

Military Review

Poetry Reader

Global War on Terrorism, 2001–2021



Military Review

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Cover photo: Army 1st Lt. Jared Tomberlin (*left*) gets a firsthand view of the land with outgoing commander 1st Lt. Larry Baca on top of a ridge near Forward Operating Base Lane, Zabul Province, Afghanistan, 21 February 2009. Tomberlin is assigned to Company B, 1st Battalion, 4th Infantry Regiment, and Baca is assigned to Company C, 1st Battalion, 4th Infantry Regiment. (Photo courtesy of the U.S. Army)

Back cover: Quote from Lionel Giles, trans., *Sun Tzu on the Art of War: The Oldest Military Treatise in the World* (Leicester, UK: Allandale Online Publishing, 1910), 6.



Foreword

Between what is written and what is read are feelings—
they form an intimate connection between writer and reader.

—W. Piatt

Since the dawn of human history, soldiers have turned to poetry to express their experience of war. Poetry is an outlet to extract meaning from the exhilaration, suffering, injustice, and destruction of war, allowing the soldier to record personal experiences wrought by intense emotions, passions, visceral fear, anxiety, loss, pain, even despair. Poetry fuses sensual perceptions and moral reflections into a disciplined mode of verbal and written expression, trying to give the war experience a sense of coherence that can be intensely personal and often communal.

For me, writing is therapeutic. Having experienced battlefields from Bosnia to Afghanistan to Iraq, I quickly learned that war—the intentional killing of other human beings—is the worst human invention. It is a terrible condition of humanity that sends soldiers to foreign lands to kill other soldiers. The strategic purpose of conflict should never mask the toll it takes on the people who wage it. The brave men and women upon whom this responsibility is placed do so with honor and valor, yet their innocence is lost by witnessing the pain and suffering at such a monumental scale. The only joy is to survive, and that feeling quickly fades, overwhelmed by the loss of so many and the destruction of so much. Any joy for surviving is quickly replaced by guilt for being alive, despair over all that has been lost, lives ruined. Through it all, the soldier endures knowing that if we do not stand for liberty and justice, the alternative would be far worse. And so, I write my thoughts as I feel them, creating a poetic flow that has allowed me to understand, purge, occasionally savor moments—in the moment. Often, as I have written the words expressing my feelings, these emotions seem to leave my mind, allowing me to keep moving forward, as soldiers need to do. Later, I realized that these feelings remained, deep inside, in my soul, often eating away at my emotional state.

The writings that follow capture the experience and feelings of war. No history book or Hollywood production can render the raw range of emotions felt by warriors. Only the military members themselves can put into words their own experiences. And thus, these beautiful writings are eyewitness statements to what the writer was seeing and experiencing at the time and they are an invitation to you, the reader, to see, feel, and experience the war through their eyes.

—Lt. Gen. Walter Piatt
December 2022

Preface

A full understanding of individual wars in their time is incomplete and unsatisfactory without examining the artifacts of cultural expression that participants in each such war produce. The link between war and creative human expression is ancient. One recurring outgrowth of the human desire to extract meaning from the exhilaration, suffering, injustice, and destruction of war is the impulse to record personal experiences wrought by intense emotions, passions, visceral fear, and anxiety in cultural expression such as in poetry. By its nature, poetry is an outlet for fusing sensual perceptions and moral reflections into a disciplined mode of verbal/written expression to give the experience of war first coherent personal, and then later, community meaning. Thus, warriors writing poetry about their experiences in war is nothing new or novel in human history.

To illustrate the historical relevance of poetic expression, this short collection is introduced by a selection of examples penned by participants in previous wars. After these, the *Military Review* collection itself opens with a poem written by a civilian writer expressing her reaction to the event that formally commenced the Global War on Terrorism (GWOT)—the 9/11 attack on the United States conducted by al-Qaida terrorists. The collection begins with her expression on the assumption that the feelings she expressed in many ways reflected the emotional responses of many, if not most, Americans at the time in how they viewed the event.

The subsequent collection of poems that follows are mostly original submissions to *Military Review* over a twenty-year period. In 2006, *Military Review* began soliciting poetry penned by service members engaged in the GWOT to provide an outlet for expressing in some small way a dimension of the conflict apart from its purely military aspects and preserving such expressions as part of the record of the war. No one expected at the time that the war would last for another fifteen years.

Of note, the modest-sized collection here does not include all the original poems that were submitted to *Military Review* but has given precedence to original poems penned by GWOT combatants who attempted to employ the conventions of formal poetry in formulating their contributions (e.g., stanzas, meter, metaphors, rhyming, etc.). Additionally, there are also a few civilian contributors as well as reprints from other sources that seemed appropriate and reflective of the military mood at various stages of the conflict as it progressed. It concludes with poems that appear indicative of the generally melancholy views of military members at the conclusion of the war.

Consonant with historical experience, as future historians and anthropologists assess the impact of the GWOT on the modern world, the importance of creative expression recorded in small measure here—and perhaps more robustly elsewhere—may well prove at least as vital to understanding its ultimate meaning of that war for the United States as the customary rote collection of sterile historical chronologies and data files that habitually are compiled after wars.

Additionally, we would like to express our deep appreciation to Dr. Robert E. Williams Jr., a professor of political science at Pepperdine University, who allowed us to publish an updated version of a paper he delivered in 2013 on the subject of “War and the Liberal Arts,” which provides a detailed look at the relationship of poetry as well as artistic expression in general to the dilemma of armed conflict.

—Editors, *Military Review*

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Historical Examples of War Poetry

Fragment 10, 7th Century BCE

For 'tis a fair thing for a good man to fall and die fighting in the van for his native land, whereas to leave his city and his rich fields and go a-begging is of all things the most miserable, wandering with mother dear and aged father, with little children and wedded wife.

For hateful shall such an one be among all those to whom he shall come in bondage to Want and loathsome Penury, and doth shame his lineage and belie his noble beauty, followed by all evil and dishonor. Now if so little thought be taken of a wanderer, and so little honor, respect, or pity, let us fight with a will for this land, and die for our children and never spare our lives.

Abide then, O young men, shoulder to shoulder and fight; begin not foul flight nor yet be afraid, but make the heart in your breasts both great and stout, and never shrink when you fight the foe. And the elder sort, whose knees are no longer nimble, fly not ye to leave them fallen to earth.

For 'tis a foul thing, in sooth, for an elder to fall in the van and lie before the younger, his head white and his beard hoary, breathing forth his stout soul in the dust, with his privities all bloody in his hands, a sight so foul to see and fraught with such ill to the seer, and his flesh also all naked;

yet to a young man all is seemly enough, so long as he have the noble bloom of lovely youth, aye a marvel he for men to behold, and desirable unto women, so long as ever he be alive, and fair in like manner when he be fallen in the vanguard. So let each man bite his lip with his teeth and abide firm-set astride upon the ground.

—Tyrtaeus, Spartan poet



Poem from *Elegy and Iambus*, trans. J. M. Edmonds (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press; London: William Heinemann, 1931), http://demonax.info/doku.php?id=text:tyrtaeus_poems.

U.S. Civil War—1861–1865

[A soldier's poem]

“Lines on the death of my friend Louis Mitchell of Co. I 1st Regt Minnesota Vols: who was killed in a skirmish on the Virginia side of the Potomac Oct: 21st 1861. The events and circumstances are literally true.”

We've had a fight a Captain said
Much rebel blood we've spilled
We've put the saucy foe to flight
Our loss – but a private killed!
“Ah, yes!” said a sergeant on the spot
As he drew a long deep breath
Poor fellow, he was badly shot
Then bayoneted to death!

When again was hushed the martial din
And back the foe had fled
They brought the private's body in
I went to see the dead.
For I could not think the rebel foe
(’Tho under curse and ban)
To vaunting of their chivalry
Could kill a wounded man.

A minie ball had broke his thigh
A frightful crushing wound
And then with savage bayonets
They had pinned him to the ground
One stab was through his abdomen
Another through his head
The last was through his pulseless breast
Done after he was dead.

His hair was matted with his gore
His hands were clenched with might
As though he still his musket bore
So firmly in the fight
He had grasped the foeman's bayonet
His bosom to defend!
They raised the coat cape from his face
My God! It was my friend!



Think what a shudder thrilled my heart
'Twas but the day before
We laughed together merrily
As we talked of days of yore
“How happy we shall be,” he said
When the war is o’er and when
The rebels all subdued or dead
We all go home again!

Ah little he dreamed, that soldier brave
(So near his journey’s goal)
That God had sent a messenger
To claim his Christian soul!
But he fell like a hero fighting
And hearts with grief are filled
And honor is his, though our Chief shall say
“Only a private killed!”

I knew him well, he was my friend
He loved our Land and Laws
And he fell a blessed martyr
To the country’s holy cause.
Soldiers our time will come most like
When our blood will thus be spilled
And then of us our Chief shall say
“Only a private killed.”

But we fight our country’s battles
And our hopes are not forlorn
Our death shall be a blessing
To “Millions yet unborn”;
To our children and their children
And as each grave is filled
We will but ask our Chief to say
“Only a private killed.”

—H. L. Gordon, 1st Regt Minn. Vols.
Camp Stone, Maryland, 12 November 1861

Poem available online at H. L. Gordon, 12 November 1861, Gilder Lehrman Collection, The Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History, New York, <https://www.gilderlehrman.org/collection/glc06559038>.

World War I

Dulce et Decorum Est

Bent double, like old beggars under sacks,
Knock-kneed, coughing like hags, we cursed through sludge,
Till on the haunting flares we turned our backs,
And towards our distant rest began to trudge.
Men marched asleep. Many had lost their boots,
But limped on, blood-shod. All went lame; all blind;
Drunk with fatigue; deaf even to the hoots
Of gas-shells dropping softly behind.

Gas! GAS! Quick, boys!—An ecstasy of fumbling
Fitting the clumsy helmets just in time,
But someone still was yelling out and stumbling
And flound'ring like a man in fire or lime.—
Dim through the misty panes and thick green light,
As under a green sea, I saw him drowning.

In all my dreams before my helpless sight,
He plunges at me, guttering, choking, drowning.

If in some smothering dreams, you too could pace
Behind the wagon that we flung him in,
And watch the white eyes writhing in his face,
His hanging face, like a devil's sick of sin;
If you could hear, at every jolt, the blood
Come gargling from the froth-corrupted lungs,
Obscene as cancer, bitter as the cud
Of vile, incurable sores on innocent tongues,—
My friend, you would not tell with such high zest
To children ardent for some desperate glory,
The old Lie: *Dulce et decorum est Pro patria mori*.

—Wilfred Owen



Wilfred Owen was an English soldier and poet. He was killed in action on 4 November 1918, a week before World War I ended.

Poem from Wilfred Owen, *Poems* (New York: Viking Press, 1921). Latin phrase is from the Roman poet Horace: "It is sweet and fitting to die for one's country."

Pre-World War II



Through a Glass, Darkly

Through the travail of the ages,
Midst the pomp and toil of war,
I have fought and strove and perished
Countless times upon this star.

In the form of many people
In all panoplies of time
Have I seen the luring vision
Of the Victory Maid, sublime.

I have battled for fresh mammoth,
I have warred for pastures new,
I have listened to the whispers
When the race trek instinct grew.

I have known the call to battle
In each changeless changing shape
From the high souled voice of conscience
To the beastly lust for rape.

I have sinned and I have suffered,
Played the hero and the knave;
Fought for belly, shame, or country,
And for each have found a grave.

I cannot name my battles
For the visions are not clear,
Yet, I see the twisted faces
And I feel the rending spear.

Perhaps I stabbed our Savior
In His sacred helpless side.
Yet, I've called His name in blessing
When in after times I died.

In the dimness of the shadows
Where we hairy heathens warred,
I can taste in thought the lifeblood;
We used teeth before the sword.

While in later clearer vision
I can sense the coppery sweat,
Feel the pikes grow wet and slippery
When our Phalanx, Cyrus met.

Hear the rattle of the harness
Where the Persian darts bounced clear,
See their chariots wheel in panic From the
Hoplite's leveled spear.

See the goal grow monthly longer,
Reaching for the walls of Tyre.
Hear the crash of tons of granite,
Smell the quenchless eastern fire.

Still more clearly as a Roman,
Can I see the Legion close,
As our third rank moved in forward
And the short sword found our foes.

Once again I feel the anguish
Of that blistering treeless plain
When the Parthian showered death bolts,
And our discipline was in vain.

I remember all the suffering
Of those arrows in my neck.
Yet, I stabbed a grinning savage
As I died upon my back.

Once again I smell the heat sparks
When my Flemish plate gave way
And the lance ripped through my entrails
As on Crecy's field I lay.

In the windless, blinding stillness
Of the glittering tropic sea
I can see the bubbles rising
Where we set the captives free.

Midst the spume of half a tempest
I have heard the bulwarks go
When the crashing, point blank round shot
Sent destruction to our foe.

I have fought with gun and cutlass
On the red and slippery deck
With all Hell aflame within me
And a rope around my neck.

And still later as a General
Have I galloped with Murat
When we laughed at death and numbers
Trusting in the Emperor's Star.

Till at last our star faded,
And we shouted to our doom
Where the sunken road of Ohein
Closed us in its quivering gloom.

So but now with Tanks a'clatter
Have I waddled on the foe
Belching death at twenty paces,
By the star shell's ghastly glow.

So as through a glass, and darkly
The age long strife I see
Where I fought in many guises,
Many names, but always me.

And I see not in my blindness
What the objects were I wrought,
But as God rules o'er our bickerings
It was through His will I fought.

So forever in the future,
Shall I battle as of yore,
Dying to be born a fighter,
But to die again, once more.

—Maj. George S. Patton Jr.
Circa 1930

World War II—1939–1945

Aristocrats: “I Think I Am Becoming a God”

The noble horse with courage in his eye,
clean in the bone, looks up at a shellburst:
away fly the images of the shires
but he puts the pipe back in his mouth.
Peter was unfortunately killed by an 88;
it took his leg away, he died in the ambulance.
I saw him crawling on the sand, he said
It's most unfair, they've shot my foot off.

How can I live among this gentle
obsolescent breed of heroes, and not weep?
Unicorns, almost,
for they are fading into two legends
in which their stupidity and chivalry
are celebrated. Each, fool and hero, will be
an immortal.
These plains were their cricket pitch
and in the mountains the tremendous drop fences
brought down some of the runners. Here then
under the stones and earth they dispose themselves,
I think with their famous unconcern.
It is not gunfire I hear, but a hunting horn.



—Keith Douglas, Tunisia, 1943

Oxford-trained writer Keith C. Douglas served as a British soldier during World War II. He was a tank commander in North Africa fighting against German forces. He was later killed on 9 June 1944 during a reconnaissance mission in Caen, France, following the Normandy landings of 6 June.

Korean War—1951–1953



A Last Moment Caught

It comes again,
without prejudice,
in another millennium;
I know the weight of an M-1 rifle
on a web strap hanging on my shoulder,
the owed knowledge of a ponderous steel helmet
atop my head, press of a light lace on one
boot, wrap of a leather watch band
on my wrist,
and who stood beside me
who stand no more.

—Tom Sheehan
November 2019

Korean War Poem



We didn't do much talking,
We didn't raise a fuss.
But Korea really happened
So please – remember us.

We all just did our duty
But we didn't win or lose.
A victory was denied us
But we didn't get to choose.

We all roasted in the summer
In winter, we damn near froze.
Walking back from near the Yalu
With our blackened frozen toes.

Like the surf the Chinese kept coming
With their bugles in the night.
We fired into their masses
Praying for the morning light.
All of us just had to be there

And so many of us died.
But now we're all but half forgotten
No one remembers how we tried.

We grow fewer with the years now
And we still don't raise a fuss.
But Korea really happened
So please – remember us.

—Lt. Cmdr. (Ret.) Roberto J. Prinselaar, U.S. Coast Guard

Poem from General Douglas MacArthur's Honor Guard Association, <http://generalmacarthurshonorguard.com/wordpress/the-stories/the-stories-korean-war-poem>.

Vietnam War—1963–1975

A Man Less Than His Best



There once was a man, who was at his best.
Proud he was, while at his best.
Friends he had, who were at his side.
Proud they were, while he was at his best.

Crowds they once cheered, for this man at his best.
Awards he received, for being his best.
Proud was this man, who was at his best.
And proud were his friends, proud of this man who was at his best.

Then a war, it did come for this man at his best.
This man did fight, this man, who had been at his best.
Then this man, who had been at his best, became this man, no longer at his best.
He then became, as some would say, a man who was less than his best.

Then a wife, he would come to have.
A wife he would have, while he was less than his best.
A man she would have and only knew, while he was less than his best.
This wife of his would get a man, less than his best.
What this wife of his would get, would be a man, that once was his best,
But she would not see him at his best, she would see, only what was left.

To that wife of his, he is so sorry,
That she only saw what was left, and never knew this man when at his best.
He is so sorry she only knew what was left.
Oh, if only she could have known, this man at his best.
How proud she would have been, of this man at his best!

Then children they would come to have, children they would love,
Children who would only know, this man who was less than his best.
Children would think, this man was best, but his children would never know,
This man at his best, they would just know what was left.
To those children of his, he is so sorry that they only knew what was left,
And they never knew this man when at his best, he is so sorry they only knew what was left.

Oh, if only they could have known, this man at his best.
How proud they would have been, of this man at his best!
To that family of his, both wife and children alike,
He wishes they could have known him when he was at his best.

