



THE PASS IN REVIEW



Giuseppe Pellicano's
THE GRENADE SERIES

MAY 2014



THE PASS IN REVIEW

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ESTABLISHED IN 2014
PUBLISHED QUARTERLY

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ISSN 2372-8701

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Printed in the United States of America
First Printing, 2014
The Pass In Review Inc
536 Northgate Road,
Lindenhurst, IL 60046
www.thepassinreview.com

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EDITOR'S NOTE

*Dear editors, why don't you accept non-fiction?
Don't you want veterans to tell their stories?*

We get this email, or some version of it, on a regular basis so clearly this is something that needs to be addressed. First off, the blunt answer: 99% of our staff consists of Army infantrymen with combat experience. We've been to war. We've made it through war. We don't want to hear people's war stories. The last thing that we wanted to accomplish with this magazine was to serve as a platform for yet another "kill team" memoir about fallen comrades, fallen heroes or fallen anything. Our magazine was created for veterans to grow as artists and to do that, we need to explore more than just our brushes with death, because we *are* alive. We want to bridge the gap between civilians and veterans and I don't believe that non-fiction memoirs are the way to do it.

Some people will argue that it takes plenty of creativity to tell a true story. Yes, I'll admit that it *does* take some creativity to spin a compelling yarn about a true-to-life event (thus the term 'creative non-fiction') but the fact is, you didn't make it up. The imaginative element is pulled completely out of it and then you're just describing real things with pretty words. Fiction is different. It forces you to use your imagination, even if you are writing about things that you know.

There has been a lot of talk recently about using art as therapy. I'd like to quote one of our contributors, Randy Brown, who said, "Writing can be therapeutic, but it sure as heck ain't therapy." Recounting one's experiences might make you feel better, but it can only take you so far as an artist. The expression of raw emotion through art is only the first step to becoming a great artist. The next step requires discipline and imagination. We urge you to channel those raw emotions into well-crafted works of art that go beyond combat.

You can't grow if you never stray from what you know. I challenge each and every one of you, civilian and military alike, to move out of your comfort zone and try something that you normally wouldn't try. Do you normally only write military non-fiction? Try your hand at a sci-fi love story. Do you only paint military themed images in acrylic? Try experimenting with abstract work in oils.

Just like we want to push vets to grow in their artwork and creativity, *The Pass In Review* is growing as well. We have so many exciting events, themes and ideas that we plan on implementing

in the future that we hope that you'll stick around with us to see these ideas grow to fruition. Workshops, live storytelling events and even an audio fiction podcast with dramatized readings of our artists' works are on the horizon and coming soon.

We want your most exciting, freshest and edgiest work that you can create. Be bold, be raw, be alive. Take a risk and if you think it's too weird for us, it's probably not.

Please enjoy this incredible collection of veteran artwork!

Alexander Zapata
Editor in Chief
The Pass In Review

Bernie

Brian Turner

The flames that perched atop the three hundred foot concrete tower twisted and writhed as through trying to grab hold of the night sky. Illumination was at zero percent and the nearby condenser towers of Iraqi GOSPs provided the only light available for US forces operating in the area. The flames reflected off the ground and silhouetted their rifles, casting shadows over the asphalt. They stood there motionless, against the backdrop of the refinery, staring at the vehicle.

The driver must have had some sort of a death wish, or at least that's what they would tell themselves. No sane person would attempt to drive past a 12 man platoon pulling check-point duty at 0300 in the morning. Scores of 5.56 millimeter bullet holes – each traveling at a velocity of 853 meters per second - perforated the window shield, forming a mosaic of cracked glass. All four tires were shot out and the smell of petrol hung heavily in the air. Both mirrors were shattered and the radiator was shot to pieces, sounding off with the familiar “Glug, Glug, Glug,” noise of antifreeze leaking out over the pavement.

The driver's side door was ajar, with one of his legs dangling lifelessly over the running boards. He'd died instantly from a close range gunshot wound to the head, and had the tennis ball sized exit wound to prove it. The passenger seat was occupied, not by a person but rather the brain matter from the right side of his skull. His grease stained khakis looked as though they had been the drop cloth of a hastily disguised murder scene as they were soaked with blood. The look on the dead man's face was unsettling, and would doubtlessly serve as the inspiration of countless one on one sessions with a VA psychologists. His mouth? Wide open. His eyes? Wide open. His tongue? Nestled comfortably atop his receding gum line. But it was the slight upturn on the side of the driver's mouth that would haunt them the most. None of them mentioned it to one another, but it was

unanimous. The driver had died with a smug grin on his face.

Sergeant First Class Sadowski was the first to break the silence. "All right First Platoon. Let's get our shit together and Charlie Mike."

Sadowski approached the vehicle slowly, sleeves rolled up to his forearms, exposing an airborne tattoo covered in beads of sweat. "Staring at him ain't gonna bring him back to life."

The night was at least 110 degrees, and that was sans flack vest and Kevlar. The endless months of late night checkpoints had taken their toll on the 12 man platoon. Collectively, they had lost at least three hundred pounds of fat and muscle. They were exhausted, but more than that, they were fed up. Fed up with the bad food, fed up with the lousy weather, and fed up with the leadership. Sadowski's orders fell on deaf ears as the men continued to stare at the vehicle, lost in their thoughts.

"I'm not fucking kidding First Platoon, let's get going! Sergeant Vogel, get your guys together." Sadowski was a diva and hated being ignored. He began barking out orders like an auctioneer, stuttering between each syllable.

Sergeant Vogel sighed loudly and spit a wad of Copenhagen from his mouth. He turned toward Specialist Torres, wiping the tobacco remnants from his lips, "Torres, I need you to push Bernie back into his seat and close the door."

Torres, still shaken from having pulled the trigger that ventilated the driver's skull, was finishing a cigarette. "Did you just call the dead guy Bernie?"

Vogel smiled. "Yeah, you know, from that movie Weekend at Bernie's." He pointed at the driver, "He kind of looks like him doesn't he? You know, with the mustache and all."

Torres shook his head and put out his cigarette. "You're fucking sick man."

Vogel smiled and adjusted the strap on his M4 carbine, trying to fit it over his massive shoulders. Ten years of pull-ups and semi-annual HGH cycles had given him shoulders that were unnaturally large and cumbersome in appearance. Vogel watched as Torres kneeled beside the driver's side door, setting his rifle on the ground. The ammonium heavy scent of urine caught Torres's nose and he swore under his breath. While pinching his nostrils shut he noticed a yellow liquid dripping from the driver's shoe. He poked around with his finger, trying to find a section of his leg not soaked in bodily fluids.

Vogel shouted, "Come on Torres, he's dead. Why the fuck are you coddling him?"

"His leg's covered in piss."

"Who cares? We got some Purell in the Humvee."

The flames burning from the tower grew in size and ferocity as

larger quantities of vapor was purged from the GOSP. Assisted by the increased visibility, Torres located a dry area on the driver's leg and shoved it back into the car. He slammed the door shut.

Torres stood up and looked into the car, "You don't want me to buckle his seatbelt do you?"

"I think it's a bit late to worry about whiplash."

"So no?"

"It's got airbags right?"

"Yeah."

"He'll be alright."

Torres grabbed his M4 and began rubbing his hands on his pant legs. Satisfied with their cleanliness, he pulled a fresh smoke from his flack vest and lit it.

"Another square, that's like five in six minutes?"

Torres ignored him and watched the rest of the platoon as they attached a tow cable to the dead man's vehicle. They worked slowly, stringing the cable through the undercarriage of the truck and through the tow hook of their M113 Armored Personnel Carrier. The dull thud of desert boots echoing off the pavement barely rose above the roar of the refinery.

Sadowski rounded up the platoon to give last minute instructions. "Okay we're ready to go. Vogel, Torres, you're with me in the Humvee. First and second squad will be in Charlie 11 and Charlie 12. Charlie 12, you're gonna be towing Haiji's truck, so drive slowly. We'll be following you, and Charlie 11 will be leading."

The platoon dispersed like a well-oiled machine. Most went into the armored tracks, one in the drivers hatch and one manning the 50 cal. Ignitions turned, sparks lit, and connecting rods cranked. The track engines came to life with a metal on metal thunder louder than any Detroit assembly line. Torres and Vogel jumped into the back seats of the Humvee, with Sadowski and his driver in the front. The convoy lurched forward, dwarfed by the gas filled citadel surrounding them.

Sadowski was the first to notice the problem. He could see the dead man's vehicle swaying behind the track. What he originally thought to be road debris was soon identified as large chunks of tire rubber. Sadowski grabbed the hand mic, "Charlie 12 this is Charlie 14, slow the hell down. This ain't fucking Daytona, you're gonna have this truck riding on its rims if you keep that up."

The track began to slow, but it was too late. All the rubber had been stripped off the cheap Kurdish retreads. Steel belt met pavement with a shriek that rivaled that of a swine being boiled alive. Metal was sheered from the rims, leaving behind a wake of yellow sparks. The refinery flames were burning much larger now, and hotter. More valves were opened

and more gas was vented, creating a positive feedback loop of hydrocarbon lust that grew with every passing second.

Sparks continued to pour out over the road. Torres and Vogel noticed them tumbling by the side of the Humvee. Torres turned toward Vogel, "What the hell is going on, did someone set off an incendiary?"

