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Identity, Reality, and Truth in Memoirs from the Iraq and Afghanistan Wars

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By

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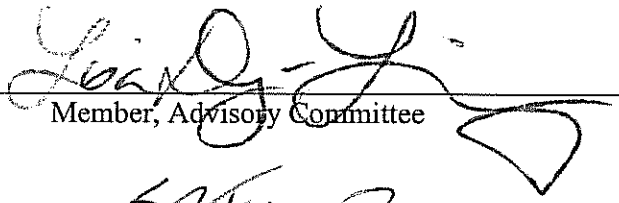

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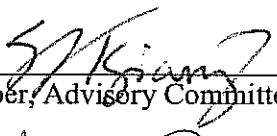

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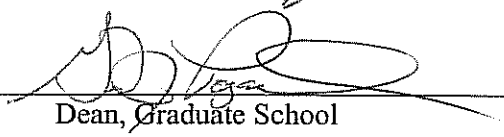

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DEDICATION

To the strong women who have guided me over the years:

My mother, who, with little help, gave every bit of herself to raising and instilling in me the values that have gotten me to where I am today.

Annegret Martin, my first and biggest fan, your confidence in my abilities far surpasses my own. I can't help but try to live up to the greatness you see in me.

Lynn, Wanda, Deborah and Lisa, you each helped me turn a tumultuous past into a promising future. Thank you for teaching from the heart as well as the mind.

I will make each of you proud.

∞

In Memory of

Kyle Derrick Roberts

~

A brother and a friend, I only have to look into the eyes of our family to see your presence.
You are loved and missed.

Cpl. Kevin McCray Jones

~

Thank you for helping me load that connex before our last mission together.
I'm sure you are smiling and you know everyone in heaven on a first-name basis by now.

∞

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Veterans Affairs officials continuously supported my growth and education. Shannon Moler and Retha Sandlin provided me with access to many resources and information about educational entitlements. Ivan Weir from the Somerset VA fought to ensure my well being. The Associate Director of Veterans Affairs at EKU, Brett Morris, gave me the opportunity to put this research to work assisting, mentoring, and teaching student veterans. Sandy Douglas from the Office of Services for Individuals with Disabilities was one of the first people I met at EKU. Since that time, I have come to respect her work ethic and cherish her friendship. All of these people have been a part of the community I needed to succeed at graduate work. I am eternally grateful.

PREFACE

It is important to understand what led to my exploration of war literature. The following excerpt details a single night during my second deployment to Iraq in 2005. Only in looking back have I found the same themes, struggles, and difficulties accessing the past described by my fellow veterans. As a result, exploring works from the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan—the works of my contemporaries—has proved to be both a scholarly and personal endeavor. My story begins with war; it continues with my attempt to understand my war through research and a redefinition of myself as a student; and it is shared as I apply my research and experiences to help my fellow veterans transition into the world of peace.

This is more than a research paper. This is my story.

9:00 PM—30 Miles North of Najaf, Iraq.

Having already fired a flare directly towards the vehicle without success, I decide to flash my spotlight three more times. My efforts to communicate with the driver fail, and the car continues straight towards our convoy. I break two glow sticks and wave them in an "X" pattern, trying to get the driver's attention. He slows a little, acknowledging that he sees me; but the driver chooses not to stop. The sun has just set. All of Iraq turns a grayish brown as the uncertainty of dark begins its slow creep over the once illuminated landscape. I pull out my night vision goggles, tie them to a strap on my flak vest, and set them next to the green ammo can directly to my front. Meanwhile, the car I fired a flare at transforms from a white speck into a clearly distinguishable orange

and white sedan. For now, the car is not a threat. But it will have to come to a stop before our convoy can pass.

I am the gunner in a Humvee leading a convoy of military gun trucks and civilian supply vehicles. I stand looking forward with my knees locked, swiveling back and forth, bouncing off of the sides of the hatch with every little bump. My body flails against the cold steel like a small, helpless ball bouncing around in a pinball machine as the Humvee rolls along. I often let myself bounce around like this to stay awake; but I am not tired. Rather, I am bored and trying to stay alert while deciding if this seemingly innocent car in the distance poses an actual threat. My left hand rests on a crank that can swivel the gunner's hatch left or right depending on which way I turn it. My right hand tightly grips the butt stock of an M240 Bravo machine gun and periodically I ensure that the ammo belt leading into the weapon's feed tray is not tangled or caught in debris. Meanwhile, below me, and in the cab of the Humvee, Sergeant Calhoun and Captain Dallas have reached a conclusion concerning the meaning of life.

My platoon-mates' bantering is a welcome relief from the nervous silence accompanying night missions. When you are the gunner in the lead truck you are cut off from everyone. The driver and convoy commander are only two feet away, but they are nestled in the somewhat secure confines of an uparmored humvee. I am exposed, both physically and psychologically. Physically, my upper torso is fair game for IED blasts, sniper rounds, rocket-propelled grenades, and that piano wire the enemy has taken to stringing up under bridges. The piano wire rests at the perfect height to decapitate gunners who think too much, like me. Psychologically, the lead gunner is under a lot of stress: It is my job to spot things in the road that go "boom". And if I fail, it can mean the

death of not only me, but my friends in the cab of the vehicle below me and the vehicles behind me, people that I have come to know and love.

One thing that I both love and hate about being the gunner in the lead truck is that there are no military trucks in front of me. It can be scary when you think about the fact that you are the only one able to prevent an assault coming from the front of the convoy. And you have to take the fact that you are secure to your six o'clock (directly behind you) by faith. But there is also something about being in the front that allows you to relax from time to time. Having no military vehicles in front means that I can momentarily slip out of the war and imagine what it would be like to drive down these roads in my own car. I often find myself pretending that Iraq is just a normal place, like anywhere else. When the sun recedes and the ground takes on that grayish brown color, I pretend that the desert sand is brown grass, decaying and withering in anticipation of the winter. Sometimes, the street lights in urban areas are so like home that I imagine myself driving the night away like I used to do before I enlisted, throwing the angst and uncertainty of youth into the curves of random roads. And when Calhoun and Dallas chatter over the headset, it almost feels as if I am out for a drive with a couple of my best friends.

I am silent most of the time, eavesdropping on their conversations. Their banter is hilarious and I only chime in when I have given particular thought to what I am going to say. They are both from the north and a little wittier than I am. Where I am from, in Kentucky, we have a different sense of humor and our approach to life is much slower and relaxed. Specifically, I am not accustomed or experienced enough to add my two cents about sexual conquests and I am not brutal enough to win a battle of insults. Soldiers don't insult one another out of malice; it is more a sign of camaraderie than

anything else. I have been called every name in the book in the most loving of ways. Still, we judge each other based on the promptness and quality of our rebuttals to said insults. I usually approach insults from a self-deprecating angle; and I have my moments during our 36-hour, three-way conversations on the headsets. One of these moments led to the creation of Sergeant Travis "Cat Balls" Martin. In a flash of inspiration—deprived of sleep and in search of a cure for the tedium of driving down a route with nothing but desert for as far as the eye can see—I constructed my character over the radio. The story was simple: Calhoun and Dallas were talking about sex and various predicaments of the phallus when I chimed in with an entirely made-up fact:

"In high school the guys in the showers gave me the name, 'Cat Balls' because my testicles are abnormally small and furry."

"That's it!" Dallas exclaimed.

"Yes, from now on you will be known as 'Cat Balls', the sickest, deadliest and craziest gunner in all of Iraq," Calhoun added.

"And when the enemy hears of Cat Balls driving through their village they will run in fear and lock their doors because they know that my balls are small and furry. They will never understand that the slaughtering I do is not hatred for their people, but rather, a natural reaction to having been born with the balls of a cat," I concluded.

And so, the legend began: From then on my moniker was Cat Balls. Naturally, Calhoun became known as "Smurf Dick" for reasons that are easy to guess. Dallas simply took on the call sign "C-P-T" as an alliteration of the abbreviation for his Captain's rank. Dallas' nickname was partly a joke about the practice of calling a lieutenant "L-T" and it was less severe than Cat Balls or Smurf Dick because, outside the

humvee, he was an officer who commanded respect. Our motley crew traversed every corner of Iraq with some sick desire to be the occupants of the lead truck at all times. Missions would last anywhere from six to forty-eight hours depending on whether or not we had a breakdown or an accident. We performed escort missions almost exclusively, getting the Iraqi and Jordanian truck drivers where they needed to be with supplies and ammunitions. Our convoys had only five or six American gun trucks interspersed throughout; the remaining twenty-to-thirty trucks were driven solely by local nationals. To kill the time, Smurf Dick and I often made calls back to the rest of the convoy:

"Never Scared 2 this is Smurf Dick 1, over."

(Confused mumble and static)

"This is Never Scared 2, go ahead."

"Roger, this is Smurf Dick 1. Cat Balls 1 says that there is a box on the right-hand side of the road; keep an eye out, over."

"Smurf Dick, can you have Cat Balls describe the box? Over."

(Chuckles overtake the static)

"Roger, this is Cat Balls 1 Actual; prepare to copy … On the right hand side of the road, about five meters from the edge, there is a brown box that looks suspicious, over."

"Roger, we will keep an eye out, over."

"Roger that. Cat Balls 1 out."

So it is Cat Balls—the furry-testicled warrior—trying to size up the orange and white sedan heading towards our convoy. Is this the crazed suicide bomber that I dream about every night and forcefully forget before each mission? Is this the guy that people

are literally dying every day to meet? I play out the scene of my own death in my mind: The car speeds up and I am caught off guard. At 50 feet away I start firing at the vehicle. I hit the driver; and with his lifeless foot on the accelerator, he speeds directly towards my humvee. At 25 feet the driver and my platoon leader start yelling at me. At 15 feet the driver of the car begins to swerve. With no way to keep firing, I throw myself down inside the gunner's hatch and the car impacts on the right side of our humvee. The impact triggers enough explosives in the trunk to level a building. Everyone (including myself) in the humvee dies; we are liquefied by the magnitude of the blast. Any remaining pieces are bagged up and mailed home. At the memorial service someone mutters to someone else that the three deaths are my fault: I failed to act. I play out this scene in my head before every mission, when I am eating chow, when I am sitting in my room, when I am brushing my teeth or staring at the stars, and especially when an orange and white sedan does not come to a stop. It only takes two or three seconds for my brain to let the whole tragic ordeal unfold. And despite the fact that I have never witnessed or been a part of something nearly so terrible, it is horrifying and real enough that I must constantly reaffirm my own place in reality.

I swivel my gunner's hatch at an angle, making it so that the shield can block me from the shrapnel of a blast while allowing my M240 Bravo to point directly at the driver's face. I pull back the charging handle on my weapon—loading a round in the chamber—keeping it trained on the car. The bolt slides back so smoothly that my right hand—the one holding the charging handle—feels a little giddy, excited from the successful execution of its simple task. Once again, I have to decide whether or not my fantasy-suicide-bomber friend is an actual-suicide-bomber friend. I have to rework the

equation that turns over and over and over in my mind every time I leave the base-perimeter wire. I have to decide if a simple orange and white sedan creeping towards me is a threat, not so much to my life, but to the lives of the people I share a humvee with. Most importantly, I have to decide whether or not this risk is worth taking a man's life and living with the consequences.

I figure that since the man is slowing down, he must not be bent on killing anyone. But then again, I am going to get yelled at if he does not stop and I let him go by. I am the lead gunner and it is my job to make sure that all traffic comes to a stop and that no one sneaks a VBIED (Vehicle Borne Improvised Explosive Device) into the heart of the convoy. I basically demanded this job. I figure if someone is going to be up front it should be me. Other guys get trigger happy; other guys fall asleep in the hatch; other guys are complacent. But not me. I read the words "Complacency Kills" on the wall every time I leave the base, and like a good little soldier, I take the words to heart. Perhaps I am egotistical to feel responsible for the lives of everyone in my vehicle, every civilian I pass, and every truck behind my own; but I know I will probably pay for it before the end of the deployment. After all, if someone is going to run over a bomb, get shot by a sniper, get his head cut off by piano wire, get crushed in vehicle a roll-over, or run into a VBIED, it is more than likely going to be the lead gunner.

My hands shake from Red-Bull and caffeine tablets; but I am not nervous. The ill-effects of caffeine, taurine, B-vitamins, and sugar are a welcome relief from deadly fatigue. Pointing my machine gun at the Iraqi's face, I accept the fact that circumstances are beyond my control. I have to come to terms with this fact each time we go on mission. I tuck the fact that my control is illusory—that little metal bullets will do little to

stop a vehicle bent on running itself into my vehicle—neatly away in the back of my mind. Ultimately, the driver of the sedan is going to choose his own fate. I am simply another cog in the machine. Depending on my degree of resistance to military indoctrination, I am mindless; I am not supposed to think. And every time I hesitate—choose not to immediately fire at my perceived enemy—is a moment in which I am disobeying orders and putting my friends' lives in jeopardy. This resistance has become a horrible habit that I am finding hard to break.

The driver of the sedan can't see me. All he can see, possibly, are the streaks of light from my glow sticks in the distance. He has no idea about the thoughts rushing through my head. He is absolutely and unequivocally foreign. He did not grow up in a small Kentucky town in the Bible belt. He does not understand how hard he is making my life just by driving down an Iraqi road. And he is probably confused about why I just shot a flare at him and why I am waving glow sticks around in the air like a madman. He is blind. But I can see him clearly: He is a man on his way home from work, rushing to his wife's embrace and the warmth of children hugging at his legs. At the same time, he has waited for this moment his entire life: It took him months to put together the explosive materials weighing down the rear end of his orange and white sedan. He lost three fingers toying with old mortar shells and land mines and electrical wire; he hates me with every bone in his body and he suffers from a mental disorder that is shameful in his culture. Death is the man's only respite; and, to him, I am simply an easy ticket to martyrdom.

The man with two distinct identities is stopping, but not fast enough. Normally, one of two things would happen at this point: (1) The Iraqi stops or (2) the soldier begins

mercilessly pumping rounds into the car. But I expected this sort of thing and prepared a third option before the mission. Picking up a rock from next to my ammo can, I take aim and launch it at the driver's windshield. The sound of glass breaking is loud enough that the rest of the people in my truck hear it. They laugh and the Iraqi comes to halt. It was really the only choice I had; it was either the rock or I would have to shoot the man. I have every right under the rules of engagement to fire on any vehicle that gets this close to my convoy; at least, this is what I am told.

Essentially, I am an ordained minister for the would-be-god otherwise known as the United States Army. I interpret this false god's laws, dictating life and death and separating the innocent from the wicked. But I am a generous dictator: It is my job to determine who lives and who dies, but I believe that if at all possible no one should have to die. I use jokes to keep people from realizing I've never fired on anyone with the intent to kill. I mockingly call myself "God's gift to war" or repeat a saying that I read inside a port-o-john in Kuwait: "Truck drivers pay no toll at the gates of Hell." That is what we are, in case you are wondering, just truck drivers. I am not in a combat arms unit or a trained killer. I am just a lowly truck driver. However, I am in a position where I pretend to be an infantryman every night. In the lead truck I am a gunner, I decide the fate of every Iraqi man, woman, and child passing in front of my vehicle.

I have never had to shoot up one car, never had to point the gun at a man and take his life. And I thank God (the real God, not the Army) every day for this. Sure, I have returned fire after explosions; and we have been shot at, blown up and generally harassed. But I've never faced the enemy and been in that situation I expect to happen any day now. In place of adrenaline and a fight for survival, my war is an algorithm. My response

to any given situation is little more than a cold, calculated solution derived minutes, days, weeks or even years prior to the time of an actual event. My reactions are a struggle between personal morality and years of combat training and experience. The whole war thing is an equation for me: Every rock I carry—each broken windshield and fit of ensuing laughter—is equal to a life saved.

It is not that Captain Dallas, Calhoun, and the others are evil. They are in the same predicament as I am. As the convoy commander, Captain Dallas has about as much knowledge of each passing car as I do. His only course of action is to have his gunner follow the Army's rules and keep his men safe. No matter which way you look at it, the burden falls on me. I am to shoot every car that gets within 25 meters of the convoy. But, and to be fair, there are a lot of little rules that lead up to this event: First, I have to flash the car with the spotlight; then I have to shoot a flare in the general direction of the approaching vehicle; then I wave the glow sticks, and if that does not work, I am supposed to bring the car to a halt using any means necessary. But traveling at full speed through busy streets makes all of these rules—these standard operating procedures—null and void. So, I throw rocks. Sadly, if the higher brass finds out that I am throwing rocks through windshields I will likely get in more trouble than I would for decimating a vehicle full of people.

The "Standard Operating Procedures" or "Rules of Engagement" (as they call them) are not practical. For instance, often a car will pop up on the other side of a curve and I will have to think fast. I figure 99.9% of these guys are just on their way home from work; so I throw a rock through their windshield instead of killing them. There are those that would argue—in light of the imposed curfew—that anyone caught out in the middle

of the night is up to no good. But no one has ever blown up when I am in the front. I figure that I am doing everyone a favor through restraint. If I kill one innocent Iraqi, his three children will just grow up to be terrorists who will, in turn, be killed and produce three more terrorists apiece. In all actuality, each windshield I break gets rid of at least nine terrorists. This is what I tell myself when I think about the violent smash of my rock penetrating a windshield and hitting an infant—little baby brains meshing with the broken glass. I see imaginary-infant quite often when I am doing my calculations. Sometimes, the infant is replaced by a woman or a pre-adolescent boy or an Iraqi man who supported U.S. troops before being violently accosted. But these are all just variables. I know that bullets kill for certain.

Such is the irony of my war. Innocent people get killed every day, legally, under the pretense that the killer could not determine whether or not there was an actual threat. So long as the spotlight is used, the glow sticks are waved, and the flare is shot, a gunner can shoot anyone he or she wants. Of course, this is not how they teach it to you in the meetings. But enough "what if" scenarios are brought up so that those in charge basically say what I have said happens through a wink and a nod. Think about it: Lives are just winked and nodded away.

My schematics are little more than an attempt to justify my actions. But I suppose everyone looks for a sense of self-justification when they are forced to make life and death decisions. I simply try to ignore everything the Army taught me about the morality of killing for one's country and do what I think is right (there's that ego coming back into play). I don't follow the same logic as some of my fellow soldiers. A couple of weeks ago, a Reserve unit arrived on the base that I am stationed on and started performing

escort missions similar to our own. However, these guys were ill-equipped. They did not have spotlights or glow sticks and likely, they did not know how to shoot a flare. So what did they do when a car came up to their convoy? They followed the rules of engagement to the letter and shot it. I know this because I witnessed it. I was in the lead truck in our convoy and we left the gate soon enough after them. We were so close that I could see their last truck. At every intersection—every turn—I would hear gunfire and see a disabled civilian car on the side of the road a few minutes later.

Now, I am not saying that everyone they shot at died; but, in all likelihood, some of them did. I elevate myself to something better than these confused or scared or possibly trigger-happy "new guys" by believing that, if I had been the lead gunner on their convoy, those cars would have only gotten a rock through the windshield as a worst-case scenario. I also try to tell myself that these Reservists don't know any better—that I can't really know what is going on up the road—despite having travelled the exact same route hundreds of times. The scary thing is that I have heard people talk about how this kind of thing is funny and actually brag about how many times they have shot cars. These same people will go home and tell their friends that they "engaged the enemy" countless times. But I know, and they know, that they just killed some guy on his way home from work.

Back to tonight's mission, the one where I just threw a rock through a guy's windshield and everyone thinks it was the funniest thing in the world. I select about 10 rocks for each mission. They are big rocks; and they do a considerable amount of damage when they hit a car going at full speed. But I'm not killing anyone. I am better than those guys in that Reserve unit. Right?

Allow me to clarify: Tonight's mission came with a warning in the intelligence briefing. Apparently, the locals are mad because they believe American soldiers are shooting unarmed civilians (big surprise). We are to expect an ambush of some sort as retaliation. But other than the windshield I just destroyed, there has been no action. There is a man outside of his vehicle cussing at our convoy in Arabic and I hear people chuckling over the radio. But other than that, it is the same monotonous trip that we always make.

Three hours and six rocks later we have escorted the supplies to where they need to go and are on our way home. But somewhere along the way the map shows that we have taken a wrong turn. We stop the convoy and everybody is on guard, scanning their sectors and making sure that no one approaches. I am in an awkward position. The road is going straight and our convoy is parked along the side. But our truck, the lead truck, has turned right and gone about fifteen feet onto an adjacent road. The main road is running parallel with the rest of the convoy, and I am out of position to stop traffic from the front. There are no buildings and the dark envelops the living and everything else more than twenty or thirty feet away. At first, there is no traffic and I silently pray that I am not called on to act from my current position.

Then it happens: a car just like the one I threw a rock at earlier comes towards the convoy. I spotlight and wave and do everything I can to get its attention; but the driver does not see me until he gets within about twenty feet of our trucks. At this point, I should have already opened fire. He must know that he has happened upon an American convoy and that he has no business coming any further. At the same time, he must be confused and unsure about why an American convoy is on this particular road. He stops

about twenty meters away from my truck and just sits there. I have gotten complacent—too used to not killing people—and I am hoping that this guy does not come any further as I put on my night vision goggles. The lights from his car screw up my vision; but I can distinctly see the driver, someone in the passenger seat and what looks like three little heads bobbing around nervously in the back. Every car is a complex equation to be solved: It will haunt you for the rest of your life if you get the wrong answer.

I think to myself, "If this guy is going to become a martyr, and get however many virgins when he gets to heaven, he would most likely not bring his wife and kids." I think this, but I also see Dallas returning on foot from behind. He has been sorting out the directions and gives me a disgusted look while asking, "Are you just going to sit there and let this guy blow us up or what?" This is ridiculous, I think. But without hesitation I fire a couple of warning shots right in front of the vehicle and yell at the guy to move out of the way. Well, I yell the Arabic word for stop, which is one of the only Arabic words that I know. In actuality, our would-be-suicide-bomber friend follows my directions perfectly.

The guy does not move an inch. In fact, he lights a cigarette and just stares at me. I hear from inside the convoy, "What the fuck, Martin? Seriously, if you don't have what it takes then I'm going to find someone else." I don't want to kill this guy and his kids. I think this is a worthwhile notion; but I don't say it out loud. Dallas is not angry that I haven't shot the car. He is angry that I have let it get this close to our convoy. I have failed in my job as lead gunner. I explain that there are kids in the back and he starts to question how I know they are kids, attempting to diffuse my argument. Luckily the Iraqi

slowly backs away before I get the order to fire. Dallas gets back into the Humvee and we turn the convoy around, exiting the area from the way we came.

The whole ride home I get made fun of: "Yeah, Martin, that guy punked you out back there." I try, as usual, to turn the whole thing into a joke at my own expense. They call me a pussy, a bad gunner, and every other name in the book, and I just take it. This is my cross to bear. I deprive trigger-happy kids from getting their bragging rights. People see through to my massive ego; they believe that I think I am better than everyone else (although, I don't see it exactly that way) and they resent me. Whatever the case, I have been doing this for four months now and no one dies while I am in the front.

We get back to the base and I dismount my gun and carry it into the tent. Everyone else has their own air-conditioned connex, but we sleep in a big tent. Tents are stifling hot, regardless of whether or not you have an air conditioner. But we sleep all day and pull missions all night; so it really does not matter. I slide my machine gun under my cot and roll my sleeping bag out to lie down on. I take off my boots but leave the rest of my clothes on. A night full of deciding who lives and who dies, of doing the work of the would-be-Army-god has made me very tired. I close my eyes and fall asleep instantly.

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INTRODUCTION

After returning from my second deployment to Iraq in 2005, I thought that the best way to secure my future would be to write a memoir based on my wartime experiences. I had it all figured out: I would make a million dollars and live off of the interest, retiring at the age of twenty-two in some obscure corner of wherever. But it did not take long for me to realize the absurdity of this notion. Writing about my wartime experience was a lot harder than I expected: Entire months of my life were completely repressed; memories from my deployment in 2003 were confused with memories of my 2005 deployment (and vice versa); I experienced psychological and physiological responses to recalling traumatic events; and I eventually learned that some of my "memories" never happened at all. Still, I felt and still feel a compulsion to tell my story. And I now know that in order to create a story for the public, it first has to be comprehensible to me. Therefore, for the last couple of years my goal has been to better understand how writers in the face of traumatic experiences write about what they witness. To this end, I have explored several American war memoirists from the Civil War to the present, written about my own—traumatic—experiences, and attempted to share what I have learned with my fellow veterans. Literary tropes carry over from generation to generation; but I have found that our understanding of war authors and how they write has increased exponentially. The goal of this essay will be to bring war memoirs from the current wars in Iraq and Afghanistan into the conversation centering on the genre of war writing as a whole. I also hope to uncover ways to apply the knowledge gained from my literary studies to bettering the lives of those who have served.