He is sorry they never saw him at his best, he is sorry that they only saw what was left!
He loves dearly, that family of his, because they loved him for what was left,
And not what was best!

This man, who once was his best,
Would come to know, that the best he could be now,
Was not the best, he had once been, but only the best, of what was left.

What was left, was not a man at his best.
What was left, was a man in his shell,
Not a man, who was once at his best.

Try as he might, and try as he could,
This man, once at his best, would now have to settle for only second best.

Now were gone, for this man, once at his best.
The crowds and the friends, who were once so proud of this man at his best,
But, sad to say, never knew him when he was less than his best,
They never knew what was left.

Now this man would become, the best of what was left,
Not the best he could have been, but, the best of what was left!
This man never dreamed he would not be his best,
This man never dreamed he would only be what was left!

But, the best of what is left,
May actually be better than what once was his best!
Only time will tell which actually turns out best,
What was once his best or what is left!

—Charles A. Peters
Vietnam War Draftee
U.S. Navy 1969–1975

Global War on Terrorism, 2001–2021



9/11

I sat and stared,
At the destruction on the screen,
The waste of life.

The loss of families and dreams,
I couldn't move.
I couldn't run and hide the truth.
I sat and stared.
I sat and stared and thought of you.

I thought of you and me and everyone on this
great planet Earth.
I know we all could be the other one the mo-
ment of our birth.
Instead we go on hating, killing, when instead
we need to care,
And if we did,
I wouldn't have to sit and stare.

I felt the pain, in all the faces that I saw.
Time and again,
Full of emptiness and shock,
My heart went out,
In hopes that some way I could share,
The peace I had,
Before I had to sit and stare.

This world is small.
This little world is all we know.
And why we fight,
Is something I will never know.
There's love for all.
And all we have to do is share,
And if we did,
I wouldn't have to sit and stare.



—Kevin Rowley and Tisdale Sask

9/11 Attack on the Pentagon



The Pentagon Police had risked their lives to save others
Entering the Pentagon in search for bodies, one after another
Some officers were denied entry by the heat from the jet fuel
One officer had reached the point of using his voice as a tool
Officers were dedicated to maintaining their post under control
There were officers helping the injured victims while on patrol
The fire was spreading within that section by the minute
The Pentagon Police officers did their best to help defend it
There were a few police officers that stared death in the face
They were struggling against time, without a second to waste
There were police officers escorting the fire and rescue team
Lives were definitely at risk during the evacuation from the scene
The police officers that were off, arrived without any delay
Pentagon Police officers have more pride than words can say
The Pentagon Police officers created a new meaning for brave
They didn't ask for anything in return, for the lives they help save
The Pentagon Police are mixed with different cultures and race
They work together as a family with the threats they may face
The police officers risked their lives and worked extremely hard
They deserve a lot of respect for doing a great job

—Charles E. Cooke
Pentagon Policeman/former Infantryman

Poem by David Vergun, in "Soldier for Life: Former Soldier Inspires Others through Poetry," Army.mil,
https://www.army.mil/article/150510/soldier_for_life_former_soldier_inspires_others_through_poetry.



U.S. soldiers reading the New York Post with the headline “War” three days after 9/11 terrorist attacks in New York City at ground zero.

Part 2—Submissions to *Military Review* during the Global War on Terrorism, 2001–2021

Anecdote of Antiquity



Afghanistan.

The ancients say we first met when our goddesses—now foresworn—
rode above in a lion-drawn chariot, which now casts its shading convoy,
to see if hypnotic swords are beaten to peace.
Or witness plowshares melting to flashpoints.

—Maj. Jeffrey Alfier, U.S. Air Force
March 2002

Notification

To a KIA, Baghdad Iraq, October 2005



In a flash you became invisible to me.
The grey-black ash framed by dun colored dust swirls,
filled
our
sky.
The flood of sound pushing away all sound, swallowed you.
Then that fearsome flood washed over me.
In the swelling mushroom cloud
Where I stood, at the roadside,
Watching you,
I wonder if my time was up—
This time.
But, I never said your name.
Now, the Sergeant Major will shout it out—your name
(with the others).
We'll sit where you sat, and walk where you walked
Amid the pale flowers, flags, and dusty tentage.
All drained of color by that common sun that God made for us.
Outside, the makers of your demise—
The builders of the bomb.
And inside, the dissembling retinue,
And the once-again mourners.
But our sudden shock is incomparable
To the sharp stab and lingering ache
Of the inevitable notification.

—Lt. Col William Adler, U.S. Army
September 2020

Afghan People

There is a spirit here
I have failed
To grasp
It lives and moves
All around me
Yet I cannot see it
I can only sense it
As if the people
Know something
I cannot comprehend
I feel their sympathy
For my ignorance
My inability
To understand
Their simple life
And the fact
They do not envy mine
The longer I stay
The more I realize
It's my arrogance
That blinds me
It calls to question
In what direction
Civilization has really moved

—Maj. Walter Piatt
Afghanistan, 2002

Afghan Soldiers

There will be
No parades
No soldiers welcome
When this man returns
Just dried up fields
That need planted
And a family
That needs fed
No deep meaning discovered
From visiting the edge
And returning alive
Just survival
Basic and real
The purist of all feelings
That speaks
In this land
It moves in all directions
Empowering all
To survive
To live another day
It is God's will

—Maj. Walter Piatt
Afghanistan, 2002

An-Safwan, OIF 1, 2003

Beggars on the highway,
children in the street.
Bandits only ten-years old,
no shoes on their feet.

Iraqi border town,
overcome by war,
we ride HUMVEES sideways,
with guns out the door.

“Close that distance up!”
“Keep those people back!”
“Stay alert up there!”
“That could be a trap!”

“Don’t stop for nothin’!”
“Keep moving on!”
“Don’t let your guard down
Until we’ve passed Safwan.”

—Maj. Theodore E. Lockwood II
821st Transportation Battalion
Topeka, Kansas

Forgotten Stones: A Prayer

Wake up Hoshea, son of Nun, from the
sacred tomb that hides your bones
Favor my rifle, heart and armor to once
more defend my post!
Plead for the crimson of my flag, old soul,
to The Great,
For it is sanctified by the blood of heroes
past.
Accept my offering to thee,
This bullet that has spared today a father's
life.
Oh, blessed be!
Rise from your grave, servant of God, and
let your courage shelter me
As mortars fall to crush and maim.
And let my Soldiers rise above their guilt,
their fears, and their shame.
This blessed day I pray to thee My sacred
nation here to see; our sweat and tears fed
your grave,
Our blood, our toil, our selfless acts to
shield the Land of Free and innocents of
war that
warmness has beffed.

Oh, blessed be!

The hallowed precepts of our creed, as
consecrated infantry, Let them be heard by
friend and foe,
on land and stormy sea; And let our wis-
dom guide our cannon's light for all to see
That we are strong, but also filled with love
for widow, child,
And hope for People's Liberty.
Wake up Hoshea, son of Nun, and see the
candle that I light
For thee and for all heroes past who died in
fight for God And for my country's might.

Oh, blessed be!



As bodies of my fallen brothers fill the
lead-lined caskets; As worms infest their
flesh, and putrid
smell our nostrils; As they are laid in com-
mon ground – Let it be known
That they have given all for freedom and
for peace.
Let rifleman and priest alike invoke their
spirit's candor
For our States.
Let widowed spouses, sons and daughters
Venerate the reminiscence of the names
forgotten
On pieces of stone, at the graves in the sand.

Oh, blessed be!

I pray that you have a blessed 4th!

—Lt. Alexander Thymmons

Written after a patrol 4 July 2007 near the reputed
tomb of the Biblical prophet Joshua in Iraq in the midst of
the Iraqi tribal "Awakening."

Soldier

I felt
The soldiers fear
And at the same time
Felt good
About myself
About my life
Though afraid
I was not scared
The excitement
Gave me confidence
In what I am doing
What I must do everyday
If we are to win this war
People will die
Yet I feel it is naïve
To blame God
For my violence
In his name
Both sides believe
But this of course
Is man's fault
That it came to this
Bringing me here
To this mountain
To kill another
But for me
I am a soldier
And the fear
Means I am alive
This is real
Life or death
Me or him
And I chose me
With no regrets
Only pride
In country
And the honor
Of walking off the mountain
Though I no doubt left
A part of my soul there

—Lt. Col. Walt Piatt
Afghanistan 2004

The Loss of Private Waller



Pray for Private Waller, boys,
He's somewhere in the sand—
Another red-haired mother's son
At Uncle Sam's command.
The sun may burn his freckled face
And bake his freckled skin,
The wind may rip and tear and make
A quite new man of him.
But seas still ripple far away
Beyond those western dunes,
And stars still twinkle down upon
The surface of the moon,
And God may look down from those stars,
By God, I hope he does,
For men have made this Earth a Hell,
And the devil's here with us.
So pray for Private Waller, men.
Lord, lead him safely home,
And may we all soon pass the glass—
Still lost, but not alone.

—Maj. Jerry Drew, U.S. Army

Quiet Nights in Al-Asad



Red skies at night are
A sailor's delight,
But a star-filled sky gets
This soldier high.
Even Orion's belt fails as the
Star showers sail
These thousand points of light
Make for wondrous nights
As I go to greet with open arms
A combat sky Filled
with peace and hope and love.
Almost makes me believe in
Some power up above.
Whatever created this sight
Did so out of love.

—Sgt. Katharine S. Dahlstrand, U.S. Army Combat Medic
Al-Asad, February 2006

4 Months In

Soul is worn out, tired, threadbare
Fraying at the edges with sanity
Eyes are half open, dazed
Bloodshot with insomnia
And boredom.
Seconds of fear, minutes of
Excitement, hours of nothing.
A year is such a long time.
Don't even care if I rhyme.
Be professional, be polite,
Have a plan to kill everyone
You meet.
This place is rotting my
Intelligence and my mind.

—Sgt. Katharine S. Dahlstrand, U.S. Army Combat Medic
Al-Asad, May 2006

Hamsi

Dull heat and dust choke my soul,
as bright red life drips, drips
Into this place of brown and waste.

The shallow smiles I see,
are only for our money.
Their sullen stares behind bright veils
are more the timbre of reality.

Dried ochre was once his life
that I can't scrub away
no matter how hard I try, and try.

And I'd never have been here,
If it weren't for their hate
Of the green and joy
I've left behind.

—Lt. Col. Sean Michael Salene, U.S. Marine Corps
2007

Darkness from Tarin Kowt



That year I spent in Tarin Kowt in the heart of the Taliban.
“Shadow Governors” from the Popalzai tribe,
their black robes, henna beards and body odor.
We venture into the city’s heart for a shura that would never be
The suicide bomber who would be the darkness harbinger on his motorbike
That darkness creeps an inch closer
He anticipates his chance to strike, as I sense his shadow
My rounds strike him in his lungs and heart
He missed his chance this time
yet he remains by my side not willing to give me up easily
Sadness is the color of my blue eyes,
that my soul a darkness is distant and foreboding
My heartbeat is the sound I don’t want anyone to hear
pumping fear and anger on my pillows in the morning
before I drink my first cup of coffee
After Tarin Kowt, I can never be myself again and unguarded
My darkness smells like sweet-salty sweat that makes animals uneasy
like doors slamming,
and a falling feeling while sleeping.
I feel nothing afterward but darkness
Darkness is the color I paint on a colorless canvas knowing more missions are to follow
Why am I here?
Whiskey burn, blood shot eyes, easing into my inebriation
Sirens causing me to react to contact
— seeking cover,
toes pointed to target and feeling the rush dancing with darkness
once again I realize I have no fear
Once again I see my darkness clinging to me at every turn
As before his taunts are unrelenting,
his motor humming in the shadows

—Maj. Adam Carson

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 suppress 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

Our New Camouflage

The Cold War's demise left us underdressed
near the smolder of kommissar campfires.

So we altered the patterns and colors
of our passe battle dress uniforms,

shifting the design so we could keep pace
with a foreign policy of hard steps—

new abstract art for a global footprint.
Museums might call it “Cubist redux”

that mimes the tints of sands, trees, skies, and seas,
and any shadow whorled with absent light;

these outfits for all weather and seasons
shielding skin we hope is still worth a kiss.



—Maj. Jeffrey Alfier, U.S. Air Force
January 2006

Early Risers



Across the dim parade field that foregrounds
the vista, crows in fir trees wrought like spires
watch barracks wake in synchronous lighting
where young men rouse to demands for order.

They move out in rows of compliant minds,
Their last letters from home held close in thought—
each caring word faithful to cadenced steps
as crows rise, scatter, and merge into clouds.

—Maj. Jeffrey Alfier, U.S. Air Force
January 2006

Dogs and Soldiers

Dogs and soldiers keep off the grass!
So the hoary motto is passed
From generation to generation,
Of the enlightened class;

About my brothers, some in the present,
And some in the past.

Baby killer, knave, drunkard, coward!
We don't need any military power!
So the enlightened ones shout and glower.

Make love not war!
The only thing that makes us sore,
Are soldiers and sailors defending our
shore!

Peace at any price! they happily rant.
Freedom, oh Freedom! They cheerfully
chant.

They don't know freedom isn't free.
And the cost of that freedom is a very high
fee.

Too high to be paid by their peace loving
souls,
They call on soldiers to pay the whole toll.

Men of honor and integrity still pay the blood fee,
Through service and sacrifice keeping us free.

So chant the chants and rant the rants!
But don't try and kick me in the pants!
Dogs and soldiers keep off the grass?
They can just kiss my "G.I." brass.



—Master Sgt. (Ret.) Chuck Doig
September 2006

Unlike Antoine Lavoisier

Here is where it all goes wrong:
You've got twenty teams in perimeter

at the site of the bombing, boy,
quartered on the cloverleaf overpass

unable to see each other, some
local men start a scrap fire for tea

as if the world billowing from dust
is nothing new, squatting, while police

hover at the government building
unsure if they should blame themselves.

The blast, northwest of the bypass,
blooded ventricle, you've shut down

traffic, make them go around, pump them,
compress, suck, the flares sputter for

flat, safe landing, and slowly for the dead
a flight medic drapes and zips the bags.

Anticipation, rather than reaction, one team
must sacrifice its Igloo, ice and all; off

to find when the wrecker rolls it,
an experiment unlike blinking in the sand.



—Capt. Benjamin Buchholz, U.S. Army
September 2006

Antoine Lavoisier (1743–1794), the “Father of Modern Chemistry,” figured out combinations of chemical reactions involving oxygen that greatly improved the production of gunpowder. In 1794, Lavoisier was sent to the guillotine by Robespierre. Legend has it that Lavoisier arranged one last experiment before his execution; after the blade fell, he would blink his eyes as long as he could, so that his assistant might determine how long a man could retain consciousness after beheading. Lavoisier supposedly blinked between fifteen and twenty times.

Baghdad April



Who would have thought even minutes ago
Black Hawk swept from the taupe
Medieval California Kuwait to the quiver-
ing sandust of Talil
Sweat, Al-Hilah, Marine bird, older than
damp crew, machine
Smell, vibration ammo cammo scraped
paint web belts, still
Tighten gray roar and chaos, nose down
brown. Just get us there.

Now green. For ten thousand lives this
river ran brown with blood
Helping reeds limber bodies once passed as
blind. Just get us there.

Down, then BIAP, destruction for glory
Spurts and unthinking tremors, the shakti
of nonduality,
Bills unpaid as crushed planes kneel lame,
Torn tarmac shattered with dust
Fade, then the comic book, cantos: a prince
of Babylon, sword of Assyria, builder of
Ur, heavens perturbed,
Trauma hung close in crumbled glass, a
façade (yet more)
Meaning deep to those who looted that
brief cosmic day
Missed by those who watched.

Stories, reprise, thunder run
Endless dust nights of expendable men
Blind (they must have been)
To spin a rusty truck against a tank
With only, what? passion? hate?
fear?
Perhaps no thought at all
Except to hope the engine would start (or
not)
and no one else would see.
No matter. They are now mist, counters in
a game.

We hurry, are watched, relief, no love and
Bomblets are toys, slipping through dry
canals with a last black smoke
To please a small hand as
Green towers turn red, mating in the night.
Somehow, we must have known (even a
first summer wind will dry the eye). Yet
Rank on file is an army shrouds, mist,
And hot days turn gray, crafting wry
smiles.
Then fade. Finally,

to destroy and build, Shiva in web gear
While somewhere a bridge is lost. But
what?
Who is destroyer, who a builder? Who
know
Often great power is only owning the
detritus.
Still there is BIAP, flight out, home, strong
shoulders and
Hip-hop, path to insanity and relief.
And then, a tiny point of blood receding on
the glass.

—Dr. Steven Metz, U.S. Army War College
November 2006

At the clinic of Ibrahim Higer



At the clinic of Ibrahim Higer
an American Colonel and minions
avoid tea, eye cracked catheters,
the crowd

Inquire about vaccinations,
His schooling in Basra, little joke
over good times gone, come again,
the crowd

ask where water and power are
made, he doesn't understand, for it must
be by God, surely, or jest?,
the crowd

what diseases does he see what
pestilences, shingles?, can they bring
medicine?, would he like help, training?
the crowd

about the pharmacy, where is it?,
how do drugs arrive?, does he
have black-market issues?, of course,
the crowd

waste?, sharps?, is there an
incinerator?, where are your dead
buried?, have you not seen them, sir—
the crowd

his topic, his biggest needs, what are
they?, an ambulance?, IV fluid?, a guard
at the entrance?, can they just hold back
the crowd

—Capt. Benjamin Buchholz, U.S. Army
January 2007



Dreamseeds

A desert land, desolate place,
Mankind moves at primal pace.
Ancient homes of mud and straw,
Give abode to Evil's rise and fall.

