

WE HAVE DONE WHAT MEN CAN, WE HAVE DONE WHAT MEN MUST

June 9, 2008

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The river  
of my childhood,  
that tumbled  
down a passage of rocks  
  
and cut-work ferns  
came here and there  
to the swirl  
and slowdown  
  
of a pool  
and I saw myself—  
oh, clearly—  
as I knelt at one—  
  
then I saw myself  
as if carried away,  
as the river moved on.  
Where have I gone?

--“A River Far Away and Long Ago”

Mary Oliver

1. The Gates of Babylon. He couldn't sleep. Anxious, he got up in the middle of the night and gathered those around him and started to plan. They were in trouble. The more classically trained members of our audience may have already begun to recognize who we are talking about, and what important event was taking place in his life.

This was the night that Xenophon of Athens embarked on the adventure that has kept his memory alive even to today. Xenophon, the classical Greek historian, is hardly the typical classical author. Looked down upon by some in the history establishment, but clearly the father of military history, Xenophon was himself an interesting and puzzling figure in the history of Greece of the late fifth and mid-fourth centuries before the Christian era, and a man we literarians would welcome into our midst.

He is best known for the work we will be discussing in the first part of my paper tonight, the Anabasis, or as it is sometimes known, The March Upcountry or The Persian Expedition. But Xenophon was a man of many parts, writing a number of Socratic dialogues—he was a friend and follower of Socrates—as well as a continuation of Thucydides’ history; the life of Cyrus the Elder; works on hunting with hounds; on horsemanship; and many others, at least seven volumes in the Loeb Classical Library.

We won’t stop with Xenophon, however. We will also consider a more modern march down country, much closer to our own time, and then I will discuss just how I got interested in this topic, and conclude with some remarks about how a non-historian such as your speaker makes use and misuse of history and its lessons. In the face of such an august audience as this, replete with distinguished historians, I beg your bemused attention, and indulgence.

Back to Xenophon on that trying night when he couldn't sleep. As I said earlier, Xenophon and his comrades were in a fix. As a young man, Xenophon, probably because he had nothing better to do, had signed on to be part of a mercenary expedition led by Cyrus the Younger, a Persian prince, against his brother the Persian emperor, Artaxerxes. The band of Greeks recruited by Cyrus were called “the 10,000,” simply enough because there were 10,000 of them, a considerable force in those days. While deciding whether he should join the expedition, Xenophon asked Socrates whether he should accompany Cyrus. Socrates told him to consult the Delphic Oracle, but Xenophon fudged the question, asking Apollo instead what god he should sacrifice to so as to insure the success of the venture. While Socrates chided him for this evasion, he told Xenophon he should go ahead since he had consulted with Apollo and would otherwise have been wasting the god’s time and attention. So off he went, and Cyrus led his armies, including his band of Greek mercenaries, for that is what they were, into the heart of the Persian Empire. Before the gates of Babylon at Cunaxa, they engaged Artaxerxes’ forces in battle. The day was largely won when Cyrus was killed.

Bereft of their commander, the 10,000 Greeks had to figure out how to extricate themselves from a very awkward situation. They were some 1800 miles from home in the middle of an alien empire, ruled over by a potentate whom they had just tried to overthrow. Their situation was almost immediately worsened by a species of treachery reborn from age to age. It was seen most recently in Panama with General Noriega in the 1980s. Before that, the Russians pulled the same shameful trick on the Hungarians during the Revolution of 1956. The ruse is to invite the opposing leaders to a parley under safe conduct, then treacherously jail or kill them. Like Noriega and Yuri Andropov, later General Secretary of the USSR's Communist Party, this is what the Persians did to Clearchus and the other Greek generals of the 10,000, and that is why Xenophon couldn't sleep that night. The 10,000 were leaderless and did not know what to do.

