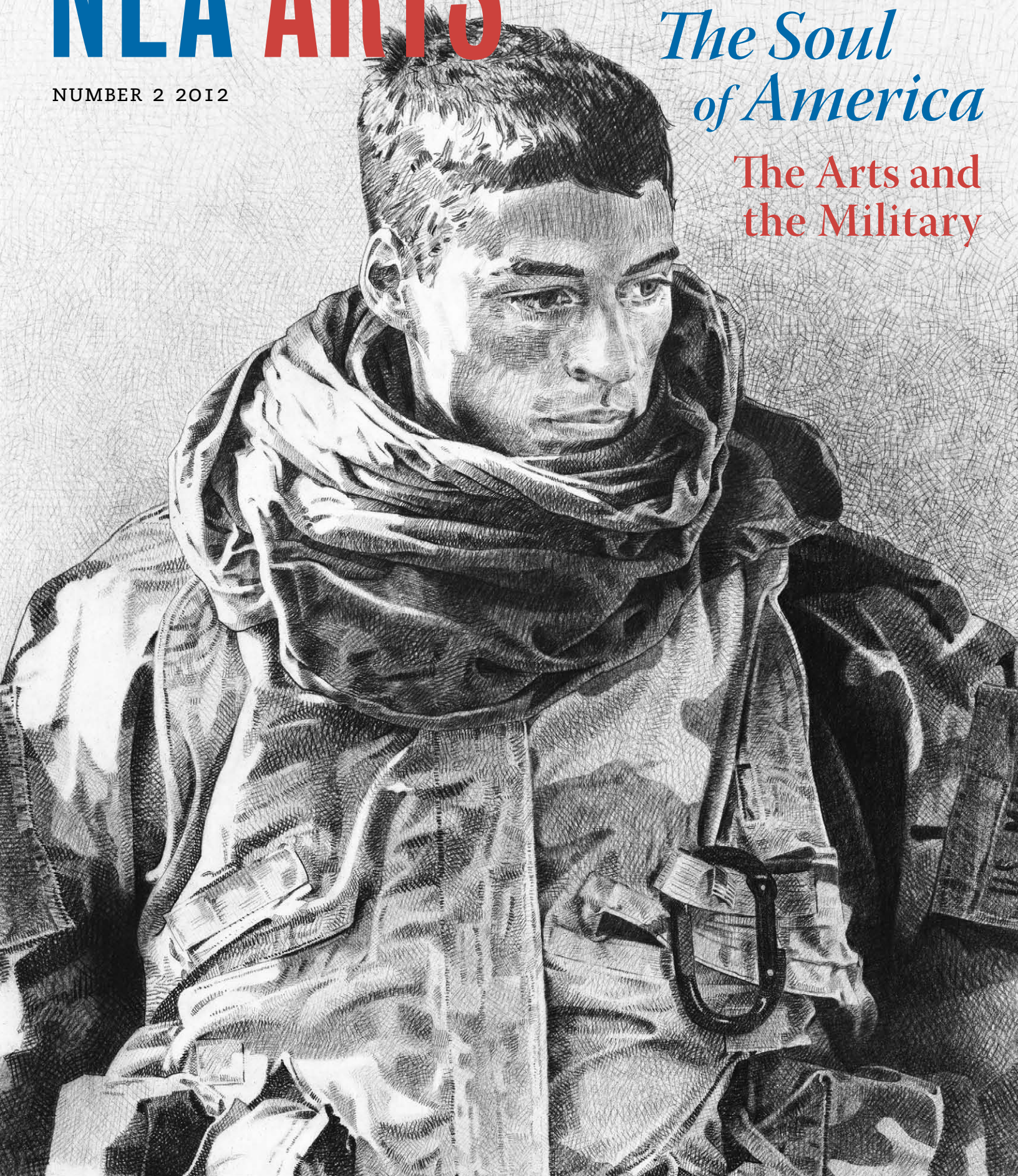


# NEA ARTS

NUMBER 2 2012

*The Soul  
of America*

*The Arts and  
the Military*



# NEA ARTS

## NATIONAL COUNCIL ON THE ARTS

Rocco Landesman, *Chairman*  
James Ballinger  
Miguel Campaneria  
Ben Donenberg  
Aaron Dworkin  
JoAnn Falletta  
Lee Greenwood  
Deepa Gupta  
Joan Israelite  
Charlotte Kessler  
Bret Lott  
Irvin Mayfield, Jr.  
Stephen Porter  
Barbara Ernst Prey  
Frank Price

## EX-OFFICIO

Sen. Claire McCaskill (D-MO)  
Sen. Sheldon Whitehouse (D-RI)  
Rep. Betty McCollum (D-MN)  
Rep. Patrick J. Tiberi (R-OH)  
Appointment by Congressional leadership of the remaining ex-officio members to the council is pending.

## NEA ARTS STAFF

Don Ball *Executive Editor*  
Paulette Beete *Editor*  
Liz Auclair  
Rebecca Gross  
Josephine Reed  
Abigail Roberts

Nancy Bratton Design



## ABOUT THIS ISSUE

At first glance, the arts and the military might seem to have very little in common. But in truth, the two disciplines have a long history together. From the Greek playwright Aeschylus who took the ancient Persian-Greek wars as his subject circa 472 BC, to Walt Whitman who not only wrote expansively about the U.S. Civil War but served as a war-time nurse, to the numerous military scenes captured in the visual arts, such as August Saint-Gauden's Civil War memorial sculpture of Robert Gould Shaw and the all-black 54th Regiment, there has always been an overlap between conflict and creativity.

Today, however, the relationship between artist and service member goes much deeper. For one thing, all of the armed services contain artist occupations—from members of military bands to graphic artists to writers to photographers. The arts have also become part of the protocol of military health care as health professionals integrate diverse disciplines—music, visual arts, creative writing—into the ongoing care of troops recovering from a range of physical and mental injuries.

The NEA has long recognized this intimate connection. Programs like Great American Voices and Shakespeare in American Communities brought arts performances to military audiences, while Operation Homecoming offered military personnel and their families the chance to expound on military service through creative writing.

In this issue we will take a look at several intersections of the arts and the military, including the combat visual artists programs of the U.S. Army and Marine Corps, and the men and women who serve in the 158 U.S. military bands. We'll also visit the groundbreaking National Intrepid Center of Excellence at Walter Reed National Military Medical Center, where arts activities are a prescribed part of the clinical experience for patients. We'll take the stage with 2011 National Medal of Arts recipient United Service Organizations (USO), which has been bringing great artists to visit troops since 1941. And finally, we'll go behind-the-scenes with the NEA's Blue Star Museums program and find out what it took to get this groundbreaking program from idea to reality.

Scan the QR code to the left to access additional online-only material for this issue, and join us on Facebook ([www.facebook.com/NationalEndowmentfortheArts](http://www.facebook.com/NationalEndowmentfortheArts)) and Twitter (@NEAarts).

