

Gary Lark

Protecting Cottage Grove

I was in the Army National Guard
from 1966 to 1972. Pleiku, Tet, Hue,
five hundred thousand troops
on the ground in Vietnam
and I marched around Cottage Grove,
dug foxholes up the hill.

Then all the training changed
to riot control.
Seattle and San Francisco,
Berkley and the U of O,
my fellow college students
were now the enemy,
or so I was supposed to believe.

After students were gunned down at Kent State
I went to the First Sergeant
and told him I couldn't always follow orders.
He said, "That's the first time this has come up."
We both hoped not to test those waters.
Being politically suspect I was put to washing trucks
and acting as an aggressor for the rifle platoon
to practice on.

On a hot day, at an old mill site,
they came in formation with gas masks
looking to push us down a particular *street*.
We became a little too aggressive—
a tripwire, dust on their masks,

and we found out how shots could be fired.
Fear and confusion transforms.

We all hoped to pass through this time
without complications. And we did,
more or less. We did not invade the U of O
as we were poised to do.
The ROTC building was not burned.
We stumbled on, trying to see through
our lenses.