This barren land serves battleground,
For our tale of Good's resound.
Of eternal call for vigilance,
Infinite struggle for righteousness.

In epic war of Good and Evil,
Romantics write of Good's retrieval
Of honor, and of Heroine,
Vanquished foe, and conquered sin.

But on fateful day of 9-1-1,
All Good's intents were undone,
By Evil's wicked, sharpened scythe,
Good's innocence suffered, died.

And Evil won 'gainst antagonist,
Breeding terror with ignorance.
Adding potion of poverty,
Mixed with aberrant religiosity.

And in the depths of defeat,
Scarlet blood and carnage meet,
In a jagged field of sacrifice,
Good plants Dreamseeds of device.

Dreamseeds root, begin to grow,
As nations grieve in sorrow.
Dark days loom, doubts abound.
Good is dead? Freedom unsound?

All the while, Dreamseeds thrive.
Heartland heroes give their lives,
To a cause just and pure.
Fight for freedom gives allures.

A pulse is found, begins to quicken.
Dreamseed roots begin to thicken.
Nurtured, fed by Good's life force,
The human spirit on due course.



To fight again another day?
Accept defeat some would say.
But human spirit, soul, and mind,
Resurrect Good in healing bind.

Strength of millions 'round the world,
Witness Freedom's colors unfurled,
Good gains footing, stands erect,
Evil shudders, feels affect.

And ignorance, once Evil's whore,
Withers as Good opens door,
Letting knowledge, wisdom in,
The mortal enemy of Evil, Sin.

A coalition of Good and Willing,
Cast Freedom's blanket o'er the chilling.
Victims of the darkest days,
When Good was lost in a haze.

Of smoke, doubt, and harmful press,
In Evil's struggle for redress.
Of empty grievance, empty core,
Evil won battle, lost the war.

What's this Dreamseed, one would ask?
Your child's mind, a conjured task,
Hope, desire, and fantasy,
Enduring Freedom and Security?

Dreamseeds grow where'er planted,
Stunted growth whene'er canted.
But grow unsurpassed and ably
Only when planted in land o' the free.

—Maj. Todd Schmidt
January 2007

Meat Maker



Skinless carcasses amid woolen flock; slaughtered
In the Muslim way; hot copper knife carves a
Sluggish duck-blind to a stop and
Then breathless world in
Stop-frame! Moments
On mobile-bunkers shook
In atom-breaking sight and sound;
Smells and everything rush US when life and
Loss share places we cry and hurl and blaspheme

At the wrong time?

—Maj. Stephen Douglas Pomper, U.S. Army
Baghdad, 20 January 2007

Inshallah

Dismount!

Walking forward
Walking fast
Keeping your place
Left flank
Third from point
Wedge formation
Traveling overwatch
Walking....

Strangely calm
Scanning your sector
Rifle at the ready
Walking....

Remember
Positive target ID
Safety off
Aim center of mass
Squeeze, don't jerk...
Walking....

Breathing
Go forward
Do your duty
It's all in God's hands
Inshallah....

—Lt. Col. Prisco Hernandez
September 2007



A Question of Trees



If a tree in the forest falls,
do the other trees in the forest care?

30 Jun 07

117 degrees. Memorial ceremony for a fallen soldier.
Bagpipes. Taps. Fold the Flag. Final salute. I hope you think of
Him, and his wife and child, tonight.

And back in the States? Paris Hilton.
The beat goes on....

If a man gives his life in the service of his country,
Do his countryman care?

And perhaps more importantly, what does it mean if they do not?

And now, tonight, more bad news. Another tree has fallen.

Here, too, the beat goes on....

—Maj. Mike Matthews, U.S. Army Special Forces
30 June 2007

Talk versus Do



Operational theories of design
translated into practical applications,
or not.
The journey versus the destination.
Which is more important you ask?
Well, how much time do you have?
Balancing the task,
talk versus do.
and do versus talk.
Please, don't concern yourself **with time**,
until you see you have no time.
Of course, by then it may prove too late.
So discourse and inquire
as if you have nothing to **lose**.
Deliberate and dialogue
to your very heart's desire.
Peer through that Clausewitzian fog
and examine that infinite potential.

See? There's really not that much to lose.
Explore fully that which may be
inconsequential.
and ignore the tendency to do.
See? There's not so much to lose.
Only,
maybe, just maybe
that small difference
that small sum,
inconsequential really,
which may be measured
twixt failure and victory
and quite often occurs
when the talk overtakes the do.

—Major Edward L. Bryan
March 2008

Us versus Them?



wars of thoughts and beliefs
dueling ideologies
at arms length distance
ours versus theirs
so much death and devastation
when perceptions of reality do clash
untold destruction
spawned by mere thoughts
then translated into deeds
us versus them
can it be that simple?
a zero-sum game
with such deadly consequences?

—Maj. Edward L. Bryan, U.S. Army
January 2009

Smells

The smells of burning rubber,

Wafting with the essence,
Of the unspoken.
Such fires burning forever,
In the memories I have come to fear.
And thus, days come and nights go.
Never waking to the burning sun,
As I lay each night, delaying
sleep,
Each minute, laying, praying,
Through the endless nights,
Yearning, anxious for one more
day.
Fearing anything more
Would be far too greedy.
Each day, a movement to contact.
Each night, I lay trembling,
Avoiding the dreams I so fear.
Thus, to be at war,
Is to live in the present,
Nothing more.
Forsake the future
as impossible
revel in the past
wake,
each day knowing,
believing,
this could be my last.



—Maj. Edward L. Bryan, U.S. Army
January 2009

The Return

Doves knock dates on my head
As I walk under the palms
A flutter of wings as they
Fly off into the desert sky.
The west walls crumble
In front of the setting sun,
Stained pink with light
As they contain me within the prison of our own making.
My hands grow cold in the December air.
I breathe into them to warm them from the chill.
It's quiet.
Again.
No gunfire tonight,
No explosives today.
For now, the helicopters shuttle only boredom; the cries of the wounded no longer on
board.
Iraq is different now.
Not like before....

—Maj. Theodore E. Lockwood II
March 2009

Twilight in Ar-Ramadi

Slip away fire fingers of the red sun. Know that night has begun.
Stand fixed toward the west. The millennium of minutes of another day has past.
Marking the passage of ten thousand random thoughts, like sand.
Bats flutter free. The night avengers to the sparrows' sunny canvas.
They herald the reaper, who claimed more of us. Screeching the Archangel's
Trumpet culled the living with the scythe of God's redemption.

Amidst the heaven stars pinpoint our home.
Archer Orion in repose sleeps. A thousand warriors doze while in Ramadi cars explode.
Yet in falling temps, we vigilant keep watching for insurgent spree.
Flares burn bright a flickering light of freedom shines. Life's toil undone by smite.
For Hamurabi's laws had it right. The plight of man called to task.
Twilight's hue of purple crowned newly king the night.

—Maj. Joseph A. Jackson
October 2004

Answering the Village Elder in Qandahar Province

We'll get It done, although I don't know how.

I know we promised stuff to eat and wear.

Remind him that we're working on It now—

What generators we said we'd repair

I know we promised stuff to eat and wear,

But half our unit's fighting In the hills—

What water pumps did we say we'd repair?

He has to wait until the fighting stills,

'Cause half our unit's busy in the hills.

One truck can't bring both mortar rounds and seeds.

He has to wait until the fighting stills.

I understand his problems and his needs—

One truck can't bring both mortar rounds and seeds!

Tell him again: our trucks can't risk that road,

I understand his problems and his needs—

Christ, how did they manage before we showed?

Tell him again! Our trucks can't risk that road—

He repeats himself, It's all In my notes.

Christ, how did they manage before we showed?

Apologize again for those dead goats.

—He repeats himself, It's all In my notes.

Remind him that we're working on It now,

Apologize again for those dead goats,

We'll get It done. Although I don't know how.



—Dr. Stephen Sossaman, New York University professor/
embedded civilian journalist with the 34th Infantry
“Red Bull” Division, Iowa National Guard
September 2009

IED



Improvised explosive device.
How curious and technical,
this description of death.
A simple acronym,
Mentioning the words,
an instant depiction of death.
Mental images stirred
and conjured horrors realized.
Such a curious and strange term,
resonant with such graphic,
crystal-clear depiction,
of the desert affliction.
IED, the horror,
the signature weapon,
of the desert war.

—Maj. Edward L. Bryan, U.S. Army
September 2010

Days of the Week are Dead to Me

Days of the week are dead to me.
Monday, Friday, Sunday, Saturday,
They are all the same.
Days of the week are dead to me
And so they will remain.

The day I saw an IED
Through a Predator's eye
Take out that convoy of Humvees,
That day of that week
With me will remain.
The day I heard the "All Clear" call
After rockets fell from the sky,
That day I will remember, laugh a little and cry.

The day of the week that the sergeant killed
Five of the brothers over by Commo Hill.
I can't recall.
But that day of the week
Was the worst of all.
Days of the week are dead to me
And so they will remain.

But when I return
And enjoy the life
That blood has paid
Many times over and more the price,
I shall rejoice in me days I spend
With family and friends
And not worry about
What day it is, or what day will come,
Because they're all the same to me now
And I will cherish every one.

—Capt. Thomas J. Carnes III
Brigade Provost Marshal, 56th IBCT
Texas Army National Guard

Lt. Carnes was the night battle captain in the Victory Base Defense Operations Center, 11 May 2009, when a distraught soldier opened fire in the counseling center killing five soldiers at Camp Liberty, Baghdad.

Restive Reminiscence

Strolling the parched path of life,
Easily tracked by the clouds of dust.
Clouds of dust? Clouded! A clouded life of distrust.

Resting, if you may call it so,
By a pool of sin and cess.
Pool of sin? Drowning!
Unable to swim, no less.

Fleeting thought like many flies
Lighting on my stinking soul.
Fleeting thoughts? Lost!
O, that I could shew the whole.

Remembering against my will
Life's antebellum bliss.
Days of bliss? Blistered!
Who could know wars like this?

Recounting life's woeful tale;
Etched on a wounded heart.
Bleeding heart? Dying!
Will an end follow the start?

—Sgt. Trent Schmidt
Logar Province, Afghanistan,
Combat Outpost Charkh, 173rd Airborne, 2011

Scars



Ah, how I remember.
How could I forget?
The cold, gray November,
Passing Fall's lament.
The straggling, stubborn leaves,
Holding on in desperate heaves.
The season that grows the mold –
Of depression.
That time when to hold on
Means cling.
Cling to your memories
Of Summer.
Of Spring.
Pray for the cycle, to cycle sooner.
This was the season of my birth.
The irony of Thanksgiving
Giving me my first scar.

I try to remember my birth
As often as possible.
It is my most prized scar.
The scar upon which
All other scars are.
It sets me apart
From all other scarred peoples.

Ah, how I remember.
How could I forget?
The searing heat;

The haze hiding my feet.
Or was it snow,
As the slicing winds blow?
I don't remember the time –
Half as well as my birth!
Yet this particular scar
Has invaluable worth.
The day I discovered brotherhood.

With a twist of a knife,
The idea was defined.
What's mine is mine, and
What's yours is mine –
Unless it is you.
You can have that,
But only that,
And I may still borrow that –
Sometimes.
The scar of Brotherhood.
The scar of childhood.

Ah, how I remember.
How could I forget?
The steely, hollow grinding
Of the gears.
The firing, the forging
Of human engineers.
Oh, the discipline of the machine,
Fouling the mind once clean,

The fruit of good and evil,
Bearing the seed of the obscene.
The scar paid for,
 In more ways than one –
The scar of education.
Anesthetized with little suspicion,
Incised by cruel intentions.

All my instructors have one face,
 A black market surgeon
 With decorated bludgeon.
At the end of the operation –
 Young minds effaced.

As the architects design the scar,
And surveyors plot the marks,
We pour the foundation,
And corrupt the next generation.

Ah, how I remember.
 How could I forget?
Autumn's changing palate;
The brilliance explodes.
The last gasp of life,
 In theatric throes.
Impending Winter's hate.

So, the exquisite scars of religion,
As if God Himself were the artist.
Every time I hear a sermon –
I brace with squinted eyes,
 And clinched fist.

Some scars become
 Inoculation...some.
Some don't understand
 Scars of church, cross,
 Bible, lamp stand.

These scars we bear with pride.
 A sign of fraternity?
 I scar you and you me.
 When we gossip, chatter, chide.
All the while it is not God, but
 Us who make the cuts.

Ah, how I remember.

How could I forget?
C'est passion du Coeur.
The innocent budding
 Of loving.
C'est Printemps de l'amour.

The echoes of this scar are
 Incisive and cause more scars.
You never learn a lesson from
 True love's scar.
Always ready for more.

Ah, how I remember.
 How could I forget?
Its mooring taunt, fastened,
 Meant to last.
Its bearing true, perfect North,
 Steadfast.

The jagged scar of friendship.
 Friends that jump ship;
 Loyalty that seems to slip.
I am on my ump-teenth
 Circle of friends. May this be the end.
I cannot bear another jagged scar.
The cosmetic cost
 Of friendship lost.

Ah, how I remember.
 How could I forget?
All nature resounds with
 The sound of the song of
 Family.

That cacophony of genes.
The pain, the distortion,
 The zigzag seams.
The deepest, most dangerous by far
 Are family scars.
However, we must remember our part,
And the knife we wield,
And the scars we leave
 On crest and shield.

Ah, how I remember.
 How could I forget?
Strewn across the forest floor,

A mighty oak, no more
Than a distant memory.
The branches that held the hammock, the
swing,
The tree house, the laundry string,
Stolen by time's treachery.

Lamentable scars of death,
Infected by things not present.
The words, the deeds, the thoughts,
Hugs, kisses, letters never sent.
The coldness of death robs our repent.
So, everyone experiences death.
Even those that retain their breath.
More people have died in my life,
Than I have buried.
Maybe I should bury them
Just how they died,
Inside.

Ah, how I remember.
How could I forget?
Like the petals of a rose.
So many, so perfect,
So beautifully as it grows.
The purpose it shows.
So are my self-inflicted scars.
How many times have I cut?
Myself?
What some call pruning, but
My slicing, severing, searching is not
For something else to grow.
Sometimes it's just practice,
Or uncaring.
Maybe boredom, waiting for the next show –
The tragic comedy of self-inflicted
scarring.

Ah, how I remember.
How could I forget?
The monotony of time –
Fading, marching, waiting
Illuminating, hiding, reconciling,
Wounding and healing.

The heaps and stacks of life's scars.
No fresh flesh,
No frontier unviolated.
The chaos, the mess.
No real recollection of
Where they originated.

They are just scars.
They are just there.
There for all to see.
There for all to stare.

They are who I am.
They are not who I am not.
They are so attractive.
Masterpieces of blood clots.

As I admire my scars,
I admire yours as well.
Your perseverance,
Your resilience.
I admire the story
Your scars tell.

Yes, these are our scars.
Yet, they are so much more!

—Sgt. Trent Schmidt
Logar Province, Afghanistan,
Combat Outpost Charkh, 173rd Airborne, 2011

Praying for the Scars to Come

(On the death of my brother killed
In a car accident after surviving a combat tour
In Afghanistan)
This wound won't heal, or so it seems.
It boils, festers, as sadness teems,
From my heart's open, gaping gash,
A flow of sadness seems to forever last.
Oh come, I pray, the scars, please come!
For it is within that I am undone!
Without, you see the stoic me...
Yet, internal bleeding of the mind runs free.
Rewinding life, running back the past.
Turning it all over, searching every last
Second, minute, day and week
For succor in my actions is that I seek.
No scars or scarring leaves open wounds.
No blood or clotting, but to the tombs
Of death and dying this wound leads.
This I pray, "God, scars I need!"
You wrote of scars you could not forget,
From your past and how you met
The challenges of life from birth to death,
From first love to last heaving breath.
You wrote of scars by others or self-inflicted,
Making you - you - and we're all afflicted.
I have the scars of which you speak.
Scars of your passing is what I seek!
Needing seeds to start the scars to grow.
What seeds there are, the hell I know?
Knowing anguished pain is more the matter,
Knowing Hell can be no sadder.
So I sit besotted, muttering to myself,
What scars matter to my health?
I pray for scars. or even callous,
To stem the flow of sadness, self-hate, self-malice.
You see scars are so different from a callous,
From scars we learn from ancient Pallas.
Scars remain a lifetime tender,
As ballasts to life, life's lessons they render
Callous builds with frictionous rubbing
Portending a past of violent drubbing
Callous allows feeling to fade...
Goodness to fade...
Dreams to fade...
You fading from dreams cannot be weighed!

