and he dodges and counters with his own jab. She steps back, and they turn with each other. Finally in sync.

"This is boxing," Borden whispers. "Right-left-left."

She throws the punches hard enough so it looks real but lands them soft so Gino knows she's not here to win. She's here to teach.

"Right-left-left. Good," she says. "Two body shots. Then upper cut with the left. Where the jaw meets the neck. Fight's over."

She steps forward to clench up again. She tells him, "I could have chosen any man."

It's a lie, but Gino doesn't know that. As Shields breaks them up, she whispers, "Do me just like I showed you."

They circle the ring. Gino comes in, pumps three times, and backs off. Borden gives him a hard look, letting him know it's him or her. He comes back: right-left-left. She leans into the last one. Gino gets low and lays a couple of body shots against her lower ribs. She opens her right arm, and his left hand comes up in a nasty upper cut.

The climax of the fight feels something like dying. But in a good way. Everything goes white for a second, and the feel of the leather is the last thing she remembers.

When she comes to, Gino stands over her. His hand is behind her head. His one eye is swollen, but she can tell from the color it's already losing its stiffness.

"You didn't have to do that," he says.

"Was it good for you?"

He laughs. "You're a good soldier, Sergeant."

"Call me Carrie."

Ryan Smithson's fiction, nonfiction, and poetry has been published in several journals, including Metropolitan Review, Whistling Shade, Shattercolors, Identity Theory, Oregon Literary Review, *and* Proud to Be: Writing by American Warriors. *His memoir* Ghosts of War: The True Story of a 19-Year-Old GI, *published by HarperCollins in 2009, was nominated as an ALA Best Book for Young Adults.*

Poetry.

I Once Saw a Policeman . . .

Richard Epstein

I once saw a policeman shoot a black cocker spaniel
that was struck by a car. The policeman got down
on one knee, lifted the dog's ear, drew his revolver
and bang! It was over. I was seven and on my way to school.

When my brother was twelve, my dad
put his dog to rest by a quick tap to the head
with a hammer. *It had to be done,* he said.
He was blind and deaf. It's better this way.

When I was twenty-three in a foreign land,
I had a similar task at hand. The dog was sick.
I agreed to take him from a friend. After several
months of care, the dog stopped eating.

His time had come. I put him on his leash
and we walked to a police checkpoint
at the north end of town. I asked
for the policeman's assistance.

The answer was no.
I asked two soldiers at a bicycle shop.
They looked at each other and said no.
Rejected, we walked back home.

I retrieved my .45 and we set out again.
This time to a field of tall grass and bamboo
at the south end of town. I sat with him
on my lap, waiting for darkness, I guess.

With safety off, I moved my hand along
his shadowed mass until the gun rested
behind his ear. I held the barrel
where my father once tapped.

Instead of squeezing, I pulled and it was done.
I sat there a while listening to the night
then pushed my way through tall grass and bamboo
to begin the long walk home alone.

Richard Epstein is a long time resident of the Washington, DC area. He has produced two veteran anthologies and authored several chapbooks. His poetry has appeared in O-Dark Thirty, DEROS, Incoming, Poetica, Schuylkill Valley Journal *and* The Federal Poets. *Richard hosts an open mic venue adjacent to the Vietnam Veterans Memorial for veterans and friends of veterans each Memorial Day and Veterans Day.*

The Value of a Good Book

C. R. McCarthy

Was learned in flight
On a humid morning when the air, warm
And heavy, pressed the Potomac from a flow
To an ooze as we waited on creaking campstools
In columns of four outside

The mute warehouse. The day had arrived to turn in
Our accoutrement of mildewed
Canvas shelter halves, web belts, canteens
Each infused with generations of
Candidate sweat, anxiety, self-doubt
While a menacing sergeant patrolled the ranks
A shark amongst minnows, asking each shaved head

"What are you reading, candy-DATE?"
Each shaved head, in crisp cadence, replied
"*How to Zero Your Service Rifle!*" and "*The Sword Manual!*"
and "*Marine Heroes of the South Pacific!*" until the shark
arrived at this minnow who
In an unwitting act of insurrection, said
"*The World According to Garp*"

Which made the shark bare his shining teeth and growl
"Throw that shit away, candy-DATE!"
This Candidate did so, moving at the double-time to a gray
Dumpster with a yawning mouth, as if rousing
From morning's humid blanket
And from my hand the book took flight up
Beyond the gray maw and arced up

Over to land, flatly, with a damp thud, on the far side on the waking gray can.

