

Basic Training

Lewis Horne

We were like filings, lifted straight
As though a magnet stiffened up
Our figures like the hair upon
Our closely cropped skulls. But we,
Draftees, were regularized
In squad, platoon, and company.

We bunked, barracks crammed, fell out,
Helmeted, to a bitchbox bark,
Where magnetized we strode as one
On Fort Ord's January streets.
The early morning fog's miasma
Spread over hills and lights and barracks.

We sounded off in unison.
For us, in uniform, Korea
Formed a private watershed.
It set some personal divide
Till private course was loosed again.
I never thought contrariwise.

As in life, we were in training
Honed to different basic needs.
What remedies survival has,
I only snatched at some, not all.
A bayonet's a fearful thing.
A killer's rage I never mastered.

Life can be blunt. Koreas appear
Anywhere. The end of skill
Is to stock the skull with strategies,
Prepare the bones for an exercise
That will from a well-stocked store fall out,
Fierce as filings magnetized.