

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*