

Honors Pt 1.

The blades rotate, cutting the air.

Night closes in on our formation.

Ambulances back up under the klieg lights.

We all stare as the doors open.

I am voluntold.

New to the platoon, but still family.

I stand the twenty-four who carry the body bags.

Each man takes a corner of one of the six litters.

I am in the last pair with Fisher standing next to me.

We carry Lewis to the waiting bird,

Through pools of light in this land of shades.

Together we stand and protect our fallen.

We think it is Lewis, but we don't know.

The bags are filled with parts of bodies.

Nothing whole remains of our kin.

Not surprising when you find a SAW on a roof six houses down.

I am beaten, underfed, and still shaking from weeping with the others.

My fingers start to lose the handgrip from sweat and weakness.

I have to use two hands to carry my corner of Lewis.

I am not worthy of the honor to be my brother's pallbearer.

We approach the helicopter and lay down our burden.
We salute as they leave for their final flight home.
The Valkyries shoulder our tears, our blood, our dead
To rest eternal in their homeland.

The brigade commander talks to us about loss.
He tells us about his ritual for remembering the fallen.
I hate him for it.
I want him gone.

This is a family matter.
He may be “one of us” but he wasn’t there.
He doesn’t roll with us, isn’t blood of my blood.
He has NO right to preach at me.

Now I see he had every right.
They were his family, too.
I’m sorry, sir, for my ignorance.
We miss them and remember them in our own ways.

2

I love Julia.
Erin doesn’t know about her.
But I take care of her,

And she loves me back.

We spend every day together, never separated.

Well, sometimes we're apart, but never very far.

We eat together, sleep together, walk together.

But at the gym or MWR,

She stays at the entrance with her friends.

I love my rifle, and she treats me right.

She was with me through the worst

On the rooftops, through baking streets, over foul creeks.

I dust her off during missions

And scrub and oil her down between same.

She is the constant in my life.

Only on rare occasions does Julia get a GI cleaning.

Broken down to the smallest bits, scrubbed and oiled.

Scrubbed and oiled, scrubbed and oiled, scrubbed and oiled.

Finally, when not a speck of dust, a molecule of carbon can be found,

I put her back together to be polished.

Her ebon finish glistens before the memorial.

She sits outside with her friends.

They lean on each other for support, like we do inside.

Each clutches a three round magazine to her heart

As they wait politely for their turn to speak.

The six of us march outside into the heat.

We carefully secure our weapons and await our orders.

We push away sadness to a deep place.

We ignore each other's tears, and act as consummate professionals.

We must be perfect, they deserve no less.

Group atten-SHUN, and we become like statues.

Port ARMS, and the rifles move as our hands chamber rounds.

Right FACE, and we turn as one mechanism.

READY, and our right feet slide back in the gravel.

AIM, and rifles rise as safeties click off in synchronicity.

FIRE! And we cycle the bolts.

FIRE! And the single device we are cycles the bolts.

FIRE! And all rounds are expended.

Present ARMS, perfection is achieved, if only for an instant.

Atten-SHUN, and it is finished.

We collect the brass to send home to the families with their flags.

Blanks are filthy things that spray carbon and powder everywhere.

Julia gets another thorough cleaning at home that night.

Like the others, I just need to shut off for a while.

I throw myself into the task of making my love spotless.

3

The incessant buzzing could drive a man mad.

It drowns out the music.

Stifling the conversation.

Making me focus on the pain.

The tattoo isn't my first, but it's the biggest.

Right now, it's a line and two numbers.

More will be added later, but for the moment

It's a simple symbol for a complex memory.

Five slash six, five over six, $5/6$

It doesn't look like much, very minimalist.

Except it takes up a quarter of my torso.

A scar on my body to match the one in my mind.

I try to talk with the artist about life,

As his needle stabs me thousands of times.

I need the pain, the reminder, the ink.

I must never forget May Sixth.

My memory is pretty well shot,

But I will never forget the names:

Alexander, Romeo, Lewis, Harkin, Purcel, Bradshaw.

This scar helps me remember.

I'm not the only one to get tattooed.

We all bear different variations

But maintain the same theme.

We will remember them.

Never forget the day.

Never forget your brothers.

Remember their sacrifice.

Honor the dead.