## ABOUT THE COVER

*Lance Corporal Nicholas G. Ciccone* by Michael D. Fay, a portrait drawn during their duty in Afghanistan. Ciccone committed suicide in 2003. Courtesy of the Art Collection, National Museum of the Marine Corps, Triangle, Virginia

## STORIES

### 3 THE MAGIC OF THE ARTS

Using Creativity To Help Heal Troops  
By *Rebecca Gross*

### 8 SEEING IS BELIEVING

War through the Eyes of a Combat Artist  
By *Christy Crytzer Pierce*

### 12 LIFTING THE SPIRITS

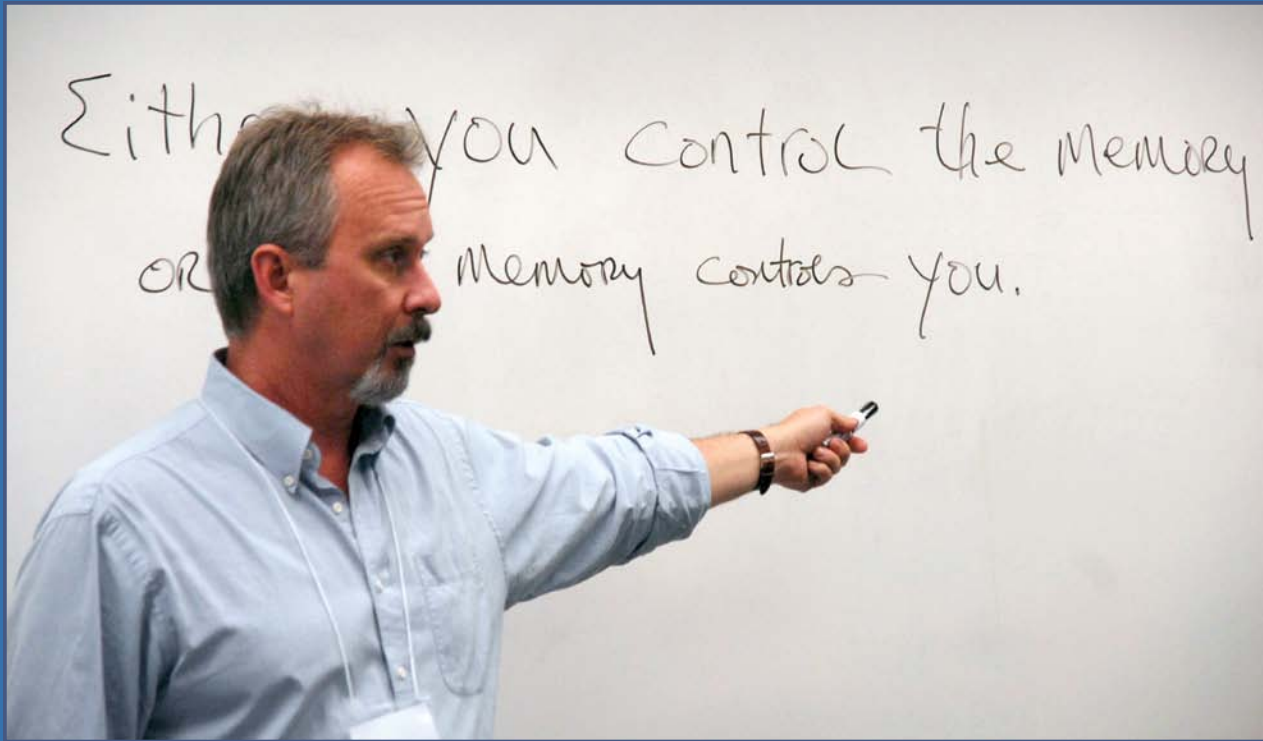
The USO Brings the Arts to the Troops  
By *Paulette Beete*

### 16 STRIKE UP THE BAND!

The Bond between Music and Military  
By *Michael Gallant*

### 20 THE ART OF GIVING BACK

The Blue Star Museums Initiative  
By *Rebecca Gross*



# *The Magic of the Arts*

## Using Creativity To Help Heal Troops

BY REBECCA GROSS

In 1998, Lieutenant Colonel Ron Capps was sent to Kosovo to work as a diplomatic observer for the State Department. One of his duties there was to write up official daily reports of what was happening in the field, which were then cabled on to Washington.

“We were told to write crisp, dry reports about messy, horrible acts of cruelty,” Capps said. “That wasn’t satisfying to me. I needed to really capture what I was seeing and what I thought about it. I did that a lot; if not every night, most nights. I wanted to remember.”

Ron Capps leading a workshop for the Veterans Writing Project, which he founded in 2011. Photo by Jacqueline M. Hames, *Soldiers* magazine



(opposite) The labyrinth in the main lobby of the National Intrepid Center of Excellence at Walter Reed National Medical Center in Bethesda, Maryland.

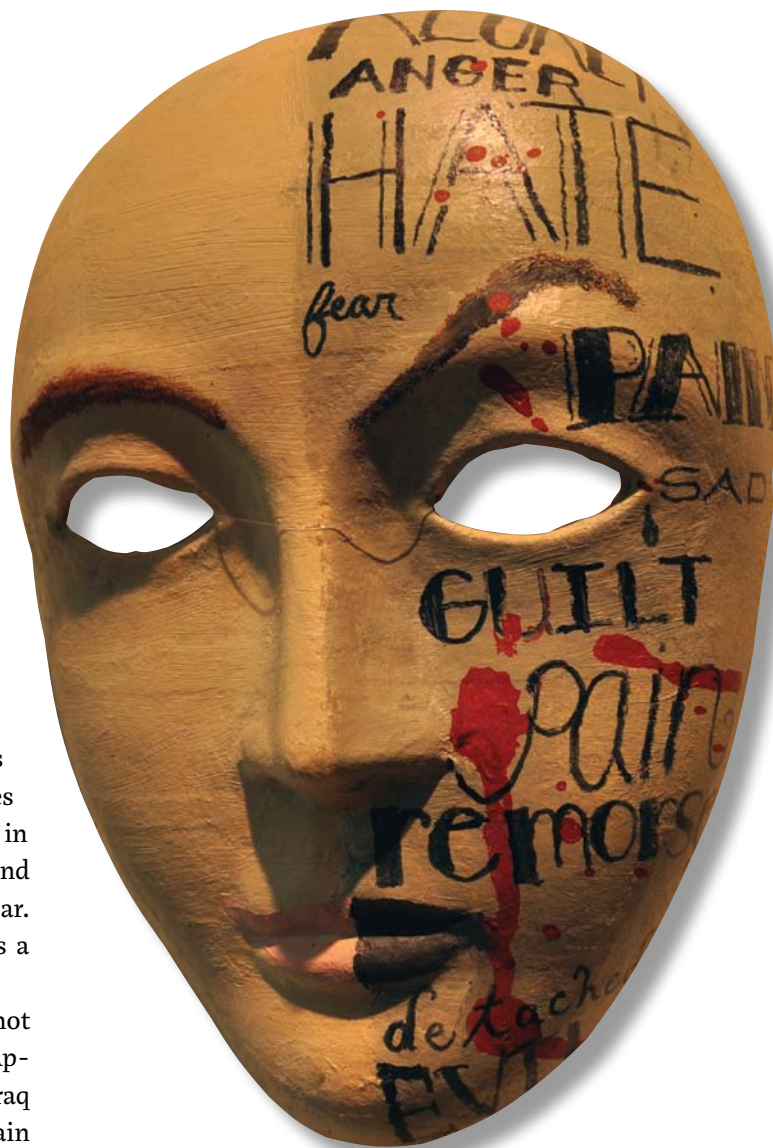
PHOTO COURTESY OF THE NATIONAL INTREPID CENTER OF EXCELLENCE

It was a habit he maintained during the next several years as he was assigned to Rwanda, Afghanistan, Iraq, and Darfur, each one a war zone with its own special set of atrocities. He had seen the bloody results of massacres, been held at gunpoint, listened to stories of rape and mutilation, and dodged rocket attacks. By that point, he said, “I didn’t want to remember as much. I wanted to forget. But you can’t.”

After being diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), Capps began to self-medicate with Prozac and whiskey. But it was not enough. While stationed in Sudan, Capps, a 25-year veteran, nearly committed suicide. He was later medically evacuated back to the United States and retired from the military. He received his MA in writing from Johns Hopkins University in 2011, and founded the Veterans Writing Project the same year. Today, he lives and works in Washington, DC as a writer.

