

# Doonesbury-The Sandbox-Military Blog, Milblogs for Military Families

7-9 minutes

---

**Name:** Charlie Sherpa

**Previously embedded:** with former unit in Afghanistan

**Hometown:** Boone, Iowa

**Milblog:** [Red Bull Rising](#)

**Email:** SherpaatRedBullRising.com

Trained as a member of a U.S. Army [rocket-artillery](#) crew, [Jason Poudrier](#) once helped rearrange large swathes of terrain with high-explosives blasts. Now, he quietly crafts words and memories with a sharpshooter's precision. The 29-year-old veteran and [Purple Heart](#) recipient is now a high-school teacher of advanced-placement English in Lawton, Okla., a coach of cross-country and track teams, and a published poet who regularly explores and engages with military themes.

Poudrier's work is full of darkness, heart, and humor. [Reviewers often comment](#) on his occasional references, for example, to [Bugs Bunny](#) cartoons. In one poem, he observes "I flipped a switch: / The rocket launched / and landed with an / [Acme](#) cartoon cloud." In other, a character muses that he should've taken that left turn in Albuquerque. He's not necessarily making light of his experiences as a soldier, but he is making light with them.

"I realized that not all war poetry has to be involved these stark-death-dark images. I wouldn't want to read a book that was all that," he says. "There is inspiration in the military, too. Not to mention moments of great joy, more pure than anything else you'll ever experience. I want to do something with those moments, too."

While some aspire to be poets, others have poetry thrust upon them. Having graduated from an Oregon high school in 2001, Poudrier joined the U.S. Army for the bonus and to see the world. He first trained and then was stationed in Oklahoma. From there, he deployed to Iraq in time to race toward Baghdad with Charlie Battery, [3rd Battalion, 13th Artillery Regiment](#).

"As weird as it sounds, I feel lucky to have been there when I was," Poudrier says.

"There was a clear enemy. We knew who were shooting at, and they were shooting at

us." Artillery units that deployed later to Iraq, he notes, were often assigned non-artillery missions. He got to fire rockets.

The [Multiple Launch Rocket System \(M.L.R.S.\)](#) on which Poudrier was a crew member is a long-armed weapon. In some cases, he says, they even had to drive away from Baghdad and back toward Kuwait, to get the minimum 7-mile distance their weapons system needed to breathe. The system can reach targets out to 190 miles.

During [Operation Iraqi Freedom](#), the crew [jumped](#) nearly every day in the desert, and slept on their trucks and tracks.

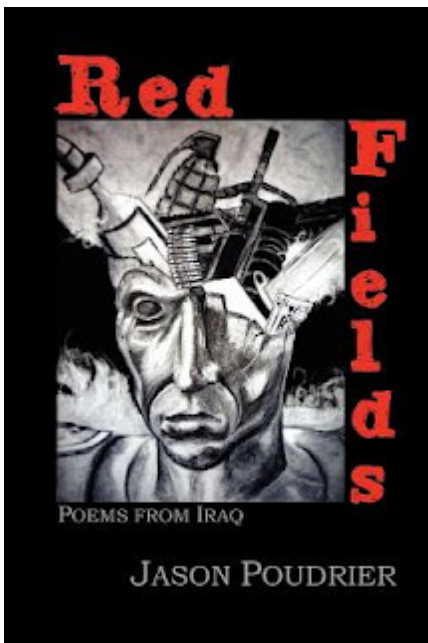
Then, they got blown up.

Poudrier lost both friends and flesh in the attack. Adding insult to injury months later, he would learn the attack was the result of [friendly fire](#). A U.S. Air Force pilot had allegedly thought their missile launcher was an enemy anti-aircraft system.

Poudrier had come back injured and angry, although unwilling or unable to realize the extent of his hurt. He had begun to think of the Army as a potential 20-year career, but found that his self-referral to mental health services had blocked a second deployment with this unit. A mentor helped get him lined up for a ["Green to Gold"](#) program, which would have resulted in a 4-year degree and an officer's commission, but that fell through, too. Poudrier decided that, if he wasn't able to go shoot rockets with his buddies, or continue his education while in the Army, he needed to fight for a medical discharge.

"It's not what I wanted, but it was probably the best thing for me," he says. "There was a higher power looking over me. Because, the way I look at it, if I try to make something happen and it doesn't, then it was supposed to be something else. I was doing everything I could to stay in, and it wasn't happening."

First enrolled as a business major, Poudrier found himself gravitating toward creative-writing classes in the English department. He struggled and sweated with military themes in longer-form prose, but found a useful and efficient tool in poetry. "Take a brief moment. Get as precise as you can on the details—the actions, the emotions, the smells," he says. "Suddenly, instead of this huge timeframe in narrative that I'd have with fiction or non-fiction, I just have this brief moment. I can work on it, and play with it, and stop working on it, and go back to it. It worked for me."



Earlier this year, Poudrier published a collection of poems titled "[Red Fields: Poems from Iraq](#)." He also presented seminars at the inaugural "[Military Experience and the Arts Symposium](#)" at Eastern Kentucky University, Kent. On Nov. 11 in Indianapolis, he read as part of the Kurt Vonnegut Memorial Library's "[Veterans Reclaim Armistice Day: Healing through the Humanities](#)."

His work also appears in these recently published anthologies:

- "[Remembrances of Wars Past: A War Veterans Anthology](#)"
- "[Proud to Be: Writing by American Warriors](#)"

A sampler of three of Poudrier's poems — "Red Fields," "Baghdad International," and "Fort Sill's New Housing Division" — also appear on the "[Sugar Mule](#)" literary magazine [here](#).

While everyone is different, Poudrier has found the writing of poetry useful in reconciling and resolving painful memories.

"Part of PTSD is intrusive memories. You don't have control of them," he says. "You have a flashback, and all of a sudden it's coming in. You were driving down the road, now you're somewhere else and you have no idea how you got there."

"To me, it was almost as if the memory were saying 'I do not want to be forgotten. I am something important that happened in your life.' The way I look at it is, if a poem is supposed this precise image -- that's exactly what this intrusive memory is. I'm going to write that out — as is, not trying to put any poetic devices on it. I'm going to capture that image," he says.

"I'm going to cognitively pull up that image that is being intrusive. Now, it's on a piece of paper. And I can choose to look at it when I chose. I'm not going to forget that memory. It has been recorded. But, now, instead of an intrusive memory, I have control of it."

In Poudrier's opinion, there can be as much benefit in sharing and publishing a poem as in writing it. "One of the most healing moments is when ["Red Fields"] was selected to be published. What I think a lot of military writers don't get, particularly when they're writing but they're not seeing the therapeutic side of it, is writing itself is just half the process. The other half of the process is that it needs to be read by somebody. It needs to be communicated."

\*\*\*\*\*

*Note: This Red Bull Rising content regarding military writing is underwritten by Victor Ian LLC, a military media and gaming business. The business publishes [Lanterloot](#), an eclectic lifestyle, technology, and military blog; has a physical retail storefront called "[Dragons and Dragoons](#)" located in Colorado Springs, Colo.; and hosts military-writing workshops and other events under the "[Sangria Summit](#)" brand name.*