

# With the Words of Veterans

What Testimonial Theater and Veterans Seeking Healing from Military Trauma  
Can Teach Us

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## ABSTRACT

The culmination of my college majors for Journalism and Theater Performance came together in the creation of How to Leave a Battlefield a testimonial stage play distilled from the verbatim testimonies of US military veterans living in the Colorado area. Inspired by the testimonial theater plays of American playwright, actress, and professor, Anna Deavere Smith, How to Leave a Battlefield strives to explore, not the traumas of military service, but seven veteran's journeys toward healing and recovery that all vets begin after their service ends and what others might take away from those journeys. The following paper breaks down my processes of interviewing these veterans, the transcription and construction of the script, and finally sharing and reflecting on the artistic choices I made in producing, advertising, and directing this play in mid-April of 2019.

Table of Contents	Starting Page #
INTRODUCTION	3
PART ONE: THE PROCESS	6
A. INTERVIEWING THE VETS	7
B. TRANSCRIPTION AND SCRIPT EDITING PROCESS	11
C. UROP FUNDING, EVENTS, AND PRODUCTION PUBLICITY	13
PART TWO: THE SCRIPT	27
PART THREE: REFLECTION	114
A. AUDIENCE RECEPTION	124
B. VETERAN REACTIONS	128
CONCLUSION	129

## INTRODUCTION

What drives someone to put their life at risk? To protect the people they love; to uphold their values and beliefs; to fight against forces they see as evil or unjust, are all reasons that come to mind when I think about risking my life. What about protecting a stranger? To fight for someone that you will never meet or speak to? That would be, for me personally, a step too far. But every person who enlisted with the US military has, to one degree or another, made exactly that choice. And I wanted to learn why.

How to Leave a Battlefield began with curiosity. The first veteran I met and interviewed for the project, Robert R. Kehoe, served during WWII as the radio operator of a three-man team that parachuted behind enemy lines in France to assist and organize French resistance efforts. It was the 2016 fall semester of my freshman year attending CU Boulder, and I remember thinking, “Wow, I have never met someone who would volunteer for such a dangerous and uncertain mission. Who in their right mind would *ever* willingly take such risks?”

Back then, I was not thinking about writing a script or putting on a play. I just wanted to know why people like Kehoe make the choice to join the military. And it was my desire to answer *why* that led me to a fundamental and profound discovery about myself and my drive as a theatrical artist: I am obsessed with learning the reasons behind why people made major decisions in their life that I myself would *never* make.

Looking back on that first interview with Kehoe, I was focused on learning about his motivations to enlist, rather than some external sense of patriotism. The major reason I continued to focus on veterans as the project evolved was that vets are a group of people who have survived some of the most dangerous and uncertain situations life can throw at someone. I picked vets

because they've not only tackled stakes at the level of life and death, but after returning home, often strive for a life of peace and healing. Those truths are worth exploring and sharing with others.

#### ANNA DEAVERE SMITH

Anna Deavere Smith was the inspiration behind my testimonial script building process and formatting. I first learned about Smith from an assigned reading of her book, "Letters to a Young Artist," during the spring semester of my sophomore year, and snippets of her book stuck with me. Quotes like, "I take being silly very seriously," and "My generation made the mistake of focusing too much on ourselves. Don't make the same mistake." She is an accomplished actress, famous for her role on the



2000s TV show "The West Wing," and is constantly producing new and challenging pieces of theater; all in her unique verbatim, one-woman-show style, of testimonial theater.

But what is testimonial theater? It goes by a few other names too: documentary theater and verbatim theater, all of which fundamentally involve taking the exact words of a person, or a group of people, and staging those words under the umbrella of a common theme or event.

Reading two of Smith's testimonial plays, Twilight: Los Angeles, 1992 and Fires in the Mirror, was my first exposure to what testimonial theater could be, as well as Smith's poetic style of script writing. Without *any* prior knowledge of her process to meeting with people and

interviewing them, I was blown away by how strong the voices of the people portrayed in these plays were, and I loved how *transparent* and powerful their stories unfolded. I mean, these weren't characters conjured up from the mind of the playwright, but real *breathing* people willing to share their lives with the whole world! How cool would it be if I could make something similar? Smith's script style visually illustrates every breath and pause that a person makes when giving testimony. The closest comparison to her work that I can think of would be the stanzas used in poetry, set not to a preplanned rhythm or meter, but to the ebb and flow of speech patterns that are unique to every person.

Smith's work and stances as a professional artist quickly became something I idolized, and aspired to emulate. One of CU Boulder's theater department faculty professors and my mentor, Dr. Cecilia Pang, had even worked for Anna Deavere Smith, years ago in LA where she learned about Smith's process to testimonial theater, and who passed that process on to me; I felt like the budding third generation of a theatrical legacy.

At the other end of my studies, journalism as a second major proved invaluable when it came to ethically interviewing vets. My freshman "Introduction to Journalism" class taught by Tom Yulsman of CMCI spoke often about how to work ethically as a journalist. He even suggested I read the book, "The Art of the Interview," by Lawrence Grobel to work on my interviewing skills when I talked to him about my interview with Robert Kehoe way back in the project's infancy. It would defeat the whole purpose if I mishandled or altered these veteran's words, so by asking everyone I interviewed to sign a standard release form, I gained the freedom necessary to build and edit this script to a standard I could be proud of. My studies in journalism helped me navigate and maintain a high ethical standard.

## PART ONE: THE PROCESS

The timeline that follows lists events from the very start of the project to opening night of my stage production:

March 19th, 2016 - Interviewed Robert R. Kehoe, Frasier Retirement Community, Boulder, CO

March 26th, 2016 - Interviewed Hugh W. Evans, Frasier Retirement Community, Boulder, CO

February 15th, 2018 - UROP Individual Grant Application Submitted

April 12th, 2018 - UROP Individual Grant Awarded

May 25th, 2018 - First lunch visit with Warrior Storyfield Project, Longmont, CO

June 6th, 2018 - Interviewed Terry P. Rizzuti, Post 119, Estes Park, CO

July 1st, 2018 - Interviewed Daelinar Adama, Boulder Public Library, conference rooms

July 5th, 2018 - Interviewed Erik L. Stevenson Boulder Public Library, conference rooms

October 17th, 2018 - UROP Sidewalk Symposium! CU Boulder Quad

November 24th, 2018 - Interviewed veteran Robert (Bob) Sampson Alfalfa's Market Boulder,

January 15th, 2019 - Interviewed Christopher Huzau Boulder Public Library, conference rooms

January 22nd, 2019 - Casting offers emailed to prospective student cast & crew members

February 15th, 2019 - Frist cast meeting and script read through, CU Boulder Campus

February 16th - April 13th, 2019 – Rehearsal period/one-on-one coaching sessions

April 14h, 2019 - Introduction of technical & lighting elements, CU Boulder, Loft Theater

April 15th, 2019 - Final dress rehearsal, CU Boulder, Loft Theater

April 16th, 2019 - How to Leave a Battlefield opening night, Loft Theater

The next three sections will first expand on and briefly summarize the meetings and interviews I had with each veteran, then discuss the process of breaking down and building up the How to Leave a Battlefield script, and finally talk about the Undergraduate Opportunities Program funding and publicity support I received, as well as my own media used in advertising the show.

## INTERVIEWING THE VETS

**Robert R. Kehoe** - OSS Jedburgh Team Frederick, First Sergeant, US Army Signal Corps, analyst with CIA, 1942 – 1984, WWII

Robert Kehoe jumped around with the energy of someone half his age despite being in his 90s when I first interviewed him back in March of 2016. His laugh was infectious, and the questions I asked him back then, involved how his military experiences serving during WWII differed from his later wars and military conflict, rather than his journey toward mental healing. The veteran parent of one of my student cast members in the stage production knew who Kehoe was by reputation alone, due to Kehoe's later years serving as an analyst with the CIA. During his interview, what surprised me the most was the humor he could bring to his war stories. Here was someone who had fully come to terms with his military experiences, and he laughed while giving his testimony about a bullet ricocheting under his bunk after he had been debriefed in England. Only so much material from his testimony made its way into the script, due to the shift in topic the project would make years later.

**Hugh W. Evans** - Private to T.S. Sgt. with the 10th Mountain Division Army, 1943 – 1945, WWII

Hugh Evans was the second veteran I ever interviewed for the project back in March of 2016. He was living Frasier Meadows Retirement Community in Boulder with his wife Ann Gullberg, where I had first met Robert Kehoe. Evans used an oxygen tank when I interviewed him, which changed the pacing of his speech, and made for longer pauses during our conversation; a fact which the student actor playing him in the production, Zack Heygood, pointed out during the rehearsal process. The members of the 10th Mountain Division hold an annual reunion up in Vail that Evans has been involved with for years; he gave me a copy of the

2007 “Hale and Farewell” reunion hardback booklet; which illustrated the reunion events of that year. Similar to Robert Kehoe, only so much of Evan’s recorded testimony fit into How to Leave a Battlefield after I stated building the script.

**Terry P. Rizzuti** - Rifleman, United States Marine Corps, 1966 – 1970, Vietnam

Terry Rizzuti showed me great hospitality when I drove up in early June of 2018 to American Legion Post 119 in Estes Park where he was stationed as Commander. It’s not a short drive, and he was gracious enough to buy me breakfast up there at a local diner; letting an interview source pay for your food does not follow ethical journalistic practices I might add! But I felt it would have been rude to refuse his offer. Terry is the author of several books which detail and unpack his military trauma from the Vietnam War through fictional accounts and stories of characters that go through similar trials that Rizzuti himself had lived through. Rizzuti’s way of speaking was very methodical, very deliberate, during our interview, and we took a photo with my camera phone together before I left; a trend that I did not continue with the other veterans I would meet. After the interview, he gave me a copy of his book, “The Second Tour,” and explained its title, “When a veteran ends their first tour, they begin their second. And that second tour lasts the rest of their life.”



Sean Guderian on left, Terry P. Rizzuti on right, June 6th, American Legion Post 119 Estes Park, Colorado



**Daelinar Adama** - Specialist, 1st/52nd mechanized infantry, National Training Center, Fort Irwin, 1989 - 1991, Desert Storm

Daelinar Adama is actually a longtime friend of my mother's family. One of my oldest memories with him is as a child receiving a temporary sundial back tattoo Daelinar had drawn with some kind of paste mixture that stained your skin a greenish-yellow color. I had no idea Adama had served in the military until my mother mentioned to it to me over that summer in 2018 when my project was well underway. His opinion of the military was justifiably negative, as he had sustained some injuries during his service period which manifested in the form of years of chronic pain and fatigue after he left. We had a spot of lavender tea at the Boulder library cafe before his interview. His bitter sense of humor when talking about his time serving, stood out among the other vets and he often chuckled gently under his breath while giving testimony.

**Erik Lincoln Stevenson** - Infantry Machine Gunner, Marine Scout Sniper, United States Marine Corps, 1996-2000

Erik Stevenson is friends with Daelinar Adama, and I interviewed both of them nearly back to back. Stevenson is a big bear of a man with a heart of gold, and someone who came across to me as fiercely intelligent and motivated. My discussion with him holds the record for the longest interview I've ever done at over two hours long! Stevenson had a lot to say, and choosing which of his testimonial pieces to put into the script was very challenging because I felt he had made so many good statements, which is why his words makeup a lot of the script. One of the best conversations I've ever had with a veteran, or anyone for that matter.

**Robert (Bob) Sampson** - Infantry, the 196th and 198th light infantry brigade, 1971-1972, Vietnam

I interviewed Bob Sampson at the Alfalfa's Market Cafe in Boulder. It had been a frigid November morning, and I remember Sampson walking up to shake my hand in the market parking lot wearing a great big orange bubble coat. We both got some coffee, and I tried my best to interview him with the noise from other people around us. It surprised me how open Sampson had been to discussing not just his military traumas gained during Vietnam, but also the abuse he'd suffered during his childhood. He told me he had fallen in love with cooking after his military service and now worked as a private chef for wealthy homeowners. He'd brought me a leftover piece of lemon tart he'd baked the day before, which went great with the coffee.

**Christopher Huzau** - Intelligence Analyst. United States Marine Corps, 1998 to 2004.

Chris Huzau's position in the military was very unique as someone indirect work led to the deaths of people by missile and drone targeting. He was a bit reserved at first when I met with him, but quickly opened up about his history with depression, and what he described as a "knot" or "ball" of painful emotion in his chest that loosened as he started to engage with shamanistic practices and journeys to help himself and other vets find peace. Huzau's work toward healing is a great example of what How to Leave a Battlefield is striving to highlight: the motivated actions and perspectives veterans take to face trauma.

