Poetry Review: Graham Barnhart’s THE WAR MAKES EVERYONE LONELY

1.

The book arrives. By mail and on the cover. There are clouds.

Gray clumped in altostratus heaps. A military helicopter headed.

Into thick sky that stretches off. The bottom right hand corner of cardstock.

Or how the title. *The War Makes Everyone Lonely* makes me think of 2007.

How my husband deployed to Afghanistan. And how lonely we both were.

When he came home.

2.

Graham Barnhart’s poems are about war.

What war is.

What war is not.

Like clouds his poems

gather.

3.

There is a musicality to them. Barnhart’s poems.

The transformer outside his sister’s house –

still humming somehow

(Everything In Sunlight I Can’t Stop Seeing)

How the hum makes memory.

Reminds Barnhart of war –

electricity quieting in the wire when the sun

scrapes its knee bloody up the mosque steps

(Everything In Sunlight I Can’t Stop Seeing)

Or how. When he was at war. For Barnhart –

every insect droning is a cicada

(Unpracticed)

4.

Or bullets. How –

Bitterness sounds like this: steel-tongued

cascades pouring out by the handful.

(Range Detail)

5.

At home there is. A child playing an oboe.

Through a window and after.

After Barnhart comes home from war dull.

Growing dull or the music of it.

Human breath pushing down an oboe’s neck.

Blast of sound. How the boy –

he sounds like a robot learning to speak,

but now and then an almost “Ode to Joy”

or “Lean on Me” outlines itself, and I forget

I am going to die.

(Belated Letter To My Grandmother)

6.

Barnhart’s poems are electric.

Like voltage in a box. Or moving down a wire.

How it is this constant current.

The persistent hum of still being alive.

And then the jolts. When you remember.

7.

Remember *yes.*

Writing to his grandmother a letter about the letters

he never wrote.

While he was away. How Barnhart writes –

to say yes

yes, the guns were loud –

loud like gods applauding

(Belated Letter To My Grandmother)

8.

But most of all there is tension.

Tension in Barnhart’s poems.

9.

Tension between war and home. Between

remembering war and leaving it behind or

how –

Flashbacks

don’t announce themselves.

It takes so little.

(Everything In Sunlight I Can’t Stop Seeing)

In one poem, Barnhart is flooded with it.

Memory of barracks and army green wool.

White sheets. Film reel dark rooms.

Passing moon.

The fire watch and screams. Of a drill sergeant.

How Barnhart writes –

I told her all of this when she found me

standing in the bedroom doorway.

(Somnambulant)

10.

The tension is a distance. Between

what happened and how he cannot

describe it. Or regret. When he does –

Behind headlights growing darker

night against the snow, I regret saying

kind of like Afghanistan aloud

with my mother and grandmother

in the otherwise silent heat of the car

(Sewing)

11.

In Barnhart's poems, there is a sense that

coming home from war is displacement or

this placement outside of time. How –

tree branches, black

in the dawn sky, resume their grays and browns

by lunch. The black wrought fences continue

leaning into their rust, rigid and failing

(Everything In Sunlight I Can't Stop Seeing)

Everything remains. Goes on.

And Barnhart writes –

there

is no war in this but me.

(Everything in Sunlight I Can't Stop Seeing)

12.

Or the tension between what is real

and what is not. How there is training

for war. Watching grainy videos of men

over there. Placing bombs. Or defecating

under almond trees. Set to pop music.

Only to emerge in America –

sunbright Texas

tobacco juice hissing on the tarmac.

(Capabilities Brief)

13.

How soldiers play *Call of Duty.* To pass time.

This game of war. Where –

Rifles were weightless. Bombs fell with nothing

close to oversight. Injuries meant

heavy breathing –

a red-tinged screen.

(Medics Don't Earn Killstreaks)

But in a video game, war is fiction. And unreal.

How –

there's no difference between urgent and expectant.

No need to estimate under fire

the percentage of a body burned.

How much fluid to administer. How much per hour

they should piss out. No need to pull the bodies to cover.

They disappear without you

checking their pulse.

(Medics Don’t Earn Killstreaks)

14.

And the unreality of war is not limited to what is virtual.

Barnhart describes an army recruiting advertisement.

A child hugging a soldier. Her brother or her father.

