# THE WAR TAPES

Directed by Deborah Scranton

PRODUCER Robert May

EDITOR/CO-PRODUCER
Steve James

EXECUTIVE PRODUCER
Chuck Lacy

A SenArt Films and Scranton/Lacy Films Production 2005 / 108 Minutes

### THE WAR TAPES

108 Minutes Full Synopsis

The war in Iraq has been the most covered conflict in history. 2,700 embedded reporters, instant messages and blogs from the front lines, websites and satellite phones have transformed the way the world sees war. At the same time, almost all of the mainstream media coverage has been sanitized, distorted and pre-packaged by government message machines, profit-driven news organizations or Hollywood-style producers pushing one-sided agendas.

Now comes THE WAR TAPES -- a real-life documentary that allows the soldiers to tell their OWN stories. Immediate, raw, and direct, THE WAR TAPES is the first film shot by the soldiers themselves; bypassing the "embedded reporter" filter and providing an intimate front-row look at how soldiers cope with life on the battlefield moment by moment.

THE WAR TAPES is unique among war documentaries: It is not a polemic for those who support the war or for those who want us out. It's a fresh and balanced look at the lives of men who don't fit conveniently into any stereotypes or manufactured roles

THE WAR TAPES is a feature-length film about three National Guardsmen deployed to Iraq in March 2004 - as the insurgency began to take hold.

First-time filmmaker Deborah Scranton directed the film from her farmhouse in rural New Hampshire. Up every night instant messaging with her soldier cameramen, Deborah pushed the soldiers to take the audience with them as they faced ambushes and roadside bombs.

After an emotional homecoming, the filmmakers record the soldiers and their families as they try to reconstruct their civilian lives. We see them try to reconstruct their civilian lives after a year in combat.

THE WAR TAPES introduces you to:

Specialist MIKE MORIARTY who was so moved by the 9/11 attacks he re-joined the National Guard to fight terrorists in Iraq.

Sergeant STEPHEN PINK a wise cracking former reporter who made a "rash decision" to join the National Guard for college money and uses his writing and story telling to cope with modern warfare.

Sergeant ZACK BAZZI, a Lebanese-born Arab who escaped from the Lebanon Civil War as a child only to return to war in Iraq as a U.S. soldier.

These soldiers were not picked by casting agents or movie producers. They have different opinions about the war. They just want to show you first hand what it's like to serve in Iraq. Together, they tell an important story that all Americans must see.

THE WAR TAPES is directed by Deborah Scranton, produced by Robert May (Fog of War) and Steve James (Hoop Dreams), Edited by Steve James, with soundtrack by Stewart Copeland (formerly with the band The Police), and executive produced by Chuck Lacy. For theatrical release in 2006.

### **About the Filmmakers**

### **DEBORAH SCRANTON / DIRECTOR**

First-time filmmaker Deborah Scranton developed the concept of THE WAR TAPES after being asked by the New Hampshire National Guard to embed with them as they deployed to Iraq. Realizing there were already plenty of 'embedded' reports already in existence, Scranton decided that embedding video cameras with the soldiers themselves would give a more direct and realistic view of the war – and tell the story of Iraq from the soldier's perspective.

In what would turn out to be the first time soldiers would film a movie firsthand, Deborah asked the Guard if they would take video cameras to document their experiences directly. She chose to work with the only active Mountain Infantry unit in the US Army – Company C of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion of the 172<sup>nd</sup> Regiment to be her subject. Scranton negotiated the access, trained the soldiers as cinematographers, and coached and directed their filming in Iraq through instant messages and email from her farmhouse in New Hampshire.

Previously, Scranton directed the television documentary, STORIES FROM SILENCE, WITNESS TO WAR, which featured oral histories of World War II veterans from her hometown of Goshen, New Hampshire. Her work on this documentary so impressed the New Hampshire National Guard that they called her to work with them to tell their story.

