



Artist Statement

Brian Ballou

Since I have been an artists and photographer I have learned more than I could have imagined. I started out being interested in photography when I was a kid and asked my father if I could barrow his camera to take pictures on family vacations. From that point on, I found myself taking pictures all the time. When I was about half way through high school I got my first DSLR camera. Once I got this camera, I was taking the camera everywhere with me and taking pictures of everything around me. I didn't really take any art classes in high school but I always continued to do art and drawing on the side because I had an interest.

Once I got to college I didn't go right into art starting off but I knew something was wrong with my major. After the first semester, I decided I was going to be a photographer. My first photography class was just amazing. I had never done any dark room work before or even worked with film. I was really interested in black and white silver gelatin prints. From this I started using a medium format and a large format camera. I was so please with the results from the large format view camera I went out a purchased a view camera.

This view camera allowed me to capture some of the most devastating damage from the floods. At the time I was in the Army National Guard and got mobilized for a major state emergency; the Colorado floods of 2013. What I saw from the floods was death and loss of the most personal positions that have been around for decades and even centuries. I went out with my view camera to photograph the after math of what people had lost in the floods. This was personal

connection to me because I was so close with these people in my work. One memory I recall is there was this lonely piano standing in what seemed to be a reminiscence of a house and in fact it was. I started photographing the house and the owner showed up to collect most of her belongings. She told me this used to be a house that had been passed down from her great grandparents and everyone in her family grew up in this house. Now, she was left with nothing except this intact piano. I learned from this, photography can capture some of the most beautiful things and some of the most heart breaking things.

After working with analog technology for a while, I got into digital capturing. Since I was interested in capturing landscapes and the outdoors, I wanted to continue with that. One of my major modern influences was Mitch Dobrowner. Mitch is a contemporary landscape photographer that photographs major meteorological occurrences and unique rock formations. This sparked an idea to travel from Colorado to Arizona. Along the way, I photographed in many national parks and Indian reservations. This was interesting because on the Indian reservations, I had to hire a guide to take me to some of the most remarkable places in the South West. I had to be taken in highly modified vehicles and squeeze through the tightest canyons to capture the right shots. I was on an expedition to capture light on surface and use different techniques that I have never used before. The South West is very dusty and keeping clean equipment is essential. I found that some of my pictures had dust on the sensor, which resulted in white pixels in some of the photos. This was a valuable lesson because I couldn't use the photographs. Continuing on with nature and landscape, I also wanted to create panoramas with the pictures I had taken on my trip and expand those with photos in Colorado. I started taking panoramas of cloud formations and cityscapes. These were amazing

because the pictures had to be stitched together seamlessly to form a large long image. Since I was taking large images and using them to compose a larger image, I detail was just remarkable. Even though I was taking mostly landscapes with not a lot of conceptual background, I wanted to switch gears and try something else.

Considering I am in the military, I really wanted to do a project that is really close to me and what I do in the military to show people what is like and what we go through. At first, I was bringing my camera to work and taking photos of everything that I did at work. Some of these things were taking pictures of soldiers shooting machine guns or taking photos when we would get transported in aircraft to locations around the state. I thought this would be interesting but I wanted this project to get more personal. Today, we are still at war in the Middle East and hundreds of thousands of soldiers had deployed, seen combat and have come back with both mental and physical injuries. I was thinking I could interview soldiers in my unit of their experience in the military. The interview would be a biographical interview of when they entered the military, why and till they no longer were in the military. The varieties of the subjects were from most branches of the military, different ages, male and female, officers and enlisted and operated in different U.S. conflicts. Along with the interview, I wanted to get a better look into what is like in a combat environment and see photos that I veteran took overseas. Somehow I had to incorporate my photography skills into this project and thought I could get a present day photo of them to show a photo of them deployed and a photo of how they are today. The results where astonishing, in that these veterans are lucky to be alive today from what they went through. Some of them still continue to battle Post Traumatic Stress, physical injuries, and losing some of their closest friends. In

the photos I took, you can see the pain and agony still in these soldiers today even though some of them have not seen war for more than fifty years.

At the time I had been in the military for almost 5 years and knew how the military worked and thought this could be a great way to be able to pull out more information of these veterans. Since I recorded the interview I thought it would be a great idea to incorporate the audio in the exhibition show because it would bring the views much closer to the pieces of art. The viewers would be able to hear each of these individuals speak in front of them and would add an emotional aspect to the pieces of art in the gallery.