Understanding war literature is essential to understanding war itself. The study of war memoirs allows us to understand how wars are fought and what it is like for the soldiers who fight them. But understanding war and the warrior is no easy task: "[T]he authority of autobiography is not susceptible to definitive determination … [but] it is nevertheless necessary and desirable to monitor it carefully in each case" (Couser 248). Scholars of war memoirs, autobiography, and trauma assert that it is simply not possible to accurately comprehend, let alone record the traumatic events that occur during combat. War writers engage both historical and personal truths as they write. But "truth" is not arrived at easily when a war writer reflects upon an experience filled with pain and suffering. In *The Soldiers' Tale* Samuel Hynes provides insight into this problem: "Wars are fought, and remembered, by men who are unaware of events and meanings beyond their own vision" (14). And the wartime experiences may be clouded by more than even the effects of personal trauma; soldiers who write about war write about a reality where next to nothing experienced remains true in "our" world of peace. Complicating matters further, new research into trauma and the brain's ability to process information during and after a traumatic event seems to dictate that war writers are incapable of writing truthfully about personal events that are traumatic. However, discussion should not center on the fine line between truth and accuracy. While these two concepts may, at times, be related, truth for the individual may completely forgo the kind of accuracy entailed with historical fact. There are many reasons why war memoirists are "unaware" of truth when it is related to accuracy. But a form of truth emerges in every case of autobiographical writing.

I will discuss the "significance" that emerges from the supposed contradictions between public and personal truths. Significance arises from the realization that we may never learn a "lesson" through the study of war literature. But significance also demands that we accept the "importance" of reading and learning about wars and those we—the noncombatants nestled in the security of a nation protected by wars fought abroad—ask to fight on our behalf. Furthermore, significance in war literature demands that we accompany the war author as he or she recounts traumatic, disturbing memories. We must take part in the warrior-author's personal journey and welcome him or her back into the community. Constant reminders of the consequences of war are a necessary and significant part of translating a soldier's identity into something viable in peacetime reality. The product of translation is the only truth that can be derived from a war story; war's death and dying do not create meaning; these things destroy meaning. The end result of translating a soldier's identity—of narrating wartime experience—is that of a more complete, healthy identity owned by the wartime author. As the author learns about his or her self, simple and profound truths emerge from the exploration of significance. Later, I will explore the implications of these truths as they exist in the realities of peace and war.

I now know that I suffer from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and a very mild form of Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI), the two "signature wounds" of the War on Terrorism. TBI—closed head wounds inflicted by blunt force trauma, or the shock waves from concussion blasts (such as those created by improvised explosive devices or mortar rounds)—can cause a complete erasure of memory surrounding a traumatic event, problems forming new memories, and difficulty recalling old ones. For me, TBI causes

migraines, difficulty remembering the IED blast that made my brain smack the side of my skull, and (the jury is still out on whether or not the problems are related to a brain injury or post-traumatic stress) slippages in memory and cognition. I am one of the lucky ones. Severe cases of TBI result in paralysis, speech impediments, and severe amnesia in addition to the minor side-effects that I have. Obviously, soldiers who experience and deal with the aftereffects of TBI struggle in recounting wartime experience. Early in the WWI memoir *Goodbye to All That* Robert Graves admits that he suffers from "sudden and most disconcerting spells of complete amnesia" (10). At first glance, and without the benefit of recent research, Graves' statement may appear to be a simple one about his personality. However, his words are more revealing when knowledge about TBI is applied to the mortar round attack that severely injures him later in the memoir. Is Robert Graves suffering from the aftereffects of TBI? If so, how does the condition influence or impede his writing? These kinds of questions can now be explored using scientific/medical research concerning the signature wounds of the current wars. And research into war literature can teach us new ways to understand the individuals that clinicians are trying to help.

Understanding TBI works to reveal a set of factors in war where specific memory problems can develop and be explained. Automatically, if a war author describes a head injury or concussion blast, the work must be read with care, so that the words of the author can be contextualized and verified alongside historical accuracy. The goal should not be to fact-check the author, but to notice how his or her wounds emerge through narration. Certainly, war memoirist suffering from the effects of TBI are not necessarily unworthy or incapable of producing truth; rather, war memoirists suffering from TBI tell

two stories: They tell the story of both a soldier at war and an author attempting to recount that war in the face of trauma. TBI is identifiable because of the circumstances in which it occurs. However, PTSD is much more difficult to diagnose and it may very well be that society's approach to this "disorder" limits our ability to understand it. Similar to analyzing literature in the face of knowledge about TBI, analyzing literature with the knowledge we have gained concerning PTSD—through a post-traumatic lens—enables us to revisit the words of war authors from a new perspective.

PTSD is an anxiety disorder that occurs after an individual encounters a singularly troubling or series of troubling, traumatic events. Research into the condition reveals impaired memory processes both during and after the source of trauma.[1] During the event, problems of authority emerge: Adrenal responses and heightened processes in the thalamic pathways influence abilities to accurately witness and incorporate perceived events into the brain. Long after the threat of a traumatic event has passed, PTSD can influence the individual's ability to recall events because of repression and dissociation with the emotions that occurred during the experience itself. As a result, the post-traumatic soldier writing about his or her experience is unable to relate to the pre-traumatic soldier on an emotional level.[2] All of these things affect the ability to produce "public truth" in a war memoir.

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[1] In "Not Outside the Range: One Feminist Perspective on Psychic Trauma" Laura Brown lists symptoms of PTSD, including "nightmares, and flashbacks; avoidance symptoms, the marks of psychic numbing; and the symptoms of heightened physiological arousal: hypervigilance … [and] a distracted mind." Brown continues, explaining the causes of PTSD and asserting, "first and foremost" that the condition is caused by "*an event outside the range of human experience*" (100).

[2] This is why extreme situations are relayed nonchalantly and with a sense of bewilderment. Robert Graves provides an example from WWI: "Like everyone

Public truth is the fact-based relation of experiences prized and viewed as the standard of story-telling by modern society. Our culture places more weight on facts than it does the impact of an event or events on an individual. However, the very nature of PTSD eschews facts because of the brain's inability to perceive while under stress. Still, the impact of trauma upon an author is no more or less profound based on society's perception of the facts. I cannot recall the dates or what led up to the story serving as a preface to this text. I know that my memories are jumbled and am aware of the impact trauma has had on my ability to recollect. So, how can I claim my preface to be true? Simply put, I can claim my story to be true because it is how I remember it. The effects of my war are a very real part of my present; and public truth—even if it were readily available—would do little to change how I feel and have been changed by the experiences of war. As a result, a post-traumatic lens uncovers the significance of my perceived truths by revealing the influences of war upon my writing and identity.

The "Post" in "Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder" connotes memory problems lingering long after exposure to a traumatic experience. Prolonged exposure to trauma, especially the type experienced in the year-long and often repeated deployments to Iraq and Afghanistan, result in changes to the way the brain recalls information and reacts to the recounting thereof. Henry Krystal describes psychic numbing and distancing as relatively common components of PTSD, differentiating between the freezing up, surrendering, or panicking more common in battle, and the "psychic closing off" more

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> else, I had a carefully worked out formula for taking risks. In principle, we would all take any risk, even the certainty of death, to save life or maintain an important position. To take life we would run, say, a one-in-five risk, particularly if there was some wider object than merely reducing the enemy's manpower" (Graves 132).

often associated with prolonged traumatic experiences. Prolonged traumatic experience, such as being imprisoned or trapped for a long period of time "permits a certain automatonlike behavior, which is necessary for survival in situations of subjugation" (81). Krystal's automaton-like behavior refers, most clearly, to the loss of affect described by war survivors in clinical settings.

The symptoms of PTSD and TBI *become* the personality traits of soldiers in battle. Symptoms like hypervigilance, paranoia, and anger associated with PTSD keep soldiers alive on the battlefield. Similarly, the symptoms of TBI are adaptations to the lethal setting of combat. What we perceive as weaknesses are actually strengths in the opposite world of war. And an understanding of the effects of trauma offers insight into the ways in which soldier-authors develop a new self or series of "selves" comprised of these traits which are components of the psyche caused by and needed to exist in combat. Paul John Eakin likens the creation of these selves to the creation of identity in childhood development where the individual's attempt to narrate life experience harkens back to "memory talk" or the process that young children engage in to establish identity. Soldiers tell war stories because of an imperative—a compulsion to write about what was experienced—and what was lost.[3] The causes of PTSD—traumatic events—are a part of the narrative of war, or, what Eakin refers to as "dysnarrativia":

> I want to get at the psychological rather than the neurological dimension of these phenomena, the strange absence or loss of affect in such individuals that in case after case makes so deep an impression on the

[3] "[W]e learn to tell stories about ourselves, and this training proves to be crucial to the success of our lives as adults, for our recognition by others as normal individuals depends on our ability to perform the work of self-narration" (Eakin, *Living Autobiographically* 152).

> clinicians … The sense of something missing, and inner chill or deadness, seems to be associated with a "dysnarrativia" that bespeaks damaged identity. (*How Our Lives Become Stories* 140)

Dysnarrativia is the root of war memoirists' difficulty combining their wartime self with selves that occur before and after wartime experience. These more "normal" experiences are easily compatible with one another; that is why I have the problem of overlapping memories from my two deployments. But experiences of war do not mesh easily with peacetime experiences because of the disparate nature of the two realities. As a result, any attempt to forge an identity comprised of both wartime and peacetime selves will be fraught with difficulty.

Each personality trait—each departure from "normal" identity—can be explained by the struggle to survive life at war. For example, the dark sense of humor displayed by soldiers in the presence of death is really just the soldier's way of handling the presence of death. Emotions can get a soldier killed in the heat of battle; therefore, they find it necessary to turn off emotion entirely. Soldiers learn these skills and we later call them symptoms. Soldiers preparing and in the midst of war relearn what it means to live, talk,[4] eat, sleep, and walk. And many times these approaches to the wartime reality directly and indirectly save their lives.

[4] In *Jarhead* Anthony Swofford learns a new language: "Eventually I finished, and did not a bad job, for the first time in my life attempting to fold skivvies into four-by-six-inch squares, for the first time in my life actually referring to underwear as *skivvies*, pants as *trousers*, a hat as a *cover*. Now, hands were *dickskinners*, the mouth was a *cum receptacle*, running shoes were *go-fasters*, a flashlight was a *moonbeam*, a pen was an *ink stick*, a bed was a *rack*, a wall was a *bulkhead*, a bathroom was a *head*, a shirt was a *blouse*, a tie was still a *tie*, and a belt a *belt*, but many other things would never be the same" (30).

Certainly, PTSD fails to fully explain the self necessitated by war. However, defining the alternate reality that necessitates the wartime self can teach us about the soldiers returning from war as well as the societies that create these soldiers. Marianna Torgovnick believes *The Iliad* teaches "that armies should honor past sacrifice by fighting on, a sentiment that always manages to sustain the momentum of war because withdrawal or even negotiated peace seems to dishonor the fallen" (1838). Torgovnick's belief is not the sentiment of the authors discussed in this paper. Instead, authors using the language of war are wary of their wars at best. They tend to agree with Tim O'Brien's description of the wartime reality:

> Now war ended, all I am left with are simple, unprofound scraps of truth. Men die. Fear hurts and humiliates. It is hard to be brave. It is hard to know what bravery is. Dead human beings are heavy and awkward to carry … some men thought the war was proper and others didn't and most didn't care. Is that the stuff for a morality lesson, even a theme? (*If I Die in a Combat Zone* 23)

War memoirs are, first and foremost, a personal journey. Yes, politics[5] may intrude upon the story; but the search for wartime self is a paramount point of intersection between our reality and the reality that permeates and defines every war memoir.

Not only must PTSD come under scrutiny, but all of the language we use to describe the warrior must come under scrutiny. Samuel Hynes believes that courage and cowardice "assume meaning at the point where war and the individual self intersect"

[5] "The argument circulates freely in discussions of the Iraq War. When a politician or pundit uses the almost obligatory code words 'honoring the troops,' the phrase segues into the assertion that to make their deaths and sacrifices count we cannot 'cut and run'" (Torgovnick 1839)

(57). But his belief ignores the constructedness of the realities housing war and the individual, vernacular and contexts of our reality. In this essay, I want to use the knowledge available from the current generation of soldier authors to explain the differences between the realities of peace and war while unmasking the wartime self. These differences reveal the significance of war literature; and significance will lead to truths about war that are valuable on both literary and practical levels.

War authors struggle to fully and accurately record their wartime experiences because of an inherent inability to comprehend, recall, and feel the trauma associated with battle. This struggle leads to difficulty for the soldier attempting to recall his or her wartime self in a peacetime reality. But the explanations of PTSD and TBI refer to the symptom and not the problem; they only work to explain what the author cannot do; and they do not help readers understand the truths hidden within the pages of war writing. The context in which war memoirs are created—the nature of war itself—has to be exploded and examined alongside normal experience so that departures from reality can be isolated and defined. A study of the wartime self is the most obvious point of intersection between meanings from the two realities. And if we can find significance in the wartime self, we might learn something about war and the nature of beings who wage it, ourselves.

Nothing about war is the same as it is during peacetime. By nature, the memoir is tied to reality and history. But war is separated from any "normal" reality while the history of war is one that the traumatized author prefers to forget. In the place of reality emerges a landscape of terror, chaos and a seductive, atavistic intrigue. Hynes claims that war narratives contain elements of other genres but that they do not help the reader to

understand the landscape in which war is fought.[6] Hynes asserts that *"Strangeness* is the great constant in remembered wars" (19, emphasis Hynes's) and explains that war is an "*anti*-landscape, an entirely strange terrain with nothing natural left in it. It's the antithesis of the comprehensible natural world" (7). PTSD appears to be something not at all like a disorder within the confines of this alternate reality. Again, hypervigilance, paranoia, increased startle responses, sleeplessness, and anger are the things that keep a soldier alive in the wartime reality. It is only when soldier authors return to our reality that they struggle with these aspects of their personality.

PTSD and its counterpart TBI help to explain the psychological makeup of the war author. Certainly, these conditions should not be viewed as points of contention or ways to refute truth as it occurs within war writing. These "disorders" or "disabilities" promote survival in a wartime scenario. And the causes have to do with how we prepare our soldiers for war, peacetime training and the stigmas of emotionality on the battlefield instilled in the soldier long before the traumatic experience occurs.

While Hynes uses the notions of "strangeness" and "anti-landscape" to explain the disparate relationship between war and peace.[7] But Paul Fussell sees "irony" as the golden thread which holds war memoirs together: "In reading memoirs of war, one

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[6] Hynes claims, "War narratives are something like travel writing, something like autobiography, and something like history. But different too. They're *not* like travel writing, because a travel book makes the reader feel that he knows the place he is reading about … War narratives don't do that; though they make war vivid, they don't make it familiar. Indeed, one motive for writing them seems to be to show how *un*familiar war is, how strange and desolate its ordinary scenes are" (6).

[7] "The young man who goes to war enters a strange world governed by strange rules, where everything that is not required is forbidden, a world without women or children or old people, a violent and dangerous world where, out there in the darkness or just over a hill, strangers wait whose job it is to kill you" (Hynes 19).

notices the same phenomenon over and over. By applying to the past a paradigm of ironic action, a rememberer is enabled to locate, draw forth, and finally shape into significance an event or a moment which otherwise would merge without meaning into the general undifferentiated stream" (34). Fussell believes that we have a perpetual need to tell war stories despite the fact that we will continue to wage war because "irony engenders worse irony" (37). And the wartime self is a tool for the war author seeking to contextualize experience within this definable structure. The "strangeness," "irony," and significant structures in war memoirs are describable to the point that an author's trauma functions normally within.

Hynes' strangeness describes individual experiences of war while Fussell's irony holds these aspects together within the framework of what I will call "anti-reality." Basic training marks the beginning of the journey from one reality to another, acclimating soldiers with the language, behavior, and skills needed to survive the wartime reality. Developing in the same way that children develop during childhood, soldier-authors train intensively in the nature of war and what it means to exist during war. However, training uniformly falls short of preparing these soldiers for what is to come. And the language of peace uniformly fails to describe what happens during war.

When soldiers return from the battlefield they must face both trauma and third party influences upon their narratives; war authors must live up to the expectations about war already conceived by the inhabitants of the peacetime reality. Governments attempt to appropriate the truth of an individual's experience to bolster support for their wars. At the same time, society holds preconceived notions of war and the warrior that the author must address when attempting to define his or her wartime self. For example, Fredric

Jameson claims that there are only a few types of war stories that "more or less exhaust the genre":

> As for the narrative variants, which seem to me to hold for film as much as for the novel, I enumerate eight of them: (1) the existential experience of war, (2) the collective experience of war, (3) leaders, officers, and the institution of the army, (4) technology, (5) the enemy landscape, (6) atrocities (7) attack on the homeland, and (8) foreign occupation. (1533)

War authors usually conform to one of these arbitrary genres. But this conformity has more to do with the audience than it does the author or the subject. War memoirists are caught between the duties of an ethnographer—telling "the facts" of a foreign land in an unbiased way, constructing a story that fits into one of Jameson's models[8]—and the search for wartime self that requires elements of fictionalization to combat the effects of trauma, time, and circumstance. In this way, war memoirs are always existential; they represent the journey of the wartime self into the greater identity of the postwar author. And the need to recall traumatic memories requires a fictionalization of public truth to create a complete narrative. To understand the fictionalization of self, and to better identify with how this need has impacted my own ability to conceive and write about my wartime experience, I turned to Shoshana Johnson's *I'm Still Standing*, an Iraq War memoir written by the first black female prisoner of war about her capture and tumultuous return home in 2003.

[8] "The language of the existential individual already possesses an elaborate history with all kinds of stereotypes that it can be the task of representation to correct, disrupt, undermine, or metaphysically challenge" (Jameson 1547).

Johnson battles the effects of trauma in recounting the ambush that led to her capture. She deals with the problem of time by exposing obscenity in the competing versions of her narrative that emerged in the years that it took for her to write her memoir. The author balances her role of ethnographer with the search for her wartime self—the version of herself that existed in her wartime reality—and reveals how ugly truth can be re-reappropriated to help soldier-authors regain the rights to their own past. Johnson describes the government's efforts to silence her story, creates a wartime self, understands that self, and moves forward with a complete (although fictionalized) identity. In the end, the "unprofound scraps of truth" discovered and created within her memoir do not create a true story. Instead, Johnson creates a fictional memorial to her lost friends, her lost self, and all of the men and women who lose versions of themselves in combat.

War veterans of modern wars have especially had to deal personally with attitudes, opinions, and criticisms of the wars they fight. Instead of levying accusations at the politicians and enemies who start wars, the public generally directs their angst at the most visible component of warfare, the soldier in uniform. Whereas soldiers of my generation are generally treated with respect and dignity, I have found it difficult to address and separate criticisms from my own personal involvement with the war in Iraq. I find myself wanting to believe that what I fought for was just but also aware of the very compelling arguments that suggest otherwise. I am left with a simple question: What is the role of the public in a war waged by the military? To explore this question, I turned to Anthony Shaffer's memoir, *Operation Dark Heart*.

Shaffer, a man with a career's worth of intelligence gathering experience in the peacetime reality, finds he is unprepared for war when he arrives in Afghanistan. His memoir reveals an anti-reality where peacetime rhetoric falls short of describing wartime experience. Every meaning in peace has an opposite meaning in war's anti-reality. And the point where these two meanings contradict each other in Shaffer's memoir are points of intersection from which significance can be extracted. Shaffer walks between the worlds of peace and war because of his dual role of soldier and Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) officer. As a result, significance emerges not from his wartime self, but from the Afghanistan War itself. When Shaffer attempts to denounce government intrusion upon the war effort his message gains an opposite meaning and it teaches us about our capacity to wage war as a nation: Wars cannot be won if the countries that wage them are not actively engaged. Worse yet, wars not actively understood by the public lose their purpose and rage on without meaning or any conceivable end.

If Johnson and Shaffer teach us about the relationship between peace and war, Colby Buzzell provides a lesson about how the expectations of a peacetime audience impact the experience of trauma. Traumatic events are not the sole cause of the lingering problems with post-traumatic stress experienced by war veterans, and as trauma theorist Cathy Caruth believes, trauma is a paradox because it must be experienced later than the actual event that causes it (91-92). In *My War: Killing Time in Iraq*, Buzzell cannot experience his trauma because of the constructedness of our own society. And because preconceived notions surround the soldier, Buzzell and others like him experience trauma as much because of the society from which they emerge as the war in which they fight. Buzzell's description of combat and his lack of emotion are indicative of trauma because

of the opposites in meaning that emerge from war. Buzzell is forced to play the role of soldier long after he takes off the uniform: "[I]f I ever got a call from the battalion commander … and they needed me as an M240 Bravo machine gunner again, I'd probably tell him, 'That's a good copy, sir. Let's roll'" (254). The fact is, however, that Buzzell must carry pain along with his nostalgia. And truth lies in the fact that his suffering is as much our own fault as the fault of war itself.

The three memoirs that I have chosen hold both personal and scholarly significance. Johnson served in Iraq and in the type of unit that I served with during our respective deployments in 2003. While I never served in Afghanistan, I have found the debates about this war to be ambiguous and contradictory when juxtaposed alongside the debates centered on the War on Terror as a whole. For all intents and purposes, the war in Iraq—as an extension needed to quell perceived extremism—began in Afghanistan. When looking at the bigger picture—at political and public opinions about the war in which I fought—I find Shaffer's testimony to be representative of the inner struggle I face when considering the greater implications of my war. Buzzell's experience more closely represents the type of job and modernity I experienced in my 2005 deployment. His blog was written in the midst of war and I find what is missing—the lack of emotions—indicative of the coping mechanisms that I and my platoon-mates espoused during our own deployments. I have a personal interest in the works of Johnson, Shaffer and Buzzell; but I also believe that these works are important to the current and future trends of literary research as a whole.

Never before have we had the privilege of focusing so thoroughly upon women and minority war authors. Johnson is a pioneer in writing as well as in her status as the

nation's first black female POW. And her insights into war's anti-reality are singularly denotative of the experiences shared by the marginalized and oppressed that have fought (and continue to fight) under America's banners of freedom and equality. Analyzing the three works I have chosen opens up a multitude of new possibilities: We can investigate war from the eyes of the lowest ranking troops in the midst of combat and officers alike. Shaffer, as an intelligence officer, describes the intricacy of his role in the Afghanistan War, providing a synthesis of civilian and military perspectives of combat. Buzzell, whose blog now has become a bestselling "blook", or blog turned into a book, shows the immediacy in which current war authors write. In many ways, Buzzell's use of technology serves as a point of intersection between the forms of communication used by the realities of peace and war. His memoir teaches us about how memoirists from the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq write and communicate with the peacetime world; but the immediacy of his work—the perspective of a soldier writing during his war—provides added insight into the subjects that war memoirists of previous wars have reflected upon in literature written after the fact. In the future, Johnson, Shaffer, and Buzzell will be the focus of literary scholarship concerning war literature. These memoirists help us to be aware of the present condition of our troops on the ground while linking the nature of service as we understand it today to the nature of service as we have understood it traditionally.

Research into PTSD and TBI also teaches us about soldier-authors of the present and the past. Trauma theory and methods similar to the post-traumatic lens I use in this body of research will grow and become an integral part of understanding soldiers on literary as well as practical terms. My personal exploration of war literature has been

therapeutic in that I now have a deeper understanding of the symptoms and/or wartime adaptations that followed me home. I have learned skills and methods for making sense of my wartime experience through narration. More importantly, I have learned ways to share my growth with the veterans around me. In this way, my journey has come full circle. This text begins with my personal experiences in Iraq; what follows are the inquiries I have made into the formation of identity in war, the absurdity of wartime reality, and the ways in which trauma operates in this reality and in the minds of those who live through combat. I will conclude with the summation of all I have learned, the creation and implementation of an orientation curriculum for veterans making the same transition that I once made from military to civilian life in college. It is my hope that this research will turn my personal examination of the greatest crime that mankind is guilty of committing into a tool used for healing the invisible wounds of the few who have been asked to wage war on behalf of the many.

CHAPTER I—The Battle for Balance: Ethnography and the Creation of Wartime Self in Shoshana Johnson's *I'm Still Standing*

Shoshana Johnson enlisted in the United States Army in September 2008 as a Food Service Specialist. The Panamanian native came from a military family, and with a career-military father and sister serving as an officer, Johnson thought she knew what life in the military entailed: "[A] military career was one in which you could succeed based on your skills and abilities, a career where color, gender, and even nationality have little to do with your success or failure. I had watched my father move up through the ranks and my sister was an officer. Putting on a uniform was the logical thing to do" (10). However, military service takes on a different meaning and logic vanishes when her convoy falls prey to an ambush in the opening days of the Iraq War. Johnson and those captured alongside her become helpless: As a prisoner of war (POW) Johnson's "skills and abilities" mean nothing because she no longer has control over her own life; and a successful career is the least of her worries after her life is placed in the hands of Iraqi soldiers. This pattern continues after Johnson is rescued: she regains little control over her life because her status as the first black female POW garners unwanted attention from the media at a time when she desperately needs time to adjust to postwar life.