I count my own cadence	One
Look around, where is the shark?	Two
Run around and pick up the book	Three
Place it in my cargo pocket	Four

And become complicit in my own revolution.

C. R. McCarthy recently retired as a colonel after 30 years in the Marine Corps. His career included deployments to Liberia, Somalia, Albania, Qatar, Iraq and Afghanistan.

Elegy

Michael McManus

On that morning just outside of Fallujah,
another Krakatoa exploded.
It blew Rico into pieces,
sent him spinning into the sacrificial
air where T.S. Eliot was
wrong—the mangy dog never whimpered
as it cowered and crawled
along the ground for twenty yards to Rico's arm,
which looked like a B-grade horror movie prop
as the little pink tongue licked and licked
the bloody offering.

I emptied my entire magazine
into the what-the-fuck-has-happened-here,
the dog exploding into a bullet-riddled pelt,
my fear the skin on that
dying animal.

Back home in Millheim, Pennsylvania,
my parents were partnered with molecules
in their nightly still-life,
foregoing a chance to see the stars above
Paddy Mountain for the heartbreak
of the living room sofa,
where they hunkered in on opposite sides.
They wore *Netflix* T-shirts,
any and all of their desires muted by Keystone Light,
the cans cold against their hands.
Inside their molded cages they sat looking outward,
watching reruns of Seinfeld like aliens
on earth for the first time,
blissfully unaware
of this world's unerring executions.

The work of Michael McManus, a Navy veteran, has appeared in numerous publications. He is the recipient of an Artist Fellowship Award from the Louisiana Division of the Arts, numerous Pushcart Prize nominations, the Virginia Award, and the Oceans Prize for poetry. He currently lives in Millheim, Pennsylvania.

After Action Report

JoLee Passerini

text taken entirely from
A History of the War in Afghanistan, 3 vols.
by John William Kaye
London, 1874

I have been walking with a torch in my hand.
There is the chance of an explosion at every step.
I have been treading all along on dangerous ground.

Few and far between as were the towns,
the kingdom was thinly populated.
Navigable rivers were wanting,

and the nature of the country precipitous.
The work was done rapidly. The match
was applied. The powder exploded.

Guns. Wind. The explosion was barely audible.
A column of black smoke. Willow and poplar trees.
The pastoral and predatory were strangely blended;

tented encampments
of sheep-drivers bristled into camps of war,
into awful ruin and confusion.

The square red-brick dwellings,
with doors of Turkish arches; the tents pitched
on the flat house-tops; the long terraces

began to crumble beneath the heavy fire
into shivered beams and a glimpse of the morning sky,
the enemy, the garden, the point of attack.

JoLee Passerini is a writing teacher at Eastern Florida State College. She is among the first Student Veteran Allied Faculty Education (SAFE) certified faculty members and a supporter of Collegiate Veterans Society. Her father served in the US Navy in the Pacific theater during World War II. Her five uncles all served in the armed forces during World War II, and her husband is also a Navy veteran. She earned her MFA in Creative Writing from the University of Alabama, but her best education comes from her students, who are a constant source of motivation and inspiration.

Dying in the Light

Jacob Paul Patchen

The shadows here are tall and mean. A darker version of myself, armed and just as dirty; stretching out towards home, or freedom, or forgiveness, only to fall short of that salvation. A dark angel beside me, who looks like me, who moves like me, but is able to bend along these desert walls, hugging to the cover of concrete and marble, if it wants to; or fearless, poking out into the open streets; daring poor bastards to fire, to expose their hidden intentions, to invite in that kind of death and destruction.

My shadow is a cold-blooded warrior; faceless and stern. But in the heat of a flaring sun, he still catches me when I fall.

Jacob Paul Patchen was born and raised outside of Byesville, Ohio, where he spent his youth tormenting babysitters and hiding in trees. He is a graduate of Meadowbrook High School and Muskingum University. Jacob is a poet, blogger, author, and combat veteran.

First Night in Country

John Rodriguez

Packed like sweaty sardines
Body Armor, and helmets
Big men in tiny seats
The bird twists and turns
Corkscrewing to land
Mouth waters
Bile in the back of throat
Dinner wants to say hi.
Just heat and motion
Or nerves?