Capps’ journey to the brink is unfortunately not unusual among members of the military today. Approximately 27 percent of troops returning from Iraq and Afghanistan suffer from PTSD, traumatic brain injury (TBI), or both. In the first 155 days of 2012, 154 active duty troops committed suicide—an 18 percent increase from the corresponding period in 2011. What is unusual, however, is how Capps was able to use writing as a means of healing. He frequently says that he “wrote himself home.”

Now he is helping others write their own paths back to wellness at the National Intrepid Center of Excellence (NICoE), located on the campus of Walter Reed National Military Medical Center in Bethesda, Maryland. Open since October 2010, this brand-new facility is pioneering a holistic approach to treating and researching combat-related TBI and PTSD. The patients referred here typically have complex physical and psychological issues, and haven’t responded to conventional treatment. During an intensive four-week program, they are treated with a combination of traditional medicine and alternative therapies, including acupuncture, recreational therapy, art therapy, and writing. In June, ground



During Melissa Walker’s art therapy program, patients create masks as a way of visually expressing their conflicting identities. PHOTO COURTESY OF THE NICoE HEALING ARTS PROGRAM

broke on two NICoE Satellite Centers at Camp Lejeune, North Carolina, and Fort Belvoir, Virginia.

The writing component of the program is a new feature of the NEA’s Operation Homecoming initiative. From 2004 to 2009, Operation Homecoming conducted more than 60 writing workshops for troops, veterans, and their families, giving these individuals an opportunity to tell their stories. The project resulted in a published anthology of submitted works, as well as two award-winning documentaries. In a new iteration of the program, the NEA has collaborated with NICoE to feature expressive and creative writing in group and individual sessions as part of the center’s standard clinical program. Capps

was brought in by the NEA to lead the workshops. At the time of publication, plans were also in the works for the NEA to partner with NICoE on a new music therapy program. Like all components of NICoE, both the writing and music programs are designed as cohesive aspects of service members' overall treatment plans.

Capps and Melissa Walker, the program's art therapist, have worked together to ensure their programs are integrated and reflect issues that patients will be working through with their other care providers. Both structure their first group classes around themes of masks and identity. Walker begins by having service members create masks, which allows them to visualize and externalize conflicting identities of who they were and who they have become. For his initial expressive writing session, Capps starts with a scene from *The Iliad* that describes how Hector, while wearing armor, isn't recognized by his own child.

"The service members are coming here because they're trying to figure something out," Walker said. "Their career might be changing. They might have to transition out of the military. They might go back into the military, but not be able to operate the same way. It's confusing for them." On top of that, troops must somehow reconcile their combat identity with their family identity. "You have to keep your warrior in theater, and you've got your family person when you're at home," she said. "Sometimes that spills into each other."

Once patients start creating, both Capps and Walker believe the hypervigilance associated with PTSD can begin to weaken. After 15 months spent on guard in a combat zone, it can be difficult to turn the brain "off" into a relaxed state. With art, "They're finally able to zone in, hone in, and have everything slow down," Walker said. "I think that helps to at least start to reverse some of these effects that [mental] ramping up has had on them."

Although sharing their writing and artwork is not mandatory, it can help build bridges back to both peers and families. Every Wednesday evening, informal creative writing sessions—accompanied by a barbeque—are held for all patients and families at either NICoE or the Fisher House (which provides free, on-site housing for troops receiving treatment and their families) as an additional part of the Operation Homecoming initiative. These sessions are supported by The Boeing Company, which has sponsored Operation Homecoming activities since the initiative's inception in 2004.

Those who wish to share their work with the group may do so. "We have a number of cases where family members would just look at us and go, 'He's never said that before,'" said Capps. "Maybe because he couldn't."

Capps elaborated on what he referred to as "the magic of the arts." "Writing helps to create a little bit of distance," he said. "The way that I think of it is as if you have this traumatic memory and it's hot or radioactive. You pick it up with your bare hand—your bare brain so to speak—you can't manage it, it's unmanageable. But by putting art or music or writing in between, you have a filter—it's like putting on a pair of gloves. You can reach out and pick it up."

Existing scientific research seems to back up this idea. In the 1994 study *The Body Keeps the Score*, Bessel van der Kolk used neuro-imaging to show that traumatic recall caused the left frontal lobe of the brain to shut down. This is where Broca's area—the center of speech in the brain—lives, which would explain why so many individuals have difficulty verbalizing their traumatic experiences. In contrast, traumatic recall lights up the brain's right hemisphere. "Those are the same areas that you use when you're doing spatial reasoning and using your hands and creating something," Walker said. "You're literally accessing the same parts of the brain [that you would] if you were trying to access that trauma."

NICoE hopes to continue to research the effects that the arts have on treating TBI and PTSD. Right now, the art modalities are evaluated anecdotally, but NICoE is beginning to explore how they might be measured scientifically. "We need to figure out what are the measurable effects, and then build those into a protocol," said NICoE Director Dr. James Kelly. Functional imaging, he hopes, will allow doctors and scientists to see "what parts of the brain are used when creating art, and how this helps people psychologically."

But anecdotal or no, the evidence seems powerful. On July 3, 2010, E-4 Army Specialist James Saylor was hit by mortar fire in Afghanistan. He took shrapnel to the back of his head and neck, part of which bounced off the back of his skull and lodged itself against the jugular wall. One of the discs in his back was broken, and two others were herniated. During a surgery to remove the shrapnel, a nerve was nicked, and the right side of Saylor's face became paralyzed. Diagnosed with PTSD, he found himself plagued by nightmares, impatience, and irritability.



In addition to masks, patients also create montages that express the many layers of their experiences, thoughts, and emotions.

PHOTO COURTESY OF THE NICOE HEALING ARTS PROGRAM

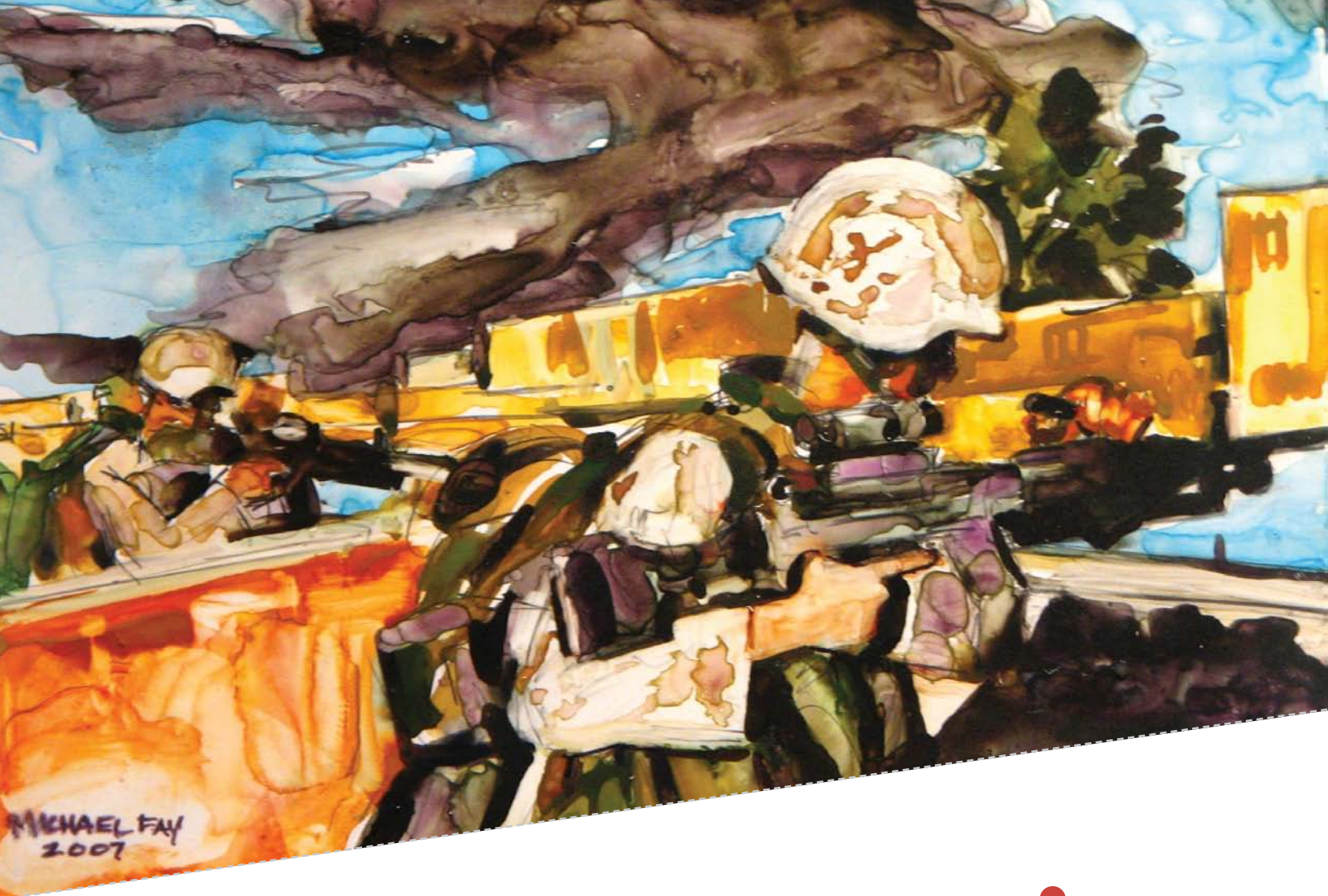
After an unsuccessful stint at the TBI clinic at Fort Campbell, where Saylor is stationed, he was admitted to NICoE in February 2012. All troops are invited to bring their families along during treatment, which was a gift for his wife, Tiffany. When it comes to TBI and PTSD, she said, it's not just about the individual soldier. "You're also healing the family, because that family's got to adjust to it as well."