Vogel snapped, "It's coming off the back of Bernie's truck you retard."

Torres looked out of window shield and saw the truck swerving from left to right in an intoxicated daze, spraying metallic shards all over the asphalt. Since there was no rubber, there was no road absorption. Every bump on the road was sent through the trucks chassis and up into the driver's lifeless body. Torres and Vogel could see the outline of the corpse bouncing around the cab, flailing his arms and rolling his head.

Vogel joked, "It looks like he's doing the wave."

Sadowski grabbed his hand mike, "Charlie 12 increase your speed, I repeat, increase your speed. We're only five miles from the compound."

Vogel tapped Sadowski's shoulders, "What do you mean increase your speed? That vehicle could catch fire any moment, including the dead Haiji in it."

"Who the fuck cares? He can't feel anything. If he wakes up, I owe you a cheese spread."

The convoy increased its speed with all the fury of a freight train. The refinery's flames, once so humble, had grown in volume and ferocity. The fifty foot spires gestured skyward as though in protest of the surrounding opacity. Smoke began to fill the cabin of the truck and the dead man's erratic movements became partially obscured by a dense grey haze. The rims were worn halfway down and would soon be running on brake calipers. Torres and Vogel began to detect a smell, not entirely unpleasant but similar to that of a chicken gizzard left too long in a parched frying pan.

Torres grabbed his nose. "Son of a bitch. Is that Bernie?"

Vogel was holding his nose and tears were streaming out of his eyes. "Yeah, I think he's being charbroiled."

The smell soon became unbearable to Torres. Bile flooded his stomach and rose in his esophagus. A fit of dry heaving overtook him, yet he managed to keep his jaw shut. The truck was swinging in larger arcs, mimicking the movements of a grain scythe. The night – once so proud – was in full retreat to the tower's unrelenting illumine. It was as though Lucifer himself had been walled up in the tower. Struggling, reaching upward, straining against his brick and mortar enclosure in an attempt to pull down the very foundations of heaven.

“I don’t think that trucks gonna make it,” said Vogel.

The truck swung back and forth on the road. Any hand not cupping a mouth was clinging tightly to a rifle. Eyes were blinking hysterically, trying to deflect the sweat sliding off their foreheads. Teeth were clenched, legs were restless. Vomit was being swallowed by the liter. The flames rose higher and higher, towering over the convoy like a crazed horseman of the Apocalypse. Sadowski noticed the rims were almost gone. He was sure it would flip once the calipers touched the road. More sparks, more odor, more smoke. The star spangled façade crumbled all around them, replaced with the all-consuming visage of the GOSP flame. The light from the tower, so bright, caused the platoon to shield their eyes. Daylight. It was daylight for a moment. Dawn had broken at 0350.

Torres noticed the convoy was slowing. They had arrived at the compound, and so had the truck. Torres and Vogel exhaled, and relaxed their grips. Darkness quickly overtook the sky as the refinery flames decreased in intensity. Vogel put a fresh wad of Copenhagen into his mouth and looked over at Torres.

“You know, I once asked God about nights like this?”

“You hear anything?” asked Torres, lighting up a cigarette.

“Nah.”

VISUAL ART



“FOLLOW THE LEADER”
Christina Beltran
Charcoal on hot pressed paper, 18" × 24"

VISUAL ART



“HALT”

Christina Beltran

Graphite and colored pencil on hot-pressed paper, 12” x 16”

your squad leader writes haiku

Randy Brown

1.
Bound as fire teams:
“I’m up. He sees me. I’m down.”
Action front, Leapfrog.

2.
Push through an ambush
like hornets roused out of nests
ablaze with hatred.

3.
Your weapon is jammed?!
Slap. Pull. Observe. Release. Tap.
Then Squeeze the trigger.

4.
Cover stops bullets
and concealment hides from view.
Know the difference.

5.
Take care of your feet.
Dry socks are better than sex
out here in the field.

wait for it

by Randy Brown

Drill sergeants first teach their troops
the Zen of Hurry Up and Wait
in sundry lines outside the Post Exchange:
There, they learn to anticipate without wanting
(or wanting too much)
pogeybait, home, glory, or comfort.

War also is often more boring than not.
Then, it is scalding. Do not covet action.

Remember: Just as a watched pot never boils,
the barracks showers never truly get hot
until someone flushes.
Be on your guard.

The Five Most Dangerous Things in the Army

Christopher Clow

1: A PRIVATE SAYING ...

"I learned this in Basic," Private Arnold said. In his hands he held a spool of class III parachute cord, the fabled 550 cord. He tied one end to the foot of the bed and began to wrap the other end around his waist and legs. Even in his inebriated state, he could still tie a perfect Swiss seat harness, just as he had learned in basic.

"I don't know man, are you sure you don't want to just ask the CQ sergeant to unlock your room?" Private Swenson asked. "This seems kinda like a big risk to take over locking yourself out of your room."

"Uh, Sergeant Cam's on CQ, he'll eat me alive. You know how he is about booze in the Bs. Besides, it's not dangerous. I'm just going to use the rope to rappel out your window, down a floor to my room. Then I'll unscrew the window bracket, dismount the window pane, climb inside, and I'll be back in bed, and good to go in time for first formation tomorrow morning."

Swenson thought about the plan for a moment, and through the magic of alcohol, found only one flaw in it. "You mean this morning," he said, smiling an empty grin.

"Huh?" Arnold was already inspecting the window, considering how he was going to take his first steps out into the softly illuminated night.

"First formation, technically, it's this morning." Swenson was pleased that he had caught that fact. It seemed important.

It wasn't until Arnold had gathered his courage and dropped from the third story window sill that Swenson had remembered another, perhaps even more important fact:

the bed was not bolted to the ground. The bed bucked as Arnold's full body weight ripped it across the room, sending sheets, pillows, and empty beer cans flying into the air. The two hundred dollar piece of furniture slammed against the wall, and stuck there, as if pinned by a puckish boggart. It was truly a testament to the legendary strength of 550 cord, perhaps the only thing in all of creation that was grunt proof.

Arnold, thanks to the effective training of his drill sergeants, had accurately measured the length of cord, and even with the bed slipping, he had avoided dashing his skull open against the concrete below. However, he was not entirely in the clear. He hung upside down, moaning from the shock, insensate. In addition, 550 cord, while capable of holding him up, was not climbing rope. It was no thicker than a number two pencil, and when subjected to a significant force, it exerted equivalent pressure. The force had shredded the running shorts the private had been wearing, and the pressure from the harness, wrapped around his legs and waist, forced a lot of blood to his ... well, privates.

It was in this condition that Sgt. Camoyan, the NCO in charge of quarters found the soldier when he came to investigate the cacophony: bound, naked, moaning, and aroused. He was swinging in the breeze, a wind vane designed by Hieronymus Bosch. Electing to let the MPs deal with the soldier and his evidently bizarre masturbatory routine, the older man simply walked away, muttering, "Well, now I done seen everything ..."

2. A SERGEANT SAYING ...

"Trust me, sir," Sgt. Camoyan said, using his best soothing-a-worried-butter-bar voice. "I've seen everything there is to see, and this is the best way to deal with it." He set down the black garbage bags that he had *acquired* from the mess hall. The POGs wouldn't be needing them.

"I don't know, Sgt. Cam," 2nd Lieutenant Speers, the aforementioned worried butter bar, said. "I mean, I am signed for this stuff."

"And you shouldn't be!" Cam interjected. "I don't know what they were thinking at brigade when they gave us these things, but you and I both know that the ROE will never let us actually use the Javelin, so what you've got here is essentially a \$180,000 paperweight. A paperweight that brigade will want returned, unused, and cleaner than it was when you got it."

"I know, but—"

"And you know that anything that we take outside the wire will get so much sand in it that it will never be clean ..."

"Yeah, but—"

"So, obviously, the best thing to do is to wrap it up in

this here garbage bag to keep the sand out, and leave it in your CHU so that when you've got to turn it back in, we don't get stuck trying to pull all the sand out of it with a toothbrush. Trust me; the men will love you for this."

"Alright, Sergeant, take care of it. We're heading out soon."

"Roger that."

They spent the day outside the wire, escorting a company of engineers as they repaired the roads that the war tore apart with regularity. It was an interminable crawl, which kept them in one place for far too long for the liking of any soldier, but despite their fears, the mission turned out to be a milk run, and they returned to base untouched.

"What are you doing in my CHU?" Speers asked. The company TOC roach (the overweight soldier who was a liability on real missions), who got all the shit jobs on base, stood in the LT's CHU, broom in hand.

"CO told me to clean up all the CHUs while you were outside the wire, sir," he said, obviously proud of his struggle to vanquish the slovenly disorder that had permeated the LT's home. It was clean, organized, and almost, but not quite, devoid of sand.

"It's gone!" Speers squatted next to the cupboard where he had left the bags containing the expensive anti-tank missile system. "What'd you do with the Javelin?"

"What Javelin?"

"The one that was right here!"

"There wasn't any Javelin there, just a couple garbage bags."

"It was inside the bags!"

"Oh." The TOC roach mentally retraced his steps. "Well, I chucked all the trash on the cart to the burn pit."

