Graham Hillard

At the National D-Day Memorial

Bedford, Virginia

Like a wound, or a medal pressed into a widow’s hands, it lies upon the landscape, one hundred acres
called to attention, gathered into such stillness that even the birds seem wary of it, flitting away before
I can name them. The names one finds here are artifacts, antique as ration coins: Vester, Eldridge,
boys innocent in the telling they have left us along with this bronze necrology, careful arch
on which our dead are graven. Nearly everyone who knew them is gone. Soon the names will be
mere letters, codes for which the cipher has been lost, knowable only by this context: sculpture park,
gardened plaza where even now Eisenhower gazes toward Normandy, his face as white as England’s chalk horses. I don’t know if I can claim this suffering, this desperate victory. Beneath the Overlord Arch,
the Ad commemorandum has begun to fade. Soldiers sprint, frozen, through early tide, their helmets dully gleaming.

Above a stairway, men of the 2nd Ranger Battalion scale Pointe du Hoc without ceasing. They will not meet my eye.