How the word *army* is used five times. *Strong* six.

But there is little war. How there are no –

piles of feet

on airport roads

and no one assigned to shovel them.

(Notice and Focus Exercise)

And –

No blistered trigger fingers.

No depressions in quiet skulls

(Notice and Focus Exercise)

15.

In Barnhart’s poems, war is –

Another year refusing water to children.

When they made the universal gesture for thirst

along roadsides you wouldn’t stop.

(Days of Spring, 2016)

It is bombs –

A bombing at the gate before you arrived

was just a story you knew about rubble.

(Days of Spring, 2016)

It is guards at a gate –

hired to die so you wouldn’t when another bomb came.

(Days of Spring, 2016)

16.

Barnhart’s poetry acknowledges militarism.

Acknowledges aggression.

The physicality of deployment.

Occupying space in a country

that is not your own.

Barnhart remembers arriving in a village

raided by American soldiers. Arriving and –

Dressed
like the men who killed

their
husbands, we passed out sewing machines

to
widows so they could make clothes

for their children and embroider cemetery flags.

(Sewing)

17.

Or in Iraq. Dinner with a man who called himself. King of Kawliya.

Who fed them meat peeled from goat bones.

How they fed each other from their hands.

Barnhart writes –

I remember my fingernail

against a man’s lip .

(Shura)

Or how later –

the women who had prepared our food

and waited with their children for us to finish

were given to eat what we had left.

(Shura)

18.

There is leaving in Barnhart’s poems.

War and

what it leaves behind.

Remembering transitioning a village, Barnhart writes –

all the small corners in that small base

were pulled open. Picked blessedly clean.

Before our dust-wake settled, no stone,

if we had stacked it, was left standing on another

(How to Transition a Province)

This is the tension.

Between going to war but not staying.

Between leaving a mark and wanting

to leave nothing at all.

And the complicity when it is not possible.

19.

Barnhart remembers H.E. rounds. Their smoke and

dust. How –

illume
shells – packed light and smoke

and
shot too low – drop phosphorous

through
civilian fields we aren't

supposed
to burn, so we wait down

the cease-fire in the bus that brought us.

(Indiana-Stan)

There is privilege in leaving. Because –

Over there, if the wheat

or poppy crops catch, we can leave

those fires as soon as they start.

(Indiana-Stan)

20.

This is the complexity of going to war.

21.

When imagining himself on a dating site.

And choosing a profile picture.

Barnhart writes –

Hope it all says: confident

and responsible.

As an aggressor

aware of his complicity.

(Tinder Pic)

He acknowledges –

there will be left swipes

for that arrogance.

For trying to play imperialist

and dissenter without seeming too

patriotic or worse –

apathetic. Naïve or too reckless.

Unwary and soon to explode

(Tinder Pic)

22.

This is the complicity of it.

23.

Or how
because. Because Barnhart is a medic. D18.

U.S.
Army Special Forces Medic. There is a tension.

Between going to war and going to war as a medic.

24.

How the word medic in Latin.

Mederi

Means to heal.

25.

During
deployment, Barnhart works with a physical therapist –

learning
to scrape sore tissue

with
a slice of machined steel

curves
to match the shape of the musculature.

Like
a cradle or scythe, you said to no one

(Days of Spring, 2016)

In
Barnhart’s poems. This is the tension.

How
he is both. A cradle. And a scythe.

He writes
—

And that was how morning found you,

sometimes
a cradle, sometimes a scythe

(Days of Spring, 2016)

26.

But out
of it. Out of this complexity of war.

The
complicity of it. Comes Barnhart’s poems.

Like
the purple loosestrife he describes. That

grows
at the prison near Mazar-i-Sharif –

gathered

trembling
against the walls

(Tourists)

27.

Barnhart
imagines himself –

a glowing green eye in a gargoyle mass.

(0300)

28.

He
describes going to see an informant.

How
he is remembering the man and his cell phone video –

Hacksaw tugging neck skin.

The careful
way you spoke in English

my
uncle, my brother, my uncle’s son. Your
finger

touching
each shemagh-wrapped face.

The
one you couldn’t name I knew was you

(Informant)

Or how
Barnhart’s poetry is like this.

How in
his telling it. He straddles worlds.