Ramp lowers, an escape.
Greeted by a hot blast of air
And darkness.
A sky black as all blackness
Punctured by the control tower lights and
Bright blue jet cones
Racing down the runway,
A roar and rumble that fades,
Never leaves, never stops.

Guided to a tent, in-briefing orientation
Welcomed by word of Wanat
Nine killed, twenty-seven wounded
A platoon decimated.

Walk to the pisser,
Alone with my thoughts
Confronted by mural to the fallen
"Live a life worthy of their sacrifice."

John Rodriguez is an infantry officer in the United States Army. He served on active duty from 2006 to 2012 and currently serves in the Maryland National Guard. John served in Afghanistan as a rifle platoon leader and rifle company executive officer in Kunar Province from 2008 to 2009.

Extreme Measures

Larry Thacker

I wake up, tongue stabbed and swollen,
sore-raked across the teeth, a mystery
in the mouth at first but familiar once
the coffee stings over the bleeding spot.
I worry a top molar over a small missing
chunk, the taste of blood mixed with morning
breath, the same story no VA therapist
or new chemical cocktail can unravel.
It smarts more than usual but at least
it didn't wake me up in the middle of another
strange dream this time, choking, stabbed
in the mouth, tongue extracted, cut away,
or drowning, chewed and swallowed.

I'm not epileptic. I don't grind my teeth.
I just bite the fuck out of my tongue.
Maybe it just keeps me from screaming
the answer to a mystery in my sleep.

Larry D. Thacker is a writer and artist from Tennessee. His poetry can be found or forthcoming in journals and magazines such as The Still Journal, The Southern Poetry Anthology: Tennessee, Mojave River Review, Broad River Review, Harpoon Review, Rappahannock Review, Silver Birch Press, Dead Mule School of Southern Literature, AvantAppal(Achia), Sick Lit Magazine, Black Napkin Press, *and* Appalachian Heritage. *His stories can be found in past issues of* The Still Journal, Fried Chicken and Coffee, *and* The Emancipator. *He is the author of* Mountain Mysteries: The Mystic Traditions of Appalachia, *the poetry chapbooks* Voice Hunting *and* Memory Train, *and the forthcoming full collection,* Drifting in Awe.

A veteran of the US Army and a student services higher education professional for fifteen years, he is now engaged full-time in his poetry/fiction MFA from West Virginia Wesleyan College.

Interview.

A Conversation with Dick Camp

Dick Camp is a retired Marine Corps colonel whose writing career began after his retirement from active duty, with the publication of his Vietnam memoir, *Lima 6*. The memoir details his experiences as a company commander in the days leading up to, and then through, the historic siege of the Marine combat base at Khe Sanh. Camp served the Marines as an infantry officer at the platoon, company, battalion and divisional levels. He also has extensive experience leading Marines on recruiting duty and the drill field. In retirement, in addition to writing, Camp served as the Director of Marine Corps University's History Division, and as the Marine Corps Heritage Foundation's vice-president of operations at the National Museum of the Marine Corps. He has written fourteen books of fiction and non-fiction, including three about Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom: *Operation Phantom Fury: The Assault and Capture of Fallujah, Iraq* (2009), *Battle for the City of the Dead: In the Shadow of the Golden Dome, Najaf, August 2004* (2011), and *Boots on the Ground: The Fight to Liberate Afghanistan from Al-Qaeda and the Taliban 2001-2002* (2012).

ODT Art Editor Michael Fay interviewed Colonel Camp.

O-Dark-Thirty: Tell us a bit about your life and what led to your becoming a Marine.

Dick Camp: I was born in upper New York State in a little city called Newark in 1940. My father was a state trooper, and so we moved around quite a bit. My mother was a homemaker, and I have a brother who is a retired Rochester, New York, police officer and a sister who's a retired elementary school teacher. We lived mostly in the Finger Lakes area of upper New York State.

