War Photograph
By Valentina Gnup

—dedicated to Margaret Gipsy Moth, photojournalist, (1951-2010)

Consider the lines on a map—
arbitrary as a child's coloring book.
Russia doesn't know where Mongolia begins.
Texas doesn't know it's Texas.

Outside my kitchen windows, centuries-old redwoods
stand like ancestors, like seven towering witnesses.

I just read about the life of Margaret Moth.
Clutching her heavy TV camera, she rode on top of tanks.
She faced bullets and bombs. She was shot at and survived,
yet she loved documenting battle after battle.

I would not willingly risk my life to photograph wars
or to fight in them.

This is as close as I'll get to a war photograph—
this lament about imaginary borders on a map,
boundaries bought and stolen with people's lives.

I'm preaching again, but aren't you tired
of the world ending one soldier at a time?

What would the redwoods tell us?

Perhaps, just to remember Margaret,
and every soldier who followed orders to the grave,
as if the war was their church,
their body, a burning candle.