Reveals
secrets. Identifies himself. And

invites
the reader. To find themselves.

29.

The
war. The war stretches on like sky.

Across
countries and deployments.

How this
war does not ever end.

30.

Because how many years ago. When I stood on that corner watching.

As a plane
hit the first tower. And a plane hit the second tower. Fire.

Or
people clinging to the metal. Slipping and jumping and falling and

how
the two towers crashed down.

31.

There is a poem about post 9/11 tear gas training.

Words *PRO PATRIA MORI* in red.

Above a cement hut door. *To die for your country*.

Or how. After. Barnhart writes –

Somehow
outside, somehow after

on my
knees with everyone else, purging

years
of sediment phlegm from scraped alveoli,

I saw
the line waiting to go in, heard

the
men behind me learning to drown.

Learning
to breathe that evil pure as air.

Motes
of gas, like dust in sunlight,

wafted
from the exit labeled DULCE ET

(Post 9/11 Gas Training (II))

32.

How
many. Soldiers have gone to war. Gone to

war
post 9/11 and how many have come home.

And how
many.

How
many dreamed of its *sweetness.*

33.

There
is a futility.

Poems
about training and more

training
or the feeling that it may

not

matter.

34.

Barnhart writes —

Today
I can deadlift four-oh-five.

When
I can move four-ten it will

not
stop a bullet or

the
overpressure of a bomb

(Cultivating Mass)

There is a sense of inevitability.

Because
—

A
tourniquet will work

unless
it doesn’t

(How To Stop the Bleeding)

35.

Language
is questioned.

Its
privilege. How Barnhart inscribes diplomas in Pashtu.

Only
to be told. By the Major. To write them in English —

The
Pashtu,

he said,
is lovely

but unofficial.

(Certificates of Training)

36.

Or the
task of announcing he will deploy again.

How Barnhart
imagines his words as bats. How —

I’ll
probably just open my mouth,

wait for something to fly out

(Telling You I Will Deploy Again)

Or when the words don’t come.

Barnhart describes hitting them

with a racket.

Scoops and sloughs them outside.

And –

Regretting,

only
a little, the need, the abrupt

cessation
of a fragile thing,

that terrible
satisfaction, even

with
these apologies hanging limp,

crumpled in the rhododendrons.

(Telling You I Will Deploy Again)

37.

In
trying to describe to his father –

the
dull machine chunk

of a
rifle’s sear reset between rounds

(What Being In The Army Did)

Graham
offers —

maybe
there is no word

(What Being In The Army Did)

Just
space.

Air
between bars. Distance between keys.

To
which his father replies —

No,
he said,

there
is definitely a word

(What Being In The Army Did)

38.

And
Graham questions poetry.

Remembering
a photograph of two dead bodies.

Men wrapped and left on a dirt field. Barnhart writes —

bodies

sloughed
in a field then photographed.

In
their repose

deserving
more than this poem

and
its portions

of
sky framed by power lines.

(Deserving
(II))

39.

Of
course. Loneliness is this.

This
futility. The question.

Of
whether anything makes a difference.

Or if
words are enough.

40.

But

in Barnhart’s poems. His words

are
the answer. The raveled call to

prayer.
Or his surprise to see a boy –

kneeling beside his bucket to kiss the dirt.

*(Call
to Prayer)*

The shared
humanity of experience.

Even
in war. Even in our loneliness.

41.

In
his poems, Barnhart sews together.

The pieces
of war. Memory. Leaving

and coming
home. What it means to

fight
a war and care for its wounded.

42.

He
describes history as a skeleton –

each city suturing

new skin to the skeleton.

(Pissing in Irbil)

Or
how his poems are flesh.

Attaching
themselves to the

skeleton
of what happened.

Wrapping
bone in meaning.

43.

At a poetry
reading, Barnhart sees a bee

dragged
by a spider. As the poet who is

reading
says –

Those
with the time

for

poetry don’t deserve it

(Deserving
(I))

Barnhart wonders –

The
poetry or the time

(Deserving
(I))

44.

I am
not certain we deserve either.

But,
as I read Barnhart’s *The War Makes Everyone Lonely,*

I am
grateful.

Grateful
for both.

New Poetry from Amalie Flynn: “Celebrate”

TREE / SKIN / BONE *image by Amalie Flynn*

1.