Callousness in any form must be stayed!
Must be flayed from any thought and mention,
As your life's death is my death, your ascension.
My death will be slow, from inside out.
As hopeful imagination fades in slow drought.
I've read your "Final Dream Prophesying Death."
Allow the same, to tell your spirit of my ensuing last breath.
Your death was sudden, mine will not be.
Your death was violent loosing, your spirit let free.
Your death leaves sadness, mine leaves relief.
Your death leaves all eternal asking, "Why!," in disbelief.
My death will come in a slow, slow, slow, grinding halt.
My death will leave a life in default,
Of expectations and commitments to many left unmet,
Of promises broken, others' lives upended, upset.
All this I see in the direction I am going,
As wounds from your death leave my heart overflowing,
As drunkenness fades and grief slowly starts to stem,
"Left wanting!", unfulfilled, my life, my judgment 'in rem.'
So, the question remains, scars or callous will heal?
As callousness grows, it's for the scars I appeal!
Seeds of true healing may nurture scars to grow,
Watered from Christ's chalice, the answer, I know.
But it is up to I to drink from His overflowing cup,
Rather than from my cup of bile, from His I must sup.
As super-ego and id internally debate the matter,
Life passes by in empty-headed, idle-like chatter.
If the scars ever grow, ever build, ever arrive,
Then and only then will I believe I'll survive,
Till then the callous with razor I vigilantly flay,
Patiently awaiting the scars for which I pray.

—Maj. Todd Schmidt
May 2011



Influence—Helmand Province—2012

The elders (though that word does not contain
Sufficient substance to describe the strained
and weathered faces, demarcated by
a hurried youth disrupted and denied) approve of my entreaty to their sense
of liable paternal influence.
They linger though, reclined, content to drone
In colorful, if futile, martial tones,
On lavish (Persian) carpets on the floor,
As old Kalashnikovs in younger, more
Determined hands (paid in rupees), sow
That lethal seed—unrestrained, row on row.

—Capt. Chad Lewis, U.S. Army
January 2015

Ode to Honor



Honor.
The only thing you keep.
As an infantryman
I disdain stylistic verse
Shows of emotion
And pretension in all forms
But an image reemerges
The silhouette, the sound
A flash, explosion
A projectile grows larger
As if it were a 1980s arcade game
But no points float in the air
Only a man falls to the ground lifeless
A terrorist certainly
But by no mistake a man
He comes back every night
His family asks me why
I have no answer...
Though I've done no wrong
I feel such sorrow
Why should he hate me
Why should I kill him
I don't know

But the men in my truck
Are still here
Finding their way home
Updating the world about Cowboys
Seminoles, Giants and Lions
Of friends lost lovers gained
I was there when they needed me
I will always have that
It helps me sleep
I may feel sorrow
But I have no regrets.

—Capt. Joe Miller, Infantry
October 2012

Musings

Leaving after a decade past
Blood spilled, never mind the sweat
And now what have we to show
Stories of war, countless told
Beyond those trivial stories though
What arises from packed earth and snow
A legacy of hopeless war
Broken now or forevermore?

—Maj. Dustin E. Lawrence
2-503rd Infantry, Wardak Province
Afghanistan, 2013

“casuals”



All I wanted was a cigarette.
We weren't allowed to smoke.
He knew where to go.

We swept sidewalks together.
Raked sand together.
Talked about life together.

His window was across from mine.
I think he saw me changing once.
Maybe more than once.

He was getting dishonorably discharged.
I didn't think he was a good man.
I didn't think he was a bad one, either.

I had been two weeks since I landed in Monterey.
I only wanted a cigarette.
He knew where to go.

I bought the Southern Comfort and bottom shelf gin.
He carried them with him to his room.
I didn't think anything of it.

We raked sand together.
We ate lunch together.
We watched movies together.

We sat on a makeshift bench by this ditch
by the installation fence.
We drank and smoked and laughed.
I taught him Farsi and he taught me Russian.

Russian for “hello” and “goodbye.”
Russian for “This is allowed.”
Russian for “This is not allowed.”

I think he saw me changing once.
He tried to kiss me on the cheek.
I told him no, my boyfriend wouldn’t like that very much.

We smoked some more
We drank some more.
We laughed some more.

It was 2130.
I had to be in my room by 2200.
He said not to worry, I’d be back in time.

I insisted and tried to leave.
I fell to the ground.
He didn’t help me up.

I only wanted a cigarette.
He kissed me on the mouth.
I did not kiss him back.

I was immobile.
Paralyzed.
Drugged?

He kissed me again.
And again.
And again.

I did not kiss him back.
I had a boyfriend.
All I wanted was to smoke and drink and laugh.

He grabbed me by the ankles.
Pulled me over the ditch behind the Army barracks
by the installation fence.
I could hear soldiers coming back to their rooms.

I was paralyzed.
I always thought I would fight.
Fend him off with car keys stuffed between my fingers.

I looked up at the tree branches above me, my watch
said 2147.
That was the last time I prayed to God.
There were leaves in my hair and dirt on my arms.

There was something less than a man between my legs.
It looked at me with hate in its eyes.
We swept sidewalks together.
God kicked back and swigged a PBR
While I was raped behind the army barracks,
over the ditch by the installation fence.

He helped me up.
I couldn't stand on my own.
How sweet.

I vomited by a tree.
I was disgusted with myself and him and God.
I wanted to drown in Southern Comfort and bottom shelf
gin.

He walked me to my barracks building.
How sweet.
I made it to my room by 2200.
All the girls watched me stumble down the hallway.

I was so violently alone.
Taps wailed outside the window.

I left my hat by the bench by the ditch by the installation
fence.
He brought it to me the next morning.
How sweet.

—Staff Sgt. Ashley Garza, U.S. Air Force
July 2013

A Soldier Hits the Dirt



A soldier hits the dirt
Not daring to image what's beneath
The smell of death fills his nostrils, encasing his taste
Longingly, he remembers the girl back home
Beauty unstifled, pushing back her hair, waiting for a vow
155s, 82s, rockets, IEDs, killing and crippling
These things they do to men
Kill, capture, crush and run
To him they have no meaning
To cry is a shame, to kill a leisure thing
Why must these things be, O Great Deity

—Master Sgt. Timothy R. Ryan, U.S. Air Force Tactical Control
March 2014

The Talib



At best a wayward child, lowly born,
Misinformed;
At worst the Devil's own. The fatal sum-
Opium.
When eye-lined soldiers chase the dragon song,
Fear is gone;
Unhinged, the Talib martyr's glory ride
Suicide.
While sinister, self-righteous mullahs plan—
Pakistan,
Their dirty, youthful minions pile high,
For a lie.

—Capt. Chad Lewis, U.S. Army Special Forces
March 2014



The Citadel

*Eons flicker and fall
like flakes of empire to settle
at the bottom of an hour glass.*

*Yet stands the citadel,
assailed but untaken.*

*Turreted walls glare down
across the centuries,
dust piled high on their
shoulders,
bones fallow at their feet.*

In aching memory:

*A shivering tangle of axes and
spears,
bullets and whistling shells,
whispering reapers,
that cleave time and flesh,*

*and the savage will
that holds the dusty heights
cloudless and austere
while the blood laps
at bare and cracking feet.*

*About the ramparts
stomp the ghosts of Afghans before they were Afghans,
and the Persians,
and Macedonians hefting their silver shields,
Asian hordes with hardy ponies and humming arrows,
Tommies, Commies, and Yanks,
chiseled faces, frozen in youth.*

*Each a life spent in the churning nothing,
in the majestic absence
between Oxus and the snarling peaks.*

*For fun, for empire, for salt, for silk
For God, for you, for me, for
a disinterested democracy,
for nothing.*

*And the foe paces
over the stark parapets,
another ghost in his train,
bored with victory,
bored with defeat.*

—Maj. Wes Moerbe, U.S. Army
Herat, Afghanistan



A Father's Packing List



If I could put you in my rucksack, and take you along with me,
Then we would have adventures daily, once we made it 'cross the sea.
See, we would walk the sandy desert, 'til we found a shady tree,
And we would watch the camels go by, as you'd sit upon my knee.
Next we would meet my Army buddies, and we'd jump in the Humvee,
And they would teach you about virtue, humble pride, and loyalty.
You know we'd stop and help some people, we would do it happily,
Because this world needs men and women who will love heroic'ly.
Then we would find a vacant desktop, sit and write to your Mommy,
And we'd draw hearts and tell her stories, 'bout my rucksack, you, and me.

—Maj. Tom Anderson
October 2015

Patriots

I. Grab your kevlar, grab your ruck
recruits'll need both skill and luck
Welcome, Soldier, to the battalion
we're somewhat weary and newly back,
hardened by death and experience;
but here, put this welcome letter in
your pack

from Harry F. Buggins
Lieutenant Colonel
Infantry, Commanding

II. Driver stop, dismount right
fire team stack, learn to fight
A job well done,
young man, today you're best
and for that, a training medal—
then patience, war brings the rest

said Harry F. Buggins
Lieutenant Colonel
Infantry, Commanding

III. Dirty city, Tigris' crown
behold Mosul, Jonah's town
Welcome to Iraq
boredom, danger, and fear
to engage in combat and these combat
The picture can't be displayed.
we'll bring peace to this land of tears

wrote Harry F. Buggins
Lieutenant Colonel
Infantry, Commanding

IV. Fearful blast, all too close
the IED almost kills us both
Get off the Stryker, breach
the house and flow;
find the enemy, young
rifle: go

Authenticated. (Harry F. Buggins
Lieutenant Colonel
Infantry, Commanding)



V. The blood is red, it's from his eyes
up in the hatch my sergeant dies
Mrs. Smith, my Soldier's sister,
your brother's mission's done
I honor him with heavy heart; please find
enclosed his boots, tags, and pictured son

in sorrow, Harry F. Buggins
Lieutenant Colonel
Infantry, Commanding

VI. Evergreen trees, Cascade peaks,
patriots set home their feet
Fifteen months and three cities
end with a color's passing glory;
but I'd with you, if I could, train and
together go again, on your desert story

formerly, Harry F. Buggins
Lieutenant Colonel
Infantry, Commanding

—Lt. Col. (Ret.) Harry F. Buggins
October 2015

Our wrath remains



To all who read these presents, Greetings:

When you see the headlines, the commentaries, the talk shows. the social media bloviating, and hear the wonks and pundits of all shapes and sizes wringing their hands and gnashing their teeth over the proposed personnel and budgetary cuts to the United States military,

Be you Friend or Foe ...

- If you think America is weaker,
Then ask an Air Force B2 Pilot
- If you think America can't get there,
Then ask a Navy Aircraft Carrier Commander
- If you think America won't have enough people to get the job done,
Then ask a Marine
- If you think America has lost its ability to fight anywhere, anytime against any enemy in 24 hours or less
Then ask a Ranger
- If you think the tip of the American spear has been blunted and you believe there is truth to the end of American Military dominance

We can assure you, though we are few, it is not,

We are the perennial Tom Joad and our wrath remains.

Both living and dead
Soldier or Sailor
Airman or Marine
Uniformed or Civilian
General or Private
Just look and you'll see;
We'll be there-

—Lt. Col. David S. Eaton, U.S. Army
November 2015



Medal of Honor Recipient
Sgt. 1st Class Alwyn Cashe
23 July 1970–8 November 2005

Boots



Take me to a land that's new
Then help me with a cause that's true;
And protect me along the way.

Bring me home when it is done
Return me to my bright-eyed son;
And gather dust in peace, I pray.

—Maj. L. Burton Brender
2015

Poem of a Soldier

You praise the man I was, and curse the man I am.
Depending on which God you love, who I will be
may be damned.

Yet still I'll sell my soul for you, I'll save us all
from our worst selves,
I know no other love than this, I fear no other hell

I am what I am, 'cause I was made to be.
I raise the mountains, bring them down, and push
the seven seas.
I reap the grapes of wrath, I am the hand that feeds,
I am the brimstone falling from the angel wings

I damn the damned, and bless the weak.
For the lame walk, and for the mute speak.
The poor and oppressed find their rest in me,
I break the chains and bring forth the free

The destroyer of worlds, I am become of death.
I am enveloping nights, approaching bayonets.
I am the darkest valley where the sword is whet,
the shadow of death is my silhouette

I was forged in a fire lit long ago.
Born of a crucible not my own.
Yet by this birthright in man am I mold,
I am strength multiplied by a thousand fold

I am the photos of loved ones, now nothing but
memories.

I am folded flags, torn, tattered and history.
Yet it is I who held high these in Pyrrhic victory,
I am the Idea that we've died for, for all of eternity

I am the scorching heat, I am the bitter cold.
I am the broken sleep that shakes your soul.
I am the naive youth, and the fearful old,
I am the hell you pray you'll never know

I am a soldier, and no one asked me to be.
I raised my right hand and said "God, send me!"
I am the man that the boy I was wanted to be,
The incarnate nightmare of my enemies' dreams

I am the comforting safety we've known at home.
I am the cogs of wars we hope we won't.
Pray you never need me, yet when you do,
I am also the fear which caused you to

I am the cherubim, and original sin.
I rule the fallen world, and the broken men.
From the depths of the waters to the roaring winds,
I am new beginnings and imminent ends

—2nd Lt. George Bruner, U.S. Army



Field Stripping the M4 Rifle



given an m4-
series rifle, place
the weapon on a
clean flat work surface.
ensure the weapon
is on safe, remove
any magazine,

pull back the charging
handle and observe
there is no round in
the breach, return the
bolt to the front.
remove the sling and
the rifle's hand guards,
note the few grains of
Hajj sand that fall out,
left over from that
almost good enough
weapons cleaning right
before flying home

remove the lower
receiver from the
upper, take out the
bolt carrier, checking the
face of the piece for
carbon residue

bolt and the rifle's
bolt carrier, checking the
face of the piece for
carbon residue...
...must have popped off a
few good ones to have
this much...put the bolt
assembly in the
locked position and
remove the firing
pin retaining block

let the components
drop—drop—just where they
are, like that patrol
when we smoked that hajj—
let them drop, onto
the working surface,
watching him fall down

set the components
aside and remove
the spring from the butt
stock assembly by
recalling how young
he was and how scared
his [-----] brown eyes seemed
lay the components

out and ensure none
have rolled off of your
working surface ‘cause
losing one of them
won’t [-----] fly, not
here, not in combat

not when its your job
to bring young dicks like
jefferson home when
he flakes on patrol.
when your heart stops and
you don’t know where the
kid has got off to.

to reassemble,
put the spring back in
the butt stock, making
sure the hammer is
cocked; put together
the bolt and its carrier
in reverse order

sliding the face of
the bolt forward,
sliding—the face of
that man dress ‘raqi
kid with the AK;
sliding it; pointing
it at jefferson,

put it into the
groove within the top
receiver, back
into the—I said
back. i said get back,
son of a bitch, the
[----] you think you’re
doin’?
jefferson, move this
way, i’ve got a bead

on him; [---]damnit,
soldier, stop shaking
and get over here.
jefferson! jeff, hey,
just look at that kid,

he’s more nervous than
you, [----- -----],
and probably younger;
see, he’s...holy [----].
put it down. put it
down now! drop it! drop
it now or i’ll...click
put the receivers
together. charge the
weapon, set it to
“safe.” attempt to fire.
it won’t. switch to “fire,”
pull the trigger, and
the hajj boy is dead

—Maj. L. Burton Brender, U.S. Army



The Men Who Have No Name

In woods of dark
I lie;
heart beating against the pine needle floor.
He is there, in sunlit place, marching up in
haste,
up a sloping green meadow.
With the bend of my finger,
gliding metal hurries intensely for a private
embrace.
Leaves rustle
(f
a
l
l)
in autumn mourning.
Through the looking glass, I cannot see
reproachful eyes,
Therein meadow, blood red poppies blow,
A soft wind carries off a nameless soul.

—Staff Sgt. Christopher M. Rance, U.S. Army
May 2018



Have I Ever Been to War?

With a different view of the
battlefield, I'm wary of what I
claim.

I have dented the earth and bent
the air inside the enemy's door
But I cannot help but ask my-
self, Have I ever been to war?

I've topped the heights and
flung my craft into valleys in the
black of night
But the intimate pain and guilt
in death remained outside my
sights.

I've squeezed the trigger that ended men's lives but did not witness the gore
So again I have to ask myself, "Have I ever been to war?"

I've seen the ghost of my imminent end
But never the face of a dying friend

I've seen the hopeless green smoke rise
But never the suffering it disguised

I've heard the whistling rounds drop in,
Without a clue of where they'd land
The picture can't be displayed.

But I've never felt their sting before.
And so I ask, Have I been to war?

I don't carry a load, nor am I lost between the darkness and the light
I'm the same as the man who left to go, but I question if that's right.

To all those who there remain, and to those who've gone before
I joined you in that hellish place, but I'm still not sure I've been to war.



—Lt. Col. Ryan “Rhino” Hill, U.S. Air Force
January 2020

Walls



Lord, break down the walls that came between
As I walk through this life I am not really seen
I've built my façade so carefully crated
Brick upon brick a warrior was grafted
on top of my soul, these walls block me in
they keep everyone out, and protect what's within.
These walls keep you all from really seeing
my hopes, dreams, and fears, the core of my being
Walls that were built to protect my heart
Have kept me from truly being a part
of deep fellowship with my brothers and sisters.
I have become a lone sentry facing life's twistlers
When I open the door and let you come near
I tremble and shake, paralyzed with fear.
But to my great surprise, I don't find more pain
What I discover is we're all the same.
I find that these warriors are all just like me
We all want our hearts to truly be free
The truth of the matter, we're all so much greater
Bonded in spirit, made by our creator
When I let you in, we all get to see
Who I am, who you are, who we're all meant to be.

—Lt. Col. Kevin M. James, U.S. Air Force
March 2020

Standing Fast



In times of calm, there are those who stand fast on the ramparts.
When challenges come, there are those who stand fast at the bulwarks
If peace shatters, those who stand fast sally forth into the breach.
When those who sallied forth may fall, there are those standing fast to take their places.
In victory, there are those who stand fast to remember the fallen.
And again in peace, there are those who stand fast, manning the ramparts, to ensure
that peace prevails.
It is the warrior who stands fast.

