

## **Standing in for Utah**

**Fokkina McDonnell**

They were given six weeks to pack and leave.  
Round and oblong tables stowed in a van:  
Hannaford the Butchers. Empty farms grieve  
for cows, sheep taken by women and men.  
Forty-six square miles behind Slapton Sands,  
gravel, dunes, the flooded marshes of Lyme Bay.  
A cold, still, grey hinterland that stands  
in for Utah, the rehearsal for D-day.  
Three thousand people, animals, the year  
before sent to live in another place.  
Now American boys are sheltered here  
and dodging live ammo with sudden grace.  
    How small, the blue Heritage Coast dots on the map.  
    Distant that April night when Start Bay was a trap.

Operation Tiger was the code name.  
One Tank Landing Ship keeled over and sank  
in just six minutes, the wheelhouse aflame.  
That boat spewed burning gasoline from its flank.  
German Schnellboote fired the torpedo.  
Rusted-up life boat tackle abandoned;  
never told how to use life belts, below  
seven hundred and forty nine men drowned.  
This is my ship and I am going back,  
Lieutenant John Doyle, skipper, who turned,  
against orders. Picked up shapes limp and black;  
clinging on to charred life rafts, men who'd burned.  
    Destiny is shaped by random things, often small:  
    wrong frequencies, second chances, the place where you fall.