Celebrate them.

2.

Celebrate the soldier who went to war

Just to kill.

This soldier accused of shooting and

Killing civilians. How the men from

His own platoon. They say *he did it.*

He shot civilians. He shot at civilians.

Shot a girl in Iraq in a flowered hijab

In her stomach.

Blooming wound. Like a daisy eye or

Hole in her gut. How he shot an old

Unarmed man dead. His white robe

Drenched red. The stain a spreading

Blood sun.

And they say they saw him. Saw him

Kill a teenager.

An ISIS fighter. Wounded and waiting

For a medic on the dirt floor in Mosul.

How they say the soldier said

Lips into a radio

Don’t touch him.

Because *he’s mine.*

Before driving his knife deep and deep.

Hunting knife

Into the boy’s neck. Through skin and

Muscle. Tissue and ligaments an artery.

3.

Or how

There is a photograph.

The soldier squatting in the sand.

Full battle rattle next to the ISIS boy.

His dead body. Face up. Arms bare.

Calves exposed. His legs sprawled.

And the soldier. How he has the boy.

His hair. Gripped in the fist. And he is

Yanking. Yanking him. The boy’s head.

His face up. For the camera.

How in the photograph.

The boy is dead.

And the soldier is smiling.

Because the boy is not a boy.

He is *deer kill.*

3.

Celebrate him.

Celebrate that soldier and the way it felt

When he held that soft sweat tuft of

Human hair.

Between his thumb and fingers like.

Like feathers.

4.

And why. *Why stop there?*

How there are more. More soldiers

5.

Soldiers who stood over dead bodies

On a video. Standing over the dead

Bodies of Taliban fighters they killed.

Killed in war in Afghanistan.

How the soldiers exposed their penises

And urinated on the bodies. Urinating

On the dead bodies or how

They are laughing.

Celebrate them. Celebrate those soldiers.

Celebrate how they felt when that stream

Of urine. Their urine.

Hit the men. Hit the dead bodies. Hit dead

Legs and dead torsos. Dead faces. Splashing

Open dead eyes. Into dead mouths.

Celebrate how.

How it felt. When their urine

Filled the dead men’s nostrils.

6.

Celebrate Abu Ghraib.

Celebrate that it happened. Celebrate

Soldiers who stripped prisoners naked.

Raped them with truncheons. Strapped

Dog collars around their necks. Soldiers

Who dragged men on leashes like they

Were dogs. Who placed bags over heads.

Made men stand on boxes with wires

And electrodes attached to fingers and

Skin. Soldiers. Soldiers. Soldiers who

Tortured men.

Soldiers who piled men. Piled men up
And into contorted piles. These piles
Of tortured human flesh.

7.
Celebrate them.

8.
Celebrate all the soldiers who do it. Who
Do *things like this.*
Celebrate them even though. Even though
The military is filled and filled and filled
With soldiers who
Would never. Who never do these things.

9.
Just don’t say. It is because
They did nothing wrong.
Don’t say. Don’t say *they didn’t do it.*

10.

Celebrate them because you know.

You know they did.

11.

Celebrate them because you like it.

Poetry Review: Aaron Graham’s BLOOD STRIPES

1.

I’m reading Aaron Graham’s war poetry. And I think *violence is a volcano.*

How pressure builds. Between layers of rock. Trapped in a chamber. Or when magma pushes. Fissures like rivers. Up through the upper mantle. Finding surface. How it erupts. Spews hot lava and ash. How bodies can blow. Apart and across a desert named Fallujah. Hurtling and pyroclastic. Or the aftermath.

Graham’s poems remind me.

How war is.

2.

This is Graham’s Iraq.

Come see the valley –

the death-cradle of civilization

(Boots On The Ground)

Iraq is where war is. Where Graham was. Deployed as a Marine. It is where I find him now. A soldier narrator. On the pages of *Blood Stripes*, his debut poetry collection. It is where his poems take me. To Iraq where. Violence erupts and

shells of men are spit out

(Boots on the Ground)

To Iraq where. Skies are shrapnel

whose maw expands in the air

teeth like flame plumes

scorching gouts

(Boots on the Ground)

To Iraq where. Soldiers learn

fresh-burnt flesh

smells like roast beef

(Since Shit Went Sideways)

To Iraq where. There are

limbless boys

whose beautiful bodies

collided on football fields

in Iowa not six months before

(Boots on the Ground)

To Iraq where. Where

infantrymen are now the law

and the law is a pack of white dogs

hunting high-value targets

covering bearded brown faces

with black bags

(Since Shit Went Sideways)

To Iraq where. Children die and

There are bullets in young Sunni boys

mothers must take to a morgue

(Conjunctivitis)

Where the question. This question

did I bury a Sunni girl no larger than my arm?

