

# NORTH ATLANTIC REVIEW



## *Special Sections*

Tom Casey - *Dynasty & Human Error* (an excerpt)

Michelle Campbell - *My Tuesday at Jim's*

Steve Matteo -

\* *Positively 4th Street - Bob Dylan in Greenwich Village*

\* *The Word Became Flesh - Interview With Gay Talese*

Owain Hughes -

\* *Hurricane Jimena—Two Views*

\* *The Birds*



Number 22 2011 \$15

**North Atlantic  
Review**



Number 22 2011

**NORTH ATLANTIC REVIEW**  
**2011**

**Number 22**

*North Atlantic Review* is published once a year by the North Eagle Corporation of New York, a not-for-profit organization.

Submissions of poetry (to 1,000 words) and fiction (to 5,000 words) are welcome, along with humor, satire, essays, criticism and book reviews. Send queries for consideration of novel excerpts and narrative poems.

Manuscripts should be typed and double-spaced and all correspondence must be accompanied by a self-addressed, stamped envelope (SASE). Reporting time on submissions is five to six months. Payment is in contributor's copies. Simultaneous submissions are acceptable.

Subscriptions are \$18 for two years and \$10 per single issue. Contributions, donations, etc., are welcome and are tax deductible. Please make checks payable to "North Eagle Corp. of N. Y." at the below address.

North Atlantic Review  
15 Arbutus Lane  
Stony Brook, N. Y. 11790-1408  
E-mail: JohnEdwardGill@cs.com  
Website: <http://www.northeaglecorp.com/>

**Editorial Board**

Dolores Bilges (production & design)	John Gill (editor)
Michelle Campbell (Paris photo editor)	Andrew Kennedy
Richard Castellano	Carolyn Johnson Lewis (fiction)
David Cohen, Esq. (legal consultant)	Stephen Lewis
Steven Dietrich (technical consultant)	Lee Mandel (fiction)
Lin Gill (research)	Gerry O'Connor (graphic design)

Ceil Mazzucco-Tham (managing editor)

*North Atlantic Review* is distributed by  
Ingram Periodicals, Inc.  
18 Ingram Blvd., La Vergne, TN 17086

©2011 North Eagle Corp. of New York

# Contents

## Special Sections

Tom Casey	<i>Dynasty</i>	1
	<i>Human Error (an excerpt)</i>	5
Michelle Campbell	<i>My Tuesday at Jim's</i>	14
Steve Matteo	<i>Positively 4th Street</i>	28
	<i>Bob Dylan in Greenwich Village</i>	
	<i>The Word Became Flesh</i>	39
	<i>Interview With Gay Talese</i>	
Owain Hughes	<i>Hurricane Jimena—Two Views</i>	43
	<i>The Birds</i>	48

## Prose and Poetry

Elaine Kay	<i>So, What Happened to Kinky?</i>	52
Edward Eriksson	<i>Enjoying Sicily</i>	56
	<i>Stealing Home, an excerpt</i>	70
	<i>from Moonbeam in My Pocket</i>	
Stephen Lewis	<i>The Gulls' Sweetly Banked Flight</i>	79
James V. Jordan	<i>Sympathy for the Devil</i>	86
Jody Azzouni	<i>Sunny</i>	90
Bob Cengr	<i>Yearbook Photo</i>	97
John Edward Gill	<i>Last Run in Paris</i>	105
Ed Gutierrez	<i>White is the Absence of Color</i>	123
Enid Harlow	<i>Round and Round</i>	135

L. Upton Illig	<i>One for Our Side</i>	146
Allan Izen	<i>Breaking News</i>	153
Jeffrey N. Johnson	<i>Legs of the Lame</i>	157
D Sprung Kurilecz	<i>You are Mine</i>	167
CB Magin	<i>Heir Pollution</i>	182
E. Martin Pedersen	<i>Heal Thyself—an excerpt</i>	194
Mark Meier	<i>The Thing We Had Slain</i>	208
Guy Prevost	<i>The Canadian Sergeant</i>	218
Sally Weiner Grotta	<i>The Broken Bottle</i>	231
Suzanne Schnittman	<i>Resurrection: The Sweetness of Comfort Food</i>	241
<b>Contributors</b>		244

# The Canadian Sergeant

Guy Prevest

He first came to me in the early morning, after a night patrol. I expected the usual.