Xenophon did, however. Well, perhaps he did not know what to do, but he certainly knew how to act, and we see it in the first conference of many that are held as he and the 10,000 make their way back toward Greece. Xenophon was clear thinking and a good speaker. He generally let others talk first and only entered the discussion when he saw the parameters of the discourse. He probably did this to take the temperature of the group. We don't know for sure—he wasn't that self-conscious a writer. Not once during the six books of the Anabasis does he tell us what he was actually thinking. On this instance he spoke so well that the 10,000 elected him one of their leaders, even though it is probable that he had not been an arms-carrying soldier on the march up country. And, under the guidance of General Xenophon and other replacement generals, they devised a plan. That was to march northwest, through Armenia and what is now northern Turkey, to reach the Black Sea — what Xenophon called the Euxine, which the Greeks were busily colonizing.

This they did, literally fighting their way through constantly hostile territory, without any communications, without supply lines, and certainly without air cover. The tale itself is an interesting one, as Xenophon and the other generals improvised in situation after situation. Imagine if you will just what the “10,000” was. This was not a neatly organized corps of divisions and battalions all neatly labeled and bebannered, but an unwieldy mass of men, accompanied by their supplies, pack animals, field wives and boyfriends—these were Greeks of the Socratic era after all. There is one memorable scene during a tight spot in the fighting when supplies were short. Xenophon and another commander have the men walk between them with

all their possessions. The commanders tell the soldiers as they proceed through the gauntlet what they can continue to carry. Much like the TSA at a modern day airport. They only elicited argument when a soldier was especially enamored of a woman or a boy whom they did not want to leave behind.

Other scenes are just as basic. In one battle, the Greeks are pinned down by a local tribe on higher ground, busily rolling stones down the hill as the Greeks try to move from one forested area through a clearing to another. The solution Xenophon hits upon is to have men dodge into the open and then back behind the trees, depleting the natives of their supply of stones. The ruse works, and once the stone cache is empty the pious Greeks, as they do before each battle, call on their Protector Zeus and their Leader Heracles, strike up a hymn to the gods, and defeat the rock rolling Taochians, who then throw themselves and their children—a horrible sight, says Xenophon--off the walls of their city.

But none of this is to belittle this heroic course of basic, brutal scenes of the cold necessity of warfare and survival. At one point the Greeks have captured two local farmers and interrogate them as to the best road to take back toward Greece. The farmers refuse to cooperate. Finally the Greeks threaten one of them with death. When they remain silent, the Greeks without hesitation kill the first hostage. The surviving captive suddenly finds his voice, recovers his memory and tells the Greeks what they need to know.

All of this is told in forceful, forthright language, with, one feels, little embellishment or shading. The truth is interesting enough, even to readers some 2400 years later. Some of you may be thinking of another classical book on warfare that you were surely taxed with if you took Latin I, Gaius Julius Caesar's Gallic Wars. But the effect is really quite different. As best I can recall at a remove of 50 years, the focus in Caesar was always on Caesar himself, and the efficient and cold-blooded way in which he taught the Helvetians (the modern Swiss) a lesson in warfare that the always neutral Swiss have not forgotten to this day.

In the Anabasis, we do see the life of the 10,000 on the march and in battle, but we also get to know a good deal about Xenophon's supple intellect as well as his views of the necessary horror and unpredictability of warfare, contrasted with an ideal vision of life at home and at peace. To this admittedly prejudiced reader, it is grossly unfair for one set of classical scholars to look down their noses at Xenophon and the 10,000. Not atypical is Oswyn Murray, co-editor of The Oxford History of the Classical World, and a Fellow of Balliol College, Oxford, who

refers to the book as a “boys own” tale of the adventures of a bunch of brigands. I cordially hope that Oswyn chokes on his scone at high tea at Balliol, if he has not done so already, and spends the rest of eternity frying in hell for such an attitude.