"You WHAT?" Speers glared at the private with the predatory gaze of one about to crush an insect beneath his boot.

It was at this point that Sgt. Cam felt compelled to step into the situation. He grabbed the private by the shoulders, turned him towards the open door, and whispered "Run!"

The chubby little soldier scurried away in a manner that justified his derogatory nickname.

"Fuck! What are we going to do?" Speers asked.

"We? I ain't signed for that shit, sir. You're on your own."

3. A LIEUTENANT SAYING ...

"In my experience," Lieutenant Speers said as he looked at the terrain. "A Bradley can make it across this." The stream had swelled with the winter rain and the snow melt. The ground was saturated with water that welled up as the vehicles passed by. "Take us across," he ordered.

“If you say so, sir,” the driver replied. He shoved the controls forward, engaging both tracks, lurching the twenty-seven ton treaded monstrosity forward towards the stream bed. The fighting vehicle crashed through the brush, contemptuously swatting aside branches; an unstoppable juggernaut, a monster with a 600 horsepower V-8 heart that exhaled black smog and crushed everything in its path.

This was the sort of thing that recruiting videos were made from, the moments that made all the laughable bullshit of the Army life worthwhile. The Bradley charged into the stream, and Speers felt like a god as the water parted in sheets, sending waves traveling up and downstream from the impact. It rolled, inexorable as fate into the stream bed... and became lodged in the other bank, a victim of its own mass and inertia.

“Gun it!” Speers insisted, and the driver leaned into the levers, putting the full force of the diesel engine behind the treads, which spun, churning up the water, spraying mud, and digging the Bradley even further into the stream bed.

“Shit. Try reverse,” the LT commanded. No luck. The water level upstream was rising as it backed up, trying to find a path through the armored obstruction.

“Goddamn it! Get out, we’ll tow it clear.” One by one, the men in the belly of the beast clambered up through the drivers hatch, and swarmed over the Bradley’s carapace, shivering as they sought refuge on the banks of the stream.

The Platoon Sergeant’s Bradley rumbled forward, and the men rigged steel cables between the two vehicles, then stood clear as both tried to back up, digging up roots and rocks and flinging them into the woods. For a moment, there was the appearance of motion. They thought that the bogged down IFV backed up, maybe an inch, maybe less, but there was the distinct impression of progress. Then everything fell apart. The towing Bradley shrieked metal on metal as its left tread slipped free from the wheels, leaving it incapable of any movement.

“Do you think we can fix this?” Speers asked his platoon sergeant.

“Well, sir, we’ve got one truck with a slipped track, and another that you decided would be better suited as a three million dollar dam on a piss ant creek in the middle of BFE,” his platoon sergeant retorted. “Totally fixable!”

“Really?”

“Fuck no. Get Captain Blevins on the horn, we need extraction. And prepare your anus, because forcible sodomy doesn’t begin to describe the reaming you’re gonna get for this one.”

4. A CAPTAIN SAYING ...

"I was thinking," Captain Blevins said, staring at the pictures streaming into the TOC from the Air Force's Predator. "I could take point on this one."

"Alright, Blevins, it's yours," the Battalion Commander said. "Go over the intel, and prep your plan."

"Thank you, sir!" An opportunity like this was an irresistible aphrodisiac for infantry commanders. The intel was unmistakable in his mind; a group of insurgents had begun digging a defensive trench on the outskirts of the city, carving fortifications out of the dusty earth, taking advantage of the American forces having been pushed back from the Northeast quadrant of the city. A clean take-down of an entrenched enemy would make Blevins' career. His actions would be studied for decades. So he threw himself into the information, dissecting the slightly blurry images, trying to figure out what represented a machine gun emplacement, what might be a command bunker, and where the defenses would be weakest.

He finalized the plan in the small hours of the morning and briefed his company. They would begin calling in air strikes to disrupt the enemy immediately, and they would bring the company in force to finish the insurgents off.

A dozen Blackhawks took off, carrying the company aloft for their rendezvous with destiny. They could see the initial barrage light off, two F-15s blazed past, dropping JDAMs onto the suspected defenders. Spectacular explosions lit up the sky. Then an A-10 soared in, low and slow, its 30mm Gatling gun spewing rounds into the trench. Radio reports came in, the enemy was fleeing the trench. Ten million dollars in fuel and ordinance. Everything was going according to plan.

The company dismounted at the landing zone, and performed their parts in the dance perfectly. One platoon set up a cordon, another waited in reserve, while the final platoon moved in to sweep and secure the trench. Two soldiers pushed up to the lip of the trench, and on the count of three, rolled in.

There were no gunshots. Nothing to indicate that they had encountered any resistance. "It's full of shit," they reported over the radio.

Unsure what to make of that comment, Blevins requested confirmation. "Repeat your last."

"It's full of shit. Up to my knees. I think we just blew up an irrigation ditch."

"Shit!" Blevins cursed. He brought the hand mike to his mouth. "Get confirmation, there was equipment visible on the intel, find it."

“Wilco.” There was silence for a minute as Blevins fervently prayed that they would find something, anything, to justify the mission.

“Yep, I think this used to be a plow. It’s a fucking farm.”

Blevins’ shoulders sagged. “Copy that. All elements: exfil to LZ.”

A raucous laughter came from the front of the Blackhawk.

“That’s why you can’t trust those drones, sir. Gotta use the mark one eyeball if you want solid intelligence.” The bird’s pilot, CWO Hensey, was struggling and mostly failing to contain his amusement at the whole situation. Blevins couldn’t see the man’s face, obscured behind a helmet, visor, and face-mask, but he could picture the warrant officer’s shit eating grin. It was contagious, and soon, every member of the helo’s crew were practically vibrating with suppressed laughter.

“Shut the fuck up, Chief,” he said as he petulant-ly strapped himself back into the helicopter’s seat.

5. A WARRANT OFFICER SAYING ...

“Watch this shit,” CWO Hensey said with a chuckle as he pitched the nose of the Blackhawk down, filling the view with the snow covered mountain.

“What are you doing?” his co-pilot asked, uneasily.

“I’m gonna show those gunship jocks a real stunt,”

“Fuck...”

The Blackhawk, devoid of cargo or passengers, flew in a lively manner, slowly easing out of the dive as Hensey eased the cyclic back to level. They streaked across the LZ, no more than a few meters off the ground, a mockery of the practice gun runs that the Apache pilots had been running minutes before. Hensey yanked back on the cyclic, and pulled up the collective, sending the helicopter arcing back into the sky.

A helicopter is a strange bird. It is an abomination. Unlike a fixed wing aircraft, which want to fly, a helicopter wants to drop out of the sky. The only thing keeping it aloft was the skill, prayers, and curses of its pilots. Hensey knew this, but after over a decade of flying, he had become intimately familiar with the limits of the airframe, and frankly, he was bored. So listening to the screams of the crew, he stomped the foot pedal as he pitched the stick between his legs forward.

The helicopter pivoted on its axis, and once again slid back to earth. The maneuver was called a pitch back turn, more commonly called return to target, and while a common maneuver for attack helicopter, utility birds like the Blackhawk rarely had need for it.

Staring at the white powder coating the rocks ahead of him, Hensey’s co-pilot had an epiphany: Hensey was absolutely insane.

This was true. At the same time, Hensey himself had a similar light bulb moment, although his was every bit as true, it was slightly more salient to the situation at hand. Hensey realized that here in Afghanistan, they were 8,000 feet above sea level, a massive difference from his last deployment to Iraq, or his training in the states. High air is thin air, and thin air doesn't grab the rotors the way Hensey thought it would. He hauled back on the controls, trying to bleed speed and regain altitude, but it was too late.

They smashed, belly first, into the snow. The strain warped the blades of the rotor, snapping them off and flinging them into the drifts, carving, along with the body of the chopper, what amounted to a twenty million dollar snow angel.

The bird, with its wings now clipped skidded and skipped across the terrain, bleeding off energy in tumbles and rolls, eventually settling to a stop.

"Everyone alright?" Hensey unhooked his facemask, and laughed. "Woo! What a rush! Never gonna do that again!"

His co-pilot caught him across the jaw with a right cross. "Damn right you won't," he said to the now unconscious pilot.

THE GRENADE IN THE DOLL HOUSE:
AN INTERVIEW WITH GIUSEPPE PELLICANO

A family dinner. A solitary fishing trip. Christmas morning with the kids. To the majority of people, these are mundane, normal fixtures of our lives. Viewed through the artistic lens of Giuseppe Pellicano, however, these settings are transformed into something that is both beautiful and shocking at the same time. Through the medium of sculpture and photography, Giuseppe's "The Grenade Series" is an ongoing project that explores PTSD and its effect on veterans.

Daniel Anderson (Managing Editor): I discovered Giuseppe through a mutual friend, Keith Jeffreys, and when I saw his work, I immediately knew that we had found our featured artist. I sent Giuseppe an email expressing our admiration for his work and he agreed to do an interview with us.

Alex Zapata (Editor in Chief): With the time set, Dan and I both decided to sit down with Giuseppe for an informal, "camp-fire" style interview. We hope you enjoy the interview with myself, Dan and our talented featured artist, Giuseppe Pellicano.



Daniel Anderson: So, Giuseppe Pellicano, who are you?