"I just want to talk," he said. "Sleep, maybe."

"I'm not paid to talk."

"You can tell them what you want." Well, I saw no harm in it, so I didn't protest. He surveyed the tent, sniffed a bottle of my perfume, then looked down at the old phonograph.

He flicked the switch and the turntable spun silently. He turned it off and sat down on the bed. By the time I poured myself a glass of *pinard*, our rot gut wine, he'd fallen asleep. The early light, muted by the surrounding mountains, spilled through the canvas curtains. I stood up, slipped on a robe, and lit a cigarette. I glanced at the sleeping soldier. He was slight of build, and seemed different than his comrades. I'd noticed he spoke French as if it was his first language, but with a funny accent. And he was clean shaven, making him appear younger than the others. A while later he woke up, seeming not to remember where he was.

"You were pretty quiet for someone who wanted to talk," I said. He left me a pack of cigarettes and disappeared through the curtains.

That was in the early part of the campaign at Dien Bien Phu, before the catastrophe. Spirits were high. I walked outside into the cool morning air. I tried one of his cigarettes, which was sweeter than our standard issue. A heavy fog lingered on the lush mountains, canopied with liana vine and calamander and broadleaf trees. It was a paradise, I had thought, when they flew us here. Water was as plentiful as the sand of my homeland, green prevalent as the browns of my arid mountains. Madame, our senior officer, was supervising the girls from the night shift as they brought buckets of water up from the river. She cast me a sideways glance as she walked by, having just passed the Canadian Sergeant.

"Beatrice," she said. "Try and hurry it up next time."

I shrugged. "He was more patient than most."

"You know how to handle that," said Michelle. The others laughed and cackled as they emptied the buckets into the storage tank beside the "Tent of Blue Lights," as our barracks were called. The incandescent bulbs strung along the canvas roof shone faintly in the gathering daylight.

"Third brigade jumping in this afternoon..." said Madame. She meant settle down and be ready for this evening. I nodded, took a drag of the cigarette. It would be a big party. As I said, this was early, when High Command was flying in special chefs to cater to the *kepis'* international tastes. Lamb for the Africans, *boudin* for the French, schnitzel for the Germans. As regulars in the Mobile Field Brothels with the legion rank of private, we often shared in these feasts, especially in the beginning.

The high mountains created the horseshoe valley encircling our base. There were a number of smaller hills which thrust up from the valley floor. It was here that the soldiers were making their fortifications, though nobody dreamed the enemy would ever get close enough to be in range. They named each hill after one of us: *Huguette*, *Francoise*, *Claudine*, *Michelle*, and finally mine, *Beatrice*. But of course these weren't our real names, any more than the soldiers' names were real.

I could see rows of men, like ants, digging trenches on my namesake hill. Further down, the Vietnamese loyalists were stringing barbed wire into the field below, right up to the river's edge and the new airstrip. All our supplies and men arrived by plane or parachute. The huge Howitzer on *Beatrice*, a 155 mm I later was told, was being moved over to the left, pointing north. A jeep drove by with General de Castries, smoking his pipe, laughing with his adjutants. He was the Commander of all French forces in Indochina. He saw me and tipped his hat.

The Canadian Sergeant returned several days later, after another patrol. He brought a record and asked if he could play it. Of course. This was my trademark. "*Beatrice Philco*," they called me sometimes. I had stacks of old records to choose from if they didn't bring their own.

The well-worn cardboard sleeve had a picture of a black man at a piano. The Canadian Sergeant removed the record and laid it on the turntable. He stopped, looked at me carefully, as if sizing me up.

"Algerian?" he asked.

"Moroccan."

"Your eyes," he said. "Blue, green... green blue." I poured him a glass of *pinard*, which he sipped, and then he turned on the phonograph.