## TRANSCRIPTION AND SCRIPT EDITING PROCESS

When I transitioned over to the transcription and script editing process, I discovered that while I had a lot of material to work with, not all of it had a place in this script; there were so many pieces from these vets that I had fallen in love with, and fortunately, Dr. Pang was an objective party that I could ask to look over these pieces, and workshop how they might be organized. I lost count of number of days and hours I spent pouring over transcriptions. Back then, I made the mistake of listening and transcribing the *entirety* of what was typically hour long interviews. Pages and pages of transcriptions all typed out in Anna Deavere Smith's poetic formatting style. I got really good at it too, but so much of those transcripts ended up on the cutting room floor. Now I know that pulling from an interview is all about finding the moments that best reflect the veteran to transcribe, not necessarily the whole thing.

Deciding on the categories for each chapter in this script was difficult as well. It all came down to connecting the dots between these veteran's different experiences, then making cuts to their responses that would best isolate where that experience fit within the broader subject defined by each chapter; the commonality found in their stories led to the names of the chapters! Like reverse engineering! That's why it was so important to install a projector into the production's performance space to visually illustrate the script's chapters for the audience; it was not abundantly clear from listening to these testimonies alone how important the order and organization of the whole narrative was.

Philosophically, I believe you can hold to both a personal opinion and a professional or career-oriented opinion toward any subject. That, in context, I didn't need to personally support the military or the actions of veterans in order to stage and handle their testimonies with respect.

Building this script asked me to find the humanity in these people's stories rather than just a soldier's point of view.

During the months I was advertising my 2019 April stage production, many people commented on how much I must love and care for vets and the military to do all this work, and when I told them the truth, some became irritated or even angry. "What do you mean you don't care about veterans? You shouldn't be allowed to do this project if you don't support vets!" But it's perspectives like that which vets, and by extension myself, are trying to fight against.

As I spoke with more veterans, and worked on building this script, I came to realize that American society places service members on a pedestal without making a genuine effort to understand who vets are as people. The most common example of this "propping up" is the offhand phrase, "Thank you for your service." I have yet to interview a veteran who's told me they enjoy hearing that phrase. At best they tolerate it, because deep down, "Thank you for your service," is an excuse used to briefly acknowledge and then dismiss a bracket of time that for most vets, especially combat veterans, is the most damaging and traumatic period of their entire lives. The culture of flag-waving, military enthusiasm that so many Americans follow runs deep, but stops abruptly before a seabed of trauma and pain illuminated only by a lightless, willful ignorance.

If the American soldier is the most powerful weapon on the planet, then the damaged veteran they often become is something to be hidden away, so as not to distract from the shining idea of servicemen and women that many Americans worship in their minds. To acknowledge and accept the combat veteran suffering from PTSD and struggling to reintegrate with society would mean also accepting that those shining ideas of soldiers are far from perfect.

## UROP FUNDING, EVENTS, AND PRODUCTION PUBLICITY

How to Leave a Battlefield took its next big leap in the spring semester of my junior year, when I was awarded project funding from the CU Boulder Undergraduate Research Opportunities Program (UROP). Dr. Pang agreed to be my UROP faculty advisor, and it wasn't until she came onboard in an official capacity that I considered styling How to Leave a Battlefield in the same way Anna Deavere Smith does her own plays.

Receiving UROP funding to support this project was invaluable to me not just from a financial perspective, but a motivational one as well. I now had *deadlines* to meet and a stage production to put on with only one year to pull it all together. Without those sudden responsibilities, How to Leave a Battlefield might have remained on the backburner of my mind indefinitely; there are always excuses to put off working on your art, and I'm glad that UROP helped me put away those excuses.

The next five pages that follow is a copy of my original UROP Individual Grant Application:

Does your project directly or indirectly involve, support the development of, and/or provide outreach or services to communities on and/or beyond the CU Boulder campus?	Yes
UROP proposals are evaluated by one of six faculty review committees organized by the disciplinary categories below. Select the category that most appropriately describes your proposed project. If your project is interdisciplinary, select the category that best describes the project's methodology or approach.	Arts and Humanities
Does your project involve international travel—that is, travel outside the United States?	No
Does your project involve human subjects?	No
Does your project involve non-human animal subjects?	No
Will you be working on research supported by the NSF (National Science Foundation) and/or NIH (National Institutes of Health)?	No

I hereby give permission to the University of Colorado and its agents or employees, to use my name and major, my mentor's name and department/program, and related project information in any publication which may include printed or electronic media, or both. I hereby relinquish any right to inspect or approve the completed product or products which may include advertising copy or any other printed or electronic matter that may be used in conjunction with them now or in the future, whether that use is known to me or unknown, and I waive any right to royalties or other compensation arising from or related to the use of the designated information. I hereby agree to release, defend and hold harmless the University of Colorado and its agents or employees, including any firm publishing or distributing the finished product or products in whole or in part, whether on paper or via electronic media, from and against any claims, damages or liability arising from any misuse of the designated information, either intentionally or otherwise, that may occur or be produced in the production of the finished product, its publication or distribution.

I certify that I am at least 18 years of age and am competent to contract my own name. I have completely read this release and fully understand the contents, meaning and impact of this release.

I agree.

100 words maximum: State the specific objectives/purpose of your project and, if applicable, of the larger project within which yours is embedded. Explain the project's relevance and who stands to benefit. Alternative prompt for creative/performance projects: Tell us the objectives, points of curiosity from which you're starting, hypothesis or question you're exploring and the guiding principles of the work. Discuss where and when the final project will be exhibited, displayed or performed.

How do veterans recover from wartime? Do they recover? How have previous generations of soldiers sought healing for their experiences? Media outlets are quick to glorify and document military actions or scandal, but rarely give focus to the recovery of individual soldiers, or the families of those soldiers. Transcriptions from recorded interviews with veterans will be organized into a stage play. The final project will be performed in the Loft Theatre space at the University Theatre late in the Spring 2019 semester, and selected scenes derived from the play will be performed as a part of the department "Senior Showcase."

100 words maximum: Situate your project within other work in the field by providing a summary of the work done and discuss the theoretical traditions influencing your project. Note what is original about your project and what contribution it makes to the field. Alternative prompt for creative/performance projects: Discuss what theoretical, aesthetic, and/or creative traditions influence your project. Include what contributions you're making to the field. Include your own creative/performance history and talk about how it's prepared you for this project.

This project will combine my studies of Theatre and Journalism. Verbatim Theatre is the process of interviewing individuals about a topic, then using their testimonies to construct a play. The American actress/playwright Anna Deavere Smith pioneered this process of playwriting, and The Laramie Project, by Moises Kaufman and Techtronic Theater, is a famous example of this form. While highlighting alternative uses for journalistic work and practice, this project will be an accumulation of my studies. I interviewed two local WWII veterans, and their testimonies alone offered enough content to construct a play; additional interviews will offer more perspectives and insights.

200 words maximum: Explain the method(s)/strategy used in this project, including justification for your approach. You may note international travel, if your project requires it.

This project will focus on the proper and ethical execution of the interview process, and how the structure of live theatre can empower the voices of veteran communities in Colorado. Multiple perspectives on military mental and physical health and healing will be brought together and shared to raise awareness about the lack of attention and care given to people called American heroes. The interview is a subtle experience between the journalist and the individual. During my experiences conducting interviews, there has always been a strong sense of invitation to share the nuances of opinions and facts that would otherwise go unvoiced in a conversation. The audio recorder asks the interviewees to reveal themselves and their experiences in a way that is honest and beautiful; putting their testimonies on a live stage further heightens and illuminates the truth of their words, all while giving it to a larger community. Each veteran is asked to sign a standard release form, which gives me the freedom to organize the material in a way that is more narrative, and therefore more accessible and interesting for an audience. My role in this project is less that of a playwright, and more that of a librarian.



50 words maximum: Note any experience, training and/or coursework required to complete this project, and explain how you have prepared.

My initial interviews of the two WWII veterans served as test runs to discover how the recording process might play out. I established a working relationship with that specific retirement community and have the contact information of other veterans to interview. I refined my staple interview questions for each recording.

100 words maximum: Describe how this project advances your academic and/or professional goals, including how it fits within your degree plan.

The American Press is under attack by the new political administration, and the trust between journalists and consumers continues to dwindle with the increasing use of social media as news sources/outlets. Citizens don't want to hear from the reporter holding a microphone in front of a camera anymore, and constructing a piece of live theater using the verbatim testimonies of real people, real veterans, serves to advance my academic and professional goals of fusing journalistic practices with theatre performance to offer honest, compelling, and trustworthy storytelling to the public. This project satisfies requirements for both my theatre and journalism degrees.

150 words maximum: Explain your project timeline (when activities will happen) from the start of the grant term to which you are applying, noting major phases to the end of the grant term.

My project will begin with the gathering of additional audio testimonies from veterans of various generations and service branches; the majority of these interviews will be conducted over the course of the 2018 summer term, during which I will have the available time to schedule and meet at length with veterans. I will then transcribe the interviews, and use the resulting material to construct a Verbatim Theater stage play from which select material will be work-shopped as solo and partnered scenes in my THTR 4193 Studio 5, Senior Project studies by myself and members of my Senior BFA class during the 2018 Fall semester. All in preparation for the BFA Senior Showcase trip to New York City scheduled in the Spring of 2019. A final performance in the Loft Theatre space of the whole stage play will be presented in late April or early May, closing with a talk-back session.

75 words maximum: Indicate the resources and materials needed for your project, and explain how you plan to acquire and make use of them.

For my project I need a digital audio recorder and sim cards for audio storage; the CMCI department offers rental audio equipment for their students, which meets my needs. Unfortunately, they do not offer rentals during the summer term, and I would need to purchase my own audio equipment during that period. Gas and travel expenses to meet with in-state veterans, and travel/hotel expenses to visit New York city for the 2019 Senior Showcase presentations.

By submitting this form, I (Sean Guderian) agree to:

I agree.

Maintain eligible status as an undergraduate at CU Boulder throughout the award period;

Complete all applicable university compliance procedures related to international travel, human and animal subject testing, and/or the responsible conduct of research;

Respond to UROP communications in a timely manner;

Maintain communication with my mentor (Cecilia Pang); and

Conduct the proposed project to the best of my ability.

Application Reference #	2665983
Last Update	2018-02-15 21:07:38
Start Time	2018-02-15 21:01:32
Finish Time	2018-02-15 21:07:38

A big thanks to professor Kevin Rich of the CU Boulder theater department, who helped me reach out to my first group of local veterans, Warrior Storyfield Project, around the same time as my UROP application approval in early May of 2018. After making contact with the members of Warrior Storyfield Project, specifically the metal welding artist Robert Bellows, I drove down to Bellows's Longmont property almost every week that summer to eat lunch with him and any veterans who were there working on two massive metal statues of a dragon and a phoenix. I mention this time because their dragon statue served as inspiration for a chalk mural advertisement I made for the stage play during the UROP Sidewalk Symposium on October 17th of 2018.



October 17th, 2018 CU Boulder Quad, chalk mural advertisement.

UROP went the extra mile for me by arranging articles to be published about my stage production in Colorado Arts and Sciences Magazine as well as the Daily Camera in Boulder.

Below are those two articles, as well as URL links to the original pieces posted to each publication's respective websites:

Colorado Arts and Sciences Magazine Article Link:

<https://www.colorado.edu/asmagazine/2019/04/03/student-uses-stage-journalism-shine-light-veterans>

By Kenna Bruner • Published: April 3, 2019

## **The result is a play, *How to Leave a Battlefield*, which will be performed on campus**

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Wars tend to be remembered for their battlefield glory or decisive military action, not for soldiers' recovery and reintegration into civilian life. A CU Boulder senior, however, is using theatre and veterans' own words to change that.



Sean Guderian takes a break during rehearsal. At the top of the page, he works with a student actor. CU Boulder photos by Patrick Campbell.



When Sean Guderian was a freshman, an English class writing assignment propelled him on a four-year search for answers he found by interviewing military veterans. He recorded many hours of interviews with veterans of wars and conflicts. As he listened to their combat stories, he asked them what happened after.

"I wanted to know how soldiers come home as veterans and live out the rest of their lives after living through the most extreme dangers and responsibilities life can throw at you," said Guderian, who is majoring in theatre performance and journalism.

The culmination of his work is *How to Leave a Battlefield*, a stage play Guderian wrote using transcripts from some of the recorded interviews in the hopes of shining a light on soldiers transitioning to civilian life. His play will be presented April 16 and 17 at 7 p.m.; and April 20 at 2 p.m., in the Loft Theatre, in the CU Boulder Theatre Building.

