



TIM BRADSHAW

Stylus

Stylus

*Special issue
devoted to the creative work of military veterans
enrolled at Midlands Technical College*

The Literary Annual of
Midlands Technical College

2008-2009

Stylus

2008–2009

Editor: Travis Gordon, English Department

Assistant Editors:

Douglas Capps, English Department
Alice Davis, English Department
Curtis Derrick, English Department
Amy Hausser, English Department
Keith Higginbotham, English Department
Julie Nelson, English Department
Jennifer Viereck, English Department

Design & Layout: Travis Gordon, English Department

Editorial Policy:

The Stylus editorial staff reads and judges all submissions anonymously (without authors' or artists' names), ensuring objectivity throughout the selection process. Each published work is chosen according to the creative and artistic merit of the individual piece. Only works received by the deadline were eligible for awards.

For their assistance, support, and advice, the Stylus staff wishes to thank

Marshall White, Jr., President; Ron Drayton, Vice President for Arts and Sciences
Diane Carr, Associate Vice President for Arts and Sciences; Rhonda Grego, Chair, English
Dave Kellish, English; Minnie Thompson, Administrative Specialist, English
Monica Boucher-Romano, Administrative Specialist, English and Humanities



Stylus is printed on recycled paper.

© 2010 Midlands Technical College
Columbia, South Carolina

All rights revert to authors and artists upon publication.

CONTENTS

Poems

The VA Hospital (3rd floor)	Joseph Hirsch	6
War Finally Won	Joseph Hirsch	8
Deer in Iraq	Anonymous	11
Buddies	Anthony Pichoff	12
Fondly Forgotten	Karla Layne Sanders	13
Patriotism	Karla Layne Sanders	14
The Mean Reds	Karla Layne Sanders	15

Fiction

From Quonset to Cadillac	Joseph Hirsch	17
--------------------------	---------------	----

Nonfiction

Old Fort Sill	Tim Bradshaw	35
Alive Day	Steven Diaz	39
A Soldier's Memory	Steven Wickers	43
My Last Tour in Iraq	John Mahaffey	45

Art

Humphrey Minnis	25, 26, 27
-----------------	------------

Photography

Tim Bradshaw	5, 10, 15, 35, 36, 44, 52
Christia McNamara	28
Larissa Farquharson	35

Stylus Awards 2008–2009

ooo

Nonfiction: Timothy Bradshaw and
John Mahaffey

Poetry: Joseph Hirsch

William C. Goodwin IV Memorial Art Award:
Humphrey Minnis

Video: Jacob Sellers

Photography: Larissa A. Farquharson



TIM BRADSHAW

The VA Hospital (3rd Floor)

In that red brick ship
A galleon swabbed by blind janitors
Who see only fluorescent
And move only mops
Up and down the endless corridor

There sleep too many men
From too many wars...

...But to take the occupants of two rooms
Draped in oxygen lines
Fine and thin as silkworms

One man a relic of World War Two
The other a product of Vietnam
Both drifting, it is to be hoped, toward a more merciful
constellation

On this star, however, Purgatory abides
With television to bridge that limbo

The Haunting whistle of Andy Griffith calls one last time
Echoing from black and white eternity
Enfolding John Wayne and George S. Patton
Among other pale ghosts

While in the other room-
The hand of Red Foxx clutches the hills of Khe Sahn
And then all of Southeast Asia
Before grabbing his chest
For the final Fred Sanford heart attack

Drawing a gruff laugh
Muted by liters of dioxin
Melanin soaked in defoliant
Like bug spray squirted over the thorax of a crawling insect

And me?
I am a piece of Iraq
A volunteer with a laminated nametag
Man-child of limited education
Blessed with GED enough to push this wheelchair

As the polarity of magnetic injustice
Tugs shrapnel from the center of a brain
Toward the spokes of fate
Cruel or otherwise

And I close with this entreaty:

Please save me a bed

JOSEPH HIRSCH

War Finally Won

The parasite, long entrenched
Slinking over eons of black obsidian to find me

It crawled up the ivory post that was my spine
Coiled slowly around my brain
Squeezing venom into the soft tissue
Blotting my hypothalamus with clouds of unfurling, purple cumuli
Fogging medulla oblongata with even darker looming shadows

It pulsed in time with puberty
A metallic scream in the chest
Ricocheting from the tine of one rib, on to the next

He (for let us finally give it gender) told me who to hate
Love
And worship

In return, he gave me nothing
Dilated my pupils until the orbs were plotted tombstones
In a less than verdant cemetery

His final act was to place an M-16 in my hands
At which point my mind finally screamed as loudly as my heart

And I ran toward the engulfed ramparts, stretching from the blood of
Mars
To the sands of Iraq.

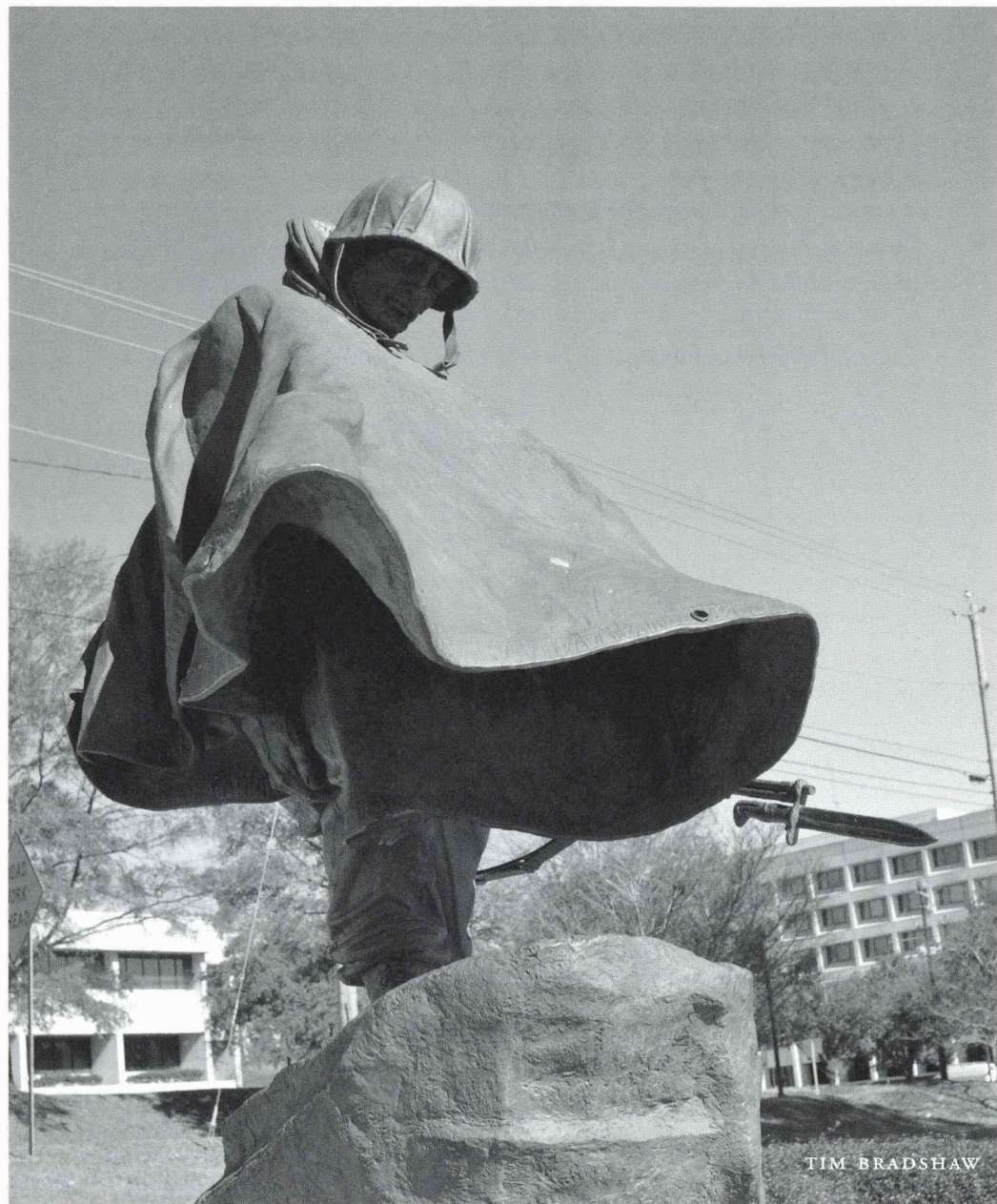
On back to America
Where the refrigerator and the Internet were empty

And she was full

While I was mystified
Wondering why it took me twenty-six years
Bumping the walls of my feral catacomb
In this albino's red eyed maze

The riddle finally solved

JOSEPH HIRSCH



Deer in Iraq

They say that the headlights of a car paralyze deer.
Not this one.
She was just trying to get across the street.

