

Slow-Motion Firefight

I'd felt a firefight before
in Vietnam; as now, a tacit war.

One moment a routine patrol,
the next a sanguinary hellhole:

flash and crack and sing-song slugs. Jackson screams and falls;
Perez dies without a sound; Keller trips a mine, his blood and body
strewn around. But I am only nicked; the scar still shines along my shin.

Just so, until quite lately all was well among my hoary crew;
now, though, we're besieged, a skirmish playing out in dilatory time.

Aretha's cancer has returned, and Ralph's cheek sags with stroke,
Percy's going blind, and Eve was diagnosed with early stages of ...
you know. Each week, it seems, a bullet strikes. This onslaught,
I suspect, is our last stand; still, I fight, if only to delay my namesake shot.