I always had a desire to go into the Marine Corps. I can remember being in high school and read every military book in the library. In those days there were a lot of military themed books in the library because the 1950s weren't too far from World War Two. I probably read *Guadalcanal Diary* at least twice, if not three times. My high school soccer coach was a former Marine artillery officer who had served in Korea. That was a great role model for me right there. A funny story—my parents knew that I wanted to go into the Marines, but of course my mother, like everyone else's mother, didn't want me to. So, in my junior year of college at the State University of New York at Brockport, when my mother said she was going Christmas shopping in Syracuse, I volunteered to drive her. She should have realized I had an ulterior motive. I had already called the officer selection recruiter and arranged to take their test. My mom went shopping and I went and took their test. I passed the test. I don't know if I really passed or if they just gave me a passing score. So, I signed up and I can still remember my mother saying, "Oh no, you're not going to go." The year was 1961.

After graduation I went to Officer Candidate School at Quantico, which you know can be a shock, but since I'd read so much about the Marines it wasn't *that* big of a shock. But until you experience it, it's very difficult to anticipate what it's actually going to be like. I hate to say this, but I enjoyed it. You're always on edge; the sergeant instructors

were always saying, "You're not going to make it," which keeps you excited. I got through OCS and headed to The Basic School for six months and while I was there my company commander was a Captain Sam Adams. He was a battlefield commissioned officer from Korea. He had been at some of the toughest fights there, places like Outposts Vegas, Reno and Carson. He was an old-time infantryman and when he talked you just wanted to write it down and absorb it. He was another great role model that I had. Coming out of TBS I wanted to be an infantry officer. Quite frankly, I didn't realize there was much else besides infantry in the Marines. I put in my first choice for duty as an 0302, infantry officer, and my first choice of duty station was Kaneohe Bay, Hawaii with the 1st Marine Brigade. I got all of them, probably due in large part because my class standing was number ten in the company and number two in my platoon.

ODT: In 1965 the Vietnam War was gaining momentum. Was your unit ever tasked with going?

DC: We were supposed to participate in a training exercise called Operation Silver Lance on the West Coast. They had already mounted up the artillery units on the slow moving LSTs and sent them out. All of a sudden word came down that Silver Lance was canceled and we're going to Okinawa and then Vietnam. I can remember the MPs coming to find me on leave in a bungalow over at Bellows Air Force Base. They told me to report immediately to my duty station. So, I roared back over to Kaneohe Bay and reported into the company. Bob Fallon greeted me and made me the pay officer down at Pearl Harbor aboard the waiting ships because I was the only bachelor. Everyone else was saying goodbye to their families and wives. So, I went over there. Because we were the reconnaissance unit, we had radio operators and they were manning the communications aboard the ship.

I said, "What the hell is going on guys?"

And they said, "We're going to Vietnam." I thought, *holy cow,* and drove back to Kaneohe Bay with just enough time to throw and lock all my stuff in the closet of my BOQ room. I got my gear and reported back down to the company.

There was a huge regimental parade field and the entire brigade is out there formed up. A very, very emotional time for everybody. Every unit was lined up—perhaps two thousand Marines. We boarded the trucks, headed down to Pearl Harbor, loaded onto the boats and off to war. Well, we got to Okinawa and we had a briefing in the base theater. I remember sitting there about four people away from the company commander. Just as they're talking about how the brigade is going into Vietnam, the company commander leans over and says, "Dick, you're not going."

I said, "WHAT?"

He says, "Your orders are here for Marine Barracks Washington, DC." I just sat there with an open mouth, because I'd trained with these guys for a year. But they executed my orders. The brigade is going to Vietnam and I'm headed to Washington, DC.

I remember reporting into the barracks and the papers already had the casualty rosters coming out. Several members of my platoon were on the casualty lists. I actually got to participate in the Medal of Honor ceremony for my good friend Frank Reasoner. His wife was there, the whole shooting match. His medal was posthumous. He'd been killed going to the aid of his wounded radio operator, who'd been caught out in the open.

ODT: Were you eventually sent to Vietnam?

DC: Well, at the Marine Barracks I was initially assigned as the Special Services Officer. I bitched and moaned and everything else. If you're

not on the parade field at Marine Barracks at 'Eighth and Eye Streets', then what are you doing there? Eventually they honored my request for a better assignment and I went down to be with the Guard Company. I had a platoon there. Loved it. Loved the ceremonies. I took over the Special Ceremonial Platoon, which consisted of the Silent Drill Team, the Body Bearers, and the Color Guard of the Marine Corps. I traveled all over the country with the drill team and the drum and bugle corps. We put on what is called the Battle Color Ceremony all across the country.