Scranton and executive producer Chuck Lacy co-founded Scranton/Lacy Films, LLC to produce THE WAR TAPES and other films about everyday Americans telling important stories about their lives. Prior to directing her first documentary on World War II veterans, Deborah spent 15 years working as a television reporter and producer at ESPN, MTV, and the ABC and FOX affiliates in Salt Lake City ABC. She is a former member of the US Ski Team, and received her bachelors degree from Brown University and a masters degree from Dartmouth College.

### **CHUCK LACY / EXECUTIVE PRODUCER**

Chuck Lacy is co-founder of Scranton/Lacy Films, LLC and an experienced entrepreneur and historian. Currently, Lacy is the President of the Barred Rock Fund, a venture capital fund he founded in 2000. He is the former President of Ben & Jerry's.

This is the first major project for the Scranton/Lacy partnership. He and Deborah Scranton started Scranton/Lacy Films, LLC to make films about everyday people in New England. His other current business interests as Partner or Director include: Gonofone Inc., the largest wireless phone company in Bangladesh; Bakewell Reproduction Center, breeder and marketer of the world's best cattle for grass fed beef production; Guayaki Yerbe Mate, tea produced in Paraguay for the American market; Vermont Mystic Pie Company; and others. He has Undergraduate and Graduate degrees from Amherst College and Cornell University respectively and is currently a graduate student at Dartmouth College.

### **ROBERT MAY / PRODUCER**

Robert May was Executive Producer of Errol Morris' Oscar® winning film THE FOG OF WAR: Eleven Lessons from the Life of Robert S. McNamara (acquired by Sony Pictures Classics), which premiered at the 2003 Cannes Film Festival. THE FOG OF WAR has also won numerous awards for Best Documentary including: The National Board of Review, the Chicago Film Critics, the Los Angeles Film Critics, the Washington D.C. Area Film Critics and the Independent Sprit Award.

May produced THE STATION AGENT (Miramax Films) with director Tom McCarthy. Appearing on over 60 Critics Top Ten Lists, THE STATION AGENT tied MYSTIC RIVER for the most Screen Actors Guild award nominations

May also executive produced STEVIE (acquired by Lions Gate Films), a critically-acclaimed documentary by Oscar® nominated HOOP DREAMS director Steve James. STEVIE won the Grand Jury Prize at the 2002 International Documentary Film Festival Amsterdam and the Excellence in Cinematography Award at the 2003 Sundance Film Festival.

A successful entrepreneur, Robert May sold a large service business he'd built over 25 years before pursuing his interest in film by starting SenArt Films in 2000. His successes since then are legendary in the world of independent film.

### STEVE JAMES / EDITOR/PRODUCER

Steve James is best known as the award-winning director, producer, and co-editor of HOOP DREAMS, which swept every major documentary award of 1994, among them, the Robert F. Kennedy Journalism Award and the Peabody Award. James recently served as an executive producer, story director, and series editor on THE NEW AMERICANS, a seven-hour miniseries on the lives of contemporary immigrants that aired to critical acclaim on PBS in 2004.

In 2002, James produced, directed and edited STEVIE a feature-length portrait of a troubled young man for whom James was once a Big Brother. The film won the coveted grand jury prize at the International Documentary Film Festival Amsterdam as well as other major awards at other film festivals including 2003 Sundance Film Festival. STEVIE was released theatrically and landed on more than a dozen "Ten Best Films of 2003" lists including USA Today and The Onion.

James' dramatic films include the feature PREFONTAINE, which premiered at Sundance, the TNT movie, PASSING GLORY (1999), and JOE AND MAX (2002), which premiered on Starz and was nominated for an ESPN Espy Award. James's newest documentary is REEL PARADISE, on former "indie film guru" John Pierson, who took his family to Fiji for a year to run the world's most remote movie theater. The film premiered at the 2005 Sundance Film Festival.

### **Q&A with DEBORAH SCRANTON / DIRECTOR**

### THE WAR TAPES presents a real soldier's-eye view of the war. How did the idea originate?

The concept of THE WAR TAPES came from a phone call from the Public Affairs Officer of the New Hampshire National Guard. He had seen my TV documentary on World War II vets and he was calling with an offer to embed with any New Hampshire National Guard unit being deployed to Iraq as a journalist. He said I would have complete access to tell the story of the soldiers' experiences at war.

