

HOMECOMING

Roll Call

With only two days left before leaving to come home
we broke the line of our convoy,
putrid sitting ducks all alone.

Sardines jammed in a can,
our armored vehicle with a hole,
we rolled along the dusty road,
music blaring high, spirits riding low.

A shadow sweeping from above
over my arm blocked the sun,
I followed the cascading light
in time to catch the frolicking sight,
gleaming insurgents leering bright,
peering over the lip of the Stryker's open eye.

Latched through the rungs of an overhanging bridge,
their rabid feral monkey screams
rang through the ridge.

We'd driven straight below
their trapezing mortar circus show,
and with a final lull in the savage cacophony
they opened fire, loose machine guns blazing free.

They danced and they pranced
frolicking with glee
arms flailing wildly, grenades they tossed and heaved
with an innocence, a peace, a childlike calamity.

It dropped from the bridge pirouetting grace
the tiny delicate egg
somersaulting into place
straight through our hatch,
a perfect home run I could catch.
Bouncing with a delicate note,
the grenade teetering, it rolled,

inches away, grazing the edge of my knee
and then, a quiet hush, and all explosive insanity.

A searing flash erupting in flames,
blanketing shrapnel, exploding marrow in my face.
Vaporized deep inside the armored belly's thickened hide
I rose from the depths, out of my charred splintered mind.
Rustling to be free from severed limbs above me
I clawed for the radio, ignoring the sight of raw bone
as I called in the code,
my resonating velvety tones
filled crackling airwaves with a sweet savory soul.

It certainly wasn't mine, that
voice that saved the rest in line,
alerting the convoy to the band
of lingering grenade-launching men of sand
peering over the bridge,
lying in wait
to ignite American fringe,
gnashing their gums to
bleed us dry,
to poison our freedom and take our privileged life.

Poor sordid souls, they lie and they try,
But one thing they discount,
the unholy wake of American Pride.

The Dream

Under the cover of leaky night
we sweep through the darkness, buzzing in flight.
Crossing through rivers of streaky lunar blue the iron bird idles,
bobbing up and over the bleared eye peeping sky.

Safely strapped away
in its belly of steely grey
our bodies bounce against the sides,

each soldier a Cracker Jack prize.

A whirring fly, we buzz around
the stretching blanket of quilted clouds
weaving closely in and out through
spiked mountain molars, torrential looming mounds.

Mangled great peaks stand in our way
We sift, we sink, we sweep
And we sway by each just out of reach,
A lose fire hose dancing, flailing forth furiously.

Deep at the edge of the endless horizon
We slow in our dip, our plunging energy rising.
The band of ants strapped onboard, unbuckle to go
Tread in line at the hind near the bird's meaty throat.

Lingering at the cusp of the enemy's scene
We bob at the mouth of the Tangi Valley ravine,
circling slowly, humming lowly,
surveying the menacing vein of an infested, bleeding, land
we go for the artery, a deadly mission perfectly planned.

Tails shoot out, thick black rope dangles down.
Wisping in the wind, I clench my gloved fists
around the surly rope, choking tightly the confines of his throat.
Jumping from the machine, to my fate my body springs.

Impenetrable boots hit the ground, troves of littered bodies slamming down.
Our first, final, reign of the coming day,
pitter patter, we land, we rise, we take.
Molding softly into the deadened fray, a desert wilderness of decrepit decay,
we blend with the root,
tipping and toeing,
boots never touching, dalliantly flowing.

Silent, I pray, kneeling under the retreating bird's thumping weigh,
my eye hooked by a noose, a flickering tantalizing whipping whoosh
cast on the jagged ridge's stony mantle. Moonlight shines across its face,
a stark formidable shape. It snaps in the wind,

a Taliban flag flying high,
stately amidst the stirring dawn's whispering light.

Shaming the delicate map of our step, pushing our heads to our chests,
It overshadows our careful dance,
Plucking our heart's most tender hand,
a lasting promise to our death, for America, we shall never forget.
Armored tight in the pride of his home, to the base, another body floats.
He rips it from the dirty peak, plucking the feather from the feral beast,
erupting with a carnal scream, a boobytrapped splintering beam
welcoming our surge, opening our mind, severing our nerves.
Ladies and gentleman, meet the IED.

A delicate twinkle shimmers within the flesh,
against exposed bone shiny shrapnel sits enmeshed.
Pungent plumes invade the cavern of our eyes,
stifling our view with smoke's billowy wiles.
Soot clogs the esophagus, grout is setting in the lungs,
a fiery breath of death clings tightly to each rib's rung.
Vengeful flames lick at the ground,
lapping up entrails of carnage all around,
enveloping the dewy innocence of my mind, and
my heart melts inside,
distending all at once, my final human sighs.

Thrashing and spiraling, through the dream I scream wildly.
The wheels spinning violently I rush towards my stampeding mind again.
Grasping through the night trying hard to win this fight,
ignoring the roar, I rev the engine amidst the gore,
pushing hard to start the car.
The ignition turns over into present day
spitting me out, far from that mountain base,
long and far from the bloody spray, my shredded body torn away.
I lay in my bed, drenched in a cold clammy sweat,
returned to my life, from my dream, a respite.