It was just piano, fast, and to be honest, it didn't sound like music to me. He sat on the bed and smoked, listening, rant. I waited for the usual



– but no. He gave me another pack of cigarettes, and again he fell asleep. This time, when he awoke, he lingered for a moment.

“I’d like to go to Morocco. It’s very pretty, I hear. The desert.” He took the record and left.

It was usually after their third visit that they started to spill their guts. Only with the others, it was some nonsense about sporting triumphs, their miserable wives, or the cruel judges who’d forced them into this mess. This being the Legion, the *kepis*, I always heard the sob stories, the hard luck which drove each of them from their country, family, stripped of all respect. And usually there was bitterness, and, I hate to say it, I generally had the feeling they got what they deserved. And wondered once their five years of service was over, and they were honorably discharged with a new name and a clean record, if they’d screw up their lives all over again.

In him, I never sensed the bitterness. He was more concerned about the campaign and the men in his squad. And what General de Castries was doing or rather what the enemy was doing. There were rumors, he said, of a Vietminh supply line coming down from the Chinese border. This seemed impossible. Seven hundred miles of tortuous mountain jungle. No way to move men and guns on this terrain—that’s why High Command had chosen the valley to make a stand. To stop communism. I didn’t know what that meant at the time.

“It’s complicated,” he said. “It’s politics.”

The next time he came with his friend Dr. Badois, the camp surgeon, who was one of Michelle’s regulars. Michelle herself strolled in and we sat around drinking *pinard* and listening to records. The air was thick with cigarette smoke as they talked about the journalists visiting the camp and the wild American pilot who was helping fly in supplies. We were all waiting for something to happen.

Michelle asked if she could borrow the *Philco*. I said yes and she and Badois left with the phonograph. I was looking at the back cover of the Sergeant’s record sleeve, trying to decipher the mystifying rows of symbols which made up the printed French. I could recognize only a few words.

I started to look forward to the visits of the Canadian Sergeant. Even that crazy piano music I grew to enjoy. Maybe he was bored, maybe he had “*le cafard*”, “the cockroach”, that desperate isolation suffered by legionnaires at remote Saharan outposts (which led, they say, to the founding of the MFB, for relief). Maybe he wanted to remember whatever it was that piano music made him think about. Then one afternoon he



brought me a little book, *History of France in 10 Chapters*. It was a primer for French schoolchildren. And that's when he began to teach me to read.

Two weeks later Michelle and I walked back from the airfield, carrying a box of perfume and penicillin, marked with the MFB stencil. A light rain was falling, and a supply plane lumbered down the tarmac, the backwash of its propellers bending the high grasses, then taking off and sweeping an arc into the distant clouds above the mountains. We watched it disappear and moved on beyond the infirmary toward our Tent of Blue Lights. I heard a high pitched whistle, faint at first, then louder, like the sound of fireworks. I turned back, looking for the plane, and there was an explosion, right beside me, an eruption of dirt and mud. I felt an enveloping warm wind, a kind of pressure, stumbled, but somehow held my ground. I still gripped my side of the box but Michelle had let go. I looked back and there was nothing left of her – just a hole in the ground, a shred of her peignoir.

General de Castries and High Command thought the VM had moved one gun into the mountains. But it wasn't just one.

We held a service for Michelle by the river. The Canadian Sergeant and Dr. Badois brought flowers salvaged from the officers' mess.

Back in the Tent of Blue Lights, he was smoking quietly. I was drinking wine. The shelling had begun in earnest, day and night. We could hear the explosions up on *Claudine*.

"Do you have brothers, sisters?" he asked.

"Six brothers, two sisters."

And finally, like the others, the Canadian Sergeant started to talk.

He came from very fancy people, he told me. In his hometown, Montreal, his father's family was buried in a big crypt which overlooked the cemetery and the city. They were French Catholics. His father, a doctor, had died in a car accident when the Sergeant was very young. He came from a long line of doctors and now his brother was in medical school. His brother was a better student, and though he too could have studied medicine, the Sergeant had decided against it. He'd known he'd always be in his brother's shadow, and he wanted to continue to love him and not grow to resent him. Besides, he didn't like cadavers and blood. We both smiled grimly.