**"I think that what most people don't realize is that for war vets, the real war doesn't start until after they leave the battlefield. Which is the fight for their own existence."**

*Erik Lincoln Stevenson, infantry machine gunner and Marine scout sniper, United States Marine Corps, 1996–2000*

**"Yeah, I find that people who go through trauma and heal and help repair themselves are really . . . awesome human beings."**

*Robert Sampson, infantry, 196th and 198th Light Infantry Brigade, Vietnam, 1971–72*

Guderian was studying English when the project began. His writing group at the time, [the Literary Buffs](#), visited Frazier Meadows, a Boulder retirement community, to entertain the residents with essays and short stories. During the visit, he met with two World War II veterans who shared stories about their experiences in combat. These stories gave Guderian a glimpse into the extent of what they encountered—"both incredible and horrific."

Hearing their wartime experiences gave Guderian the idea for a theatre project that focused on the veterans' return to civilian life rather than their time spent in combat. Not everyone was willing to have their raw stories open and bare on the stage. After speaking to about 30 veterans, he wrote a play using the testimonials of seven.

"I didn't want to focus on the pain of war," he said. "And while it did come up, and there's some of it in the play to place things in context, it was important that we didn't dwell on that. The message in the show is healing and how the veterans felt they were supported after they came back."

"How do you leave a battlefield?" was always the primary question, and the answers Guderian received varied. Many of the veterans he talked with will never leave the battlefield in their minds. Others were more optimistic.

"It's so easy to generalize a soldier," Guderian said. "Here's someone who signed up, gone to war, and when they returned are hurt by that. I was interested in the relationship with their service and how they live today.

"For as bad as things were for them, I've had veterans say they don't regret joining and serving, because of how much they learned through the experience. In juxtaposition of that, there are situations where they carried out orders they regret," he said. "They have to find a way to live with that."

Guderian is framing his play based on the style of playwright and actor Anna Deavere Smith, widely recognized for developing a form of theatre dedicated to social change.

Guderian was introduced to this style of testimonial theatre in a class taught by Cecilia Pang, associate professor in theatre and dance at CU Boulder. Pang, who is Guderian's faculty advisor, served as Smith's assistant on the 1994 premiere of *Twilight: Los Angeles 1992* about the Los Angeles riots.

Drawing on her own experience with this specialized type of performance, based on the testimonials of real people, but presented by actors on a minimal set, Pang coached Guderian on how to conduct interviews for this documentary-type theatre performance. She also taught him how to "conduct, transcribe and enact the interviews" in Smith's style.

"It's fascinating to see how the veterans opened up to Sean," Pang said. "His script is genuine. It's about authenticity. This show is a new technique for our students, because it's not covered in CU's curriculum. The experience has been a truly worthy endeavor for Sean. What has impressed me so much about Sean is that he has a vision, initiative and followed through with it."

#### **How to Leave a Battlefield, by Sean Guderian**

**When:** April 16 and 17 @ 7 p.m. and April 20 @ 2 p.m.

**Where:** Loft Theater (C370) CU Boulder Theater Building

**Cost:** Free and open to the public

For his project, Guderian received a grant from CU Boulder's Undergraduate Research Opportunities Program. UROP helps students develop their own projects under the mentorship of a faculty member. Guderian's grant will go toward paying the student actors and crew.

This will be Guderian's first stage show that he produced and directed.

"Sean is very clear on this show," Pang said. "It's his single-minded pursuit of a dream."

**(End of Colorado Arts and Sciences Magazine Article)**

Daily Camera Article URL: <https://www.dailycamera.com/2019/04/12/cu-senior-puts-local-war-veteran-stories-to-script-in-stage-play-how-to-leave-a-battlefield/>

## CU senior puts local war veteran stories to script in stage play ‘How to Leave a Battlefield’

By KALENE MCCORT | [kmccort@prairiemountainmedia.com](mailto:kmccort@prairiemountainmedia.com) | Boulder Daily Camera  
April 12, 2019 at 1:49 p.m.

### If you go

**What:** “How to Leave a Battlefield” production

**When:** 7 p.m. Tuesday and Wednesday; 2 p.m. Saturday, April 20

**Where:** LOFT Theater, C370, CU Theatre and Dance Department Building, 1595 Pleasant St., Boulder

**Cost:** free

As a college freshman, three years ago, Sean Robert Guderian visited Frasier Meadows retirement community with the Literary Buffs — a University of Colorado club for undergrads looking to explore writing ventures on and off campus. The group recited poetry for elderly residents and it was there that he met World War II veteran Robert Kehoe. Now in his senior year at CU, with a double major in theater and journalism, Guderian has crafted an engaging stage play, “How to Leave a Battlefield,” based on interviews he did with Kehoe and other area veterans. The hour-long production, made possible by a grant from CU’s Undergraduate Research Opportunities Program, provides a revealing look into the real men that served and protected.

“Testimonial theater’s intention is very different,” said Sean Guderian, who crafted the script by combing through more than 20 hours of recordings from interviews he conducted. “We are here because we have something to say.”

Held at the intimate venue of the Loft Theatre Space, located at the top of the stairs at University of Colorado’s Theatre and Dance building, the stage set will remain bare-boned with 7 chairs and a table. Actors will not be dressed in camo fatigues, but in civilian clothes — a detail Guderian was quick to incorporate, as he wants audience members to see the human side of these soldiers and hopes the production encourages open dialogue and mutual respect between those who have seen combat and those who have not.

“There’s something I dig about, here’s a literal person and we are going to put this person on stage,” said Guderian. “This was an opportunity to marry the work I’m doing with journalism to theater.”

The men interviewed for the project, portrayed by CU seniors, range in age and all have different experiences from WWII to Vietnam to Desert Storm. At least four of the men who participated in the interview process have confirmed they will be in attendance for the upcoming performances.

The carnage of what went on overseas will not be the focus of the show, rather the production will shine a light on what it means to return home, regroup and heal. Monologues will reflect modified versions of actual word-for-word conversations had between Guderian and the men he interviewed. Guderian believes the production will appeal to those who have a direct connection with vets and to those who simply want to learn more about the troops.

Surprisingly, Guderian doesn't have personal experience with the military, nor does his immediate family — a factor that he has said made him approach the project in a completely open way.

"It's been a point of power," said Guderian. "This work isn't self-serving, as I'm not trying to come to terms with my own military service. These people go through the worst that life can throw at you and come out alive. Time heals and they get to a point of a new normal."

"It's certainly much different from anything else that I might have to act in," said Daniel 'Dee' Jimenez, who portrays Daelinar Adama, who served in Desert Storm. "When preparing for this kind of role, one must focus on the words, the way the living person constructs their sentences."

Guderian found many of the local vets that agreed to have their stories shared in the production by connecting with Longmont's Warrior Storyfield Project — a nonprofit that allows vets to engage in therapeutic, collaborative, large-scale sculpture building.

"I also prefer to act in important shows or at least shows that are sensitive to what's occurring in our communities," said Jimenez. "I knew that Sean wrote a project that would represent those who don't often get the chance to express their pain. This kind of theater always manages to move people, or sheds light on something stuck in shadows."

The feel of the play may conjure images of a group meeting or therapy session, as each performer shares authentically and without judgment.

"I have never thought in detail about the implications of being trained in such a dangerous, specialized field and being asked to return to civilian life without any kind of reintegration program," said Jimenez. "I will never understand what it's like to be a veteran, or someone with PTSD, but I'm so grateful to have a better grasp of their experiences. Veterans are members of our community, first and foremost, and the least we can do as their neighbors is demonstrate our understanding of their trauma and our willingness to lend a hand."



Eventually, Guderian would like to interview veterans that have dealt with homelessness and direct a similar production with this issue as the focus. After the performances of “How to Leave a Battlefield,” audience members will be able to participate in a Q&A.

“I love acting and being in plays and musicals, but it doesn’t fill my cup the way this project does,” said Guderian.

### **(End of Daily Camera Article)**

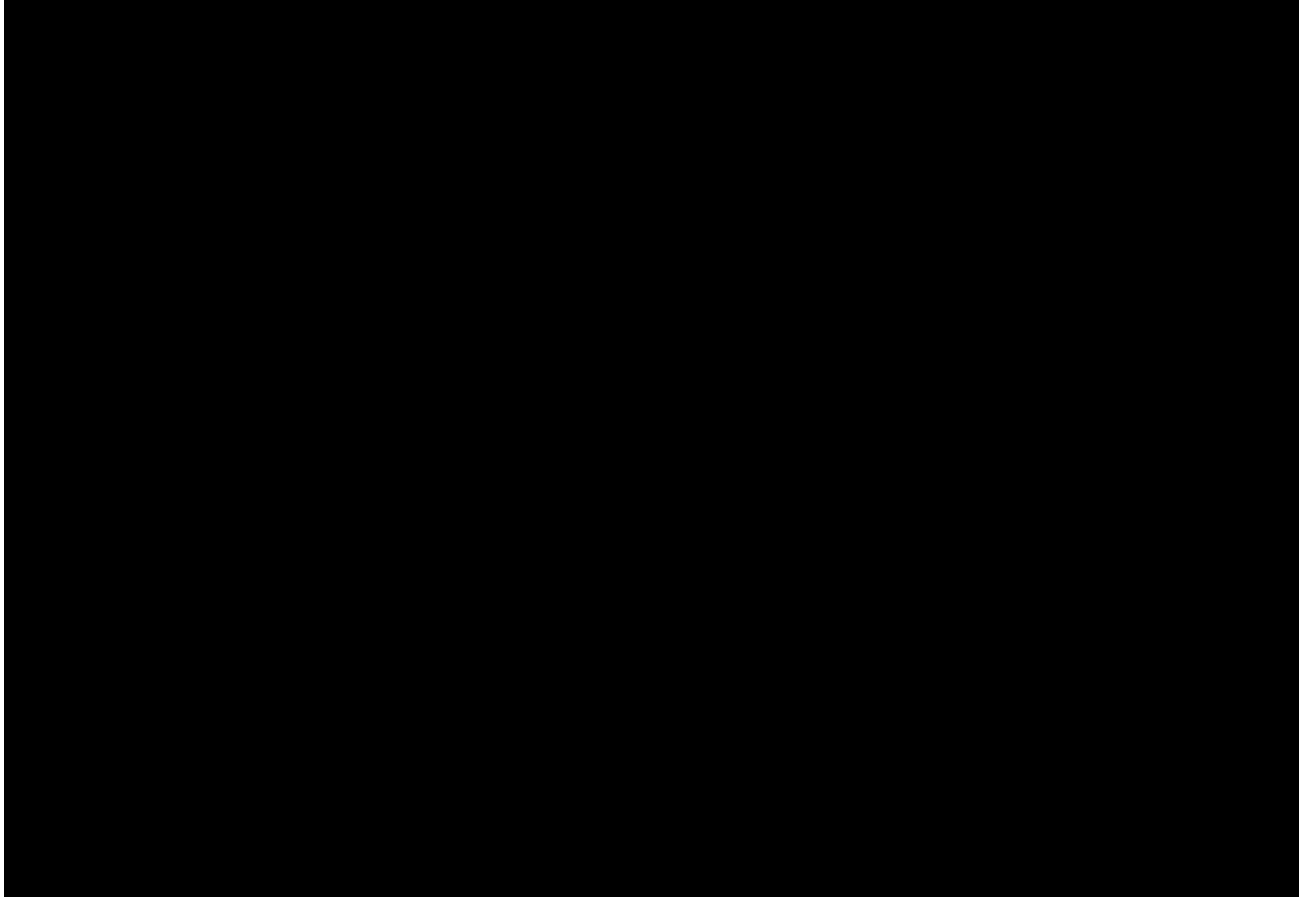
I was proactive in my own efforts to advertise this show as well. Embedded below is the full-color poster I put up around the CU Boulder university campus and the theater department building, as well as a short promotional video I shot and edited to email and spread around social media:



Photo taken at the Museum of Modern Art, NYC, with my camera phone

How to Leave a Battlefield Promotional Video:

(If the embedded video does not function, please refer to 3rd party media files published with the thesis on CU Scholar)



## PART TWO: THE SCRIPT

I love this script and this style of storytelling because it strives to honestly stage and elevate the perspectives of real people, so they might reveal both the weaknesses and strengths of their humanity. I believe this style of theater brings a script as close to an unbiased piece of journalism that you can get without literally putting veterans on stage to talk. A Colorado mountain's worth of time and energy went into interviewing these vets, transcribing their words, and arranging them in a format that other people, like a group of college acting majors, could interpret and stage. And as I reached out to cast my show and schedule rehearsal dates, I knew this production was only the beginning of what would be, and will continue to be, a long journey.

What follows is a copy of the original script of the April 2019 How to Leave a Battlefield production complete with color-coded titles and highlights which were used to navigate and quickly identify sections of the script during the editing process:

(A short "supercut" film of the production and the digital projector chapter title slideshow was uploaded to CU Scholar along with this honors paper, to provide a visual sense of the production)

# How to Leave a Battlefield

By Sean Guderian

April 2019 production script

## PROLOGUE: Who Am I

### - H. Evans:

Hugh Evans. Private to T.S. Sgt. with the 10th Mountain Division Army, 1943 - 1945

### - T. Rizzuti:

Terry Philip Rizzuti. Rifleman, United States Marine Corps, Vietnam 1966-1970.