—Lt. Col. (Ret.) Todd Kenneth Hulsey
4 May 2020

Peace in Iraq

Iraq now asks
What now
Is possible
When brave warriors
Are not enough
When victory
Is not enough
We admire
The sacrifice
Of the martyrs
Yet we build nothing
From their deeds
Wars do not end
In peace
And words alone
Will not heal
The suffering
We need now
The strength
Of the warrior
To win the peace
Many have
Fought so hard for
Before those
Who did not fight

Did not suffer
Did not bleed
Set again
Another course
Toward the next war
Leaving the people
Wondering
Where is the peace
And calling
For the return
Of the warrior
In this city
Of peace
There is seen
Only blood
When will
Baghdad return
To govern its people.
Who so deserve
Her peace

—Maj. Gen. Walter Piatt
Iraq, August 2018

Leaving Afghanistan–2021



Desiccating grit pelts our faces in the turbulence of smothering black back blast
Spewing from screeching engines on the tarmac powering up for retreat.

Deadened and disoriented, we heavily laden listless figures shuffle into the
metal leviathans, crowd ourselves methodically into regimented rows

and strap ourselves securely with red and yellow nylon belts to the bulkhead for take-off,
our equipment crammed into where it can fit,
underneath our seats or stacked underneath nets,
with weapons secured.

Breathing in the smell of sweat, and pee, and JP4, the urine-colored interior light
Blinks suddenly to phosphorescent green as the rear ramp elevates

From the ground up and locks shut with the metallic finality of perdition.
Outside, there is a dull roar and the muffled whine of engines powering up that
melds a midnight-like buzzing of locusts

With the rolling crash of waves thrashing some distant stony shore in the dark.

A drowsy silence prevails, some are already asleep, some laugh, and some weep.

—Maj. Paul Faust
February 2021

Last Man Out



Maj. Gen. Christopher Donahue, 52, was the last soldier to leave Kabul. He boarded the final U.S. Air Force flight out of Afghanistan, at one minute before midnight on Monday, 30 August 2021.

An After-war Poem

Freshly scrubbed, fed and cleansed of your war for
now.

But you suspect,
that the stink won't go away.
The odors will betray,
(you) like the lies of privileged men.
"Ambition. Sacrifice. Honor."
"Now," you think,
"things all smell the same."

A change in the breeze
brings on
burning rubber and oil.
The memories of sweat, urine, and shit.
Those smells of people and rot
The revolting dead-air breath
of coffee, cigarettes,
and vomit.
All compounded with
your
wild,
animal fear.
This is nature's trick to
mock you for believing the lies.

—Lt. Col. William Adler, U.S. Army

The Curse

The morning dew invites thoughts of stand-to
because dawn is when the enemy attacks.
The draws and creek beds become
dead spaces and kill zones.
My mind furiously sketches range cards,
templating claymore mines and grenade launchers.
My riflemen can cover the grassy fingers
of earth sprawling from the ridge-line.
The woods will prove the toughest fight,
but by then we'll have won.

Wait...who am I fighting?

Am I doomed to a life of battle arrangements
in contrast to the beauty of the ground before me?
Open fields evoke Cemetery Ridge. Beautiful gentle
steeds transform into platforms for cuirassiers.
Hilltops become strongpoints, heavy forest provides
concealment, and all while the babbling brook
see canteens gurgling their fill upstream.
My mind converts miles into meters, and does machine gun math,
and I don't have my basic load...

I stand in the midst of peaceful mountains majesty;

I am not at war.

But my mind won't let it be so.

—Maj. Marshall McGurk

Dress Code

He came angry and mean in
A pretty package.
Pomp and circumstance
crowned in a high and tight
Yes, Sir! Yes, Ma'am!
Nothin' like a man in uniform.
Batting baby blues
They way they do
When they slide
into your bed and into your life.
Pressed dress whites
A crumpled heap on the floor.
Gold medals and ribbons
Cuff links and patent leather
The groom wore white.
Sliced our wedding cake
with the sword slung on his hip.
Til Death do us part.
The Military opens its ranks
Wraps the wounded willing young.
A sultry Siren
Lures with promises
Glory and Honor and a Pension.
Buttons and Bars and Brass
The Uniform binds the broken
"Let The Journey Begin"
I married the man not the military,
I bear witness.
The man shattered when the uniform came off.

—Kelly Hedglin Bowen
2021

So I was a Coffin

They said *you are a spear*. So I was a spear.
I walked around Iraq upright and tall, but the wind blew and I began to lean. I leaned into a man,
who leaned into a child, who leaned into a city. I walked back to them and neatly presented
a city of bodies packaged in rows.
They said *no. You are a bad spear*.

They said *you are a flag*. So I was a flag.
I climbed to the highest building in the city that had no bodies and I smiled
and waved as hard as I could. But I waved too hard and I caught fire and I burned
down the city. But it had no bodies.
But they said *no. You are a bad flag*.

They said *you are a bandage*. So I was a bandage.
And I jumped on Kyle's chest and wrapped my lace arms together around his torso
and pressed my head to his ribcage and listened to his heartbeat. Then I was full,
so I let go and wrung myself out.

And I jumped on Kyle's chest and wrapped my lace arms together around his torso
and pressed my head to his ribcage and listened to his heartbeat. Then I was full,
so I let go and wrung myself out.

And I jumped on Kyle's chest and wrapped my lace arms together around his torso
and pressed my head to his ribcage but there was no heartbeat. They said *no*.
You are a bad bandage.

They said *you are a coffin*. So I was.
I found a man. They said he died bravely, or he will. I encompassed him in my finished wood
and shut my lid around us. As they lowered us into the ground he made no sound because
he had
no eyes and could not cry. And as I threw dirt upon us we held our breaths together and
they said, *yes*.
You are a good coffin.

—Gerardo “Tony” Mena, Marine Recon

(For Kyle Powell, who died in my arms 6 November 2006)

This poem was written after his return from deployment to Iraq and discharge from the Marine Corps, while he was attending college. It won the 2010 “War Poetry” contest sponsored by Winningwriters. A voiceover video rendition of this poem can be found at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IdYJuY0ZRjU>.

Scattered Soldiers



The towers trembled, burned, and fell,
America sought revenge,
And scattered soldiers here and there,
To find the evil men.
We said the cause was just and right,
The world nodded “yes,”
We scattered soldiers here and there,
To end the terror threat.
Attack Al Qaeda’s network first!
Then weaken the Taliban’s grip!
By scattering soldiers here and there,
To decapitate their leadership.
The further tactic to embed,
And win the villagers’ hearts,
By scattering soldiers here and there,
Did “counterinsurgency” do its part?
When all else failed we nation built,
Considering the battle won,
By scattering soldiers here and there,
And hoping peace be done.
As time went by our nation tired,
Butter more important than guns,
We scattered soldiers here and there,
As the nation’s interest set like the sun.

“Is the nation safer?” an American asks,
For we have fought for a dozen years,
With scattered soldiers here and there,
And “victory” not so clear.
Our nation calls our very best,
To fight and sometimes die,
While being scattered here or there,
To preserve our way of life?
I buried a soldier yesterday,
And cried when Taps was played,
We scattered his ashes here and there,
I prayed for a better day.
In 2014 the horizon looms,
Our troopers beckoned home,
But how many soldiers will we scatter,
To meet the future unknowns?
As history reflects on all we’ve done,
What will our judgment be?
For scattering soldiers here and there,
To help make others free.

—Col. (Ret.) Dwayne Wagner, U.S. Army
March 2013

Part 3—Introducing “Arts and Letters, War and Peace”—2023

A fascination with combat is an obvious and persistent characteristic of the human condition. The reasons for this have for millennia provoked sometimes virulent religious as well as scholarly debates. Some on the one hand assert that human beings are born with personalities *tabula rasa* that are socialized to competitive violence as a result of the dire economic conditions into which most humans historically have been born. And, that such impulses can be unlearned by fairer economic distributions systems combined with proper socialization methods aimed at assuaging and dissipating entirely the impulse to violence toward those who would otherwise be their competitors.

In contrast, others assert that humans by dint of biological evolution are genetically—and irrevocably—inclined to be predatory and violent by nature, and that the best that can be hoped for in achieving something like peaceful community stability is imposing social constraints through rigidly enforced laws linked to the proselytizing of cooperative attitudes backed by coercive punishments. Still others have asserted that human beings are born innately “good” but fall into the temptation to violence due to the influence of malevolent spiritual forces, and that the only solution is penitent submission to the type of religious conversion that inculcates pacific attitudes.

Irrespective of the purported evidence for any of these explanations and their asserted solutions, it remains the case that a mesmerizing fascination with violence continues to be a common trait of human social intercourse manifest in many ways and places in the modern world that dominates a good part of human cultural expression. Whether in the writing of endless murder mysteries, television series chronicling the exploits of diverse detectives, gang violence in popular music, or recounting of criminal activity in general, the appetite for violence in cultural expression appears insatiable.

Moreover, the grandest celebration of interest in human violence appears reserved for the enduring fascination with mythologized violence related to war. Whether in the light-minded treatment of war in countless superhero movies and other unserious cartoonish products of fiction or the vast examination of war in sober treatments of historical war events in film, video, books, journals, poetry, websites, and music—not to mention almost daily news accounts and documentaries about ongoing large-scale conflicts today—memorialization of the details of war permeates our culture with resonating effects.

To provide greater insight into this phenomenon, we express deep gratitude to Dr. Robert E. Williams Jr., professor of political science at Pepperdine University, for allowing us to print in this edition a slightly revised version of a paper he presented at Westmont College in 2013 that provides broader treatment of the significance and influence of cultural expressions related to war on our society. The full paper can be found online at <https://www.yumpu.com/en/document/view/48363902/what-poets-and-painters-can-teach-us-about-international-politics>.

Arts and Letters, War and Peace

What Painters and Poets Can Teach Us About International Politics

Robert E. Williams Jr., Pepperdine University

Is there a place for the arts in the study—and teaching—of war? I want to argue, emphatically, that there is. In fact, while it is possible to engage the problem of war intensively and effectively with no reference to the perspectives of painters and poets, to do so ignores the example of some of the most influential modern students of war, including Michael Walzer, Jean Bethke Elshtain, and the late John Keegan.¹ It makes the questionable assumption that those artists who have played pivotal roles in the struggle for peace and justice—people such as Austrian writer and Nobel Laureate Bertha von Suttner, Czech playwright Vaclav Havel, Chinese artist Ai Weiwei, Romanian-American writer and Nobel Laureate Elie Wiesel, and Polish writer Adam Michnik, to name but a few—have been motivated by factors unrelated to their artistic sensibilities. It leaves untapped important resources for learning in both the cognitive and affective domains. And it distances us from what peacebuilding expert John Paul Lederach calls the “moral imagination.”²

I believe there are deep and enduring truths about war to be found in poems such as Wilfred Owen’s *Dulce et decorum est* and in paintings such as Picasso’s *Guernica*; that the study of artistic representations of war helps us both to understand some truths about war more easily and care more deeply about this tragic aspect of the human condition; and that, in making these points, we bolster the case for the fundamental unity of knowledge and thus for preserving the liberal arts. To make this case, let us look at the underlying problem—the fragmentation of knowledge—and how it has played out in academic studies of war within the discipline of international politics.

The Fragmentation of Knowledge

In an essay entitled “The Loss of the University,” Wendell Berry lamented the fact that specialization in modern academia has meant that “the various disciplines have ceased to speak to each other.”³ Berry was hardly the first to worry about the fragmentation of knowledge. C. P. Snow, in the 1959 Rede Lecture, framed the problem in even starker terms with his suggestion that there are two cultures, the scientific and the literary. These cultures not only do not speak to each other, Snow argued, they know little, if any, of the other’s language.⁴ Stefan Collini, in his introduction to the Canto Classics editions of Snow’s *The Two Cultures*, notes that T. H. Huxley and Matthew Arnold debated the same chasm separating scientific and literary modes of thought in the late nineteenth century, with Arnold offering his defense of the liberal arts in the 1882 Rede Lecture.⁵

Whether we think in terms of the “two cultures” or merely the fragmentation of knowledge in the broadest possible context, the issues raised are not “merely academic,” to use the phrase that signals that a controversy has no practical significance. They are academic, of course, as those who sit on curriculum committees and those who allocate resources in colleges and universities know all too well. But there are echoes of the two cultures idea—sometimes deafening echoes, in fact—that appear in debates over public

policy. For example, in October 2011, Governor Rick Scott of Florida stirred controversy by proposing to shift state higher-education funding to the fields of study most likely to prepare students for existing jobs. “Is it a vital interest of the state to have more anthropologists? I don’t think so,” he said in an interview with Sarasota’s daily newspaper, the *Herald-Tribune*.⁶

Jeff Flake, a Republican congressman from Arizona, drew the ire of political scientists in May 2012 by offering an amendment to cut funding for the National Science Foundation’s Political Science Program. His measure, predicated on the belief that studies of matters such as the origins of the lower rate of representation of women in politics are of interest only to academics, actually passed the House of Representatives by a 218-208 vote.⁷

These examples are part of what seems to be an increasing tendency to disparage certain academic disciplines, a tendency that judges research and education sometimes on purely ideological grounds but, more often, according to their economic effects. In these judgments disciplines such as anthropology and political science—to say nothing of art history or literature or music—generally fare poorly in comparison with the sciences, technology, engineering, and mathematics (the STEM disciplines). The implicit assumption is that not only can the different branches of learning be distinguished in a clear-cut way but that some branches can be considered practical while others are impractical or even frivolous.

There is another echo of the two cultures thesis in contemporary political discourse, although one that seriously distorts the original version because it substitutes either faith or political ideology for literature on one side of the gulf across which understanding appears to be so problematic. In this version, science is the target in spite of its economic merits. The chief examples of the divide (although by no means the only ones) are the debates that have engulfed evolution and climate change.

These political echoes of the two cultures thesis suggest that the fragmentation of knowledge is problematic for several reasons. First, it can lead to invidious comparisons among fields of study. A host of criteria—economic utility, technological promise, global perspective, and so forth—can be found for ranking disciplines and dismissing those that fail to measure up once the assumption is made that economics, political science, business, ethics, literature, history, and the others are entirely separable fields of study. Second, it suggests that some forms of knowledge are more valid than others. While this may work against the sciences in conflicts with religion, it may also privilege the sciences (or scientific methods within fields not generally considered sciences) over literature, the arts, or even “soft” sciences such as sociology and political science. Third, it can pit those in different disciplines against each other, especially in economic circumstances that are said to demand cutbacks in some areas of teaching and research.

If the fragmentation of knowledge means what Berry suggested—that “the various disciplines have ceased to speak to each other”—then international politics, and especially the part of the discipline that focuses on war, stands as guilty as any other. In fact, those representing different schools of thought or methodological commitments within the discipline at times have difficulty communicating with each other. And, like many other disciplines, international politics has almost completely lost touch with the arts in spite of the fact that painters, poets, musicians, sculptors, novelists, and playwrights have provided, very often, the most acute depictions of the discipline’s central concerns and, occasionally, some of the most original thinking about solutions. Dante, for example, argued for political unity under a secular ruler as a means of securing peace in *De Monarchia*.

Ambrogio Lorenzetti, in a fourteenth-century fresco known today as the *Allegory of Good Government and Bad Government*, articulated a vision based on the virtues by which the leaders of Siena were encouraged to keep their state peaceful and prosperous. Christine de Pisan offered similar advice in prose to Prince Louis, Duke of Guyenne, in *The Book of Peace*. Tennyson articulated a vision of a “parliament of man” in the poem *Locksley Hall*. The experience of chemical warfare during World War I was depicted powerfully on canvas by John Singer Sargent in a 1919 work titled *Gassed* and in the 1917 poem *Dulce et decorum est* by Wilfred Owen. It was the novelist (and former colonial administrator), Leonard Woolf who, with the encouragement of Sidney and Beatrice Webb and other Fabian Socialists (including George Bernard Shaw), articulated a plan for the elimination of interstate war based on the concept of collective security, the very concept that Woodrow Wilson would make the centerpiece of his own plan for peace at the end of World War I.⁸ In short, artists have had—and continue to have—much to say about war, but those who study international politics are not generally very receptive to their contributions. At a minimum, painters, poets, and other artists should be enlisted in the efforts we make to teach war.

The biologist Edward O. Wilson has argued that “the greatest enterprise of the mind has always been and always will be the attempted linkage of the sciences and the humanities.” The unification that he labels “consilience” is necessary in part because “the ongoing fragmentation of knowledge and resulting chaos in philosophy are not reflections of the real world but artifacts of scholarship.”⁹ At its birth, the discipline of international politics, born of the desire to solve the problem of war, attempted to link the sciences and the humanities—or at least a number of them. To explain how this effort at the integration of knowledge occurred, how the discipline became fragmented, and what might be gained by incorporating an artistic sensibility into the study of war, we turn to the war *problématique*—the central concern of the study of international politics and the complex of issues that surround it—followed by a brief disciplinary history intended to suggest how its internal fragmentation has developed. Later, we will focus on a few paintings and poems related to war and reflect on how they might help us teach war and understand it more fully.

