

FLIGHT CHIEF

Mark Rhoads

I feel its thunder every spring.
A lone survivor of the glorious war
lumbers low over the house, making
the windows rattle, adrenaline soar.

A local airport hosts the shrine—
tours eight dollars, rides three fifty.
I've taken the tour, but lately incline
toward taking flight, ignoring safety.

B-17s make a ravishing sound;
I've tried to pretend three hundred in flight.
But this one alone makes memories rebound—
memories imagined in black and white.

He knew the craft from tail to nose;
ordered repairs for the next-day's run.
Those that came back were bloodied; those
that went down were replaced by next-morning's sun.

I used to think he took it laid-back—
a good-day's work in the old Air Corps;
but the loss of comrades by fighter and flak—
a memory full—was the hell he bore;

and he came back changed (my mother mused):
a vacant look, a distant air;
the wary view of a mind abused
by relentless death and silent despair.