### - B. Sampson:

Robert Sampson. Infantry, the 196th and 198th light infantry brigade, Vietnam, 1971-1972.

### - D. Adama:

Daelinar Adama. 1st & 52nd mechanized infantry, United States Army, Operation Desert Storm, 1989 to 1991.

### - E. Stevenson:

Erik Lincoln Stevenson. Infantry Machine Gunner and Marine Scout Sniper  
United States Marine Corps, 1996-2000.

### - C. Huzau:

Chris Huzau, Intelligence Analyst. United States Marine Corps, 1998 to 2004.

### - R. Kehoe:

Robert R. Kehoe. First Sergeant for the Office of Strategic Services. 1942 – 1984

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## Why I Enlist

### *Hunting the Demons* - E. Stevenson

"Why did I go that route"

uhm

for me it was a lot about sort of hunting the demons

Y'know kind of this

idea of

uhm

I grew up in a

Y'know the kind of turbulent background

abuse and

around a lot of

uhm

troubled individuals for various reasons

and

was constantly sort of

uhh

either put in a position

being a

a Y'know

physically big and powerful man

of

examining this question of right use of

power

and

witnessing when it wasn't

in a right relationship

so my dad was physically abusive with my mom

uhm

being in and around a lot of sort of like

misogyny and or

uhm

kind of

in situation where people were breaking the law or were

using force and intimidation to

enforce their agenda

personal agenda or otherwise

uh

I grew up in Denver

uhm

in the Capital Hill area

at a time when it was sort of

quote unquote "re-gentrifying"

uhm

and

one of the dynamics that was going on was that there were a lot of like active Neo Nazis  
in the area and

the uhm

like North of Colfax

was still like African American

Y'know so like

there was a lot of like racial tension

type of poverty

and so then like racism came up

uhm

Y'know there was probably gunshots

like once every ten days in the area

Basically in high school I felt like

I was prison bound

like I just had this anger and I had this strength and it was like

it needed

a positive outlet

and I wasn't finding it

I

wasn't certain

that I was gonna find that in the military



but most of the men that I grew up with  
served in the military  
so they served in Vietnam  
they served in World War Two  
they served in Korea  
uhh  
my dad was a  
Marine Officer  
and he served  
kind of at the peak of the Cuban Missile Crisis  
he was in West Germany  
he was in intel  
he was an Marine Intelligence Officer  
like  
in 1959

uhm  
and one of the guys that I trained with in Kung Fu  
was a Vietnam vet  
uhm  
but  
Y'know

he would talk about his experiences

and something about his story

uhm

like resonated with the questions that lived in me

and uhm

my dad died when I was fifteen

uhm

he probably would have disowned me if he'd known that I'd joined the military.

### ***It Was in My Blood* - C. Huzau**

I joined as a junior in high school

and I wanted to be a grunt

infantry

and uhm

I tested really high

and they wouldn't let me

yeah

pretty much

like they called my bluff

uhm

Y'know

you go to the place called

MEPS

Military Entrance Processing Station

that's where you go through your physical

and that's where you do your oath

and that's where they give you your job

I went there

and

they knew I really wanted to be a marine cuz I started hanging out with the recruiter

freshman year of high school

and I'm like: "well if you don't give me the job I want

I'm outta here"

and they

they called and I was like: "ok see ya"

and I walked out the door I walked down the hallway and I came back like a minute later

and I'm like: "are you really gonna

force me?

to

do this job that I have no idea what it is?"

it was in my blood

I have no idea why

ever since I was a little kid I just knew

not only the military but I wanted to be a Marine

and like my Dad wasn't a Marine  
and he wasn't in the military  
uhm  
it kind of skipped a generation  
it is like  
in my grandparents and great-grandparents  
a lot of military service  
yeah  
I just knew I wanted to do it  
and uhm  
now looking back on it I think it was just  
a kid's way of knowing that  
Y'know I wanted to be of service  
and didn't really know how to direct that other than  
toward the military.

***180 Degrees***    - H. Evans

I was a  
a high school student  
and  
ah  
when the war broke out in Europe  
uhm

I felt  
America had no business being involved  
uhm  
as did almost everybody  
that I  
that I knew then  
and didn't think we would be  
then the bombing of Pearl Harbor  
that  
went  
180 degrees  
and  
uhm  
with every justification  
uhm  
to be in the service  
and  
try and protect our country and defeat  
our enemies and Japan  
and Hitler  
Mussolini.

***A Zest for Living*** - B. Sampson

Well

I was from

a

small

small

town

had one stoplight

uhm

at nineteen I was very naive

completely unworldly

and I basically grew up

in Vietnam

my eyes were opened

to

life and living and

rather than this small town living out in the country where

everything is the same

my a

my world was expanded

it

opened my eyes

to  
the differences in the world  
uhm  
that there was something outside of Walden New York  
uhm  
it gave me a zest for living  
and a  
scared the shit outta me.

***One Thing After Another* – R. Kehoe**

At  
at your age you would've been  
enlisted  
I mean  
right?  
you'd've have to register  
and uhm  
lord we had to register in  
uhm  
1939 I think  
something like that  
when the war in Europe broke out  
but uhm

registration didn't mean anything because that was all

I mean that was

to get the register

the

uh

from which the Selective Service selected

uhm but

uhm

in Vietnam they were all

ahhh

all draftees

which is fine

I mean that's the way you run things

but the thing is

uhm

there were draftees for a war over there

that was doing something

-heh heh-

uhm

whereas World War Two

we had

a real feeling as to what it was doing

now people it varied with individuals of course



but still

uhm

Hitler's

movements

gradual grasping and squeezing

everything

was

real out of Germany

was very obvious

and it was going on and on

and then his defiance?

uhm

first the occupation of the Rhineland

and then

the

uh

he said basically the

French had

something like forty-two divisions

to Germans

ah

handful

four

now the Germans were  
extremely well  
uhm  
equipped and trained  
because they had this  
rotating divisions and so on  
but nobody knew that  
except everybody knew that  
but I mean the French could've just told  
"Look guy  
get out of there!"  
and the uh  
"we're staying here"  
Y'know on the island  
and the uhm  
uhh  
Germany couldn't of done anything about it  
then they  
then the Tsar  
and then the whole  
uhm  
well one thing after another they  
and then of course

the a  
development of the totalitarian state in a  
Germany  
the a  
a  
brutal suppression of the Jews  
and uh  
then eventually  
which we didn't know about  
this was later  
the  
the uhm  
Y'know the  
the  
the  
death camps and so on  
Auschwitz etc. and that  
but uhm  
one thing after another.

## How I Serve

### *Down to Panama* - T. Rizzuti:

In the

In the Marine Core

everybody

starts out as a

what's called a Rifleman

uhm

MOS

uhh

Military Ocu

Occupation Specialty I think is what MOS stands for

is um

is is Rifleman

and a number associated with that is 0311

so in the Marine Core if you're an 0311 you're basically a Rifleman

which is a Grunt

uhm

so I served as a Grunt

uhm

1966

1967

uhh

which included my time in Vietnam

and then after Vietnam I served

uhm

a couple different ways

at one point

uhm

I was sent down to Panama

to teach jungle warfare school

and

at another point

uhh

I served in Charleston South Carolina as an MP

Military Police

uhm

standing guard on the gates and that sort of thing

and I also served

uh

on board

uh

a ship

the Franklin D Roosevelt

uhm

and had various duties there

uhm  
one duty was  
uhm  
uhm  
guarding the brig  
and another duty was guarding the bomb bays  
uhm  
which are  
all the  
rooms onboard the ship that  
that  
Y'know all the cargo spaces  
that have bombs in um  
and then another duty onboard ship was guarding the  
captain  
so um  
that pretty much  
covers all the duties I had.

### ***Trigger Finger vs. Mouse Finger*** - C. Huzau

My experience was a very unique  
there's very few people I know who've had  
the same experiences I've had

uhm

yeah because it's almost like

kind of stuff you see in movies a lot of times

like my wife is always asking me

"tell me what you did tell me what you did"

and it's like "well we could watch this movie and this is kind of very similar to what was going on"

uhm

data collection

equals

writing reports

those reports

lead to

where the drones went

and where they drop their stuff

so

in many ways

my

my analysis

my report writing

determined like

who got killed where bombs went a lot of times

me and like

my team of three or four other guys

Y'know

I wasn't

responsible

for death

with my trigger finger

but I certainly was responsible for death with my mouse finger

right

just like

allocating targets for

for drones and

Tomahawks and

that get launched from

battleships and what not

Y'know

in the Gulf

I don't know if you remember

uhm

Shock and Awe

when Y'know

when the invasion of Baghdad happened



we had  
at the most we had  
at one time we actually had 1200 Tomahawks that were just circling the city like  
airplanes circling an  
an airport?  
and then they just wait to get pinged  
and then they're laser-guided right to their target  
you can put it through a hole the size of a basketball  
that's how accurate it is  
-heh-

### **Laser Tag – D. Adama**

Well the infantry is  
uh  
just plain  
combat  
uh  
training  
uhm  
my particular  
unit that I was assigned to  
uhm  
we were stationed out in the

um Mojave Desert

a big place called the National Training Center

where all they did was conduct

uhm

war games

uh

for training purposes

and I was on the

what was called the opposing force

I was part of the permanent

attachments assigned to that middle of the desert station

-heh heh-

who get to play the enemy for all the other people who came out to fight against us

um

so

so yeah I was in

over two years of like straight

combat training

just war games nonstop.

-heh heh heh heh-

uhm

basically

big laser tag

uhm

they had big

uh

laser tag equipment you could put on vehicles and planes and helicopters

and

even small ones that mounted on your little rifles

uhm

and then all those

transmitted

uh

radio signals

to a big

uhm

I guess operation center

where all the generals sat

and watched how the tactics played out'n everything

uhm

it was very

hi tech at the time

-eh heh heh heh heh-

but uh

yeah I'm not sure how that evolved

but  
uhm  
it was uh  
we were  
considered one of the most important  
military bases in the country  
at the time  
uhm  
because of what we were doing  
for a  
training the military.

***Recovered from All Three* - H. Evans**

I was a  
observing  
I was a Platoon Sergeant  
observing the units  
moving up on  
it was hill 903  
and  
some German must of spotted me and dropped a mortar shell in  
very fortunately it hit the tree next to me rather than the ground or I wouldn't be talking  
to you today

uhm

it a

uhm

put some splinters in my head and blew my eardrums out

otherwise I

it knocked me down

otherwise I was alright

uhm

however I ended up in the hospital because a

Y'know your balance is associated with your ears

and I couldn't even stand up

uhm

said that I had ended up in the hospital

managed to contract Hepatitis

-heh heh-

so went Naples in the hospital

and got back to the unit after the war had ended

in Italy

and managed to get Polio

-heh heh heh-

and then re

recovered from all three

-cough cough-  
very fortunate.

### ***Kill or Die* - E. Stevenson**

Stories from people I've talked to  
who're doing night raids  
and doing that kind of stuff  
where  
whether it's bad intel  
and things go bad  
Y'know and they're killing  
grandma  
on accident  
and whatever else like  
night after night after night

the story of why they joined was to  
uphold Democracy  
their lived experience  
of being a trigger

Y'know

a door kicker and a trigger puller

is they're killing families in their own home

that is not what they signed up for

even if

at a high strategic level

someone somewhere justifies it

so what you have then is a psychological dissonance

in that individual

Y'know someone saying: "this is not what"

Y'know all of the

the things that

got that person to join and serve

and so I'm talking about infantry

right?

infantry rules

uhm

what it looks like on the ground is not

clear cut

we're doing the right thing

but when you're in there  
it's like you can't say no  
like  
when you're on the ground  
and you're  
Y'know  
kicking in a door  
it's kill or die  
and that's part of how the system is setup  
right?  
we put people on the ground  
in a team  
and say  
Y'know: "follow orders"  
even if you don't agree with them  
because if you don't  
your friends die  
if you don't you die

I mean like it's  
you're seeing people get turned into hamburger  
you're seeing your friends get turned into hamburger



the  
the extremeness  
of the environment  
is traumatizing  
is horrifying  
legitimately  
right?  
you  
you see the worst of humanity  
and you see it in yourself  
you see it in your friends  
all under the banner of "we're doing the right thing"

so for me  
in that role  
as a sniper  
it's like  
I had no choice  
Y'know chances are  
who the people I got set after  
would be pretty morally  
unambiguous  
right?