There were already plenty of embedded reports from Iraq, but none shot by the soldiers themselves. So I decided to move this project one step closer to the truth and give cameras directly to the soldiers: for them to film their own experiences to tell the real story, "blemishes and all". From the research on my previous film, the infantry was the part of the military I wanted to work with since historically they've been the guys who traditionally close the deal in war. Ultimately it was Company C, 3<sup>rd</sup> Division of the 172<sup>n</sup> Regiment Infantry -- the only infantry unit in the state of New Hampshire – that would become the subject of the film.

# You have been very clear from the start that this is the story of the soldiers themselves, and not a polemic for those for the war or for those against it. Why is that?

Absent the leveling effect of a military draft, many Americans do not know any soldiers in the all-volunteer Army. I do. I'm ninth generation in a rural New Hampshire community where the only major employers are the hospital and the gun factory. For many, the military or National Guard with its college benefits is a way out. For others, they have a calling to serve their country. The men of Company C range from 18 to 57 years old. They could be your neighbor – soccer coach – volunteer fireman – school teacher – graphic designer – mechanic - your best friend, father, son or husband. My filmmaking style is first person, multiple story strands, with no narration. My interest is in individual soldiers. They've made decisions very few of us ever have to make.

This project is my attempt to get personal and help their voices be heard – by all of us.

### What's different with THE WAR TAPES from the documentaries on the war in Iraq?

No other documentary follows soldiers during a war – filming continuously through an entire year's deployment. Because of this day-in and day-out filming, we captured a more comprehensive view of what their experience was like.

This film is honest and deals with the men as human beings like us or our friends and family. It lets the men speak for themselves for once at length, unlike in short articles, and it's an excellent record of the reality of the war from an undeniable point of view, not filtered through the news media or the government.

# The soldiers captured some remarkably heated battle scenes and footage that we haven't seen elsewhere. How did this footage help tell the stories of the soldiers, and what makes it unique?

By showing actual footage of battle, we are able to give anyone who wants to watch a grunt's eye view of what it means to be living this war. When the bullets are flying and IEDs are exploding, it is not about policy, it is about covering your buddy regardless of how he voted in the last election.

Of the initial 10 cameras given out to soldiers who volunteered at Fort Dix in March 2003, 5 soldiers filmed for the entire year's deployment. Three of those five soldiers are the main characters in the film; Zack Bazzi, Mike Moriarty and Steve Pink with much of the footage shot by Duncan Domey and Brandon Wilkins.

## How did you select the soldiers who filmed in Iraq, and did you meet some initial resistance from the soldiers when you first started the project?

Chuck [Lacy] and I flew down to meet with the unit at Fort Dix, New Jersey a few weeks prior to their deployment to Iraq. At the end of a routine company formation, the First Sergeant announced the project to the entire unit of 180 men. He introduced me and I described how I wanted them to tell their story – with camera's we would supply.

After the soldiers grilled me to make sure that there was no political agenda subtext to our intentions as filmmakers, about twenty guys expressed an interest to hear more. We moved to a briefing room where we continued to talk. There were a lot of questions. I shared a personal experience when I had been on the receiving end of an Army night helicopter rescue while directing a backcountry heli-skiing shoot for a television commercial. It was Army soldiers, who, in the dead of night, searched for and recovered three of my dead crew members off of a mountain. I had a profound respect for those soldiers that has lasted years beyond than night. By the end of that conversation, ten soldiers were ready and willing to participate. We then traded emails and instant messenger screen names.

Before they left for Iraq, we came back twice to Fort Dix with a crew to film their preparations and interview the soldiers so they could open up about their feelings. We were also there to answer any questions they had about filming techniques.

### How did you train the soldiers and what film techniques did you teach them?

I'd like to make sure a copy of some of the soldiers' raw tapes is present in every film school across the country. Each of them had an incredible eye for composition and content. I didn't teach them anything. I just encouraged them to come up with innovative ways to mount the cameras on their Humvees so they could be able to point back at themselves and to do "diary cams" which by and large they all hated to do. They felt self-conscious, but they did them.