So through his uncle, who ran a restaurant and was well connected, he landed a job in a bank, with the intention of working his way up. He started as a teller. This turned out to be a bad choice, he said.

In those days he played poker every Tuesday night with a group of

businessmen from the city. He was always good at cards, and one night won five hundred dollars from Mr. Lavarre, a real estate developer. Lavarre was short of cash, promising to pay him the following weekend. He knew Lavarre for a long time, and was confident that he would honor the debt.

That week a beautiful girl came into the bank, a girl, he said, he had always yearned for and known throughout his school years. She had brilliant blue green eyes, just like mine, he told me. Because she had been with his brother for a while, he had kept his distance. But now, the thing with his brother had ended. That day in the bank she told him she and some friends were going down to New York, taking the train, planning to stay the weekend and hear a new piano player in a special part of the city. She invited him to come along.

He couldn't afford the trip, but Navarre had promised to pay him the five hundred by the end of the weekend. He mulled the options and was struck by a simple thought. He could "borrow" the money from the bank. Each day he emptied out his drawer, the amount was noted, then locked up until the following day when it was verified by the Manager. He could take the money he needed (after the tally), which was close to the five hundred he'd won from Lavarre, then collect from him Sunday night and restore it before the Monday verification.

All went as planned. They went to hear the piano player, whose style was so different and so exciting. The Canadian Sergeant rented a room at a grand hotel, and the girl stayed with him that night. They had fun, they spoke of the future. But on Sunday night Lavarre never showed up to re-pay the money. He'd died of a sudden heart attack.

When the bank found out about the missing funds the next morning, the Canadian Sergeant was summarily fired. The amount was enough to bring charges of embezzlement, and the bank pressed for the harshest punishment, to make an example. The Sergeant was most concerned for his mother. She fell under a cloud of shame. And he knew he was her favorite, despite his brother's excellence in all things.

The Sergeant's family held a trump card, a powerful and influential Aunt, his dead father's sister, who was also the wife of the Police Chief. The Sergeant's mother approached the Aunt, though it was very difficult for her. She knew the Aunt disliked her, had regarded her as inferior and had always resented her marriage to her brother. Still, the Aunt agreed to intervene. But she secretly wanted to hurt his mother, as deeply as possible, and now controlled the fate of the person she loved most in the world. So the Aunt brokered a deal where the charges were dropped on the condition that the Sergeant would leave the country for ten

years. It was this or five years in prison, which she knew her nephew would never accept. The Sergeant said goodbye to his brother, mother, and friends. He went to France. After drifting in Paris for six months, he surprised everyone by joining the Legion.

“It turns out I like the military life,” he said.

“And the girl?” I asked.

“I told her to forget me. Ten years is too long to wait.”

The battle had started now, the battle they thought would never come. The VM had taken the high ground in the mountains and somehow had moved the guns into position. The French Officer who boasted he could neutralize those guns had committed suicide. The shelling was relentless, as were the waves of VM troops, young as the French and just as ready to die. We needed penicillin, lots of it – not only for us – but for the soldiers, because the wounded were too numerous to count. But even then some came into the Tent of Blue Lights for the usual, and now you couldn't help but care for them.

Nobody counted on the bicycles, the Canadian Sergeant told me. Or the log bridges built underwater, just a few inches below the rivers' surface, so that the bicycles and sledges could cross, but the French pilots couldn't spot them from the air. He told me that the VM had built the supply line everyone had thought was impossible. They didn't ride the bicycles, but loaded them with sacks of grain and ammunition and pushed them over the treacherous mountains. They tied together the treetops above the trail, making it invisible.

The rain came. Our dirt floors turned to mud. We put down boards, raised them with stones we scavenged from the battlefield, between the corpses.

Still, when the battle lulled, he would come to talk, or to continue the lessons. I'd write out the French verbs in a black and white spiral notebook. And then read from the primer, “*The great king Charlemagne united the hostile barons...*”

He never regretted that weekend, he told me. And then, he said, that maybe he'd never go back to Canada.