The Anabasis is not boy’s fare, although, as we will see much later in this paper it has helped boys become men. Among the best lessons to be learned from the travail of the 15 months that Xenophon spent in getting the 10,000 back to safety, are his own prevailing habits of mind, the values that he espoused. This was warfare, and a primary value was discipline and of a basic sort. In a memorable scene at the end of the Anabasis, the men have turned against Xenophon, as they periodically did. It takes a fine speech by Xenophon to keep from getting killed by his own men. One of the ring leaders of the tumult is a man who complains that Xenophon had unjustly struck him. Xenophon quickly discovers that he had come in contact with this man before. As Xenophon, disciple of Socrates that he was, cross examines the man, we find that the accuser had attempted to bury one of their wounded comrades alive as they proceeded on the march, and that Xenophon had hit him as he tried to stop this murderous act. Turning to the larger group, Xenophon asks rhetorically if they preferred for him to strike them with the fist or for the enemy to strike them with the spear. The group comes up with the sensible answer, and the trouble maker is shouted down.

There is, then, a hardness to the story that I find sobering but satisfying. Xenophon is not unlike the drill sergeants we see in grade B war cinema, in which the recalcitrant recruit learns that Sarge is only preparing him for the real difficulties to follow. This view of life as a tough case that must be endured if one is to prevail is a view I share, and one to which, as you will soon see, I have long subscribed.

But all is not brutality. Another value Xenophon prizes very highly is friendship. A big part of friendship is the just and generous treatment of friends. We see this early in the Anabasis as Xenophon write a glowing, extended encomium to Cyrus, his fallen leader. He praises Cyrus as a just and generous man, who always remembered and shared with his friends, who was as good to them as he was ferocious to his enemies. He makes much of the fact that Cyrus’s guard of Persian nobles die with him to a man in the battle of Cunaxa, preferring certain death to an uncertain life without their Prince. This obituary was high praise from a Greek as we remember that the Greeks and Persians had already been at war for over a hundred years at the time of the March of the 10,000.

Xenophon's best friend on the march had been Proxenus. Indeed, Proxenus was the man who had invited Xenophon to join the expedition, sending a letter to Xenophon's house. However, Proxenus disappears from the scene quite early. Unfortunately, he was one of the leaders fooled by the Persian false truce, taken prisoner and then removed to Persepolis, to be beheaded before Artaxerxes. Nevertheless, after the Greeks have successfully completed the journey back to friendlier territory, Xenophon takes a portion of the booty that is his share of the spoils of war and dedicates a votive offering to Apollo at Delphi, inscribing on his offering the name of Proxenus, because, as Xenophon simply states, "Proxenus was his friend."

The dividing up of this booty also leads to one of the most remarkable passages in the Anabasis. Another part of his portion of the spoils Xenophon left with the sacristan of the temple of Artemis at Ephesus, telling him to return it if Xenophon made it back to Greece alive. And the Sacristan, Megabyzus does just that years later, when he comes to Greece to see the Olympic Games. Xenophon used the money to buy a grove dedicated to the goddess, at the estate the Spartans had given him, at Scillus, close to Mount Olympus:

As it chanced, there flowed through the plot a river named Selinus; in [the] stream, moreover, there are fish and mussels, there is hunting of all manner of beasts of the chase. Here Xenophon built an altar and a temple with the sacred money, and from that time forth he would every year take the tithe of the products of the land in their season and offer sacrifice to the goddess, all the citizens and the men and women of the neighborhood taking part in the festival. And the goddess would provide for the banqueters barley meal and loaves of bread, wine and sweetmeats, and a portion of the sacrificial victims. . . For Xenophon's sons and the sons of the other citizens used to have a hunting expedition at the time of the festival, and any grown men who so wished would join them. . . .

This idyllic vision of the very real future Xenophon and his progeny experienced emerges from the misery, death, courage and resourcefulness of the expedition. It is what is hoped for as Xenophon maneuvers and cajoles the Greeks back toward their homeland, the vision of which is memorably captured in their first sighting of the sea after their many months of fighting their way across the plains of Asia Minor.