The War *Problématique*

Vitruvius, the Roman architect whose comments on mathematical proportions and the symmetry of the human body prompted Leonardo da Vinci’s drawing of *Vitruvian Man*, said that the architect should “be educated, skilful with the pencil, instructed in geometry, know much history, have followed the philosophers with attention, understand music, have some knowledge of medicine, know the opinions of the jurists, and be acquainted with astronomy and the theory of the heavens.”¹⁰ The list is daunting, but Vitruvius elaborates on each discipline mentioned in further comments on requirements for the education of an architect. Acknowledging the breadth of study he has recommended, Vitruvius suggests that what makes it possible to know everything that is necessary for the architect to know is the fundamental unity of all knowledge: “A liberal education forms, as it were, a single body made up of these members. Those, therefore, who from tender years receive instruction in the various forms of learning, recognize the same stamp on all the arts, and an intercourse between all studies, and so they more readily comprehend them all.”¹¹

If the architect requires a broad liberal arts education in order to master her discipline, the same must be true for the student of war and peace. In fact, the study of history, philosophy,

and law seem even more germane to an understanding of war than of architecture. But many other disciplines are necessary as well. This fact may explain a comment Einstein reportedly made during a 1946 conference on the world's political problems. Asked why the human mind, capable of unlocking the secrets of the atom, had thus far proven incapable of devising a plan to prevent the atom from destroying humankind, Einstein replied, "That is simple, my friend. It is because politics is more difficult than physics."¹²

The study of war cannot be limited to a single discipline such as political science or international studies. War has economic causes and consequences and thus engages the attention of economists. It constantly demands new technologies and thus involves physicists, chemists, and engineers. It begins in the minds of men and women, and sometimes destroys those minds, and so it calls for the participation of psychologists. It evokes depths of despair that are indescribable in ordinary language and thus compels the labor of poets. It leaves behind tales of valor and evidence of political and social change and thus must have its historians. If there is a central core of war studies to be found in political science or international studies, those disciplines are apt to draw from other fields certain concepts or metaphors that seem likely to promote understanding, or maybe just a favored belief. For example, balance-of-power theorists have elevated to a cardinal principle of international relations theory the notion of equipoise drawn from the apothecary and clockmaking trades while epidemiology has unwittingly contributed the notion of war contagion.

Just as economists offer insights about war that psychologists do not, so painters evoke responses that poets do not—and vice versa. War is the elephant and political scientists, painters, poets, and physicists often find themselves in the roles of the blind men trying to apprehend it. Each senses something, an important characteristic perhaps, but not everything. The historian can draw attention to the use of aerial bombardment in World War II, but the poet and the novelist often provide a better visceral sense of what it was like to be present during an air raid than anything historians have written or recorded.

The war *problématique* comprises not only the problem of war—How might a human behavior that has proved to be increasingly destructive over time be limited or even eliminated?—but a complex set of problems related to war as well. War cannot simply be described as a product of human nature or an outgrowth of the Westphalian system of international relations. It involves problems of geography, demographics, economics, and law. It forces us to confront poverty, human rights abuse, arms races, miscommunication, deviant psychology, and resource scarcity.

The Development of International Politics: From Integration to Fragmentation

Where war is concerned, the twentieth century may well be remembered for three things: the rise of total war and, with it, crimes against humanity on a massive scale; the rise of the social scientific study of war; and the beginning of the end of war. Each is related to the other two. Total war prompted the development of new approaches to the study of war, including the scientific study of war. What has been learned in the scientific study of war, combined with the widespread revulsion prompted by the enormous destructiveness of total war and its frequent companion, genocide, may be responsible for what appears to be the near-total cessation of interstate war and the decline of other forms of organized violence.¹³ But the key phrases here may be the "*near-total* cessation of war" and the "*decline* of organized violence." The problem of war is not entirely behind us.

And even if it were, it seems likely that we may come to find ourselves in the same place concerning war that we do with slavery—able to celebrate abolition but forced to confront old problems in new guises.

There are, of course, many “sources” of international politics as a separate discipline beyond diplomatic history and international law. There is, first, a modest body of work in which advice on how to conduct foreign relations is proffered to statesmen. The outstanding example of this genre is Machiavelli’s *The Prince*. There are also a number of discourses on military strategy, of which Carl von Clausewitz’s *On War* and A. T. Mahan’s various writings on naval strategy are perhaps the most enduring, that have significantly influenced at least a portion of the modern field of international politics. Finally, the development of international politics may also be traced to several important strands of political theory, from the *jus gentium* idea of Roman political theory to the just war thought of St. Augustine and through Thomas Hobbes’ *Leviathan* and Immanuel Kant’s *Perpetual Peace*, to name a few of the more important strands. These three rather indistinct categories are not sufficient, either singly or in combination, to have given birth to a separate discipline, but each has made important contributions to a field that developed independently.

In the aftermath of World War I, the serious study of international relations as a separate discipline began. The separate studies of diplomatic history, treaty-making, international law, and other subjects that had been examined before were still being conducted, but the crucial difference was that in the postwar period these studies began to focus on the deficiencies of the international system. They were, in other words, reform-oriented. They were also integrative. International relations as a new field of study was “invented” in order to help the world understand the conditions that had engendered the war thereby making possible the construction of a system that would prevent its recurrence.

Thus, during the interwar period international relations was a discipline having as its purpose the establishment of permanent peace. Characteristic of this formative stage was Lord David Davies’ establishment of the Woodrow Wilson Chair of International Politics in 1919—the world’s first professorship in international relations—at the University College of Wales in Aberystwyth. There was in this early period an excessive optimism that E. H. Carr (at one time a holder of the Woodrow Wilson Chair), in *The Twenty Years’ Crisis*, compared to the utopianism of the medieval alchemists who studied matter in a vain effort to turn base metals into gold. Carr noted that this utopian phase is one through which most new sciences must pass and that it is only when utopianism is exchanged for realism that genuine progress can be made in the discipline.

The events of the 1930s shattered the postwar optimism that had informed the study of international relations. When it became clear that the idealists had been, in some respects at least, naive in their expectations, a realist reaction set in and what some historians of the discipline call the first “Great Debate” (between realists and idealists—or Wilsonian liberals) began. Much of the reaction was led by German intellectuals who had been forced to flee the Nazi regime. Scholars such as Hans Morgenthau and, in the next generation, Henry Kissinger brought to the United States a tough brand of *Realpolitik* that emphasized the overriding importance of power in relations among states. Their message was appealing to a new generation of American statesmen and academics impressed by the failure of the idealists to prevent a second descent into global conflict and burdened for the first time with major international responsibilities. As testimony to the impact the realists had on the study of international politics, it is worth noting that Morgenthau’s textbook, *Politics among Nations*, remains in print over seventy years after its initial publication.

But just as there was a reaction against the idealism of the interwar period, there has been a reaction against realism. Neorealists have argued that Morgenthau and his intellectual kin were myopic in focusing almost exclusively on states as actors in the international system. World Order theorists have suggested that there are many international concerns that both realists and idealists failed to address. Others, sometimes including constructivists and theorists of the English School, have made the point that the normative approaches of the interwar period do offer something positive after all. Marxists and feminists have argued the need for greater attention to economic matters or the concerns of women, respectively. The many differences in perspective found in the discipline have produced what some call “the inter-paradigm debate,” another Great Debate in the reckoning of some (but by no means all) students of the discipline’s development. (Ironically, in international politics, even the question of what merits inclusion among the field’s Great Debates is subject to debate.) Sadly, the study of international relations has moved far away from its original integrative impulses to a degree of fragmentation unusual even among academic disciplines. In less than a century, the study of war has gone from being an exemplar of the impulse to integrate to a discipline whose members often will not—or cannot—speak to each other.

A second Great Debate fragmented the discipline in the 1950s and 1960s. (If the inter-paradigm debate is numbered among the Great Debates, it was the third, having developed in the 1970s.) This debate was a methodological debate between traditionalists—those using case studies or other non-quantitative methods—and advocates of more scientific, often statistics-based, approaches. It was prompted by the rise of behavioralism in the broader field of political science in the late 1940s, but, like the discipline of international politics itself, it has roots in the response of scholars to World War I. In fact, one of the earliest advocates of the scientific study of war was Lewis Fry Richardson, a Quaker who served in a Friends Ambulance Unit in northern France during the war. Without violating his pacifist convictions, Richardson experienced total war in a very direct fashion—one that would lead him to attempt, independently of the developing scholarly community in the field of international relations, to discern the causes of war through mathematical analysis.

Richardson is best known for his application of mathematics to weather forecasting. Using similar methods, he attempted to generate a science of conflict, first with a differential equation (now known as the Richardson Equation) that describes the process of competitive arms buildups and then with a statistical analysis of the world’s “deadly quarrels” between 1815 and 1945.¹⁴ Although Richardson’s only academic appointment was in the physics department at Westminster Training College, his work on conflict inspired many analysts of war after his death.

During the 1930s, Quincy Wright at the University of Chicago began his own quantitative studies of war. *A Study of War*, a three-volume compilation of his work, was published in 1942. It also inspired a generation of students who, witnessing the behavioral revolution in American political science, believed that the scientific study of international relations held the greatest promise, if not the only one, of yielding valid conclusions about war and its correlates. To Wright and Richardson’s work must be added the pioneering studies of Pitirim Sorokin, the founder of Harvard’s sociology department; Kenneth E. Boulding, an economist and founder of general systems theory (and, like Richardson, a Quaker); and J. David Singer who, in 1963, established the Correlates of War Project at the University of Michigan to provide a comprehensive source of data for those students of war interested in applying statistical methods to the discipline.

In 1954, the Rockefeller Foundation convened a two-day meeting that brought together Hans Morgenthau, Reinhold Niebuhr, Arnold Wolfers, William T. R. Fox, and other notable realists. The purpose of the meeting was to establish the parameters of international relations theory. The participants sought to establish a discipline separate from political science and inoculated to some extent from the scientific ambitions political science appeared to be developing. The effort was hardly successful in the latter respect, but it may have helped to solidify the branch of the discipline committed to the realist paradigm and the traditionalist methodology.¹⁵

This sketch of the development of the discipline born in the aftermath of the Great War to study the problem of war shows a curious path from the initial integration of studies of law, strategy, politics, diplomatic history, and other disciplines to the eventual fragmentation of the discipline under the strains of philosophical and methodological debates that might be more aptly characterized as parallel monologues since few of the participants have actually addressed those on the other side.

Painters, Poets, and War

What have painters and poets had to say about war? The short answer to the question is that they have conveyed the full range of beliefs about and attitudes toward war held by humankind as a whole. Given that war and its impact on humankind has been one of the universal themes in art, this should not be surprising.

Visual artists and poets alike have depicted warfare in various ways since antiquity. The *Iliad of Homer*, an account of the Trojan War, is one of the oldest surviving works of Western literature. Greek amphorae include depictions of Ares, the god of war, or Athena, the goddess of war; scenes from the Trojan War; and unidentified soldiers prepared for battle or in actual combat, among many other war-related themes. The *Alexander Mosaic*, taken from the floor of the House of the Faun in Pompeii and now on display in the National Archaeological Museum in Naples, depicts Alexander the Great and Darius III of Persia in battle. It is believed to have been based on a painting produced in Greece some three centuries earlier. The *Aeneid* of Virgil begins, “I sing of arms and the man.” All in all, it is difficult to avoid the presence of war in the art of the ancient world. But war is well represented as a theme of painters and poets in subsequent ages as well.

What follows is a very brief look at the contributions of painters and poets to our understanding of war. No effort has been made to go beyond painting and poetry or to be comprehensive with respect to time or space: Western painters and poets from the Renaissance era forward are favored, but this reflects the limits of my own knowledge rather than a preference. Paintings and poems are grouped into categories representing three themes that have much more to do with my own reasons for looking at the works than with any attempt at careful analysis. Two of the themes are presented as paired opposites, or thesis and antithesis. The section concludes with a few comments on the didactic role of paintings and poetry.

Thesis: War as a Heroic Activity

One of the most common themes related to war in the visual arts is the celebration of heroes. Public statuary all over the world, especially in capital cities, honors war heroes. (London, which is no exception to the rule, does honor conscientious objectors as well

with a monument in Tavistock Square where a statue of Mahatma Gandhi has also been erected.) Hero worship—or its close relative, patronage—has been common throughout history. In many instances, artists have depicted their patrons as military heroes, often engaged in daring military exploits. Jacques-Louis David's *Napoleon Crossing the Alps*, executed in five different versions, stands as a noteworthy example of the genre. What may be the American counterpart of David's work (although painted by the German Emanuel Leutze) is *Washington Crossing the Delaware*, a work that, ironically, was destroyed by a British air raid on Bremen during World War II. (A second version by the same artist survives in the Museum of Modern Art, and copies of the first abound.)

The heroic view of war at the common soldier's level has been expressed frequently by those with too little experience of it. Rupert Brooke made war seem a noble thing in a series of sonnets written before his death (of blood poisoning) enroute to fight at Gallipoli, a battle that proved to be one of the great follies of World War I. Brooke's poem *The Soldier* was read by Dean Inge from the pulpit of St. Paul's Cathedral on April 4, 1915. It begins with the famous line, "If I should die, think only this of me: / That there is some corner of a foreign field / That is forever England." *The Dead* expresses a view of the nobility of war that few in England would still retain by the war's end in 1918:

Blow out, you bugles, over the rich Dead!
 There's none of these so lonely and poor of old,
 But, dying, has made us rarer gifts than gold
 These laid the world away; poured out the red
 Sweet wine of youth; gave up the years to be
 Of work and joy, and that unhoped serene,
 That men call age; and those who would have been,
 Their sons, they gave, their immortality.

Blow, bugles, blow! They brought us, for our dearth,
 Holiness, lacked so long, and Love, and Pain.
 Honour has come back, as a king, to earth,
 And paid his subjects with a royal wage;
 And Nobleness walks in our ways again;
 And we have come into our heritage.

A work by a lesser poet, Owen Seaman, titled *Pro patria* expresses a similar sentiment, though from the perspective of one too old to go off to war. Two of the poem's nine stanzas provide a sense of what it advises those headed into battle:

Others may spurn the pledge of land to land,
 May with the brute sword stain a gallant past;
 But by the seal to which you set your hand,
 Thank God, you still stand fast!

Forth, then, to front that peril of the deep
 With smiling lips and in your eyes the light,
 Steadfast and confident, of those who keep
 Their storied scutcheon bright.

The poem's title is based on a line from the Roman poet Horace: *Dulce et decorum est pro patria mori*. (It is sweet and proper to die for one's country.)

The kind of poetry that Brooke and Seaman wrote at the outset of World War I became much rarer after the war. While there have always been artists who have focused on the unheroic aspects of war, the conflicts of the twentieth century made their work far more acceptable than it would have been in an earlier period.

Antithesis: The Unheroic Aspects of War

Wilfred Owen and Siegfried Sassoon, both of whom experienced more of the First World War than either Brooke or Seaman, provide a very different take on war in their poetry. Owen's *Dulce et decorum est*, in fact, treats with scorn the line from Horace that supplied Seaman's title as well. The poem describes a march in which soldiers, having lost their boots, "limped on, blood-shod" until a chemical attack forces them to put on gas masks. After explaining what it was like to witness the horrible death of a comrade who failed to get his mask on in time, Owen concludes,

If in some smothering dreams you too could pace
Behind the wagon that we flung him in,
And watch the white eyes writhing in his face,
His hanging face, like a devil's sick of sin;
If you could hear, at every jolt, the blood
Come gargling from the froth-corrupted lungs,
Obscene as cancer, bitter as the cud
Of vile, incurable sores on innocent tongues,-
My friend, you would not tell with such high zest
To children ardent for some desperate glory,
The old Lie: *Dulce et decorum est*
Pro patria mori.

Siegfried Sassoon captured very succinctly the constant presence of death in war in *The Dug-Out*, an eight-line poem that describes his premonition of a friend's death in a foxhole. It concludes:

You are too young to fall asleep for ever;
And when you sleep you remind me of the dead.

The poet who looked most clearly at death in World War II was probably Randall Jarrell. In *Losses* he wrote, "In bombers named for girls, we burned / The cities we had learned about in school— / Till our lives wore out; our bodies lay among / The people we had killed and never seen." In the more famous *Death of the Ball Turret Gunner*, he began, "From my mother's sleep I fell into the State" and concluded, "When I died they washed me out of the turret with a hose."

The tendency of modern poets to describe war plainly and to urge its renunciation may be why Lyndon Johnson once told members of his staff, "I don't want anything to do with poets." His aversion was clearly political rather than aesthetic: one who had visited the White House had used the occasion to criticize the Vietnam War.¹⁶

As war has become more destructive, artists have focused more and more on the baser realities of war. After all, there is no virtue to be celebrated in a massacre. The work that, perhaps above all other twentieth-century paintings, is considered the iconic antiwar statement, Pablo Picasso's *Guernica*, offers a good place to start an examination of visual art that presents the more chilling aspects of war.

Guernica was painted for the Spanish Pavilion in the 1937 World's Fair in Paris, an event that had as its theme a celebration of modern technology. In spite of the ongoing economic depression, wars in Spain, Manchuria, and Ethiopia, and ominous developments in Germany, the World's Fair exuded a spirit of optimism about the prospects for a better world through technological development. *Guernica*, however, would prove to be a more prophetic statement about the impact of technology on the world, at least over the course of the next eight years.

On April 27, 1937, the German Condor legion, fighting on behalf of Generalissimo Francisco Franco's forces in the Spanish Civil War, bombed the Basque village of Guernica for over three hours. For the Germans, the attack was an exercise to test the effectiveness of tactics that would become part of their *Blitzkrieg*, or "lightning war," strategy two years later. Sixteen hundred people, all of them noncombatants, were killed or wounded.