For James Saylor, it was writing that became a favorite tool to manage his PTSD. "We're trapped in our own heads in these dreams and these nightmares and these flashbacks," he said. "But once we get down into the writing and music and art—that we can control, and we can do what we want to. We can change it and take it anywhere we want to, whenever we want to." During the creative writing sessions, Saylor began to write a story about dirt track racing; it is now 30-something pages long.

Even though the content doesn't deal directly with

his traumatic memories, the story provides a way to channel his feelings in a more manageable framework. "[Dirt track racing] is something that I know a lot about, and I'm not scared to write about it," he said. "I can express my feelings—my irritability and anxiety—through my story in ways that I know, that I've seen on racetracks."

Of course, artistic expression isn't effective for all patients; like any other wound, TBI and PTSD heal differently for different people. But for those who do respond, it can be a saving grace during what can be a years-long—and sometimes lifelong—recovery. Although Capps retired from the military in 2008 and has gone on to re-shape his career and his own personal story, he said that the therapeutic value of his work still persists as he writes about his experiences in Kosovo, Afghanistan, and Darfur. "I somehow knew that writing was, for me, the way that I was going to get control of my brain," Capps said. "And I did. And I still do." ▲



# Seeing is Believing

## War through the Eyes of a Combat Artist

BY CHRISTY CRYTZER PIERCE

A painting by Michael D. Fay of rooftop patrol, Operation Steel Curtain, in Ubaydi, Iraq. COURTESY OF THE ART COLLECTION, NATIONAL MUSEUM OF THE MARINE CORPS, TRIANGLE, VIRGINIA

American artists have chronicled war for centuries—John Singleton Copley’s *The Death of Major Peirson* (1784), Winslow Homer’s *Sounding Reveille* (1865), and *El Pozo* (1898) by William Glackens, to name just a few. The advent of an official U.S. military art program, however, arrived in World War I when eight artists were commissioned to record the activities in Europe of the American Expeditionary Forces. Following the war, most of the work produced became part of the Smithsonian Institution.

The military’s efforts to document war through the arts were re-activated during World War II, giving rise to programs such as the Army’s War Art Unit and the Navy’s Combat Art Program. Since the Second World War, each branch of the military, including the Coast Guard, has established its own art program. Together,



these programs have covered conflicts from the Korean War to Vietnam. More recently, artists have been sent to Desert Shield/Storm, Iraq, Afghanistan, and various other missions and humanitarian operations.

One such artist is Michael D. Fay, a painter, illustrator, and retired chief warrant officer for the Marine Corps. The Marines credit World War I artist Colonel John W. Thomason, Jr. with starting their artistic tradition, but the official Marine Corps Combat Art Program began in WWII under the guidance of Brigadier General Robert Denig. When embedding artists alongside correspondents, photographers, and filmmakers, Denig's philosophy was this: "At peace or at war, man cannot live by bread alone. A special case for art in time of war may be made, for it is then that man's spiritual, as well as physical, being is most severely in need of sustaining strength."

Fay's philosophy of why it's important to have artists side by side with troops on the battlefield is simpler: "They just don't want to be invisible."

As a combat artist in Iraq and Afghanistan, Fay embedded himself with Marines and captured them both in the throes of combat, as well as in quiet, everyday moments. One of only a handful of combat artists across the services, Fay came to his profession in a "serendipitous" way. Enlisting in the Marines from 1975–78, he then went on to receive a degree in art education from Pennsylvania State University. After struggling to find a teaching job, he reenlisted in the Marines from 1983–1993, and it was then that Fay started sketching "slice-of-life" moments.

For the next few years, Fay held several jobs, but none in the arts. After a chance encounter with Colonel Donna Neary, a Marine reservist and former combat artist who owned an art gallery in Fay's hometown of Fredericksburg, Maryland, Fay's sketches won him a place back with the Marines in 2000, but this time working with the Marine Historical Center (now part of the National Museum of the Marine Corps). Following the events of September 11, 2001, Fay was deployed four times, creating art in Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Bahrain, and Oman.

"The Marine philosophy has always been, 'Go to war, do art,'" emphasized Fay. "This is not for propaganda purposes or to make posters.... [Y]ou are expected to go out with the troops and to make art from their experiences."

To gain this level of access, combat artists must

earn a high level of respect from both the officers and troops. "I'm often asked if I'm an artist first or a soldier, and it's not a static thing; it's very dynamic," explained Fay. "If you go out with a unit and you are not value-added in combat, word will spread and you won't go out again.... They need to know that if things get out of control, you will drop the sketch book, pick up a gun, and start shooting."

Unlike combat photography, which records a singular moment in time, combat art can capture and interpret the entire experience. For Fay, living this experience, especially while out on active duty, was the first and most important part of the art-making process. He often took digital pictures and brought an audio recorder to help him document the events.

"What I'm doing creatively then is I'm having the experience as deeply as I can," he recalled. "I have the gear on and I'm hot and sweaty, dying for a drink, and I'm having the experience along with the soldiers."

If there was a quiet moment, Fay would do field sketches, often with dirt, sweat, and other conditional realities mixed in. These works provided both artistic and historical on-the-spot testimonial, coveted by historians. At night, Fay worked in an ad hoc studio on base. Often with only a blue headlamp to guide him, he sketched emblematic images from the day.

Back at home, Fay created bodies of work based on his notes, photographs, and sketches. With quiet, time, and perspective on his side, he could lay out entire collections and use materials that were not compatible to the harsh field conditions, such as watercolors and oil paints. All works based on his four deployments, both from the field and back at home, are now part of the collection of the National Museum of the Marine Corps.

No matter the assignment or branch of military, almost all combat artists have had firsthand wartime experience. This was no exception for Fay, who named November 16, 2005, as his darkest day on duty. In his *New York Times* blog series "Drawing Fire: Into Ubaydi," Fay narrated his experiences in Operation Steel Curtain, a battle against Iraqi insurgents along

**> Go to [arts.gov](http://arts.gov) for a special online-only interview with military artist and Vietnam veteran Don R. Schol.**

the Euphrates River, during which many young soldiers were killed and wounded.