The vanguard sees the sea at a distance, and raises the shout “Thalatta, Thalatta!” “The sea, the sea” in Greek, and all rushed forward, men and pack animals and horses alike, the troops of the rearguard, running, and “when all had reached the summit, then indeed they fell to embracing one another, and generals and captains as well, with tears in their eyes.” The cairn they immediately built to memorialize the spot is there to this day, as demonstrated by the photograph of one smiling Greek scholar, proudly standing upon it, the sea surprisingly far over his shoulder.

It is these tears, the hugging and crying officers and men, the running pack animals, the sensitivity shown by a man who could just as well measure the relative efficacy of rational persuasion and the argument of the fist that makes this book worthwhile for me. The Anabasis is not just about warfare, but about one man’s intelligent and brave reaction to it, his responding in a way that saves not only his life but those of his comrades, and makes the life back in Greece, the hunting and fishing of his sons and their friends possible.

After leading the army back to the Black Sea, Xenophon left the army and eventually returned to Greece. Among the 10,000 were many Spartans and this odd Athenian, intellectual though he aspired to be, felt more at home with the warlike Spartans than with the more complicated Athenians and so entered their service. As with so many, the Athenians exiled him, commuting his exile only when Xenophon’s son Gryllus died in battle for the Athenian state some years later. Nevertheless it is unclear whether Xenophon ever returned to Athens.

The book ends quietly, without fanfare, although on a somewhat jarring note, as we see Xenophon and the army plundering a hapless Persian nobleman, the result Xenophon blithely states, that he will have enough so that he can do good to another. An idiosyncratic view of generosity, perhaps. There is not room here or need to tell more of this fascinating tale. Instead, we will jump ahead a mere 2400 years.

2. Chosin Reservoir. One Saturday morning in 1951 at the age of six I was driving with my father to his restaurant in Louisville’s West End. He stopped to pick up a young fellow he knew: “I thought you were in Korea. . .” said my Dad, himself recently back from a stint in the National Guard in Louisiana. The young man told how he had been injured in a night attack by a horde of Chinese swarming over his position, most without guns, brandishing clubs and sticks. He had been knocked unconscious by a club and was lucky to escape with his life. He was mustered out and sent home.

I didn't think more about that fellow or about the early days of the Korean War until I picked up Martin Russ's book, Breakout, a few years ago. Breakout is an account of the escape of the First Marine Division from encirclement by six veteran Chinese Red Army Divisions, perhaps 65,000 men in all, at least twice the Marines' number at Chosin Reservoir, far into North Korea, in late November and early December, 1950.

Early in the Korean conflict, our forces drove the North Korean army almost to the Yalu River. General Douglas MacArthur, his colossal ego already swollen with the victory over Japan and his position as Viceroy of the conquered Empire, was spoiling to cross the Yalu and invade China. Mao's Red Army had only recently won the long and bloody civil war with the corrupt Kuomintang and its war lord chieftain, Chiang Kai-Shek.

In late November, 1950, with our forces rapidly approaching the Yalu, the Chinese entered the Korean Conflict and Chinese "volunteers" poured into North Korea. MacArthur and the rest of the high command did not immediately realize the gravity of the situation. The First Marine Division was strung out along primitive roads in the wilderness of North Korea along the West side of Chosin reservoir. Elements of the US Army were on the East Side of the reservoir equally oblivious of the fact that Chinese forces were preparing to mount a major offensive against them. It was cold, very cold, and the fighting about to be described took place in temperatures down to 25-30° below Fahrenheit, with wind-chill of down to 50° below.