Johnson details the tragic ambush of the 507th Maintenance Company convoy in An-Nasiriyah, Iraq, during March 2003. She recounts horrible deaths, wounds in both legs, twenty-two days of captivity, and a tumultuous return home. Whereas Jessica Lynch becomes the center of media attention, Johnson vanishes into obscurity, secretly struggling with PTSD after failing to embrace the newfound celebrity status thrust upon her by the military. Years later, Johnson returns to the discourse surrounding her own

life. Because of the needs of her audience to understand the nature of her wartime experience, Johnson assumes the new role of ethnographer, revisiting her experiences in a way not entirely dissimilar to how cultural anthropologists revisit their notes after a field assignment. It takes the author six years to tell her story and to address governmental and media depictions of her and the events surrounding the ambush (Johnson v). In the end, Johnson struggles to define a wartime self because of trauma, repression, her role as ethnographer, and the third-party fictionalizations of her experience. Johnson's story addresses competing narratives of a single experience, painstakingly maintaining the balance between the personal and public versions of truth that must coexist in her single narrative.

I'm Still Standing is a balancing act between varying accounts of Johnson's experience on a single scale of truth. One side of the scale reflects Johnson's struggle to define her wartime self. This self is defined by overcoming personal barriers, avoiding outside influences, and recovering repressed memories and feelings that may or may not have factual grounding. The other side represents Johnson's role as ethnographer and her task of educating the public about *what really happened*. The search for public truth in *I'm Still Standing* is in many ways more difficult than Johnson's search for wartime self: She must overcome the same trauma and repression present in her search for self with the added dilemma of creating a narrative that is true, accurate and authoritative. If this narrative scale were constructed and tipped completely in favor of either ethnography or the search for wartime self, "truth" would emerge. However, autobiography does not

allow for absolute truth.[9] Instead, a fictive hybrid of personal and historical facts emerges as products of each and every war story. What's more, Johnson's balancing act provides an acute example of this necessary fictionalization, illuminating circumstances specific to the current generation of authors emerging from the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

While Truth and authority have traditionally provided heated discussion in the field of autobiography, the debate over the importance of fact in memoir became as heated as ever in 1985 when Rigoberta Menchú received a Nobel Peace Prize for "the testimony of an obscure Guatemalan *campesina* about her own and her family's experiences during their country's civil war … [the story] ultimately played an important role in bringing about the end of that war" (Walford 113). Menchú's tale had the effect of change on a national level. However, "Menchú was shown to have embellished facts and invented incidents, that is, to have stretched the truth to promote her cause" (Walford 113). Still, Menchú is hardly held to account for her actions. Lynn Walford calls the response to knowledge of her fabrication as a "postmodern stance" that "gloss[es] over inaccuracies and bolster[s] weak arguments" (119). But Walford is likely in the minority with her "fuss over facts" (119). The public saw value in the form of change, not accuracy. Truth came in the form of this change, despite any and all acts of

[9] Renato Rosaldo explains how the personal narrative was once the preferred way of recording history: "[P]eople have advocated the use of narrative in social analysis. History has been the site of this argument because narrative long occupied a canonical status in that discipline comparable to the position of distanced normalizing discourse in anthropology. During the reign of narrative history, practitioners tended to use their favored mode of composition as if it were a transparent medium for telling the 'real truth' about the past. Not surprisingly, the hegemony of narrative was countered during the 1950s by a resistance movement, which, in turn, led to a creative rethinking of the virtues of 'narrative as a cognitive instrument'" (130).

embellishment. War memoirists like Shoshana Johnson perform the same "stretching" in order to overcome the impediments to remembering and recording life events.

Johnson's version is not that of the political establishment, and it is most certainly not the truth she espoused before she committed to the narration of *I'm Still Standing*. Paul John Eakin claims that "autobiographical truth is not a fixed but an evolving content in an intricate process of self-discovery and self-creation, and … the self that is the center of all autobiographical narrative is necessarily a fictive structure" (*Fictions in Autobiography* 3). "Autobiographical truth" is what the public considers to be factual. In recording autobiographical truth the author becomes an ethnographer only to have the "intricate process of self-discovery and self-creation" result in a fictionalization of the facts. At the same time, historical facts influence self-discovery and self-creation—the search for a wartime self—by prescribing circumstances that may not remain as part the author's memory. For the autobiographer, the acceptance of these circumstances results in a fictionalization of self necessitated by the need to accommodate history and/or the influence of third parties. Both ethnography and the search for wartime self revolve around a common, unattainable center; both become fictionalized, and the result is "evolving content" within a single narrative frame.

There is truth in the saying, "We are the sum of our experiences." Autobiography charts single or multiple versions of an individual's self. These selves combine to form identity, or a "totality of subjective experience" (Eakin, *Living Autobiographically xiv*) that encompasses the sum of one's identity in the present (152). A complete, healthy identity is an amalgamation of the sum of a person's selves, but not everyone has a complete, healthy identity. Within the war memoir exists an extreme version of the self, a

"wartime self" unlike its counterparts. War authors find, again and again, that their wartime selves do not mesh with who they were/are outside of war because the experiences of war fall "*outside the range of human experience*" (Brown 100). These disparate experiences of war do not easily fit within the constructed identity of the author, and the natural response to this problem is attempting to repress or forget the wartime self. Shoshana Johnson avoided her wartime self for several years. However, *I'm Still Standing* is a tale of courage in that Johnson faces her traumatic past in an attempt to isolate, describe, and incorporate her wartime self into her greater identity.

Johnson's narration is notably hindered by post-traumatic stress and repression. In a classic display of survivor's guilt, isolation, and sadness, Johnson describes her difficulties in adjusting to postwar life:

> These feelings of sadness have continued for years and I still struggle to understand why I am alive when so many good people aren't. Some days I'm okay, other days it's hard to simply walk out the door. I have felt as if I'm not really engaged in life. I'm not dating for the most part. I rarely go out. Sometimes it's hard simply to be around people. (266)

The symptoms of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) are wide-ranging and affect every aspect of the sufferer's life. In "Not Outside the Range: One Feminist Perspective on Psychic Trauma," Laura Brown lists "nightmares, and flashbacks; avoidance symptoms, the marks of psychic numbing; and the symptoms of heightened physiological arousal: hypervigilance [… and] a distracted mind" as indicative of the condition (100).

Johnson not only displays these symptoms, she admits to dealing with them as she writes her story.[10]

Each symptom of PTSD obfuscates the reality of Johnson's past and her ability to perceive her wartime self. As a result, fictionalization becomes a necessary and practical approach to writing. In taking six years to write about her experience, the author certainly shows avoidance symptoms, and elsewhere she describes having nightmares and problems remembering: "PTSD had been and was going to continue to be an obstacle for me. I was already on antidepressants and sleeping pills, I was seeing a therapist, I couldn't remember things, I was having nightmares" (258). Without doubt, it is difficult for Johnson to look into her past. Each painful memory drudges up guilt, fear, and hypervigilance; as her wartime experiences and medications trigger numbness, Johnson must face all of the physiological responses to recalling trauma, and, at the same time, she must face the loss of memories altogether.

The difference between repression and suppression is that suppression occurs in the moment whereas repression connotes an awareness and search for the thing that was suppressed. Repression is a key component of PTSD and one that makes Johnson's effort to reach into her past more difficult. Repression is not uncommon among those who experience war. Jonathon Shay's research with Vietnam veterans reveals why this act is necessary to survive battle: "Selective suppression of emotion is an essential adaptation

[10] Johnson describes accepting the fact that she has PTSD: "So when my aunt told the doctors that she thought I needed psychiatric help, I was appalled. I wanted to tell her she was wrong, that everything was okay and I could handle whatever happened. But as much as I didn't want to admit it, she was right. I was depressed. I would cry at times for minor reasons. Most times I had no idea what had triggered the response; I would just suddenly be crying. I would snap at people for no reason, and unfortunately, my aunt Maggie was usually the most convenient person on which to vent my frustrations" (235).

to survive lethal settings such as battle, where numbing grief and suppressing fear and psychological pain are lifesaving" (39). In the initial ambush that led to her capture, Johnson describes this kind of suppression: "I would have curled into a fetal position, grabbed my wounds, screamed for help, been paralyzed in pain and fear, but as much as it hurt, there was too much stuff going on to pay attention to any of it" (1). Through narrating these experiences, Johnson engages with her repressed emotions. In the author's effort to understand her wartime self, these feelings of "pain and fear" become a very real part of her present.

Soldiers returning from the frontlines now have access to "demobilizing units" where they are screened for mental health and medical issues (Ebb 24). This service came about after officials realized that soldiers returning from combat suffer from PTSD and experience suicidal ideation in greater numbers than non-veterans.[11] Johnson contemplates suicide after returning early in 2003: "I often thought I should correct what luck had dealt me and kill myself" (236). Ebb explains that "[k]ey factors in soldier suicides and other post-deployment problems are personal relationships and the economy" (26). Johnson does not suffer from economic hardship, but she describes turmoil with her family after returning home:

> There were times when I simply lost it. Being back home with my family around and having so many people sending me things, wishing me well,

[11] There are not many excuses for the military's lack of anticipating the mental health problems of returning soldiers. Veterans from the Vietnam War and the Gulf War resoundingly showed the same reactions to combat stress as we see in the veterans from Iraq and Afghanistan. Anthony Swofford describes considering suicide in *Jarhead*: "I'm standing in the middle of my small barracks room, placing the muzzle of my M16 in my mouth and tasting the cold rifle metal and the smoky residue of gunpowder. The reasons are hard to name … It's not suicide's job to know, only to do" (70).

> showing such support, was overwhelming. I couldn't get over the guilt I felt. Why were people treating me like I was some kind of hero? I wasn't brave. I had merely survived when others didn't. It was confusing and overwhelming, and as much as I tried to fake it, I wasn't dealing with it very well. (231)

Caruth reveals part of the paradox of trauma within how Johnson experiences the emotions she originally suppressed: "Traumatic experience, beyond the psychological dimension of suffering it involves, suggests a certain paradox: that the most direct seeing of a violent event may occur as an absolute inability to know it; that immediacy, paradoxically, may take the form of belatedness" (91-92). At first glance, it seems that Johnson experiences the emotions pushed aside during her ambush because she was unable to "know" them at the time of the event. In retrospect, Johnson understands the facts: she was wounded and her life was in jeopardy. But how can she recover an emotion that was repressed? Did that emotion ever occur? And if not, why does Johnson paint herself in a negative light? The reason comes from her need to act as ethnographer and describe what she *should have felt*.

Caruth believes that trauma is incomprehensible because of its immediacy, but Johnson cannot know what she felt during the ambush because she immediately suppresses the emotions. Therefore, Johnson's "fear and pain" are necessarily fictional. These emotions are part of the wartime self that Johnson decides upon: she chooses to define herself using these emotional responses. Oddly, she chooses to reinforce the stereotypes that she sees enforced by the public:

> We brought shame to the Army and to the unit in many of their eyes. They wanted us to disappear, and far from enjoying all of the events and public appearances we were making, they wanted us to feel ashamed for having been POWs, for having been ambushed, and for having survived. The level of pettiness and bitterness I felt from other soldiers was staggering at times. (250)

War memoirists must assume the role of ethnographers, travelling to exotic countries and "coming back with information about how people live there, and making that information available to the professional community in practical form" (Geertz 1). Johnson travels to Iraq and learns about the people there through her captors, but she also travels with the 507th Maintenance Company, a subject of intrigue and sometimes anger among the American people. She reports the facts as she remembers them, but these "facts" do not match the versions of her story that already exist.

In many ways, the government, media and other parties take the liberty of narrating Johnson's experience during the six-year gap between the ambush and the publication of *I'm Still Standing*. The outside interpretations influence Johnson's private life as well as her wartime self. As the first black female POW, Johnson represents "a symbol of abandonment and victimization" that Thomas Conroy claims causes Americans "to question the belief that they [are] part of [a] nation divinely determined to be 'superior'" (67). Conroy continues, "[T]he Bush team constantly sought to identify an event that that would provide an opportunity to craft a message that would resonate with its working class constituency … The Jessica Lynch episode presented just such an opportunity" (75). And so, Johnson's story is meant to be a footnote in the government's

attempt to raise support for the war.[12] Lynch becomes the poster child while "Shoshana Johnson, a Black woman, was captured and held for more than twenty days. That the Pentagon spokespeople ignored her story indicates their cynical calculated analysis of the chivalrous resonance that the Jessica Lynch image, a frail white woman, would have on a particular audience" (Conroy 79). However, Johnson works against prescribed versions of her experience. Eventually, she gains control through narration, defining her wartime self as she rewrites her history and engages with the audience duped by the Lynch façade. Still, Johnson's narrative is fictionalized because of the influence of the wartime self created by the United States government.

Johnson's scale of truth tips in favor of seeking her wartime self, but this self is subsequently polluted by media saturation. In the dedication section of her story, Johnson reveals the influences that led to her writing: "It took a lot of convincing before I would agree to write this book" (v). Indeed, it took more than six years, the efforts of her family, friends and colleagues as well as the help of an assistant author for Johnson to tell the story of the "first black female ever to be held as a prisoner of war" (v). In 2010, Johnson says, "Now, almost ten years since the start of the Iraq War, it has become clear that they were right. It is a story that should be told" (v). This statement effectively separates Johnson from her own experience. Johnson does not say that she "needs" to tell her story; she does not say that she is "happy" to write; she basically says that "despite the pain and

[12] In "Harm's Way: Language and the Contemporary Arts of War" Mary Louise Pratt explains that "Wars can be sustained only if they are sufficiently meaningful to those who sacrifice for them. Fighting must be done in the name of a transcendent object, an object of love, or an object of hate, deemed worthy of killing and dying for. In whatever media are at hand, from pulpits to poets to video feeds, wars come with elaborate semantic and symbolic accompaniments that continuously reestablish that object, rekindle the love or hate, assign meaning and meaningfulness to the violence and suffering being sustained" (1520).

agony it causes me to think and write about these things, I will write about what happened to me for the sake of the reader." Johnson takes on the role of reluctant author to better understand herself, and she takes on the role of ethnographer to gain control over the version of her self that already exists in the minds of her readers. However, the same reasons that cause Johnson to struggle with remembering the emotions she felt during the ambush also create problems as she attempts to remember historical facts surrounding her capture. Johnson's fictionalized versions permeate and fill the gaps of her memory, complicating the task of maintaining balance on the scale of truth.

In the opening pages of *Jarhead* Swofford says, "My vision was blurred—by wind and sand and distance, by false signals, poor communication, and bad coordinates, by stupidity and fear and ignorance, by valor and false pride. By the mirage … Thus, what follows is neither true nor false but *what I know*" (2). Swofford goes on to list the things he cannot remember: "I have forgotten most of the statistics and must look them up. I remember the weapons, though not their capabilities, so I must look those up as well. For the place names I refer to maps. For unit deployments and order of battle, I must consult published charts" (2). Oppositely, Swofford then lists a number of things he *can* remember, referring to personal memories of spouses not writing their husbands, lies from his leaders, and personal fear still fresh in his mind (2). For Swofford, it is easier to place emotion within the context of his scenario because emotional responses are predictable. It may be easier to explore self than to become an ethnographer in the face of trauma.[13] Revisiting facts is easier than revisiting trauma. Defining self is extremely

[13] In "The Desert of Experience: *Jarhead* and the Geography of the Persian Gulf War" Geoffrey Wright shows how "Swofford constructs the geography of the Middle East, the landscape of his wartime experience, through a process of remembering

painful for Johnson, and the facts of her past have been confused, making it a struggle to *decide* upon the "truth" of even the most important issues.

Johnson's most obvious approach to this conundrum is in the structuring of her book. *I'm Still Standing* begins with the standard attention-grabber in her first chapter with the words "I'm hit! I'm hit!" (1). Afterwards, the memoir fades in and out of the combat and captivity sequences, interlacing aspects of Johnson's pre-war and post-war lives with the horrors she experienced in Iraq. Indeed, *I'm Still Standing* is very much a contrivance; the narrative frame is clearly an unnatural construct. But the narrator is constructed as well: Johnson engages with an assistant author, M.L. Doyle, who refers to Johnson's memoir as a "project" (x). The magnitude of Doyle's influence upon the story is not made clear anywhere in the text, and this influence only underscores the fact that Johnson is an author battling the effects of time and trauma, seeking to discover and to create a past all in the same book.

West Point graduate and author of *The Unforgiving Minute: A Soldier's Education*, Craig Mullaney reflects the importance of acting as narrator after being wounded: "Ultimately, I wasn't strong enough to continue serving in uniform and to meet the duties I had to my family. My battles will no longer be fought in boots and camouflage, but I still hope to serve this country I love that has given me so much" (380). For Mullaney, the battle continues in the form of narration. Johnson takes part in the same battle, and her book is as much a story of her struggles after war as her struggles during war. Johnson is confused and creating a false construction is an effective way of

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by writing. As he writes, the contours of the desert—its flatness and openness—and its material substance define not only the shape his memory takes but also his evolving sense of an embodied self" (1678).

framing and contextualizing her experience. By taking control of her own narrative Johnson effectively takes off the "boots and camouflage" and engages with the wartime self influencing her in the present, but obfuscation comes from both inside the author as well as from without. And it is Johnson's job to overcome these obstacles for her own sake as well as the sake of those who fought alongside her in the Iraq War.

Johnson is not the first female POW to have help constructing a narrative. Like Johnson, Rhonda Cornum was a pilot captured in the Gulf War. She was badly wounded and taken captive for eight days by Saddam Hussein's forces. Later, she published *She Went to War*, a text written "as told" to author Peter Copeland. Johnson begins her text with, "It took a lot of convincing before I would agree to write this book." Similarly, Copeland writes in Cornum's preface: "It wasn't easy to convince Cornum to tell her story", and he explicitly states, "My only condition was that the book be absolutely accurate, that if she couldn't remember something, we would omit it rather than invent it" (Preface). So far, it has been shown that invention is necessary in each and every war memoir. While Johnson's co-author is hidden within the text, Cornum's attempt to claim absolute truth is also untrue: The confusion that accompanies the recollection of traumatic memories, the influence of a public narrative, and the constructedness of both works means that both of these "true" accounts of the war are necessarily fiction.

In 1990, twenty years before the events of *I'm Still Standing* took place, Tim O'Brien articulated the confusion Johnson would later face. In *The Things They Carried*, O'Brien notes, "The pictures get jumbled; you tend to miss a lot. And then afterward, when you go to tell about it, there is always that surreal seemingness, which makes the story seem untrue, but which in fact represents the hard and exact truth as it *seemed*"

(71). Johnson has many ideas about the "seemingness" of what she experienced, but she can never be absolutely sure of what she experienced because of trauma. Furthermore, public attention and scrutiny influences her memory to a point where reality becomes an abstraction. For example, Johnson reveals the limits of her knowledge:

> There are large gaps in my memory that I've tried to fill but can't. Do I remember everything that happened to me? My rational mind tells me that I wasn't raped, but sometimes a kind of psychosis takes over. There isn't any physical evidence to point to a sexual assault, but I wonder if some of my depression, some of my anxieties, are a result of an assault I'm working hard to forget. It's just something I wonder about. (263)

As Johnson wonders about being raped, she considers a possibility of immense magnitude. To be raped would mean that she was victimized in the purest sense. However, the problem is that she has no recollection or proof of the event ever happening. At the same time, Johnson engages with her audience through the language of her exploration: words like "wonder" and "just" are loaded and designed to test the waters inhabited by her audience. Johnson honestly questions the possibility of being raped, but the influence of third parties—an audience in this case—comes in the form of Johnson asking if her questioning of her own past is proper.

Why does Johnson believe that she may have been raped? And from where does this confusion originate? It would seem that she is either a rape victim who repressed all memory of the event, or, she was never raped at all. Suzette Henke discusses one "semi-autobiographical character" who through narrative reveals being raped by her father: "[The story] functions as a waking dream, a frame for the reconstruction of a trauma

narrative so dangerous that it can only be expressed in the veiled discourse of a fictional persona … A censored truth seeps out in fictional form" (138). Narrative necessarily produces a "fictional persona." This concept is why controversy incessantly follows the recovery of repressed memories: Truth becomes suspect. And Johnson's narrative is the frame in which she will reconstruct her wartime self, addressing an audience influenced by the falsehoods produced in the Lynch controversy.[14] Henke's character reveals that she was raped. What would be the impact of Johnson creating a wartime self that was raped when no such rape occurred? She would have to live her life with the pain of a trauma that never occurred solely because of the influence of third parties on her narrative.

Johnson is likely unaware of Shay's research, but she is painfully aware of Jessica Lynch's experience: "People may not ever ask me to my face, but I always know they wonder if I was raped … They say from her physical examinations that Jessica was sexually assaulted, but she doesn't remember it happening at all. Am I repressing some horrible memory, too?" (263). The public version of Johnson's wartime self is so strong that Lynch's possible repression *becomes* Johnson's possible repression. Donald Anderson claims that "What is remembered or imagined *becomes* reality. And if we *don't*

[14] At this point, I want to clarify that it is my position that Jessica Lynch should be associated with what I call "the Lynch controversy" by name only. Lynch also suffers from versions of her wartime self being ascribed to her. And Johnson is quick to point out her view on the matter: "[T]here began to be speculation that I was angry and jealous of her for the way she was made to appear the hero … I was her friend before that ambush and I'm still her friend now. I have never felt resentment toward her, not for the media hype about her role in the ambush and certainly not for any settlement she received for her injuries. I don't know the reason why the Army or the press hyped up Jessica's role in the ambush. Judging from her testimony before Congress in 2007, it's clear that Jessica doesn't understand or appreciate the way the Army embellished her story" (251).

create our personal versions of the past, someone else will do it for us. This is frightening political fact" (32) The Bush administration tried to dictate Johnson's story and the public believed in this version of Johnson's wartime self.[15] Therefore, the *possibility* of rape becomes a *reality* of being raped because she was a female and within the confines of a merciless enemy. Johnson is expected to have been raped; and, because of the effects of trauma and repression, she is unable to prove otherwise.

In reality (at least in the reality provided in Johnson's memoir), the captors in *I'm Still Standing* are notably non-violent. Johnson's confusion seemingly stems from public expectations: she is sexualized in a way that calls for a rape in her story while the enemy is demonized in a way that calls for them to rape her. Cornum explicitly relates a sexual assault to *Time Magazine*: "Being a POW is the rape of your entire life. But what I learned in those Iraqi bunkers and prison cells is that the experience doesn't have to be devastating, that it depends on you" (Booth). Cornum's sexual assault happens in the back of vehicle: "As they bumped along a desert road in the dark, her Iraqi captor pushed her muddy, bloodied hair out of her face—and kissed her. Pulling a blanket over them, he unzipped her flight suit and started fondling her." But she chooses not to let the instance define her: "You're supposed to look at this as a fate worse than death. Having faced both, I can tell you it's not. Getting molested was not the biggest deal of my life" (Booth). Cornum *chooses* to not be sexualized in her story. Johnson deals with the

[15] In "War is Culture: Global Counterinsurgency, Visuality, and the Petraeus Doctrine" Nicholas Mirzoeff describes the current political strategy behind media saturation in the current wars in Iraq and Afghanistan: "It should be read as a technique of discipline, normalization, and governmentality … In everyday politics, the refusal to engage with the counterinsurgency strategy has now marginalized antiwar movement and all but removed Iraq from the headlines. In the first half of 2008, the three major television networks in the United States devoted a total of 181 minutes to coverage of the Iraq War in their nightly newscasts" (1738).

absence of memory brought on by repression; she must *decide* whether or not she was raped. This struggle does not mean that Johnson wants to carry an unnecessary burden; quite the opposite: It is Johnson's right to appropriate her own femininity in the same way as she appropriates her truth, using it to turn public expectations against an audience hungry for victimized women and evil enemies, focusing on the lack of rape as a manifestation of public misconceptions. Johnson's audience expects her to have been raped and she combats their false narrative with the ambiguity of her traumatic memories. In the end, her constructed self-doubt is a way to fight against the false narrative created by the government and maintained by her audience.

Johnson capably finds other avenues of disproving the government's false creation. She starts by rejecting the stereotypical enemy, causing public expectations to follow suit. The author corrects the perceptions of both the enemy and her role as hero. Regarding the enemy, Johnson is very generous and forgiving toward her former captors:

> The men in charge of us now seemed like reluctant captors, as if they were confused about what to do with us. The Captain would talk to Williams, taking him out of the room for conversations. He revealed that they were all police officers, and while he never admitted that they didn't want us, it was clear they were making the best of an uncomfortable situation. They were kind. They were doing what they could. (194-95)

Johnson is an ethnographer recounting a personal rather than public past. Her authority over the creation of her wartime self trumps the government's authority. Six years later, Johnson rewrites the past, gaining the authority to redefine the enemy. Johnson appropriates the truth, creating what must be a fictionalized version of the past because of

trauma and repression. As a result, the balancing act between ethnography and creation of the wartime self continues.

