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William Styron, *Suicide Run: Five Tales of the Marine Corps*. New York: Random House, 2009. Pp. 194. ISBN 978-1-4000-6822-7.

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*The Suicide Run* collects five short stories<sup>1</sup> written between 1953 and 1995 by Pulitzer Prize-winning author, William Styron (1925–2006). All deal with the experiences of young marine officers during and after the Second World War. The slenderness of the volume belies its wealth of detail and imagination.

In “Blankenship,” a young marine captain stationed on a prison island in New York Harbor is guarding “yardbirds” in the latter half of World War II. Styron uses the escape of two inmates to introduce the major characters, Captain Blankenship and Colonel Wilhoite. Blankenship is a no-nonsense, dedicated Marine (and Guadalcanal combat veteran) who responds well to volatile, challenging situations, often upstaging the more complacent Wilhoite, particularly in his handling of the jailbreak. The third major character, an enlisted man named McFee, has a particularly strong disdain for authority and tradition. He provokes Blankenship through various rhetorical taunts and eventually Blankenship strikes him in response. Styron engagingly shows the range of individuals to be found in a Navy prison guarded by U.S. Marines.

In “Marriott, the Marine,” a Marine reserve officer, Paul Whitehurst, who served in the Second World War, is unexpectedly recalled to duty for the Korean War. His arrival at Camp Lejeune in North Carolina and the descriptions of base housing highlight a mental chasm between reserve officers and regular officers. At an officers’ social event, Paul meets and is very impressed by Lt. Col. Marriott, a much-decorated marine’s marine who also speaks fluent French and is better-read than Paul, who is a writer himself. Paul’s roommate, a country boy from South Carolina, affronts the reserve officer’s more refined sensibilities. The arrival of the roommate’s father, a former marine of some renown, and his subsequent death impel the story to its conclusion: when Marriott learns of the death he regales Paul with the tales of the father’s service in the Old Corps, in the process damaging his opinion of the once mighty Lt. Col. Marriott.

In “Suicide Run,” Paul describes his occasional trips to New York with Lacy, a fellow officer, to spend a passionate day with their lovers. The hectic, sleep-deprived nature of the trips inspires the story’s title (93). On a return trip, the two barely miss hitting a tractor trailer and this experience prompts Lacy to describe an incident on Okinawa in which he was wounded. The story ends with Lacy’s prediction that their upcoming transfer to Korea will be a “suicide run” for the two marines.

In “My Father’s House,” Paul is home from the Second World War and enjoying civilian life at his father’s house near Newport News, Virginia. In a typically memorable turn of phrase, Styron writes that the Cold War was “just recently announced by Winston Churchill at some Missouri cow college” (122). Paul obviously enjoys the relatively carefree lifestyle of a former marine in postwar Virginia, although the story features a difference of opinion regarding the morality of execution for rape. In addition, Paul reminisces about his time in Saipan and the impending invasion of Japan. Styron’s description of the attitude of the marines who were to be in the first waves provides an interesting take on the need for the atomic bomb attack on Hiroshima.

In the very brief “Elobey, Annobón, and Corisco,” Paul longs for a glimpse of a stamp (of three Spanish islands in the Pescadores) and other childhood items during his time on Saipan. Styron, using first-person narration (and a characteristically periodic sentence structure), captures Paul’s fears before his first combat:

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1. Four have been published previously: “Blankenship” in *Papers on Language and Literature* (Aut 1987), “Marriott, the Marine” in *Esquire* (Sep 1971), “Suicide Run” in *American Poetry Review* (May/June 1974), and “My Father’s House” (in part) in *The New Yorker* (6/13 Jul 2009).

For in truth the embryonic fear I'd felt on the ship had swollen hugely. I was scared nearly to death. While previously Okinawa had been an exciting place to dream about, an island where I would exploit my potential for bravery, now the idea of going back there nearly sickened me. Thus I found myself in a conflict I had never anticipated: afraid of going into battle, yet even more afraid of betraying my fear, which would be an ugly prelude to the most harrowing fear of all—that when forced to the test in combat I would demonstrate my absolute terror, fall apart, and fail my fellow marines (191–92).

Styron's own service in the Corps no doubt facilitated his flair for colorful details, whimsical phrases, and insights into character. It is good to have these short stories reissued in the present volume; they are entertaining evocations of life in the U.S. Marine Corps at a specific time and place.