We did not know that this area had deer.
Did not even image it.
Why were deer out so late?

After we hit her you think we would stop.
But we did not.
In the dead of night we know never to stop.

We got home and saw her head.
Her face.
And G.I. Joe asked why were deer out this late?

Her name was Azhaar.
She was only 9.
G.I. Joe has a son and daughter just like this.

Like Richard Cory, G.I. Joe was sick.
He went home 14 months and 5 days later and died for our gift.

ANONYMOUS

Buddies

Soldiers strewn across the field,
On both sides bleeding.
Comrades of the fallen weep.
Company of their dead still needing.

On the morn, we charged the hill,
Caught up in the fury of it all.
John went down. He cried for help...
But I never heard his call.

Through the night, we walked the wire
Attuned to every sound.
Then all hell broke loose...
And in the din, Sam's cry was drowned.

Two months ago, out on patrol,
Incoming took Pete out.
He booked out on the spot...
Never even had a chance to shout.

And here I sit,
"Safe" within the wire.
I'm exhausted to the bone,
But I will never tire.

My buddies are gone.
We'll link up on the "other side."
"Til then the best I can do
Is make Charles pay...
For all the tears I've cried.

ANTHONY PICHOFF

Fondly Forgotten

I used to softly drag my fingers over your nose,
your lips,
your eyelids,
your chin.
Blinded by and succumbed to emotion never wanting to not be able
to remember your face.
I cried last night.
I don't do that anymore — cry for you.
I emptied my head of useless things, but with all of the brain power
I could muster...
I couldn't remember it.
And in retrospect of the experience that night in my bed,
I did remember something perfectly.
The looks on their faces as they walked up my front porch steps to
tell me what you had done.
And that left all my attempts to remember you, fondly forgotten.

KARLA LAYNE SANDERS

Patriotism

Fight young one. Fight.
This is your country.
Older generations are here but soon to go.
Learn what it means to be an American.
Learn what it takes to run a country, so that you can do it
...or at least respect the ones who do.
True patriotism isn't just red, white, and blue.
It is taking that initiative to love your country with so much of your
heart that you yearn to make her,
and her people better and happier.
So quit griping about what some politician did wrong.
Wise up. Fix it yourself.
This is your country.

KARLA LAYNE SANDERS

The Mean Reds

My face is radiating.
Turn the air on.
My jaw is locked tight.
Turn ACDC on.
Quivering breaths
Face buried in the pillow on my bed
I think I'm coming down with the mean reds.

Nina Simone...
... Can't ease my pain
Should take a walk 'round the block.
My head's a mess.
Mama called the doctor and the doctor said,
Your baby's got a case of the mean reds.

I need a drum set
I need a gun
I need a time out
I need some fun
Run a vacuum inside my head
Help me get rid of the mean mean reds.

KARLA LAYNE SANDERS



TIM BRADSHAW

From Quonset to Cadillac*

JOSEPH HIRSCH

THE FIVE REMAINING MEN LIVED IN A QUONSET GREENHOUSE, the windows of which were greased black from the smoke of the generators burning outside. They ran the machines for six hours per day. If they didn't find any more fuel during patrol in the upcoming month, they would scale back their hours on the machine to five per day. And if they lost any more men on patrol, they wouldn't go out at all, any more. The generators were never run past 6 p.m., for fear that the light might draw attention from any one of the marauding bands roaming the countryside.

Each of the men had slowly become a prisoner of the habit that had helped him pass his time up until now, and they rarely spoke to each other, because it led to fights. They could fight about anything, from how to tic days off the calendar (some favored an "X," the rest wanted a checkmark), to questioning the reasoning behind even keeping a calendar anymore. There was nothing to look forward to, and if money had lost its value, what the hell was the point of time?

But the men persisted in their isolated illusions and avoided each other to keep their respective bubbles from popping under the weight of objective

* This story appeared earlier in the online version of *Underground Voices Magazine* (<http://www.undergroundvoices.com/>), November 2007.

scrutiny. Brent and Devin got along the best, and if a reason had to be given as to why they got along so well, it would have to be that their activities kept them outside for the greater part of the day, while the other men remained inside. Brent was a pothead and Devin was a fitness freak. Brent kept his cannabis plants secreted within a patch of waist-high reeds that shielded them from plain view, but not from the sun.

His red eyes and trembling hands were fixed upon a cluster of weeds bent backwards, stomped into the ground by a human foot. It only remained to be seen whether it was a meddler from Fallout (the nickname they had given their shack) or from an outsider, which meant there might be trouble some time in the near future.

Brent did his best to mat the reeds back into place and walked over to a disused couch with the trundle bed pulled out, a busted cabinet model TV at its foot. He lay down and pulled a hog's leg from his breast pocket, lighting it with a T-Rat match. He flicked the match-head, reveling in the sulfuric pungency before taking a deep drag, sending out a festive cloud that billowed up and over his shoulder toward his friend who was doing suicide regimens of close-hand and wide-armed push-ups.

Devin's back flexed, marbleized as he strained his core to hold the position; he coughed as the smoke hit his face. "Goddamn, man. Can't you do that somewhere else?"

Brent coughed, laughed. "Apologies, man. But you know," he said, standing, and then walking around the side of the bed, taking a supervisory position over Devin. "This stuff is good for the lactic acid in your muscles."

Realizing that he would have to budge, Devin merely shook his head, hopped up, and walked off. Brent laughed and continued smoking, thought he heard the first helicopter to break the flat blue plain of the sky in some years; he looked up, saw nothing, and dismissed it as an auditory hallucination brought on by a finely pollinated and cured strain of the Creeper.

On the other side of the glass panes, reverberating under the strain of the generators, Dallas played video-games on a battery-op TV, while Porter, behind a wall of army rations, read verses from the New Testament, softly and to himself. They were sitting pretty since they had stumbled onto a

disused National Guard armory. They had taken what they could that night and loaded it into the bed of the pickup, which died on them a couple of weeks later and still sat on the other side of the greenhouse. They had made off with four M-16s, two crates of spring-action 30 round mags, and an ass-load of ammunition.

They hadn't had cause to use any of it yet, but it gave them all a nice sense of security, a warm and fuzzy feeling to know that they wouldn't have to make due with only the bolt-action Winchester they had taken from the hands of an old man, whose oxygen tank had failed him where he lay in his trailer, cold and dead underneath the antlered head of a deer he had felled some decades ago.

Carver was the resident Armorer, and at fifty-five he was the oldest man in the group, and the only one who held out any hope of some day being reunited with his estranged family. He could be heard at the other end of the room, fidgeting with his weapons, the click-clack of a receiver sliding back and forth, well-oiled and ready for action, waking one from NBA dreams and another from his Psalms.

The front door opened, bringing with it Devin and Brent. "Din-Din time," Brent said, under the spell of the munchies. The seated others looked up at him, all with looks of something like resentment. At some level, they all felt he enjoyed living like this, and had probably anticipated the collapse of civilization, as if it was the ultimate form of de-criminalization.

