

Reunion of *Georgia Military Academy Class of 1962*

I.

Our class bugler Jimmy Sims,
blows the “Taps” and breaks down.
One hundred graying men, some saluting
and others with hand over hearts
have come to attention around
their former bull ring, bounded
by knee-high pyramids of cannon balls.

Like a graduation procession
through heaven’s gate, the names
of departed classmates are read,
by our chaplain, John Brinsfield
each underscored with a prayer-gong,
struck and left, thirty-three times
to resonate into silence.

Each name surprises,
like an “incoming” round--
a memory, of a camaraderie
when time didn’t seem to count--
in class, on sport and drill field,
or screwing off in refuge
from the discipline meant
to make us into men.

The Commandant meted out punishment
in wasted time and shoe leather
for the pranks we played.
Before we went off to real war,
we practiced for it here.

Unrecognizable, except by our tags
fifty years has etched our faces.
“I can’t look that old?”
and then I can’t recall the story
saved to tell after all these years,
when it’s my turn at the cocktail party.

II.

With the reading of the names, the faces
of my departed teammates and the story come
back:
Football camp in South Georgia,
a steamy August.
We were up at dawn to run
a mile and a half around a tempting lake
we couldn’t plunge in.

John Reeves, our skinny half-back,
ran in combat boots and always won;
Big Don Kirkpatrick, who caught
many a crucial pass, our tight end,
was also up-front. Duncan Dunn
our star fullback, we always counted on
for yardage, coolly lagged behind.
We were state champs until Dunn
went down ramming in for the score.

With whistle in square jaw,
Franklin Brooks, our line coach,
an All-American from Georgia Tech urged us on.
For him, we would go through walls;
he made us forget the heat
and hunger for combat.

Bruised and exhausted
from two weeks of internecine combat,
pushing sleds and hitting dummies,
we were finally allowed one night
out to the movies. We dreamed
of something with lots of Hollywood cleavage.

We drove into Palmetto,
Georgia, searching for the marquis
at the Dixie Theater.

Damn!

We rubbed our eyes—
there, in big black and white letters:

“Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs”