

GRAHAM BARNHART

What Being in the Army Did

Things you'd expect.
Taught me a trigger's weight—

its pull—depends on the gun
and doesn't matter much

if you practice
proper follow through.

Follow through here means holding
the squeeze through the kick

like you won't have to do it again,
like you'll never have to do it again.

The army taught me torsos
and tailgates

are useful for gauging distance.
That swaying grass

or flags or scarves
can estimate windspeed,

and traveling from an artifact
to a fundamental constant

requires loss.
It takes me sixty steps

to walk one hundred meters.
Assuming my body weight

and leg lengths remain
roughly constant

and I'm using a compass,
which means I'm moving

in very straight lines, then sixty
ten times is a kilometer,

and sixty
one hundred times is ten.

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In France, they have a lump
of platinum and iridium made in 1879.

They named it Le Grand K,
and that's how much a kilogram is.

They keep it under glass.
Won't even touch it wearing gloves

because of however much
a fingerprint weighs.

They used to have a metal rod,
but now a meter is how fast light travels

in 1/299,792,458ths
of a second.

Five liters is still the same
as a little over a gallon

but any amount of blood looks
like more blood than it is.

When I say things like that
my girlfriend asks if I'm proud

of being dangerous.
I can safely say

I used to be and now at least
I know the dull machine chunk

of a rifle's sear reset between rounds,
a sound my father asked about once.

He asked if I knew any words
that sound like a prison door locking.

Abduction? Deconstruction?
He shook his head.

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So I said maybe there is no word.
Maybe if there are bars,

describe the feeling
of the air between them.

If there are keys, the distance
between the sound of them

touching and the sound
of them touching the door.

The weight of your days
approaching that closure—

No, he said,
there is definitely a word.