"We need a guard dog," Devin announced, panting and sweaty. Carver entered the picture, his shoulders covered with slung weapons, missing only a bandolier. "I haven't seen a living animal in over a year," he said. "And I don't think they migrated. Something's up. If we had to rely on them for food, we'd all be dead. Brent!"

He shouted his name sternly, but Brent was too busy tearing a box of MREs, foraging for his favorite meal, the Burrito Chili-Mac combo. His rifling through the plastic disturbed Porter's cross-legged liturgy. He looked up. "Do you mind?"

"Not at all." Brent smiled, and continued digging. Dallas was still catatonic with his video-games. Devin looked from him to Brent, then at Carver, telepathically letting the old man know that he was establishing,

via eye-contact, a route between the two weakest links, and that, if it came down to cannibalism any time soon, these two would be the first to go, and whatever parts of their bodies weren't eaten would join Caroline in the ground, next to where the garden was supposed to have been planted.

"Brent!" The old man shouted again.

Brent turned around, smiling with a mouth full of crumbling pound cake. "Que pasa?"

Carver sighed, then spoke. "How are the crops coming?"

"You want to know how my garden grows?"

Devin, his massive arms crossed in front of his chest, said, "If he can't smoke it, he won't grow it."

That got a small laugh from Dallas, otherwise dead to the world outside of his games. "This is serious," Carver said. "These rations aren't going to last us forever."

"I know."

"Dallas, turn off those games," Carver said. Dallas's mouth was open, and his hands did little ergonomic flickers of muscle memory, the only part of his body which hadn't yet atrophied.

"Turn it the fuck off," Devin said. Dallas looked up at Devin, then looked back at the screen. Devin looked at Carver, commiserating. "This is what we waste our electricity on?" The old man could only shrug. So far, midday muster was a disaster. They could usually avoid this because the roster clearly stated who had guard duty when, but Sunday was a wild card and they were supposed to draw straws. Porter was out of the running because he was a Pentecostal and refused to work on Sunday, and they had no desire to fight him on that point, since otherwise he was a good worker and good on foot patrol. But, if the signs cut at the edge of Brent's plants were any indication, there was good reason to take guard detail seriously once again. Everyone had been slacking lately.

That was something else they needed to talk about. Devin, the natural leader, sometimes deferred to Carver on the basis of age, but he felt like having his say right now, and would have spoken, if the TV hadn't interrupted them. And not the TV with the blip-blip, abrasive video game sounds that

gave everyone but Dallas a headache, but real TV, the stuff that civilization, helicopters, and planes were made of.

The voice coming to them wasn't necessarily the sanest. It was tinged with an orator's showmanship, could have been anything from a priest to a president, but it was enough to shut them up. This was first time someone had been on television in at least five years.

The man stood in front of a shaky camera, blinkered in and out on some low-fi satellite feed. "Ladies and Gentlemen," the man said. He was an old, white haired, red-faced hustler from the Deep South, the last vestige of a society that had sunk as surely as the makers of the pyramids had disappeared. "Although I mean to speak only to the gentlemen, since what I have to say concerns them most."

Everyone listened. Devin and Brent joined Dallas on the couch. Even Porter came around from the hiding of his mini-monastery. "I know your pain, and I feel your pain, and I want you to know you're not alone. And that I want you to join me."

"Bullshit artist." Devin muttered, but he kept listening. The man was partially hidden by whatever he was selling. Or, since currency had collapsed, bartering. Whatever it was, it was arranged in boxes, stacked in front of the man about chest high.

"Recently," the man explained, "I requisitioned a batch of a very potent medicine, which cures a problem that ails us all. This commodity is as rare as the sight of the squirrel flitting across a meadow. As rare as a woman. And," the man stepped from around his stack of modern day snakeskin oil, the shoddy camerawork struggling to track him, "as surely as I will find a woman for myself, I know that I will be ready for her, thanks to this."

For those too dense for his euphemism (Dallas among them), the man made it plain for all to see what he was selling, as he stood, in spite of his seventy-some years, with a massive erection bulging against his tweed pants, as obscenely sinister as the tongue of the crimson tie bulging underneath his vest, drenched with golden pocket watch. Who the hell dressed like that anymore?

"Gentlemen," he said, basking in the propulsive weigh of his pride, "if you are receiving this signal, then you are within walking distance of my

magic cure-all. I urge any and all interested parties to seek me out under the water tower you see on the horizon, due east, west, north, or south of your present location. I am currently in possession of some five-thousand pills, available for trade. I will entertain offers of trade on any and all items, from the humblest to the most sumptuous.”

The man squinted and hissed, a pained gesture that burst capillaries on his already red face. A hand from off-screen reached out with something, which the old man summarily took in his own hand. The camera shook briefly as the second hand reclaimed it, and the old man balanced on the cane, with a golden talon for him to grip at the top of the staff. “Razor-blades, canned goods, livestock, if you have any. And, gentlemen.” He shook his head wistfully. “I would trade my fortune for a woman.” His eyes misted, and he gazed toward the ceiling of the shack where he was broadcasting, as if he were staring upon the face of God. “A woman in any repair. From age twelve to sixty. From the dainty weight of one-hundred pounds, to a fertile queen of more than two-hundred kilograms. Beggars, as they once said, can’t be choosy. And we are all, in these dark times, gentlemen, beggars.” The man, lost in the poetry of his own words, shook his head from side to side a few times, then stared off to the side of the screen, where his camera man-cum-cane-lackey said something that was inaudible from this end.

“My colleague here informs me that our battery’s life is near its end. And thus I must conclude this transmission. Be at the Tower, gentlemen, at 9 a.m. tomorrow morning, with serious inquiries only. And, oh...one more thing.” The man’s paternalistic smarm evaporated so that the hustler’s shell was revealed, total alligator animus. “I can only ask you politely. Do the Christian thing, and don’t attempt to tip the scales in your favor. I shan’t be taken for a ride gentlemen. Attempt to rob me of my goods, and you will find yourself robbed of life. Good day.”

His image disappeared, and video games returned. Dallas continued playing basketball, and the four, slightly closer to sane men looked at each other. They were quiet, but only for a moment. Devin, with his arms still crossed, said, “I don’t need it.”

But they knew it was a lie. The only woman in their collective had been

a pretty, independent spirit worth at least three of the lesser men. And she had rebuffed them as deftly as possible, but had finally caved to her own urges, and shortly less than a year after the last of the condoms they had found in what was once a guidance counsellor’s office at the local high-school had been used, she had given birth to Devin’s baby, and died in the process of childbirth.

None of the men had made good midwives, despite their best efforts, first to search the countryside for another woman, and then to attempt to birth the baby on their own. Her cries had almost shattered the glass of the Quonset, but the baby had been silent, and stillborn, and was now buried on top of his mother, next to where Brent now claimed tomatoes were growing.

After she had died, and thoughts and memories of women had drifted from them, their abilities slowly faltered, and had probably abandoned them. They hadn’t tested them in so long. There wasn’t much privacy, and above that, there wasn’t much reason. Now, since it had been so long, any one of them might have been scared to even try, afraid of even their own touch, and terrified to voice the fear. The best any one of them could do was sit with arms folded like Devin, and lie.

Even bible-thumping Porter wanted in on the action, and they huddled until the sun passed over their glass hut, and dipped west, toward the water tower in question. First, it was a matter of personnel. Devin volunteered himself as spearhead, Carver spoke up on the strength of his position as Armorer, which left Porter to bicker with Brent, while the other two began feeding 5.56 mm rounds into magazines, because they had very little to barter or trade, and they needed those pills, even if they were salt peter. A prolonged, guaranteed erection would be more valued than gold, even without a woman. Just to be able to walk with one would give any of the five men a restored sense of pride.

They packed a rucksack with three sets of T-rats, chem lights, and extra ammo. “Don’t kid yourself. You’ve fried your sperm already.” Porter chided.

“There’s no conclusive evidence that marijuana reduces your sperm count.”