By November 26th, with his troops strung out along Chosin Reservoir, General Oliver P. Smith, commander of the First Marine Division, knew that he had a difficult situation on his hands. The First Marines were based in three towns, Yudam-ni, Hagaru-ri and Koto-ri, with smaller forces at other locations. The roads connecting the desolate towns were primitive, little more than tracks in places. The Chinese had cut each of the roads anyway. In fact, the First was surrounded at Yudam-ni, at Hagaru-ri, and at Koto-ri, with the bulk of the troops at Yudam-ni, the northernmost and most beleaguered position. Smith began the task of drawing the First back together, chiefly at Hagaru. To do this and then break out to the South, the Marines had to win three major battles, breaking out of Yudam-ni, securing Toktong Pass between Yudam-ni and Hagaru, and then breaking out of Hagaru and fighting across an improvised bridge at Funchilin pass. Ten days later, after these battles in paralyzing cold, after ferocious nightly attacks by waves of Chinese forces, the First marched into the port of Hungnam, heads high and most of

their equipment intact, to take ship to the South and then fight back North out of the Pusan perimeter.

The story of the breakout from the Chosin Reservoir is remarkable, not without parallels to the struggles of Xenophon and his 10,000 two and a half millennia before. The tone of the two stories is, however, completely different. If in Xenophon we see the mind and personality of the general in action and get a glimpse of his overarching philosophy, in Breakout we see more the raw heroism that imbued this campaign, with a full look at the ferocity and horror of the battle and the undaunted courage of the Marines.

Russ might not want me to talk about the absurdity and waste of it all, but that is there as well. Two incidents suffice. Early in the battle, a beloved infantry lieutenant lost his life because no blood was available to transfuse him. The blood was there, but it was so cold that the available stocks of plasma were frozen solid and there were no facilities available to warm them. A medical corpsman sat with Lieutenant Ball and watched helplessly as he slipped away. Ball was not the only casualty so lost to the brutal cold. At the very end of the battle, as the Marines were preparing to abandon their base at Hagaru-ri, Dr. Peter Arioli, a valiant draftee from Brooklyn, was shot in the head by a distant sniper and instantly killed as he stood inspecting a wounded soldier. The good doctor was not supposed to be at that location at all, having volunteered to replace a disabled colleague.

However, it is not the absurdity of war that Russ mainly wants us to see but the ferocity and courage of battle. Every night during these infernal 10 days took on the lineaments of nightmare as bugles, whistles, cymbals and shouted curses marked the onslaught of yet another human wave of Chinese attempting to overrun the American positions. Hideous images abound. One morning finds the Marine commanders inspecting the unbroken lines and coming upon machine gunner Pfc. Gallagher, a smile on his face, standing by his gun before waves of Chinese bodies, the last corpse's elbow touching the front leg of the gun's tripod, the human wave having almost but not quite overwhelmed the position. The inventive Gallagher had used two or three Chinese corpses almost as sandbags, to further shield his nest.

Later in the battle, as the engineers are preparing the primitive roads for the final breakout over an improvised bridge at Funchilin pass, spanning a gorge some 2900 feet deep, bulldozers are seen, smoothing the road, mashing Chinese corpses into the snow and ice at times, and slicing off here an arm or leg or head as they cut through mounds of ice and dead bodies.

In the midst of the constant horror, there is also a quiet grace and dignity. Col. Homer Litzenberg quietly devises a plan to relieve Capt. William Barber's Fox Company which has been holding Toktong, the crucial pass between Yudam-ni and Hagaru by sending Lt. Col. Ray Davis's battalion directly across country, down one mountain ridge and up another. Meanwhile, Barber, though seriously wounded, walks the lines encouraging the defense by his 240 men, only 80 of whom are able-bodied when finally relieved. Through a driving snowstorm, over two days, Davis's troops fight their way across eight miles of wilderness. The task is handled with quiet efficiency, if not without lots of bloodshed, and this one maneuver like others, could just have been the pivotal act that saved the whole campaign. For this and other service, Barber and Davis were each awarded the Medal of Honor, as were 12 other heroes of this campaign, seven of them posthumously.

