

## Inside Doors

*by Nancy Mann*

Tired from stomach crawling,  
Yesterday's ammo-hauling  
He kept up the banter and jokes  
He laughed Dear John letters off, and offered soldiers hope –  
Bolstering remarks were never trivial –  
Single moments- camaraderie, beer-drinking, convivial...  
Commo not always official, packaged delivery or bliss-  
Might be a buddy's sudden, low hiss...  
Keep 'em, Remarks, humorous,  
Some medals awarded would be...posthumous.  
His mind would stop, drift, float  
Wander without purpose, on a voyaging God-knows-where ship or boat

Dawn  
Fallujah –  
Lay dog  
Lying in darkness  
Hearing muted sounds  
Wedged in - forty men  
3,000 insurgents, around.

A door is a movable barrier  
He dreamed about one yesterday night  
The Enemy crashed through – he woke-Fright!  
Thinking: Something's not right...  
Phantom Fury- next week? No – it'll be...tonight...

Then he was in it and, his flank  
Next to pools – stagnant water, which royally stank...

Nervous and jittery  
Months before, April, he combed the city  
You couldn't tell then broken nerves by his salute-  
Snapped to attention – was alert  
Fired back: "Numbers killed or hurt..."  
The intel major, safe in the rear  
Offered poor leadership, was ever unclear...

Major? No medevac requested  
Said "ground fire too intense,"  
His superior's plans – "bested."  
He, new recruit, 18-round magazine opened fire,  
Iraqi's back – emptied the entire –  
Recruit's ulna – broken.  
From the Major – no words were spoken...  
Once faced no cover,  
Chase ship, CH46E Sea Knight helicopter hovered –  
Recruits cried "We've been had!"  
But the Major, truly never gave the word  
"Crank the birds!"  
The recruit recovered alleged insubordination –  
Doubled the Major's one man guard and shifts,  
For himself,  
Listened to dudes re: fragging, tried to heal rifts...

The weather – it was clear and hot –  
Calculated his odds...sweating...  
Would he come through this one? Not.  
In Basic Training, he shouldered arms, sprinted,  
More serious matters, officers never hinted...

Sudden brain stoppage – ghost-images chess-mate, checked –  
Re-engage, soldier! Break light-beam  
Down into individual flecks...  
Sometimes, strangely, Monotony...  
Then, "Wham!" Death for infantrymen – IEDs arrived;  
Time's Present – A Lesson in Mortality.

First Battalion, 8<sup>th</sup> Marine Regiment looking? Al-Zarqawi  
Confronting Chechens, Libyans and Saudis  
Procedures in place:  
Defend, Reinforce, Attack, Delay  
November of '04, 24-hour day.  
93,000 machine gun rounds 3<sup>rd</sup> Marines – 300 precision rockets  
He, 1-8 versus Ba'athists – in spider pockets –

Stress reactions: Can't prioritize tasks.  
Relief through drugs – pot, in flasks.  
No concentration. Exhaustion.  
Headaches. Back pains. Sweating.  
Nausea. Vomiting. Depression.  
Startle response. Abuse of a Spouse.

Clothing unkempt. Apathy. Dysentery.  
Suicide Attempt. No longer honorable,  
Auto theft. Vagrancy begins.  
Felonies; he'd need money –  
For hard-stuff – for the rent.

In some restaurant, someday, you might see  
Your way back with (limit ten) tapes, "6 Days in Fallujah"  
From the video store,  
Ten tapes – or more,  
Or, "Christmas" (same place) sung by Billy Joel,  
You, in the crowd, might see  
A Lost Soul (Definitely) –  
Civilian life begins Lifetime of Nightmares,  
(If anyone cares)  
You'll see a guy, boots firmly on the floor,  
A stiff-necked Vet, will be sitting...

Sitting  
Facing the door...