(Marine Corps Leadership Training)

Dares to exist. This is Graham's Iraq. Where bullets pierce organs and

When a tracer round

becomes a collapsed lung

(Marine Corps Leadership Training)

How

breath

becomes a sparrow flapping

(Marine Corps Leadership Training)

Graham's poetry makes me think of J.G. Ballard. How he said *our civilization is like the crust of lava spewed from a volcano. It looks solid, but if you set foot on it, you feel the fire.* Graham's poems are full of fiery war. The violence of its eruptions. Graham's words forcing themselves up the throat of a volcano. Exploding like lava onto a page.

3.

Graham writes violence as a woman. How even before. War or enlistment. There is a craving

Until bent and jointed,

I hung

Between your breasts

(Midnight Runner)

Or how at war. Violence becomes anatomical. Between fingers. Coating tongue and gums. How

with each trigger pull

until death is a second skin to me,

is the film I rub

between my index and forefinger –

a charnel film I grind against

the backs of my front teeth with a raw

and bleeding tongue

(The Situation on the Ground)

And how after war. How it never goes away. Graham writes

I wear my violent acts

like a hand knit cap – reserved like a fossil fuel

a blubber slice

(Repatriation)

Graham writes of the aftermath. How after the eruption. Lava will flow. How even after. War can push into a house. Seep into a marriage. How

I tell her there are things you know only

after you've seen combat, there exists depths,

intimacies, I cannot will into existence

even when in her arms

(The Curse of a Hammer, About to Drop)

Magma cools and hardens. Forms new igneous rock and PTSD. How

Your curse is the hammer about to drop –

hyper-vigilance. Doors you always lock

when you're on the wrong side

(The Curse of a Hammer, About to Drop)

For Graham PTSD becomes its own violence. One that violates but also beckons. Graham writes

I give thanks to the dead

(Marine Corps Leadership Training)

And. How it is

Because so many of the dead

they're always here

at the table

I've set,

like a mother's breast

(Marine Corps Leadership Training)

Graham’s poems tell a truth about war. Its intimacy. How

there’s nothing as intimate as bleeding

with those men in the desert. A devotion

you’ll never share with a lover, child, or spouse

(The Curse of a Hammer, About to Drop)

War is not just what happens on the battlefield. War is what happens after. What keeps happening. To the soldiers who fight it. The civilians who survive it. After deployment is done. Armored trucks move out. Or a soldier goes home. Graham’s poems offer us the aftershocks of what explodes. And the truth. The truth that. For those it touches. War does not end.

4.

In Graham’s poems, the landscape haunts. Graham writes

I know my way around velvet

(Marine Corps Leadership Training)

How the air in Iraq is alive and cellular.

Electrons sway like the boiled wool

hides – hanging in Yezidi doorways

(Marine Corps Leadership Training)

Landscape is a language. The shape of it shapes meaning. On the pages of *Blood Stripes.* The desert stretches. Almost endlessly. Across Graham’s poems. Across a war. Across all

wars. Years that span a history that can feel ancient. Endless like a horizon line or how

Still the magnitude hits.

A thousand years stretch

down this street

(Mythos (Deployment))

But Graham’s landscape is not endless. This is a landscape marked by war.

The golden sands

that appear

a cold dark green

an eternal crystalline lawn

surveyed by rifle scopes

(Funeral Pyre)

Here is the desert. Where war and dunes heave. Like dying lungs.

This is Graham’s Iraq. How it seems endless. And how. It is also a place of endings. A landscape cropped by the circumference of a rifle scope. Cropped by what happens when. Bullets tear through a chest wall. And hit heart.

