

## Going Home



I'm wearing my Class A uniform, waiting on flight number 4505.  
The plane will pick me up on New York and deposit me in Philadelphia, where  
I will meet an old Army friend; together we'll travel to a special ceremony.

My polyester uniform does not breathe well; on a long trip.  
I begin to offend those around me.  
The tie chokes me: like a man noosed for execution.  
My luggage strap tears at my ribbons, scattering them on the dirty floor.  
I am choking.

As I make my way to Gate 28, a vet from The Greatest Generation walks up to me.  
He and his wife would like to buy me lunch.  
I thank the man for serving our country and add that it is I who should buy him lunch,  
Then remember: I am waiting for Dave to come home from Iraq.  
The old vet nods understandingly, we look into each other's eyes, shake hands and  
I disappear to be alone.

While I sit in the empty gate (I am early), CNN reports that a suicide bomb went off in  
Tal-Afar.  
Tal-Afar is near Mosul, where Dave was stationed.  
I think, "These are the times to say 'I'm sorry' to those who matter most."  
I wait for Dave in silence.  
My only companions are a tired stewardess and CNN—broadcasting to no one.

A woman in a two-piece suit comes up to me.  
Reflexively I reply: “Yes, Ma’am.”  
She informs me that Dave is waiting for me in the cargo area.

The gate slowly fills; the gazes multiply.  
I can’t stop it.  
A flood I have sought to surpress washes down my face.  
Stares crowd closer...I can barely see them, yet I feel them.  
They suffocate me.

A man in a suit waiting to board “First Class” casually reads  
the sports section of a newspaper,  
tossing the front page aside: “Suicide Bomber Kills Four in Mosul.”  
I don’t need to read the story because I know the picture too well.  
I also know that the press probably mailed in the story from the comfort of a hotel suite,  
Ignoring the details.

I want to tell this man that while he lounges in “First Class” my friend Dave lies in cargo.  
What will I say to his wife Cindy when I meet her?  
Words and thoughts swirl around my head, but I can’t locate anything.  
All I feel is grief, and Cindy does not need me to cry on her shoulder.

There are no Army manuals to instruct me on what to do. I am at a loss.  
I am the escort officer who is taking my fallen comrade home for the last time.  
For Dave: Rest Easy, Brother.

—Maj. Zoltan Krompecher  
1 October 2005