It was supposed to be a three-year tour, but because of the war it became a two-year tour, so, at the end of two years I got orders to 3rd Marine Division along with a couple of good friends, Myron Harrington and Ron Christmas, both of whom would receive the Navy Cross while over there. Ron was badly wounded in Hue City. I got my orders and took my family to Indianapolis—one of the hardest things I've ever done was to say goodbye to them, because I was going into combat. Fortunately the Corps had given me a detour to go to Reconnaissance Replacement School, which was really a fire support school for artillery, naval gunfire, and close air support. And so that brought me up to speed after being out of the Fleet Marine Force for two years.

I went to Vietnam through the usual route through Okinawa. I was bound and determined that I was going to be a rifle company commander. That's what a 0302 does. I remember reporting into division at Danang. You know, as you go into these places you have no idea what the hell is going on, where anyone is, and it's dirty and filthy. You're thinking, *Somebody please take care of me. I don't know what's going on.*

I reported to the division adjutant, who was a major. I was a captain at the time. I said, "Sir, I'm Captain Camp reporting for duty." He says, "Yes Captain Camp, I got you right here." I said, "I'd like a rifle company." And he looked at me with a look that said *Captain, I assign officers here.*

And I said, "I'd like a rifle company in the 4th Regiment." Again, he looked at me askance and I said, "Well, I'd served with the 4th Marines."

He relaxed and said, "Okay, okay, I understand." He ran down the list. "No," he said, "there's no openings in the 4th Regiment."

I said, "I'll take any rifle company in the division."

He said, "You're going to go to 3rd Battalion, 26th Marines." I didn't even know we went up that high. The 26th Marines had been formed up for World War II and then disbanded, and then revived for Vietnam. As a throw-away question as I was turning to leave, I asked, "Company commander rotate?" The major shot back, "No, he was killed in action last night." I thought, *Oh shit, have you got anything in a Mess Kit Repair Platoon?* That was a moment when you say, "Holy cripe, this stuff is for real."

ODT: What do you recall of taking over your first company?

DC: I remember going out and as usual, there's a big group of guys waiting for transportation; in this case it was helicopters. Again, you don't know where anything is.

Where's the 3rd Battalion, 26th Marines?

There at Dong Ha.

Where the hell is Dong Ha and what is it?

You have no idea. I went out there and the choppers came in, mostly CH-46s. A chopper would come in and the crew chief would yell, "Dong Ha!" Guys would scamper out to the bird. There was no manifest, no seats, no nothing. The windows were even gone. So, you climb on board. You've not been issued any gear and [you're] still in your stateside utility uniform. In those days they were all starched. The starch is now running down your legs because it's 200 degrees and 400% humidity.

We flew up to Dong Ha, and I reported into regiment, who sent me down to battalion and then to the rear detachment of the company. The battalion itself was up in the field at Khe Sanh and Dong Ha was about twenty air miles away. This was in July of 1967. I went down to the company's rear area and they had a supply sergeant and odds and sods on details. I went to get my gear, and of course, word had already gotten out that the new captain is here. I'm taking over for a company commander that had been killed just three days before. I'm in this big GP tent and there's bins of stuff, you know, 782 gear. They have my gear laid out for me. All brand new stuff. And I think, *Wait a minute, I may not have been in combat before, but Dick has read a lot about the Corps.* I tell them, "I'll take the stuff that's been worn out." Because, brand new stuff, combined with radio operators standing around, and guess who gets shot first? At least that was my thought.

As I'm getting this stuff, the tent flap flies open and this old fart comes in. He's probably in his late thirties, an old guy, at least to us. He huffs and puffs, doesn't look me in the eye, starts swearing and throws a couple things and storms out. I thought, *Who the hell was that?* I asked the supply sergeant. "Sir, that's your company first sergeant," came the reply. I thought, *Holy cripe, this is going to be a long tour.*

Well, what I found out was that the first sergeant was having a difficult time adjusting to losing his company commander. They had been very close and all of a sudden his company commander's killed in action. And now this new guy shows up. But, in the end, we were able to form a very professional relationship.

So, I flew up to Khe Sanh, not too far from the Laotian border and the DMZ, in a CH-34. You land on this hilltop, and you know, for those of us who've read so much about the Corps and the infantry, that it's really something to see them. There they are, there's the grunts. The base had a 360 perimeter and you could literally smell them before getting out of the helicopter. I don't know how long they'd been

in the field, but man, they were there in front of me—dirty, scroungy, uniforms ripped and torn.