The Marines are constantly looking out for one another. They share blankets, shoes, bites of peanut butter, they cover for each other, smother grenades with their arms, their legs, their entire bodies, risk their own lives to bring out the bodies of their fallen comrades whenever possible. (Hundreds of the Marine dead, however, are still buried in unmarked graves along the west side of the reservoir. So far as this writer knows, those graves have not been visited by Americans in close to 60 years.) But Russ's notion of friendship differs from Xenophon's. The allegiance is not that of man to man, of friend to friend but of Marine to Marine, not fellow humans, but fellow pieces of the fighting machine that never quits and never wishes to admit defeat.

While the Chinese are almost always referred to as "gooks" or "shambos" and the Marines exult in the kill, in the fact that they mauled six full divisions of the Red Army so badly that they had to be withdrawn from combat, there is also, at moments, a grudging respect for the bravery that the Chinese soldiers showed. In one moving passage, a Marine officer observing one morning the carnage of the night before, remarks that the bodies of the dead Chinese, lined up in concentric circles, ever closer to the Marine positions, all faced the guns that had killed them. Good soldiers as well.

So the tale is not without its humanity, nor is it without its tears. During a respite before the Hagaru breakout, Col. Raymond Murray welcomes back an old friend, a Chicago Sun-Times reporter who has flown in. They share a bourbon, and Murray chides the reporter for not having been with them during the furious action at Yudam-ni. He takes another sip, and says that he

didn't think they were going to make it out of Yudam-ni alive, as he wipes tears off his cheek with the sleeve of his dirty parka.

At the last, the Marines make it over an improvised bridge at the gorge, concocted of railroad ties, two lengths of portable trestle and, amazingly, plywood. As they march on, dynamiting the bridge behind them, they see in the distance the Sea of Japan beyond Hungnam Harbor. I would like to think that Martin Russ had Xenophon in mind when he wrote that passage, but if he did, he missed almost all of the poetry of the moment.

Seen largely from the perspective of the fighting men in the trenches, there is a ferocity here mostly absent in Xenophon. Gen. Smith and the other leaders of the First would have recognized and appreciated the calm rationality of Xenophon, the ability to meet the threat of death and formidable opposing force with a clear head and an ability to calmly persevere through the crisis. They have the same qualities that Xenophon exhibited, and share the same happy result: they lived when they very well could have died. In the face of surrounding force, they held the center of their own being and consciousness and broke through back to their home life, back to the identity that, in the beginning, one can only surmise, had given them their clear-sighted vision and supreme courage.

The Marine Corps views the Chosin campaign as one of its finest moments. At the time there was considerable speculation back in the States that the First would never make it out of Chosin. That they did and in a sense even achieved victory is a shining chapter in the history of a remarkable fighting force.

3. Michigan Avenue, Chicago. I am in the Borders Bookstore on Michigan Avenue, Chicago, not far from the Water Tower, a few years ago. I am downstairs, in the basement, killing time, wandering through the Classics section. This Borders is a fine bookstore, and this is a real Classics section. I notice the Loeb Classical Library, green covers for Greek and red for Latin, and I pick up a volume of Xenophon. Not the Anabasis—something else, a Socratic dialogue, I think. I hit upon the plan to read the Anabasis and order the book. I tell myself that I am going to finally run down, find, the line that is the title of tonight's paper: "We have done what men can, we have done what men must."

I had never seen that line in print, although I had looked for it occasionally in Bartlett's or some other collection of familiar quotations. The line had stuck in my head, though, from the time I was a 13 year old boy. One summer evening when I was in the 8<sup>th</sup> grade a Catholic priest

had stopped by our house to talk to me and my mother and father, indeed to recruit me for his order's minor seminary. We saw the inevitable slide show and heard Father's pitch. He was a garrulous guy, lonely I guess, and he stayed and chatted with us. Why he thought the untutored Covattas would be interested in Xenophon I can't really say, but he started talking about the Anabasis, and somewhere along the way had Xenophon saying to the 10,000, probably as they see the sea—"Thalatta! Thalatta!"—"We have done what men can, we have done what men must."