I mean

they either deserved it or it was clear

so even in like

the pregnant woman with the bomb vest

like that's the kind of thing

that in a sniper role

uhm

is hard to live with

legitimately

if that woman with the bomb vest

even though she's pregnant

and that's a terrible terrible scenario

if she detonates that

people you know personally die

so it's not

Y'know like

those are the easy ones

in some ways

they're hard to live with

but they're easy to make

because you're like

yeah

either I kill that person

right here right now

within the laws and rules of engagement

because you're playing god in that role

you may be getting permission

you may not

the commander may be busy

and that commander may have said:

"make your best judgment call"

and you will be held accountable

right?

Y'know

I mean it's like

it's a lot of responsibility to be put on a

twenty-two-year-old.

## MEMORIES

### **Zoom** - R. Kehoe

After I got back to England  
and I was one of the earliest back  
we'd been the first team in  
first or second I forget  
maybe both at the same time  
and uh  
so soon as we finished up there they wanted us to come back right away  
to get debriefed and find out what  
but anyway we did  
so I was in a  
uhm  
uhm  
a bunkhouse  
small  
temporary  
and uhm  
right next um is a  
a guy came in the next day  
and he was an Englishman  
one of the English  
Non-Coms like myself

and

uhm

he was in

I think the bed right next to me

just had cots on the

uhm

very

very pleasant actually

and uhm

on the floor and so on

and in the middle of the night sometime

I hear this shot going off

and I jumped!

well he had grabbed his rifle

and he was having a nightmare

or a

whatever it was

and he had

start

shooting

and his first shot when right under my bunk

right under my cot

and it ricocheted up again

now had it ricocheted  
sooner  
we would have had a little different story going on here  
but it was  
zoom  
like that  
well  
he was  
he was in  
practically  
he was really shaking  
he had had a rough time.

***Baby Killer*** - T. Ruzzuti

I was a journalism major for a couple semesters  
and so one of my assignments was to cover  
uhm  
some of the war protesting that was going on at the University of Oklahoma  
uhm  
on campus  
and off campus  
Y'know with a microphone and whatnot trying to interview people and that sort of thing  
for

for my class

and uhm

I started getting death threats by telephone

uhm

now this is back long before cell phones

-heh-

telling me to stay the hell away

uhm

that they didn't need no Vietnam vets investigating

uhm

protesting against an immoral war

Y'know

and if I didn't stop

I'd be sorry

Uhm

other incident involved

uh sittin in a classroom when a journalism professor

stated talkin about the Meli Massacre

and how our trigger-happy armed forces had caused all these civilian deaths

etcetera etcetera etcetera

and I tried to explain

uhm the actions of an outfit  
like Calley's Outfit  
in a search and destroy mission

what I didn't realize in my youth  
Y'know I was twenty  
two years old and that point  
I didn't realize  
uhm  
what the term search and  
how  
how search and destroy would be perceived  
by civilians  
I mean think about it a minute  
search  
destroy  
- heh heh heh-

that's how they saw it  
whereas in the military  
uhm  
we didn't think about it



Y'know

we would search a village

and yes sometimes the village would get destroyed

but most of the time it didn't

most of the time a search and destroy was just

search

looking for weapons

looking for the enemy

that sort of thing

and you move on

ok

well

I tried to explain what happens when you're scared

Y'know you're young, scared, and you're angry

angry because

maybe yesterday you lost a buddy

Y'know killed

someone in that village

-heh-

Y'know

so

it

it changes you  
and I was trying to explain that to the class  
and the professor  
dismissed the class  
and then for the rest of the semester nobody sat next to me again

another time  
uhm  
I  
ah  
hitchhiked  
from North Carolina where I was stationed  
up to the Port Authority in New York City  
uhm  
and a woman came runnin up to me

I estimated she was forty  
she ran up to me  
I was in uniform  
she ran up to me and she spit all over my  
ribbons and started calling me  
a baby killer

and my buddy  
wanted to kill her  
and I had to hold him back  
to keep him from doin that.

***Please Not Now* - H. Evans**

At eleven pm  
on the  
uhm  
the night of February 19th we start our attacks on  
Belvedere and Grugliasco  
uhm

when we first came under artillery fire  
I  
was so frightened  
and  
so tight that I thought I'd  
my body would pull apart  
that when  
when the shells started to fall  
below us and came up through us and  
and uh

when I got myself up  
uhm  
realized the man in front of me had stayed frozen  
I didn't know whether he was injured or killed or  
not  
went up and  
he just  
he couldn't move  
and got him up  
and we caught up with the uh  
the uhm  
rest of the platoon moving up ahead and  
uhm  
by the morning of the  
of the uhm  
twentieth  
uh  
we were below the  
German mines  
uhm  
my  
platoon sergeant was riddled in the chest with machine guns and  
died in my arms saying: "Please not now. Please not now"

which infuriated me  
when he did die and I  
went up where our machine guns were  
firing on the enemy lines  
and  
ended up taking out two  
machine gun positions  
uhm  
for which I was  
given the silver star  
and uhm  
we did take the  
both Belvedere and Grugliasco.

***Onward Christian soldiers* - E. Stevenson**

Most of the guys I served with  
were a  
like  
one of my  
my scout  
he ended up  
when he got out he was a Baptist  
and he fell in with kind of the Tea Party crowd

Y'know so he was a pretty extreme  
form of Christian  
and just being Muslim was enough  
for him  
and I  
he was one of the people that I wouldn't've even have considered overt  
overtly racist  
like so he didn't have a toxic level of racism  
when I was in  
I don't remem  
that I remember?  
but  
when we got out  
he wanted to  
he went back in as a mercenary  
I don't know which company he ended up working with  
be he and I got into this big theological debate  
about  
whether or not him becoming a mercenary  
was  
  
like

as

with his justification being like: "I'm a Christian"

Y'know "Onward Christian soldiers"

"This is the right thing to do"

so I got in

we started quoting the bible at each other

and like

getting into this big theo

Y'know cuz I'm studying it

like in my philosophy debate

I'm like: "Woah, that's not what my interpretation of the bible is"

Y'know it was very Old Testament

Y'know this sort of

flaming Baptist kind of thing

and so he ended up

getting killed over there

he

he died by an IED

in

in Iraq

uhm

as a

convoy

escort

uhm

part of a security team

uh

and that

Y'know had its own shockwaves in my life.

### ***I'm Outta Here!* - D. Adama**

I remember minute one

-heh heh heh heh-

I remember driving

my car

I was all packed up

and

uh

I was driving

I drove over the

uh

the border of the military base

on

Y'know this desert road



heading

into southern California

and I looked at the guard station in my rearview mirror

and I chuckled at the finger

-hah hah hah-

and I said: "I'm outta here!"

"Thanks for...noth-"

I don't know what to thank you for

lessons learned I guess

um

some camaraderie

um

but otherwise the military just really hurt me.

## What I Learn

### *Ok, Let's Do This* - B. Sampson

Y'know I think

I think there was some really

good points

to me being in Vietnam

uhh

yes

I saw horrible things

yes I did grow up and change my world view

uhm

it did give me

a base of

of

survival

uhm I think I could survive

much better than most people

could

if things happen

yeah

prepared

and also

I uhhh

I find I'm very good in tough situations  
great under pressure  
I've been in  
several situations where you had to keep your head and get shit done  
and uh  
and actually friends  
call me  
for that reason  
shoulder to lean on  
and uh  
but when someone's in a tough situation  
I'm I  
I can act  
many people will  
be a deer in the headlight  
I react  
It's like "ok, let's do this"  
we only have to do one thing  
this thing right in front of us  
now  
then we can think about  
the next thing  
we just have to do one thing

I'm good at getting people  
focused  
uhm  
but  
I find  
veterans  
that  
have seen some combat or anything like that  
seem to be  
more unflappable  
yeah Y'know they don't get  
excited or panicked  
it's like: "ok, let's do this."  
Yeah.

***Weren't Able to Stop Themselves***     **- E. Stevenson**

Someone almost killed me with a pipe  
in the military  
we were on a ship  
this is one of those can-of-whoopass moments  
where we were wrestling  
we're having fun  
I was winning

Y'know so it turned into this

like

ego like

pissing match

and

he grabbed a pipe

and then he started

Y'know like

brandishing it and threatening me with it

and he was like: "it would just be that easy"

and Y'know like: "I could of killed you right there"

and it was true

like yeah

he

he had me like

he got me

so it went from

fun play

to

he almost killed me

right?

so this is the kind of thing that happens for vets

when they come back to the civilian world

you get some macho jackass

maybe they know that

you're a vet

maybe they don't

they challenge you

at the bar

at work

you have the boss

that's

Y'know

insecure

and you're the inferior subordinate

and he starts yelling at you

and you go to the

life or death kind of thing

and you as a vet with combat reflexes and combat trauma and whatever

have to stop yourself

because if you don't

you're a criminal

if you do

right?

you  
that trigger is still there  
so every time that boss pushes that trigger  
you're gonna go back to that place  
and like  
Y'know  
again do the research  
how many vets  
weren't able to stop themselves  
  
from enacting a  
conditioned response  
that they were trained to do by our government  
by our society  
and not given  
a program  
to  
disarm that  
like I'm the walking bomb  
so I didn't have a choice  
like  
in order to not explode I had to do my work  
I had to do this

that was the  
prison-bound-ness that  
sent me into the military in the first place  
I was looking for the context  
to like  
I'm living with this amount of rage  
like  
what do I do with it?

***Need to Start Asking Questions* - C. Huzau**

Uhm  
yeah  
when I first got out  
Y'know  
I got out when I was twenty-three  
I went to work for  
various other three letter agencies  
in the DC area  
uhm  
CIA  
and other ones  
I feel into a deep depression  
looking back I think I've narrowed it down to why that happened



and it's because something happened  
when I was like twenty-five twenty-six  
where something just really  
flipped  
and I realized that  
like  
what the hell am I doing?  
I'm  
we're not the good guys  
like  
we pretend to be?  
if that makes sense  
uhmmm  
working  
eh  
like twenty-five twenty-six  
uhm  
like  
what am I doing with my life I don't feel like I'm being of service  
to  
let's just say  
to the safety of Americans  
I kind of

began to see things a little bit more clearly  
where

I feel like

Y'know like

wa wa why are we going to war?

is it really

are we fighting terrorists?

or

are a bunch of beltway bandit

corporations making a ton of money

when were in wartime?

stuff like that

Many occasions where

Y'know presidents on TV saying something

and we're all just like: "what the fucks this guy talking about?"

like we know for sure that everything he's saying is bullshit

based on

our intelligence gathering

and our reporting

Y'know like

eventually I'm gonna start going like:

“well wait a minute here”

right?

like

this is not adding up

why is the president on TV saying one thing

and there's no facts to back that up?

then independent thinking starts to occur more

which

military does not like independent thinkers

they like people that

“here's your order do what your told”

which is why they love eighteen year olds

which is why they love the younger guys because

I think as we get older

something happens where

and not always

I don't want to sound too general

but like something happens where it's like:

“well wait a minute

I think I need to start asking questions here.”

***I'm A Civilian Now* - T. Rizzuti**

I guess

uhm

I would ask a civilian

to pay close attention

to

the wars our government is involved in

why are we involved in um?

uhm

are they necessary?

uhm

and if they're not

I would ask

I would want them to be questioning whether we should be involved or not

I think

uhm

most wars today

are waged for economic purposes

maybe they always have been

but

they certainly aren't

waged

to protect us

that's a personal opinion  
so I would want a civilian to know  
that the effects of war are numerous  
on the combatant  
and that there's a lot of  
collateral damage  
that occurs  
uhm  
not just the veteran  
but to the Veteran's families  
and friends  
and to  
civilians  
in the countries that which we're at war  
so while we might only be losing  
let say  
five veterans a year  
five military personnel a year  
the countries we're fighting in  
could be losing millions  
of civilians  
per year  
so I would want a civilian to know that this is happening

and that

it's their responsibility

it's our respon

I'm a civilian now

it's our responsibility to investigate what our government is up to

and do something about it.

### ***Full Metal Jacket*** - D. Adama

When I was in the military

uhm

I kinda knew right from the beginning that

it wasn't my

cup a tea

uhm

I wasn't really into the hierarchical structure

uhm

I especially was not into taking commands from people who were very obviously

much less intelligent

-heh heh heh-

than I was

so um

the whole thing was really hard to swallow

I really had to find just day to day

little bits of

keeping hold of my personality

making friends and sticking through it

I mean I suppose I could have gotten out at any time I wanted to

but there was something about my early childhood programming that said: "You gotta stay with your commitments, no matter what"

uhm

and I think that ac

that programming actually hurt me more than the military did

-heh heh heh-

I was like

staying in a situation that I knew wasn't good for me

uhm

uh

so lesson learned in that one.

and then uh

I also learned a lot about our government and how it operates

while I was in the military

uhm

especially the military industrial complex

and their motivations

and uhm

yeah I was like that guy in Full Metal Jacket

who wore the “peace” button when he was in Vietnam

Y’know I became

-heh heh-

uh

anti-war

even while the war was going on

and whenever I told somebody I was a veteran

they would say: “Oh thank you”

“Thank you for serving”

-heh heh-

but Y’know when it actually comes down to needing help

those same people who say: “Thank you for sacrificing your time and your body and  
your mind for

protecting our country”

do they offer any

financial support?