I got out of the helicopter and, of course, you don't know anyone and nobody knows you. I'm wondering where's the battalion, or even the battalion commander, when this old guy shows up, sticks out his hand and tells me he's the battalion sergeant major. Ok, I'm over the hump. He says, "The colonel would like to talk to you," and he takes me over to the side. Here's the Old Man, in a skivvy shirt, bearded, he stunk, and he's a little bald headed.

He said, "What's your first name?"

"Dick," I said.

"Well Dick, come on over here, I want to talk to you."

Alright, I thought, I*'m going to get The Word. He's going to brief me on how to be a company commander.*

He says, "You see that hill out there?"

Christ, there were hills all over the place. "Ah, yes sir, I see it."

"Well, your company's out there. They've been out there a couple days. We're looking for a rocket site. Do you have any questions?"

I said, "No sir."

"OK, go get 'em." That was my brief from the battalion commander.

I got in a chopper, flew out there, and I asked the pilot to circle the hill a couple times so I could get a look at it. It didn't look right to me. You have a sense. So, we landed, and this big guy comes up to me and sticks out his hand. "Captain Camp, I'm Lieutenant Aulick." Yahk Aulick had been a displaced person in World War II when his family had to flee the Russians.

I said, "Yahk, can we walk the perimeter?"

"Oh, yes sir."

As we're walking I said, "We need to move these guns." You've seen movies like *Platoon* where they say things like, "Well, sir, get your

feet on the ground, you'll be alright." Well, no, that isn't the way the Marine Corps operates. So I said, "I want to move this gun over here, about ten feet." That was the place it should have been. Nobody said, "Well, sir, get your feet under you first." They just said, "Yes, sir." Now, they may not have liked it, and probably didn't, because they were already dug in. But they all did it.

As I'm talking with Yahk, a platoon comes up out of the jungle. Up there the valleys were filled with jungle. There were elephants, tigers, and monkeys. This young lieutenant comes up, and again, he doesn't know who I am. So, I say, "What have you got, lieutenant?"

He says, "We thought we saw somebody down there." I filed it away in my head and that night, my first night in the field, everything went okay.

In the morning I told the lieutenant, "Let's go, I want to go down there with you," and so we went. The sides of these draws were just so steep that you had to literally hold on to vines. The platoon got down in the valley and we were in this gulch, with a nice little stream with maybe two or three inches of water, really very beautiful. Quiet. You could hear the water falling over the rocks. You could literally hear the insects in the air it was so quiet. You move very, very cautiously.

I'm about seven men back from point. We're going along and I'm thinking, *Holy cripe. Parts of this are fifty meters straight. Goddamn, if there's anyone in there, they're just going to grease us.* You had great fields of fire. So, I was getting really nervous. There was a split in the stream and again, you're channelized.

All of a sudden, the point man stopped and kneeled down, looking at something. So what does the new company commander do, he goes up to where he is. I ask, "What do you got?"

"Sir, I think this is a footprint."

I look down and there's a tire track. What the hell is a tire track doing in the middle of the jungle? That was a Ho Chi Minh sandal.

It's very, very quiet, and I give the hand signal to move forward, but instead of falling back to my previous position, I'm now three men back from the point. The company commander has no business being there. We were walking along, by the way, I carried a rifle. I looked up just in time to see this trooper look back. He then falls back against the bank yelling, "Gooks, gooks, gooks!" and opens up, full automatic.

His slack man starts firing full automatic and I'm just standing there. I can't register this. The platoon sergeant throws me literally against the bank because he's got a pin out of a grenade. He yells, "Grenade!" and throws it in this bunker.

Long story short, it was about a twenty-bunker complex. The point had walked right past an embrasure that was literally two feet away from him and didn't see it. All he saw was the embrasure. Nobody was home. Fortunately, because they would have had us badly.

There is a "high speed" trail leading out of this bunker complex. A high speed trail being about two feet wide, no vegetation and just straight up the hillside. You know, you're always worrying in the jungle where is the artillery fan? You do not want to run out of the artillery fan. So, we follow this trail and there are steps literally carved into the uphill side of the hill. I'm thinking, *Holy cripe, what the hell do we got here?* We looked up on this hill and there was a bare knob out of the jungle. Looked like there was a stack of telephone poles. I thought, *What the hell is that? What are telephone poles doing in the middle of the jungle?* We got closer and saw that they were 122mm rockets stacked there.