This is the striking duality of Graham’s landscape. Because

the cost of invasion is

how something beyond

fathom is lost

or, rather –

comes to end

(Sandscape: Mojave Viper)

This is where. The desert nurtures.

Iraq sand holds your face –

like friends and family used to

(Repatriation)

And this is where war also takes and takes. Until everything is gone or dead. How

in deep deserts

there is only

the abrupt – blast –

cracked windshields

and punctured MRAP

husks. Their rhinoceros bodies –

(Footfalls)

This is where soldiers patrol streets alive. But almost dead.

We trod the pavement on dead

patrol. Deep desert has no edge.

Our third day over the line

outside the wire

horizons merge, a cusp

of bright sky bleeds into earth

where being and not

being

touch impossibly

(Footfalls)

Graham’s poems offer us the duplicity of war. It is the craving and the curse. The eternal and the instantaneous. The invigorating and the deadly. And when soldiers are lucky to live through it. War is a landscape they leave behind. Before realizing they took it home with them.

5.

There is a tension. In Graham’s poems.

Of whether to tell his story of war. Or not to.

I pulled back from the vastness

where nothing needs

– and does not need –

to be written

(Sandscape: Dunes Overlooking Balboa Naval Hospital)

There is the question of how to write war. Because

Violence has a language all its own

(The Language of Violence)

There is a feeling. How war is

Just us bleeding in the desert

(Ode to a Wishing Well)

And that no one. No one else will understand.

Because. Americans do not know war. How they

probably learned

the words that describe

what happens to Marines

in the desert by watching

Anderson Cooper's lips –

round words

(Speaking Arabic with a Redneck Accent)

War for civilians is somewhere else. A running body of chyron.

About a third of the way into *Blood Stripes.* On page 32. A poem entirely in Arabic. I make a list of who I know who speaks Arabic or how. I decide not to. Decide not to try to find out what it says. What the words mean. Because the poem speaks to me in Arabic. How I can read it in Arabic. Even

though. Or because I do not know. What it says.

This is a truth of war. It belongs to those who fight it. The land it is fought on. The civilians who endure its wrath. How there are parts of it. Parts of war. That are hard to translate.

Still Graham does it. In poem after poem. He writes war. He writes war in its own language. Where

a statement is a scar

(The Language of Violence)

Where

The voice of the wound

has a flickering tongue

its syllables escape

with fine bits of lung –

falling wet, into sand

(Speaking Arabic with a Redneck Accent)

And where. A Syrian amputee standing on a road speaks. Speaking in scars

the sacred scars,

which are a language

I can read to you at night

(The Language of Violence)

When Graham writes

how to sing bombs out of the air?

How deep to listen?

(Repatriation)

This is the task. The poetic task Graham takes on. Arming himself with words and war memories.

The result is *Blood Stripes.* And war. Written into being in Graham's poems.

Vivid and startling and forceful.

6.

I wake up thinking about Baudrillard.

And how *The Gulf War Did Not Take Place.*

It happened obviously. But it was something else. Something other than what we thought it was. Different from what we were told.

For Baudrillard. The Gulf War was a series of atrocities. Not a war. The Gulf War was a performance of war. Not a war. The Gulf War was a media narrative constructed. Not a war. Where even the word fighting defied its own definition. As Iraqis got bombed by Americans flying in a technological sky. For Baudrillard. The Gulf War was hyperreal. A simulacrum. It was a not-war war.

And yes Iraq.

How the Iraq War was like this too.

A war. Where American soldiers went. Because of *weapons of mass destruction.* To look for *weapons of mass destruction.*

That did not exist. How the war they thought they were fighting. Was a war that did not happen.

And yet. Graham.

He writes

dry bodies

bloating and broiling

fattening in the desert

(Marine Corps Leadership Training)

How he writes

the purple lips of a wound

(Speaking Arabic With A Redneck Accent)

And I think to myself *there*. *There it is.*

Because war is not what our country tells us it is. War is what happens. To the soldiers who fight it. To the civilians. To the men and women and children and land it surrounds and engulfs and assaults. To the ripped bodies and roads. Roads of sun and bones it leaves behind. To everyone who carries it after. To everyone who carries war for days and weeks and months and years after. Long after we say *it is done.*

The Iraq War happened.

I know it did.

And not because my country told me it did.