“And you?” he asked.

I broke my rule, never to reveal anything of myself.

I told him how the day before my father sold me was white hot. How the sand stretched from the outskirts of our settlement, near the edge where my six brothers and I would play after the sun fell low on the horizon. We were throwing stones to see who could get closest to a stake

once used to tie up the family goat, recently eaten by ourselves and patrons of my father's restaurant for the past week. In the distance we saw the convoy of trucks and tanks approach the village. We generally looked forward to this, because it meant good business. My father served couscous and mint tea and offered the occasional kief pipe.

The next morning, after my father had reaped a windfall with the troops, he woke me, forced me to pack my few belongings, and had my mother brush my hair. He gave me a blouse, white lace, and my mother groomed me in the way of the French. She said I looked beautiful and hugged me very tightly. Then she gave me the *Philco*, her most valued possession, a gift from a wealthy woman in Fez whose house she cleaned. My father took me down to the place where the trucks were bivouacked. I was fourteen. I knew my father had no use for me. He had plenty of help around the restaurant from my older sisters, while my brothers had gone off to Casablanca and other bigger cities to find work.

"This will hurt," he said. "But in the end you will thank me... at the end there is a pension."

We walked through the encampment, past the rug merchants and farmers hawking their grain, and I saw the soldiers looking at me closely. I'd noticed this funny stare on the faces of men since I'd turned eleven, even from boys in my own village. We approached a tent, and my father spoke in his broken French to the guard standing outside. The guard disappeared, and then came out with the Colonel.

The Colonel looked me over, "No disease?"

Only later did I learn the terms of the agreement. Ten years of service in the MFB and then retirement on a small pension with lifetime medical care from the French government.

After I told him my story, the Canadian Sergeant ceased coming for several days. The fighting had intensified and I was afraid to ask about him. It was April, the anniversary of *Carabone*, a legendary campaign where a brigade of legionnaires fought bravely to the last man. Ordinarily a cause for celebration. Now a grim reminder. So the men were whispering. This was to be another *Carabone*, or worse.

The problem was the airfield. It had taken such a beating from VM shells that soon our planes would be unable to land or take off. We'd be completely isolated and surrounded by the enemy. Madame had been trying to talk High Command into airlifting us out. She'd won de Castries' approval and we'd even started packing our gear. The funny thing is, as I gathered my *Philco*, records and a few clothes, I began to feel that I wanted to stay – to leave would be a kind of desertion. But the plan was

scuttled without warning. The last flights were reserved for the wounded - and a few journalists.

Finally the Sergeant showed up. He was very distraught, hurrying to gulp a glass of *pinard*, pacing from one side of the tent to another, having no relief. He turned to me, his beautiful smile now grotesque: two front teeth had been replaced with false ones made out of lightly colored wood.

"... patrol up north of *Claudine*, something underneath ... the ground... thudding, scraping. At first I thought a Howitzer. I turned back just as I saw the VM soldiers -tunneling to the surface. Up through a hole like rats." He told me he lost his teeth diving for cover, others were not so lucky. And this was the best the surgeon could come up with, Laotian teak.

He didn't want to play music that day.

"Yesterday was the last plane out," he said.

"I know."

Grimacing, the Canadian Sergeant examined his new teeth in the mirror.

"You're still handsome," I said, touching his face.

"Sure," he replied. "Cheaper too. I'll go to the carpenter instead of the dentist." He turned from the mirror and opened the primer. "Let's continue...*Louis XIV, known as the Sun King...*"

The airfield was cratered like the moon. Now at night, or in the foggy dawn, we stood outside listening for the drone of the supply planes. Huddling with the other girls, I thought of my first days with the MFB, how I cried for three days straight, confined in the Legion barracks, just minutes from my own home. How I was sure my father would change his mind and come to save me. How Madame, in her own way, had tried to comfort me, and waited until the battalion moved on to another village before my "initiation."

We saw the sacks drop from the sky. Huguette, Claudine, and I ran to find those marked for the MFB.

"They're asking the men for volunteers. A patrol past *Michelle* and the river...to make a final breakthrough," said Huguette breathlessly.