Ethnographers are not without biases. Geertz believes that "there are dangers in regarding the anthropological vocation as in important respects a literary one" (142). But he also acknowledges the inherent relationship between the two: "The present state of play in the field is at once disordered and inventive … If it is now to prosper, with that confidence shaken, it must become aware. Attention to how it gets its effects and what those are, to anthropology on the page, is no longer a side issue, dwarfed by problems of method and issues of theory" (148-49). It is not the point of this essay to comment upon the individual's role in ethnography. Instead, my point is to show that Johnson's conundrum is in no way unique. Cornum faces strikingly similar circumstances; Swofford deals with the same sort of psychological trauma; and Johnson is embroiled in a conflict between selves well into her postwar life. However, her responsibility to the public seems divided with her responsibility to herself and to the cause of denouncing the U.S. Army's immoral facade.

O'Brien comments on truth and morality in war stories: "A true war story is never moral. It does not instruct, nor encourage virtue, nor suggest models of proper human behavior" (68). The public version of Johnson's wartime self does all of these things, but we know that her story is not "true." It is not possible to create a "true war story" because of trauma. But, at the very least, Johnson's efforts place authority over "self" back in the hands of the individual. Johnson laments, "The press reports seemed to blame us for the problems. Somehow it was our fault we had gotten lost. It was our fault that our weapons malfunctioned and that our radios didn't work. It was our fault we had been ambushed

and captured" (Johnson 162). Johnson directly challenges this reality, calling into question her leadership, the government's lies, and public conclusions. Ultimately, she creates a wartime self that nullifies other, competing versions. As a result, she is able to incorporate a version of her self into her identity on her own terms and, perhaps, effect some measure of healing.

Johnson points out that her narrative is not the only falsehood perpetrated by the U.S. Army:

> Another example is what they did in the Pat Tillman story. The elaborate memorial ceremonies they held, the wildly overblown stories of Tillman's bravery, were an embarrassment. They wanted so badly to cover up that Pat Tillman had been killed by his own unit in Afghanistan. Not telling the truth about the incident was an insult to a family that had raised an outstanding, patriotic man. (253)

The bulk of Johnson's memoir, and especially the latter parts, seem to argue that the government's false narrative inflicted harm upon everyone from the 507th Maintenance Company. Johnson's search for wartime self is synonymous with both subverting the government's harmful deeds and her personal healing. Johnson heals through the construction of wartime self; but the exact opposite is true about her reaction to the false narrative: Johnson's narrative destroys false, third-party narratives about her. The government destroyed Johnson's self and, through the creation of her memoir, she destroys the government's authority. All of this destruction reveals a battle between competing versions of a single truth and the public's perception that "only one point of view can be correct." O'Brien claims that "You can tell a true war story if it embarrasses

you. If you don't care for obscenity, you don't care for truth" (69). Johnson invokes obscenity throughout her memoir. Specifically, she summons a kind of obscenity through her consideration of rape, humanization of the Iraqis, and conversion of the U.S. Army into the enemy.

In Johnson's story, the roles of "enemy" and "friend" are reversed. As Johnson is moved from prison to prison by reluctant captors, American forces serve more as a source of danger than salvation:

> I squeezed my eyes tightly shut behind my blindfold. Then a huge explosion went off right in front of the vehicle and we swerved recklessly around it, almost knocking me out of my seat. The tension in the truck was high. We all knew, prisoners and guards alike, that we were a target. Even if we weren't, we could stumble into something that would kill us all. I clenched my teeth and prayed and hoped for the best. (Johnson 166)

Her fellow captives incite rebellion and taunt the captors, endangering Johnson's life: "I was constantly frightened for them every time they acted up, but I was proud of them, proud of their bravery" (170). In captivity, Johnson finds herself at a remove from the combat and explores her role in the battle that led to her captivity and the death of her friends: "I found myself playing back the video of the ambush in my head over and over again. I berated myself for not putting up a fuss about driving into the city … I saw Lori's bloody face and the first sergeant's battered body" (176). In captivity, Johnson is able to process trauma. But in civilian life and within the safe arms of the Army, she is forced into stardom and comparison with the false narrative of Jessica Lynch. Healing becomes

impossible while Johnson naturally represses memories and allows the government to replace these memories with false constructs.

I'm Still Standing is really the story of an individual fighting public perceptions. Johnson's rescuers request snapshots, which is also one of the first things the Iraqis do when they take her prisoner. The correlations continue with Johnson not being allowed to shower in solitude while in custody of the Army:

> When I finally did get the chance to shower, they wouldn't let me take it by myself for fear that I would fall and hurt myself or something. A nursing assistant was right there, scrubbing my back and washing me. I hated it. I hated relying on other people, hated not having control of my own situation. I wanted that alone time to enjoy getting clean on my own, but they wouldn't allow it. (213)

Johnson describes being used by the Army from the onset of her rescue. As a result, she is not permitted to heal while under the care of her doctors, friends and family. Healing takes place in the space between Johnson's traumatizing events and the production of *I'm Still Standing*. And the benefit of Johnson's healing comes in the form of her using her writing—her trauma—as a tool to strike back against those who reappropriated her narrative in the first place. In "Autobiography and the Feminist Subject" Linda Anderson says, "To use one's experience as representative … is to attempt to assert its political meaning, to seek to offer a more general means of reflection on the experience and construction of female subjectivity" (124). Johnson nullifies the false versions of her self created by the government; then, she goes on the offensive. By describing the pain of

what the Army put her through, she does the same thing to the military that was done to her: Johnson uses her authority to create a fictionalized identity for the U.S. Army.

According to Eakin, "Most readers assume that all autobiographies are based on the verifiable facts of life history" (*Fictions in Autobiography*, 3). However, none of the facts in Johnson's memoir are verifiable because they are tainted by trauma. Similarly, nothing that the government reports on Johnson's experience is believable for two reasons: (1) Johnson has the ultimate authority over her own life narrative, and (2) the authority of public truth vanishes upon a single omission, or, in the case of Johnson, multiple omissions and numerous falsifications meant to bolster support for the war. So, to assume that autobiography reports facts is a mistake. Eakin continues, "Historians and social scientists attempt to isolate the factual content of autobiography from its narrative matrix, while literary critics, seeking to promote the appreciation of autobiography as an imaginative art, have been willing to treat such texts as though they were indistinguishable from novels" (*Fictions in Autobiography* 3). Both parties assume that such a thing as "truth" exists. All life writing has motivations. And history is notoriously written by the victor of each conflict.

At the end of her memoir, Johnson lists the names of her friends killed during the ambush: "And, of course, hardly a day goes by when I don't think about the ones in my unit who didn't make it. There's not much I can do but remember them. We should all remember them" (276). Repeatedly, Johnson asserts that the Army wants to forget the debacle that led to her capture. [16] And she may be right: The very last line of her work

[16] "Today, you won't find the 507th Maintenance Company on a list anywhere on Fort Bliss. The unit no longer exists. It was deactivated and then reactivated under another name … The only memorial is a small bronze plaque on the side of the

lists a website on the 507th Maintenance Company that is no longer active. In fact, no official site for the heavily scrutinized company is currently active. As a result, and through the authority asserted by Johnson as the author of her own history, *I'm Still Standing* becomes a tribute to her fallen comrades. She memorializes her friends and attempts to undo the government's work of erasure.

Johnson is not the only memoirist to attempt a similar feat. Cornum dedicates her book to "the real heroes, who gave their lives trying to rescue a fellow aviator" before the preface to her own story. These gestures are almost certainly made in good faith. And memorializing the dead may be the closest thing to "truth" in any form of war writing. When the Irish revolted against the British in 1916, William Butler Yeats attempted to memorialize some of the fallen in his poem "Easter 1916." Yeats lists names and concludes with excellent insight into the nature of war:

> I write it out in verse—
>
> MacDonagh and MacBride
>
> And Conolly and Pearse
>
> Now and in time to be,
>
> Wherever green is worn,
>
> Are changed, changed utterly:
>
> A terrible beauty is born. (74-80)

Yeats' "terrible beauty" is the simultaneous act of homage with painful remembrance. These acts are strikingly similar to the conflicts between truth and self within Johnson's narrative. Johnson's innocence and a version of her self dies with her comrades. In the

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motor-pool building. A small plaque. It's as if they wish we would just disappear" (Johnson 250).

end, her war memoir is a testament—a memorial to those who died—and it signifies Johnson's lost self and all of those who lost their innocence and versions of their selves but "survived" the war.

Johnson struggles with being merely a "survivor." Beneath the battle for authority that permeates Johnson's story is a sad and painful truth that all competing narratives must acknowledge: There is no truth to be found in war. And no one hits upon this point more succinctly than O'Brien in his own memoir, *If I Die in a Combat Zone*:

> Now war ended, all I am left with are simple, unprofound scraps of truth. Men die. Fear hurts and humiliates. It is hard to be brave. It is hard to know what bravery is. Dead human beings are heavy and awkward to carry … some men thought the war was proper and others didn't and most didn't care. Is that the stuff for a morality lesson, even a theme? (23)

O'Brien's frustration begs the question of what there is to gain from writing about war. Johnson, on the other hand, reveals one use in her memoir. She is unjustly robbed of her right to narrate her own experience and define her wartime self. However, she regains this right by challenging established versions of truth, properness, and morality by exposing obscenity in the competing versions of her narrative. The balancing act between public and private interpretations of this self becomes a source of contention, but Johnson reveals how the ugly truth can be appropriated to help an individual regain rights to her own past. With all of the government's efforts to silence the story of Shoshana Johnson, she emerges as the victor, creating a wartime self, understanding that self, and moving forward with a complete (although fictionalized) identity. In the end, and despite bullets, blindfolds, and press releases, Shoshana Johnson truly earns the right to say, "I'm still

standing." Nevertheless, her assertion and the "unprofound scraps of truth" discovered and created within her memoir do not create a true story. Instead, Johnson creates a fictional memorial to her lost friends, her lost self and all of the men and women who lose versions of themselves in combat.

CHAPTER II—The Search for Truth: Points of Intersection and Significance in Anthony Shaffer's *Operation Dark Heart*

Shoshana Johnson regains control of her narrative by balancing the search for wartime self with the role of ethnographer. She reveals how war memoirs are necessarily fictionalized, how the self that emerges through narrative is a fictional product, and how the product becomes a real part of the author's postwar identity. The difficulties inherent with combining a wartime self with the "normal" selves constituting identity stem from the extraordinary experience of war: War necessitates a self unlike any other because of its singular nature. War memoirs represent more than empowerment and personal growth for the author. The problems associated with recounting, discovering, and creating wartime self—the struggle to move past trauma and to translate wartime experience into part of an individual's experience—lends itself to the fact that, in war, there exists a reality contrary and opposite to the reality of peace.

Johnson's memoir ends as a memorial, illuminating a point of agreement between the peacetime and wartime realities as well as her wartime self. However, this wartime self is only another point of intersection between the two realities. Adding to what we—the peacetime audience—have learned from Johnson, Anthony Shaffer's *Operation Dark Heart: Spycraft and Special Ops on the Frontlines of Afghanistan—And the Path to Victory* illustrates peacetime rhetoric falling short of describing the wartime experience. By extension, Shaffer's dealings with the Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) echoes the third-party, governmental intrusion upon Johnson's recounting of trauma and narration as well as explicit censorship. *Operation Dark Heart* reveals how every meaning in one reality will have a contrary meaning in the other, but there are agreements to be found

and significance can be explored in these contradictions and points of intersection. And this significance must be explored by the memoirist and studied by the peacetime audience as a constant reminder of the consequences of war. It is a compulsion of every soldier who experiences combat to relive that experience. I find it necessary to explore the words of authors like Shaffer so that I am enabled to relive my own wartime experience. In this way, the war memoir is a tool for me and other war veterans to understand memories that are incomprehensible in the peacetime reality that we inhabit after the return home. For the peacetime audience—those who have not directly experienced war—the war memoir is also a tool that charts and defines the ways of being and experiences of war's absurdity. Just as it is a need of the public to try to understand war, the war memoir is an indispensable tool for accomplishing this task. For the peacetime audience to not *try* to understand war would lead to detachment and even war without purpose. Johnson reveals how the war memoir is a healthy way of exploring experience and creating the wartime self. However, Shaffer reveals, through intersections of meaning, how the war memoir can serve as a window into the reality of war. Whereas the author explicitly descries the intrusion of the civilian government upon military war efforts in Afghanistan, *Operation Dark Heart* implicitly reveals the importance of a peacetime audience engaging with the wars they perpetrate. In the end, the act of reading war memoirs interrelates itself with the ability of a country to find purpose and be held accountable for their actions.

Operation Dark Heart clearly draws a line of distinction between the realities of war and peace. Like Johnson's memoir, Shaffer's narrative does not mesh with public versions of the same story. And he reveals a problem with war writing—even with

increased knowledge about trauma, media saturation, and foreknowledge of the human brain's inability to perceive and recount events—is difficult to grasp: In a sense, war memoirs do not exist. By nature, the war memoir is tied to reality and history through the author's role as ethnographer. Trauma, perception, and the human capacity for memory make it difficult to record a painful past. Like Johnson, Shaffer explains his reality by challenging history. Furthermore, and similarly, in *Operation Dark Heart* Shaffer assumes two roles: special operations *soldier* and DIA *officer*. Shaffer's status as military soldier and a civilian officer make *the author* a point of intersection between the realities of peace and war. Afghanistan is Shaffer's competing narrative, an anti-reality, and the conflicting natures of Afghanistan in *Operation Dark Heart* make it so we—the veteran seeking to remember as part of the larger, peacetime audience—can find significance, and perhaps, with a little exploration, meaning from the war itself.

Despite her narrative's exertion of control over personal experience, Johnson's memoir ends ambiguously, calling into question the authority of all narratives by both exposing and creating fictional versions of a single truth. She establishes her authority and nullifies the credibility of the government. Still, Johnson's words remain fiction because of her inability to remember, the effects of trauma, and the politicization of her wartime self. While truth may not emerge from Johnson's memoir, *significance* is readily available. The memorial at the end of *I'm Still Standing* remains a viable testament to those who lost their lives and to those who lost their innocence in *her* war. Furthermore, this intersection of meaning reveals perhaps one of the few truths to be found in any war memoir.

Tim O'Brien echoes this truth in *The Things They Carried*: "War is hell, but that's not half of it, because war is also mystery and terror and adventure and courage and discovery and holiness and pity and despair and longing and love. War is nasty; war is fun. War is thrilling; war is drudgery. War makes you a man; war makes you dead" (80). All of these descriptors contradict one another, and this contradiction represents the simultaneous interpretation of a single war by agents from two disparate realities. Why are there war stories? What is there to gain from discussing something that will never teach people anything? After all, war is an inevitable part of each generation. We just never seem to learn that, as O'Brien says, "A true war story is never moral. It does not instruct, nor encourage virtue, nor suggest models of proper human behavior, nor restrain men from doing the things men have always done" (*The Things They Carried*, 68). So, what do we have to gain from reading war stories? The answer comes in the form of significance. In O'Brien's words the consensus that war leads to death remains a truism between the two realities, and this agreement is significant because it extracts a measure of truth from the seemingly meaningless destruction and chaos experienced in war. Meaning may not be readily available, but every intersection of meaning(s) between the two realities is a starting point for finding truth.

Paul Fussell's research into WWI writing further seeks to answer the question of what we have to gain from the exploration of war memoirs:

> In reading memoirs of the war, one notices the same phenomenon over and over. By applying to the past a paradigm of ironic action, a rememberer is enabled to locate, draw forth, and finally shape into

> significance an event or moment which otherwise would merge without meaning into the general undifferentiated stream. (Fussell 34)

Fussell believes that an "irony-assisted recall" can help us—the peacetime audience—make sense of war literature and shape it into significance. The findings may best be described as something of importance, a truth, perhaps, that we have yet to categorize and define. We may never "make sense" of war, but we might be able to delineate importance, draw meaning from death and destruction, and map the anti-reality that confuses and challenges war authors to remember.

War is unlike anything experienced within the confines of a peacetime society. Certainly, countries under siege and countries within close proximity of their enemies throughout history tell a different story. But memoirists who fight overseas—who take part in "police actions" or "operations"—struggle to describe what they have witnessed to an audience with little to no personal relationship with combat. Peacetime rhetoric uniformly falls short of describing "another world, where men feel and act differently" (Hynes 10). Samuel Hynes describes the creation of war stories as the exploration of "a dream, or the life of some other man, remembered with a kind of astonishment" (10). Hynes' "astonishment" is the emotional reaction to intersections of peacetime and wartime meaning within the war memoir. This reaction can take the form of confusion, fear, or even trauma—all with significance to be found. Despite the inherent difficulties, Shaffer juxtaposes scenes from both realities together within his single narrative. The constants within his framework reveal clues about the nature of the environment around the author and narrator. Ultimately, there is no stronger intersection of meaning than that of the author's son and the opposite aberration that materializes in Shaffer's Afghanistan.

Shaffer joins his adolescent son in a father-son camp just days before deploying. The boy asks his father not to go; the usual consolation and "you-need-to-grow-up-and-help-your-mother routine" ensues. Shaffer's son is concerned that his father will lose contact with him while he is deployed. Shaffer responds, "'I'm told that I will also be able to e-mail you often.' I just left off the part, for now, that I'd be using the name Tony in my notes … did not want to add more stress at this point" (21). Shaffer's real name is the first thing to go. Next, he must give up the role of father; then, the role of DIA officer; and his entire identity will be dismantled and reassembled in preparation for war. This process is not that dissimilar from the process of basic training: Armies break soldiers down—strip them of their individual identities—and build them up with new skills, attitudes, and behaviors. Shaffer, at this point, is already a seasoned veteran in the intelligence community; he claims a lifetime of military experience both from growing up in a military family and as a reservist. However, none of this training prepares him for the reality of war.

The scene with Shaffer and his son represents the tumultuous stripping of identity that takes place in training. Obviously, it is painful for both the father and the son. Shaffer continues to describe the scene: "[T]he winds started to blow. First at the treetops and, quickly, down to ground level. I sat and looked up. The sky was still clear. What the heck was going on?" Nature reacts to Shaffer's necessitated wartime identity. He no longer fits within the reality of peace at that moment. It could easily be said that this scene is the sight of a freakish storm, but the words—the unexpected and dangerous nature of the storm—echoes war's anti-reality:

> The wind had now become a gale, and I almost thought that there was a tornado; then I saw the first clouds begin to cover the stars as a violent summer thunderstorm came rolling in. I had never experienced anything like it—going from clear and calm conditions to full-blown storm in less than five minutes. Just as my mind finished processing what had happened, the rain came whipping in like small bullets. Alexander and I ran for the tents—as did everyone else. (21-22)

Shaffer's postwar identity emerges from his description of the past. The author will go from "clear to calm" when he transmogrifies his self, creating a person suited for the dark nature of warfare.

His transformation is similar to the way that war changes every individual who partakes in the spectacle: "The individual's journey from innocence into experience, the serial discovery of what had before been unimaginable, the reality of war. And because that is true, we must be conscious, as we contemplate the narratives of many wars, of both what changes and what remains constant" (Hynes 17). Innocence and experience is another common point of intersection between the two realities. The telltale signs of intersection are confusion, violence and anger. That is why the new, untrained solder reacts with astonishment in the stories experienced soldiers tell. However, as the soldier becomes more experienced in warfare—as they make that journey from innocence to experience—the reaction to war's horrors have less of an effect. Shaffer is already well into his career when he begins this journey, but the effect is the same.

Shaffer is a soldier, but his skills come largely from working as part of a DIA "intelligence-collection assignments" (16). He describes the merging of military and

civilian assets in 1995 as a "hostile takeover" where the "analytical" DIA was "vocal about it being a bad idea." Shaffer considers the DIA's "academia-rooted culture" as "never comfortable with the set of skills unique to operational intelligence on the battlefield." The author continues, "Those skills were radically different from those required to either count Soviet missiles or for military attachés to function in their duties in embassies in urban settings under peacetime conditions" (16). Shaffer is trained in the military tactics looked down upon by the DIA. However, his experience as an "undercover agent" (15) does not prepare him for combat in Afghanistan. In many ways, Shaffer is a spy within a network of spies. He is a soldier masquerading as a DIA operative.

Shaffer has the best training money can buy; he is highly experienced in Cold War counterterrorism operations (12); and after 9/11, Shaffer commanded a DIA special operations base in Africa that he claims was "the first DIA covert operation of the post-Cold War era" (19). He is a soldier with abundant civilian experience. When Shaffer goes to Afghanistan, he finds that this experience is not enough, and his civilian counterparts lack the experience needed as well. Shaffer watches his training, experience, and fellow intelligence officers fall short of the needs of the war, becoming "disgusted with the whole intelligence program" (18). But he believes in the war effort. And by volunteering for active duty military assignment in Afghanistan (18), Shaffer becomes a spy with the mission of finding out why the war is being mismanaged. But he will have to gain experience in the wartime reality before he can comment on what needs to be done to win the war itself.

The author of *Operation Dark Heart* initially depicts a calm, cool character in the face of terror, but this construct vanishes as his newfound *reality* becomes more *real*. Shaffer admits to not being prepared for war: "I wasn't really scared. There was more of a feeling of emptiness. I was working to be very Zen about the whole thing; I had opened my mind to the new possibilities. No preconceived notions. Whatever was going to happen, would happen" (24-25). Shaffer's task is easier said than done. After the scene with his son, Shaffer discusses one of his first missions in Afghanistan, a scene that involves another young boy: "Moving like a blur, the kid tossed the metal item toward Dave's truck. My M-4 was up, now clearing the truck's firewall, barrel lined up, and I was just putting pressure on the trigger. Time seemed to go into slow motion" (36). Again, the truth, as told by the author, becomes suspect: He claims that he has "no preconceived notions," but his hesitation in the face of being attacked by a child claims otherwise: "*I just got here*, I thought, *and I'm gonna shoot a freakin' kid*." Everything about this situation is contrary to what Shaffer knows about reality. In the real world—the world of peace—children do not throw bombs, and adults, especially fathers, do not shoot little boys.

Before he reveals how he handles the situation, Shaffer reiterates the same kind of constructedness as in Shoshana Johnson's memoir by flashing back to the briefing where he learned of child insurgents. He explains how he concealed his anxiety and how he learned about the Taliban using children to throw "explosive devices at vehicles—hand grenades and IEDs." He goes on to say that he pretended to be calm, but retracts this assertion and claims, "Truth was, I was nervous as hell but working hard not to show it." As this tangent within his book makes its way back towards the present, Shaffer says,

"I'd seen a ton of kids today in the streets. Using them [as weapons] … I couldn't believe it" (43-44). In short, he is not ready for the reality that unfolds in front of him as the child throws the metal object toward his vehicle: "While I had done dangerous things my entire professional life, going into a war zone was a new experience for me" (24). Nevertheless, Shaffer adapts to his newfound reality and, like all war veterans, reacts in the best way that he knows how.

The Afghani boy is his son's opposite in the wartime reality, and this sequence is a prime example of what happens when understanding in one reality intersects and counteracts with the other. In Shaffer's world, confusion is the most clearly audible emotion, a telltale sign of meanings converging on one another. He is a father, and, in his world, all fathers love their children: He cannot fathom the use of a child to commit acts of terrorism. Throughout *Operation Dark Heart* violence, confusion, anger, and the emotions of a damaged self result in intersections of meaning. Hynes says the experience of war is a "journey from innocence into experience" (17), and this journey might always relate, in some form, to trauma. However, an exploration of intersection reveals that the inability to perceive a traumatic event might be the by-product of competing realities. Shaffer's experience, training and worldview have no value in the wartime reality. As a result, he is unprepared. The significance of Shaffer's lack of preparation is that all soldiers are unprepared when they experience a wartime reality.

Cathy Caruth's paradox of trauma, as discussed in the chapter on Shoshana Johnson and wartime self, coincides with combat: "Traumatic experience, beyond the psychological dimension of suffering it involves, suggests a certain paradox: that the most direct seeing of a violent event may occur as an absolute inability to know it; that

immediacy, paradoxically, may take the form of belatedness" (91-92). The emotions that are suppressed during combat are sifted through as war author's recount repressed memories. Caruth's process is at work when Shaffer gives the conclusion to the hectic scene:

> Then suddenly, out of the corner of my eye, I saw something. The shiny object fluttered in a sudden wind. Bombs don't flutter. I hesitated, my mind rocketing over the possibilities. The device the boy threw was blue and silver. Then I caught sight of a familiar logo … It wasn't a bomb. It was a silver-and-blue Capri Sun juice container … A freakin' juice box. Just like the ones my son drank when we were at Boy Scout camp together right before I left. (44)

Based on Johnson's memoir, memories can be clouded by trauma and interpretation of past events. Shaffer writes both of these scenes from the distance of the future. His retrospection, in both cases, is clouded by trauma because "[t]he story of a combatant or bystander witnessing a battle unfold live thus becomes a testimony to the mediated quality of an event that ostensibly gains its significance from the immediacy of its physical horrors" (Mieszkowski 1649). Shaffer immediately links the Capri Sun juice container—the moment when he almost had to commit the unspeakable act of killing a child to save his own life—with the life of his friends on the camping trip.