I always remembered this line. It was a mantra by which I shaped my life. I finally needed to pin down its origin, to actually see it in black and white on the printed page. However, I am sorry to report to you that several close readings of the Loeb edition's translation of the Anabasis, including a glance or two at the Greek on alternate pages, as well as poring through renderings of the work by Rex Warner and other translators, did not reveal this saying, or anything close (at least to this reader). I am almost persuaded that this priest, whose name I have long forgotten, not Xenophon, is the author of my mantra. Or did I embellish, change, romanticize what the padre or Xenophon had said? Create the words for myself from the broken shards of recollection? Memory has played this trick on me on more than one occasion. I have no answer to the question.

I have likewise been disappointed in other respects in the texts I have chosen for tonight's paper. It is said that the victors write the history books, and that is probably true almost by definition. The losers are too busy being enslaved or dead to be worrying about writing history. There is a slight variant here. There was a history of Cyrus's campaign written by Ctesias, a Persian, in a larger history of the Persian Empire, but it is lost. What interests me more is Xenophon's shaping of the exploits of the 10,000 to show himself as always a wise leader, a generous friend. Was this the way he was talked about around the Agora after his exile from Athens? One doubts it. Or was this more likely the apologia, written 30 years or so later, of a man who had gone over from the side of his native city to that of its chief rival? This is not to take away his accomplishment, only to place it in a more human context. Heroism in the context of a mercenary endeavor is not without its ambiguities.

Moreover, Xenophon, were he alive, would have to reckon with the fact that he has been championed in recent years by Leo Strauss, the University of Chicago philosopher, spiritual godfather of Paul Wolfowitz and the rest of the execrable neo-con crowd. I would submit that

Cyrus's employing of the 10,000 in an unprovoked assault upon the Persian Empire is probably an act that the neo-cons would applaud. The Greeks probably thought that the assault on Persia would be easy, paid for with revenues from spoils and that they would be greeted in the streets of Persepolis as liberators. But I digress.

Similarly and more centrally, Russ's work is flawed. The *Semper Fi* attitude of the book gets quite wearing, and for a balanced view of what happened at Chosin you need to read the works of Roy Appleman, a scholarly retired Army Lt. Colonel who gives the Army units who were stationed to the East of the Reservoir the modicum of credit and sympathy that former Marine Russ is not able to bring to the situation.

Back to the main theme. I found a lot more in these books than I was bargaining for, even if I did not find the origin of that phrase that has been running through my head for 50 years now: "We have done what men can, we have done what men must." Did Xenophon really say it? Was the priest hallucinating? Why has it stuck with me so long and so deeply? The phrase met a need in the heart of a little boy, a need in the mind of a man, and if he hadn't heard it, if he didn't hear it, he would have had to invent it. Did he?

4. Texas Avenue and Sylvia Street, Louisville. In the early 1950s, house builders in my hometown, Louisville, Kentucky, would excavate the foundation and basement of construction sites, and shape the scooped-out earth into a glorious mound to the side of the site, later to fill the gap around the foundation and remove the residue. This mound of course made a splendid play site for the young boys of the neighborhood. A mountain to climb, loose earth to slide down, later an empty house to throw dirt at and explore, and of course, lots of dirt clods to throw at each other.

Little wonder then at the excitement we felt when a new house started going up at the corner of Texas and Sylvia, only a few blocks from my house on Delor Avenue. I must have been 8 or 9. In those days, this was old enough to go exploring in the long twilight of a summer's evening on your bicycle. So one summer night some of my friends and I rode over to the construction site. When we arrived, a bunch of kids from another neighborhood were already there. One thing led to another, and soon there was a clod throwing contest—no, a clod war. The other kids were up on the mound, and we were in the foundation, throwing dirt for all we were worth.

