

DESERT ODYSSEY, 1991... AND STILL...

This dreaded sea is dry, its wavy crests
Designed of sand, its granulated tides
Eternally unscheduled, owned by wind
Or gravity when overburdened heights
Slide down a concave swell. And now disturbed
By men in motion and their weaponry.
A mortar shell will spew a mighty splash,
The hole fills up like leakage in a bilge.

Could be the desert has its own Poseidon.
And if he chose this realm for peaceful rest,
His hideaway for secret meditation,
His anger rose at those first noisy lights
That ripped the dark and crazed the blistered sky.
By now, the god must be enraged enough
To pour his bile on mortals setting fires
That char the clouds, and blasts that crater Hell.

My own seaworthy ship, a tank with eyes
To leap horizons, pierce the dark and relay
Images Athena couldn't conjure.
My crew is trained but none is battle-wise
As those who followed brave Odysseus.
I make myself no such comparison,
No hero. No enchanted sojourns, nymphs
Or ogres-- ah well, maybe counting colonels.

Eng-Lit professor, weekend warrior
For years-- small incongruity in that.
My Army unit called me up and shipped
Me out, late of a college classroom where
I taught the classics: Homer, Virgil, Dante,
Themselves no strangers to the Fates and Strife.
And like most men who fight on foreign ground,
The mind survives on memories of home.

(cont.)