Interestingly, the storm described in the camp scene represents the same kind of danger posed by the child with the would-be bomb. Shaffer says that "Alexander and I ran for the tents—as did everyone else." But in the scene with the terrorist child, his reaction is to point his gun and take the child's life. Shaffer concludes the scene: "I

lowered my rifle, slumped back in my seat, and let out my breath that I had instinctively held for the past few seconds. The kid was fading into the crowd, but I caught his eye and stared at him. He looked to be about the same age as Alexander" (45). The convoy and the camp scene's opposites are as follows: Shaffer's child is innocent and the Afghani child is a perceived threat. Time slows down for Shaffer in Afghanistan; in the camp scene the storm comes rushing in. The response in the scene with the storm is defensive while at war Shaffer responds with aggression.

Significant intersections between the two realities offer insight into the very nature of wartime trauma. What causes the trauma? Where does it begin and end? The search for answers to these questions can lead to real, tangible knowledge about how to predict and deal with the aftereffects. The juice box scene is not the only site of trauma in Shaffer's memoir. He describes an IED attack:

> The giant blast washed over us, coming at us through the tires, the firewalls, and the windshields of the convoy I was commanding. We were in the crowded center of Bagram village, within sight of the base … *Shit*. An IED … I could see a mushroom cloud billow up just off to the right of my windshield near the gates of the base. I grabbed the radio. "Keep going!" I shouted into it … It was as if the cars suddenly got stuck in cement. Panic-stricken drivers hopped out of vehicles and began running back and forth. As the smoke billowed up, pedestrians dropped their goods and joined them. Bicycles were thrown down in our path. People screamed and pushed, and knocked against our vehicles. No one seemed to know where to go, what to do. (131)

Training comes into play only when Shaffer gives the order to keep going, a standard operating procedure for exiting an enemy bottleneck. In order to avoid battles being fought at a time and place of the enemy's choosing, current procedures dictate that U.S. forces will first exit the "kill zone"—the initial area of an ambush—before assessing damages or engaging hostile forces. But Shaffer cannot exit the kill zone: He is stuck and, as a result, his training falls short of meeting the needs of the wartime reality. The intersection between the needs of his current situation and his training results in significance that takes the form of confusion: Shaffer's only reaction is four-letter explicative and the people in the street transform into a mob. Again, before providing the conclusion to this action scene, Shaffer reverts to describing the terrain, the history of the airbase, and some of the events leading up to the ambush.

In itself, this tactic of constructed narration is an intersection. It is an act of psychic distancing—a way for Shaffer to remain in control of the situation—long after the battle comes to an end. In the anti-reality of war, there is nothing but chaos, confusion and a lack of control. But Shaffer's narration trumps the lack of control common in "anti-reality" when he switches the narration to describing the history of Soviet occupation (132), concluding with the scene of a tank graveyard that is "a vivid example of the kind of trap Afghanistan could become" (135). Significance emerges on two levels from this assertion: First, in the scene of this battle, Afghanistan had become a trap. Also, Shaffer depicts the war effort as a whole as a potential trap. Throughout the book, Shaffer politicizes his every action, shedding light on governmental intrusion upon the military war effort. And it leads to the pinnacle of meaning in war narration, a truth that I will discuss in more detail later.

In the meantime, Shaffer continues to describe the battle scene: "We struggled to say [sic] focused, surrounded by confusion and hysteria. To maintain concentration, I literally [sic] had to take a step outside myself. *This is Tony playing me in a movie*, I told myself. It was a way of detaching to get over the shock of what had just happen. Don't worry. It's just a movie" (136). The intersection of meaning, again, is the contradiction of training and chaos. Shaffer's coping mechanism is to step outside of himself and view the whole thing as a movie; he must distance himself from his self in order to avoid death. Death is the ultimate distance from one's self, and Shaffer finds that in war approaching this state of being is exactly what keeps a man alive.

Finally, as terrorists surround the group via the rooftops above the streets, help arrives:

> Out of the windows, I could see an MP yelling at the Afghans, getting them out of the way as the vehicles made their way slowly toward us. Drivers looked up, saw what was coming, and jumped into cars and trucks to creep out of their path … I looked up. The figures had faded away. What saved us, I realized later, was that the blast had gone off too early and the traffic had compressed so quickly, we hadn't had a chance to move into their kill zone. They screwed up. Otherwise, we would have been dead. (138)

It is not the military that saves Shaffer and his comrades; it is the mistakes of the enemy. The author finds he is totally unprepared for the experience of combat in this scene. But who is ever prepared for a life-threatening experience? This scene reveals something about the nature of trauma: Caruth is correct in her paradox. It is not possible to fully

experience a traumatizing experience in the moment it happens. Shaffer's reaction is pure, unadulterated confusion. It is not until later, when he writes his narrative, that he can fully process his own experience. At the point of intersection between peacetime training and wartime combat, insight into trauma emerges: A lack of preparation is traumatic. One can never be prepared for war. Therefore, war, in itself, is traumatic. War memoirs uniformly focus on the shortcomings inherent with training. Sometimes, as with the WWI memoirist Hervey Allen, the impracticality of training dredges up feelings of anger and resentment:

> It was the grim common sense of the "doughboy" and not our obsolete and impossible tactics that won that ground. Oh! The precious time wasted in our elaborate, useless, murderous science called "musketry." It is as much out of style as the musket from which it takes its name. Teaching it should be made a court-martial offense. It is murder in print. Battles were not fought in lines. (139)

The American military no longer fights the type of trench warfare experienced by Allen. However, the lack of preparation has a similar effect on Shaffer. He almost dies because his leaders were unable to prepare him for the ambush. It is not necessarily anyone's fault: Peacetime training exercises cannot embody the actual experience of war. This significance cannot be easily explored; not every combat experience or source of trauma is the same. However, our understanding of trauma increases examining the meaning of opposites within a single scene. More importantly, our understanding of the soldier recounting trauma through the juxtaposition of these opposites allows us to understand the traumatized soldier.

Shoshana Johnson's memorial is significant in that it shows at least one point of agreement among the two realities: "[W]ar makes you dead" (O'Brien 80). The point of intersection in Johnson's reality is her wartime self. The government created a version of that self that is a heroic symbol of American victory. Oppositely, Johnson paints a human portrait of herself and a symbol of deceit in the American war effort. The two children in Shaffer's story are opposites. In many ways, in Shaffer's anti-reality the Afghani child represents an anti-son in that everything about him is opposite in meaning. The intersection of training and combat is another set of opposites: The significance that emerges has to do with understanding the origins of trauma and the resentment that emerges when training falls short of providing safety. Nothing can change truth, it is immutable. The one extracted from Johnson's memoir is that war leads to death. Shaffer's memoir, at this point, has not yielded anything that can alter or change this fact, not even training, the one thing meant to counteract death. What is the one constant to be found between the two children? What is the source of meaning to be derived using Fussell's "irony-assisted recall"? The answer may simply be the Capri-Sun juice box. In the end, the search for truth will ultimately have many dead ends, but that is not to say the significance uncovered during the process is without value. It is simply that a truthful interpretation is not possible using our current, peacetime rhetoric.

While many extrapolations and interpretations could be drawn about the juice box, the fact of the matter is that the beverage container escapes interpretation. However, examining the different possibilities reveals meaning in the most basic form of agreement between the two realities. First, the Capri Sun juice container must be a rarity in the impoverished cities of Afghanistan. Because the country is not exactly a target

demographic for American businesses, the box could be a symbol of American capitalism. Furthermore, the child's throwing it at the convoy could be construed as a rejection of the American way of life. In the peacetime reality the juice box brings nourishment; in war it brings death. The point is this: Examining the irony of the situation—the sense of things not being what they seem—of O'Brien's "seemingness" (71), opens the simplest points of intersection up for interpretation. And exploring these areas further leads to finding significance.

One might be tempted to ignore the juice box as significant because the combat scene it comes from is anti-climatic. At the same time, one might be tempted to make to assert that truth exists in the combat scene with the IED because it has a conclusive ending. However, the term anti-climatic holds an opposite meaning in war: For Shaffer, the simple act of pointing his weapon at the child brought up years of training, thoughts about his son, and the guilt of possibly killing a young boy. In the IED scene, the points of intersection converge upon peacetime training and anti-reality's combat, but nothing changes the truth that "War makes you dead." Jan Mieszkowski understands the importance of looking for significance in places that may seem obscure or insignificant:

> Where understanding of war is concerned, seeing is only part of the task at hand. Many ideological forces inform the ambition (or lack of ambition) to experience vicariously under fire. To delineate them in their full complexity, however, it must be recognized that any representation of a battle is first and foremost a representation of the difficulty of conceptualizing the disjunction between war as a physical act of demolition and war as a set of signifying practices that perform an intent.

> If we ignore this difficulty … we will be at risk of concluding that since there is currently nothing to see, there is probably nothing happening. (1660)

Shaffer intended to kill the boy had the Capri Sun box been a bomb, and his intent has far-reaching implications. For instance, what does it say about him as a man? Should he not gladly give his own life for the sake of a young child? But it is not that simple. The boy could have killed other soldiers both in the present and later.

Relating a shared truth in both peace and war serves as a starting point for understanding war through the language of peace. What is the language of war? And how is this language any different from the language of peace? Certainly, the ability to communicate wartime experience goes beyond grammatical constructs and linguistic variations particular to each environment. James Dawes comments on this subject in his aptly titled work *The Language of War*:

> Importantly, both the emancipator and disciplinary models of language and violence are hortatory; they make claims upon us. Because conceptions of language are a factor in the invention, obfuscation, or realization of particular social practices, we cannot opt out: to view language merely as an ideological neutral tool, capable of serving a multiplicity of purposes, is to take a particular sort of stance with a set of consequences. (21)

Dawes emphasizes the "consequences" associated with interpreting wartime language using peacetime rhetoric. Certainly, these consequences proved true in my exercise with the juice box. Almost infinite possibilities emerge. *I'm Still Standing* is a work influenced

by trauma— "neither true not false" (Swofford 2)—a fictive hybrid that reveals fictive versions of wartime self. However, these problems with creating and discovering self are only symptoms of the greater issue of anti-reality.

In Johnson's anti-reality, truth escapes definition. However, significance comes from the consensus about war and death made understandable through her memorial. This significance allows for a charting of wartime reality and the understanding of a simple truth: War leads to death. Johnson's invention establishes significance despite the "obfuscation, or realization of social practices" brought on by trauma and battled in form of third-party intrusions. The importance of establishing truth comes from the intersections revealed: Every conflict between the competing narratives in a single memoir represents a potential element of truth to be explored and understood as separate but equal in both peacetime and wartime realities.

In distinguishing the characteristics of war's form of existence, Hynes thinks along the same lines: "I called this desolation 'landscape,' but it isn't that: it's *anti*-landscape, an entirely strange terrain with nothing natural left in it. It's the antithesis of the comprehensible natural world" (7). Hynes is correct in that the "strange terrain" is the "antithesis of the comprehensible natural world," but he is wrong to assert that there is nothing natural to be found in this anti-reality. The anti-reality of war is full of meaning based upon a separate worldview where "[t]he solitary body of the suicide bomber, on the one hand, finds itself opposed, on the other, to the smart bombs and pilotless drones of an aerial warfare visible only on monitors" (Jameson 1547). Fredric Jameson points out a more obvious contradiction about the realities of war and peace: The peacetime observers and wartime combatants have different concepts of Shaffer's war. The suicide bomber is

close and personal. Peacetime reality, especially the type that results in the type of disconnected warfare mentioned by Jameson, is detached from warfare. But both of these parties seek to kill, maim, and defeat the enemy. So, even in this seemingly opposite set of meanings, the very existence of an intersection reveals significance: Both sides seek to kill.

Before a war memoirist can write about war, he first has to experience war. And before a soldier can learn how to write about war, he has to learn the language of war. Every war memoir attempts to describe war from the safe, comfortable remove of peacetime reality. When living in a world of opposites, Shaffer requires a way to convey the seemingly unreal reality that he experiences. His need is not dissimilar to the way in which a person learns another language. Almost always, foreign speakers will stick to the words they know and relate things via these words until a more accurate mode of conveyance is learned. For Shaffer, this discursive mode is science fiction. Throughout *Operation Dark Heart* Shaffer explains things in terms of popular science fiction references: "Dark Arts" (14), "Jedi Knights" (14), "dark side of the force" (8), "Babylon 5" (48), "Death Star" (206), "Twilight Zone" (222), and "*X-Files*' Cancer Man" (270), among others. Shaffer sees himself as a part of reality that can only be explained using science-fiction references from the fringes of peacetime thought and discourse.

In the combat scene with the IED, Shaffer claims to go outside of himself and to pretend he was an actor in a movie. This role-playing is his way of staying alive. Further, more complex implementations of fiction are necessary for the author to explain his role in the war: "We were seen as the dangerous men—knuckle draggers who shouldn't be in the intellectual mecca that was the DIA" (16). Opposite to the scientifically advanced,

futuristic warfare described by Jameson and opposite to the science fiction used by Shaffer throughout his book, this description is both unflattering and meant to reflect how the military element of the intelligence war in Afghanistan is viewed by the DIA, the peacetime reality. And the description is another point of intersection between the two realities. Shaffer, who had worked for the DIA in a civilian capacity, has two competing narratives of himself. These narratives are not constructed for the author. Instead, they represent how he assumes two roles within the single war and interprets the Afghanistan war using both peacetime and wartime rhetoric. But what significance can be found in this intersection?

Mieszkowski understands the problems inherent with interpreting warfare as well as finding meaning in death and suffering:

> Today we continue to be plagued by uncertainty about what it means to watch war and what we can hope to learn by doing so. In exploring, these problems, contemporary scholars have focused not simply on the challenges of accurately representing warfare visually or verbally but also on how military operations are organized by the imperative to tell their own story. (1649)

Part of the compulsion to record a wartime reality has to do with an innate need to describe what is *witnessed* and what is *felt*. Shaffer's disparate descriptions of himself reflect a sense of distrust and condescension on the part of those associated with the peacetime reality. He is simultaneously a part of and looked down upon by the DIA because of his status as a soldier. And his status is significant because it shapes his

attitude and the purpose behind writing *Operation Dark Heart* as a politicized attempt at truth.

Truth emerges as the intersection between the realities of war and peace—of Afghanistan itself—in *Operation Dark Heart*. Shaffer's memoir centers on an attempt to reveal this truth as a soldier who walks between the worlds as both a soldier and DIA officer. He follows the familiar pattern of attempting to establish the authority needed to relate truth early in his story: "I learned that telling the truth isn't that bad. It's a lesson I've applied many times in my life when something I did ran me into trouble" (10). Shaffer builds a compelling case to bolster his credibility: Early in the story he reveals he was raised in a military family, he is a professional who takes his career very seriously, and he believes in the cause of his war. Shaffer goes as far as to discuss deficiencies within the military ranks to prove his objectivity:

> The problem had become that achieving victory had been lost in the process—measures of performance became the measure to which one's military success was held. What got dropped was the focus on measures of effectiveness—or achieving victory. The military tends to worship mediocrity. Achieving and maintaining standards—even if those standards do not achieve victory—is the safest course of action. Follow process, no matter what. (60)

Shaffer makes his frustration explicit. In the juice-box scene, his frustration comes from having to fight his training and not shoot the young boy who posed a threat. Again, training falls short of the needs of war's anti-reality, and Shaffer is not shy about addressing the shortcomings of the military. But he knows that the military is a much

needed part of any war. What he is not sure about—the question he seems to propose—is, "What is the role of the DIA in the Afghanistan War?"

Shaffer finds a need to interweave both his role in the war as a civilian and as a soldier. Filling both roles allows for him to establish credibility and to complete the task of decrying bureaucratic mistakes. But he also needs to interweave these versions of his self in order to expose points of intersection between the two realities. Shaffer interweaves his experience in explaining his introduction to the war:

> It was to be the longest, strangest period of my life when, despite the best efforts of myself, my team, and some of my commanding officers, the United States squandered the momentum it had after defeating the Taliban in Afghanistan after the September 11 attacks. Official timidity, bureaucratic foot-dragging, overanalysis—I saw it leading up to the September 11 attacks, I saw it in Afghanistan while I served there, and I see it still today. (2)

Shaffer claims that his wartime experience is one of the "strangest" experiences of his life. And this strangeness is, in part, due to the government's mismanagement of the war. He cannot wrap his brain around the decision making that goes on all around him, he cannot understand how a kid could possibly be synonymous with a terrorist, he does not know why his training is insufficient, and Shaffer's only way to describe Afghanistan is "strange."

Hynes echoes Shaffer's description of Afghanistan: "Strangeness is the great constant in remembered wars. The young man who goes to war enters a strange world governed by strange rules, where everything that is not required is forbidden, a world

without women or children or old people, a violent and dangerous world where, out there in the darkness, or just over a hill strangers wait whose job it is to kill you" (19).When Shaffer accepts his new role as soldier, he explains that he was ignorant of warfare despite his training and experience. His expertise derives itself from a peacetime reality, and it holds little meaning in Afghanistan. Shaffer explains that he had no "preconceived notions" when he arrived in Afghanistan. The author accepts his dual role of soldier/officer with the hope of winning the War on Terrorism. But the concept of a "War on Terrorism" is a peacetime construct based upon America's interpretation and justification of the war. The rhetoric does little to describe the actual events playing out in Shaffer's Afghanistan experience. Furthermore, the phrase does little to account for the child that Shaffer almost shoots over a juice box. Still, it is this direct wartime experience that allows him the opportunity to describe the wartime reality.

Shaffer explains his job early in *Operation Dark Heart*: "I was part of the 'dark side of the force'—the shadowy elements of the Department of Defense and the rest of the U.S. government that function outside the bounds of the normal system. Our job was to protect the country through subterfuge and deception. Hide the truth to get the truth, as we say" (8). The author is part of an organization that deals in the procurement and exchange of information. And Shaffer has years of experience before putting his talents to work in support of the War on Terrorism. However, his experience and training come from *within* "the bounds of the normal system." As a result, Shaffer is unprepared for the very thing he prepared for.

Shaffer is unhappy with the way the war is managed, and he attempts to change things by asserting his experience as a soldier. The soldier is ameliorated in the eyes of

the public; soldiers are not viewed as "knuckle-draggers" as is the case by the DIA. And these opposite definitions offer a point of intersection between the two realities. The significance behind this intersection deals with why Shaffer decries the war management—not the effort, the management—and insight can be drawn from the irony of the situation: The DIA—the peacetime agency responsible for intelligence in the war—has no respect for the individuals actually fighting the war. However, Shaffer's persona in *Operation Dark Heart* is that of a soldier, and he is punished for trying to live in both worlds:

> So that is it. You know the rest of the story—and how, in the middle of combat in Afghanistan, I unknowingly sowed the seeds of my own career's demise. I revealed embarrassing mistakes made by Defense Intelligence and by multiple senior leaders in DoD in mismanaging pre-9/11 intelligence information and then trying to cover up for their incompetence from the 9/11 Commission. (275)

Shaffer refers to his testimony that he provided for a congressional hearing on "Operation Able Danger," an anti-terrorism mission conducted before the Iraq War. However, telling the truth results in a ruined career for Shaffer: The military uses the excuse of $300 in illegal expenditures to remove him from his civilian job in the DIA (271). Shaffer's firing is another point of intersection. The opposites here are the enunciation of truth for the needs of the whole versus the silencing of an individual for the needs of a few. Truth, for one reality, is countered with lies by the other reality.

Just as with Johnson, the government tries to erase Shaffer's narration. However, Shaffer does not sit idly by while his beliefs and past are appropriated by the larger war effort. In his epilogue, Shaffer describes life after the DIA's actions against him:

> I spent the next three months in limbo, then left active duty and resumed my position as a DIA civilian employee in June 2004. I was placed on paid administrative leave while the security clearance suspension wound its way through the system—a process that could take years. So I settled in for the long haul. It took the better part of two years before they finally fired me. (273)

Shaffer remains in the Army Reserves and decides to find out what was really behind his firing. He learns how his testimony about anti-terrorism work—about how the U.S. could have potentially prevented 9/11—made some of his bosses look bad. In fact, the entire classified annex of his report was deleted from the records; the government had erased his work: "It was not about the $300 I was accused of misusing. It all came from my disclosure of the existence of Able Danger to the 9/11 Commission" (273). Shaffer is no longer in war. He is in the reality of peace and his work as an intelligence officer in the war is in the process of being erased as he writes *Operation Dark Heart*. But Shaffer finds that the very important work of narration lends him the credibility and opportunity that the government tried to rob him of through pettiness and deceit. As a result, he regains his past as well as his voice.

Shaffer uses his wartime experience to make a bold accusation about the nature of warfare in Afghanistan: He claims that the war is being lost because of outside intrusion in a concluding section entitled "How to Win in Afghanistan." What's more, his

accusation has bold new consequences when looked at as an intersection. Shaffer believes that peacetime agencies hamper the abilities of soldiers on the ground, that they are uninformed mismanagers with no respect for the common soldier constantly putting his or her life on the line. There are many points of intersection—of opposites ripe for exploration—through Fussell's irony-assisted recall, but there is a larger, more paramount significance to be gleaned from Shaffer's predicament: The cohabitation of peace and war within Afghanistan is, in itself, a point of intersection.[17] What is the problem with the two worlds intersecting? In short, if previous points of intersection are any indication, the reaction that these two neighbors will have to each another will be violent.

Hynes believes that war memoirs are a form of conversion literature: "A war memoir is like autobiography in that it is the personal narrative of one man in his life; though it would be more precise to consider it a subcategory of this genre, conversion-literature, since it is a testament of a profound inner-change in the teller" (5). Hynes is correct to point out this inner change. He continues, "Most war stories begin with a nobody-in-particular young man, who lives through the experience of war, to emerge in the end defined by what happened to him. Out of that nobody, war has forged a Self. Nobody, however young, returns from war still a boy, and in that sense, at least, war does make men" (5). Despite his age, Shaffer does not become a man; at least, he does not become a man in the wartime reality until after he experiences combat. Becoming a man

[17] Paul Fussell understands that this is the result of the two realities intersecting: "[T]he great tragic satire which was the war will be seen to consist of its own smaller constituent satires, or ironic actions" (6). Fussell focuses upon WWI, but, and by extension, the relevance of his work in regards to literature from the Iraq and Afghanistan Wars reveals how war narratives are not time bound.

and making the transition from innocence to experience bestows agency upon the soldier. Shaffer gains the ability to speak of, from, and for the anti-reality.

The government hits back hard. In September 2010, "The Defense Department … paid $47,000 to destroy 9,500 copies of [… Shaffer's] war memoir that the Pentagon contends threatened national security" (Associated Press). Now, *Operation Dark Heart* exists in a heavily redacted form: "The most common redaction in the entire book is Shaffer's cover name, 'Christopher Stryker,' and other popular redactions are references to the National Security Agency, the abbreviation SIGINT (signals intelligence) and comments like 'Guys on phones were always great sources of intel'" (Barum). For all intents and purposes, Shaffer is prohibited from exploring the wartime reality that he experienced. As with Johnson, the government tries to erase his words. This time, the attempt comes in the form of burning his book; they attempt to silence his words by firing him from his job, and their efforts are the necessary reaction to anti-reality.

Similar events have occurred in previous wars. Paul Fussell discusses the famous Christmas Day truce in WWI: "The first Christmas of the war saw an absolute deadlock in the trenches. Both British and German soldiers observed an informal, *ad hoc* Christmas Day truce, meeting in No Man's Land to exchange cigarets and to take snapshots. Outraged, the staff forbad this ever to happen again" (9). This begs the question, "Whose war is it?" Does the war belong to the soldiers fighting it? Or should the soldiers rightfully submit authority to the elected leaders? This is a contentious question. No one doubts the extremes of sacrifice that soldiers make on the battlefield, but no one wants a military run amuck, either. Still, there is something to be said for the

knowledge of an experienced military making command decisions. And this is the significance to be found in the intersection of peace and war in *Operation Dark Heart*.

While the government has good reason to be wary of some of the information in Shaffer's text, the extent of censorship is such that it borders on the absurd: the government chooses to redact seemingly trivial parts of the book, from abbreviations to names of actors referenced "only about 10% of the redacted passages, such as the identity of the CIA station chief in Kabul and a physical description of that station, have 'some conceivable security sensitivity'" (Barum). These statistics come from juxtaposing uncensored versions alongside the redacted text.[18] And the comparison underscores the fact that, in all of our detachment from the wars in the Middle East, such descriptions of anti-reality cannot maintain meaning in the world of peace. Again, this significance is open for debate.