Or emotional support?

Or?

Very very

very very little

if any

Y’know



There's a few people I've met who  
who would go out of their way to  
help a veteran  
but uh  
it usually because they've known a veteran  
personally in their own family  
uh  
or they are one  
-heh heh-

## HOW TO COPE

### *Thought Intrusions* - T. Rizzuti

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder

uhm

I have a hard time

accepting it

as a description of a single-incident trauma

experience

I think of it more in terms of long-term exposure to trauma

so for example

to me there's a difference between PTSD and someone who survives a plane crash

and someone who survives a warzone

uhm

probably the closest traumatic experience I can accept

that's similar to what combat veterans go through

would be

abused women

uhm

because it's long-term exposure to trauma and that results in

ah several

uhm

conditions

uhm

one of which is

fear

uh

one of which is

uhm

paranoia

uhm

another one is thought intrusions

that's usually the biggest

you relive the incidents over and over and over

ad nauseam

or it drives you nuts just thinkin about the stuff.

### ***Not in Good Shape* - R. Kehoe**

World War One they called it Shellshock

World War Two it was Battle Fatigues

and then now it's something else

I don't mean to be cynical on this

but

in World War Two

the need for manpower was so great

that a lot of guys who were really suffering were pushed back

into it

uh  
the  
the rehabilitation  
usually  
let's say in Normandy  
might be a couple of weeks  
something like that  
and there were a lot of cases sent back who  
and they were  
not in good shape.

***Everything's Been Okay* - B. Sampson**

I've had  
uhm  
foot surgery  
so I have a 50% disability  
so I am covered  
100% medically  
I have uhm  
PTSD

I just had my eyes examined

Y'know

stuff like that it's all good

uhm

part of the VA though is hard or takes a long time

to get an appointment or

yeah

long waitlist

I was on the phone for four hours

and I never actually even got to spoke to anybody

uhm

so finally I went to the vet center here a and talked to

uh

and incredibly knowledgeable woman

and

she gave me the low down

and so basically

everything's been okay.

***They Represented Me for Free* - C. Huzau**

I started at 10

I'm up to 90 now (percent disability)

all because I had really good people helping when I first got out

I see people not having as good of luck

where like

I had

the American Legion behind me

and the Disabled American Veterans behind me

and like so

they represented me for free.

***Bit of a Fraud* - D. Adama**

Umm

the VA benefits

uhh

are a bit of a fraud

uhm

I did get my army college fund

for being a Desert Storm veteran

uhm

it barely covered my rent

so I still had to take out massive loans and get grants and stuff to actually pay fees and tuition and books and living expenses and

uhm

so

yeah and I'm hearing nowadays that a lot of veterans aren't even getting things that were promised to them like their enlistment bonuses

uhm

uh

medical benefits or anything like that

uhm

Y'know

I am still eligible for things like guaranteed home loans

but there's a lot of caveats with that

like

like uh

the Veteran's Home Loan

does not

uhh

offer any assistance for anybody buying vacant land for instance

So if I actually wanna go out and have the experience of building my own house on my own land

the military won't help me with that

because

they want to

they want to buy you a house

they don't want to buy you

a piece of land

- heh heh heh-

so

so there's all these little things

that are

you can't do with your benefits

and uh

It certainly wasn't worth a ten-year contract

the harm they did to my body and my mind

uhm

I'm still dealing with

Y'know

to this day.



## WHAT NOW?

### *A Loaded Gun in My Mouth* - C. Huzau

Today

I'm a

Shamanic practitioner

so I serve people like that

I love it

my my

my purest intention is to work with vets

I have vets that come to me it's great

can give the kind of treatment that the VA can't give

Mindfulness Teaching?

Y'know

uhm

teaching

teaching these guys and gals how to

be with whatever comes up?

instead of resistant to it?

I guess that's

like

the main way

ok so holding space

in ceremony  
while people can  
have their experiences in a safe container  
while they can meet  
spirit  
whatever you wanna call it  
teachers  
guides  
in a container that is safe and like  
bulletproof

I moved here in twenty  
ten  
just Y'know  
it's  
the way life works  
and then I  
I found my teacher  
my mentor  
my shaman  
and  
after my very first journey  
medicine journey

it's like this this  
deep  
soul  
core depression just stated to  
loosen its grip on me  
and then all of a sudden  
3 to 6 months later like  
"oh I'm not depressed anymore  
I'm actually happy  
I'm actually  
finding enjoyment in my life and this is great and  
I'm not sitting around with  
a loaded gun in my mouth  
which I have done a couple times.

### ***Asking for Trouble*** - H. Evans

I was discharged in November of 1945  
came here to Colorado School of Mines  
and started my college career  
That's a  
no  
not similar to what I've read about  
the a

psychological damage

I can certainly understand it

the

circumstances under which they fought were different

and the conclusions of the

of those conflicts

weren't positive

as they were

in World War Two

the Korean ended up with a

38th Parallel standoff

uhh

and the others

uhm

really

surrendering and

leaving the country

uhm

in the case of Vietnam

uhh

it uhh

worked out that the

uhm

communists

were Democratic

well the ultimate result was more favorable

in the a

Middle east Wars

well it's like these bombings in

London and

or not London

but in Paris and Brussels

exceedingly difficult to deal with

and I would

I would have very different psychological effects I think

but I don't know any of

my buddies that would really

had the kind of problems

we didn't have drugs

didn't use them

uhm

never have

uh

that's something that's come with the younger generation

which my wife Ann and I think is

tragic

Colorado's

making the drugs legal we think is just foolish

just asking for trouble.

### ***Augmented Reality*** - E. Stevenson:

I'm actually in the process of trying to develop

like augmented reality video games as a training platform

to help

people

repurpose

those combat reflexes

Y'know I'm doing like

meditation maps

and doing

Y'know just

whatever that person

cuz again

if a person doesn't have legs and arms

like

they're limited to what they can do

but they can still go through a

mind imagining thing

Rolling Stone just published something on

there's a

an

a

app

that changes the music that you're listening to?

based on what your

what your brain activity is doing?

which ties to some of the psychedelics research and everything else

right?

so like

all of these things now are increasingly

possible to have on your smartphone

most vets have access to a smartphone

right?

if you can have a

subsidized app or whatever

that works

Y'know again proven by scien-

like really just pour the resources into making sure that it works

and you

that is just part of what you get

as

your service

is a smartphone or a

Y'know

a device that can run this shit

and then a daily practice routine

that works.

### ***Sense of Purpose*** - T. Ruzzuti

This is an American Legion Post 119 Estes Park Colorado

I'm the current Commander

of this post

we have a veteran's service program here

we try to help veterans

if they need

mental therapy

or whatever

we try to schedule appointments for um

help um get the help they need

uhm

and we still have Vietnam veterans

coming out of the woodwork



never seen a

never seen a mental health counselor in their lives

but suddenly realize they got some issues that want to deal with and they ask for help.

I've become a huge believer in turning to the arts as a form of therapy

uhm

and I'd very broadly define arts

so it's not just writing which is the method that I chose

but

also music

ah

any kind of artwork or drawing

Painting

Or sculpting

Uh

Or woodworking

oh gosh

just however you wanna define art

because

it gives you purpose

I think

I think what happens to a lot of veterans is when they come home from war zones

is they've lost their sense of purpose

and

beyond that

they've often come home

damaged

uhm

physically damaged

mentally damaged

emotionally damaged

and

to address those damages I think takes purpose

and then beyond purpose takes

regaining

some self-pride

even though pride is one of the deadly sins

we all have to have some of it

within moderation

and I think what

art can do for you

because art can be beautiful

so that has a healing effect

and I believe that to be true of

all art  
that if you  
work at it  
diligently  
you'll find a sense of purpose  
and  
if you are successful at it  
you'll instill pride from it.

***Motherfucker* - B. Sampson**

Well  
part of the reason of helping to start  
Veterans Helping Veterans  
was  
to help  
or lessen the suffering  
of younger veterans coming back from Iraq and Afghanistan  
and we wonder  
is that possible  
or do  
do you have to suffer  
30, 40 years?

our hope was to make it less

happen less

or

make the transitions less

and I think

a few guys were helped

and I still think

Y'know

people are aware enough

to know

that they can be better

or

feel better

will

accept that

will allow that to happen

will accept help

rather than being

"hey I'm a strong motherfucker and"

yeah.

## EPILOGUE

### - H. Evans

If you join the military  
you're serving your country and your country needs you  
and needs the best that you can give  
and I think that today's soldiers are  
just as good and qualified.

### - R. Kehoe

By the time we got in to the war  
umm  
we were ready for it  
in fact they usually had so many guys lined up  
right after Pearl Harbor they couldn't handle um all  
the draftees Y'know

so

uhm

in that sense it was a very

I

I'd say

maybe I'm too

sweet about it or something

that it was a  
a very deep felt war  
everybody felt committed.

**- C. Huzau**

There seems to be a sense of  
people and veterans who think they're broken  
and uhm  
that needs to just be completely retaught somehow  
where it's like  
you're not broken.

**- E. Stevenson**

I think what most people don't realize  
is that for war vets the real war doesn't start until they leave the battlefield  
which is the fight for their own existence  
the fight for  
their  
redemption reintegration  
I would say that's the harder fight.

**VOICE OVER: Can you leave a battlefield?** (Voiced while sitting in the audience)

**- D. Adama**

I think it is possible

uhm

but you gotta have the right teachers

like I said

that

part of that support network

uhm

I think a lot of people who had those kind of skills and knowledge and how to deal with

battle energy and how to dissipate it

so people could reintegrate back into a peaceful village life

and uh

but also the battlefield needs to leave our village

-heh heh heh-

uhm

and this country needs stop being

in perpetual war

and we need to stop teaching our kids that that's what life is all about

uhm

And that the only way you can live a life is by being a coercive asshole

Y'know

which is not not

it's not sustainable

it's not loving

-heh heh heh heh-

**- T. Rizzutti**

Uhm

I

I think it's probably

pretty easy to physically leave

a battlefield

to mentally and emotionally leave a battlefield I think is impossible

I think

I think you're stuck

with the memories

for as long as your memory works.

**- B. Sampson**

I think it will always be with you

but you can

leave it in a sense and being ok with it

accepting it

what I did



uhh

you have to forgive yourself

forgive others

uhm

but

I believe it's always with you

but

there can be less pain

less anxiety

and more acceptance.

Yeah I find that people who go through trauma

and

heal

and help repair themselves

are really fuckin awesome human beings.

**(end of script)**

## PART THREE: REFLECTION

Long before I had finished writing the script, I knew that I didn't want to host open auditions for this production, but instead email casting offers to my peers in the CU Boulder theater department BFA conservatory program. All seven of them said yes, and my stage manager, Katie Ross, and light board operator, Elena Sayeedi, were also members of my BFA program. It was very important to me that this final project with the theater department included working with my peers; I even used the majority of the grant funding from UROP to pay all my cast and crew members. With this production, I wanted to begin the transition from student theater artists to paid professionals together. Embedded below is the paper program for How to Leave a Battlefield:

(Front Page)



# How to Leave a Battlefield

There will be an optional post-show discussion with the playwright and members of the cast immediately following the performance.

it.  
ings much of my college career full circle. What  
osity and conversation at Fraser Meadows  
community back in 2016 has rapidly jumped on its  
last year, and as much as opening and closing this  
e an end, it is in fact the start of what I imagine will  
s worth of work.  
lict is the history of the United States, and the  
nd women of our military are the people who carry  
them. Those that survive, return home to fight  
the that is reintegration; How do veterans, once  
ons, deescalate themselves? Can they heal? And if  
it civilians instill from that healing?  
eave a battlefield?