“Ha!” Porter scoffed.

“And I wonder what God would have to say about you setting off on a pilgrimage, in search of the ultimate chubby. Somehow not as benevolent as the quest for the holy grail.”

“Be fruitful and multiply.” Porter went over to the arms corner, drew himself an M-16, tapped a pre-loaded mag against the side of his head, and stalked off with the other two, standing in the doorway. Neither one raised an objection, and all three stared back to Brent with harsh eyes.

His mouth was open in disbelief. He was trumped by both age and ability, and probably only now regretted his horticultural specialty. “I can’t believe you’re going to strand me here with Kid Catatonia.”

But they did just that, turning away from him, heading around the side of the house with the trundle bed, over toward the grave, passing Caroline and the unnamed baby. The distance between here and the water tower was flat and unchanging.

They hadn’t bothered to designate a guard between the two that they were leaving behind, to preclude quarrels between them while the men were away, but the bottom line was that they were expendable, and if neither was there when they returned, assuming they made it back, no one would be surprised, and honestly, no one would have cared.

Their minds were elsewhere, on penetrating the growing darkness, their sudden rebuke of the rules they had lived by until now. No patrols after dark. And they didn’t even have a light-source, apart from the chem lights and the lunar white water tower, which had once borne the name of this small town on its face, and now only bore the graffiti of warring factions who had used all their mental energy to scar the superstructure. A black, spray-painted swastika dominated its surface.

Vandalism was constant and rampant, and took on forms that slowly picked apart the sanity of any wayfaring traveler. Signs had been uprooted, changed and swapped from state lines and waypoints, so that Welcome to California signs could be spotted as far east as Arkansas, the result being that no one knew where they were at any time, and the most any one of these three men could say was they were somewhere in the Midwest. It didn’t matter anyway.

They crossed a stream, kept their weapons at the low ready, tried not to



HUMPHREY MINNIS



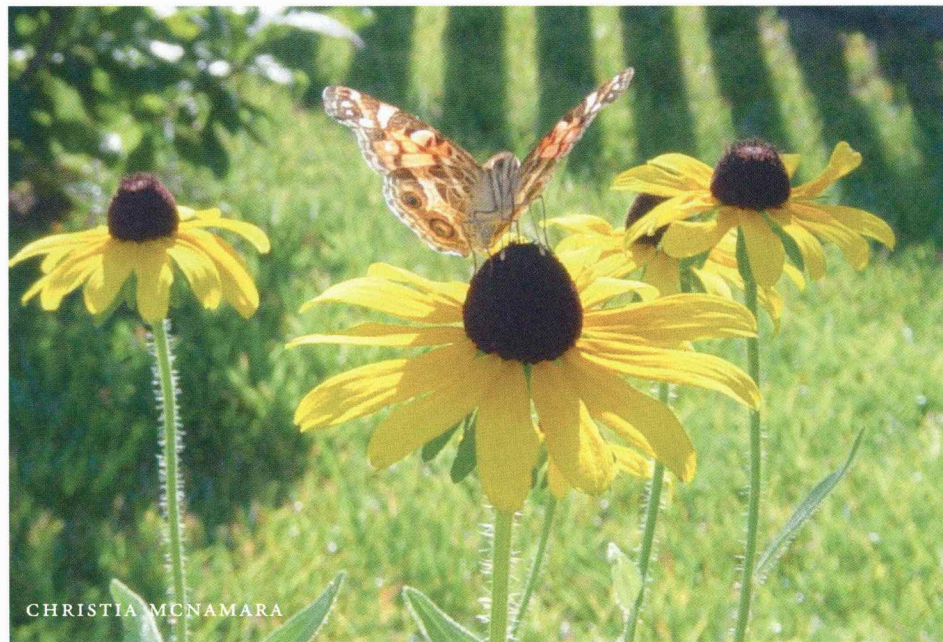
HUMPHREY MINNIS



HUMPHREY MINNIS



CHRISTIA MCNAMARA



CHRISTIA MCNAMARA

wantonly make noise but couldn't help crunching leaves underfoot as they went. They scanned, abided by a personally worked and reworked system of hand-signals that had seen them in good stead thus far. They had been involved in some minor altercations with a group of bikers active in the area, two of whom they had killed, and one of whom had given Devin a surface wound to the shoulder with his service revolver. That was when they had the one Winchester between them. If they ran into those men again, post National Guard armory, the outcome would be a foregone conclusion, and they would have their own fleet of motorcycles to rove on, sans the indiscriminate sense of destruction those brutal Huns rolled with as their only abiding philosophy.

A couple of clicks out from their destination, and a full sun away from the next day, the men set up a bare bones camp along the backside of a rotting log. Devin shimmied out of the rucksack and threw it between his legs, digging into it for one of the T-Rats, which had probably become Z in the intervening years. The eggs were brown, but he ate them.

Carver stroked his weapon, just outside the trigger well, cobalt and smelling of cordite. Porter bowed his head in grace before taking his share of the food. "You know what I want, more than a woman?" Carver asked, breaking the silence that had lasted most of the hike.

"What's that?" Devin asked.

"A cigarette."

"Amen." Porter said, without a trace of irony. All three men looked up at the stars, pondered the galaxy within the limits of consciousness, since too much spacey thought could lead to dreams, and three slit throats. The stars twinkled like jewels unrelated to the madness below. But maybe, Porter thought, staring, when God had brought the rapture below, he swapped Sirius and Betelgeuse like he swapped California and Arkansas.

Four hours of light sleep later, the three men humped it to within shouting distance of the tower, approaching solemnly, as if a king or a prophet lived there, and it was their job to shout up unanswerable questions, and his job to shout down riddles. There was no spot to recon from, set up and give themselves the advantage until the old man approached,

which was Devin's initial plan, so they stood, waiting. And when their legs hurt, they sat.

While waiting, Porter watched a dark mass some fifty feet away, which he was sure only he saw. But Carver finally said something. "What the hell is that?"

"You see it, too?" Porter asked. They were in the process of getting it confirmed by Devin, a third sounding board who would make the mirage real, when the demands of something sure and moving on the left periphery caught their attention.

"On our nine," Porter said, warning Devin. "I see it," he responded. All three weapons shifted. Their potential enemies mustered in the dark, two deep, with a shotgun between them. One of them was a woman, the one not holding the weapon.

Devin looked to Carver. Both were worried. "Shit," Devin said, giving voice to their fears. If the woman was part of the bargain, they had the upper hand at the negotiating table. But, if they could manage to kill the old man, secure his pills, and overpower this woman's companion, would she have the misfortune to service them as long as the supply of 5,000 pills lasted? Were they above rape? Devin sometimes thought that the last of his humanity had died with Caroline.

The three men watched the two through their rear-sight apertures, debating whether or not to fire. The couple didn't see them, and seemed to be fixated on the dark mass in the distance that had occupied everyone's attention, minutes ago.

It revealed itself when the sun came up, and the heat made it stink, a pyre of dead dogs stranded, stinking quadrupeds wrapped around each other, fetid and matted, grey bristled fur like the hides of sewer rats, or pinkish opossums; it stank badly enough for the woman to keel to her finer sensibilities, and double over vomiting, as the man with the shotgun patted her back. Now would have been a prime time to blast them both, but the men waited.

"What the hell's that all about?" Carver asked.

"It's an abomination against God," Porter said. Devin stared at it, spoke after thinking. "Maybe something they use to scare off intruders. I don't know."

An ancient Cadillac, white walls stripping around hubcaps, burst into view on the horizon, and it had to be the old man, an anachronism driving an anachronism. Both groups of strangers walked forward to watch it, beyond the wall of dead dogs, and in doing so came upon each other.

There was a catch of disbelief in each group, a registering of the weariness of battle, a case of hail stranger, well-met, two civilian militias in a world of pirates. "Hello," Carver said.