Fay blogged, “For many of us it would be a long journey back to anything close to wholeness and equilibrium. Like our buddies who carried the dead to the waiting helos hours before, we too would feel the weight of their presence pulling on us for years to come.” It would take Fay years to finish a collection based on this experience.

Even in these dangerous and emotionally raw situations, Fay believes the presence of an artist—once there is rapport—can actually be a major morale booster for the soldiers. “For guys facing their own mortality,” he explained, “feeling that what they’re doing is important and won’t be forgotten is extremely motivating.”

Since his retirement from the Marines in 2009, Fay has continued his mission to visually chronicle the effects of war on troops. As founder of the Joe Bonham Project—a group named after the limbless, faceless character in Dalton Trumbo’s antiwar novel *Johnny Got His Gun*—he and about a dozen professional artists are now documenting the recovery experience of wounded service members through art.

Since the program’s inception, the artists have sketched soldiers with everything from bullet holes and shrapnel burns to colostomy bags and missing limbs, primarily at the Walter Reed National Military Medical Center in Bethesda, Maryland. So far, hundreds of works of art have been created, with gallery shows already presented at the University of North Carolina, Charlotte, and at Storefront gallery in Brooklyn, New



(left) Fay’s painting of Lance Corporal Fuller, who is mourning the loss of his comrades from Operation Steel Curtain, Ubaydi, Iraq. COURTESY OF THE ART COLLECTION, NATIONAL MUSEUM OF THE MARINE CORPS, TRIANGLE, VIRGINIA

(below) *Lance Corporal Guzman Tosses in a Grenade, Ubaydi, Iraq* by Michael D. Fay.

COURTESY OF THE ART COLLECTION, NATIONAL MUSEUM OF THE MARINE CORPS, TRIANGLE, VIRGINIA



York. This November there will be a show at the Pepco Edison Place Art Gallery in Washington, DC.

So how do these wounded warriors feel about having artists capture their ravaged bodies? Contrary to general assumption, Fay insisted the soldiers are not self-conscious about being sketched. He told the story of Specialist Derek McConnell, who lost both of his legs in combat. McConnell asked artist Victor Juhasz, "Do you want to see everything?" and proceeded to take off his shirt to reveal severe stretch marks, a bag, and wounds that had gone septic. "These guys understand why we are there, and they are really willing to open up to us," noted Fay.

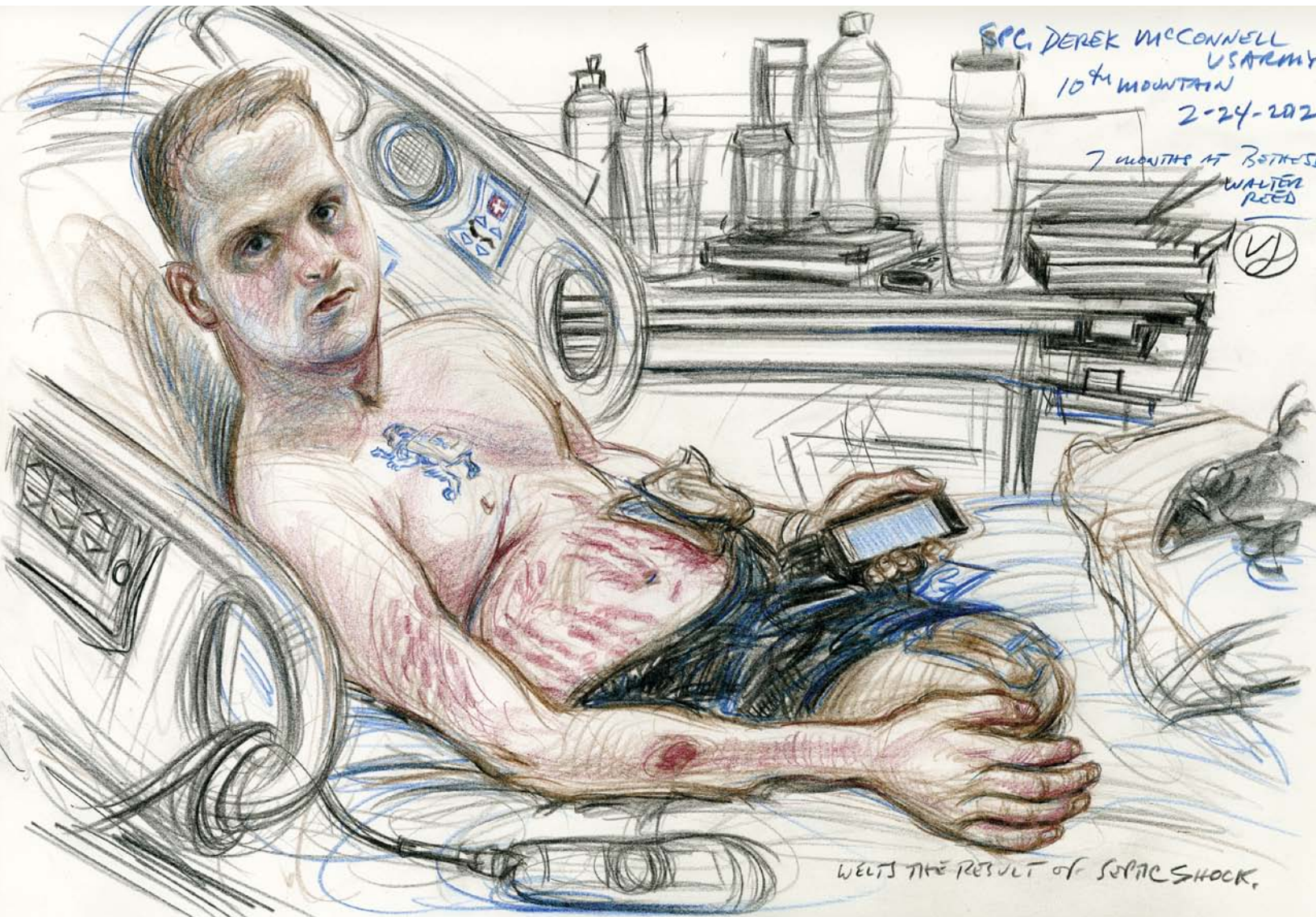
In addition to sketching the service members, the artists also ask to hear their stories. Oftentimes family members are in the room, hearing for the first time how

their loved ones were injured. "In a way, this is how we give them visibility, too," Fay pointed out. "We're not afraid of asking the tough questions everyone is afraid to ask...they want their sacrifice to count."

Fay wishes more people talked to troops about their experiences, instead of trusting video games or Hollywood to shape their perspectives on war: "I think culture is formed by storytelling, and these stories just need to be told." ▲

—Christy Crytzer Pierce is a writer and publicist in Fort Worth, Texas.

**Portrait of Specialist Derek McConnell by Victor Juhasz as part of the Joe Bonham Project, founded by Michael D. Fay.** IMAGE COURTESY OF MICHAEL D. FAY



# Lifting the Spirits

## The USO Brings the Arts to the Troops

BY PAULETTE BEETE



In early 1941, with the U.S. on the verge of entering World War II, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt was busy preparing America's armed forces for the upcoming conflict. FDR was concerned with more than military strategy; he also considered the morale and comfort of those headed toward battle. As explained by Sloan Gibson, president of United Service Organizations (USO), "I think Roosevelt already had a sense for the challenges that the country was going to have as America mobilized. And he brought together six different organizations—YMCA, YWCA, Salvation Army, Jewish Welfare Board, Catholic Community Charities, and Travelers Aid Society—under the umbrella of the USO to take care of troops during World War II, and we've really been around ever since." The mission with which Roosevelt charged the new organization? "To lift the spirits of America's troops and their families," said Gibson.