But because it is there. Because I felt it. In the viscerally

powerful poems of Graham's *Blood Stripes.*

—

Blood Stripes is available for purchase at your local independent bookstore or wherever books are sold.

New Poetry by Amalie Flynn for the WWI Centennial

Zone Rouge

(for the centennial)

photo by Amalie Flynn

1.
When the land was.

2.
Full of bodies dead. And twisted.

3.
When the fighting was.

4.
Sustained.

5.
With bodies. Dead. Twisted on a riverbank.

6.

Wrist bent. Hand hovers. Over water.

7.
Dead bodies with fingers. Like feathers.

8.
Stretched feathers or the calamus.

9.
Attaching to bird skin.

10.
These are bodies. Bodies of war.

11.
Dead with. Feathered fingers.

12.
Wing of a bird.

13.
300 days of shelling.

14.
The shells were 240 mm. Full of shrapnel.

15.
Mustard gas.

16.
Hitting men and hitting ground.

17.
Making holes. Upon impact.

18.
Shrapnel bursting.

19.
Bloom and rip.

20.
Ripping through dirt and faces.

21.
Ripped skin. Ripping off tissue.

22.
A nose.

23.
Hole in the center of an ear.

24.
Exposing canal and bone.

25.
Missing teeth. One lower jaw is.

26.
Gone. A set of lips.

27.
The chunk of a chin.

28.
And the shells. Shells from Verdun.

29.
Are still there.

30.
Unexploded ordnance. Sunk.

31.
Into dirt pockets. Like seeds.

32.
This blooming. Metal war.

33.
Shrapnel that looks like rocks or.

34.
Smooth egg of a bird.

35.
Soil made of mud and men and metal.

36.
How. Metal leaches and clings.

37.
This soil of war.

38.
Chlorine and lead and mercury and arsenic.

39.
Where every tree and every plant and every animal.

40.
Each blade of grass.

41.
Where 99% of everything died.

42.
Ground stripped raw.

43.
Stripped earth tissue or how this is.

44.
What war also.

45.
Also does.

46.
Damage to properties: 100%

47.
Damage to agriculture: 100%

48.
Impossible to clean.

49.
Human life impossible.

50.
The government declared it *uninhabitable.*

51.
A *no-go zone*.

52.
Broken skeletons of villages.

53.
And the craters that bombs make.

54.
Deep and round holes.

55.
How the bomb craters filled with water.

56.
Making. War ponds.

57.
This is a place.

58.
Where almost everything died.

59.
But the land.

60.
The land was still alive.

61.
Grass stretching again and.

62.
Grafting itself over the bone.

63.
Bone of what happened.

64.
Stretching over trenches and scars.

65.
Like new skin.

66.
And plants and trees and vines.

67.
Rodents and snails and voles and mice.

68.
Deer. Wildcats with metal stomachs.

69.
Still living I say. To my husband.

70.
Who went to war.

71.
War that he did not want.

72.
Afghanistan.

73.
How he came home with hands and feet.

74.
Covered in blisters. *Lesions* the doctor said.

75.
Skin burning. Waking up to him crouched.

76.
On the floor and scratching. Saying *I don’t know.*

77.
And I know.

78.
That this is how war is.

79.
Or later. I will lay in the darkness.

80.
And think about burn pits in Iraq.

81.
Black smoke and jet fuel and fumes.

82.
About Vietnam sprayed. The bare mudflats after.

83.
Defoliation of trees. And birds. Missing mangroves.

84.
How dioxin poisons wind. Sleeps. In a river or sediment.

85.
The fatty tissue of a fish. Atomic blasts in Hiroshima and.

86.
Nagasaki. The incineration of bodies and land.

87.
Tearing skin off people. Tearing trees out of ground.

88.
Tearing everything.

89.
Away.

90.
How black rain fell. Radioactive bomb debris.

91.
Into mouths. Of people and rivers.

92.
How radiation lives. In grass and soil. The intestine of a cow.

93.
About the GWOT. Blood soaked years and streets and.

94.
How many miles of land. Where we left bombs.

95.
Unexploded or forever.

96.
I will think about Zone Rouge.

97.
Trenches like scars.

98.
My husband gardening. The tendons in his arms.

99.
Moving like trees.

100.
Or how war never goes away.

Amalie Flynn

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