Giuseppe Pellicano: I don't know. That's a good question. Let's see. Is that a deep question or just who am I?

DA: However you want to answer that.

GP: I am a veteran of the United States Army. I served from 2000 to 2004.

DA: What unit did you serve with?

GP: I was stationed in Schweinfurt Germany with 1st infantry division 1-18. From there we were slotted to go to Kosovo. Then 9/11 kicked off. There was some confusion about whether we were going to deploy to the Middle East. But they continued to send us off to Kosovo where I spent... I think around ten months in Kosovo.

DA: Do you remember where you were when 9/11 occurred?

GP: I was attached to the scouts and snipers as a medic and I think we were doing some training or something when it kicked off. But when I finally saw it on TV it was after it had already happened. I didn't watch it live. I was out in Germany. It was scary at that time. We didn't know what to expect after that.

DA: What was your deployment to Kosovo like?

GP: Kosovo was a humanitarian mission, nothing like Iraq or Afghanistan. I assume it was very mild, comparably, as I did not fear for my life or those I served with. 1999 was when it really kicked off. We didn't make it out there until 2002. Our rotation was the last active duty rotation deployed there. I mean they had different things going on, talking about how people were bombing churches, the genocide, mass graves and things like that. I stayed with the scouts and snipers and we huddled up for 10 months until I headed back to the states. I was not in any combative situations.

DA: What did the country look like?

GP: It was absolutely beautiful, the country. I think Kosovo is one of the poorest countries in Europe right now, but you can easily see the place as a ski resort or a place where people go out for hiking. The people are nice. They have their issues with one another. The Albanians and Serbians are the ones that had the conflict between each other. Clinton was in office then. He sent everybody over and we've been there ever since. We're still there peacekeeping. The funny thing is I'd go out and give medical treatment to civilians. They'd have translators and I remember asking

an Albanian and a Serbian that were there for treatment, “We’re still here. Things seem to be fine. What happens when we leave?”

And I forgot which one, but he said, “We’ll just start killing each other again.” I thought to myself “We’re going to be here forever, babysitting.” It’s ridiculous. But it is what it is. That’s our world today, man.

DA: What happened after you go back from Kosovo?

GP: When I got back from Kosovo my wife was pregnant with our first at the time and they sent me back to, funny as it may seem, Barstow, California to train troops to go to Iraq. Barstow is a training facility for mostly the National Guard. We’d do training exercises to get people ready for deployments.

DA: You were still Active Duty during that period?

GP: Yeah. I was attached to one of the platoons as their medic. If anybody got injured out in the field, I’d take care of it. I didn’t do much training out there. I just made sure everybody was alright and healthy and good to go. Then I re-enlisted to go back to Germany. Got back to Germany, got back to my unit and then shortly after that we were slotted to go to Iraq. I got ill and that’s when I was discharged.

AZ: Sprechen sie Deutsch?

GP: No. She [his wife] does. All I can say is “Ein bier, bitte.”

DA: That’s the only phrase you need to know.
How many kids do you have now?

GP: Three. An eleven year old, a five year old and a three year old. Two Boys and a girl.

AZ: You must have your hands full.

GP: Yeah, but it’s fun. They’re what gives me my strength. To do everything, you know?

DA: Speaking of your kids, are those your children in “The Grenade Series”?

GP: Yeah, my children are in some of the photos and the girl in “Tea Time” is actually my niece.

DA: Let’s talk about “The Grenade Series.” We came across you and “The Grenade Series” after I had spoken to Keith Jeffreys of the USVAA (United States Veterans Art Alliance). By the way, how did you meet Keith?

GP: When I started going to school for art, I had a hard time getting back into civilian life. My doctor and my wife pushed me to go back to school. I didn't know what to do so I started with art. As I was doing that, these teachers were constantly telling me to research artists. During my research I fell upon the USVAA and a lot of other artists that are veterans. I founded this group called the Warrior Art Group. The connections that I have now were started in that group. Now I have a wide contact of artists like Ehren Tool, Drew Cameron and Aaron Hughes, amongst others. We started another group called "The Dirty Canteen", where we are making a documentary about veteran artists.

DA: Why were you looking for other veteran artists?



GP: To see what was out there. I was making art about my experiences and about my friends and the suffering that they were going through. I didn't make it to Iraq, so I can't say from experience how it was over there, but the stories that I hear from my friends and the troubles and traumas that they went through... I wanted to start sharing their stories for them. To help them and to help other people understand what soldiers go through. And so in my research I found other veteran artists that do this amazing work, guys like Thomas Dang, Jessie Albrecht, Ash Kyrie, Erica Slone, Edgar Gonzales and Mark Pinto. He knows Keith as well. He's doing the Warrior Art Group now. On that site you will find a lot of artists of different ranges of artistic skills, from the novice to those that have been schooled. Hopefully they

will be able to mentor one another and help each other out.

“The art can speak for itself, hopefully. Maybe that’s why a lot of veterans do it because they don’t like talking in person about their experience, but they’ll create something that does the talking for them.”

DA: When we started this magazine we set out to discover



veteran artists. We found that a lot of veterans are creating art, and creating networks through art. Why do you think this is so?

GP: I don’t know. I can’t really say why other veteran artists are doing it, but for me, I kind of just fell into it. I went back to school and I didn’t know what to do. My mind was constantly on my friends that were deployed and on my service and experiences. I wanted to get that out. I guess there’s two routes that you can take:

either writing or building with your hands and making it. I am not a good writer or storyteller. But I found a passion in making things and by making things I didn't have to talk about it. I just made it and let it talk to the people themselves, you know? The art can speak for itself, hopefully. Maybe that's why a lot of veterans do it because they don't like talking in person about their experience, but they'll create something that does the talking for them.

DA: Did you go into ceramics first or were you feeling out other mediums?

GP: I just went into the program and took what was on the curriculum. I had some teachers, an art history teacher, Wendy Koenig, my ceramics teacher, Christine Rabenold, and another ceramics teacher, Kate Pszotka, and the three of them really pushed me to express myself through art. I pretty much only had a ceramics section, a little in the sculpture program too, but I wasn't really into painting or drawing. I like building, so ceramics is where I fell into.



DA: What was the first project that you did?

GP: The first projects were just stupid things. I made some boxing gloves and some other things out of ceramics. I wasn't really ready to talk about my experiences or the experiences of others. And then, one day, I was listening to Black Sabbath and... you know that song "War pigs"?

DA: Yeah.

GP: That inspired me to make ceramic war pigs. With the help and guidance of my professor, I made a mold of an actual pig's head that I got from a butcher shop. I slip casted cheap shit clay in there to form the head and I built the horns and teeth to make them look vicious, a kind of representation of politicians.

AZ: I am looking at it right now. I love it.

GP: Thanks man. That was the first real one. Then I had some friends that... we lost and I was thinking about making a memorial of some sort. I worked on this piece where I made a mold of my combat boot. I wanted to make as many as possible for those that lost their lives and their loved ones. That was the "Left, Left, Left, Right, Left" project. I got a grant from North Central College to make them and I made one for as



many of soldiers as I could make. I think I got to 100. After the exhibition I shipped them to the families of those that provided me with the name of their loved one that they lost.

DA: Were those soldiers from your unit?

GP No. Just friends of mine that I met while I was in service. I didn't deploy with them obviously. After I got out, I'd hear stories about this or that. About my friends. I wanted to do something for all those who lost their lives.

DA: Are you still close with guys from your unit?

GP: A few I stay in contact with, mainly from my first duty station, 1-18. That was always my home, I guess you could say, when I was in. It was an infantry unit and I was a medic but it still felt right.

DA: We know how that feels. Both Zapata and I were

infantry and our medic was part of the family.

GP: Yeah. I mean, I still miss it man. It's that kind of love-hate relationship, you know? I miss my friends. The thing is I don't have many, I guess you could say, civilian friends. Most of my friends are veterans that I met or veterans that I knew while I served. I don't get out much.

AZ: I'm the exact same way. I've had a really difficult time finding civilian friends. It's gotten to the point where I don't even try anymore. There's a complete disconnect. I've tried to make friends, but the connections aren't there.

"I miss my friends. The thing is I don't have many, I guess you could say, civilian friends. Most of my friends are veterans that I met or veterans that I knew while I served."

DA: You were in an art program, I imagine, with a large number of students that were probably much younger than you, correct?

GP: Way younger, yeah. And a lot of them don't know. Like different questions, you know... stupid questions. Like, "Oh, you were in the Army? What did you do?" And then I tell them but they don't understand. "Did you go to Iraq?" No. "Did you go to Afghanistan?" No. "Well... but you were in the Army?" Yeah, I was, but... not everybody in the Army went to those wars.

DA: Is that where "The Grenade Series" came from? As a communication device to bridge the gap between those two cultures?

