The Wages of War

by Anna Froula, Guest Feature Editor

I was born in 1974 on the cusp of the United States' final withdrawal from its protracted war in Vietnam. My Gen X childhood was the last of its kind, existing in sporadic, relative peace, despite Reagan's movie-motivated flexing in Grenada and Libya and the elder Bush's challenge to Saddam Hussein to "make [his] day" in Iraq.

As a university professor, I've long wondered what impact growing up in a constant state of warfare is having on my students, who were born after the younger Bush's casus belli of 9/11. And given how little coverage we have gotten of our perpetual state of war, how many even notice what the effects upon them are? I remember a lightning bolt of revelation when I realized that the children of the first wave of warfighters in Afghanistan and then Iraq were old enough to serve in the same wars their parents had. This generation of students has never known peace. Under the leadership of the "Department of War," drone warfare with Iran is changing the face of the US presence in the Middle East, and not in the victorious way they envisioned, given the large-scale damage done to at least thirteen military bases in the region.

Jonathan Vincent's review of Daniel Kraus's Pulitzer Prize-winning *Angel Down* calls reveille to *NCLR*'s last installment of war literature this year, highlighting its grisly portrayal of the hunger for "the next war, the next, the next" in the gaping maw of World War I (Kraus 263). Next, Louis Girón's two poems weave the reader in and out of Vietnam War memories. Michael Loderstedt's piece follows, recalling the ambient stateside violence of Atlantic Beach during the Vietnam War. Elisabeth Lewis Corley takes a beat to remind us to breathe, before my review of three volumes of *Brothers and Sisters Like These,* and then, Mariah Smith's excerpt of her forthcoming novel paints an intimate picture of the 2003 invasion of Iraq. Finally, Annalise Quesnelle's review of Stan Lake's poetry collection captures the imagistic ties between his toad-catching childhood and his service, followed by Russell Worth Parker's short story, which muses on the carnage of war and reminisces about the different trajectories of warfighters.

Art by Phillip W. Jones, Ben Long, Amy Louise Brown, Rob Bates, and Kristopher J. Battles complement the writing in this section, capturing still moments in an endlessly shifting, violent landscape. Perhaps my prophetical fears will come to nought, and things will soon settle down between the US and Iran, so that future students will finally know and live in an era of peace, or at least the absence of US-led warfare. But even if not, at least we can marshal faith that an admirable and courageous array of writers and artists will always remember the feelings of war and its indelible impressions upon the humanity that such violent conflict sacrifices and leaves behind. ■