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Basic Training

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Class dismissed! Half the activists pitched
tents in cornfields, half hitchhiked home.
National Guardsmen invaded the campus;
the State Police shot mace and tear gas
into the lobby of the freshman dorm.
Two canisters rolled down the elevator shaft,
paralyzing all 13 floors along its spine.
My students, Vietnam Vets against the War,
had a bazooka, stolen from the local arsenal,
trained on the Old State Capitol's gold dome
that cloistered their two political prisoners—
the President and a Dean.

Stationed on the steps of enemy headquarters,
the militant organizers reviewed the troops.
The poets staged a read-in.
Each group took turns hogging the bullhorn.
As at a revival meeting, the sweating audience
was born again during each activist's harangue.
Somebody figured out how to switch on
the electricity. Maneuvering across the platform's
DMZ, each speaker readjusted the microphone
to his individual height and pitch.
The poets ordered their priorities: they'd
"lay down their weapons, and stop writing."
The audience cheered. By nightfall,

the militant leader's speech impediment
made the word "political" sound like "poetical."
Wrenching the mike away from him, a poet,
my fellow grad student, a manic-depressive,
lately AWOL from the hospital's psych-ward,
tranquilized the fatigued listeners with his
sermon on the mount: "The east coast
and the west coast are two strips of bacon.
And the mid-west is one big flat fried egg."