Veterans & Cast by appearance

R. Kehoe.....Jack Janzen  
H. Evans.....Zack Heygood  
T. Rizzuti.....Luke Sassu  
B. Sampson.....Michael Tandy  
D. Adama.....Dee Jimenez  
E. Stevenson.....Jeremy Segelke  
C. Huzau.....David Kocina

Production and Run Crew

Director & Playwright.....Sean Guderian  
Stage Manager.....Katie Ro  
Lighting Designer.....David Kocin  
Light Op.....Elena Sayee  
Faculty Mentor.....Dr. Cecilia Par

Thoughts from the playwright:

Testimonial theater or verbatim theater is unlike anything  
may have experienced before. Great pains have gone into  
staging every word and breath that the vets portrayed  
show once gave to me during recorded interviews over  
years. At its heart, theater in testimony seeks to reveal  
individuals and groups to audiences so that you might  
understand them and have the opportunity to take away  
from their words and experiences to use in your own life  
nothing short of an injection of empathy. and  
I adore this style and way of working and hope you'll a  
s to:  
David Kocina, Tim O'Neil & Everyone from UROP,  
ghini, CU Boulder Theater and Dance Department,  
id faculty, Connie Lane, members of the Warrior  
ject, Kevin Rich, Bryan Doerries, the cast & crew of  
e veterans themselves, and so many more.

## REHEARSAL PROCESS

I don't have much experience as a director, but from the few opportunities that I've had, I learned about my tendency to be over-controlling, and I discovered ways improve and grow as a director during How to Leave a Battlefield's rehearsal process.

As the person who physically sat down to interview, transcribe, and arrange the words of these veterans into a script, I felt there was no one better suited to direct this play than myself; I know this material *backwards*, but I had also cemented my interpretation of these stories in my mind, and because of this, held to the terrible belief that no matter how hard any of my student actors worked, they could never reach the same level of comprehension that I had. Fortunately, that thought came across to me as incredibly arrogant. How could I ever direct this group of actors to deliver these veteran's testimonies if I inherently believed they *never* could? So I took a step back, and approached directing from a different angle: just as I had sat down and interviewed Robert Kehoe for the first time, my cast would need to "meet" the veteran they had been assigned to play. By sharing the audio recordings of the interviews with my cast, they could listen and draw their own understanding from the conversations and voices of these individuals.

After our first cast meeting and read through on February 15th, 2019, one-on-one coaching sessions with each of my actors began. Because of my change in directing approach, I started *asking* my actors about their assigned vet, rather than *telling* them what I believed to be the truth. By accepting their conclusions as they studied, and guiding them to an answer when they felt lost, I learned that I could keep my own interpretations, and still share with my cast and my audience pieces of these veteran's lives and how they sought healing.

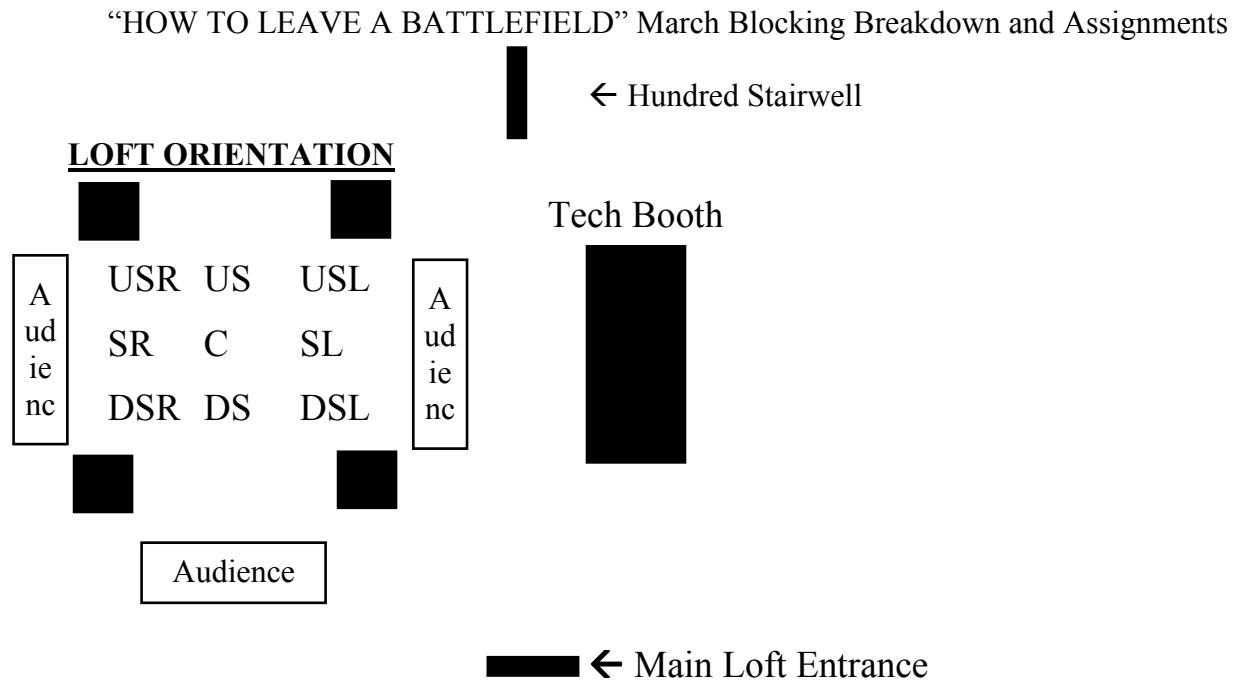
Putting on this production was a great deal more work than I had ever anticipated. Elements like: organizing the schedules of a student cast made up *entirely* of seniors during their

last semester before graduation; hiring a stage manager and light board operator able to attend performances; the lighting design, thankfully handled by one of my actors, David Kocina; reserving the Loft Theater space in the CU Boulder theater building for performances, as well as alternative spaces around the campus for rehearsals and one-on-one coaching sessions; the blocking and movement of the show; renting and installing a video projector; advertising; and about a million other details that I had not considered until they were suddenly staring me in the face. And despite all the new challenges and scrambling to stay organized, we pulled it off!

The biggest mistake I made in organizing this production was not bringing on more people *sooner*. I believed I could handle everything by myself, and I was wrong to think that. There's a very good reason why the pieces that make up a theatrical production are divided among a militia of artists; it's too much work for one person to handle, and I'm happy it didn't fall apart halfway through!

My definition of what "communication" means changed drastically because of this show. When I made it my responsibility to send out cast emails and organize individual responses, say for example, a change in the rehearsal schedule, that change needs to be resolved within a certain timeframe; time that I often didn't have as a fulltime student. I lost count of the number of late nights I was up just pouring over emails and cast class schedules searching for alternative dates to accommodate cast attendance conflicts, and conflicts came up *a lot*.

The next five pages below make up the step-by-step guide I made to blocking the entire show in the Loft Theater space, which I emailed to my actors with considerable rehearsal conflicts so they would not fall behind:



### **PROLOGUE: Who Am I**

Cast enters from main loft entrance and seats themselves throughout audience excluding **Jack** who enters and performs rollcall in following order:

H. Evans – Zack

T. Rizzuti – Luke

B. Sampson – Michael

D. Adama – Daniel

E. Stevenson – Jeremy

C. Huzau – David

R. Kehoe (self) – Jack

**Chairs – Circle Position at top of show**

**Why I Enlist** – No special transition

**Hunting the Demons – Jeremy** – No specific blocking

**It was in My Blood – David** Recruit: (**Luke & Daniel**) – Bring table from offstage → Center; **Daniel** sits behind table facing US; **Luke** standing storms out and back in sync with Huzau testimony.

**180 Degrees – Zack** tap one side of table on line: “no business being involved” then move **Daniel’s** chair back into circle → **Daniel & Luke** bring table just past US in line with US pillars before returning to seats.

**A Zest for Living – Michael** – No specific blocking

**One Thing After Another – Jack** – No specific blocking

## **How I Serve** – No special Transition

**Down to Panama – Luke** Recruit: (**David, Michael, Zack**) – Flow through tableaux → Jumping Jacks/Pushups → Guarding the Gate w/ salute → two-man missile carry of **Michael** toward USL Pillar → **David** return to Center stand still as “captain.” Others return to seats when **Luke** is done speaking.

**Trigger Finger vs. Mouse Finger – David** begin speaking from Center position; on line: “allocating targets for” Touch ONE of the following FOUR people sitting down to begin drone circling movement: (**Jeremy, Jack, Michael, Zack**) → “Drones” join in one at a time, all circling counter-clockwise around **David** who has returned Center → **David** on word: “pinged” touch ONE of circling drones who stop and stands still, while other THREE drones drop to crouching positions.

**Laser Tag – -Daniel** – Right as **Daniel** begins speaking → Entire cast moves chairs and tables slowly with effort (feel the desert heat) into two-sided battle arrangement → on line: “war games” everyone play laser tag (do this as quietly as possible, remember staccato “darting” from behind cover motions).

Upstage forces:

**Jack** (Turns table into “cover” with **Luke**)

**Luke** (Turns table into “cover” with **Jack**)

**Zack**

Downstage forces:

**Jeremy**

**Michael**

**David**

**Daniel** (not participating in game) Stage Right

On **Daniel’s** word: “nonstop” → whole cast soft freeze.

On **Daniel’s** word: “transmitted” → **Jack & Luke** bring table Center; all others return chairs to circle position; everyone sits and nods like authority figures to each other as if in agreement (on Tuesday, March 19th, please do this **safely** speed will come with practice).

**Recovered from All Three – Zack** “pull rank” with **Daniel** to salute/relieve him/claim the space. **Zack** line “however I ended up in the hospital because of a” Recruit: (**Jeremy & Michael**) to “sweep” off table and move from Center → just past Upstage in line with upstage pillars; then return to seating.

**Kill or Die – Jeremy** – No specific blocking

## **Memories** – “Shelf” Transition

Everyone grabs their own chair and moves to upstage pillars & table → (**Jeremy, Jack, Luke, Zack, Adama**) “shelve” your chairs on top of and beneath table and find a place to either side to prop or stand. **Michael** sits in his own chair USL of table and **David** sits in his own chair USR of table.

In proper order, cast members “unshelve” a chair from the table and set it down near Center → finish testimony → stack your chair near USR pillar out of the way; Jack begins the chair stack, Daniel will finish chair stack. Don’t forget to move in tandem with each other during testimony shifts; as someone leaves the center space the next up is entering the center space.

**Zoom – Jack** – No Specific blocking

**Baby Killer – Luke** – No Specific blocking

**Not Now – Zack DON’T** stack chair yet, instead place diagonally DSR; **Jeremy** will set his chair Center to face yours, then non-verbally “asks” for your military coat. **Zack** stand near pile of chairs USR out of the way to accept coat back when **Jeremy** is done speaking; both get and stack your own chairs in tandem with **Daniel** entering.

**Onward Christian Soldiers – Jeremy** – ^ posted above are instructions, we have worked individually on your blocking for this piece **Jeremy**.

**I’m Outta Here! – Daniel** at end of piece stack chair then immediately begin “bucket brigade” line to “ferry” chairs out and begin new transition everyone joins in on this excluding **Michael** who immediately moves to downstage and starts his testimony.

## **What I Learn** – Chair Structure Building Transition

Everyone excluding **Michael** joins “bucket brigade” to unstack chairs and begin building the structure. **Rules:** When a chair becomes SET don’t move it, only ADD to it. The pattern right now is → build structure → stand back to admire/debate → decide to take apart → build new and FINAL structure → stand back and congratulate, by that time **Michael** should be joining you.

Take your time building guys, it should appear that you are working together and always seeking advice from the group; I don’t want to see 1 person stacking everything or pointing out what goes where, that would send the wrong message; the message is always “supporting each other.” This act of building is a GOOD thing, smile and enjoy it, but do so silently, so **Michael** can be heard.

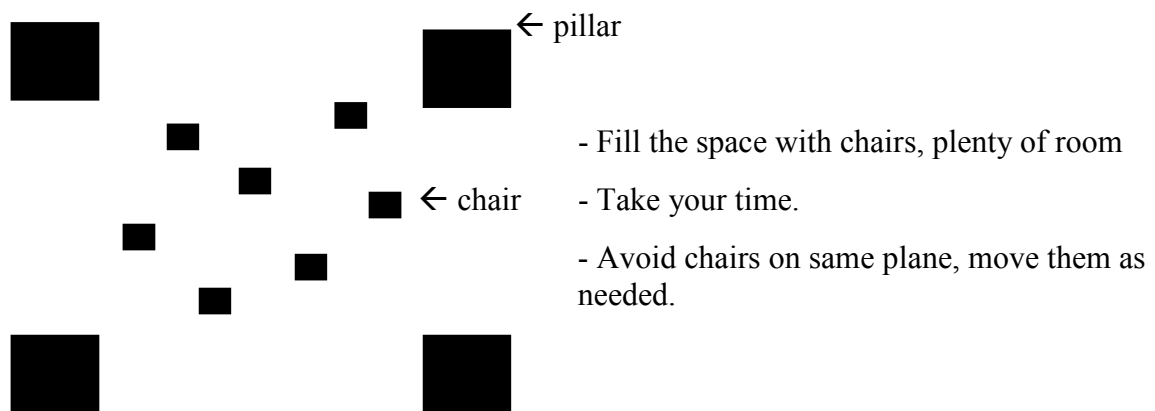
**Ok, Let’s Do This – Michael** testimony during “What I learn” transition. Remember where in the text you decide to turn and “join” your fellow vets.