Also, by knowing how the story strands were unfolding, I would make suggestions for interviews to follow up with especially after traumatic events. For instance with the Taji car bombing scene, Steve Pink emailed me as soon as they got on base to let me know what had happened. The guys on his squad were all pretty shaken, so I then instant messaged Mike Moriarty to ask him if he could get "sit down" interviews with each of the guys -- asking them some specific questions which I attached in an email. That is the footage you see in the film, cut into the event itself.

## You directed the filming in Iraq by instant messenger and email from your farmhouse in New Hampshire. How did this work?

It took approximately two weeks for a tape from Iraq to arrive at my doorstep. The guys were really great about keeping me posted about what they had captured on tape. Sometimes they would email photos or Quicktime movie files to give me an idea of what they had filmed. My computer was on 24/7.

# You were 'pinged' with instant messages and email at all hours while the soldiers were in Iraq. What was the most memorable message or dialogue you had with the soldiers?

Well, there are different kinds of memorable. The messages really ran the gamut of human emotion; from happiness to terror, from sorrow to feelings of helplessness. It was a very intimate experience to be so tightly woven in their day-to-day lives.

### What was your relationship with the soldiers like?

To many, the American soldier in Iraq is unknown on any personal level. They're often viewed as armed ciphers doing their work abroad. Our troops often keep their feelings to themselves, and the policy dictates an air of ambivalence, so they're not about to trust an outsider.

These men and I have formed deep friendships and they've been my eyes and ears for their entire year in Iraq. In return, I have become a "battle buddy." A designation normally reserved for only those who have been in combat with them.

### Q&A with CHUCK LACY / EXECUTIVE PRODUCER

This war has seen more intense coverage by media from around the world and by more technological means than any war in recent history, yet the public still doesn't seem to get an accurate view of the situation on the ground. What do you think is missing from the flow of information from Iraq?

Live reports from Iraq give us the illusion of access. But reporters can't leave the "green zone" in Baghdad to witness the war first hand. In previous wars, we relied on soldiers coming home to give us first hand accounts. These reports are filtered by memory and shaped by a search for meaning. They can fall short in sharing the experience of combat. Documentaries shot by soldiers themselves while on the front lines show their experience like no other medium.

You have received an overwhelmingly positive response to this movie from both pro-war and anti-war audiences, as well as those who are split on whether the U.S. should be at war. Why do you think that's the case?

Soldiers do not make war policy. They aren't responsible for the war. But to make good policy Americans need to understand what we ask our soldiers to do in our name. People want to hear directly from soldiers on the front line. This film gives them the chance.

# What do you think of the other war documentaries and movies that are already out. How does THE WAR TAPES differ from the other movies about the Iraq war?

THE WAR TAPES covers an entire deployment, from final training at Fort Dix in New Jersey, through the entire year in Iraq, to the first eight months after coming home. Most other films, and there are some good ones, cover a month or two, the time when the embedded filmmaker is with the unit. In THE WAR TAPES the soldiers chose what to film. They were volunteers and they decided what was important. They were the on-site directors and cinematographers. The filmmakers never went to Iraq. That's a first in war documentaries.

### How did you get involved in producing THE WAR TAPES?

Deborah was in my writing class at Dartmouth a few years ago and we liked each other's writing. She had the chance to embed with the New Hampshire National Guard in Iraq. After she got the idea of training the soldiers to film the war themselves and the Guard approved, we put our credit cards together and never looked back.

### Why do you think THE WAR TAPES is important?

This film offers first hand accounts by soldiers. You can't ignore them. You have to listen to them. You have to include them in your thinking about the war. It recalibrates what's required to tell the truth about war.

### How have new technologies helped make THE WAR TAPES possible, and which technology or technologies do you credit with making this film possible?

More than anything, this film was made with courage, not with technology. These soldiers open up their lives to the American people. Sure, the little digital cameras and instant messaging were key. But more importantly, this film is possible because this group of soldiers had the courage to tell their stories in real time without the benefit of time and memory as filters.