GP: Yeah, I guess. Other veterans share stories with me and how they cope with PTSD or how it affects them. I knew that these stories aren't going to make it out of the veteran circle. So I thought that maybe I could do something to bridge and educate civilians on what these guys and girls are going through. I couldn't build a sculpture to represent all these different things, so I figured I'd build a sculpture and then I'd take a photo of it in different scenarios based on stories shared with me. The MMA photograph is about Chris LeClair, who turned to MMA to try and get that rage out of him and to try to help with his

PTSD. But even though “The Grenade Series” is soldier related, I think that a lot of civilians can relate to it too. A lot of civilians have post-traumatic stress too. If you’re a rape victim, obviously, you’re going to have PTSD. If you were mugged and beaten in an alleyway, you’re going to have PTSD. Shit, the whole state of New York has PTSD after 9/11. It’s common. And maybe they can see, that even though there might be a disconnect between being a soldier and being a civilian, there is this connection that we are all human. And we all suffer. And we can all find a common ground to talk to one another and help one another.

“A lot of civilians have post-traumatic stress too. If you’re a rape victim, obviously, you’re going to have PTSD. If you were mugged and beaten in an alleyway, you’re going to have PTSD. Shit, the whole state of New York has PTSD after 9/11.”

DA: How did you make the grenades?

GP: I found these industrial lights that were half egged shaped. I welded those together and I cut sheet metal and formed the top portion of the grenade, the pin and the head. Then I just bent some steel and painted it up. I had it to scale. But then, when I was photographing it, it looked off scale. I had to play with it and shrink the body a little bit to try to get it to look right. Because in different angles and different shots, it will look bigger in some ways and smaller in other ways. I am still playing with it, trying to get it right. I think it gets the point across.

DA: Did you have any background with photography?

GP: No. When I started with the photography, I really relied on my brother Vito to help in teaching me the basics of working on the camera. Another veteran, Mike Dooley, helped me out with working the camera. Then I

had other people teaching me about lighting source and things like that and then after a while I slowly started to get it and it started to sink in. Then these photos developed.

DA: I also noticed that there is a skull in every picture.

GP: That's the *memento mori*. In the old days they'd always have that skull, as in "You may be rich but, hey, you're going to die." You'll have this King and somewhere in the painting there'll be a skull. It's a reminder of death, meaning that it's not all here forever. And the one thing for those that suffer from PTSD or manic depression, is that you always have that feeling of impending doom, that creeping death, right behind you. I suffer from depression. I wanted to illustrate that in each picture saying that it's always there; death is always present.

AZ: Does each one of these images pertain to a particular story or person?

GP: For the most part, yes. Some of them are combined. For instance, the grenade in front of the grave. That goes with a lot of people. When I went to Kosovo, and I am sure when you guys deployed to wherever you deployed, there's always that, "Goodbye and Good luck." If you're a survivor and you do come back, you wonder "Yeah, I had the Good luck. Why didn't my friend? Why wasn't it me? Why did he go or why did she go and I didn't?" I wanted to illustrate that. It is really, I guess, just luck.

AZ: Do you think that people don't want to see it? Is it to blunt? Is it too serious of a subject matter?

GP: If you're making art about other things you can shop your work at any studio, but if you're making art about war, trauma or your experiences, it seems like people only want to show you on Veterans Day. The rest of the year is kind of whatever. It's hard to find spaces to show because people don't normally like that. And our artwork tends to hit people over the head. They either don't understand it or don't want to see it. This is the argument with my old professors at Northern Illinois University, "Be a little more subtle with your work. Try telling your story without using the symbols." But for us we lived in a world where everything was symbols, from our rank, to the flag we saluted, everything. So it's hard to not use those symbols in our artwork. "The Grenade Series" is in your face. It's not subtle storytelling. It's, "Hey this is what happened. These are the things they use to cope, these are the symptoms." Maybe people don't want to be depressed or sad or face reality. That might be it. But all the shows that I have done and the people that I have spoken with, it's been

really positive. They want to see these things or they'll say "Oh, I never knew that, but now I do." And when you hear that, it makes it all worth it. Because we're not in this for the money.

"...war isn't subtle. Trauma isn't subtle. Mental illness is... it's hard. It takes its toll on people. For me, mental illness is something that I can easily talk about with civilians because it resonates through the lines."

AZ: Do you think that there is a little bit of cognitive dissonance going on between people saying "yeah we support you, we want to hear your story, we want to see what you're doing," but then they don't want to be confronted with images like that?

GP: Right. I agree man. That whole "support your troops." You see the stickers but you wonder about the person inside. What do they really do to support them? Most of the time it's a family member or a friend that really knows a service member and perhaps they really support them in some way. Or perhaps it is that blind support where they say, "I am an American. I am going to support my troops," but they don't want to know the story of what they're doing. I don't want to push things in peoples face and I don't think that any artist really wants to do that, but the thing is... war isn't subtle. Trauma isn't subtle. Mental illness is... it's hard. It takes its toll on people. For me, mental illness is something that I can easily talk about with civilians because it resonates through the lines. But war and trauma doesn't. That's harder for other veterans to discuss with people that don't know. You've had conversations with civilians and what do they ask you first? "How many people have you killed?" You can't talk to them about the brotherhood that we have or the good experiences that we shared, because they wouldn't understand it. It's a different culture. But if we could bridge that gap through art and conversation- because art is a conversation. We're trying to have a conversation

with somebody, to communicate with them through our work.

AZ: You basically outlined the entire purpose of our magazine. We recognize that there is a divide and we're trying to bridge it. What would you say to somebody that wants to get into art?

“Whether it’s writing or physically making something with your hands, you’re releasing that thought into a different medium.”

GP: Just do it man. I was. You just do it. And then you'll find comfort. Whether it's writing or physically making something with your hands, you're releasing that thought into a different medium. Writing and art is easy compared to the military experience. Don't let it scare you off. We all have thoughts in our heads. Put those thoughts on paper or build it from clay or metal or wood. I'll talk to you guys because I know your veterans, but anybody else I pretty much shut down. The thing with art is that you can communicate without having to say anything. With writing, you communicate, you write it, and let them read it and that's it. You don't have to talk to the person physically. Not that you can hide behind it, but you let art do the talking for you. That's the beauty of it. That and pounding on clay. It's the same as pounding on a punching bag. It's that release, release of stress. It's good stuff, man.

DA: Last question about “The Grenade Series” Is there an end goal in mind? A certain amount of photographs?

GP: My end goal is to put it in a picture book format with twenty photos. I think I am at ten complete photos right now. I have other photos that I haven't released yet, that I am not yet sure if I am going to. The other project that I am working on is about children and violence. I am trying to focus on that now and how we raise our children in a violent world.

DA: That's the project with the kids dressed up in army fatigues with camouflage paint on their face?

GP: Yeah, those are my three kids. Kids always think of soldiers as heroes. I don't see myself as a hero and I don't know any vet that sees themselves as a hero either. We don't look at each other like that or look at ourselves like that, but kids are

so impressionable. My son wants to be a soldier. “No,” I tell him, “Go be a doctor or something.” I am trying to figure out that whole thing. But I am guilty too man, because I buy them the fucking guns and shit. And they run around, pretending that they are shooting each other, pretending that they are killing teddy bears. One day, I was watching them and I thought, “What am I doing? What am I teaching them? What am I allowing them to become?” But that’s normal. I played that shit when I was kid. Maybe that’s part of being a boy. I am trying to discover that.

AZ: We loved all of your work and we’d really like to thank you for taking part in our magazine and sharing your work with all of our readers.

GP: I’m honored to be part of this, I got to tell you guys. Thank you so much for this opportunity. I appreciate it.

Giuseppe Pellicano is a United States Veteran who served in Germany, California, and Kosovo from 2000 to 2004. He achieved the rank of Sergeant as a medic attached to an infantry platoon. He completed his B.A.in Studio Arts at North Central College in 2012. You can see all of Giuseppe’s work at <http://www.giuseppellicano.com/>, <http://www.dirtycanteen.com/>, and the group that he founded, <http://www.warriorartgroup.com/>.

Giuseppe Pellicano's

THE GRENADE SERIES



“DROWNING WORMS”
Giuseppe Pellicano



“GIFTS FROM DAD”
Giuseppe Pellicano



“GOODBYE AND GOOD LUCK”
Giuseppe Pellicano



“INTESTINAL FORTITUDE”
Giuseppe Pellicano



“OH HAPPY DAY”
Giuseppe Pellicano



“SAY GRACE”
Giuseppe Pellicano



“SOLDIER’S CREED”
Giuseppe Pellicano



“TEA TIME”
Giuseppe Pellicano



“WE’RE ALL IN THIS TOGETHER”
Giuseppe Pellicano



“WHERE WERE YOU”
Giuseppe Pellicano

POETRY

Follow Me!

Reid Morton

Loud noises stir me
Is this my moment to shine?
Nay. Kitchen Patrol.

VISUAL ART



“FARMER WITH HIS SON”
Jules Roy
oil on canvas 24 × 36 (2013)

VISUAL ART



"A WOMAN'S CONCERN"
Jules Roy
oil on canvas 22 × 24 (2013)

The Missing Year: 1969

Nick Dalrymple

In January I was busy when the US population
reached 200 million—less one.
In February I was busy when Pistol Pete Maravich shot his gun.

In March I was busy when James Earl Ray plead
guilty for Martin Luther King's death.
In April I was busy when Sirhan Sirhan was
sentenced to take his last breathe.

In May I was busy when "Midnight Cowboy"
was released with an X rating.
In June I was busy when State troopers were ordered
to Cairo, Illinois to quell racial hating.