**Weren't Able to Stop Themselves – Jeremy** – Group leaves structure and returns to Upstage pillar area, excluding **Jeremy** who gets **Zack's** attention to assume the diagonal “western showdown position” on either side of the chair structure. Circle each other around the pile with **Jeremy** leading. **Zack** don't forget to be passive here, you are “EXHIBIT A” for **Jeremy** to use during this piece.

On line: “So this is the kind of thing that happens for vets” **Jeremy** break away from “showdown” position and focus on audience. **Zack** quickly come to stand downstage for **Jeremy** to continue gesturing to and using as an example. Exit together to join your vets Upstage.

**Need to Start Asking Questions – David** claim the space like you're the maid who now needs to “clean up this mess” Throughout your testimony you will be taking down the chair structure and setting each chair in a scattered pattern all facing downstage. Something like this:



The exact pattern is not important, just try not to overlap chairs on the same plane so as to avoid sightline issues. Take your time with this, I expect your whole testimony to span the length of deconstructing and building this new pattern. After you finish speaking **David**, sit in any chair you wish and put your head between you legs to hide your face from everyone.

**I'm A Civilian Now – Luke** - No specific blocking, other than sit down head between legs after you finish speaking.

**Full Metal Jacket – Daniel** - No specific blocking, other than sit down head between legs after you finish speaking.

## **HOW TO COPE** – “Mental Discomfort Pose” Transition

Anyone not currently sitting in a chair with head between legs moves to do so after **Daniel** finishes speaking and sits.

**Thought Intrusions – Luke** – Wait until everyone is seated then stand up from pose while speaking your first line: “Post-Traumatic-Stress-Disorder” That line is the que for everyone else to stand quickly upright and assume the hands-on-head discomfort pose looking up toward ceiling; (think military march precision here when standing). Hold pose for the whole of **Luke's** testimony. When **Luke** returns to sit after speaking everyone sit down and sit as you normally would, listening to your fellow vets; everyone should be sitting and facing the audience downstage at this point.

**Not in Good Shape – Jack** – No Specific blocking, remain seated.

**Everything's Been Ok – Michael** – No Specific blocking, remain seated.

**They Represented Me for Free – David** – No Specific blocking, remain seated.

**Bit of A Fraud – Daniel** – I think you standing and moving makes sense here. No Specific blocking.

## **WHAT NOW?** – Back into Circle Transition

After **Daniel** is has finished speaking, **EVERYONE** will stand and return their chairs to a circle position and sit down before

**A Loaded Gun in My Mouth – David** – No specific blocking

**Asking for Trouble – Zack** – No specific blocking

**Augmented Reality – Jeremy** – No specific blocking

**Sense of Purpose – Luke** – No specific blocking

**Motherfucker – Michael** – No specific blocking

## **EPILOGUE**

In script order, each vet will sit up and come downstage to give his piece of epilogue before moving back to stand center/upstage and slowly add to a clump with your fellow vets. **Michael** will end the show with last few lines before black out, then lights up for bows.

### **(End of blocking write-up)**

When it came to blocking the show, I turned again to Anna Deavere Smith who keeps to a minimalist-style of staging her testimonial theatrical work. Everything from the use of one-chair-per-actor to the lack of movement and soft freezes by the ensemble when someone was talking were all meant to frame and not distract from the piece of testimony being given in that moment. There is a lot of sitting around for the cast during this show, so it was important that they strive to listen and respond to each other as a group throughout the whole hour-long show. I was constantly reminding them to *show* me their focus of attention and not just wait for their next turn to speak in character.

The tableaux, soft freezes, and marching songs the company performed also served as a tonal/mood device alluding to the concept of military unit *support*. Above all, I wanted this show to flow without stopping and avoid moments of dead air. I watched military exhibition drills online for inspiration. Their clean-cut, staccato movements are what people expect to see from platoons of soldiers, and with this movement style in mind, we kept the energy up as much as we could during the show. It was very satisfying to see my cast working together to build this dogma of movement, and there were peak points in the show that I feel all our rehearsing paid off.

I wanted the external tech elements, like lighting and projector image design, to be as unobtrusive as possible. The simple, but bold primary colors from the lights in the Loft Theater space were assigned to each of the major chapters in the script, so that the audience might visually interpret a change in the space, as the student cast moved on to the next subject and collection of testimonies.

## AUDIENCE RECEPTION

Not many people attended performances. I think the biggest house we had was 16 people to whom I am forever grateful. I had scheduled performances for mid-April in the hope that students wouldn't feel pressured to study for final exams rather than attend. I think the biggest mistake I made in that aspect was reassuring people that if they couldn't attend performances, don't worry. I'm going to film the show and email you a copy. It gave anyone who might have been a potential audience member an excuse to skip out on seeing the show in person; a good lesson learned for the next time I'm pitching a show: Don't give people an excuse to not see your work.

Following each of How to Leave a Battlefield's three performances there was a post-performance discussion, of which most of our audience members stayed to participate. I didn't have any expectations going into these discussions, and there were some interesting points made. Everyone agreed that the show needed more *variety* among veterans, as every vet in this show identifies as a white male, it absolutely needs testimonies from women, non-binary individuals, and people of color. There were other times when I felt that one or two people wanted to say more, but were maybe afraid to hurt my or the cast's feelings? In hindsight, maybe I should have passed out papers with questions for people to respond to and turn in rather than ask them questions face to face?

What follows on the next three pages are the transcripts from the talkback sessions of all of our performances as transcribed by my stage manager Katie Ross:

## HOW TO LEAVE A BATTLEFIELD

Talkback April 16<sup>th</sup>

Start Time: 8:00 pm

End Time: 8:20 pm

### Comments from audience:

- “I’m a veteran. I’ve been in the VA system for 30 years and I stay as far away from them as possible. You know 80 percent of vets who get 100 disability rating never go back to the VA.”
- Talk about veterans and the health system provided by the VA
- Psychological damage
- I find it hard to believe you all are vets because you’re so young

### Good question to ask:

Are you aware of what you are getting yourself into?

What is the solution for that (preparing soldiers)?

### Questions from Sean:

What stuck with you?

“Not everyone’s experience is exactly the same”

### Questions from audience:

Did you think about the information you filtered? (thinking about the opposing side—men who did not have any negative thoughts/regrets)

“I think it is a lot easier to regret something when there is no clear answer.” – Jack Janzen (in relation to WWII vets having a clearer purpose)

Did you (as actors) have anything personal that affected you during this process in relation to family/friends in service?

Jack: gave him a better path to understanding his father’s experiences

Sean: more aware that the best people to help vets are other vets

Talkback April 17<sup>th</sup>

Start time: 8:07 pm

End time: 8:28 pm

Comments from audience:

- PTD is post WWII (shellshock)
- Did any of your research the background of the period you were representing?

We all had different wars; interesting to make connections to own lives; researched more about vet than actual war; gave new light to what was actually going on
- It touches on a lot of problems: the whole VA system, how little support there is among civilians
- Good to ask the question and challenge people's perceptions of war
- Liked the format to bring topics together

Questions from Sean:

What was it like having your own words spoken back to you?

I certainly recognize them... My description of the initial fear of combat... certainly was true. I just prayed to the lord to let me survive and I'll do my job... Military training I think is good. We were drafted--it wasn't voluntary. Now it's volunteer and I think it puts a different shade on the service. I always felt it was vital work that we were doing in WWII... very sound reasons for preventing Hitler and Mussolini and the Russians.

What would you like to hear more about?

Continue to explore the avenues of what is working and what is helping vets.

I think people need to be made more aware of what war is really like... I don't care if you go further, I care that this gets exposed to more people.

Interested to see a wider scope of veterans. (ROTC students?)

Use this to bring veterans together. Have dialogues on stage rather than just monologues.

Question for Evans:

Do you have any advice for us about life?

The most important thing is your attitude. Don't hold grudges—move on.

Talkback April 20<sup>th</sup>

Start time: 2:55 pm

End time: 3:30 pm

Comments from audience:

- Maybe have the actors talk about something that triggers them in civilian life. I've heard of some guys having strong reactions to trash in the gutter as they're driving down the road

Ask veterans to describe day-to-day experiences that average civilians wouldn't think twice about?

- Type of conversations they have/vernacular are much different from civilian world; what you can say and do in the military versus how you have to check yourself outside this
- Immersive theatre?
- Very much enjoyed the healing pieces—would like to see more of this
- More resolution? Can it heal? If it can't, why not? What is stopping it?
- Outstanding line: parallel with abused women; correlation with misogyny in military

Deeper connection with audience when it is correlated with other things

- What was it like playing veterans?  
Jack: has seen healing process first-hand with his father
- VA won't treat pre-existing conditions
- Interesting to hear more how their experiences affected their families
- Feelings of parents/families before they enlisted/were drafted
- As actors: do you want to do more of this work? How has it affected you?  
Our program does not do a lot of testimonial theatre... it was very powerful to listen to the interviews and connect with the veterans without having spoken with them personally. - Jeremy  
Work like this connects you to the real world. – David
- Stories on how they deal with physical injuries?

Questions from Sean:

What sticks with you?

Complexity and variety of experiences and how different they are from our assumptions and perceived stereotypes... the stories are so moving. I didn't know what to expect.

**(End of transcripts)**

## VETERAN REACTIONS

While only one veteran originally involved with the project, Hugh Evans, was able to physically attend a performance and post-performance discussion, most of the other vets saw and eventually responded to the video recording of the show that I emailed them either by phone or in person. They had a lot of praise to give when it came to the spirit of the production, but many of their responses involved what they wish I had done differently. The two major pieces of criticism I received were about the pacing and tone of the play. The vets who responded, besides Evans, told me that they grew bored of watching the show at about the halfway mark, and that I should explore additional ways to hold their attention.

One of the vets, Daelinar Adama, made a good point, saying that watching this show as a vet is particularly boring because, to one extent or another, they've heard it all before; they've *lived* it before, so how might I bring something else to the table that a veteran audience would find engaging? How might I surprise not just a citizen, but also a vet who comes to see this show?

The second most common veteran response was them wishing there had been more uplifting moments in the show throughout. They wanted more of what the Epilogue chapter in the script brought out; short, clear, statements of hope and advice for the future. Collecting responses from my audience members and the vets themselves will only grow and shape the future of this script for the better.



## CONCLUSION: WHAT'S NEXT?

I was floored by how much work it took to hunt for commonality in these testimonies and structure them in a way that made sense. That aspect of the project more than anything defines the creative influence I and Dr. Pang as my advisor had over this script. While it hypothetically could be rewritten with alternative material from the same veterans, I am confident that this script version illustrates the very best of the messages born from what I had recorded at that time. Which is the beauty of this work! At no point during this process was I striving to produce a finalized piece of theater. I want to build this script and this way of working into something that really moves people, and while our closing production of How to Leave a Battlefield felt like an ending, it was really the beginning of what I believe will become an incredible piece of theater. I have continued to gather new testimonies from veterans, improve as an interviewer, and practice asking better questions for better answers. This script will continue to evolve, and my next plan is to bring How to Leave a Battlefield as a one-man-show to the United Solo Festival in New York within the next couple years after graduation!

From the start of this project, back on March 19th, 2016 to its closing performance on April 20th, 2019, I did not gain some unique understanding of what veterans go through in the military, and I'll admit, I had expected to have some kind of epiphany. But many vets have told me I will never understand unless I enlist myself. It's incredibly challenging to explain an experience, like military service or battlefield trauma, to someone who has never gone through it. And because of that fact, I learned that I shouldn't bother trying to force understanding, but instead echo the moments that I have empathized with a veteran's story: The loss of a loved one or a friend; the fear and anxiety that creeps up as you stare at a future filled with uncertainty, or the moments when you feel like no one supports you and everyone is against you.

Sharing and acknowledging relatable aspects of your life with a veteran is in my experience the best way to connect with them, and that's why I love the ending of this script! Bob Sampson is speaking to the strength of veterans who've survived the hell that is reintegration into public life, but he's talking about all *people* who repair themselves, and as I look to my own future working with veterans, I think that distinction could be the final destination of this journey: these veterans, these survivors, are now the best yet most *untapped* resource other people could have in coming to terms with their own trauma; regardless of its origins. When I asked these veterans how to leave a battlefield, I think I was unconsciously asking them how, after living through the very worst that life has to offer, have you moved on and smiled at the next day to come? That strength can offer so much to society, and it's what I feel How to Leave a Battlefield should become; a performance that encourages citizens and veterans alike to come together with the intention of mutual healing and putting the past behind you.