# THE WAR TAPES captures the struggle with post-traumatic stress common with military families across the country. What surprised you most at how these particular soldiers evolved or changed when they returned home?

My own experience with this film showed me how long a year in combat can be. These guys were "outside the wire" at risk of attack most days for a year. With instant messaging and email, their families (and Deborah) knew their missions and what happened on an almost daily basis. We knew the families as they dealt with the stress of loneliness, fear, and money trouble, with no ability to assure kids that daddy would be fine. We knew the impossible expectations of the homecoming by soldiers and their families. After a year watching things unfold, I came away with no surprises about PTSD (post traumatic stress disorder).

The stories of the soldiers and the families themselves offer the best explanation of PTSD. People should see this film to understand how hard it is to make it "all the way home".

### **ABOUT THE SOLDIERS**

### **ON-CAMERA SOLDIERS**

#### SERGEANT ZACK BAZZI

### [INSERT PHOTO HERE]

SERGEANT ZACK BAZZI is a Lebanese-born Arab who escaped from the Lebanon Civil War with his family at age 10 only to be return to war in Iraq as a soldier in the U.S. Army. Bazzi, who says one reason he joined the military was to travel and see the world, has been deployed overseas twice before – in Bosnia and Kosovo.

A battle-tested veteran and fluent in Arabic, Bazzi finds himself translating for U.S. forces throughout his twelve months in Iraq. At one point, in a dramatic show of compassion, Bazzi refuses to follow his superior's orders to deny an Iraqi father the ability to carry his sick baby to a hospital just across the road. "If the colonel wants to [tell the father he can't do it] he can come down himself and do it. We weren't gonna. It goes against why we were there," he explains later.

THE WAR TAPES introduces Zack's mother, Sana Bazzi, who tearfully explains why she doesn't want her son to go to war. She describes a harrowing gun battle in Lebanon where her family's apartment bathroom was used as cover by fighters in the civil war. She had simply had enough.

Upon his return, THE WAR TAPES captures Bazzi as he is sworn in as a United States citizen. He says that after his tour of duty, he is now more cautious and skeptical of what he hears and reads in the news and what he hears from the government.

He is continuing his education at the University of New Hampshire where he majors in both psychology and international affairs.

### **SPECIALIST MIKE MORIARTY**

### [INSERT PHOTO HERE]

SPECIALIST MIKE MORIARTY was so moved by the 9/11 attacks that he joined the National Guard because "he had to do something" in response. Within weeks of the attacks, Moriarty boarded a bus to New York to see ground zero where he witnessed, in his words, "the still burning nightmare and the smell of horror." THE WAR TAPES takes you with Moriarty and his video camera to the World Trade Center site where he became a changed man.

As an Army reservist during the first Gulf War, Moriarty's unit was ready to ship out to Iraq just as war ended. He says he rejoined the Guard because "In the process of growing older and having come so close to being deployed during the first Gulf war, I reached my 34th birthday and could not stand to see another soldier die without being able to do my part."

While he's in Iraq, THE WAR TAPES follows Moriarty's wife, Randi, as she works and takes care of their 6-year-old son and 2-year-old daughter.

Despite criticism from his family for being an irresponsible father and husband before going to Iraq, his patriotism remains steadfast as he explains that he hopes "to relieve a soldier who can go home and enjoy life with his wife and children. Whoever he will be, he is my hero."

Moriarty now works as a Harley Davidson mechanic and is in the Guard through 2006.

### SERGEANT STEVE PINK

### [INSERT PHOTO HERE]

SERGEANT STEPHEN PINK is a wise-cracking former reporter who made a "rash decision" to join the National Guard for college money -- and to prove to himself that he could do it. Throughout THE WAR TAPES, Pink keeps a journal and uses his writing and story telling to cope with the ever-present danger and violence.

While at war, THE WAR TAPES visits his girlfriend Lindsay Coletti, who describes Steve as "this sensitive guy underneath" who didn't really tell her how he felt about her until he was in Iraq. She said his communication to her from Iraq was so much deeper than just "I love you."