As the war went on, the kids on the mound saw that they had a terrific advantage. They were throwing down into a hole, a confined area, while we were throwing up. Before long my comrades also got the idea and one by one they peeled off and went home. After what seemed like a very long time I found myself alone in the foundation hole firing back at 8-10 kids I didn't know, who were firing down on me. They tired of the unequal fray and begged me to give up. It wasn't any fun to throw at one opponent, who could only fire intermittently, when the clods of the ten stopped raining down on him.

But I wouldn't, I couldn't quit. After a while my adversaries devised a plan. If it had been 50 years later, they would have called it a bunker buster. While six or seven of them hurled rapid fire clods, pinning me down, two of them sneaked up to the rim of the foundation and dropped a huge boulder size lump of earth on me. How big was it? Who knows? I was eight or nine years old. Anything looked big to me then, and it did take two of them to carry it. At any rate it hit me in the small of the back, pinned me to the earth, knocked the breath and snot out of me and brought tears to my eyes. If my opponents had only let me lie there in pain, I suppose I might have quit, but they had to ask—"Are you going to quit? Do you give up?"

When I heard that I jumped up and started hurling clods at them maniacally. I was so ferocious that the whole crew quickly retreated back to the mound. The battle continued for several more minutes until two bigger boys (twelve? thirteen?) rode by on their bikes. Seeing the unequal struggle, they stopped and threw in their lot with me. The rest was easy. The three of us, two giants and one tear-stained shrimp charged the mound and drove off my tormentors. At that point the big boys told me that I had won. I accepted this, although I did not in fact believe it—at that moment—and we all called it a night and retreated to our homes.

But this fight did not end for me there at the corner of Texas and Sylvia. I have always remembered this struggle, but quickly forgot and for many years conveniently refused to remember the almost angelic intervention of the two older boys. I attributed my "victory" if you can call it that—I certainly did—to my own guts and determination, to an indomitable will to win, to which I must confess I still hold in many ways.

The fight at Texas and Sylvia was an iconic moment for me, one I always summoned up when I began to doubt my own capacity to win. I had persevered and prevailed then and could not let myself down in the later struggles of my life. From that comes my fascination with tales

of victory of the underdog against all odds, of incredible feats of courage such as those we have seen here tonight.

Nevertheless, I found this paper difficult to prepare. Indeed, it has been the most difficult paper to write of all those I have authored in my years here at The Literary Club. Perhaps it was hard because I came to realize, nay, had to admit to myself, which I barely can do even as I write these words, that the two older boys had been there, that I had been saved almost Providentially, and not just because of my own will to succeed. That it was not all of my own doing.

Did Xenophon selectively remember things 30 years after the tumult of the Anabasis? I presume so. Was not this exile and opponent of his native city trying to prove to posterity and himself that he was a brilliant and resourceful tactician, worthy of everyone's admiration, savior of 10,000 of his countrymen and even more, a faithful friend? Why does Martin Russ denigrate the role of the Army at Chosin and say virtually nothing about the constant sorties the naval aircraft were flying daily, non-stop, weather permitting, to shield the First Marine Division? Is his chest thumping faith in the Marine Corps as unassailable as he would like to think?

Perhaps we remember things as we want to remember them. Perhaps we write history to suit our own psychological needs. It does not change the basic theme of this paper, the basic theme of my own life (I still fondly hope): "We have done what men can, we have done what men must." A neat title, if I do say so myself. Repetition of two phrases, exactly the same except for the words "can" and "must." Therein lies the rub. Can, but also must. All is not so grandiloquent, so simple as I used to think. I see now that tears play a significant part in each of these tales of courage: the Greeks' tears as they sight the sea; Col. Murray's tears at the thought of the death he escaped at Yudam-ni; the little boy's tears at the bottom of the hole at the corner of Texas and Sylvia. Why tears?

Triumph against all odds is never easy nor always possible. Painful to realize, difficult to admit in the face of that fearful uncertainty that lurks below the surface of our crucial endeavors is what it is we "can," what it is we "must," how often we find that "can" and "must" mean the same thing.