"No ingles," the man said. He wore a long-sleeved flannel and lumberjack overalls, an unseasonable wool hat pulled over his head. His wife wore a wide, Aztec striped Baja, intricate and garish pink patterns tiled across the blanket. She smiled, blankly, her black hair as thick and coarse as horse hair.

Devin watched the woman, but with nothing like lust in his eyes. He seemed to detect something in her that neither of his friends saw. Carver spoke to him, but he didn't take his eyes off the woman. "You speak any Spanish?"

"A little. Hola," he said to the couple.

"Hola," the man said. The woman said nothing. The Cadillac pulled off the road, into clearer view, with the lumbering physics of a hearse, revealing its fishtails in a dusty figure eight before straightening up to show a set of bull's horns mounted on the hood, and two men riding in the front. The shotgun hopped out first, wearing a cutoff wife-beater and mesh breathing John Deere hat. He took up a firing position on the hood, giving pretty good coverage to two groups spread at a seven-ten stagger. It was red carpet security for the satellite celebrity, none other than the old man, who dowsed the ground with his cane first, before stepping out himself, and walking into the center of the two groups, where he stood and spoke.

"Well," he began, smiling with dimples that age hadn't withered. "Never underestimate the power of advertising. Who wants to go first?" He held out the bottom tip of his cane, as gold as the prominent talon he gripped. He pointed to the two Mexicans. "Ah, tu esposa? O no?"

The couple smiled, and he turned to the three men. "Well, boys. Unless you're sitting on an atom bomb or some super model pussy, I'd say you're about out of luck. Because women are as scarce as mercy in these parts."

"Lift her wig," Devin said. "Or her skirt. Either way you cut it, that's

not a woman.” He spoke with certitude. All weapons were lowered, with the exception of the hill jack leaning on the hood, but the Mexican man brought his shotgun up as a retort to the blasphemy of his offering, and he felt the sting of the shot, which hit him full in the face, rotting his skull in a brief elapse. His wife turned to run, and her Baja powdered with red dust on the second shot. The hillbilly spun his weapon back to the three men without missing a beat. All of them were pretty hardened by the times, but none approached this man for sheer, unflinching murder.

“Well, now.” The old, nameless man smiled through the cloud of gun smoke. “Let me just have a gander at her particulars to make sure your statement holds water.” The man sauntered over to the body of the wife, some twenty meters from the husband. He flipped it with his cane, and lifted the Baja, then returned to his sentry in front of the Cadillac. “Well, unless she’s as flat-chested as Susie-Plain-and-Tall, I’d say they were trying to take me for a ride. Round eye’s round eye but don’t cut me a porterhouse and call it filet mignon. I thank you kindly for the heads-up.”

Devin nodded, thinking, “two more to go,” hoping his comrades were thinking the same, but he could feel Porter trembling from here, and knew both of these sadists wouldn’t miss the smallest hint of fear. “So,” the old man said, “lay your chips on the table, gentlemen.”

“The product first,” Devin said. Carver joined Porter in flinching on that one. The old man reddened, and his boy choked up on his still-hot weapon, but the snakes slithering under the surface of the old man’s skin finally cooled enough for him to say, as he went around to the back of his truck, “Well, every showman’s inclined to demonstrate the efficacy of his product. For all you know I could be selling rat poison. Well, boys...”

They heard him digging, foraging through his car’s hold. He returned a moment later with some knockoff, generic Viagra. He undid the safety cap, displayed one pill between forefinger and thumb. “To health.” He swallowed, turned to his shotgun. “Man alive. That’s hell without water.” He turned back to the three men and smiled. “Now, I should warn you. Don’t take this stuff if you have a heart condition, diabetes, history of stroke in your family.”

His humor was lost on them, but his tactics weren’t. It was a waiting

game. The man loosened his brass belt buckle with the state of Texas brandished in a massive oval. “Now, I don’t want you boys to be offended, but none of you are my cup of tea. When you see Mr. Happy stand up and dance, will you, my good friend, be convinced of my product’s effectiveness, finally?”

Devin nodded, but his eyes were on the distant pile of dead dogs. The old man seemed rankled by his lack of reaction, and felt compelled to explain the pile, if only to bring Devin’s attention back to his own powers as a wordsmith.

“My friend here.” The old man nodded toward the double-murderer. “In addition to being handy with a shotgun, is also a creator of objets d’art, if you will. As demonstrated on the caddy.” He tapped the hood, but was almost certainly referring to the bull’s horns. “He intends to build me a shack composed entirely of dog skulls, some time in the near future. These are his raw materials.”

Devin shuddered. This man was making it easy. “So, now that your curiosity is satiated, and we are only moments away from...liftoff, what is your offer? You men seem a little light in the ass, if you’ll pardon the expression. They say to beware of men bearing gifts, but I find it more practical to beware men who come empty handed, that is, say except for three M-16s. Is that your offer? Arms for pills?”

“Something like that,” Devin said, before firing the weapon he had slowly raised by degrees, with enough subtlety to throw off the shotgun until now, the first succinct, close to point blank clap that threw the man of words against the caddy where he was impaled by one of his own bull’s horns. The crony fired, triceps flexing as he absorbed the kick, and Porter went down, right before Carver raised, aimed and fired, hollowing out the man’s right eye and putting an orbit’s worth of brain on the windshield behind him, before he hit the ground.

Both of the remaining men trembled, switched their selector switches back from burst to safety, and slung their weapons. They scanned the immediate area for backup, gagged on the smell coming from the dogs, folded their dead friend’s arms in lieu of a more Christian burial, and went to the trunk, where they found two scotch-tape sealed boxes, a third open and full

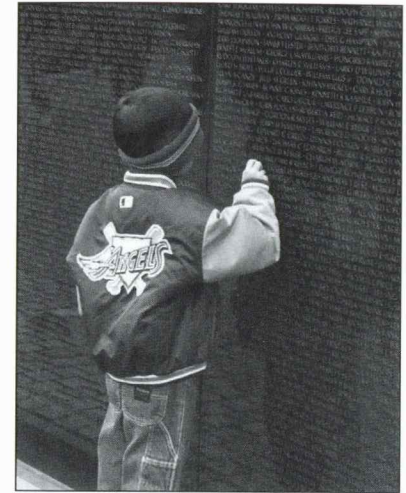
except for the bottle removed by the old man for demonstration purposes. They left it all in the trunk, because in addition to the shotgun, the Cadillac was now theirs, too.

“If we follow the tracks back we can find out where they keep the gas for this thing, and the satellite they broadcasted from in the first place,” Devin said.

Carver nodded, and walked around to the front of the truck, to the spot where the dead old man was laying, and standing up.



LARISSA FARQUHARSON



LARISSA FARQUHARSON



TIM BRADSHAW



Old Fort Sill

TIM BRADSHAW

EVERYONE MUST HAVE A VERY SPECIAL TIME AND PLACE IN THEIR LIVES. I grew up as what some people call a “military brat.” Throughout my childhood during the 1950s and early 1960s, I was privileged to live in some pretty interesting places. Most of my father’s duty stations in the United States placed us in the great Southwest. We lived in Texas and Oklahoma. Of those military posts, Fort Sill has remained to this day the most memorable. It is home of the U.S. Army Field Artillery and Missile School. The geography of this region and the culture of the Native American population living there became of special interest to me. This rugged land with its mountains and prairies was enchanting to me. It was on Fort Sill where I lived the formative years of my life. This place is very special to me because of my memories of the landscape, history, and some of my first real adventures. I knew without a doubt that this land where the buffalo roamed was unique and not too far removed from the days of the Old West.

