

SNAFU

by Anna Froula, Guest Feature Editor

April 2026. We are at war again. The grinding sameness of deployment, whether the *casus belli* is of choice or of necessity. The weapons, medical care, and understandings of post-traumatic stress advance, but the elation, boredom, camaraderie, fear, and grief of in-theater personnel remain constant. Updated, computerized, manned, and unmanned, the vehicles that deliver death from above claim warfighters and civilians alike. We don't have to keep choosing this violent human condition, but we do, again and again, again and again. The decisions made in DC, often by those who have never worn the uniform create fracturing reverberations domestically and internationally – vast and unplanned.

These universal truths are known by the helmeted warfighters floating cloudlike from some arena as if held aloft by invisible Valkyries in Army Veteran Reuben Jarvis Mabry's gorgeous cover art. Mabry also created the *Bombs Away* art that accompanies Army Veteran Walter Bennett's "Map Men." Bennett's poem connects the reader from the wretched transcontinental debris of World War II to the more recent desolation of Gaza. Then, former Battalion surgeon Louis Girón's poem "From the Montvale Veterans Home: The Now and the Then" weaves us through the haze of memories of wartime Vietnam and their long reach into the present. Army veteran Joseph Shea's poem "Dog Days Ft Leonard Wood, August '53" shares a rare glimpse into boot camp five years after the US Military was integrated. Next, Air Force Veteran Jon Kesler reviews former National Guardsman Paul Krenshaw's memoir *This We'll Defend, A Noncombat Veteran on War and its*

Aftermath, reminding us that military personnel do not have to deploy abroad to experience the war machine and its aftermaths. Finally, in his creative nonfiction essay, Navy Veteran Michael Ramos prompts us to consider what we mean when we call a veteran "Decorated."

More veteran-created artwork populates this section. Navy Veteran Jacob Joubert's *Smiley Face* captures the absurdity of war. Army Veteran Amy Louise Brown, feature artist of the Winter issue, returns with a depiction of the writing soldier in *Sitting Soldier*. Also, state war memorials appear in photographs. Abbe Godwin's *After the Firefight*, the North Carolina Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Raleigh, was the first sculpture by a woman on Union Square and the first to depict a Black soldier. An aerial view of the North Carolina Vietnam Veterans Memorial Park reminds us, as all war art attempts to do, not to forget those who fought and perished and will fight and die in our name.

What kind of stories and art will emerge from this new war in Iran? How many new war memorials must we go on to build? How much memorialization will it take us as a nation, as a species, to grasp how wars affect us all to varying degrees? Will we ever pay enough attention? As war photographer James Nachtwey reminded us, "we must look at it. We're required to look at it. We're required to do what we can about it. If we don't, who will?"* I hope that these pages will provide needed space for contemplation and prepare you for what's to come in the print issue.

In addition to the works by Leah Hampton, Jessica Cory, Kimberly Towers-Kubik, Morrow

Dowdle, and the interview with Tracy Crow by Alyssa Froemel I mentioned in the Winter issue introduction, we will feature poetry by Elisabeth Lewis Corley, essays by Paul Crenshaw and Joseph Bathanti, a short story by Laura Cruser, as well as my interview with Michael Ramos and my panel discussion with veterans El'Ja Bowens, Russell Worth Parker, and Mariah Smith at the North Carolina Writers' Network fall conference. The issue will also feature art by Reuben Jarvis Mabry, as well as by Gene Locklear, Erin O'Hara Slavick, Darrold Peters, Ida Mae, A.R. Ammons, Mary Kramerer, Dan Nelson, Skip Rhodes, and Glenn Eure. You won't want to miss a thing, so be sure to subscribe to *NCLR* to receive the print issue this summer. ■

* Quoted from *War Photographer*, Dir. by Christian Frei (Christian Frei Film production, 2001).

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