I still continue to pursue art outside the academic environment in that I worked as a commercial photographer for a ski resort, taking portraits of people on their vacation and conducting private shoots in the mountains. I have also been doing extensive research on older forms of photography and alternative methods because it would increase my knowledge and skill as a photographer and artist. Wet-plate Collodion has been an interest of mine because it was the first form of photography to make numerous prints from one image. This idea is still being used to day with film and an enlarger. Being able to take a picture and go into the dark room to watch the development come through on to a piece of metal or glass is just exciting to watch. To have something physical that I made with my hands and to watch it develop in each step is something that most people won't understand.

Echoes of Combat

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For me, the military is a journey through a unique culture with its own way of doing business with its own language and traditions. It is also very social but with a hard mission to defend this nation. The photographs in this exhibition are both very personal and public. They are about veterans who have deployed and returned with memories; some very disturbing and troubling. In some cases there is a sense of humanity lost to varying degrees. This exhibit shares their story.

As a member of the National Guard I am around veterans who never really talk about their time in the war zone. I was concerned how I might breach the subject; to capture their thoughts and memories without triggering an adverse reaction. This project proved to be unlike any other I've ever worked on.

The response from my subjects was unexpected and remarkable. It became their opportunity to say what the media never published. They opened their doors for me then they opened their hearts. And they shared their experience through their own photographs taken overseas. Then, I took their photograph. Our interview bridged the time between their deployment and today. It was tough duty and it changed all of them. For me this was an amazing journey and, for them, it was an opportunity to let go of some burdens. It is my wish that this exhibit give "thank you for your service" new meaning.

	<u>Title</u>	<u>Media</u>	<u>Original Format</u>
Figure 1:	BMCS Shepherd, #7589	Inkjet Print	Photography, 34x35
Figure 2:	CPL Colby, #E320	Inkjet Print	Photography, 34x35
Figure 3:	CW2 Davidson, #6753	Inkjet Print	Photography, 34x35
Figure 4:	LCDR Wisman, #C529	Inkjet Print	Photography, 34x35
Figure 5:	MgST Smith, #C40E	Inkjet Print	Photography, 34x35
Figure 6:	MSG Cary, #8895	Inkjet Print	Photography, 34x35
Figure 7:	SFC Lowery, #D8A2	Inkjet Print	Photography, 34x35
Figure 8:	SGT Bettger, #C472	Inkjet Print	Photography, 34x35
Figure 9:	SGT Harrington, #CEFD	Inkjet Print	Photography, 34x35
Figure 10:	SGT Pappas, #CE09	Inkjet Print	Photography, 34x35
Figure 11:	SGT Vasquez, #CCA3	Inkjet Print	Photography, 34x35



"One morning we find the boat and it's in bad shape, they were tossing bodies over the side that they had been surviving off of. They had to resort to cannibalism to stay alive. We were able to bring everybody onto the boat in a couple of hours. There was a little kid on the back of the engine. We thought we would have been able to save him but we couldn't. The one thing I remember about that experience was the body bag zipper didn't work. We had to take my knife and cut a slit, lace it up old fashion and put some sand bags in the bottom."

Figure 1: BMCS Shepherd, #7589.



"There were just some rough days. We had a few guys get hit. It was rough when one of your buddies got hit. You come back and you're packing up all of his gear up and putting it into a crate. You don't know if he made it or not for a couple of weeks. It's just depressing stuff."



Figure 2: CPL Colby, #E320.



"If someone was going in at night to kick down the doors in a compound, we would usually get overhead a couple hours ahead. Then we would live stream all of our stuff to the guys on the ground. If there were squirts, we would put our sparklers on them and Apache's would engage them. With the use of inferred you would see the body pieces flying from the machine gun fire."

Figure 3: CW2 Davidson, #6753.



"We had a quadruple amputee come in. I think this was the third or fourth amputee come in. He came in and he was awake and the doctors looked at him and said, 'what is this?' Because it didn't look like a person. He was stuck to the gurney and we had a hard time getting him off because his tissue was everywhere."