"So?"

"It's suicide," Claudine chimed in. "That's what my boys are saying."

"What do your boys know? They're all cowards."

"Shut up, you bitch!" We reached the boxes and quickly cut the nylon ropes of the parachutes to free the boxes, inches deep in the muddy

ground.

“My guy won a medal already – your man won’t even fight.”

“Not like Beatrice Philco... one of hers doesn’t even *do it*.”

The two girls started to scuffle and we all cheered them on. Madame intervened.

“You crazy whores, let’s get this stuff back before we’re killed.”

As we obeyed, Huguette said to me. “No way to get past those guns, and if you do...” She motioned with her hand to her throat.

The days and nights ran together. The smoke from the guns and fires blackened the sky. It was a different kind of *cafard*, a delusion, a dream. Even the supply planes couldn’t make their drops. Or, if they did, many of the parachutes would fall through the clouds to the Vietminh side. Outside the *thawat, thawat*, of the field artillery. I helped Dr. Badois in the surgery. Wrapping wounds, cleaning up the mess. And then back to the Tent of Blue Lights. Whether they were firing inside me or firing at the enemy it all started to feel the same. I drank enough of the *pinard*, and it was OK. I thought about how many more of these men would be dead by the end of the week. How I could be dead too. But when you’re young, death has no shape, no meaning. That’s why, I now know, they send the young to fight. Soon I felt like one of them.

Despite the chaos, the Canadian Sergeant had shaved. He brought a bottle of wine and struggled to pry the cork with his field knife. I gave him a corkscrew I had on hand. He opened the bottle and poured two glasses into our tin cups. It wasn’t the *pinard*. I noticed the difference right away.

“My mother will suffer,” he said. “I wrote her every day until the planes stopped.” He savored the wine. “It’s good, isn’t it?”

“Yes.”

“From St. Emilion. In the southwest of France. I dug it out of the rubble that was the General’s HQ...this is the only thing that wasn’t blown up.” He flicked on the *Philco*. But the power was long gone (as were, of course, our blue circus lights). He toasted me anyway.

Nobody counted on the bicycles, he told me again. And the extra men, following behind, so if a man pushing one bicycle falls, another could immediately take his place.

The VM troops would never let up.

He threw something down on the bed. A burnished silver cross imbedded in the Legion’s lion crest.

“They’re giving them out like cigarettes. To keep up morale. A medal for just doing your duty.”

“No, you should be proud.” I picked it up, pinned it to his combat jacket, then smoothed out the wrinkles in the gray cloth. I believed he must have been very brave, regardless of how many other men had medals.

“Is it pretty - the desert?”

“Yes...we were five miles east of Fez.” But I had no longing for the desert now. It seemed very remote.

He started to hum one of the tunes from the record. By now I recognized the melody, once buried and lost in all the scattered notes the black man played. The Canadian Sergeant turned, held out his arms, inviting me to dance.

He grasped me firmly but gently, guiding me in small circles around the dirt floor, humming the tune. I'd never danced that way before, the way of fancy people. But I was soon able to follow his movements with ease.

His lips brushed mine. And that's when I knew he was going on the patrol. I pulled him toward me.

Later, I walked up to the ridge between *Beatrice* and *Huguette*. The French line was holding, just barely. VM shells rained on the valley floor, sending up great geysers of mud. I saw the column leave from the shelter of *Huguette's* trench. Faces painted black, their helmets adorned with palms. I thought I recognized the gait of the Canadian Sergeant, the man at the point.

Three days later the surrender came. When I read about it afterwards, the French claimed not to have flown the white flags. But I was there, and there were white sheets, stained with blood, staked throughout the camp as the victorious VM troops descended from the mountains. They didn't cheer or shout. They looked relieved. The Staff Sergeant and Madame greeted a VM officer, and they took us prisoner, herding us into a makeshift pen. I saw Claudine and asked her about the patrol. She shook her head.