If war cannot exist in peace, the opposite must be true as well. Peace exists in the form of the DIA in Shaffer's Afghanistan memoir. All of the perceived ironies leading up to the conclusion that war and peace cannot exist within the same reality seem to reveal the inability of the DIA, as a peacetime agency, to wage war. The juice-box scene represents a miniscule intersection that can be interpreted in a way that supports this assertion. However, the merit of Shaffer's message about the Afghanistan War is only as

[18] "The government mounted its second intervention so late in the process that galley copies of the original work already had gone out to potential reviewers, and the *New York Times* obtained a copy and ran a side-by-side comparison of an original and redacted page. The redactions thus tell insurgents exactly what the DIA and NSA think should be kept out of their hands. Buying up and pulping all the existing unredacted copies of the book give an air of desperation; it also brought far more attention to the book than it would have gained otherwise. The attempted coverup was a sloppy, ill-conceived, poorly timed response. This matter required quiet professionalism but instead became a public embarrassment" (Editorial).

important as we—the peacetime audience—gives it credit for being: "Personal narratives are not history and can't be; they speak each with its own human voice, as history does not, and they find their own shapes, which are not the shapes of history. They are neither better nor worse, neither more nor less valuable that history; they are simply different" (Hynes 16).

Any DIA agent could easily present an alternative truth. Fussell believes that "[e]very war constitutes an irony of situation because its means are so melodramatically disproportionate to its presumed ends. In the Great War eight million people were destroyed because two persons, the Archduke Francis Ferdinand and his Consort, had been shot" (7). In the War on Terror it all goes back to nineteen terrorists crashing into the World Trade Center. Then the reasons for war expand to include the 3,000+ individuals who died in the attacks, the damaged trade market world-wide, threats of weapons of mass destruction, and the list goes on until the reason for war includes those who have died in the war. Eventually, the reason for war becomes war itself.

The truth found in Johnson's memoir that war always leads to death is reiterated by O'Brien and William Butler Yeats. I revealed this truth by examining the significance the intersecting selves in *I'm Still Standing*. Truth and authority are endlessly contested in the autobiographical genre as a whole, and points of intersection seem to offer insight into both of these sources of contention. Shaffer's intersection deals with competing versions of the same war. And, like Johnson's, his truth is predated by another famous poet:

> If in some smothering dreams you too could pace
> Behind the wagon that we flung him in,

And watch the white eyes writhing in his face,

His hanging face, like a devil's sick of sin;

If you could hear, at every jolt, the blood

Come gargling from the froth-corrupted lungs,

Obscene as cancer, bitter as the cud

Of vile, incurable sores on innocent tongues,—

My friend, you would not tell with such high zest

To children ardent for some desperate glory,

The old Lie: *Dulce et decorum est*

Pro patria mori. (Owen 17-28)

Wilfred Owen penned these lines after experiencing his own anti-reality in WWI. His words use the same obscenity espoused by Johnson, a summoning of the horrors of war to relate one of the few truths in meaning to be found therein: The innocent must be made aware of the experience of war. That is the explicit goal of Shaffer's memoir; he uses his wartime experience to call into question government intrusion. However, the point of intersection between military and civilian approaches to the war reveals a truth of detachment present in our country. At the same time, both the peacetime and wartime realities must exist in order to give the war purpose. Countries must believe in the wars they choose to fight.

A war without purpose or meaning would rage on forever. And that is the second truth to be extracted from any war memoir. Shaffer's memoir reveals anti-reality where peacetime rhetoric falls short in describing the wartime experience. Every meaning in peace has an opposite meaning in war's anti-reality. And the point where these two

meanings contradict each other in the memoir is best viewed as a significant point of intersection which must be explored by the memoirist. It is a compulsion—a need inherent in every soldier who experiences combat—to relive that experience. The war memoir is a healthy way of exploring experience and creating the wartime self. But not every soldier writes, and the consequences of this inaction or inability may help to explain some of the most pressing issues having to do with the well-being of the troops currently returning from combat.

CHAPTER III—The Protean Wartime Self: Colby Buzzell's Hybrid Reality in *My War: Killing Time in Iraq*

Shoshana Johnson's memoir reveals how balancing the role of ethnographer with the search for wartime self allows an author to regain control over her own narrative. Johnson battled trauma, problems with memory, and third-party intrusion to create and discover the woman she was in the Iraq War. Anthony Shaffer battled these same problems, revealing how war's anti-reality and meaning can be extracted from the seemingly pointless and destructive world that exists on the battlefield. Significance is what emerges from studying the points of intersection between meaning in the peacetime and wartime realities. Anthony Shaffer's son is the opposite of an Afghani boy in *Operation Dark Heart*. In the peacetime reality, Shaffer's sun drank juice as an unambiguous form of sustenance. However, the Afghani boy who exists as Shaffer's son's opposite throws a Capri Sun juice box towards his convoy in a way that threatens death upon the author and his comrades. The two boys are opposites, and the juice box is a point of intersection. The two characters intersect at the point of a Capri Sun juice container held by each boy in his respective reality. Shaffer's son represents progeny and life while the Afghani boy represents a child displaced by war and the threat of death. When examined closely, the significance of intersections can, but not always, lead to a truth in both realities. In *I'm Still Standing*, the wartime self is a symptom of significance, and Johnson's memorial reveals the simple, but profound truth that war kills. Of course, war is a destructive act, but the point is this: Despite whatever grand reasoning, moral superiority, and justifications countries and their leaders use to wage war, the killing of soldiers from one country by men from another undermines every good intention.

The truths found in war writing hold up in the worldviews of either reality's inhabitants. Shaffer's truth pertains to the highly politicized nature of the Afghanistan War: *Operation Dark Heart* is the story of a single man who can walk between the worlds of war and peace because of his dual role of soldier and officer in the DIA. Shaffer's point of intersection is Afghanistan itself because of the involvement of both military and civilian organizations in the war. Shaffer attempts to criticize government intrusion upon the war, but his conclusions are met with opposite truths when they are interpreted by a peacetime audience: Wars cannot be maintained without the support of the countries that start them. Johnson's and Shaffer's truths are evident in every war memoir. This is why the words of Tim O'Brien, Anthony Swofford, Paul Fussell, and Samuel Hynes have been so applicable. Every point of intersection offers a chance to discover more truths about the reality of war. However, there are also things we can learn about our own world—the reality of peace—from the men and women who experience and write about war.

In this way, memoirs emerging from the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan offer new possibilities for scholarship on war writing. War memoirs are windows into the worlds presented by the authors, and the significance found in these worlds helps to unravel the constructedness of the narrators themselves. However, the immediacy provided by new mediums of communication like email, social networking sites, and war blogs limit this constructedness. Iraq War veteran Colby Buzzell wrote about traumatic experiences as they happened and transformed his blog into the bestselling "blook," or blog-turned-book, *My War: Killing Time in Iraq*. Buzzell's work is not geographically and temporally removed from the war it seeks to describe. The author incorporates the politics and

policies shaping events as they unfold. He does not harkens back to policies that were in place in the past, trying to make sense of—contextualize—his own experience within a puzzle of interconnectedness. Buzzell's blog uses the language of an author catering to the peacetime audience's need to understand. As a result, the author's journey from innocence into experience is told in a way that those without knowledge of *his war* can understand, unaffected by trauma, time, and circumstance. Unlike the other authors mentioned thus far, Buzzell speaks *from* the reality of war, and with an immediacy that he derives from a mode of peacetime communication. As a result, Buzzell's wartime reality is a hybrid of peace and war.

Previously, truth has been a slippery subject in terms of war because the definition of truth hails from the rhetoric of our peacetime reality. When we claim something is truthful, we suggest that the facts are verifiable, or the message coincides with what we know about the world. Johnson had to subvert the truth in order to create a fictionalization of her wartime self, and Shaffer's truth is revealed only because it is the opposite of what he claims about the war. Everything deemed as significant or true in the words of these two authors must be taken with the proverbial grain of salt because of skewing in the form of trauma, time, and/or circumstance. But Colby Buzzell's blook helps the reader to see past these problems of authority: His blog is a window into the events unfolding around him, as they happen. In "'Blogs of War': Weblogs as News" Candace Wall discusses the role of blogs in reporting on war:

> In terms of their narrative style, the blogs are notable for their personalization. The sharing of personal information and sometimes providing diary-like personal accounts of events emphasizes the non-

> professional and non-elite status of most of these blogs. The use of personal opinion gives a certain intimacy to the blogs and suggests that the blogger is someone who is not manipulated by a corporate boss or filter of professionalism. The sharing of personal information … conveys a sense of transparency, suggesting that visitors are seeing the "real" inner workings of the site. (167)

According to Wall, war blogs help to translate the experience of war into a language that non-combatants can understand. Plus, the position of the war blogger is that of the common man or woman striving to survive war's harsh reality. The search for self becomes the presentation of self for a peacetime audience in *My War*. Buzzell is able to relate with his audience because they can see themselves in the author's shoes, being changed by war. As a result, and because Buzzell reveals truth in the language of peace, it is possible to learn truths about war that are applicable in the opposite reality.

Buzzell positions himself as someone that the audience can relate to by taking on the military establishment. He writes as an outsider from suburban California: "Kids from the suburbs don't really join the military" (3). And when he describes talking to the recruiter, Buzzell is not the typical, patriotic young man looking to serve his country: "I told him my rap sheet (a couple of assault-and-battery charges, drunk in public, shoplifting, open containers, that kinda crap), and he said, 'No problem'" (14). To meet the drug requirements, Buzzell describes being given a "miracle drink" that helped him pass "the drug test with flying colors" (15). And in a short time the skateboarding anti-hero is in the Army and ready for "one hell of an adventure" (21). It is because of his outsider status that Buzzell's fight against false narratives is not the same as the narrative

struggles of Johnson and Shaffer: Those authors fought to turn back the clock to undo damage already done by the government. Buzzell's fight is very much in the present, and that immediacy lends not only to Buzzell's ability to engage with his audience, but with his ability to engage with his narrative. On August 4, 2004, when Buzzell and the 1st Battalion, 23d Infantry (Stryker Brigade) fight a six-hour battle with enemy forces in Mosul, Iraq (Reardon 49-50). At 5:23 PM the next day Buzzell posts his account, "Men in Black" to his blog (260). The military releases little information about the battle, saying that American forces operated only in a supporting role (Armed Forces). However, Buzzell tells a very different story in "Men in Black," beginning with the words, "Now here's what really happened" (248). After a heavy mortar attack that last over 20 minutes, Buzzell makes the following clarifications about the report provided by the U.S. Armed Forces:

> Sgt. Horrocks ripped open the door and yelled, "grab your guys! And go to the motor pool! The whole BATTALION is rolling out!" Holy shit! The whole battalion?! This must be big … At the motor pool, everybody was strapping on their kits and getting their shit ready as fast as they could. One by one the Strykers were rolling out of the motor pool ready to hunt down whoever was fucking with us. Soldiers in the hatches of the vehicles were hooting and hollering, yelling their war cries and doing the Indian yell thing as they drove off and locked and loaded their weapons. (248-49)

Support units live up to their name: They make sure the "beans and bullets" get to where they need to be so that the combat units can sustain combat. In the previous chapter, Shaffer revealed the kind of combat experienced by an intelligence unit when he

described his convoy being attacked outside of his base in Afghanistan. Support units almost exclusively fight on the defensive. Buzzell's unit is not about to provide support; he and his fellow soldiers are about to wage war.

Buzzell's blog posts occur only days if not hours after the events described. As a result, his blook is akin to a work of ethnography written in real time. Buzzell's war blog is still constructed; he chooses how to portray himself, but as an author, he writes from within war, subverting it through peacetime rhetoric. Thomas Couser claims that autobiographers are "culture bound, confine[d] in time and space—itself limited in authority" (247). Couser believes that authority in a war memoir is limited by the perspective of the author. In this way, Buzzell grapples the trouble inherent with cross-cultural presentations of the self. Couser goes on to explain that "the troubling nature of bicultural collaborative production, particularly when the parties to collaboration understand authorship in fundamentally different ways" is apparent (247). Buzzell's work is very much the product of bicultural collaboration: He comes from one reality, he experiences another, and the reality of peace beckons his story while the reality of war asserts its dominance over his present. Buzzell does not understand how meaning reverses itself when one makes the journey form innocence to experience. At the same time, he is not fully entangled in the rhetoric of war because he has yet to fully make this journey. Buzzell defines himself in the terms of the peacetime reality until after this journey is complete. Therefore, any truth that emerges from his ethnographic endeavor will be a truth to the peacetime reality despite being written from within the confines of anti-reality.

Brandon Lingle gets at Buzzell's motivation for opposing the encroaching, official narrative of the war, showing the similarities between *My War* and the picaresque narrative. Lingle claims that in 2009 there were more than 2,400 military related blogs "allow[ed] unheard voices into the global dialogue quicker than ever before" (11). Buzzell's blog is his chance to connect with the world through his account. Hynes provides yet another reason behind Buzzell's motivation: "It's easy to see why men remember their wars. For most men who fight, war is their one contact with the world of great doings … that one time when their lives intersect with history, one opportunity to act in great events" (2). Buzzell's ethnography interlaces with the imperative to write—to assert himself—before third parties establish a false narrative. After all, and as Donald Anderson accurately states: "What is remembered or imagined *becomes* reality. And, if we *don't* create our personal versions of the past, someone else will do it for us. This is frightening and political fact" (118). But what can war writing teach us about our own world?

Truth in *My War* is best found in the "Men in Black" entry because this story comes before his blog is shut down, before the author becomes aware of military intelligence reading his logs, and before he is interviewed by newspapers throughout the country. At the point where Sgt. Horrocks comes bursting through his door, Buzzell still utilizes the language of innocence, and this freshness is what gives him more authority than any author I have examined so far. Lingle claims, "It is ironic that a figure like Buzzell provides a more accurate account of an event than the government or media" (16). Indeed, the author is brash; his language is best described as "colorful"; and he makes no qualms about his role in combat operations. For instance, Buzzell directly

addresses the intelligence officials that he believes are monitoring his writing after "Men in Black" gains national attention:

> I would like to take this time now to say a nice warm Mar-Haba (that's "welcome" in Arabic) to all my new readers down at MI who are now reading this site and have this bookmarked on their computers. Glad to have you all aboard, and I hope you like the site. Hopefully you'll find this site more entertaining than most of that boring crap I'm sure you guys have to sift through all day. (285)

Buzzell has a sense of humor, and he seems unafraid to call it like he sees it. His willingness to depict himself honestly is, perhaps, his most striking if not redeemable attribute.

The author describes one mission where his unit engages with terrorists firing from within a mosque. According to Standard Operating Procedures, it is against the rules to fire upon a place of worship unless the building places an immediate threat to operational security. Buzzell is placed in exactly this kind of situation: "I then directed my M240 Bravo machine gun toward the tower and pulled the trigger completely back and didn't let go until I was completely out of rounds. Links and brass shells spitting out of the right side of my weapon, making a huge mess all over. It was fucking beautiful" (134). The author is straight and to the point about the events that transpire; his description is completely without emotion; but the emotion is easy to discern from his reaction to the situation: "I was thinking to myself, 'Jesus Christ, I can't believe I'm actually shooting at a holy place of worship.' I thought we weren't allowed to do this kind of thing" (134). Obviously, Buzzell is dealing with an extremely taboo subject. On

one hand, he is destroying a holy building in the midst of a war where winning the "hearts and minds" of the people is an important part of achieving victory. On the other hand, his life is in jeopardy and he is reacting in the only way that he can. Buzzell does not pick sides; he does not play politics; he is honest enough to say that he thought the sight of his weapon performing its function is "beautiful" and his allegiance seems to be to the reader of his blog.

Shoshana Johnson depicts herself as someone who could have curled up in the fetal position when her convoy was ambushed: "Under other circumstances, I would have curled into a fetal position, grabbed my wounds, screamed for help, been paralyzed in pain and fear, but as much as it hurt, there was too much stuff going on to pay any attention to it" (1). Her narrative is in direct opposition to the hero's narrative ascribed to her by the government. Buzzell does something different. His blog seems so immediate—his words so unadulterated—that he appears to lack any kind of hindsight whatsoever when he writes. In this way, the author places himself outside of his narrative; there is no search for self; any attempts at amelioration or pejoration are so clearly contrived that they ask to be ignored. And that is how Buzzell is more of a commentator—a philosopher exploring the nature of his world—than an author looking back upon it. His approach and his blog set him apart from other war authors and he gains the ability to derive meaning from the war.

Lingle is correct in using the word "picaro"[19] to describe Buzzell: "His identification with the punk subculture and use of a blog place him on the margins of mainstream society and establish his position as an outsider" (12). Lingle believes

[19] Lingle defines the term picaro as follows: "Picaros, or rogues, are able to both satirize and negotiate hegemonic power structures at the same time" (12).

Buzzell is an outsider. However, he should be viewed as an insider—very much a part of the wartime reality but using the peacetime reality's rhetoric—creating his own narrative. This is not the same as Johnson: *I'm Still Standing* is a book written in the wake of war, not in the midst of it, and the author herself is removed from her experiences by time and trauma. Shaffer is a part of the wartime reality, but his self doubles as a civilian—he is a spy among the intelligence gathering community—because he is a soldier. Johnson is a civilian writing for the benefit of civilians who need to *understand* her war; Shaffer writes as a soldier for the benefit of the soldiers *fighting* the Afghanistan War. Buzzell is different from both: He writes as a soldier for the civilians who *read* his blog. As a result, his words are not skewed like Johnson's words. *My War* is a work of subversion in that it undermines the expectations the author's audience have about soldiers: By acknowledging fear and questionable actions committed out of necessity with little mention of afterthought or regret, Buzzell asks the reader of his blook to question themselves about what they expect a war story to be about. Why is it surprising that Buzzell feels little remorse for doing his duty?

Lingle believes that *My War* "tracks Buzzell's life through a progression of increasing oddity: from his suburban San Francisco home into a war zone and eventually a narrative of lured fact and fiction" (18). This "lurid fact and fiction" denotes of the obviously contrived wartime self created by the author. Lingle continues, asserting that "Buzzell's weaving of fact and fiction offers a scathing social critique as well as a nod toward fiction's ability to better capture reality than non-fiction." It is the absence of self that creates the most convincing self. That Buzzell puts so little effort in constructing a narrative allows him to use his "rebellious traits—the traits of the picaro—[… as] the

seeds of subversion, and perhaps the seeds of truth" (Lingle 18). Lingle's "seeds of truth" seem to be akin to what I have, so far, called significance.

If significance derives itself from an intersection of meaning between the two realities, then the opposites in the case of Buzzell revolve around his status as picaro—drug-using skateboarder from the suburbs—and his wartime self. Buzzell speaks from within the wartime reality, but his wartime self has not fully formed because he has not made the journey from innocence to experience. Therefore, the self that writes Buzzell's blogs is a peacetime self that can exist outside of the war and inside of the war simultaneously. Shaffer walks between the two realities, but Buzzell's wartime self forms as he writes. His journey is marked by combat, trauma, and the usual experiences of war, but he records everything with such immediacy that his words are opposite to the self necessitated by his experience. The creation act—the act of formation necessitated by Buzzell's need to create a wartime self—becomes the point of intersection. Buzzell's wartime self is growing right in front of the reader's eyes, and the growing pains are visible with each blog.

The formative years for Buzzell's wartime self are scary, filled with pain and confusion. You will not find this emotion in his blog entries because he speaks as the picaro—the rogue—the innocent young man yet to experience war but very much in the throes thereof. Shaffer and Johnson suppressed their emotions during combat only to revisit them later in writing their memoirs. Buzzell must revisit his trauma while in the midst of wartime reality through his blog. However, he must continue to suppress his emotions because his duty as a soldier demands it. At the same time, his duties as a warrior in the eyes of the peacetime audience demands that he feel fear and remorse. In

the end, subverting these expectations takes place as suppression. Buzzell's picaro act is a coping mechanism.

The author's omissions of emotion have opposite connotations: Despite what the war author tries to portray about being calm, collected or prepared for war, the opposite is true. War is an experience filled with as many emotions as there are words to describe them. And the emotionality of war is rarely discussed, heavily stigmatized, and often misinterpreted by those who have not lived through war's journey from innocence into experience. Wall claims that "[with] the exception of columnists, the traditional voice for a professional journalist is detached, neutral, and tells 'both' sides of the story. Reporters are expected remain uninvolved in their stories. The voice of the typical blogger is personalized, opinionated, and often one-sided" (161). At first glance, Buzzell appears to be more detached from his war than one-sided. His descriptions of combat lack any overt understanding of emotion, but his experience is full of feeling, meaning that the only explanation for Buzzell's nonchalance is a deceptive suppression of emotion.

The events of "Men in Black" are also reported by Mark Reardon's historical account, *From Transformation to Combat: The First Stryker Brigade at War*: "As the first Stryker [entered], either an RPG or roadside bomb hit it on the left. The vehicle continued moving out of the kill zone, but moments later a large explosion occurred at an intersection immediately to its rear, disabling two of the HETS the Stryker was escorting" (50). Juxtaposing Reardon's account alongside Buzzell's tale provides more insight into the events:

> We headed north up Route Tampa and drive right past several HETs (heavy equipment transporters) that were entirely engulfed in flames in the

> middle of an intersection where they were ambushed earlier with RPGs and small arms fire. As we drove past the burning HETs, I thought to myself that there was no way anybody could have survived the attack. (249)[20]

Notably, the events described by Reardon involve an extremely large force: A Brigade consists of battalions, companies, platoons, squads and then the individual. Reardon's perspective is the antithesis to Buzzell's, who looks upward instead of down through the ranks of men as he tries to make sense of the chaos and confusion. As a result, Buzzell's story is much more personal—more distinct—than generic, historical facts:

> I observed a man, dressed in all black with a terrorist beard, jump out all of a sudden from behind the side of a building, he pointed his AK-47 barrel right at my fucking pupils, I froze and then a split second later, I saw fire from his muzzle flash leaving the end of his barrel and brass shell casings exiting the side of his AK as he was shooting directly at me. I heard and felt the bullets whiz literally inches from my head, hitting all around my hatch and .50-cal mount making a "Ping" "Ping" "Ping" sound. (250)

Reardon's account, on the other hand, gives no information about the enemy, other than tactics and weaponry. It is impossible from the historicist approach to understand the

[20] Reardon provides an almost seamless introduction to these events: "Lieutenant Nystrom issued instructions for all Strykers in the convoy to converge on the intersection to recover equipment from the disabled vehicles and to prevent their crews from falling into insurgent hands. The lead Stryker returned to the intersection, engaging targets on the way until it reached the scene. Other Strykers dispersed throughout the convoy raced toward the intersection as well. The rest of the convoy continued moving along Highway 2" (50).

connotations of a "terrorist beard" or the fear that goes along with the "Ping" of deadly bullets ricocheting all around one's body. Yet, these are the events that are happening, with minor variations, to many if not all of the men and women serving alongside the author. Buzzell writes very little about his emotions, but we somehow *know* what he felt because of the implications of his experience.

There is something about Buzzell's words that rings true in both realities: Fear. His words are succinct and clear: The action takes place without hesitation in a simple, unelaborated way. In "Men in Black" Buzzell does not say he is scared; he says, "I cannot put into words how scared I was" (251). Buzzell speaks with peacetime language to a peacetime audience. How is he unable to describe the emotions that occur as his wartime self develops? The answer to this exploration of significance leads to a wartime truth that reveals something about the reality of peace: People try to cut themselves off from their emotions. In modern society, fear is seen as a weakness; war veterans are diagnosed and treated as "sick" because of very natural reactions to the trauma of combat. To be emotional means to be unstable, and to be unstable is not synonymous with the war "hero" construct etched into the very fabric of our war culture. Buzzell is very afraid; he enjoyed firing his weapon at that mosque whether it was right or wrong; and his inability to be empathetic towards himself in war is the last vestige of his peacetime self.

Buzzell describes situations that are universally accepted as threatening. Hynes understands:

> [T]here are the inflicted sufferings of war—the wounds, the fears, the hardships, the losses—which are in the nature of war and must be

> accepted. Not that soldiers are merely victims—they are always to some extent agents in their lives—but much of soldiering is passive endurance: standing, not flinching, surviving. But there is also something else that is done to men by wars: no man goes through a war without being changed by it, and in fundamental ways. And though the process will not be explicit in every narrative—not all men are self-conscious or reflective enough for that—it will be there. Change—*inner* change—is the other motive for war stories: not only what happened to *me*. (Hynes 3)

The catalyst to this intersection is empathy: The peacetime audience relates to the young picaro, and they can see themselves in his shoes; and that is how we learn of our own loss of affect. Buzzell cannot feel in his war story because we will not let him feel, it would be socially unacceptable. And that is why, there is a "need to remember"[21] in addition to the "need to report" (Hynes xiv). The significance of this need is that, as a result of pressures placed upon soldiers by societal expectations, the "desire to 'stop the screaming' or 'stop the nightmares' gets framed as forgetting" (Shay 38).

Hynes' "reporting instinct" seems to measure up with the type of ethnography found in Johnson's narrative. However, her ability to report the "facts" was hampered by trauma. Buzzell, on the other hand, has the "immediacy and directness" of the blog. His words suggest a fear not overtly present in the text. Lingle claims that "[Buzzell's] work

[21] "Of these records there are two principal kinds, which correspond to two different needs: the need to report and the need to remember. The reporting instinct operates as war happens, and appears in journals and diaries and letters. These accounts have the virtues of immediacy and directness, and tend to level war experience, reporting the ordinary days with the extraordinary ones, the boredom as well as the excitement, and giving to their stories a close texture, the grain of life in war" (Hynes xiv).

challenges the reader to make connections and conclusions from a relentless barrage of loosely connected and sometimes discordant fragments of information—allowing their cultural and current awareness to govern the impact of the work" (15). But these are not fragments of fact, not even of a narrative; they are fragments of emotion to be gleaned from the very essence of war. The strange thing is that Buzzell is not allowed to feel as his war unfolds. And this ultimately leads to an explanation of Caruth's paradox of trauma mentioned in the two preceeding chapters.

