

PAUL WOODRUFF

WHERE THE TUNE WAS GOING

harmonicas are in the news  
today: a picture shows  
three young men waiting

in desert battle-dress—  
one head-in-hand, one  
staring into space

the third, dead center,  
holds the metal to his mouth  
and plays old tunes

I remember hearing  
how my mother found  
Nathan's mouth-worn Hohner

cold silver metal  
on rumpled brown paper  
returned with blue-

jeans, t-shirt, belt,  
no longer needed,  
she closed the drawer

training for U.S. marines  
had sent the old life home  
to build a new man

who listens to their drumbeat,  
learns to kill, if not  
to love the Corps, and who

will breathe warm air  
in metal reeds again,  
years before he finds the tune

— not the old one, that's  
too easy, coming home—  
but where the tune was going

when it died, his head  
was shaved, and my brother  
headed for Da Nang