We called back to the battalion to let them know what we had. They said they'd send a chopper out to pick one up. We had found one of their rocket sites. You could see where the ground had been scorched. I thought, *You want me to pick up one of those rockets, what if they'd been booby-trapped?* I couldn't see grabbing a couple troops,

saying, "You guys go up there," so I went up with two guys. We felt all around them. It was funny, you hold your breath as if that's going to really make a difference.

The chopper came in and picked up one of the rockets. We went on a little bit further to a site where there were bloody bandages, so we knew they had had some casualties. At that point I said, "That's it. I'm not going any further." A high speed trail, don't know where the artillery fan is, this is not the place for a platoon. So, we went back up.

Now, I'd been there for two days. I noticed the troopers were all carrying their grenades hung on their suspender straps and in their belts. Machine gun ammunition was looped around their shoulders. No bipods for the mortars and no tripods for the machine guns. I thought, *Woo, this is not good.* As we're leaving, the choppers being inbound to take us back to Khe Sanh, I said, "OK, you mortar men, you hit that tree about 800 meters out there." Shit, they didn't even hit Vietnam. We had a little labor management discussion. I said, "You will carry the bipods, you will carry the tripods, you will put your grenades in the Marine Corps' grenade pouches, you will not carry your ammunition around your shoulders, because when you fall on the ground, guess what happens to those links?—they get filled with dirt."

That was my introduction to my company. We spent some time at Khe Sanh and then went down to the DMZ, which was a really bad area. North Vietnamese were coming back and forth, just really bad out there. Then we went back to Khe Sanh and got caught in the siege. So, I spent eighty-some odd days at the siege of Khe Sanh.

ODT: Do you think orally telling your stories of combat has influenced your writing?

DC: Absolutely. I've always been a believer, whatever position you're in, regardless of rank, you are always training your subordinates. And

I did it verbally. Orally. Jim Mattis was under my command twice, and I bored him on many occasions with stories of Vietnam. But it kept the memories fresh in my mind.

ODT: How did you go from storyteller to author?

DC: I had met Eric Hammel, who was a very fine oral historian with thirty or forty books. One night we were out at dinner and he said, "I'm tired of hearing your BS, Camp."

I didn't know whether to get up and begin swinging or not.

He said, "Look, write your story."

I said, "I can't possibly do that."

He came back at me and said, "OK, you tape it and send it to me."

After agonizing, I bought a tape recorder and for three days in my living room taped my book *Lima 6*. I gave it to him, his wife transcribed it, and he already had an agent and a publisher and gave it to them. Next thing you know, it's a book.

ODT: What experience inspired you the most to write?

DC: Vietnam. It gave me a wealth of personalities and stories.

ODT: After getting* Lima 6 *published, what did you do next?

DC: After that I wrote some articles about Marines in China and I sent them to *Leatherneck Magazine*. They published them, and *Leatherneck* has continued to publish stories that I write to this day. I'm currently writing a book about Marines and the Battle of Midway.

ODT: Describe an example of how an idea for writing something develops for you?

DC: I write oral history. When I'm reading a transcript, if I find a name of someone who seems to have done something interesting, I explore it by asking the question "What's he done, and would it make a good story?" For example, I've always wanted to write something about the Marines at the Japanese war crimes trials. I was reading something and it mentioned a particular Marine's name. At the time I was the acting civilian director of the History Division at Quantico. I was able to get his phone number and address. I called him and his wife answered the phone. I asked if I could speak with him and she said he was out back chopping wood. He's ninety years old and he's chopping wood. He comes to the phone and agrees to help me. He had been the interpreter for Yamashida. I try to find things like that to write about.

ODT: How has a having a mentor helped your approach to writing?

DC: Eric Hammel writes very fine oral history. I have all his books. He writes about individuals and he puts it in the context of combat, or whatever. I really like that because it really brings the story alive. It's not impersonal strategic stuff.

ODT: Describe your writing process.

DC: I only use the computer. Period. Believe it or not, what I do is get the title first. Once I get the title I start writing it. I kid my wife, Suzie, who's trying her hand at writing, "Look, how you write a book is you start at the beginning, work your way through the middle and get to the end." That's the secret of success right there. I start writing, and often times I won't research it in advance, but research it as I'm writing.