They led us back along that same trail they had built to come to Dien Bien Phu. We took the same underwater bridges, soaked up to the waist, but safely crossing the rivers. They guarded the French soldiers with guns, always urging them forward, but not cruelly. Some had to push bicycles, loaded with the meager provisions. Many fell down and if they could not get up they were shot. For mercy, because they were sick or wounded and there were no doctors. Some of these boys I knew. I felt bad for them, as bad as I could let myself feel for anyone by that time. The



VM were nicer to the girls. They treated us like freed prisoners and didn't ask anything from us.

On the second day, when the column had halted for water, Huguette went off to relieve herself in the bushes. She came back running, signaling to me. This caught the attention of a VM guard and he grew suspicious. He followed Huguette and she pointed to a dense thicket of ferns. Reaching down, he smiled and held something over his head triumphantly. It looked like a medal of some kind. His colleagues saw it and the guard made a big show of attaching the medal to his own uniform. The other soldiers laughed. Huguette said something to the guard, he nodded, and then she waved to me to come over. I approached, trembling. There were five corpses of legionnaires. One by one we turned them over to see their faces. But none had wooden teeth.

It took us three weeks and the deaths of many more soldiers before we reached the camps across the border.

Four months later, a man in the uniform of a VM officer called me into a crude structure made of bamboo and palm. On the wall behind him was a picture of another man with a goatee. He seemed to be staring down at us.

"Our leader," said the officer looking up. "His name means 'Bringer of Light.'" He turned back to me and continued softly, saying that an armistice had been settled with the enemy. And did I know, he asked, that I was a pawn and slave of the enemy, that their very presence in my home country was an outrage, just as it was in his country? In that way, said the officer, we were on the same side.

Given that, he said, he invited me to stay in Vietnam, continue my re-education, and work as a translator. Once they knew I could write a little French, they had already figured I could be useful to them. They were fascinated with the Canadian Sergeant's book, which I kept with me. They pointed out all the flaws and errors and barbarities of the French, as reflected in the little history stories.

Was that my only choice, I asked? No, he said, by the terms of the armistice just concluded in a city far away, I could go back to my French oppressors, if I was crazy enough to want that. I guess I was. I thought of the Canadian Sergeant. Not that I would ever see him again. I assumed he was dead. But I remembered the day when I thought we'd be evacuated from DBP, and my peculiar hesitation, my desire to stay with the French. And now that desire was stronger than ever.

High Command sent an air transport to pick us up. We filed out from the tents, most of us skinny as starved chickens. We'd been surviving

on one cup of rice a day. It wasn't the sumptuous cuisine of Dien Bien Phu. Huguette and several others decided to stay behind, accepting the permanent hospitality of the Vietminh. Most had opted to return. We embraced Huguette, said farewell, and boarded the plane.

After we landed in Da Nang, the French gave us hot soup and news spread fast. Madame, who was still with us, smiled broadly. We were all to be discharged. High Command had come to their senses and decided to abolish the Mobile Field Brothels. It was a primitive idea and not up to the moral standards of the French people. We were to receive our pensions early and a plane flight to anywhere in France.

"Where do you want to go?" The Corporal was waiting to fill in the form.

"I don't know."

"I have to put down something," he said.

"St. Emilion." Where they made the good wine. It was the only name I knew.

It turned out to be a pretty town. I married a shop owner, and have been living a comfortable life here ever since.

\* \* \*

Years later, when I was older and had sons of my own, I saw that the black piano player was performing in a festival near St. Emilion. I went by myself, as a last tribute to the Canadian Sergeant. Maybe I also dreamed of running into him, but I believed this was impossible. Outside the festival grounds students carried signs and placards protesting the Americans who were now fighting in Vietnam. I was glad my boys were not American. I had read about a new supply trail that the VM, now called the VC, had built through the heart of the country. I knew they would win.

I found a place to sit on the grass at the edge of the crowd. I had to wait but finally the black piano player appeared, and he played. I recognized some of the melodies which now, after many years in France, were familiar, second nature.

On my way out of the concert someone called to me. I turned and saw a familiar face: it was Dr. Badois, the surgeon from DBP.