With the help of an enormous cadre of volunteers, today's USO does many things, including manning more than 160 USO locations for troops and their families worldwide, sending care packages to overseas troops, providing connectivity for phone calls

(opposite) Bob Hope, who inaugurated the USO entertainment division in 1941, in a 1965 Christmas show in Vietnam. PHOTO COURTESY OF BOB HOPE FOUNDATION

(below) Rapper David Banner performs for service members during a USO concert at a military base in Iraq in 2009. PHOTO BY FRED GREAVES, COURTESY OF USO

home to loved ones, and assisting at Dover Air Force Base in the dignified transfers of deceased troops. However, the organization is probably best known by the public for its entertainment division, launched just a few months after its founding.

In its first seven years, the USO presented 7,000 entertainers and 428,521 live performances to troops at domestic and international bases. Over the years the talent roster has included everyone from Marilyn Monroe to Sammy Davis, Jr. to Stephen Colbert to Gary Sinise (who also tours with the Lieutenant Dan Band). The Dallas Cowboy Cheerleaders have been regulars on the USO circuit since 1979, and in recent years sports figures have joined the ranks of USO entertainers, including NBA legend Karl Malone, NFL Commissioner Roger Goodell, and NASCAR driver



Joey Logano. Everyone that signs on for a USO tour donates their time.

“Oftentimes these people are paid significant amounts of money to show up and do what we’re asking them to do [for free],” said USO Entertainment Vice President Rachel Tischler. “And our celebrities are selflessly saying, ‘The military and their families mean a lot to me, and I’m going to take the time out of my life to go and tell them that.’ I’ve seen [troops] have celebrities propose over the phone or call their parents or wish somebody happy birthday.”

Perhaps no artist comes to mind more readily when speaking of the USO than the iconic comedian Bob Hope. Hope is credited with inaugurating the entertainment division with a May 1941 performance to personnel stationed at California’s March Field. That first show with comedian/musician Jerry Colonna, singer/actress Frances Langford, and radio announcer/actor Bill Goodwin was the first of hundreds—including 35 consecutive Christmas tours—that Hope would host or perform in during his nearly lifelong association with USO.

The military looks very different than it did in 1941, and the USO works to make sure that the diversity of

the entertainers reflects that of today’s troops. “So you get a rapper and you get a famous author so you can talk about writing books and you get a country singer and you get a glamorous film star,” said Tischler, explaining how the organization puts together its tour schedule. “We try and send a little bit of everything since that’s basically representative of what the military is.”

But just as during the Bob Hope era, laughter is still one of the best medicines—at least according to comedian Jeffrey Ross, who has toured with USO since 2005. Perhaps best known as Comedy Central’s consummate roastmaster, Ross first signed on at the urging of Drew Carey and Carey’s TV castmate Kathy Kinney. “I was at a comedy club in L.A., and they just said, ‘Hey, we’re going to Iraq!’ And I had never even been on a military base. I mean I had no idea what I was getting into, but I love an adventure,” remembered Ross.

Ross was also inspired by what he knew of Bob Hope’s work with the group. “[Hope] had died not long before [my first USO tour]. And I remember in the *New York Times*, there was a picture of Bob Hope receiving an award from the president,” he related. “I had never seen a comedian treated with such respect from the commander-in-chief. It made me aware of Bob Hope and what the USO was.” When Ross showed the obituary to his mail carrier, a Vietnam vet, he was surprised that the man became teary-eyed. “I just had never seen a reaction to a comedian like that, and I was inspired to do something more with my life and talent. So, I got into it.”

The comedian’s first tour was especially momentous—the hotel room where he stayed during that trip was bombed. The danger didn’t deter him, however, from continuing to work with the USO; he’s performed for troops nearly every year since. He asserted, “If you can get a joke to penetrate a helmet, or a bullet-proof vest, and the punch line to stay in somebody’s mind when they’re going through all that, and make them laugh, and forget about their predicament, even for a few seconds, to me it’s a good achievement for a comedian.”

Ross added that his chosen profession especially motivates him to entertain the troops. “I talk smack for a living... and these men and women protect my right of free speech.... So I keep going back because it’s the little bit I can do for the people who sacrifice so much.”

While the entertainment tours are a significant part of how USO brings the arts to troops, they are not

**A child reaches out to touch Cookie Monster during a Sesame Street / USO Experience for Military Families show at the Wallace Theater on Fort Belvoir in 2012.**

PHOTO BY JOSEPH ANDREW LEE, COURTESY OF USO





Professional basketball player Al Horford teaches rebound techniques during the USO “Hoops for Troops” tour to military bases in Hawaii in 2011. PHOTO BY DAVE GATLEY, COURTESY OF USO

the only way. The USO2GO program, which sends care packages of toiletries, DVD players, and other comfort items to remote outposts, also provides electronic keyboards and acoustic guitars. In fact, according to Gibson, musical instruments are a common sight in USO centers. “I couldn’t tell you the last time I walked into a USO center and didn’t see a couple of acoustic guitars sitting over on the side.... In some places we’ve actually created rooms that we’ve sound-proofed. We’ve got them equipped with amps and all that kind of stuff so it becomes a place where they can actually go in and jam some.”

The USO is also studying how to incorporate the arts into its Warrior and Family Care program, which provides support to wounded, ill, and injured troops, their families, and their caregivers. Gibson explained that the goal is to have music and the arts incorporated into each of the new state-of-the-art centers it’s building at Fort Belvoir, Virginia, and the Walter Reed National Military Medical Center in Bethesda, Maryland. He stressed, “I’m not talking about celebrities here. I’m talking instead about using music and the arts as therapy for those who have traumatic brain injury or post-traumatic stress.”

The USO is also keenly aware of the emotional toll of deployment on military families, especially as multiple deployments have become the norm. To that

end, they have drafted Elmo, Cookie Monster, and a host of other Sesame Street characters for a production targeted to military youngsters. The USO initially partnered with Sesame Street Workshop (SSW) on a series of resource kits aimed at helping children deal with issues particular to military families, such as constant relocations and injured family members. SSW wanted to do more, however, and the Sesame Street/USO Experience for Military Families tour was born in 2008. To date, the Muppets—including Katie, a new Muppet who is the child of a military family—have performed at more than 130 military bases in the U.S. and abroad to an audience of more than 290,000 troops and their families. According to Tischler, the overwhelming response from moms and dads has been, “Wow, this really gives us a familiar and easy way to talk to our kids.”

Even as the USO continues to adapt to the changing needs of U.S. military personnel, the arts remain a lynchpin of their strategy for the simple reason that when it comes to its mission, the arts work. As Tischler commented, “You know how when you’re in your car and a song comes on that you love, and you’re singing at the top of your lungs and bouncing your head along to it, and having the time of your life? That’s what we bring to people... at the times that they may need it most.” ▲



# Strike *Up* the Band!

The Bond between Music and Military

BY MICHAEL GALLANT

“Where Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Studios’ motto is *ars gratia artis*, ours could be *ars gratia America*,” said Lieutenant Colonel Daniel Price, who serves as chief of music for the United States Air Force. “Instead of making art for art’s sake, we make art for the sake of our country.”

In a nutshell, such is the vital, yet often underestimated, mission of Price, his musical Air Force colleagues, and thousands of other full-time military

musicians who populate bands across the armed forces. Whether representing the Air Force, Marine Corps, Army, Navy, or Coast Guard, military musicians’ duties go deeper than simply playing the right notes to the “The Star-Spangled Banner” come Fourth of July. As Price described it, band members of the armed forces “render official honor for the United States with each performance and represent so much more than just themselves.” And as Price and count-



**The U.S. Army Blues Jazz Ensemble at Blues Alley in Washington, DC.** PHOTO COURTESY OF THE U.S. ARMY BAND "PERSHING'S OWN"

less other military musicians have discovered gig after gig, such acts of musical patriotism can have profound effects on local, national, and even global levels.

