

## The Speed of Sound

In the fifth grade Simon learned  
to count the seconds between lightning's bolt  
and thunder's arrival, five to the mile.

Learned that a second was one Mississippi long,  
and the late night 4<sup>th</sup> of July fireworks  
set off from a barge on Lake Quannapowitt  
exploded six Mississippis from his bedroom.

Eight years later he realized the shrinking seconds  
between detonation flash and thunder  
meant some B-52's rain of quarter ton death  
was miles off target in the night.

He dove for his hole.

In less than a Mississippi  
the earth bulged in the silence  
that is sound beyond comprehension.

The right wall of his foxhole  
slammed him against the left  
and would not let go,

squeezed him like a pumpkin seed,  
kept him locked in a dirt cradle,  
the steel dome of his helmet

popped just clear of the ground,  
the horizontal slit below filled  
with eyes that could not close.

In the dawn he saw distant voices  
a foot away trying to get his attention  
as they scrambled to dig him out.

There was a hand lying on the dirt in front of him,  
black ants swarming where the wrist used to be.

He knew the hand wasn't his.  
When someone stepped on it,  
he flinched.