Fort Sill is situated in the southwestern corner of Oklahoma, north of the Red River and snuggled up to the Wichita Mountains. It is a land rich in culture and historical treasures. This is a very dry country with few trees and an endless sea of grass. In the Wichita Mountains there are several very beautiful lakes. Although it may seem lifeless to some people, this desert

plain with its grasslands support an abundance of wildlife, including bison, long horned steer, elk, and prairie dogs. Cottonwood trees line the river banks and streams as they snake their way through the country. I have vivid memories of a typical summer day as I played with friends among the Cottonwood trees and watched their silky seeds fill the air like summer snow falling gently in the breeze. I have snapshots in my mind of the buffalo feeding in the tall grass on the prairie. I can remember sitting on the huge boulders on top of Mount Scott in the Wichita Mountains as I looked in amazement at Lake Lawtonka. From this vantage point I could see most of its shores and the dam at the head of Medicine Creek. In the late afternoon, locusts provided an almost tranquilizing soundtrack on this soundstage where I played. As evening approached, there was the serene sound of natural music made by the croaking of the frogs. This was land that at one time belonged to the Comanche, Apache, and Kiowa. In my mind I can still see and hear all of this.

The history of Fort Sill is grand to me. In 1868, Lieutenant Colonel George Armstrong Custer and his 7th U.S. Cavalry under the command of General Phillip Sheridan assisted in selecting the site to build this new frontier fort. In 1869 the fort was established and construction of permanent buildings began in 1870. The old limestone buildings were built by members of the 10th U.S. Cavalry. This regiment was garrisoned by all African-American soldiers with the exception of their officers. They were known by the Indians as the "Buffalo Soldiers." Throughout its frontier days, many very famous Native Americans lived and died on this post, including Geronimo and Quanah Parker. Geronimo, a Chiricahua Apache Medicine Man, was the leader of the last band of the hostiles. After his surrender to General George Crook in 1886, he was taken to Florida for a while and finally arrived at Fort Sill where he lived for the rest of his life. Quanah Parker was the last great chief of the Comanche tribe. Both of these great warriors are buried on the post. Learning about the history of Fort Sill sparked a life long interest for me to continue a study of the Indian Wars of the Old West.

As a young boy, growing up at Fort Sill provided me with some very memorable adventures. My father was a soldier at the time. It seemed only

natural to me that my friends and I played soldiers. Many days after school, we would play army in the nearby woods where we lived along Wolfe Creek. At that time, there was a very popular television show called "Combat!" starring Rick Jason and Vic Morrow. It was a World War II drama series that aired every Tuesday evening at about 8:00 p.m. My friends and I reenacted as the members of this show and we had our own make-believe battlefield. During the course of playing soldiers, we all had a great time exploring the woods and creeks of our so-called battlefield.

My father took me to many of the landmarks and cultural events around the fort, which included the original post quadrangle that still exists. I don't think he ever had any idea just how much this meant to me. I remember visiting the very guardhouse where the famous Geronimo was once kept as a prisoner of war. In N. Scott Momaday's essay, "The Way to Rainy Mountain," he writes a passage about how his grandmother and her family members had to abandon their crucial stores located in Palo Duro Canyon. He stated, "In order to save themselves, they surrendered to the soldiers at Fort Sill and were imprisoned in the old stone corral that now stands as a military museum" (146). I remember the many times my father took me to this very place; in fact it still stands today perfectly preserved.

I remember the camping trips when we used "buffalo chips" for fuel in our campfires. We explored the lakes and fished for crappie and catfish. I remember the visits to the national rattlesnake roundups where we personally saw hundreds of Western diamondback rattlesnakes and watched the handlers milk their venom. Then there was the one Christmas Day that I awoke to find my first Daisy air rifle and a Lionel train set. On Saturdays I went horseback riding on old "Charlie," an old bay gelding out at Eagle Park. And oh yeah, how can I ever forget the endless summer days I spent swimming in the huge public pool at Doe Doe Park. To this day, all of those experiences are alive and well within me. The many adventures I had there formed a foundation of values for me.

I think my Fort Sill experience is shared by many others as I have learned through the years by internet browsing. I have found others who hold some of the same memories of that place as I do. Although I was a child, I was very aware of the importance of all of the things that made Fort

Sill what it was. That special landscape, history, and my adventure are also a part of me that I wish to share in story and pictures with my sons and grandsons. My family left Fort Sill in 1967 and finally in the summer of 2000, I took my father to revisit the old post and we were able to share a lot of these special memories together. For the most part, we were both surprised to find out some of the special places we remembered were somewhat frozen in time. My remembrances of living at Fort Sill and especially revisiting the place with my father were very similar to that of E. B. White when he and his son revisited a lake in Maine. My feelings were just as he had stated, "There had been no years" (196).

WORKS CITED

- Bloom, Lynn Z., and Louise Z. Smith, eds. *The Arlington Reader: Contexts and Connections*. 2nd. ed. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin, 2008.
- Momaday, N. Scott. "The Way to Rainy Mountain." Bloom and Smith 145-150.
- White, E. B. "Once More to the Lake." Bloom and Smith 94-199.

Alive Day

STEVEN DIAZ

IT ALL STARTED DRIVING DOWN A POORLY MAINTAINED ROAD in western Iraq. I was the A driver, the front passenger, in an unarmored humvee. Not all our humvees were like that, just this one because the armor weighed us down too much. We were the lead truck in the convoy and drove at a pretty fast pace. Marines call the lead truck the "suicide truck" because usually during an ambush the first vehicle always gets hit, and since it's unarmored, the chances of you making it out aren't very good. I was listening to the radio and at the same time watching the road for any signs of Improvised Explosive Devices. Almost like a scene from a sci-fi movie, time froze. There was nothing. I couldn't talk or see anything: Then slowly the only thing that came back was sound and some feeling. I touched my face that was covered with blood while hearing people yell and scream. The only thing I remember them saying was "Diaz! Diaz! Diaz is down. He needs help!"

To this day, I don't know exactly what happened to me, and my friends don't like it when I ask them to tell me the story, but I did get some things from them to help me remember.

After the explosion happened, my Corporal, who was driving, tried to move the humvee off the road. Corporal Jahala was short, dark skinned, and always felt like he had something to prove, but nobody ever knew how