As noted earlier, Caruth believes that "[t]raumatic experience, beyond the psychological dimension of suffering it involves, suggests a certain paradox: that the most direct seeing of a violent event may occur as an absolute inability to know it; that immediacy, paradoxically, may take the form of belatedness" (91-92). Buzzell cannot experience his trauma because he is bound by the constructed notions of weakness and instability bound to emotion in peacetime society. Therefore, Buzzell and all of the soldiers like him are doomed to return from war and belatedly experience the emotional consequences of combat, the paradox of trauma. In Buzzell's lack of emotion on the page are the seeds of trauma. Our fear for Buzzell in the face of Buzzell's "inability to know" his trauma is the point where meaning intersects between our two realities. The significance is that Buzzell will suffer from this trauma later in his life. And the truth is that his suffering is as much a fault of peacetime culture as the fault of the war itself.

This type of social policing responsible for Buzzell's inability to feel trauma is most clearly represented in the governmental and third-party agencies that attempt to mandate and alter the words of the author. Buzzell prevents the appropriation of his

narrative by converting his blog into a published book.[22] Again, the government and media—the agents of peacetime discourse—retaliate: Following "Men in Black," news reports, military press releases, and even the commentary of fans and fellow authors increasingly intrude upon Buzzell's personal narrative. He is placed in a predicament where his identity as a soldier is jeopardized by his use of the peacetime medium to speak the truth. He cannot prevent the influx of public attention that his blog attracts. And his leaders become increasingly displeased. While Buzzell explicitly complains of his changing role in the war, his narrative implicitly reveals him as a displaced bystander—an everyman soldier—caught between the worlds of peace and war. Eventually, the blog gains the attention of the *Wall Street Journal* (Cooper) and NPR, and the author wonders about his role in the war:

> I figured if the Army found out about it, they'd probably get pissed and shut my blog down, so I decided to go ahead and do it for them, before they gave me the order to do so. I took every single post that I had ever written down from the blog and posted a Johnny Rotten quote up on there,[23] and left it that way for a couple of weeks. I needed a break from the whole blog thing for a while. It was becoming more of a headache now than anything else. (qtd. in National)

[22] In a footnote Stacey Peebles explains, "In this paper, quotations from the blog are drawn from *My War: Killing Time in Iraq*, the published book, since Buzzell's original blog entries have been taken off-line. The book includes those entries as well as additional writing about his war experience, and encapsulates the story of the blog itself, its popularity, and its eventual termination" (1675, n. 7).

[23] Buzzell's "Johnny Rotten quote" is "ever get the feeling you've been cheated? –Johnny Rotten's last words at the Sex Pistols' last gig. 1978" (291).

Buzzell's moniker, CBFTW (Colby Buzzell, Fuck the War) becomes associated with a true, first-hand perspective of the war in Iraq. Unwittingly, Buzzell links the world of war and the world of peace; he helps the world understand what it is like to experience war. Physically, psychologically, and emotionally the author remains at war; however, constant calls to relate his experience from the reality of "normalcy" conflicts with the author's effort to remain a soldier in Iraq. Buzzell becomes more and more alienated from the war he fights, his leaders distrust him, and at times he is taken out of the fight altogether. While the author does not stop reporting about his experiences entirely, an awareness of the controversy, specifically of Military Intelligence agencies (285) and media outlets watching his every move, permeates and defines the remainder of *My War*. And because of how his blog's immediacy offers insight into the formation of a wartime self, war writing—in the form of published books, blogs, and other forms of communication—from current and future wars will likely continue to reveal more truths about our own world from within the extreme circumstances of war.[24]

The search for truth in Buzzell's memoir begins with the search for significance. "Men in Black" is only a part of his larger memoir, the parts of his blog published in the form of a book. Later, when Buzzell publishes both the battle and the subsequent controversy in his blog he says, "I knew that my days of writing about my experiences in Iraq were going to be numbered, and that my weblog would soon be the next casualty of war" (273). Buzzell is correct: After publishing "Men in Black" to his blog, the narrative in *My War* takes a widely divergent path. Buzzell's blook ceases to be about a personal

[24] "Buzzell's blog … is an early and significant example of the influence of digital texts on the public conception of war and on the military's attempts to control that conception" (Peebles 1674).

war experience and becomes, instead, a chronicling of the intrusion of outside forces upon a war story. It is also at this point that Buzzell begins to speak as a soldier, upset because his peacetime affiliations have endangered his usefulness to the mission. The significance of Anthony Shaffer's memoir met with ritual erasure. A different type of erasure occurred in Johnson's memoir when the government deactivated her unit and tried to wash its hands of the Lynch controversy by ostracizing the nation's first black female POW. Exploration of this significance reveals truth in the fact that a country must be knowledgeable and engaged with the wars they choose to fight. The consequences of not heeding this truth results in the type of lies exposed in *I'm Still Standing* and the mismanagement of a war shown in *Operation Dark Heart*.

Buzzell seems to give up on describing a personal war after the intrusion of the outside world. Alienated from both combat for his cooperation with peace and from peace because of living in a warzone, Buzzell chooses to add the following caveat to the end of "Men in Black" in his blook: "I've put the events of that day in a shoebox, put the lid on it, and haven't opened it since" (260). Buzzell gives in to the pressures of a world demanding that he not feel while in the midst of war. As a result, he is forced into Caruth's paradox, doomed to relive the trauma of his combat at some later date. As a result, the lack of emotion expressed in Buzzell's original blog is replaced with the need to feel—the need to open the shoebox—and understand the man with the "terrorist beard" that he engaged in "Men in Black." Ivor Gurney grappled with similar emotions to what Buzzell must have experienced in WWI:

> I shot him, and it had to be
>
> One of us! 'Twas him or me.

"Couldn't be helped," and none can blame

Me, for you would do the same.

…

Well, if they get me, first I'll find

That boy, and tell him all my mind,

And see who felt the bullet worst,

And ask his pardon, if I durst. (1-16)

Are the thoughts that led Gurney to a mental hospital (Ward 28) the same thoughts hidden within Buzzell's blog? It may be that Buzzell's blook is a protean example for future war writing. The immediacy opens not only a window into the world of war; it opens a window into how we perceive and treat our warriors—how Buzzell is not permitted to feel—and it opens a window into our own world. We praise them like demigods, calling them heroes and liberators and warriors, but we pay little attention to how hard it is to live up to these expectations.

CONCLUSION

My primary goal has been to bring the literature emerging from the Iraq and Afghanistan Wars into the debates on truth, authority, trauma and memory central to any discussion of autobiographical war writing and memoirs as a whole. Secondary to this goal, I have sought meaning in the death and suffering of all of those who have given their lives and/or their innocence in support of what they thought was right or, simply, what they thought was their duty. I have uncovered a number of truths that have been mentioned previously and nowhere more succinctly than in the words of Tim O'Brien:

> War is hell, but that's not the half of it, because war is also mystery and terror and adventure and courage and discovery and holiness and pity and despair and longing and love. War is nasty; war is fun. War is thrilling; war is drudgery. War makes you a man; war makes you dead. (80)

These words are riddled with an emotion true to the form of creative non-fiction. However, the interesting part comes in exploring why O'Brien's truth can be told only with a degree of fictionalization. I discovered three central truths in this thesis with O'Brien's words being the golden thread linking them all together: 1) "War makes you dead"; 2) A war cannot be won if the country which wages it is not engaged in how it is fought; 3) The standards of emotionality we set for our soldiers are the principal cause of the traumatic stress experienced later in life. While I have not exhausted the meaning found in this particular genre of literature, I have, at least, uncovered some interesting and, perhaps, thought-provoking topics for future research and debate in the works of Shoshana Johnson, Anthony Shaffer, and Colby Buzzell.

I'm Still Standing, *Operation Dark Heart* and *My War* are both personally relevant to me as a war veteran and representative of the War on Terror as a whole. Personally, I was in Iraq during the first year, the same time as Johnson's captivity. I was also a member of a transportation unit—an occupational specialty not typically associated with all-out combat—and can vouch for most of the confusion Johnson experienced concerning tactical procedures and the unexpected nature of war. In my second deployment, I, like Buzzell, was an M240 Bravo machine gunner a year after Buzzell's deployment. I understand the nature of his job—the stress he experienced after coming to terms with having to pull the trigger—as well as the environment inside of the wire that facilitated his blog. Representatively, Shaffer's memoir seems to address the fundamental questions about "why we are war" and "how the war is being fought." While I never served in Afghanistan, it represents the origins of (to steal a line from Buzzell) "my war." In the process of writing this thesis, I have put things in perspective for myself while using the insights gained from my personal experience to guide my research and to make a statement on behalf of my own wartime self for the peacetime reality that I now inhabit.

For all intents and purposes, Shoshana Johnson's narrative existed before she wrote *I'm Still Standing*. When the United States government used the capture and rescue of Jessica Lynch as a way to bolster support for the war, Johnson became a part of a narrative both larger than herself and separate from the person she hoped to become. However, Johnson's war memoir represents any individual's right to his or her own story. Johnson openly confronts post-traumatic stress in her story, battling repression, distorted memories, the pain of recollection, and what must be a sincere desire to move on when she is required to first look back. Despite all of these things, Johnson triumphs over those

who would use her identity for personal gain and reclaims a part of herself that was lost in the early days of the Iraq War.

Johnson ends her story with a tribute to the members of her unit who died during the ambush leading to her capture. Her memorial is in no way unique: I have shown similar tributes in the words of William Butler Yates, Rhonda Cornum and Wilfred Owen; and these are only two of the host of war veterans who feel the need to pay homage to those who did not survive. But Johnson's story is also a tribute to the part of herself who died in the war. Her memorial reveals the same innocence reflected upon—again and again—by individuals who look back, but cannot understand, the drastic departure from who they were before the war. Johnson's memorial is the first and most obvious link to truth discussed in my research. Tim O'Brien says that "War makes you dead." This truth is immutable, but it is how I arrived at this truth—the search for a wartime self committed to by Shoshana Johnson—that has practical applications in a world of peace.

Johnson uses this truth in the form of a memorial to thwart the government's efforts to silence her story. She both discovers and creates a wartime self, understands that self, and moves forward with a complete (although fictionalized) identity. With the hundreds of thousands of soldiers that will return from current wars in the Middle East, our nation has a responsibility to try to understand this process of identity formation and to streamline it to those who come back suffering from the ill effects of war. These men and women can draw strength from their military service, prevent the belated surfacing of trauma, and move forward with healthy lives by engaging in the same sort of creation and

discovery espoused by Johnson. But they will need help to understand the seemingly meaningless carnage they have endured in war's anti-reality.

Nothing about combat is like peace. Men kill because it is the right thing to do; independent thought is stifled rather than kindled; and ribbons are awarded for doing things that will haunt the recipients for the rest of their "normal" lives. Every meaning in peace has an opposite meaning in war's anti-reality. Anthony Shaffer's memoir reveals an anti-reality where peacetime rhetoric falls short of describing the wartime experience. I presented a basis for understanding these opposites in meaning in the form of points of intersection. I believe that communication begins with finding common ground in our world. However, in a world where everything is contrary to our world, communication begins in finding uncommon ground. Each opposite point of intersection in meaning leads to a form of significance. And this significance is at the heart of the compulsion to write about combat found in each war memoir. Shaffer attempts to detail how civilian influences on the Afghanistan War are the reason the war has not come to a close; he openly calls into question his own leadership and exposes the secret world of the intelligence war. On the surface, it appears as if Shaffer is calling for the removal of civilian intrusion upon the military war effort. But why does he choose to write *Operation Dark Heart*? The answer is that he writes for the inhabitants of our peacetime reality. Shaffer is not writing because we need to remove all civilian presence in Afghanistan. On the contrary, Shaffer writes because we civilians need to pay attention to what is going on in Afghanistan. The opposite of his explicit message is, in fact, the second truth that I have found in my research. A war cannot be won if the people are not

engaged with how it is fought. Such a war could last forever and it would lose its purpose.

Of the three authors I have discussed, I believe that Colby Buzzell offers the most insight into the mind of a soldier fighting on the ground. Cathy Caruth envisions a paradox of trauma where the sufferer of post-traumatic stress must suffer the original trauma later in life because of his or her inability to perceive the trauma at its point of origin (91-92). I sought to explain the inability to perceive. Buzzell cannot experience his trauma because to do so would be contrary to the constructed identity we force upon the soldier. Buzzell describes combat through a set of blogs later turned into the memoir *My War: Killing Time in Iraq*. The combat sequences described in his writing are nearly devoid of emotion, but it is also devoid of a search for wartime self. This is because of the immediacy in which his text is written: Buzzell writes about war as quickly after the events happen as humanly possible. Buzzell is actively engaging in war as he writes; he has not made the journey from innocence into experience, and, therefore, his words because are spoken in a manner that we, as the inhabitants of a peacetime reality, can relate to. Buzzell's wartime self is described in its formative stages in *My War* and the lack of emotions on the page are the seeds of trauma. Our society places value upon ignoring, repressing, or even lying about our emotions. Caruth's paradox of trauma is caused by our society's constructed notions when and how an individual should experience trauma emotionally. However, the consequence of this, at least in the case of young soldiers experiencing combat for the first time, is an inability to perceive trauma as it happens, and unless we use this knowledge to circumvent that from happening, these same young soldiers will have to deal with their trauma for the rest of their lives.

We need to heed the truths found in these memoirs to better prepare our soldiers for war and our society for their return. We need to prevent the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq from becoming completely devoid of meaning and purpose by remaining actively engaged in how these wars are waged. We cannot simply allocate tax dollars to the Department of Veterans Affairs and hope for the best. No, we must break down the barriers of emotional distancing for soldiers before they go into combat. Finally, when and if these soldiers return, it is our duty to help them understand their actions and their wartime selves so that they can move forward in life with a healthy, complete identity.

EPILOGUE

I know firsthand what it is like to have lingering, military-related illnesses surface after entering the classroom. However, I continue to gain strength through exploring these problems in literature and through writing about what I experienced. The introduction to this text offered a glimpse at my wartime self, and subsequent chapters represent the efforts I have made to understand that self and move forward. Now, the roles are reversed: I instruct Eastern Kentucky University's first, vets-only orientation course with the mission of providing my fellow veterans with the information, tools, and resources needed to circumvent barriers to education common in the student veteran community. I implement assignments that give student veterans a chance to narrate their wartime experiences, understand what war has done to them, and decide who they want to become. I have found that I am not alone in my postwar confusion and angst.

Community, I believe, is the first step in breaking down the barriers and the notion that war's consequence equates to quietly suffering from the emotional baggage heaped upon the soldier. Once soldiers are able to identify that a problem exists, narration is the next step. The things I have learned from Johnson, Shaffer, and Buzzell's attempts to make sense of their wartime selves and realities are invaluable in teaching students how and what it means to write about war. Community and narration are efforts that, as far as I can tell, must to be maintained for the length of an individual suffering from wartime trauma's life. The healing process is never complete and is a continuous part of life after war. Maintaining a grasp on the fluctuating emotions and versions of self that emerge after war is something that must occur before, during, and after the final step in

the healing process. This step involves altruistic self-expression and creating a new identity that creates good—life instead of death—in the community that the veteran joins.

To truly understand the magnitude of the problems student veterans face, we need to place everything in perspective. The Iraq War is in its final stages, and President Obama believes that the war in Afghanistan could end in 2014. Meanwhile, each war veteran translates into a likely student for those who work in higher education. Currently, more than two million service members[25] claim service in Iraq, Afghanistan, or both. And the Post 9/11 GI Bill promises these veterans the opportunity of higher education. However, many suffer from debilitating physical injuries, marital problems, problems in coping with the transition to civilian life, and making the transition to college, or a combination of any or all of these things. In fact, upwards to 40% of those who have served in Iraq or Afghanistan deal with "psychological and neurological injuries associated with post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) or Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI), which have been dubbed 'signature injuries'" of the Global War on Terror (National Council on Disability 1). Regardless of whether or not these veterans suffer from wartime trauma, all veterans face a unique set of challenges as they transition into academic and civilian life.

The Post 9/11 GI Bill is designed to transform veterans into skilled members of the American workforce by paying tuition, fees, a yearly book stipend, and a monthly living allowance for veterans throughout the country (*The Post 9/11 GI Bill*). For

[25] *The Veterans of Foreign Wars Magazine* reveals the number of service members who have serve in the war on terror: "More than 2 million U.S. Troops logged more than 3.3 million deployments to Iraq and Afghanistan between September 11, 2001, and October 2009." Obviously, this number has only risen since the VFW's report.

veterans, college means more than the chance at an education or gaining a new skill-set: College offers those who have endured the trials of combat the opportunity to slow down, acclimate to civilian life, and redefine themselves as members of society. In short, higher education offers veterans a chance to heal. And they are taking advantage of this opportunity in record numbers.

More than 600,000 veterans have applied for the Post 9/11 GI Bill (Dyhouse 13).[26] In fact, the number of student veterans will rise by at least 30% this year alone (Brown). However, the many benefits of the Post 9/11 GI Bill are not a cure-all for those suffering from disability, psychological wounds, and adjustment problems. Despite all of the government's money, free health care, discipline instilled during years of training and service, and a society that praises them as "heroes" when they return home, student veterans fail or drop out of college at highly disproportional rates: "On average, just 3% of college freshmen who are veterans graduated from bachelor's degree programs in five years or less—compared with 30% of all college freshmen, according to Department of Education data from 1995-01" (Stripling). This dropout rate came before the Global War on Terror; and with the inclusion of wartime trauma into the equation, the next Department of Education report will likely bring with it even worse news. However, the vets-only orientation course at EKU represents one among many proactive measures to thwart these problems at their onset. Student veterans enrolled in the course learn ways to deal with adjustment issues at the beginning of their education, rather than allowing them to linger and become a burden later in more difficult, career-specific courses.

[26] NPR reports, "With more than 100,000 U.S. veterans of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan expected to enter college this year under the new G.I. Bill, veteran advocates are wondering whether enough services are in place to help them adjust" (Brown).

Every day, students disclose to me how their disabilities are making it hard to attend class, manage assignments, and juggle the responsibilities of work, school, and a family. Many of them are confused about the emotions that accompany their memories of war, and more than a few have considered dropping out altogether. The mission of the EKU Veterans Affairs office is to help those who have served succeed in higher education. Therefore, the wartime trauma and adjustment problems interfering with student veterans' education cannot be ignored. Disclosure is always optional; and those who choose to discuss personal issues have the advantage of doing so within a community of their peers. Shay, as a career mental health practitioner with the Department of Veterans Affairs and author of *Odysseus in America*, comments on the importance of community in the healing of psychological wounds: "The answer does not lie in something that is new or expensive, or once is said, surprising: it lies in *community*. Vietnam veterans came home *alone*. The most significant community for a combat veteran is that of his surviving comrades" (33). By placing student veterans in a class full of peers, we create this kind of community at EKU. Once again, veterans in the vets-only orientation course can find solace in the fact that they are not alone. [27]

In addition to filling the role of instructor, I am very much a peer to my students. After four years in the United States Army, I returned to my small hometown and the same community college that I flunked out of as a civilian. I quickly found that I was not

[27] "Trauma victims of course feel isolated by their experiences. They believe that no one can possibly comprehend what has happened to them. And in some ways they are right. They have been irrevocably changed by their experiences. However, as they tell their stories they discover that others have been touched by pain as well, perhaps a different pain, but pain nonetheless. This commonality helps to ameliorate the excruciating isolation that is a by-product of trauma" (MacCurdy 177).

the same person, engaging with my assignments with fervor and taking every single word uttered by my fellow students and instructors with caution. This latter behavior was likely a compensatory measure brought on by my mindless devotion to military custom and orders during my service. I was extremely paranoid, my hands shook when in the small, crowded classrooms, and I maintained the same stoic demeanor that I used behind the barrels of machine guns in Iraq to manage crowds and direct traffic. I did extremely well in my coursework, but my transition to civilian life was painful, to say the least.

I've changed a lot since my first days in college. One of my former professors has since told me that my demeanor "was scary, at times." And I have worked very hard to change this: Since 2006, I have undergone regular sessions of cognitive behavioral therapy and psychiatric treatment at the Department of Veterans Affairs. The VA provides me with techniques and medications that help take the edge off of my PTSD symptoms; their speech and pathology clinics have helped me deal with cognitive problems; and the compensation checks and educational stipends certainly make life less stressful. Still, my path to assimilation and healing did not begin until I began studying literature from the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and wrote about what I experienced in war. This is how I came to learn about the restorative power of bibliotherapy. Dysart-Gale illustrates how I am not the first to discover the healing power of reading and writing:

> As advocates of bibliotherapy point out, the restorative and healing value of literature was known to Plato, the Romans and Benjamin Rush; spiritually and emotionally edifying literature has long provided readers with comfort and guidance … Bibliotherapy has been identified as an

> important area of medical research for several practical reasons as well: it is a form of alternative or traditional medicine; it has the potential to help patients who might not otherwise receive therapy. (34-35)

Many of the veterans in my class will not go to the VA for treatment. They either do not trust the government's model of treatment or they are ashamed of the word "disorder" commonly associated with post-traumatic stress. I cannot act as therapist for these students. But I can provide them with comfort and guidance should they decide to explore their own past.

As a former sergeant and leader in the United States Army, I took an oath to assist in the training, well-being, and development of soldiers. As instructor of the vets-only orientation course, my mission has not changed all that much. My task now is to take what I have learned and share it with my students. I am still helping soldiers to grow and develop. Now, I benefit from academic research into the process of identity formation in autobiographical writings on war and trauma.[28] In every memoir I have read, authors describe some degree of post traumatic stress. While the process is not always explicit, authors uniformly show how narrating wartime experience allows them to understand *who they were* during war. These authors all look back before moving forward, past their trauma. Student veterans can do the same thing through a combination of personal writing and direction about how to find proper care.

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[28] Marian MacCurdy defines trauma: "[T]rauma does not only refer to catastrophic moments. Dictionaries define trauma as a bodily injury produced by some act of violence or some agency outside the body; the condition resulting from the injury; or a startling experience that has a lasting effect on mental life. Trauma can be a single incident or a series of incidents … Many of my students choose to write about these 'traumatic' experiences" (161).

Veterans are not necessarily damaged from experiencing war. Instead, they are damaged by the false notion that they must forget about their experiences and bury their wartime selves.[29]

The wartime self is created in the same way children define themselves, through narration. As children "we learn to tell stories about ourselves, and this training proves to be crucial to the success of our lives as adults, for our recognition by others as normal individuals depends on our ability to perform the work of self-narration" (Eakin 152). The personal essay increases a student's ability to self-narrate.[30] What's more, the vets-only orientation course allows for the act of self-narration to take place in a community of peers. However, there are a number of obstacles to overcome in order to narrate a traumatic past.

When events occur that transcend what is considered "normal" experience, the individual's ability to narrate an identity is hampered. Eakin claims that traumatic experiences create a "Dysnarrativia" from psychological and pathological breaks resulting in "the strange absence or loss of affect in such individuals that … bespeaks a

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[29] Shay reveals some startling facts about the detrimental effects of forgetting among Vietnam veterans: "Forget your pain—forget your homecoming! This is the path to destruction taken by a horrifyingly large number of Vietnam veterans. Chemical attempts to forget with alcohol or drugs—reaching the American Psychiatric Association criteria for dependence or abuse—were sought by 45.6 percent in alcohol and 8.4 percent in drugs. If a veteran has current PTSD, there rates are higher still, 74.8 percent and 11.3 percent respectively … It is shocking to realize that male civilian non-veterans who are demographically similar to Vietnam combat veterans have a 26 percent lifetime incidence of alcohol dependence or abuse and a 3.4 percent rate of drug dependence or abuse" (36).

[30] Eakin explores identity in relation to the narrative: "[The] narrative's role in self-representation extends well beyond the literary; it is not merely one form among many in which to express identity, but rather an integral part of a primary mode of identity experience, that of the extended self, the self in time" (137). Eakin's "self in time" concerns itself with "autobiographical memory," or the meaning-making, fluctuating process by which identity forms during the process of self-narration.

damaged identity" (140). Dysnarrativia stems from PTSD, the coping mechanisms of emotional distancing and numbing, and first-hand experience with traumatic events. As I have said, student veterans may have difficulty understanding the emotions they feel after war. They may also have trouble interpreting their experiences. Pathological processes and psychological responses to trauma may impede the ability to remember.