The bond between music and the military is neither new nor unique to the United States. "From the Janissary bands of the Ottoman military in the 14th century to the iconic images from our own Revolutionary War of drum-and-fife players coming back from the front, the relationship between music and the military has been an important one," Price noted. "Those Revolutionary War musicians had been bloodied in battle, but they were still there leading the parade and representing the spirit of the people."

Though drum-and-fife players no longer accompany Minutemen into battle amidst blazing muskets and bellowing cannons, military musicians apply their talents in a wide variety of contexts. "I consider myself lucky to have had an opportunity to take part in some incredibly important national events, like welcoming ceremonies for kings and queens, the funerals of Presidents Reagan and Ford, and playing fanfares for presidential inauguration ceremonies," said Staff Sergeant Chris Branagan, a Texas native who joined the U.S. Army Band as a trombonist.

Branagan has honored fallen soldiers at Arlington National Cemetery as well, a task he said is never easy but is the most meaningful work he does as a military musician. "It's about the United States rendering honor and giving thanks," said Price, describing his own work honoring fallen airmen at military funerals. "Playing 'Taps' for someone who has given his or her life, capturing the feeling of mourners and saying an official goodbye in honor of service—it can be difficult, but it's a powerful mission."

Military musicians are regularly called upon to perform at the highest of levels with tremendous poise and dignity, regardless of location, playing conditions, or repertoire—a demanding set of requirements, to say the least. "Auditioning for a premier military band is almost identical to auditioning for a major, full-time

symphony orchestra," said Branagan. "The process is intense and the pressure is high."

Colonel Thomas H. Palmatier, a conductor and multi-instrumentalist who serves as leader and commander of the United States Army Band "Pershing's Own," thrives amidst the demands of the job. "Every day's schedule was different and I was encouraged to use all of my talents as a versatile performer, to arrange music, and to lead small groups and combos," he said of his early years as a military musician. "There's not a day that goes by that I'm not excited about some aspect of my job."

Due to limited rehearsal time, the high-profile nature of most performances, and the stylistic diversity required of military musicians (repertoire can often range from patriotic classics to Adele and beyond), Branagan finds that preparation, and a wealth of prior experience, are keys to success. To gain the chops necessary to thrive in such challenging settings, military musicians often work for years as civilian musicians before ever entering the audition room. Branagan is a former music professor with significant freelance performance experience. Price holds a DMA in conducting. Palmatier earned an MFA in music and performed pop, jazz, and classical on a variety of instruments before joining the military.

In addition to their duties at home, military bands play key roles in ceremonies around the world, often

**The U.S. Navy Band Cruisers, a contemporary music ensemble.** PHOTO COURTESY OF U.S. NAVY BAND





Post-concert interaction between the Russian military and a U.S. Air Force musician (civilian clothes were mandated due to political sensitivities in the area) at the Kant House of Culture in Kant, Kyrgyzstan. PHOTO BY MSGT DANIEL H. NATHANIEL III



## JAZZ AND THE MILITARY

Military bands have played a predominant role in the early careers of many jazz artists, a place where they honed their skills as musicians. Of the 128 NEA Jazz Masters, approximately one-fourth spent time in Army, Navy, Marines, and Air Force military bands.

NEA Jazz Master Joe Wilder was in the Marine Corps during World War II, and talked to the NEA about his experience: "I was pretty good at shooting a rifle and I made sharpshooter, and usually if you did that they would take you out and put you in special weapons units and you trained with them to be snipers. But I was only in that for a short time because Bobby Troup, who wrote 'Route 66,' he was one of the officers down there and he knew who I was... and he went to the general and said, 'We've got a guy here who's been playing with Lionel Hampton's orchestra. Why don't we put him in the headquarters' band? It would boost the morale of the troops.' He had to persuade him to let me do it. So he transferred me from special weapons into the headquarters' band and after the first year I was promoted so I became the assistant bandmaster.

"On weekends we had a dance band within the military band, and we used to play at the Officer's Club and then we used to sometimes go to the USO and play for the servicemen who were there lounging around. That was a place they could go and hang out or meet their girlfriends or their wives or something like that. So we did that kind of a thing to boost the morale too."

PHOTO BY TOM PICH

serving as morale-boosters, ambassadors, and diplomats, all at the same time. Palmatier recalled a momentous performance in Russia to commemorate the 60th anniversary of V-E Day. “Marching through Moscow behind the Stars and Stripes with over one million Muscovites on the streets was quite a thrill,” he said.

Both Palmatier and Price have found great meaning in their work playing for military members in Iraq. “On one occasion, our band performed for some Marines that had been deployed for over a year,” said Price. “They were a long way from home and the ability to go out there in uniform, play for them, show them that we care and value them, and provide them with a bit of relief and a reminder of home can be an incredibly powerful mission.”

Price also recalled times when the work of Air Force musicians has helped build bridges internationally. “One of our bands was stationed in Tokyo and invited to tour Thailand in 2005,” he said. “The goal was to perform in cities that had hosted U.S. bases during the Vietnam War, to say thank you, and to entertain and build friendships with younger audiences who may still have been making up their minds about the U.S.”

The tour began with a performance for the king of Thailand, a beloved monarch who had studied in the United States and become a fan, and amateur composer, of American jazz. “We not only played for the king, which was a tremendous honor, but we created big band arrangements of a few of his compositions and played them for him in his own palace,” said Price. Attending the performance were a number of American officials, including the consul general in Bangkok. “Because of this event, the consul general was invited, along with his staff, to meet the king for the first time,” said Price. “That connection and added prestige really helped him in his role representing the United States and working within Thailand.”

A similar tale unfolded in 2011 at the Transit Center at Manas (TCM) in Kyrgyzstan. “The TCM is a critical airport to U.S. operations in the current war effort and we dearly appreciate the relationship that we have with the Kyrgyz that allows us to use it,” said Price. “We’ve had to work hard to maintain such a positive relationship, and to build relationships with the Russian military, which has a local airbase in the country.”

While previous efforts to reach out to Russian military counterparts had yielded lackluster results,

an Air Force Band performance at Manas succeeded in capturing their attention. “The Russians were invited and, for the first time, they were interested,” he said. “They were blown away by the performance and everyone had a wonderful time. We were able to meet the Russian soldiers and, as a demonstration of goodwill, their leaders even extended a reciprocal invitation for U.S. airmen to come to their airbase. In this instance, it was the musical performance that brought those two militaries together.”

Working in their artistic field and serving their country is something that makes being in a military band so momentous. Often in pre-concert discussions, Palmatier is asked which performance was his favorite. “I really want to say, ‘this one,’” he stated. “Performing music in the service of America never gets old.” ▲

—Michael Gallant is a composer, musician, and writer living in New York City. He is the founder and CEO of Gallant Music ([gallantmusic.com](http://gallantmusic.com)).

**Gunnery Sergeant Franklin Crawford of the U.S. Marine Band playing at the Capitol in Washington, DC, in 2012.**

PHOTO COURTESY OF THE MARINE BAND





# The Art of Giving Back

## The Blue Star Museums Initiative

BY REBECCA GROSS

Last summer, the McCaffery family moved from the United States Air Force Academy in Colorado to what could almost be considered a foreign country: New York City. “It was definitely a transition,” said Nell McCaffery, whose husband Tim is in the Air Force. Her family’s cost of living skyrocketed, car trips were traded for subway rides, and the great mass of humanity was always just one step outside their door. At the same time, so was culture. As the McCafferys and their two sons explored their new home, they visited nearly 20 museums, from El Museo del Barrio in Spanish Harlem, to the New York

**Military families touring the Chrysler Museum of Art in Norfolk, Virginia, at a Blue Star Museums event.**

PHOTO BY STEPHANIE HIMEL-NELSON

Transit Museum in Brooklyn, and the New York Hall of Science in Queens. Along the way, they stopped for soft pretzels, admired architecture, and figured out their routes on the subway lines. McCaffery said their museum excursions were a great way to get to know the city. And despite steep admission prices, it was surprisingly cost-effective.