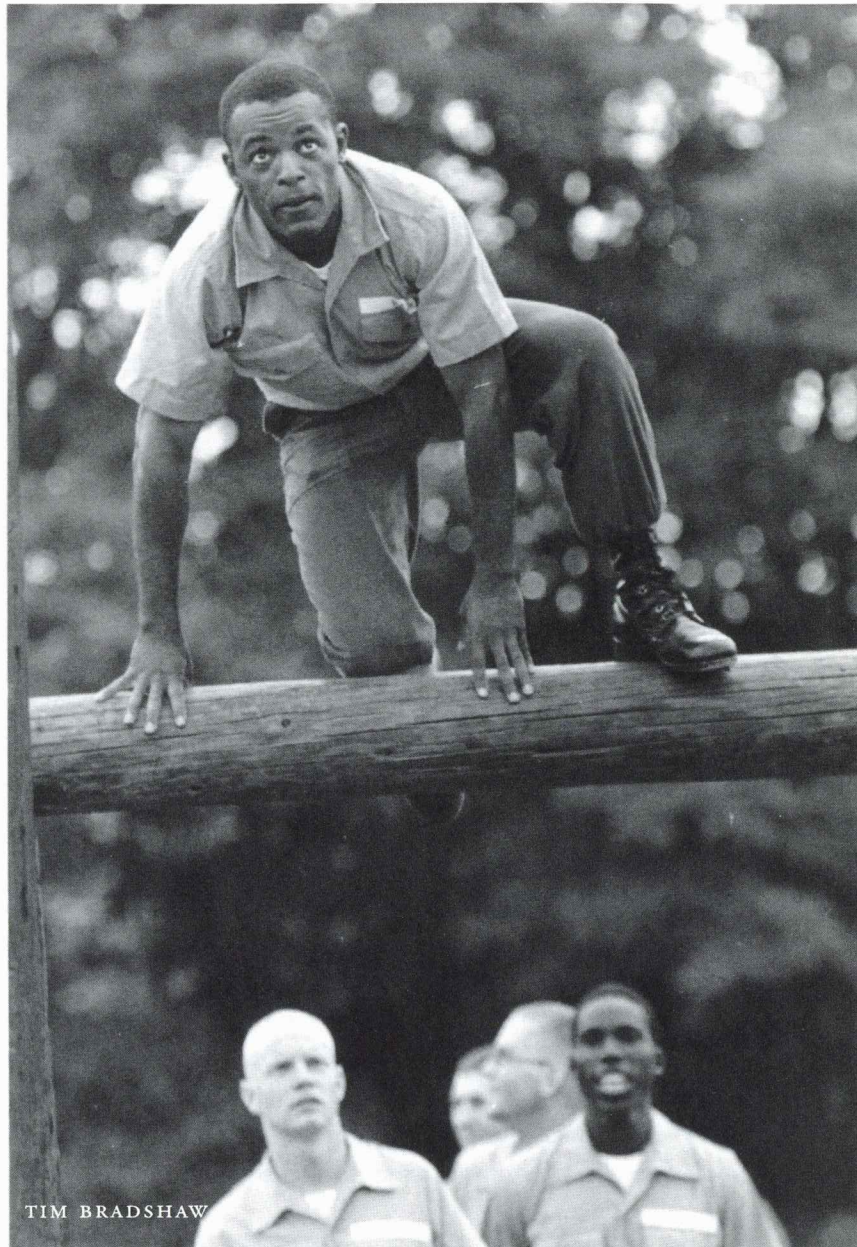
to say his name so we just called him Corporal J. We met up later on after the attack and he told me that when the bomb went off, pieces of shrapnel shot into the humvee and ricocheted inside. He said it looked like fireworks because of the sparks when it hit something metal. But it was no show; the shrapnel that didn't hit metal hit us. There was blood everywhere. Corporal J. was struck in his arms and right leg. He's not able to walk like he used to. In between J. and myself was Lance Corporal Jordan, a tall white goofy guy from somewhere in middle America; Jordan was manning the machine gun that was on the humvee's turret. Since only half his body was exposed in the humvee, he only took damage to his legs and the lower part of his arms. I took the majority of the blast, which was in a good way, because I knew that if I had it the worst, then nobody died. My body acted as a shield not only to the guys up front, but also to the other two Marines sitting behind us. Those Marines only got hurt from flying rocks and other debris. They got to stay and finish their time in Iraq. The shrapnel that bounced around hit my head, arms, and legs. One piece entered my left eye and bounced from the bones in the eye socket into my right side of the brain. A large part of the right side of my head is made of plastic. Since the shrapnel was making my brain swell, the doctors had to remove a part of my skull and couldn't put it back, so they made a replica of the skull with plastic. They let me keep the bone they took out, and I basically carry it around with me wherever I go. My arms weren't injured too severely. They were just peppered by the shrapnel, and to this day, there are still metal fragments coming out of my arms. My left leg had to have a fasciotomy done on it. I don't know what that is, but I have a huge scar from it. My right foot took major damage. It required over ten surgeries, one bone graft, two skin grafts, and many other reconstructive procedures.

I don't remember what happened after the blast other than hearing it and touching my face, but I've put pieces of the story together with what little information I've gathered. When the rest of the convoy saw what happened, word got passed down to our Lieutenant, who was in charge of us. He gave the order to leave us where we were. Maybe he was scared of an ambush, or he thought we were all dead. One Sergeant from our platoon disobeyed the order and went to help us. He then saw that we were still alive so he called from

the corpsmen, or medics, to come help us. When the corpsmen got the call, they raced up the convoy to our rescue but somehow ran out of gas. I've been told that when they finally got to me, I was still conscious, but suffering from shock. Later I fell into a coma for a week or more. I was medevaced from the scene to a trauma center in Iraq and from there, flown to a military hospital in Germany, and last, to the National Naval Medical Center in Bethesda, Maryland.

NNMC is the place where I woke up. One second I'm in a scorching hot desert, and another I'm tied down to a hospital bed with tubes coming out of my mouth and arms. I was eventually released from the intensive care unit and spent a lot of time in the surgical wards. I spent a total of one year and eight months at the hospital. During that time, I had to see many different doctors to assist me with all of my injuries. Since I had a traumatic brain injury, the doctors were all scared that I might have suffered from brain damage. They ran many tests on my head, and I had to be seen by several different neurologists. Once I was able to get out of bed, I had to learn how to walk again with the help of trainers who came to my room almost on a daily basis, due to the fact that I spent three to four months stuck to a bed and my muscles were getting weak. Even though I could walk, I still had to use crutches and a wheelchair at times to get around because of the foot surgeries I was having. Besides my brain and feet getting worked on, my eye was a different story. Since the damage I received to my eye was so intense, there wasn't much the doctors could do for it, to this day I'm still waiting for the chance to regain vision.

I was truly scared. I never before felt so much fear like I did during my recovery. I finally realized I was given another chance at life, a clean slate. God didn't want to take me yet because he had a plan for me. Ever since the accident, I've tried to live my life differently than the way I had before. I will never be the same again mentally or physically. For those of us who pulled through the brink of death from our injuries, we lived to die another day. We call it Alive Day. It's our second birthday, another day we will never forget. My Alive Day is March 25, 2005, the day I lived again.



TIM BRADSHAW

A Soldier's Memory

Steven Wickers

IT WAS A COOL AND CRISP NIGHT, PROBABLY ABOUT TWO O'CLOCK IN THE MORNING IN THE MIDDLE OF IRAQ. Unfortunately, I haven't been getting much sleep over the past six months because the only time that I can talk to my beautiful wife, living in Washington State, is very late at night. We have only been married a year and a half, and I miss her deeply. My job is working in the operating room as an Anesthesia Technician for the 47th Combat Support Hospital. Originally trained as an Army combat medic, I was chosen among fifty medics to serve in the operating room under the mentorship of the anesthesiologists and nurse anesthetists.

I was startled when I heard the door to my room slam open as one of my roommates ran to my bunk and violently shook my leg. "Wickers, wake up! There's a real mass casualty situation at the hospital!" I didn't take him seriously as I rolled over and looked at my clock, which read 2:34 a.m. Slowly, I let my eyes adjust to his shadowy figure at the foot of my bed and asked, "Are you serious?" I didn't believe him because our unit would orchestrate training drills once a month, in the middle of the night, to make sure that we were still capable of dealing with such a chaotic situation. I took off like a lightning bolt towards the hospital, which was about a quarter of a mile away in the dead of night. I ran towards the operating room

and found Major White. "Sir, I heard there was a mass casualty situation! What's going on?"

Major White replied, "I had just heard about it myself. Supposedly, there are twenty-five to forty burned patients coming to us."

Just then, I heard the sound of trucks pulling into our parking lot. I peeked around the corner into the EMT and witnessed man after man being pulled, dragged, or carried through the hospital. After the EMT filled all of their beds, they dragged more men into the ICU section. I looked into the ICU section and saw that the entire staff was working on the wounded, except for one patient in the left corner. I noticed a nurse standing over him in complete shock, looking confused and scared. I ran over to the patient and said, "Ma'am, go get a blanket to cover him up and I will start an IV!" While I was talking, a potent stench of burning flesh and gasoline overpowered me as I let out a strong gag! I quickly took a pair of scissors and cut his clothes off. Armed with a needle in my right hand, I attempted to pick up his arm, but it fell from my grasp as I clenched a piece of his severed flesh in my fingers. I retrieved his arm again and repeatedly tried to gain intravenous access into his veins. I failed many times, but I finally struck a vein just long enough to push morphine into his system. I knew that with eighty percent of his body burned he would probably be triaged as an expectant, but the least I could do was make him comfortable.

A lot happened that night and, ultimately, the man that I was responsible for died. We made him comfortable, but we lacked the necessary resources to treat him. Our hospital treated and saved the lives of many men that night. All of these men were Iraqi Policemen. These were men who signed up to make a difference in their newly liberated country. Most of the people that we treated and saved in our hospital were Iraqi, and these are some of the stories that the American media would never focus their attention on.