Eakin claims that dysnarrativia can disrupt the normal, meaning-making processes that are found in children. Military life normally does not produce an ideal narrative and combat almost never does. So, the task of helping students define *who they were* and *who they are* begins with addressing problems remembering, and a lack of experience articulating:

> Images may not be immediately available. In order to cope with trauma and its aftermath, survivors often bury … images because they can get in the way of daily functioning. In those cases, the narratives of the experiences, when offered, often rely on clichés and the "story of the story," that is, the remembered tale which avoids the depth of feeling that clear images generate. (MacCurdy 166-67)

Student veterans have to make their experience personal. As strange as this may sound, MacCurdy is correct to assert that in the face of trauma, dysnarrativia, and problems remembering, student veterans will attempt to use words found in movies, television, or, in a somewhat better scenario, books. While this may be a problem in inspiring creative thought in the writing classroom, it is part of the cathartic process of writing for student veterans who want to narrate their trauma. In the exact same way that I have turned to literature and research, student veterans in my class turn to adaptations of wartime reality

in order to try and make sense of it all. For this reason, students who choose to write about personal experiences are not stressed with grammatical accuracy; they are freshmen and I expect them to write like freshmen. Uncovering O'Brien's "seemingness" of truth is what is important. After all, what the veteran remembers or chooses to write may or may not be the "truth." However, when the process of identity-forming narration takes place, what student veterans write becomes the truth of *who they are*.

Student veterans do not need an orientation course on how to become students: In their respective branches of service they took part in (and many taught) classes on a daily basis. Student veterans already know how to learn because, at one point in their lives, learning meant life and death. Instead, student veterans need a course that orients them to life after war and military service. They need to a place where they can explore their new lives and decide who or what they want to become. However, and just like war memoirists, they will have to look back before they can move forward. They will have to determine—perhaps even decide—*who they were* before they can form a new identity and understand *who they are*. I propose that the personal essay can help student veterans overcome trauma and that college can help them redefine themselves after war.[31] However, there are risks that need to be addressed: veterans will have to overcome their own stigmas about disability and disclosure, they will need to be given access to the tools

[31] Student veterans have a world of experiences that should not go to waste. As veterans, these students have knowledge that less than one percent of the population of America can claim; and they need to be given ways to keep their experiences relevant in post-military life. This will both boost their self-confidence and serve as an effective introduction to writing: "Students have reported that their engagement with personal essays has shown them how to bring aspects of their own lives into their academic work … They see the academic universe as not welcoming original material found outside of the library" (Allen 261).

needed to succeed, and the course instructor must provide access to assignments that are therapeutic without becoming a therapist.

I have said that the vets-only orientation course should be about orienting students to life after the military. But is the college orientation course, even when comprising only of student veterans, the place for veterans to write about painful experiences? Well, I would have to say, "Yes and no." Student veterans should be given the opportunity to write about their experiences: "Numerous clinical studies, featuring alternative medical therapies, have shown a positive correlation between meditation, visualization, writing and healing" (Foehr 339). This is not to say student veterans should be forced to write about trauma that they are uncomfortable discussing. Some veterans may decide to wait years before talking about their experiences. But, for some, it is on the tip of the tongue, waiting to be spoken to anyone who will listen, interfering with all of the necessary tasks needed to do well in school.

The very existence of a vets-only orientation course denotes that student veterans are in need of special instruction. And the staggering numbers of veterans suffering from disability and adjustment problems, the disproportional dropout rates and the clear links between these two facts seems to demand action. While not all of my students suffer from PTSD, they all deal with the transition to civilian life. Writing can help these students define the problems they face and overcome them. What's more, the orientation course may be the only opportunity that these students have to find a voice and share personal experiences. This opportunity holds both academic and restorative power:

> Writing someone else's history, or something else's, can be fascinating and enlightening, but students cannot form the connections between

> worlds without unearthing their own values, ethics, and underlying assumptions produced by their past experiences and how they have encountered them. The personal essay asks students to begin a journey into themselves, but the journey will take them ultimately out of themselves and back to a community which can reestablish our common humanity. (MacCurdy 198)

MacCurdy succinctly reveals the goal of my vets-only orientation: To help student veterans narrate who they are in the face of trauma, circumstance and limited perspectives, redefine themselves, and transition into humanity. But the journey to understanding one's postwar self and finding a voice is not easy.

Finding a voice means that these students will have to do more than just *describe* their military experiences; they will have to *define* their experience through narration, filling in the gaps brought on by repression and embarrassment, facilitating control over their identities. Molloy Moran understands exactly how narration provides control over a traumatic past:

> [C]ontrary to a widespread notion, it is not the catharsis of expressing pent-up emotion that is responsible for the healing—such venting at best gives only temporary relief, at worst exacerbates the distress. Rather, other factors appear to be responsible. These include 1) the habituation response, whereby confronting a fear or a painful memory habituates one to it and thus robs it of its power; 2) the fact that naming an emotion or a trauma legitimizes it—that is, if there is a word for it, it is something society has recognized and hence the sufferer is not alone; 3) the fact that

> the act of writing objectifies the trauma and makes one regard it from different perspectives, in effect helping one to resolve it; and 4) the fact that constructing a narrative about an event is a way of finding coherence and meaning in it. (Moran 97)

Moran's four conclusions accurately describe the order behind the lesson plan I use in my course. The first step involves doing away with the stigmas associated with labeling and exploring the connotations behind the phrase "Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder." Then, students confront their problems through narration. Third, I ask them to put their emotions into context—to name their emotions—based on the experiences shared within their community. Finally, students who wish to move forward can work towards a narration and draw strength and meaning from military service.

The first step demands the dismissal of the negative connotations associated with disability. To get my students to engage intellectually with the topic of disability, and, if applicable, consider the fact that the unnamed emotions they are experiencing might be due to one or multiple diagnosable conditions for which there is care, I turn to an activity proposed by Wendy Chrisman: "Debates about disclosure in composition have usually revolved around the role of the personal essay … But disclosure can occur even without personal topics in the writing classroom, and often does occur in a disability-themes writing class" (134). Chrisman suggests an in-class activity where students place disabilities in a hierarchy:

> Together as a class, make a chart on the social hierarchies of disability, the relative risks of disclosing each type of disability, the stigmas associated with each type, the material consequences in terms of employment, civil

> rights, and so forth. For example, at the top of the disability hierarchy might be a heroic war veteran with a missing limb. His disability … is visible, a sign of patriotism and valor. (135)

The key is to get students to understand why it is that the veteran's loss of a limb is associated with "valor." Juxtapose this conclusion alongside a discussion about how the veteran suffering from PTSD is associated with "instability" or "weakness" and students must concede that the stereotypical connotations with the latter condition are baseless.

Next, I let them know that people want to hear their stories. I tell them that the wars they fought in are the topics of heated discussion and that no one's opinion is more valuable than their own. I explain the benefits of bibliotherapy, as I have done here, and explain how putting things into context will greatly increase their chances of success in college. As an alternative to taking the second and final exams, I offer an alternative assignment: The *Journal of Military Experience*. This in-house journal is composed of short stories, art work and other creative forms of expression by veterans throughout the campus community.

For the veterans in my class, telling their story can translate into not having to take two exams. It also provides them with the opportunity to begin the process of defining their postwar selves while getting published at the same time. This option works in the following manner: First, the student submits a rough draft of acceptable length before the second in-class examination (usually about five pages). Second, I edit the draft and email it back to them, making suggestions on grammar, style and clarification. The writing process for the journal submission is similar to Guy Allen's. Allen has his students "produce one original piece of writing each week for ten weeks as well as

continuous revisions" (259). My revision process involves upwards to ten revisions for each piece. The students see the work as an opportunity to let the community, their parents, their spouses and third parties not associated with the military understand *who they were*. In the process of the journal's creation, authors must decide *who they are* and work towards narrating new identities. The final, mentored paper is certainly a fair substitute for two exams.

Without any coaxing, students tend to write about painful experiences. More than one student has mentioned crying after the death of a friend in battle. Several students have talked about killing the enemy, and others seek to explain their views on the war in light of their personal experiences. Some writings come in the form of poetry, others in the form of non-fiction. I have one student working on a process-art piece. He took a list of over 5,000 names read in our War on Terrorism remembrance ceremony and made charcoal from the paper. Next, he drew a picture with the charcoal that symbolizes the current wars. Finally, he had members of the student-veteran community destroy the piece before putting it back together. The end product represents the founding principle behind my course: An identity damaged by war can be put back together.

Jerome Bump started a very successful program based on emotional literacy after a life-changing, personal experience: "I wondered what I could do in the classroom to help prevent the kind of substance abuse that had devastated my family and many others" (313). Bump argues for teaching an "emotional literacy" (315) that challenges students "to feel and express their emotions instead of trying to drown them in alcohol and drugs" (315). As mentioned, many student veterans do not understand the emotions they face after war. Instead, they turn to suppressing these memories through drugs and alcohol.

Personal writing and the search for a voice is synonymous with developing emotional literacy and supplanting the need to forget.

Regina Foehr supports Bump's claims, explaining that understanding one's emotions can "contribute to an individual's inability to cope with personal or professional stress … a lack of emotional intelligence can sabotage the intellect and ruin careers" (337). If a lack of emotional literacy can sabotage careers—where individuals are trained and experienced in their craft—it must be that much worse for the student veteran assuming a new and foreign persona. Still, writing a personal essay or two does not magically help students overcome these problems.[32] Instead, students must engage in a series of introspective assignments; they must be given material from which they can glean the knowledge needed to articulate their problems; and they must be placed in an environment where disclosure is not forced, but encouraged. For those students who have problems with marriage and/or raising a family "[e]motional intelligence includes the ability to manage oneself, recognize the emotions of others, and handle relationships by, in part, managing emotions in others" (Foehr 337). If student veterans can learn to understand and "manage" emotions they can work towards alleviating relationship problems brought on by military service.

As MacCurdy points out, "Remembering details, specific images, and writing them down helps us to heal" (167). And Foehr and Bump believe that personal writing can improve emotional literacy in a way that improves success in personal and professional endeavors. But student veterans can also find strength in their experiences

[32] "Writers may not move immediately into defining images which have shaped their experiences … However, once writers cease depending on [… labels and clichés] images and the moments they convey can come forth" (MacCurdy 167-68).

through personal writing that, otherwise, they may have never considered. This facet of the course concerns itself with seeing experience as empowering rather than debilitating. For starters, we often discuss how the symptoms of PTSD—hypervigilance, paranoia and anger—keep soldiers alive on the battlefield. I then ask them to discuss these topics in weekly reading responses, asking questions like "Why is that war veterans jump at the sound of a loud noise?" or "Why might a war veteran get angry when someone talks disparagingly about the war efforts?" I then ask my students to place their emotions in the arbitrary categories of "good" and "bad." We end by reversing the titles of the two columns, concluding that in the right circumstances these feelings and reactions make perfect sense. All of this leads into the next activity, "The Fear/Values Assessment."

Veterans may feel as if their experiences are indescribable, that their pain is so scary it could alarm others if discussed openly. The "Fear/Values Assessment" begins the process of translating concepts into fact. Foehr believes that a "fears/values approach … can reduce fear and stress" (341). Designed for new teachers, Foehr's assessment easily translates into helping a class full of student veterans: "I asked them to complete several tasks in the following stages: (1) to list and then discuss their greatest fears of student teaching; (2) to write a worst-case scenario of themselves in the situations they feared the most; (3) to analyze each fear they had listed for its opposite to discover, and then write down, the underlying value behind the fear; and (4) to write the effect of having confronted and analyzed their fears in these stages" (Foehr 341). Foehr believes that participants will gain at least some measure of control over the fear when increasing their anxiety levels about it. The exercise is cathartic, fostering understanding within a community that echoes "You are not alone" throughout the semester. In the end, by

understanding emotional and physiological responses to stress, student veterans learn how war has changed them.

The next stage in the learning process is eliminating the misconception that veterans with disabilities are "victims." Anne Hawkins believes that describing the pathology of a disease or disability can be empowering: "[The fact that] individuals in these situations have recourse to myth, and find its symbols a source of help and strength, attests to the resourcefulness of the imagination in healing" (241). Much has been said about the woes of the VA medical system. And when student veterans are bogged down in class work, a job, or family, navigating this bureaucratic system can be daunting. However, pathography provides empowerment: "[It] restores the person ignored or canceled out in the medical enterprise, and it places that person at the very center" (Hawkins 223). Furthermore, looking at symptoms helps student veterans develop a voice which is informed about trauma, the nature of their condition(s), and the plights of the veterans around them. This last fact—understanding that there are other veterans in need of help—begins the last stage of healing by empowering veterans to lend their voice to the altruistic goal of helping those in their community.

Personal writing is not always looked upon in a loving manner.[33] Allen describes the following emotions upon teaching the subject in his English classroom:

[33] Milner understands the difficulty of exploring this sometimes taboo territory:

> "Engaging ourselves or our students in writing and healing is neither simple nor easy. Such work depends on effort, bravery, and faith in the regenerative potential of human life. It is not fun. Administrators and colleagues will not praise us for creating space for 'personal' writing, even when research indicates that the personal is political and the individual is inextricably influenced by and influencing the communal" (Milner 24).

> I parked these innovations—they felt naughty at the time—into one corner of my course. The orthodox paradigm remained predominant. Even so, I felt like I was breaking rules and doing something that I shouldn't tell anybody about. The students loved the innovative assignments, and I liked reading the vibrant personal essays that I was beginning to see. (Allen 254)

I've often had the fear that someone would accuse me of trying to play the role of amateur therapist, but I don't think that is what I am trying to do with my student veterans. Still, and like Allen, I feel somewhat "naughty" because I have adapted my curriculum to fit the needs of returning veterans as much as I have used it to orient incoming students to college life. At the same time, I know that to overcome the impediments preventing veterans from graduating, I need to think outside of the box.

I am not alone in my beliefs. Many of the pedagogical scholars mentioned here are quick to point out that they are not therapists and that they do not intend to act in the capacity of therapists.[34] However, and by name alone, bibliotherapy *is* therapy; the act of writing about trauma *is* therapeutic. Rather than emphasize correctness, I focus on revision and collaboration. At the same time, I know my students work harder than they would in the regular orientation course. They write for me every week, go through a

[34] "It is important to stress that I am not suggesting that writing teachers assume the role of amateur therapists. The purpose of any writing class is to foster good writing and the concomitant thinking skills that accompany such an activity. But the original meaning of the word 'amateur' is instructive here. Our love for our students, for their truths, for their potential clarity of vision and writing talent can motivate excellence more than anything else … The most effective and ethical approach to this issue … is for writing teachers to deal with the author's text, not his life, recognizing, however, that this distinction does not take into account the recursive nature of the writing process … to re-vision a moment often means to open our lives to its consequences" (MacCurdy 194).

rigorous review process, and do all of the stuff that is in a regular orientation course with added information about things like veterans' disabilities, medical and education entitlements, student involvement, and issues faced by non-veteran, non-traditional students. Still, they are motivated. I come to class every day to find the room in a perfect circle, ready for discussion. When I email a paper back with revisions, I usually receive it in less than one day. So, I give A's as long as the writing is on topic and meets the length requirement. Unlike Bump, I am not teaching an English course.

First and foremost, bibliotherapy must be an option, not a requirement. Students cannot and will not be forced to write about personal experiences. To force students to write about these things could be damaging to their well-being. At the same time, and as Milner points out, "Contrary to what anti-expressivist compositionists suggest, students do this kind of writing whether we invite them to or not" (Milner 26). It goes without saying that painful memories will come up. That is why, repeatedly, I drill knowledge about how to get treatment at the VA and who to ask for help. I even have the university psychologists sit in on certain classes and present the services they have designed specifically for veterans. Moran understands the issue of dealing with possibly threatening issues:

> Of course, it's important for instructors to understand that writing may unleash painful feelings, and writers may find that they need the support of skilled professionals to handle these feelings. Instructors should be prepared to make appropriate referrals if the need arises. It's also important for writers to feel safe to explore these painful experiences in privacy. (Moran 104)

I had to make one referral to the counseling center last semester. The student described mixing a potentially lethal combination of pills and alcohol, and I immediately grew concerned. I talked to the student over email for hours, trying to make sure that the crisis did not escalate.

I asked him later if the writing assignments had dredged up bad memories and put him in this state of mind. He said that the writing assignments had nothing to do with his problems, that he goes weeks at a time without sleep, and that he suffers from a complete loss of affect, making him "hate everything about the world." I was relieved both when he told me that the writing assignments did not provoke his behavior and when I reviewed the emails with the counseling center. The staff psychologists there said that he was likely abusing the medication to "get high" and to "avoid the symptoms related to his PTSD." The next day, I found the student sleeping in the lounge of the Veterans Affairs office where I work. When he woke up and displayed signs of lucidity, I asked him to come into my office and talk. Together, we came to the agreement that he would take proactive measures to brace for the next batch of warning signs accompanying this kind of behavior.

I could not help but feel guilty the moment the student mentioned the pills and alcohol. The very first thing that came to my mind was the thought, "I may have caused one of my students harm." But this was not the case: The young man already suffers from extreme PTSD and probably a number of undiagnosed illnesses. I believe that my concern was caused by the negative reactions I have heard concerning the teaching of personal writing. MacCurdy sums up the opposition:

> Some in our discipline are understandably uncomfortable with autobiographical writing [… T]he personal essay course is an elective, students can choose to open themselves up to this genre; they will not be coerced into it by an enthusiastic first-year composition instructor, and they can pick their own topics, which offers them the control. The intensity of the experience is theirs. (190)

I am very much an "enthusiastic first-year composition instructor." But I am also a veteran who can directly relate with his students. These students are already suffering, and I just want to try and help them using what I have learned.

Still, there remains opposition and a rightful concern about what I am doing. I cannot answer every charge here. So I will conclude on two notes: First, "researchers have shown that most people are helped by speaking or writing to someone else about their experience, even if the 'other' is not a trained therapist" (26), and as MacCurdy points out, "[t]he same thing that helps us to recover from traumatic experiences—describing images in detail to another—produces writing which is alive with sensory description" (167). In the end, bibliotherapy in the veterans' orientation course offers a chance at healing when there may not be alternatives available (or acceptable to the veteran). Furthermore, personal writing is an act that will, if nothing else, help students improve their basic writing skills and do better in other classes. Finally, I conduct these exercises with a healthy amount of skepticism, a fair amount of research, and heart full of compassion.

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EDUCATION

Eastern Kentucky University May 2011
M.A., English, emphasis in American Literature

E**astern Kentucky University** December 2009
B.A., English, emphasis in Literature
Summa cum Laude

Somerset Community College May 2008
A.A., emphasis in English
High Distinction

EXPERIENCE

Graduate Assistant, Eastern Kentucky University Fall 2010-Present
Veterans Education and Transition Support
As the designer and co-instructor of EKU's first veteran-only orientation course I use basic study skills, information/access to university resources, and bibliotherapy/scriptotherapy to circumvent the adjustment problems faced by military veterans entering college. I am also the creator and managing editor for *The Journal of Military Experience*, a book of short stories, poems, and artwork by student veterans.

I began an exploratory committee for the creation of a minor/certification in Veterans Studies (VST). The VST program combines entirely new courses with existing courses in an interdisciplinary and interdepartmental approach to helping loved ones and professionals working directly with veterans better understand the challenges related to military service. The VST program will be the first of its kind in the United States when implemented in the Fall 2011semester.

Instructor, Eastern Kentucky University Fall 2010
Eastern's English Language Instruction Program
I designed course materials and instructed ESL students in fundamental reading skills. Through the use of poetry, narratives, and basic linguistic tools I helped students from various countries pass the Michigan assessment exam and enter into higher education.

Graduate Assistant, Eastern Kentucky University Spring-Summer 2010
Office of Services for Individuals with Disabilities
In the management of the EKU's Peer Note-Taker program I trained and assigned peer note-takers for students registered with the Disabilities Office. I also tutored individuals in composition**,** managed the hiring and placement of student tutors, and assisted with the implementation of the "Project Success" retention program. I also performed administrative duties while learning the skills needed to assist individuals with physical and psychological barriers to education.

Sergeant / Motor Vehicle Instructor, United States Army Fall 2002-Fall 2006
51st Transportation Company, Mannheim, Germany
As an Advanced Motor-Vehicle Instructor (AMVI), Squad Leader and Team Leader in the United States Army, I mentored and trained up to fifteen subordinates at a time. I instructed hundreds of soldiers in basic motor vehicle operations, European driving laws, military procedures**,** tactical operations, combat techniques, and customs and courtesies. I served two tours of duty in Iraq (2003 & 2005) and two years with the U.S. Armed Forces in Europe.

PRESENTATIONS / SPEECHES

"Reality/Anti-Reality and Morality/Anti-Morality in WWI and WWII Memoirs." Northeast Modern Language Association. Rutgers University. New Brunswick, NJ. 07 Apr. 2011. Presentation.

"The Battle for Balance: Ethnography and the Creation of Wartime Self in Shoshana Johnson's *I'm Still Standing*." Kentucky Philological Association. Kentucky State University. Frankfort, KY. 04 Mar. 2011. Presentation.

"One Night in Iraq." Kentucky Philological Association. Kentucky State University. Frankfort, KY. 04 Mar. 2011. Presentation.

"Guide to a Successful and Rewarding Graduate Assistantship." Eastern Kentucky University, Graduate Assistant Training. Richmond, KY. 18 Aug. 2010. Speech.

Alumni Panel Member. Eastern Kentucky University, McNair Scholars Program 2010 Fall Seminar. Richmond, KY. 11 Sep. 2010. Question and Answer Session.

"Going from Combat to the Classroom: Integrating the Veteran into the Campus Community." Association of Non-Traditional Students in Higher Education. University of North Carolina-Charlotte. Charlotte, NC. 12 Mar. 2010. Presentation.

"Latent Christianity in *To the Lighthouse*." Kentucky Philological Association. Eastern Kentucky University. Richmond, KY. 05 Mar. 2010. Presentation.

"Confronting Issues of Why, How and Trauma in the War Memoir." McNair Scholars Conference and Graduate Symposium. University Wisconsin-Milwaukee. Delevan, WI. 11 Nov. 2009. Presentation.

SERVICE / COMMITTEES

Mentor. Tenth Annual Undergraduate Presentation Showcase. Eastern Kentucky University. Spring 2011.

Founder / Member: Veterans Studies Program Exploratory Committee. Eastern Kentucky University. Fall 2010-Present.

Alternate Representative: Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Committee. Eastern Kentucky University. Summer 2010-Present.

Service Officer / VA Claims Representative: Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW). Richmond, KY. Fall 2010-Present.

Student Vice President: The Honor Society of Phi Kappa Phi. Eastern Kentucky University, Spring 2010-Present.

Counselor / Mentor: "Planning to Win" Summer Camp (Academic orientation for students with moderate to severe disabilities). Eastern Kentucky University, Summer 2010.

Founder / President / Alumni Officer: Eastern Kentucky University Veterans Education and Transition Support (EKU VETS). Eastern Kentucky University, Spring 2009-Present.

Vice-Chair: Non-Traditional Student Council (Student Government Association): Eastern Kentucky University, Fall 2008-Spring 2009.

PUBLICATIONS

The Journal of Military Experience (Spring 2011). Editor. ISBN-13: 978-061-545-9202.

"The Sparrow's Fall: Self's Mergence with Identity in Louisa May Alcott's Hospital Sketches." *Forum* (Fall 2010). <http://forum.llc.ed.ac.uk/current_issue/11/index.php>

"A Halloween to Remember." *Aurora Literary Arts Journal* (Spring 2010).

SELECTED HONORS AND AWARDS

Academic

Department of English and Theatre Writing Award, Graduate Writing, Spring 2011
Kentucky State Assembly Recognition (for work with student veterans), Spring 2011
Department of English and Theatre Writing Award, Creative Non-Fiction, Spring 2010
EKU Phi Kappa Phi Graduate Fellowship, Spring 2010
Aurora Journal of Literary Arts Creative Non-Fiction Award, Spring 2010
Dean's Award, Fall 2009
McNair Scholar Scholastic Achievement Award, Fall 2009
McNair / EKU Presidential Scholarship for Excellence, Fall 2009
Stellar Scholar Award for Non-Traditional Students, Spring 2009
Department of English and Theatre Writing Award, Literature and Other Media, Spring 2009
Student Government Award for Outstanding Service, Spring 2009
Academic Achievement Award, History, Spring 2008
President's Award (Every Semester), 2008-2009
Dean's List (Every Semester), 2007-2009

Military

Honorable Discharge
Purple Heart Award
Army Commendation Medal
Good Conduct Medal
Global War on Terrorism Expeditionary Medal
Global War on Terrorism Service Medal
Iraq Campaign Medal (2)
Mannheim, Germany Community Service Coin
Combat Lifesaver Course Honor Graduate
Army Certificate of Achievement (2)

Overseas Service Ribbon (3)

PROFESSIONAL MEMBERSHIPS

Modern Language Association
Northeast Modern Language Association
Sigma Tau Delta International English Honor Society
Phi Kappa Phi Interdisciplinary Honor Society
Phi Theta Kappa Honor Society
Student Veterans of America
Association of Non-Traditional Students in Higher Education
Military Order of the Purple Heart
Veterans of Foreign Wars
American Legion