Aliesa Zoecklein

WWII Documentary

If you watch the film with the sound turned off
the soldier being carried from the jungle
on a stretcher looks out as though dreaming himself
into this bewildered forest.
In the long convoy of silence
in the harmless shimmer of light on all that water
he lifts a hand to touch the bark of a small tree.
The way one sense is heightened in the absence
of another. The way the eyes are speechless betrayers
of all that has gone wrong.
Take for example the prisoner emerging
from a hole on an island north of Borneo. He doesn't know
to raise his arms in surrender.
The American must demonstrate the gesture
as if in a schoolyard game to the new boy whose body
holds the tension of eagerness and shame.
Hands raised eyes squinting from days in tunneled
darkness the new prisoner bows.
Stumbling forward he bows; again and again he bows
as if to the bayonet and not to the one holding it.

Now a prisoner rests lying down hands tied
above his bandaged head. Now someone has given
him a cigarette. His pinched lips make him look
like he is grinning or trying not to laugh. How easy
without sound to reinterpret victory. At the battle of
Leyte Gulf a carrier deck explodes; then everywhere sleep
& smoldering. One soldier lies cradled in the arms
of another. They wear the drained stillness
of children in sleep. Sweat drenched but no longer afraid
they could be as dead as the others.