I feel that I have learned a lot through my experience in Iraq. It churns my stomach listening to the media and to the opinions of people who have never served in Iraq. I believe that we provided the Iraqi people with the opportunity to live free, but it's now up to them to seize that opportunity.

My Last Tour in Iraq

JOHN MAHAFFEY

AFTER TWENTY-TWO YEARS IN THE ARMY, damn if they did not deploy me to Iraq for what was to be the last time. During this last tour, I did convoy security. I was on the roads of Iraq for five to twenty-five days pre-trip. On these missions, we made sure supplies got safely to all the base camps in Iraq. Most of my time was spent with my team except when we hit different bases for food and fuel. At first this was a problem because I had always loved being in groups. Time moved on and everyone became more accustomed to being just around the members of their own team. Everyone learned quickly that your own group were the ones who would look out for your back in a fire-fight. We gained this knowledge on a mission where we were with different people. When the gun fire started, the people we were with ran off and left us alone. It became a part of life to trust only the ones you worked with so closely.

The job of convoy security is a dangerous one. We had to protect groups of trucks that had to get supplies from one point to the next, supporting them with weapons firepower. Basically, we hed the weapons and we had to protect the drivers and trucks. My team was always the scout team. This meant that we were about one mile ahead of everyone else. That way if something started, the convoy could stop and keep safe while we fought it out and cleared the way. Often time when going through cities there would

be crowds standing around. The enemy would be hiding in the crowd waiting for the right moment to open fire or set off a road side bomb.

The mental gear change that happened to me is overwhelming on its own. On a mission in Northern Iraq, I had instructed my driver to take the hummer (military vehicle) to the shop and get it worked on. This was the way I had always done business. It was not until we had been on the road for four hours that I was made aware of the fact that he had not done the job that I instructed him to do, and I realized then that I was going to have to be that hard-ass Non-Commission Officer I had never liked. We got to the point where we were in an area of Iraq that everyone knows is not safe to stop, because in this area the Iraqis were good at ambushes and mortar attacks, and there had been a high number of embedded road side bombs. At this very place, my truck broke down, so we pulled over to fix the problem. It was an unusually hot day for early January. It had been bitter cold just the day before. We were up in the mountains of northeast Iraq. The countryside here has a good number of trees; it reminded me of parts of New Mexico. We were about 500 yards from a graveyard. Iraqi graveyards are not like ours; they are right on the side of the road on a small hill with makeshift marks — nothing fancy. We had been there long enough for the mechanics to find the problem and tell me it had to be fixed on the spot. I was so pissed off when I found out that we had to wait there because of the problem I had told the driver to get fixed before we left.

At that point I turned on my driver and called every kind of stupid fucking son-of-bitch I could think of. The only thing I did not call him was a human being. His stupidity had put everyone in danger of being attacked, if not killed. We came under enemy engagement during the two hours it took. I was so pissed off that I did not hear the first mortar tube when it fired on us. I was standing there on the side of the road with my dick in my hand taking a piss. The round landed about fifty feet from me, close enough to spray fine rocks into my face and penis. I forgot I was pissing and urinated all over my boots and pants. I started returning grenades with a launcher. The only thing I could think about at that moment was living through the attack and wanting to kill my driver. I was so fucking mad and scared that when the attack was over, I took hold of my driver and started shaking him

and drew back to hit him before anyone could stop me. I fought the people trying to keep me from hurting him. I am glad now they stopped me because if they had not I would have killed him right there on the spot. Thank God we did not lose anyone that night, but my attitude and temperament were forever changed.

By the middle of February 2005, I was still proud of the fact that there was nothing I could not do. Then my world shifted a little more. For some reason I made the mistake of writing down the wrong grid numbers taking us into an area that was under rocket attack. While out on a convoy in Baghdad, a patrol was out enforcing curfew, and they had come under heavy enemy engagement. My mistake put everyone in danger.

Before every mission, the convoy security leader had a meeting with the Intel guys. This was for an overview of the routes that were open and closed and the latest information on enemy activity. During these meetings I had to review the maps and plot the route I would carry the convoy, so if anything went wrong, it would be easier to get help out to us. However, this time I wrote down the grid numbers in a way that carried the convoy five miles the wrong way. When we got into the area that was under attack, all hell broke loose. The rockets were coming close enough to make the vehicles shake. At one point, we got close enough to the action that several of our vehicles took some small damage from shrapnel. The buildings were on fire and injured people lay on the streets along with a lot of dead people. It was total chaos. It took me an hour to get us out of there. Thank God we all came out all right, although we did take some damage to a couple of trucks.

This was the start of my second-guessing myself because I had lost my faith in my abilities. It is my second-guessing that led to my first injury in Iraq. I was running a traffic control point, and I second-guessed whether to shoot at a car that was coming. It cost me big problems with my right knee. The car hit it with force, but luckily I was able to stay on my job although with a lot of pain.

The second time I was injured in Iraq, I was on a convoy just south of Baghdad. The area we were in was a no-fire zone because of the road crews. My team and I both saw that we were in trouble at the same time. My gunner asked if I wanted him to fire so the truck would stop, and I said “no”

because of the rules of engagement for the area. I was a by-the-book Non-Commissioned Officer. I had always been the type of soldier that followed orders to the letter. For me that was the only way to do my job.

Thanks to my following all the rules, it cost my team. We were hit head on at seventy-five miles an hour. We had just crossed the Euphrates River, so the road was on built up banks, just a little better than country dirt roads. When the Iraqi driver started heading for us, he hit a dip in the road making it look like he had lost control of his truck. However, if he had, the truck would have flipped over before he got to us. The Army classified it as an accident, but I know that it was not. It is my fault that my driver has some back problems and my gunner messed up his knees. However, thank God I was the one hurt the worst. I have nerve damage in my lower back and neck, and I have some degree of Traumatic Brain Injury, so some my old persona is lost forever. The impact from the accident threw me around in the vehicle slamming my head into the steel doors and my knees into the metal racks that held the radios and weapons. Some came loose and hit me in the lower back making the bones move the wrong way causing nerve damage. The nerve damage in my neck is connected with the brain damage. I say it is my fault because I knew where we were and knew the risk but instead of acting on the situation as I would have done before, I started changing. I did not react at all.

All the events in Iraq, all the death and destruction I saw, now live on in my mind and my dreams. Learning to count on only a very few people and having to always be on high guard when around a crowd of people makes life hard. When in Iraq, a crowd of people was not a good thing because that was when you could count on someone trying to kill you one way or the other. Now it is a way of life that makes it hard to be around a group of people. For me these feelings are more intense because of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. I don't even enjoy being around large numbers of friends and family because I am always looking over my shoulder making sure that no one is trying anything crazy. The anxiety I feel when I am in public places with large groups of people is overbearing at times. My temper has gotten me in trouble. Before, I had always been passive — not losing my temper or

getting in fights. That has changed, and it scares the hell out of me that my temper has even landed me in jail on assault charges.

This is how bad it is. I was stationed at Ft. Jackson for my last tour of duty before getting out of the Army when I came home from Iraq. One night Sam, my son, and I were lying on the couch watching a movie. We both fell asleep. He woke up to my beating him in the head and chest with anything I could get my hands on. I had beaten him so hard in the head he could not even stand up because his balance was messed up. The bad thing about it is I did not even know I was doing it. I was having a flash back to something that happened in Iraq.

Through the events in my life, I have learned that I will never know who I will be forever. The most shocking and mystifying thing all this has taught me is that the events in my life changed my persona, my identity, who I am — something I did not believe could happen. I am now very quick to anger and scared to be in a crowd. I live my life as though I am still in a war zone. There are times when I feel that is where I belong, not here. I struggle every day with my inner self. The old me is deep inside and I miss him. I do things now to help reclaim as much of that identity as I can, but I know I never will be that person again. I am now in school learning a new career. If I've learned nothing else, I've learned that this will also change my identity again in some way or other.



TIM BRADSHAW



TIM BRADSHAW