Pink returns home with signs of post-traumatic stress disorder, for which he doesn't seek counseling. In interviews back home, he argues that the "spreading democracy" case for war is bogus insisting that "if we don't get that oil and that money then all the lives that are gone right now are in vain."

Pink was born and raised in Kingston, Massachusetts and currently works in residential construction.

#### **BEHIND-THE-CAMERA SOLDIERS**

### **SERGEANT DUNCAN DOMEY**

### [INSERT PHOTO HERE]

SERGEANT DUNCAN DOMEY was deployed to Afghanistan shortly after 9/11 as U.S. forces went on the hunt for Osama bin Laden. Regretting the fact that he didn't have a camera in Afghanistan to capture combat or the incredible scenery, Domey was thrilled to be supplied a video camera to capture his experience in Iraq, primarily because he likes to have a "visual history of life."

Domey shot 32 tapes of footage partially because he says he "wanted to show the beauty of Iraq" and show that when the bullets aren't flying, "its actually quite a pleasant place."

He felt there was another story to tell, beyond the one most civilians see, and he wanted to make sure he was able to tell part of it. Domey says that as his unit traveled with convoys along the supply lines in Iraq, each of them knew that at any moment, a roadside bomb could go off and end their lives. The cameras allowed them to tell their own story by "capturing as much of our experience as possible, even if it meant the worst."

Domey currently lives in Goshen, New Hampshire and recently received his graduate degree in international affairs from Texas A&M through their online study program.

### **SERGEANT BRANDON WILKINS**

### [INSERT PHOTO HERE]

SERGENT BRANDON WILKINS shot some of the most dramatic combat footage in THE WAR TAPES. He had just turned his camera on when his squad was attacked by insurgents in Fallujah, and he managed to shoot with both his rifle and his camera at the same time – capturing the extreme chaos of the moment.

He agreed to take a camera with him to Iraq because people always want to know what he has done or seen when he's abroad. He also brought the camera because "people that don't go will never fully grasp what it was like even if you show them the pictures, but they can at least get most of the way there with the footage."

Wilkins joined the Army right out of high school. After basic training, he was deployed to Korea where he got his first taste of serving abroad. When he was first notified that he was being called to duty in Iraq, he says it came as a bit of a shock to his family. "But being the tough Mainers that we are, we all moved through it very well," he says.

After settling back into life back home, he has decided to move on from military life. An avid outdoorsman, Wilkins currently lives in Brunswick, Maine where he works in the sporting goods department at his local Wal-Mart.

### **Endorsements/Blurbs/Vets**

All To Come

### **CREDITS**

Soldiers with Cameras
Zack Bazzi
Michael Moriarty
Stephen Pink
and
Duncan Domey
Brandon Wilkins

Directed By Deborah Scranton

Produced By Robert May

Produced By Steve James

Executive Producer
Chuck Lacy

Co-Executive Producer
Dal LaMagna

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Composer Norman Arnold

Music Supervisor Tracy McKnight

See the Soldiers Now www.thewartapes.com

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Ray Desmarais

**Brian Downing** 

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Scott Leigh

**Christopher Mason** 

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James Mazzuchelli

Gabriel Pavnick

Roy Reeves

Kevin Shangraw

Joshua Tuscher

Ray Valas

Jon 'Chief' Worrall

And all the soldiers of Charlie Company who filled in

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Music
"Hejwa Bestu"
Written and Performed by Paul Chilver
Published by Standard Music Library (PRS)
Courtesy of Bucks Music Group, Ltd.

"Caught In A Dream"
Written by Frank Hannon and Jeffrey Keith
Performed by Tesla
Published by City Kidd Music (ASCAP)
Courtesy of Sanctuary Records Group

"It's A Long, Long Way to Tipperary"
Written by Jack Judge and Harry Williams

"The Marine's Hymn"
Traditional

Additional Footage Courtesy Of Associated Press Television News BBC Motion Gallery CNN Image Source NBC News Archives

For more information: www.thewartapes.com

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