In July I was busy when Neil Armstrong took a moon walk.
In August I was busy when love rained on Woodstock.

In September I was busy when the Trial of "Chicago 8" did begin.
In October I was busy when Supreme Court
said school segregation will end.

In November I was busy when "Sesame Street"
premiered on PBS TV.
In December I was busy when Peter, Paul & Mary
were "Leaving on a Jet Plane", without me.

VISUAL ART



“BIEN HOA”

Neil Leinwohl

Acrylics and oil paint stick (two joined panels), 49” × 72”

VISUAL ART



"BLOOD BROTHERS"
Neil Leinwohl
Acrylics, 48 × 60"

Roadkill

By Michael Starr

The first two porcupines I ever saw were run over by Ahmed.

At the time my company was based on the Israeli-Lebanese border, near Bear Mountain. My platoon was assigned to vehicular patrol when one of the sensors on the border fence indicated a breach.

We had stopped to roast wild mushrooms over an open flame when we got the call.

“Kill the fire. Everyone to the Humvees,” the Lieutenant ordered.

“Coos emak...” swore Muhammad, a young Bedouin tracker.

He was the one that had found the mushrooms and had coaxed the fire to life.

“Don’t worry. We’ll find more mushrooms, and we can always start a new fire,” assured Salach, the senior tracker.

His words were as much for our benefit as they were for Muhammad’s.

“Do we really have to check it out?” moaned Boris, a platoon-mate.

The Lieutenant sighed. We all knew Boris was right. For a month now we were getting regular alerts from the same fence subsection. Muhammad even showed us the tracks: small, deep paw prints smoothed over by a wide dragging tail. Muhammad told us it was a “dorban” or in English, a porcupine. The porcupines were constantly burrowing under the fence, ignorant of national boundaries. Ours was the night shift, and it seemed as though the porcupines were nocturnal as well. They kept us pretty active throughout the late hours.

“If we allow ourselves to be lulled into a false sense of security, then one night it could be a Hezbollah operative that burrows through. *Yalla.*” Whining and groaning, we abandoned our late night snack and loaded into the vehicles. The Lieutenant, Salach and I took seats in the lead Humvee. Behind our vehicle’s wheel slumbered Ahmed.

Ahmed was a bald Arab man with a coarse goatee. His pale, bloodshot eyes were either open wide or closed shut. There was no in-between. Ahmed never blinked.

“Ahmed. Wake up,” the Lieutenant ordered.

Ahmed lazily opened one eye and rotated in the Lieutenant’s direction.

“What is there?”

“Breach alert.”

With cusses in Arabic and Hebrew, Ahmed repositioned himself and started the Humvee’s engine.

We checked the fence by the book; our approach covered by the Humvee with a remote controlled .50 cal. After fast and slow drive-bys, we cordoned off the section and approached on foot, Salach in the lead.

“Tsk. *Dorban*,” said Salach, motioning toward tracks in the sand strip.

“Well, now we know for sure,” the Lieutenant sniffed before cancelling the alert.

When Ahmed heard that it was another porcupine-induced alert, he whaled his fists angrily into the steering wheel. We climbed back into our Humvees and made for the nearest exit from the fence road to the civilian roads.

Suddenly, Ahmed burst into an angry Arabic tirade.

“What is it?” I asked.

Ahead of us, illuminated by the headlights, was the spiny behind of a medium-sized mammal.

“Dorban! Dorban!” Ahmed roared, slamming his foot down onto the gas pedal. The Humvee rocketed forward murderously and with a thump the porcupine disappeared under the tires of the vehicle. Ahmed hit the brakes and brought the vehicle to a halt.

“What are you doing!?” the Lieutenant gasped in shock. Ahmed said nothing, opened his door, and got out. The Lieutenant looked back at Salach and me for an explanation of Ahmed’s odd behavior. All we could return were shrugs and baffled expressions.

We heard the trunk of the Humvee open and shut, and Ahmed got back behind the wheel. We then drove off in search of more mushrooms.

That was how Ahmed killed the first porcupine I ever saw.

After I told my platoon-mates of what had transpired, rumors ran rampant, and the story grew legs. Word spread that Ahmed had stored the porcupine in the trunk for later consumption. Omri went so far as to claim that while he was on guard duty, he saw Ahmed remove the carcass and drag it to the kitchen. The validity of that claim, however, was dubious. I had never known Omri to make it through a guard shift awake.

Rumors and stories were nothing new when it came to Ahmed. In fact, all that we knew about the man was based on rumor.

Ahmed was either Bedouin or Druze. No one was sure, since neither side would lay claim to him. If someone asked Ahmed himself, he would reply, "I'm no dirty Arab. I'm Swedish," and then he'd laugh a terrifying laugh: a maniacal high-pitched 'Krusty the Clown' imitation.

Ahmed didn't lie about every personal question. He *would* admit to having served as a combat soldier during the Lebanon war, though he would never specify which one, or for whom. One tale claimed he was purposely mysterious about it because he was a Phalangist that had fled to Israel to escape war crimes. Another portrayed him as an Israeli war hero that had killed countless enemies. Both stories ended with Ahmed going mad because of his actions.

I suppose that's how rumors gain a foothold, with a little bit of truth.

The truth in Omri's claim was that Ahmed had incredibly strange eating habits. With my own eyes I had seen him eat a raw onion paired with a chunk of bread. My sergeant told me he saw Ahmed once eat a whole chicken as if it was a fruit in hand, taking huge bites and then spitting out the bones like sunflower seed shells. Omri claimed that he saw Ahmed pick food out of the trash. If it were anyone else besides that lying sack-of-shit Omri, I would have believed it.

Whatever Ahmed was eating didn't sit well with him. His stomach was constantly bloated and jutted out in an unnatural way. It was as if his gut was trying to escape the body that tormented it.

Interestingly enough, Ahmed would never partake of the wild mushrooms and passion fruits we foraged while on patrol. He said it was food for animals and women.

At least Mrs. Ahmed was eating well.

Late at night, a week from the original incident, we rested in our vehicles in a grove. As much as Ahmed tried to sleep, he couldn't, having been suffering stomach pains from whatever unusual fare he had eaten earlier in the day. A phone call distracted Ahmed from his lurching gut.

"Hello? Happy holidays, Arab dog," Ahmed grunted in Hebrew, before switching to Arabic and slinking off into the woods. To the best of my memory and knowledge, I don't think it was a holiday, Jewish or Muslim.

"Wow. Who is he talking to?" I asked Salach.

"His son, I think," Salach replied.

Talking about Ahmed got me thinking about the porcupine that he had run down, and Omri's story.

“Hey Salach, does anyone eat porcupine?”

“Oh yes, it’s considered a delicacy. Men used to train dogs to catch the porcupines. It was very expensive, because the dogs would always die.”

“Huh,” was all I could say. A Humvee was certainly more efficient than a dog.

The radio squawked to life, our outpost calling out our Humvee’s name. I grabbed the radio, and responded.

“Patrol Lead here, continue.”

“We’ve got another breach alert.”

Like clockwork, the porcupines had struck again, setting off a fence sensor.

I relayed the information to the Lieutenant, who quickly herded the patrol members into their vehicles.

“Ahmed! Get off the phone! We have another breach alert.”

Ahmed walked toward the Humvee at a leisurely pace, only disconnecting the phone call once he had reached his seat.

Off we drove to that fence section we knew so well. There was no group in the world that could approach and analyze that fence as well as we could, as practiced as we were at it.

It was again determined to be a porcupine that raised the alarm, no doubt kin of the one Ahmed ran down. Sure enough, as we drove down the gravel road that wound along the fence, the Humvee’s headlights illuminated another spiny behind.

“Dorban! Dorban!” Ahmed screeched, putting the pedal to the metal.

The porcupine darted along the road, its little legs moving as fast as they could, trying in vain to outrun fate. The spines of the porcupine stood on end, as if it was trying to catch a wind, like a boat with a sail.

I imagine the porcupine knew what was coming. It knew who its pursuer was; the crazy carnivorous man that had declared war on the clan of *dorbanim* that disrespected national borders.

Desperately, the rodent endeavored to escape Ahmed, but the speed of the powerful American vehicle was too great. Ahmed claimed his second victim.

That was how Ahmed killed the second porcupine I ever saw.

Over the course of the next two weeks, Ahmed expanded his war to all critters that set off sensors and illegally entered Israel. He ran down two dogs, three cats, a snake, and an unknown number of ducklings. Purportedly, he slew four more porcupines when I wasn’t on duty. We did what we could to curb Ahmed’s bloodlust, but he usually acted before we had even seen the animal.

Complaints were made by Salach and a few of my

platoon-mates, but nothing could be done. Ahmed was respected in the IDF drivers' hierarchy. As well, there was a shortage of veteran drivers, especially since I caught one returning to base drunk when he was scheduled for a shift.

So we put up with Ahmed's murderous tendencies, some of us even taking tally and making bets on what species the next victim would be, and when. Surprisingly, Ahmed's war on illegal immigration worked. We received far fewer sensor alerts than before his campaign. Either he had killed all the offenders, or word was getting around the animal kingdom.

One night, near the end of our deployment on the border, we rested in the grove to eat dinner. Ahmed slept on the hood of his Humvee, having devoured his meal faster than the eye could follow.