Closure

Flashing, firing, flaring, perspiring,

I shoot through my body, awakening violently.
Seared ridges of my skin, bleeding hope, sweating silently.
I wipe at the torment, branded truths pooling in the crease.
The dead weight of my head against the bed I lean tiredly.
Plummeting dread
pulling me ahead
through the rotten gorge of righteous calamity,
the dream never ends, doubt buries me in a heap beneath my insanity.

Steadily swinging
the pendulum drones mindlessly.
Tick tock it rocks
withered confines
of the hollowed clock of my humanity.
The coming of day, down it rains with sheer calamity,
Questions cascade through my brain's broken levies,
ritual reminders of the failures that subsume me,
a crazed man wanton, they drown me entirely.

Sunlight hits my naked shape. A tortured body finally awake.
Atrophied limbs from lack of use, a hazy mind after a failed reboot.
I'm weak, wasted, wrecked to the core,
but my heart surges like never before.

The espresso machine beeps with the same pinching screech
as the alarm on the base, black blaring hate filled with rage
while the fan's twirling gauge rattles its rickety laptop cage
like the rotor's battle cry,
thumping the air,
stirring the mire,
beating its giant wings
against the world's heavy eyes.

EOD explosions popping,
into the peaks Artillery's cannons firing,
insurgents launching rockets straight at the laces forged around our feet,
the soothing symphony of war,
it still haunts me.

Back and forth, I sit, my mind sways,

reaching towards life, retreating from the pain.

As my strength for the day sinks under the sun's surly rays
the beast of my core, tethered, bleeding, engorged,
thrashes wildly, twisting entirely, dying to be free,
a simple world held captive within me.

AMEN.

Bleeding with Friends

Back to bed. I rescind
my early morning attempt
to be free for a minute
from the lingering toils of war—
not the breaking, battering, sinking, or shattering,
but my wavering confidence in being sure
that my every intention had been pure to the core and
no alternate action could have heeded more,
no different decision might have salvaged our rapport.

Could I have saved him?
Tightened the cinch of the tourniquet's twisting grip?
Prevented the flood of morphine from drowning his last breath?
His open chest cavity heaving with doubt, he clung to the life seeping listlessly out,
a ripe fragmented carcass pulverized with pain,
clawing at his entrails, frantically yanking,
his long bony fingers weeding and winding
through stiff fibrous sinew, tangled, straining, binding
his two thrashing limbs as they shredded at the tissue.
Torn tendons overflowing from his hollowed out core,
I watched as he dug,
trying to deactivate
his overloaded nervous system's sympathetic strain.
I pawed through my kit for the calibrated syringe,
clean, sterile, defined along each little ridge.
Morphine injected, subcutaneously administered, dosed at
twenty milligrams, intended only to still the brain.
Flooding his veins, poison penetrated the amygdala stem,

severing all awareness from the trauma encompassing him,
seeping just too far, silencing the heart as well as the head.

Eviscerating consciousness,
a strange, inhuman predicament,
excising the soul at a hallowed expense,
a sacred act of god at the hand of mere men.

I bury my head against the dread,
my dessicated heart hanging heavy and limp.
I pray, dear God, only one more sin,
take my sodded soul
and let me disappear within.
Take away the memories.

I wanted to shriek. I wanted to cry. But faith fell strong upon my mind,
numbing the pain, taking me away, giving me a chance to enslave my righteous ways.
No good were they there, amidst the violent winds of a soulless war waged.
So I tucked them snugly in, bid farewell, slipping silently out to slay.
Indecent marrow of death left in my mouth as I went,
I turned to walk away, back to my life, safe away from the culpable pain.

They paint the honor we want to perceive,
the life, the love, the valor, the land of the free.
Promise, sacrifice, service,
our starched uniformed soldiers,
war lies in the eyes of the beholder.

Blown bodies strewn across the battlefield's endless gaping hole,
No ritual exactness or caskets paraded for show.
Like the event of the day,
bringing the bright noble president our way.

A crash so violent no formal identities declared,
the bodies were charred, to a singe, in death, this they shared.
The domino rows of death spit from the plane's underbreast,
The same faceless pattern, the bleeding white starry stripes
draped on every coffin,
flowing down the tarmac's black conveyor belt,
the dismembered bits of bodies within them never exposed.

The president arrives, all pomp and show,
touching down in Dover, his staff in tow.
Landing just a minute past noon,
he slipped in the motorcade, hidden from view.
Down the tarmac he rolled towards the grave,
finally emerging on its grey ashy face.
Silently he walked, making his way,
A hundred solemn meters to bestow American praise.

“Our thoughts and prayers are with the families of the fallen”
Rings out hollow, a feebly executed political ruse.
Half-mast the flag flutters against the waning day,
I wipe away a tear, bowing my head to pray.

But now, there is silence.
Cold, dark, alone again.
A lifeless empty drone,
Oh Honey? I think I’ve come home.
