

Thomas G. Palaima

“As Told to Wallace Terry”

Wallace told us
he interviewed his soldiers
after Vietnam.
He had loops and loops of tape.

His ten black fingers
typed out their voices,
laid their lives out flat,
letter by letter by letter
across, across and down
plain white sheets of paper,
twenty ‘bloods’ at war
speaking through spooled black ribbons.

Their stories looped and stretched,
veered and skipped,
told too much,
in awful silences.

Wallace magic-marked
the parts he could use
in each story:
1, 2, 3, 4, 5....
He cut the numbered pieces
and stacked them
like twenty decks of cards
on the table where he worked.

He sorted and shuffled and studied
the lives his soldiers had been dealt.
He drew to inside straights.
He folded on losing hands.

“I could smell the hate.”
“I just thought my time had come.”
Captain Norman McDaniel
and Wallace Terry,

prisoners of war,
Fayetteville,
Washington, D.C.
and Vietnam.

Thomas G. Palaima teaches seminars on war and violence in the Plan II Honors Program at the University of Texas at Austin. Wallace Terry, author of *Bloods* (1984), spoke to his seminar in October, 1999.