It was a particularly cold evening, so Muhammad had started a fire. We sat around it, eating, drinking and doing imitations of one another, something Israelis find inexplicably hilarious.

There was a rustling in the low bushes bordering the grove, and a porcupine emerged. The creature curiously examined the scene, unaware that the butcher of its compatriots lay sleeping mere meters from it.

"Hey Ahmed," Boris called to him, "There's a porcupine!"

"Dorban ... ?" Ahmed lazily opened one eye and turned to look at the rodent. Man and beast stared each other down and we held our breaths. It was a moment worthy of an Ennio Morricone movie score.

Finally, Ahmed shrugged, and the porcupine waddled away with a new lease on life.

Ahmed turned his cyclopean gaze on us, and we waited for him to give an explanation.

"If he doesn't touch the fence, we don't have a problem." Ahmed might have been a bat-shit-insane-roadkill-lunatic, but at least he was fair.

That was how Ahmed spared the third porcupine I ever saw.



DE OPRESSO LIBER

A FORMER GREEN BERET GIVES THE MIDDLE
FINGER TO THE VA AND LAYS THE GROUNDWORK
FOR EMERGING VETERAN ARTISTS

Daniel Anderson, Managing Editor: I had the opportunity to see a play called *Tracers*, written by a Vietnam veteran named John DiFusco. He had developed this play about his experiences with other Vietnam veterans. The play was a huge hit when it debuted back in the 80's, mainly because the same Vietnam vets who helped develop the play with Mr. DiFusco, were also cast in it.

Many years later, a fellow OIF/OEF veteran that I had taken an acting class with, Trevor Scott, was cast in the play, along with other veterans that filled out the rest of the cast. He invited me, via Facebook, so I bought a ticket and caught the show. Afterwards, Trevor handed me a free beer and introduced me to Keith Jeffreys, the Executive Director of the United States Veterans' Artists Alliance, located in Los Angeles. At that time, *The Pass In Review* was still in its infancy but I told him about the idea for our magazine anyways. Almost immediately, Keith said he would love to work with us. He gave me his email and I left with his card in my pocket.

The next day when I got home, I researched the USVAA. I found that his group did amazing work supporting veteran artists all over LA. They produced plays, hosted art shows and put on writing workshops, as well as other events. Months later, once we had our first issue out, I pulled his card out of my wallet and sent Keith an email.

He quickly responded and sat down with me for an interview.

Who are you?

I am Keith Jeffreys. I am the Executive Director of United States Veterans Artists Alliance. We use the acronym USVAA all the time as a quick reference. I always joke that that's one of the few things I learned to do well in the military: put together acronyms. As the Executive Director of the USVAA, I am responsible for interacting with veterans that are part of the organization and making sure that we're taking the organization in the direction that accommodates their needs as artists of all types, whether they are writers visual artists, filmmakers, directors, actors, poets... on down the road.

How did you meet the people that founded the USVAA?

We started the organization in 2004. I had just finished producing a theatrical production in Hollywood. It was my first theatrical production that I had produced but one I had done twice in three years. I had had this idea for some type of organization. I felt like I was sitting on the sidelines while a lot other veterans and younger people were going off to fight in Afghanistan and then Iraq. And I thought "Well what can I do?" and "What's relevant in my experience?". And I thought that it would be beneficial to have an organization like USVAA that would be able to make sure that, when veterans come to Los Angeles and explore their career or vocation in the Arts and Humanities, that they didn't fall through the cracks. That there was some kind of networking between veterans.

Another thing that we really wanted, in the way we envisioned the organization, was to educate veterans in how the arts inform each other. How literature is important to film. How visual art and its concepts, that were developed over thousands of years, are important to film and television, theater, etc. And how those works work back and inspire visual artists of all types: again our sculptors, poets and writers.

Is that why your organization gathered the veteran board members which come from diverse artistic backgrounds?

Yeah absolutely. We wanted to find veterans, as much as possible, to be on our advisory board. Two of the board members, actually, are members that I served with back in the day. Jeff Talley was on my team. Chris Cross was on a team next to us. And they have gone on to have very, very successful careers. Chris is a successful engineer with many, many patents at IBM. Jeff retired as a Lieutenant Colonel out of Special Forces and now works in the private sector.

Where did you serve?

At Fort Bragg, North Carolina. I joined when I was seventeen and started out with the 82nd. Transferred to 5th Special Forces Group a

year and a half later and made it through training. I was then assigned to a scuba team. In the back of my mind, though, I realized I wasn't made out for a career in the military. Even though the lifestyle appealed to me a lot... I mean we had a lot of fun, doing a lot of good stuff. But it just wasn't going to work for me so I got out and went to college.

Where did you go to college?

California State Sacramento and got a degree in journalism.

How did you go from journalism to theatre?

I had moved to Los Angeles a couple of different times and theatre had interested me, as well as film and television. And I had had some thoughts about becoming a screenwriter. Those didn't pan out quite the way I had wanted them to, but theatre was accessible to me and it was something that I really enjoyed. I enjoyed the spontaneity of theatre, the immediacy of theater and of the dynamic that's created by the actors and the audience. I feel that theater provides a solid foundation for writers, actors, directors, everybody, to move forward with their careers.

Did you find a community down here when you came to Los Angeles?

It has been somewhat hit and miss with the theater community in Los Angeles. But there is a solid theater community here, it's just a matter of building a foundation and making those contacts. With people like John Flynn [Founder of Rouge Machine Theater] and John Difusco [Writer of "Tracers"] for example.

Coming to Los Angeles, being a veteran yourself and in the theater world... two small groups-

Two small groups that don't necessarily interact well with each other. They're not necessarily mutually exclusive but the number of veterans that are involved deeply in theater is somewhat limited. We would like to change that. We would really like to see that change here in Los Angeles and across the country. New York as well.

Did you eventually build that community?

We just kept working at it. Our big break through organizationally was when we did "Bug" in 2010. We had two veterans in "Bug", a young Marine Corps veteran named Christopher Sweeny and Heidi Brooke Meyers, who both did a phenomenal job, Christopher in his role and Heidi in hers and her role as co-producer. That started opening up doors for us. We were very fortunate in that production to have casted a young comedian named Maribeth Monroe. We got her at just the right time, right before her career really started to break. After that she got cast in "Workaholics" and I heard that

she is now being cast in "The Brink". Having her in our production was really fortunate for us and it was a pleasure to work with her.

We had also been doing a Shakespeare program with another veterans group here in West Los Angeles and that helped get the word out as well. That program was also really successful and but we just were not able to maintain it at the Civic Center in west Las Angeles.

Those two things in combination really opened the doors up. After 2010 we wanted to reexamine what we were doing and how to do it better. During that time I was introduced to John Difusco, of "Tracers" fame. We talked about his play "The Long Way Home", which is a two man memory play about his journey developing "Tracers". So we developed that with him and through that process met John Perrin Flynn of Rouge Machine Theater. Together we went forward with the "Long Way Home" and then followed that up with this year's production of "Tracers".

With "Tracers" we developed the concept, again, of putting together an all veteran cast, which hadn't been done since the play was written in the 80's. We felt that that was something that we really wanted to do as it was in keeping with the original intent of the writers and actors in "Tracers", in which veterans told their own stories. That became an enormous success for us.

Did that bring a lot of attention to the USVAA as well?

Yeah that brought us a lot of attention. A lot of offers started coming across the table. Now it's just a matter of sorting through what's right for us organizationally.

Where do you see the organization going now?

We don't know as far as what production that will be. We are looking for work that necessarily doesn't have anything to do with the military experience. We really feel that it is important for our Actors, Writers, Directors, and other veteran artists to use our common experience as veterans and our service in the military as our starting point. We don't want to get stuck in only telling stories that have relevance to the veteran community. We want to tell the larger stories. We want to talk about all the other things that everyone experiences and make sure that our actors don't get stuck portraying only military people; that the writers are not stuck just writing military stuff.

What about artists in other disciplines, for example sculpture? I see you have a piece here...

Yeah. We have Joseph Umali Fernandez's work here in our building. It's an untitled piece. He's a phenomenal

sculptor and a Navy veteran. I like to call it the fractured man but he said it's untitled so I'll go with that.

I also have a piece here by Jonas Lara who's a mixed media artist. A Marine Corps veteran who lives up in Ventura county. [He points to photograph on his wall] Lynn Pedigo, who is a photographer and Vietnam War veteran. This is a photo he took in Cambodia.

[His finger drifts downwards to a painting on the same wall] Brian Rocks' work over here. Brian served in Korea and Iraq. Some of his work also reflects his experience of growing up in Ireland.

[His hands reach out to the air] Just tons of different artists that we want to support. Ehren Tool's cups over here. Ehren tool is an extraordinarily well known in his use of ceramics, a Marine Corps veteran as well. [He looks around the room, searching] I don't have any of Thomas Dang's work around here but he's an up and coming artist as well.

We want to support all of that. All of those young up and coming artists that are at that point where they are ready to take their career to their next level.

How do you do that?

We do that with gallery exhibits, for example. We had a gallery exhibit in conjunction with "Tracers" this year that was put together with the Soldiers Project, which is an organization that we work with. It was a great gallery exhibit. We have this wonderful space downstairs that we can use for exhibits.