It had been a long time and he wasn't sure it was me. We started to talk and he said he was there with his wife, on vacation. He was glad to hear about my changed circumstances. Finally I asked him the inevitable question. I knew he had been the Sergeant's friend.

"Oh, didn't you hear? He survived the patrol. Made it through the Vietminh lines and hooked up with the brigade across the Nam Yum river.

He's living in North Africa now, went regular army, married an Algerian woman, and has three children."

That was strange, I thought. We'd traded places, in a way.

"Did he ever go back to Canada – at least to see his mother?"

"Yes, of course, after the ten years," said Badois. And just as certainly, he went on, the Sergeant's mother was delighted to see him. But still she was one to point out the flaw in the masterpiece. So when he descended from the plane in Montreal, a hero in full dress uniform with the *croix de guerre* polished and shining on his chest, and he approached with arms extended, his mother, who had given him up for dead and hadn't seen him in ten years – she didn't even embrace him. She frowned and the first thing she said was, "Come along post haste to Dr. Gagnon – something must be done about those teeth." The Canadian Sergeant had never had them changed. The Laotian teak remained extremely durable, and by keeping them he'd never forget.

**C.B. Magin** is a mother, wife, student, teacher and writer, who lives in Selden, NY. When she isn't teaching, doing homework or spending time with her family, Magin thinks up her story ideas, when she finds the time, she writes them down. "Heir Pollution" is her first full-length novel.

**Steve Matteo** is the author of *Dylan*, a biography of Bob Dylan published in 1998 by MetroBooks, an imprint of Friedman/Fairfax Publishing. In 2003 his writings on Kenny Burrell and Wes Montgomery appeared in the book *Jazziz Chronicles: The Guitarists*, published by Cherry Lane. His second book, *Let It Be*, on the making of The Beatles' album and film *Let It Be*, was published in November of 2004 by Continuum. In 2005 *Let It Be* was published in Italian and will soon be published in Greek. He has written for *Rolling Stone*, *Harp*, *Tracks*, *Blender*, *Spin*, *Crawdaddy*, *The New York Times*, the *Los Angeles Times*, *Newsday*, the *Chicago Tribune*, the *Baltimore Sun*, the *Hartford Courant*, the *Orlando Sentinel*, the *St. Petersburg Times*, *Hamptons*, *Dan's Papers*, *Long Island Press*, *New York*, *Time Out New York*, *Gotham*, *Details*, *Interview*, *Elle* and *Salon*. He is also the Music Editor of *Pulse* magazine.

**Mark Meier** teaches part time at Marywood University and works as a freelance writer and independent consultant with a focus on education and the environment. His work has appeared in the *Virginia Quarterly Review*, *Richmond Times-Dispatch*, and other venues. He has also contributed to several textbooks and business cases.

**Guy Prevost** is a screenwriter living in Los Angeles with his wife and two dogs. He is the co-author of the film *Dinoshark* (SyFy Channel 2010) and has written for TV shows such as "Walker, Texas Ranger" and "Dead Man's Gun." His one-hour drama "The Womanizer" was nominated for a Writers' Guild of Canada Award. He has also worked as a development executive in Hollywood and taught screenwriting for Ithaca College. He graduated from Wesleyan University (BA) and the UCLA Film School (MFA). This is his first published story.

**Suzanne Schnittman** received her PhD in American History from the University of Rochester. She has been an educator for forty years, twenty at the college level. She is currently writing a book on four women's rights leaders and their daughters, entitled *A Long Road to Victory: Mothers and Daughters Fight for the Right to Vote*. A Catholic mother to

# North Atlantic Review



## 2011

### Contributors

Jody Azzouni

Michelle Campbell

Tom Casey

Bob Cengr

Edward Eriksson

John Edward Gill

Ed Gutierrez

Enid Harlow

Owain Hughes

L. Upton Illig

Allan Izen

Jeffrey N. Johnson

James V. Jordan

Elaine Kay

D Sprung Kurilecz

Stephen Lewis

C.B. Magin

Steve Matteo

E. Martin Pedersen

Mark Meier

Guy Prevost

Suzanne Schnittman

Sally Weiner Grotta