Picasso was inspired to take the assault on *Guernica* as the theme of his painting for the Spanish Pavilion by Parisian newspaper coverage of the event and by the massive May Day demonstration that he witnessed, one that included angry protesters condemning the attack. He began making sketches for the mural immediately and finished the work three months later.

Guernica was not Picasso's only antiwar work. Toward the end of World War II, he executed another large canvas with shading and composition similar to *Guernica*. It also depicts a massacre. *The Charnel House* (1944-45) was based on newspaper photographs and seems to suggest either the slaughter that occurred in Nazi concentration camps or the many killings of civilians that occurred at the hands of soldiers. Although the scene shifts in *The Charnel House* from the open air where people are killed by bombs while shopping in the market to the more intimate setting of a kitchen or dining room near a table spread for a meal, the figures are still contorted in their unnatural deaths.

In 1951, drawing on news reports of a massacre at Sinchon in North Korea, Picasso painted *Massacre in Korea* depicting a group of unarmed civilians being shot at close range, apparently by anti-communist forces. The composition of *Massacre in Korea* calls to mind Francisco Goya's *The Third of May 1808*, a painting that, along with a series of prints entitled *The Disasters of War*, reflected Goya's struggle to come to terms with the Peninsular War of 1808-12. The large canvas shows French soldiers, early in the conflict, executing a group of civilians in reprisal for an attack by partisans. The scene depicted by Goya—the murder of innocents in response to guerrilla warfare—has been an unfortunate part of war throughout history, and repeatedly during World War II. For example, on March 24, 1944, 335 Italians were massacred by a German unit at the Fosse Ardeatine near Rome. On June 10, 1944, 642 civilians were massacred by a German SS division in Oradour-sur-Glane, France. *The Third of May 1808* is clearly political in character, but some of Goya's best commentary on the problem of governments taking on their own people came in a work that is much less overtly political.

During a period of withdrawal from public life, Goya painted a number of disturbing scenes, some directly onto the walls of Quinta del Sordo, the home near Madrid that he

occupied beginning in 1819. One of the images from among what art historians have called the “Black Paintings”—and one of the most famous works held by the Prado—is *Saturn Devouring One of His Sons*.

The painting depicts Saturn—Cronus in Greek mythology—grotesquely biting the arm off the headless torso of one of his sons. Saturn, who had seized power from his own father, Uranus, was obsessed by the prophecy that he would in turn be overthrown by his own offspring. He sought to avoid this fate by consuming each of his children at birth. Jupiter (Zeus), however, was hidden by his mother from Saturn and, in time, fulfilled the prophecy.

For Goya, living in Spain under an often brutal French occupation during the Peninsular War (1808-1814) followed by independence and the revocation of the liberal Spanish constitution by King Ferdinand VII, Saturn may well have symbolized the powerful state at war with its own people. Certainly others have supplied that interpretation in similar circumstances. In 1964, the military in Brazil (with the support of the U.S. government) overthrew democratically elected president Joao Goulart and created a “national security state” under the rule of a succession of generals. The military dictatorship there would last until 1985. Brazil was not alone. Other Latin American governments—among them Argentina, Chile, Paraguay, and Uruguay—fell under the sway of the national security doctrine’s perverse belief that the armed forces were required to defeat vast conspiracies inside the state. As a consequence, tens of thousands of citizens, many of them university students, were, in a manner of speaking, devoured by the military, ostensibly to protect the state from communists but in reality to protect military *juntas* fearful of being overthrown. In Argentina under the military regime, an estimated 30,000 people were “disappeared.” Eventually, the mothers of the disappeared—including the courageous Madres de la Plaza de Mayo in Argentina—acted, like Saturn’s wife Ops, not only to save their children but to ensure that those devouring them would be overthrown.

Under circumstances like these, *Saturn Devouring One of His Sons* is an especially evocative work. But if it can be said to have anything to do with war (even an internal war), an allegorical reading is required. Someone like Goya, aware of cases in which government troops had executed civilians in retaliation for attacks by partisans, could easily have been drawn to the myth of Saturn because of its allegorical possibilities.

Allegory demands more from the viewer than a work such as *The Third of May 1808* does. It is also open to a wider range of interpretations. These characteristics of allegory make the genre especially well-suited to those situations in which the objective is not merely to convey information but to encourage critical thinking.

Visions of Peace

Poets and painters have often played an important role in our collective contemplation of war by providing visions of peace. An allegorical work that does so while leaving little room for misinterpretation is Edward Hicks’ *The Peaceable Kingdom*. Hicks, a Quaker minister who made his living as a sign painter at first, took as the inspiration for a work on peacemaking the prophetic (and poetic) words of Isaiah:

The wolf shall lie with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the kid, the calf and the lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them.

The cow and the bear shall graze, their young shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox.

The nursing child shall play over the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put its hand on the adder's den.

They will not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain; for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea. (Isa. 11:6-9)

In the foreground of *The Peaceable Kingdom* the scene described by Isaiah is faithfully rendered. But lest the meaning be misunderstood, a scene in the background shows a group of Quakers—representatives of William Penn's colony, presumably—parleying with a group of Native Americans. Peaceful accommodation the Quaker way is contrasted in this mute fashion with the alternative model being implemented nationally at about the time Hicks began painting the various versions of this subject. On May 26, 1830, President Andrew Jackson signed the Indian Removal Act that mandated the relocation of Native Americans living east of the Mississippi River to federal lands in the West. It was the migration of the "Five Civilized Tribes" from the southeastern part of the United States to Oklahoma that produced the Trail of Tears and renewed warfare between U.S. government forces and certain tribes that resisted removal. But what *The Peaceable Kingdom* fails to convey is the fact that Pennsylvania's pacifist governors were not above hiring mercenaries to fight native peoples when they deemed it necessary.

A more challenging allegorical work is Winslow Homer's *The Soldier in a New Field*. Homer, best remembered for seascapes and other works that seem far removed from war, painted numerous scenes of combat and its effects during the Civil War. After the war, he painted a Union soldier (identifiable through his blue pants and, tossed to the side, blue coat) using a scythe to harvest wheat. The scythe, of course, is the instrument used by the Grim Reaper and ripe grain being mowed down—a common eucharistic symbol in Christian art—further conveys the idea of Death. (Alternatively, and carrying the Christian symbolism further, it may be resurrection we should see.) Central to the work, however, is a survivor—a soldier who has returned from war to embrace the work of his pre-war life. The work calls us to think about the ubiquity of death in war and the inability even of survivors to escape its impact. But it also reminds us that there is the promise of a return to life and productive work after war.

The academic study of war has been closely bounded by the necessity of working within the limits of what is actually attainable—so much so that students of war have often failed to envision alternatives. As Otto von Bismarck succinctly put it, "Politics is the art of the possible." By characterizing Woodrow Wilson and those who supported his faith in the possibility of ending war as "utopians," E. H. Carr effectively excluded the examination of visionary models of global politics from the "scientific" study of international relations. As a consequence, it has often been difficult for visionaries—those with new, untested ideas about what could be—to break through the dominant realism of the discipline of international politics.

One of the virtues of poetry—and the arts more generally—is that, while hard-bitten realism is certainly a possibility (the war poetry of Wilfred Owen and Randall Jarrell testify to this), imagination is also valued. Poets have often seen—and described—alternatives that those constrained by what is cannot perceive. In *Locksley Hall*, Alfred, Lord Tennyson offered a futuristic vision of war and peace through the musings of a young soldier on his return to his boyhood home.

For I dipt into the future, far as human eye could see,
Saw the Vision of the world, and all the wonder that would be;

Saw the heavens fill with commerce, argosies of magic sails,
Pilots of the purple twilight dropping down with costly bales;

Heard the heavens fill with shouting, and there rain'd a ghastly dew
From the nations' airy navies grappling in the central blue;

Far along the world-wide whisper of the south-wind rushing warm,
With the standards of the peoples plunging thro' the thunder-storm;

Till the war-drum throb'd no longer, and the battle-flags were furl'd
In the Parliament of man, the Federation of the world.

There the common sense of most shall hold a fretful realm in awe,
And the kindly earth shall slumber, lapt in universal law.

The historian Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. reported that Harry S. Truman was a fan of the poem and carried a portion of it with him in his wallet. More recently, Yale historian Paul Kennedy titled his book on the United Nations *The Parliament of Man*.

Poets can also remind us of the peace that already exists even though it may be overlooked. William Stafford's poem *At the Un-National Monument Along the Canadian Border* begins by pointing out "the field where the battle did not happen, / where the unknown soldier did not die."

The Didactic Purposes of Art

The visual arts have long been used to teach. In fact, many of the world's greatest art treasures are found in Christian churches and monasteries where biblical narratives are depicted in paintings and sculptures produced for the benefit of illiterates. A secular parallel is found in Siena's Palazzo Pubblico where Ambrogio Lorenzetti frescoed the walls of the Sala della Nove—the chamber in which Siena's rulers met to discuss matters of state policy—with a work that we know as the *Allegory of Good Government and Bad Government*. On the wall that separates the two depictions of the effects of good and bad government—noteworthy in the history of Western art as perhaps the first landscapes—is an elaborate rendering of the virtues associated with those who govern well. The figure of Justice is prominently displayed and bears this admonition: "Diligite iustitiam qui iudicatis terram." (Love justice, you who govern the world.) The line is from Dante's *Paradiso*.

In a poem that uses dark humor to deliver its message about war, e. e. cummings lamented the fact that some people have trouble understanding that war is hell. In *plato told*, he said: "plato told / him :he couldn't / believe it." Jesus, Lao-Tsze, and General Sherman also told him, but he wouldn't hear it. So "it took / a nipponized bit of / the old sixth / avenue / el ;in the top of his head :to tell / him."

Peter Appleton's *The Responsibility* offers an excellent example of a poem designed not only to make a point but to strike the conscience of the reader. It follows the form of the nursery rhyme *The House that Jack Built*: "This is the farmer sowing his corn, / That kept the cock that crowed in the morn, / That waked the priest all shaven and shorn" and so forth. In Appleton's poem, the subject is nuclear war. It concludes with these stanzas:

I am the man who fills the till,
 Who pays the tax, who foots the bill
 That guarantees the Bomb he makes
 For him to load for him to drop
 If orders come from one who gets
 The word passed on to him by one
 Who waits to hear it from the man
 Who gives the word to use the Bomb.

I am the man behind it all;
 I am the one responsible.

In the end, it may be that we will come to understand that painters and poets have made two key contributions to the abolition of war: they have presented its true nature and have forced us to confront our own responsibility for it.

The Abolition of War: A Battle for Hearts and Minds

On May 4, 1965, President Lyndon Johnson told the assembled members of the Texas Electric Cooperatives that “we must be ready to fight in Viet-Nam, but the ultimate victory will depend upon the hearts and minds of the people that actually live out there.”¹⁷ Johnson was not the first to refer to “hearts and minds” in the context of war, but his use of the phrase, combined with the subsequent failure of the United States to win hearts and minds in Vietnam, has made it a fixture in modern discourse about war. (An Academy Award-winning documentary about the Vietnam War directed by Peter Davis titled *Hearts and Minds* also played a role in popularizing the phrase).

If winning wars—or at least defeating insurgencies—involves an appeal to hearts and minds, so does teaching war. There is a human dimension of war that can easily be lost in discussions of political aims, diplomatic maneuvers, military strategy, and social or economic transformations. The poetry of Owen, Sassoon, and Jarrell, the memoirs of Dunant, Remarque, and O’Brien, the drawings of Goya and the paintings of Picasso, are important for the way they reveal the human costs of war in ways that dramatize and personalize what may otherwise seem both distant in time and space and highly abstract.

An effort by those in the social sciences (and especially those engaged in the study of war) to engage the imagination and to add hearts to minds as we address the war *problématique* has the potential to undo some of the fragmentation of knowledge that Wendell Berry and others have lamented. But, more importantly, it has the potential to restore a measure of humanity to a subject that has often been too cold and clinical for the issues it addresses. Ken Booth, another holder of the Woodrow Wilson Chair of International Politics that Lord Davies established in 1919, once complained about specialists who have “provided the Eichmanns of Armageddon. These are the strategists in their nuclear counting houses, who rationalize the inhuman.”¹⁸

To counter this it is worth remembering, as Berry noted, that “the thing being made in a university is humanity.” The university should produce “responsible heirs and members of human culture.”¹⁹ If this is correct, then war—the destroyer of humanity—stands in opposition to the university and especially to that aspect of the university—the teaching of liberal arts—that preserves and passes on human culture. It is part of the vision of poets,

painters, and others, however, that this thing called “culture” should not simply stand in opposition to war but should be part of the solution. Stark representations of the reality of war, imaginative alternatives to politics as usual, and penetrating lessons on human folly can all come from the pens of poets and playwrights, the brushes of painters, the direction of filmmakers, and even the artistry of musicians. The materials are there for our use if we can overcome the fragmentation of knowledge. ■

Notes

1. The particular works I have in mind here are Michael Walzer, *Just and Unjust Wars: A Moral Argument with Historical Illustrations* (New York: Basic Books, 1977); Jean Bethke Elshtain, *Women and War* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995); and John Keegan, *The Face of Battle* (New York: Viking Press, 1976).
2. John Paul Lederach, *The Moral Imagination: The Art and Soul of Building Peace* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).
3. Wendell Berry, “The Loss of the University,” *Home Economics* (New York: North Point Press, 1987), 76.
4. C. P. Snow, *The Two Cultures* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998).
5. Snow, ix–xvii.
6. Zac Anderson, “Rick Scott wants to shift university funding away from some degrees,” *Herald-Tribune*, October 10, 2011 (<http://politics.heraldtribune.com/2011/10/10/rick-scott-wants-to-shift-university-funding-away-from-some-majors/>).
7. Doug Lederman, “Playing Politics with Poli Sci,” *Inside Higher Ed*, May 11, 2012 (<http://www.insidehighered.com/news/2012/05/11/house-passes-bill-bar-spending-political-science-research>).
8. L. S. Woolf, *International Government* (New York: Brentano’s, 1916). Woolf is perhaps best known as the husband of Virginia Woolf.
9. Edward O. Wilson, *Consilience: The Unity of Knowledge* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1998), 8.
10. Vitruvius, *The Ten Books on Architecture*, Book 1, trans. Morris Hicky Morgan (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1914), 5–6 (<http://www.gutenberg.org/files/20239/20239-h/29239-h.htm>).
11. Vitruvius, 10–11 (<http://www.gutenberg.org/files/20239/20239-h/29239-h.htm>).
12. Grenville Clark, “Letters to the Times,” *New York Times*, April 22, 1955, 24 (ProQuest).
13. See Joshua S. Goldstein, *Winning the War on War: The Decline of Armed Conflict Worldwide* (New York: Dutton, 2011); and Steven Pinker, *The Better Angels of Our Nature: Why Violence Has Declined* (New York: Viking, 2011).
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- p. 8 Union private infantry uniform, from plate 172. Photo courtesy of *Atlas to Accompany the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of War, 1 January 1895) via Wikimedia Commons, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Union_Private_infantry_uniform.png.
- p. 10 A plate from Wilfred Owen's 1920 *Poems by Wilfred Owen*, showing the author. Photo courtesy of Wikimedia Commons, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wilfred_Owen#/media/File:Wilfred_Owen_plate_from_Poems_\(1920\).jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wilfred_Owen#/media/File:Wilfred_Owen_plate_from_Poems_(1920).jpg).
- p. 11 Lt. Gen. George Patton observes II Corps armor preparing for engagement with German forces in Tunisia, 1943. Photo courtesy of the National Archives.
- p. 13 Keith Douglas in the desert in Egypt during the Second World War. Photo courtesy of the War Poets Association, <https://warpoets.org/conflicts/world-war-ii/keith-castellain-douglas-1920-1944/>.
- p. 14 Soldiers of the Army's 3rd Battalion, 34th Infantry Regiment, 35th Infantry Division, take cover behind rocks to shield themselves from exploding mortar shells near the Hantan River in central Korea, 11 April 1951. Photo courtesy of the U.S. Army/Library of Congress, <https://www.defense.gov/Multimedia/Photos/igphoto/2002948180/>.
- p. 15 U.S. Army soldiers assigned to the 24th Infantry Regiment move up the firing line, 18 July 1950. The 24th was part of the occupation of Japan until it deployed to Korea in June 1950. Photo courtesy of the U.S. Army.
- p. 16 A Vietnam War veteran, wearing a partial uniform, maneuvers his wheelchair past the Vietnam Memorial Wall on 5 February 2017. Photo by Inga Spence, Alamy Stock Photo.
- p. 18 Master Sgt. James Haskell overlooks Ground Zero on 11 September 2001. Smoldering fires of the World Trade Center are reflected in the visor of a U.S. Air Force MH-53M helicopter flight engineer days after the September 11th terrorist attack on the United States. Photo by Staff Sgt Michelle Leonard, 1st Combat Camera Squadron.
- p. 19 A firefighter stands under the flag of Two World Trade Center (Tower Two) 15 September 2001. Photo by PHC Eric Tilford, Fleet Combat Camera Atlantic via the Navy Archives Collection, <https://www.history.navy.mil/research/archives/digital-exhibits-highlights/photo-galleries-9-11/fleet-combat-camera-atlantic-nyc-911/image-04.html>.