Speaking of which, how did your organization obtain the use of this building?

It's an interesting story. We had started the organization in 2004 and I originally thought that Veteran's Affairs (VA) was going to support us. I thought, "Oh the VA man, they're going to help." I really didn't understand the VA at the time or where they were as a government entity. I thought, "The VA is going to love this idea! How could they refuse this brilliant idea of 'Veterans in the Arts'?"

[Laughs]

The VA has theaters over at the West Los Angeles VA campus and I thought they were just going to open their doors and say "Come on in guys and do your thing, we got all this space."

[He sighs] I wrote letter after letter and we got nowhere. We couldn't make any headway what so ever trying to get the VA to understand what we were trying to do. While I was doing that I had been a

American Veteran member and as a result of that I was told that this particular office [The Historic Amvets Post 2 in Culver City] was available for rent. This was late 2004 and we had been rehearsing stuff with a couple of actor friends at some picnic tables on the West LA VA grounds. It was the wettest winter on record, I think, for something like 75 years. We found an office over there that a friend of ours allowed us to use as long as we straightened things up after we were done. That was when we really knew where we were.

So that's when I came over to this office with a couple of other organization members and took a look at it. The Amvet members of this Post took us down stairs to look at the space and... there was a stage down there. The place was not in real good shape, but I could see that there was a stage.

I immediately turned to the person that was showing us and I said "I'll tell you what. We will take over this thing, well not 'take over', but we will run it for you. Put money in your pocket and improve the look of it and get it in shape and you won't have to do anything." So he took that offer back to some of the older veterans that were here. It took them a while to embrace the idea, but ultimately, they took to it.

And in the meantime we just came in and started working before the deal was struck. We worked on the building: painting, tearing walls out, throwing stuff away and cleaning it up... I think that impressed them. I actually think they thought we were crazy. They weren't sure what to do with us at that time. After we were done we signed the deal with them we started renting the place out. I put the listing on craigslist and people started came over and renting this place. We were able to do exactly what we had told them we would do. That's how we got here.

That's awesome

Yeah that's almost ten years ago.

Do other production companies come in and rent this place out?

We have had other production companies come in. We'd like to have more of that happen.



The USVAA is a non-partisan organization dedicated to supporting veterans in the arts, humanities and the entertainment industry. If you'd like to know more about Keith Jeffreys or the USVAA please visit them at <http://www.usvaa.org/>

GLOSSARY OF MILITARY TERMS

- .50 Cal:** Short for the .50 Browning Machine Gun (BMG), oftentimes used in the turret of gun trucks.
- 550 cord:** Extremely tough and durable parachute cord used by the military.
- A-10:** Lovingly referred to as “The Warthog, the A-10 is a twin-engine powered jet aircraft that is often used to support infantry maneuvers by strafing enemy targets with its 30mm rotary cannon.
- CHU:** (pronounced *choo*) Containerized Housing Unit, small trailers used to house soldiers.
- Cordon:** a line of people, military posts, or ships surrounding an area to close or guard it.
- CQ:** Charge of Quarters is an overnight duty usually performed by a non-commissioned officer (NCO) and another junior enlisted service member. Their duties often include guarding the front entrance to the barracks, performing roving security and enforcing curfews.
- CWO:** Chief Warrant Officer.
- The B’s:** (pronounced *the bees*) slang for the barracks .
- Bradley:** The Bradley Fighting Vehicle (BFV) is an armored infantry transport vehicle.
- Bound:** A tactical movement wherein two or more soldiers advance towards the enemy by leapfrogging one at a time while the other soldier covers them.
- Charlie Mike:** Radio speak and military slang for “Continue Mission”.
- EXFIL:** Radio speak for “exfiltration” or the removal of friendly forces in the area.
- GOSP:** Gas Oil Separation Plant.
- Grunts:** Slang term meaning “infantrymen”.
- Hurry up and wait:** Phrase used to describe a unit’s rush to have their soldiers arrive early at a specified location only to have to wait there for long periods of time anyways.
- IDF:** Israel Defense Forces.

IFV: Infantry Fighting Vehicle (*see Bradley*).

Javelin: The FGM-148 Javelin is a man-portable, fire-and-forget, anti-tank missile.

JDAM: Joint Direct Attack Munition is a guidance kit that converts unguided bombs, or “dumb bombs” into all-weather “smart” bombs.

Kevlar: Slang for the Kevlar helmets worn by soldiers.

Kitchen Patrol (KP): Kitchen based work detail where junior enlisted soldiers are assigned to work in the kitchens to perform work such as mopping, scrubbing pots and pans and serving food in the chow line. KP is sometimes used as a punishment detail due to its tedious nature.

LZ: Landing zone.

MP: Military Police.

NCO: Non-commissioned officer.

Pogey Bait: Non-military issued food items such as candy, gum, cigarettes, beef jerky and potato chips.

POG: Personnel-Other-than-Grunt, used to describe anyone in the military that isn't an infantryman, a cavalry scout, a tanker, a combat engineer, a forward observer, a medic or anyone that isn't a combat arms MOS.

ROE: Rules of Engagement.

Slap-Pull-Observe-Release-Tap-Squeeze (SPORTS):
Acronym used by soldiers to help them remember the immediate action drill to clear a malfunction in their weapon system. Slap the magazine, pull the charging handle, observe the ejection port for the expended casing or round, release the charging handle, tap the forward assist to ensure the bolt closure and squeeze the trigger.

TOC: Tactical Operations Center, manned by commanders, analysts and communications specialists.

TOC Roach: Derogatory term used to describe individuals who work mainly within the TOC. Very similar to a “Fobbit”.

WILCO: Radio speak for “Will Comply”.

The Wire: The physical boundary surrounding a Forward Operating Base or military base in a theater of war.

BIOGRAPHIES

SHORT FICTION

Michael Starr was born in Canada and immigrated to Israel when he was nineteen. He served three years (2009 - 2012) in the Israeli Defense Forces as a sniper in the Nachal Infantry Brigade (Battalion 931, "Forward" Company). Since his release from the IDF, Michael has worked as a security escort for tour groups, and as a maritime security contractor. He currently resides in Jerusalem, and always looks forward to being called up for reserve duty.

Christopher Clow served as an infantryman from 2006 to 2012 in the Oregon and Washington National Guards. He now lives in Port Townsend, Washington. This is his first published piece of fiction.

Brian Turner currently lives in the Los Angeles area with his wife of 5 years. He is a OIF veteran that served in the US Army (2000-2003) as a combat engineer during the invasion and early stabilization efforts.

POETRY

*In 2010, **Randy Brown** was preparing for deployment to Eastern Afghanistan as a member of the Iowa Army National Guard's 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 34th Infantry "Red Bull" Division. After he dropped off the deployment list, he retired with 20 years of military service and one previous overseas adventure. He then went to Afghanistan anyway, embedding with Iowa's Red Bull units as a civilian journalist in May-June 2011. A freelance writer in central Iowa, Brown blogs at: www.redbullrising.com.*

His military non-fiction and poetry have appeared in previous or forthcoming issues of Tom Ricks' "The Best Defense" blog; The Journal of Military Experience; Doonesbury's "The Sandbox" blog; The Pass In Review; the Veterans Writing Project's "O-Dark-Thirty" blog; and two volumes of the anthology series "Proud to Be: Writing by American Warriors," published by the Southeast Missouri State University Press.



***Reid Morton** entered the Army in 2006 with hopes of becoming a Special Forces operator. After breaking his leg jumping out of a plane, he spent the rest of his contract as an Infantryman, in which time he completed a 15 month deployment to Baghdad, Iraq. Since leaving the military, he has attended college, been active in Ron Paul's Campaign For Liberty, and pioneered a startup providing services in tactical shooting for civilians, survival consultation, and security called Fox Strategic Systems.*



***Nick Dalrymple** currently lives with his wife in an old farm house in rural Saint Joseph, Illinois. He has a painting in the National Veterans Art Museum collection in Chicago, a sculpture in the 555 Collective museum in St. Francis, Kansas, and a photograph and poem in the traveling exhibition titled "PTSD Nation: Art and Poetry From Survivors of War, Gun Violence, and Domestic Abuse."*

Nick served for four years in the Army Security Agency as an Electronic Warfare/Signal Intelligence Emitter Identifier/ Locator Analyst (Army - Enlisted). He was stationed in the Central Highlands from January 1969 to January 1970.

VISUAL ART

Christina Beltran served in the Marine Corps as a combat engineer from 2003 to 2007, and deployed twice to Iraq. She currently resides in the Chicago area.

Neil Leinwohl served in the U.S. Army from 1966 through 1969. He was a member of the 34th Engineer Bn at Bien Hoa and later with the 82nd Airborne Division at Fort Bragg. His art has hung in a number of veteran art shows including an exhibit at the Pentagon. He currently resides in Rockville Centre New York.

Jules Roy entered the Air Force in 1993 to start a career as a Pararescue Jumper (PJ). After numerous duty stations and global deployments he found a permanent home in Westhampton Beach, NY where he continues to operate as a PJ at the 103rd Rescue Squadron, 106th Rescue Wing. His drawings and paintings include work accomplished while in theater and a large body of retrospective work also themed after his deployments.



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