ODT: Why do you believe it's important that veterans write about their experiences?

DC: I pick up books that look like they're going to be good, and they're crap—because they're written by people who've never done it. You get halfway through and you think, *Where did they get this from?* It's important for military guys and gals to write as they saw and experienced it. Keep the BS out of it. The public gets a benefit in getting a sense of what it's really like to be in combat.

###

Acknowledgements

O-Dark-Thirty *is supported by the Boeing Company and the National Endowment for the Arts, which have partnered to support arts outreach to military communities since 2004. Previously, Boeing supported the NEA's Operation Homecoming, a creative writing program for U.S. troops and their families.*

Our supporters include

Larry and Diana Brown

David Finkel

Ron Koshes

Paul Kozac

Allysa Kropp

Paul and Dayna Brown Majorowitz

Duane Morse

Rudy M. and Harry S. Moskowitz

Jane Zimmerman

Production support provided by

military|marketing|solutions llc

strategic creativity for the military market.™

- ADVERTISING & MARKETING
- GRAPHIC & WEB DESIGN
- IDENTITY & BRANDING
- PRESENTATION MATERIALS
- PUBLICATION DESIGN
- PUBLIC AFFAIRS
- SPECIAL EVENTS
- SPONSORSHIP
- TRADESHOWS

woman|service-disabled|veteran-owned

militarymarketingsolutions@gmail.com
COMING SOON: militarymarketingsolutions.us

Subscribe to *O-Dark-Thirty*

Would you like to receive *O-Dark-Thirty*: *The Review* at your home or office? You can subscribe to the print edition and receive this great writing at your door each quarter. We print everything from our online edition, plus artwork by artists from the military community.

Individual copies are $10, and an annual subscription (four copies) is $30. Shipping is free to U.S. and APO addresses.

We also encourage individuals to sponsor a subscription for a unit, ship, or organization. Buy one subscription for yourself and another for deployed or hospitalized troops, base libraries, a veterans' service organization (VSO) post or group, or even your own hometown public library. Just tell us the unit or organization's address and, if known, a point of contact (either a position title or an individual's name), and we'll do the rest. The journal will arrive with a note confirming you as the donor (unless you'd prefer it didn't).

Or you could let us decide where this writing will have the biggest impact. We're already providing copies for every patient at the Defense Center of Excellence for Psychological Health and Traumatic Brain Injury, and to the Warrior Writers' Program at Walter Reed National Military Medical Center. Our targets include VA hospitals and clinics, units with a high deployment OPTEMPO, and VSOs.

You can subscribe through the secure credit card link on our website (**o-dark-thirty.org/subscribe**) or send a check with the necessary information (name, address, where to send the journal…) to:

Veterans Writing Project
8653 16th Street, #8206
Silver Spring, MD 20910

Submit to *O-Dark-Thirty*

This journal of is writings by veterans, service members, and their adult family members. Have you written a story, poem, or essay that you would like to have published? We seek quality, literary writing on any topic (not just military themes.).

All works submitted to *O-Dark-Thirty* will be considered for publication in *The Review*. Works accepted will undergo a rigorous review process by our editorial board and may require some back and forth between the editors and the author. We seek work of the highest literary quality.

We accept submissions year round, of fiction, poetry, and non-fiction (including memoir and profiles). If you want to write for us, you should be a veteran, a service member (active or reserve), or a service member or veteran's family member. Your submissions should be previously unpublished (see below for our definition of exactly what "published" means) and should conform to these standards:

We accept fiction of up to 5,000 words (2500+/- words are more likely to be published); Non-fiction—should be true and under 5000 words (again, shorter works are more likely to be published); Poetry—three poems per submission. Please only send one submission at a time: one piece of fiction or non-fiction, or one batch of three poems.

We cannot provide payment for publishing your work. If your work is selected for *The Review,* you'll receive a free copy of that issue and you may purchase additional copies at a reduced rate. It is also our goal to print an anthology of our best works. If your work is selected, you will receive a copy of that as well.

We use *Submittable* as our submissions manager. Please go to our website at **o-dark-thirty.org/submit/** for more information about submitting work to *O-Dark-Thirty* and a link to the *Submittable* site.