Every museum the McCafferys visited was participating in Blue Star Museums, a program that offers free admission for all active duty military personnel and their families from Memorial Day to Labor Day. Now in its third year, the program is a collaboration among the NEA, Blue Star Families—a not-for-profit that supports those facing the unique challenges of military life, the Department of Defense, and participating museums. This summer, the program has already registered more than 1,800 museums, including art museums, science museums, historic homes, botanical gardens, and children’s museums across the country. Any and all museums are welcome to join, ensuring that every family, no matter their interest or geographic location, can find their ideal field trip destination.

Without free admission, McCaffery says her family would have had to pick and choose their museum visits; living in New York City isn’t easy on an Uncle Sam salary, she noted. Instead, they were able to have their fill of Manet, Monet, and everything in between. “It exposes your kids to so much,” McCaffery said. “It’s so easy to give your kids an electronic device... [but] you’re more connected when you’re going to a museum. You might not be reading every single thing, but you find something your kid likes, and you discuss it and how it hits them in the world. It’s more quality family time.”

The idea for the program first developed during a conversation in March 2010 between NEA Senior Deputy Chair Joan Shigekawa and Kathy Roth-Douquet, the founder and CEO of Blue Star Families. Roth-Douquet, whose husband is a colonel in the Marine Corps, had experienced firsthand the powerful effect that museums can have. When her family was stationed in London in 2007, she and her children took frequent trips to the Science Museum and the Natural History Museum. Because those museums are government-subsidized and free for the public, “my kids went all the time,” Roth-Douquet said. “I felt like it re-

ally changed their lives. It really opened them up and gave them a perspective and gave them an opportunity that they wouldn’t have had otherwise.”

When the family’s next change of station found them in a small, Southern town typical of many military bases, Roth-Douquet realized that her family’s experience in London wasn’t quite the norm. “It struck me that most military children don’t get the opportunity to go to many museums, because they live remotely,” she said. “On top of it, a lot of museums in America are pretty expensive.”

As Roth-Douquet and Shigekawa spoke, Roth-Douquet proposed a long weekend of free museum



**U.S. Army Captain Creel Brown and his daughter Riley are all smiles at the 2012 Blue Star Museums launch event at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City.**

PHOTO BY MELANIE EINZIG

admission. Shigekawa went a step further, suggesting the NEA reach out to museums and see what they thought of a summer-long program. “There was no budget allocation for this. It was simply an idea,” Shigekawa said. “The thing that was most exciting to me was that the museums were happy to do it, and grateful to have the platform to give back.” With a few key museums on board, including the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Phoenix Art Museum, and the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, the program was on its way. Just two months after that initial brainstorm, the program launched in San Diego, with



**Military families at the Museum of Photographic Arts in San Diego, California, during the 2010 launch of Blue Star Museums.**

PHOTO BY SANDY HUFFAKER



more than 600 registered museums nationwide.

As the program has grown, Roth-Douquet hopes that it will become an ingrained component of the summertime “battle rhythm.” Roughly one-third of military families undergo a PCS, or permanent change of station, every summer. This usually means piling into a car and driving across the country, often visiting family and friends along the way. Without having to worry about admission costs for multiple family members, Roth-Douquet hopes that museums will make it onto the list of scheduled stops, creating a new generation of museum-goers in the process.

Even for families who aren’t on the road, the program can offer a kind of backyard sightseeing, connecting or reconnecting them with their community. At a recent Blue Star Museums event at the Please Touch Museum in Philadelphia, Laura Foster, president and CEO of Please Touch, said, “We feel it’s really important that families that are stationed here for whatever length of time feel part of the Phila-

**While museums can help you remember, they can also help you lose yourself and forget. And sometimes, that’s the only way to get through the day.**

delphia community, and one way to do that is to reach out to them, and welcome them, and make it affordable for them.”

It’s a sentiment that museum directors across the country seem to agree with. At the Barnes Foundation, which moved its main campus from Merion, Pennsylvania, to downtown Philadelphia last May, the promise of a lucrative grand opening season was overshadowed by a desire to give back. “The notion of supporting troops and their families is something which is very noble, especially since so many people



**Helen Blake, daughter of a Marine Corps aviator, marvels at a crystal during a 2011 visit to the National Mining Hall of Fame and Museum in Leadville, Colorado, a participating Blue Star Museum.** PHOTO BY MOLLY BLAKE



**Lieutenant Colonel Maureen Robinson (USAF) and her son, Shawn, tour the Gibbes Museum of Art in Charleston, South Carolina, during the 2012 Blue Star Museums launch.**

PHOTO BY SCOTT HENDERSON

who have gone overseas and come back have had very disturbing, deeply traumatic experiences. There is an element in museums that is healing,” said Barnes Director Derek Gilman. After thinking a moment, he added, “You’d have to find a good reason *not* to join the Blue Star Museums program.”

Roth-Douquet thinks that experiencing culture is especially important for military families, as it offers reminders for why people serve. “What we fight for in the military is not for the borders of the country and dirt in between them,” she said. “It’s for what America stands for, and the things that America is—its patrimony. The things that last are the things that are gathered in museums. So I think for a military family to have access to museums, which are not just art but history and science and all other kinds of treasures, that’s very tied to who we are and why we do what we do.”

But while museums can help you remember, they can also help you lose yourself and forget. And

sometimes, that’s the only way to get through the day. Daniel MacDonald III is a captain in the Philadelphia Police Department, and a military intelligence first lieutenant in the Army Reserves. In the past decade, he has served two tours of duty in Iraq, leaving his wife and children behind. At the Please Touch event, MacDonald said in his remarks that, “The easiest part is going to [fight]. Staying home must be murder.” He later elaborated, explaining, “When you’re deployed, you’re so busy that you’re able to not focus on being away. [Your family] has to worry about you every day of the week, and mow the lawn, and pay the bills.” There are missed birthdays, missed softball games, and missed bedtime tuck-ins. A trip to a museum can ease, if only momentarily, the daily stress and loneliness by providing a sort of cultural escape.

There’s at least one other benefit, perhaps the most important one of all. “My kids coming to things like this made them feel special,” MacDonald said. “They feel like Daddy’s a hero.” ▲

**National Endowment for the Arts**

1100 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW  
Washington, DC 20506



**ART WORKS.**

arts.gov



Walt Whitman, considered one of the great American poets, wrote many poems about the United States Civil War, which he experienced firsthand as a volunteer nurse in Washington, DC. The first stanza of “By Blue Ontario’s Shore” is from the 1881 version of his epic, ever-changing collection, *Leaves of Grass*. The poem is Whitman’s meditation on the place of the poet—and by extension, the artist—in post-war America.

Walt Whitman, from the series of photos by Mathew Brady of Civil War-era personalities taken in Washington, DC, between 1860 and 1865. PHOTO COURTESY OF NATIONAL

ARCHIVES, PHOTO NO. 111-B-1672

By blue Ontario’s shore,  
As I mused of these warlike days and of peace return’d, and the  
dead that return no more,  
A Phantom gigantic superb, with stern visage accosted me,  
*Chant me the poem, it said, that comes from the soul of America,  
chant me the carol of victory,*  
And strike up the marches of Libertad, marches more powerful yet,  
And sing me before you go the song of the throes of Democracy.