- p. 20 FBI agents, firefighters, rescue workers, and engineers work at the Pentagon crash site on 14 September 2001, where a hijacked American Airlines flight slammed into the building on 11 September. The terrorist attack caused extensive damage to the west face of the building and followed similar attacks on the twin towers of the World Trade Center in New York City. Photo by Tech. Sgt. Cedric H. Rudisill, U.S. Air Force.
- p. 21 U.S. soldiers reading the *New York Post* with the headline “WAR” three days after 9/11 terrorist attacks in New York City at ground zero. Photo by Peter Casolino, Alamy Stock Photo.
- p. 22 Soldiers from 17th Fires Brigade and 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 4th Infantry Division, arrive by air and convoy 11 August 2009 to assist the Iraqi army distribute humanitarian aid to the citizens of Faddaqrhryah and Bahar in the Basra Province of Iraq. Photo by Spc. Marurice A. Galloway, U.S. Army, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Flickr_-_The_U.S._Army_-_Humanitarian_assistance_arrival.jpg.
- p. 23 A soldier is overcome as she mourns the loss of Army Sgt. Dustin D. Laird at Camp Taqqadam’s Mainside Chapel 8 August 2006. Photo by Lance Cpl. Geoffrey P. Ingersoll, U.S. Marine Corps, <https://www.dvidshub.net/image/27514/soldiers-gather-mourn-fallen-hero>.
- p. 26 A silhouette of a mosque. Photo by Mohamed Hassan via Pixabay.
- p. 28. Commander of Troop A, 1st Squadron, 113th Cavalry Regiment, Task Force Redhorse, 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 34th Infantry Division, Task Force Red Bulls, Capt. Jason Knueven, of Inwood, Iowa, grasps the dog tags of a fallen hero as Sgt. 1st Class Travis Bentz, A Troop’s acting first sergeant, pays his respects during a memorial ceremony at Joint Combat Outpost Pul-e Sayad, Afghanistan, 25 April 2011. Photo by Staff Sgt. Ashlee J. L. Sherrill, Combined joint Task Force 101, <https://www.dvidshub.net/image/394598/redhorse-soldiers-mourn-loss-fallen-hero>.
- p. 29 Photo of the blue and pink Andromeda Galaxy. Photo by Miriam Espacio, <https://www.pexels.com/photo/blue-pink-and-white-andromeda-galaxy-way-110854/>.
- p. 32 Soldiers from Company C, 1st Squadron, 8th Cavalry Regiment, 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 1st Cavalry Division, conduct a dismounted patrol around Tarin Kowt, Afghanistan, 12 January 2013, as part of an exercise to validate them as the Theater Reserve Force. Photo by Cpl. Alex Flynn, U.S. Army, <https://media.defense.gov/2014/Jan/21/2001124756/1088/820/0/311876-Q-CGK54-576.jpg>.
- p. 33 Photo courtesy of the U.S. Army, https://www.army.mil/article/56409/cao_a_pillar_of_strength.
- p. 35 OCP Scorpion W2 uniform 22 November 2019, the current issue of the U.S. Army combat uniform. Photo courtesy of Wikimedia Commons, https://de.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Datei:OCP_SW2.jpg.

- p. 36 Photo courtesy of the U.S. Army, <https://media.defense.gov/2013/Jul/24/2001119404/-1/-1/0/639679-H-QLN81-754.jpg>.
- p. 37 Demonstrations against Iraq war in London in April 2006. Photo courtesy of willem via Flickr, <https://www.flickr.com/photos/willemgo/943912675>.
- p. 38 A U.S. Army Stryker on a mission to recover another damaged Stryker in support of American forces in Baqubah, Iraq, is destroyed by an improvised explosive device on 10 May 2007. Photo courtesy of the U.S. Army.
- p. 38 *Portrait of Monsieur de Lavoisier and his Wife, chemist Marie-Anne Pierrette Paulze*, 1788, oil on canvas, 259.7 cm x 194.6 cm. Painting courtesy of the Metropolitan Museum of Art via Wikimedia Commons, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Antoine_Lavoisier.
- p. 39 A destroyed Iraqi T-55 Main Battle Tank sits along a roadside during Operation Iraqi Freedom 13 April 2003. Photo by Staff Sgt. Bryan Reed, U.S. Marine Corps; <https://catalog.archives.gov/id/6634432>.
- p. 40 Photos by William M. Darley.
- p. 41 Sgt. 1st Class Ed Franco plays with local refugee children in Dar Ul Aman, Kabul, Afghanistan, 8 April 2007, in support of a volunteer community outreach program. The program includes a children diversion tactic that allowed volunteers to distribute two hundred bags filled with clothes, shoes, and toys without distraction and is provided every month with the help of donated items from U.S. citizens. Photo courtesy of the Department of Defense, <https://www.defense.gov/Multimedia/Photos/igphoto/2001144135/>.
- p. 43 1st Sgt. Shane Chapman, from 1st Battalion, 8th Infantry Regiment, 3rd Brigade, 4th Infantry Division, yells for a medic to treat an Iraqi civilian injured in a vehicle borne improvised explosive device explosion 6 March 2008 in Mosul, Iraq. Photo by Staff Sgt. Jason Robertson, U.S. Army, https://www.army.mil/article/108143/manning_guilty_of_20_specifications_but_not_aiding_enemy.
- p. 44 Soldiers conduct a patrol in Ja'ara, Iraq, 31 August 2007. The soldiers are from 3rd Platoon, Bravo Company, 1st Battalion, 15th Infantry Regiment, 3rd Brigade Combat Team, 3rd Infantry Division. Photo by Sgt. Timothy Kingston, U.S. Army, <https://www.flickr.com/photos/soldiersmediacenter/1397390074/in/photostream/>.
- p. 45 A fallen tree in Twickenham Rough Junction, London. Photo by Jim Linwood via Flickr, <https://www.flickr.com/photos/brighton/50227748088>.
- p. 46 Sgt. 1st Class Michael McKinney, 2nd Infantry Brigade, 8th Infantry Regiment, and an Iraqi soldier from the 8th Iraqi army oversee a group of applicants waiting to register for the Sons of Iraq in Diwaniyah, Iraq, 25 October 2008. U.S. forces supported the Iraqi army as they continued to move toward conducting operations

- without U.S. support. Photo by Sr. Airman Eric Harris, Joint Combat Camera Center Iraq, https://www.army.mil/article/13697/sons_of_iraq_registration.
- p. 47 Taliban fighters are seen on the back of a vehicle in Kabul, Afghanistan. Photo by Stringer/Sputnik via the Associated Press.
- p. 48 An Army soldier assigned to the 431st Civil Affairs Battalion, 101st Airborne Division, helps to secure an area of downtown Mosul, Iraq, during a violent demonstration by protesters during Operation Iraqi Freedom, 12 June 2003. Photo by Staff Sgt. Ronald Mitchell, U.S. Army, courtesy of the National Archives, <https://catalog.archives.gov/id/6625219>.
- p. 51 Army soldiers and an interpreter sit with a Spin Boldak resident in Afghanistan's Kandahar Province, 15 September 2011. Photo courtesy of the Department of Defense, <https://media.defense.gov/2011/Sep/26/2001167088/-1/-1/0/125805-B-XWJ98-028.jpg>.
- p. 52 A Stryker Infantry Carrier Vehicle lies on its side after a blast from a buried improvised explosive device 6 January 2007 in Iraq. The Stryker was recovered and protected its soldiers on more missions until another bomb finally put it out of action. Photo courtesy of the U.S. Army, https://www.army.mil/article/26877/rethinking_ied_strategies_from_iraq_to_afghanistan.
- p. 55 Air Force Tech. Sgt. Jim Araos, 39th Air Base Wing Public Affairs office noncommissioned officer in charge of community engagement, poses during a photo shoot 23 October 2019 at Incirlik Air Base, Turkey. Araos faced numerous consecutive challenges in his active-duty career and recovered from depression with the help of a military family life counselor. Photo by Staff Sgt. Joshua Magbanua, U.S. Air Force, <https://www.dvidshub.net/image/6116684/long-we-alive-we-can-rebuild>.
- p. 60 City elders drink tea and snack on cookies during a shura at the government center, 22 May 2010, Marjah, Afghanistan. The shura marked the first in a plan to hold monthly meetings between city elders and government officials. Photo by Lance Cpl. James W. Clark, Regimental Combat Team-7, 1st Marine Division Public Affairs, <https://www.flickr.com/photos/isafmedia/4662760020/in/photostream/>.
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- p. 63 Air Force Airman Jodi Lange, 20th Medical Support Squadron, poses for an illustration photo depicting an abused woman silenced by her abuser as a result of sexual assault, Shaw Air Force Base, South Carolina, 25 March 2012. Photo illustration by Airman 1st Class Ashley L. Gardner, U.S. Air Force, <https://media.defense.gov/2012/Mar/28/2000165924/-1/-1/0/120325-F-VU971-003.JPG>.

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- p. 67 Artistic AI rendering by Charlotte Richter, Army University Press.
- p. 68 Composite graphic by Michael Hogg, *Military Review*.
- p. 69 Staff Sgt. Josh Hemminger, 833rd Engineer Company, hugs his two sons Brandon (*left*) and Austin just before leaving for Afghanistan. These engineers deployed to Afghanistan in support of Operation Enduring Freedom. Photo by Staff Sgt. Chad D. Nelson, Iowa Army National Guard, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Saying_goodbye_\(8430000604\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Saying_goodbye_(8430000604).jpg).
- p. 70 Task Force Currahee soldiers from Company C, 1st Battalion of the 506th Infantry Regiment, 4th Brigade Combat Team, 101st Airborne Division are led out of Forward Operating Base Khayr-Khot Castle by Afghan National Army soldiers on a presence patrol to the city 6 October 2010. The soldiers patrolled the city to interact with the people and reassure them that they are there for their security. Photo by Spc. Luther Boothe Jr., U.S. Army, <https://api.army.mil/e2/c/-images/2010/10/16/88816/army.mil-88816-2010-10-16-071001.jpg>.
- p. 71 This still image made from video released by the U.S. Central Command on Tuesday, 23 September 2014, shows a structure in Tall Al Qitar, Syria moments after a U.S. airstrike. Photo courtesy of the U.S. Central Command.
- p. 72 Sgt. 1st Class Alwyn Cashe. Photo courtesy of the U.S. Army.
- p. 72 Soldiers guard a nearby central petroleum infrastructure in Syria with their M2 Bradley Infantry Fighting Vehicle in the Central Command area of responsibility, 20 November 2020. Photo by Spc. Jensen Guillory, U.S. Army.
- p. 73 Photo from <http://theconcordian.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/03/ArmyBootsWEB.jpg>.
- p. 74 Sniper Spc. James Wanser keeps watch in the early morning hours of 8 September 2011 while his battle buddy catches a few precious minutes of sleep in Paktika Province of Afghanistan. Photo by Spc. Ken Scar, U.S. Army.
- p. 75 Air Force Sr. Airman Ryan S. Godar, a tactical air control party specialist with the 169th Air Support Operations Squadron, cleans the bolt of his M4 carbine after a weapons qualification at Operation Northern Strike in Alpena, Michigan, 15 August 2014. Photo by Staff Sgt. Lealan Buehrer, U.S. Air Force, <https://www.dvidshub.net/image/1510198/northern-strike-2014>.

- p. 76 Artistic AI rendering by Charlotte Richter, Army University Press.
- p. 77 Sgt. Ian Rivera-Aponte, a U.S. Army Reserve sniper and infantryman with the 100th Infantry Battalion, Honolulu, poses for a promotional photo shoot for Army Reserve recruiting at Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst, New Jersey, 26 July 2017. Photo by Master Sgt. Michel Sauret, U.S. Army Reserve.
- p. 78 A 354th Expeditionary Fighter Squadron patch is displayed on the head-set of an A-10 Thunderbolt II attack aircraft crew chief during a theater security package deployment to Lask Air Base, Poland, 13 July 2015. Photo by Staff Sgt. Christopher Ruano, U.S. Air Force, <https://www.dvidshub.net/image/2081308/10s-take-skies-poland>.
- p. 79 Army Staff Sgt. Hassan Kafi (*right*) shakes hands with an Iraqi soldier before conducting a weapons qualification on Camp Taji, Iraq, 8 March 2015. Kafi was a linguist assigned to the 82nd Airborne Division's Company C, 2nd Battalion, 505th Parachute Infantry Regiment, 3rd Brigade Combat Team. Photo courtesy of the Department of Defense, <https://www.defense.gov/Multimedia/Photos/igphoto/2001138048/>.
- p. 80 A multipurpose canine team provides security for a nearby mortar firing position in Deir ez-Zor Province, Syria, October 2018. Photo by Sgt. Matthew Crane, U.S. Army, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:U.S._Army_Special_Forces_Multi-Purpose_Canine_team.jpg.
- p. 82 Soldiers assigned to the 82nd Airborne Division prepare to board a U.S. Air Force C-17 Globemaster III aircraft in support of the final noncombatant evacuation operation (NEO) missions at Hamid Karzai International Airport, Afghanistan, 30 August 2021. The Afghanistan NEO was the largest noncombatant evacuation operation ever conducted by the U.S. military. Photo by Sr. Airman Taylor Crul, U.S. Air Force.
- p. 83 Maj. Gen. Chris Donahue, commander of the U.S. Army 82nd Airborne Division, XVIII Airborne Corps, boards a C-17 cargo plane at the Hamid Karzai International Airport in Kabul, Afghanistan. Donahue was the final American service member to depart Afghanistan; his departure closed the U.S. mission to evacuate American citizens, Afghan Special Immigrant Visa applicants, and vulnerable Afghans. Photo by Master Sgt. Alex Burnett, U.S. Army, <https://www.dvidshub.net/image/6810419/last-american-soldier-leaves-afghanistan>.
- p. 88 Lt. Gen. Jim Lovelace, U.S. Army Central commanding general, addresses the crowd of service members, civilians, coalition forces troops, and Kuwaiti soldiers during a Memorial Day observance at Camp Buehring, Kuwait, 26 May 2008. More than four thousand service members are pictured on the wall behind Lovelace, which commemorated the sacrifices of those who had fallen during Operations Iraqi Freedom and Enduring Freedom. Photo by Spc. Giancarlo Casem, U.S. Army.



Medal of Honor

Maj. John J. Duffy

Maj. John J. Duffy was awarded the Medal of Honor for his actions on 14–15 April 1992 in the Central Highlands of the Republic of Vietnam while assigned to the 5th Special Forces Group and serving as a senior advisor to the 11th Airborne Battalion, 2nd Brigade, Airborne Division, Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN).

On 14 April, Duffy was directing the defense of Fire Support Base Charlie, which was surrounded by a battalion-sized enemy element. The ARVN battalion commander had been killed and Duffy wounded twice during an attack two days before, but Duffy had refused medical evacuation. That morning, he was wounded again as he moved toward enemy anti-aircraft positions to direct airstrikes, but again he refused evacuation. Instead, as the enemy began pounding the base with artillery, Duffy remained in an exposed position to direct gunship fire on the enemy positions, which temporarily stopped the barrage. During the lull, he supervised moving the wounded to a safe location and redistributed ammunition. However, enemy artillery fire resumed, and Duffy once again

moved to an exposed position to direct gunship fire. Later that evening, as the enemy assaulted the fire base from all sides, Duffy moved from position to position to spot targets and adjust fire, and ultimately, to direct gunship fire on a friendly position that had been compromised. That evening, when it was clear that the base would be overrun, he organized a withdrawal. Duffy continued to call for fire on the enemy and was the last man out of the base.

The next morning, the remaining soldiers were ambushed as they move toward an extraction site. Duffy organized the men into a hasty defense to push the enemy back and then led them to the landing zone. He continued to direct gunship fire against the pursuing enemy, marked the LZ, and supervised the extraction. Duffy saved a South Vietnamese paratrooper who had fallen from the aircraft as he boarded; he was the last man onboard.

Duffy originally receive the Distinguished Service Cross for his actions, but it was upgraded fifty years later. He received sixty-three other awards for his time in service, including eight Purple Hearts.

Missing-in-Action Requiem

They were missing-in-action.
Their bodies were not recovered.
Their stories are not known.
Their deeds went unrecorded.

They went off on a war mission.
They were tasked to do reconnaissance.
They were tasked to bomb the enemy.
They patrolled in submarines.

No reports, no stories: missing-in-action.
Had they lived, they would speak:
“We fought the devils without knives.
We killed them until they killed us.”

“I aimed my bombs and they hit,
My plane exploded, hit by a missile.”
“We sank three enemy ships and were escaping,
They depth-charged us, we are at the bottom.”

Play the Pipes, and beat the drum slowly.
Dip the flag in honor of a fallen hero.
Let a tear run down your face in homage.
Salute a brave warrior. Missing-In-Action.

—Maj. John J. Duffy

Maj. (Ret.) John J. Duffy, a Medal of Honor awardee, is an accomplished and widely recognized poet, who has written extensive verse examining his experiences in combat as well as a wide variety of other subjects. He has written six books of poetry and has been previously nominated for the Pulitzer Prize. Two of his poems were selected to be inscribed on monuments. (Photo courtesy of the Department of Defense)



There is no instance of a country having benefited from prolonged warfare.

It is only one who is thoroughly acquainted with the evils of war that can thoroughly understand the profitable way of carrying it on.

The skillful soldier does not raise a second levy, neither are his supply-wagons loaded more than twice.

—Sun Tzu



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