

Introduction: *The Journal of Military Experience*

The following stories, poems, and artwork belong to men and women trying to translate entirely foreign experiences into a language that others—and the writers themselves—can understand. The following pages detail the efforts of veterans to look back and decide *who they were* in uniform, what they have become, and what their experiences mean to their respective futures.

Most of the authors here are student veterans making the transition from military to civilian life. In that way, they are re-shaping their skills and knowledge into something palpable for existence in a strange new reality. If what you read seems surreal, horrific, or confusing, know that this way of life became completely ordinary for the authors in this journal. It is the world that they have been asked to reintegrate themselves into—the world that you consider to be normal—that has grown, to them, estranged and unfamiliar.

It seems like every generation has its wars and men and women in uniform who write about them. Before you read any further, ask yourself, “Why is this the case?” What possible reason could there be for airmen, marines, sailors, and soldiers to write about the most unspeakable crime that mankind is capable of committing? The answer lies in the question: War is as horrible and awe-inspiring as they say; it is something that we—the citizens of a country lucky enough to fight wars in faraway locations—have the option of pushing to the back of our minds and quietly dismissing as a necessary evil. War is something that we do not have to think about, but it is something that those who fight in our stead must think about every day after they return home.

Not all of the stories and poems that follow are about combat or service overseas. Yes, some of the authors write about the unspeakable things that they have been asked to do, or more accurately, that have been done to them. But some focus solely on that work of translation, making sense of a warrior culture and the mentality of an individual who has been bred, trained, and conditioned by a society in desperate need of a few willing to sacrifice for the many. In this way,

all of the following works are interrelated—bound by a common bond of service—and speak with a unified voice to a fragmented audience of believers and skeptics alike.

I have had the help of some kindhearted, altruistic individuals at Eastern Kentucky University in making *The Journal of Military Experience* become a reality. I particularly want to thank Brett Morris for allocating the time and resources (job) needed for me to work countless hours soliciting, compiling, and editing the submissions. I also want to thank Dr. Deborah Core and Dr. Lisa Day-Lindsey for their mentorship and guidance in the fields of life-writing, trauma, and English composition. Russell Helms, from EKV's creative writing program, met with me in the early stages of the journal's formation, setting me on the right track about how to go about the work of creating a journal. On the same note, and if this journal later appears in online form, know that Linda Sizemore from the EKV Libraries approached me and is currently guiding me about how to include these works in their online repository. Ryan Donahue, a veteran and leader in the EKV VETS student organization, helped me figure out how to convert this journal into printable form. Veteran artist Matthew Foley put countless hours into interpreting the emotions and symbols contained herein for the production of an original cover. The same credit for artistic interpretation should go to Luke Manuel and Micah Owen for the artwork accompanying the stories. Thanks must also go to Dr. Susan Kroeg and the members of Sigma Tau Delta English Honors Society for volunteering their services as editorial consultants. Most importantly, none of this would have been possible without the financial contributions of the EKV Student Government Association and the College of Justice and Safety.

Finally, I want to thank the authors for being brave and willing enough to share their memories, dreams, and emotions. We corresponded regularly through emails, expanding and revising the works as many times as we could possibly fit into two semesters. I have read these works so many times that I have internalized their lessons. Pride, sadness, honor, and pure, unadulterated terror have been regular parts of my daily routine for some time now. As you read, you

will find yourself asking how these men and women were able to endure so much for so long. Speaking from the personal standpoint of teacher and friend to many of the authors, I can say that it is an inspiration to witness their resiliency, not only in sharing their experiences, but in waking up each day with the courage to create a new life after witnessing so much pain and suffering. Facilitating a means for these authors to narrate their experiences in a cathartic, healing way that educates non-veteran readers about the nature of military service is what this is all about.

—Travis L. Martin

Editor, *The Journal of Military Experience*