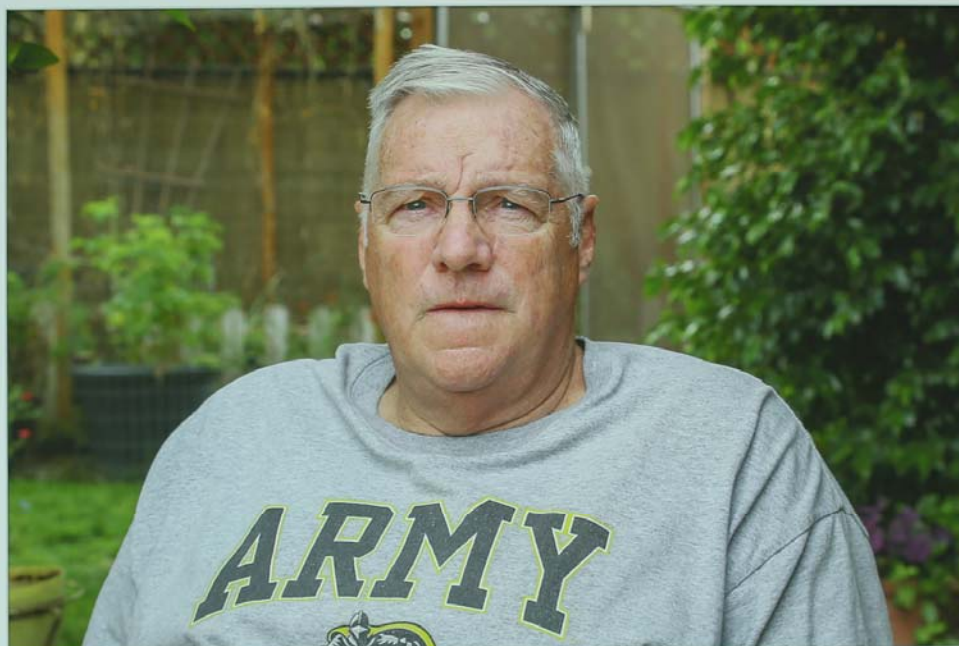
Figure 4: LCDR Wisman, #C529.



"A full operation occurred in Somalia called Operation Restore Hope. I was going to be the Detachment Gunnery Sergeant. One minute you could be doing peace keeping missions and the next minute you could be dodging rounds down range. We got shot at but I never returned fire. The ROE at the time was if you got hit that was considered combat."



Figure 5: MgST Smith, #C40E.



"Occasionally I would walk point with an M79 grenade launcher. We would carry beehive rounds, double ought buck, and your HE. So in an open area like a rice paddy I would put in an HE round. When we would get into the woods or jungle I would put in double ought buck or a bee hive round. One time we came around a bend in a trail and 15 feet away there was an NVA with his weapon and I pulled up the M79 and just let it rip. I had not changed rounds because I had just gotten out of the rice paddy. So I had an HE round and there wasn't enough distance to arm the round and it knocked him to the ground. The next guy behind me had an M16 and finished him off."

Figure 6: MSG Cary, #8895.



"Migrating back to the U.S. was always a problem. You can't jump into the pool of war and come out dry. You fire off and go into the red zone super fast. You automatically want to kill them and you want to beat them with your bare hands."



Figure 7: SFC Lowery, #D8A2.



"After a rough flight on a C-5 from Kuwait to Baghdad the reality that we were in a warzone finally hit. Flying from Baghdad International Airport to our FOB on a Chinook gave us our first glimpse of our battle space. South Baghdad lived up to its reputation as one of the "bad places" in Iraq. Our first night at our FOB we were mortared until morning, it was quite the welcome. We waited a few days for our tanks to come in and after some quick recalibrations we were on our way to our combat outpost (COP)."



Figure 8: SGT Bettger, #C472.



"This time they had gotten close enough for small arms fire. We had this giant rock in the center of the FOB and on top the Afghans put a recoilless rifle called a SPG-9. I'm running as fast as I can and made it to the rock. They fired the recoilless rifle and all I heard was the explosion and all I saw was a fireball. I couldn't see anything or hear anything and I thought I had gotten blown up and thought I was dead. I could still feel my legs moving and feel my arms moving but I thought to myself I'm dead and this is my hell, me running forever."



Figure 9: SGT Harrington, #CEFD.



"You have to be careful for what you wish for. I got to watch one of the best people I know in the Artillery world from the Guard, get shot orbital to orbital and I could do nothing to help him. They told me to stay inside the truck because if the medic got hit, what would they do to help me."



Figure 10: SGT Pappas, #CE09.



"Nothing really prepared us for that at all. Our rules of engagement changed so many times in a period of minutes, hours and days. That's how fast it would change because that's how fast the enemy would change. We are going to go through this highway and kill everything in sight as long as it is the enemy."

Figure 11: SGT Vasquez, #CCA3.