the WAR HORSE

2018 ANNUAL REPORT
Friends,

This year, we focused on building a robust, diverse community of writers and giving voice to military and veteran families through our first-person reflections. We also continued building our business and organizational infrastructure in support of The War Horse’s commitment to long-term sustainability. Thank you to everyone who helped make 2018 a transformational year for our newsroom.

In March, Drew Pham wrote about losing his ability to have children as a result of wartime toxic exposure. In September, Kelly McHugh-Stewart, a Gold Star daughter, shared her story about visiting her father’s grave on Fort Leavenworth. During the last two years, The War Horse has published more than 130 reflections, which form the cornerstone of our newsroom and provide vital context for our reporting, and we continue to grow and develop our network of writers.

Many of our stories come directly from our writing seminars, all-expenses-paid workshops centered around community building and training the next generation of war writers. We held two writing seminars in 2018—one for women veterans and the other for military spouses. In 2019, our team will host our Writing Seminar for Combat Medics and Corpsman.

Our team had another reason to celebrate in 2018: Our investigative reporting was awarded the American Legion Fourth Estate and Regional Edward R. Murrow Awards, and our work was highlighted in Columbia Journalism Review and on PBS NewsHour.

In 2019, we will begin regularly publishing investigative reporting. To support that work and cement a path toward sustainability, we’re establishing a membership program. We hope you’ll join us on our journey.

Thank you in advance for supporting our team’s crucial journalism.

Semper Fidelis,

Thomas Brennan
MEET OUR TEAM

Educating the Public On Military Service, War, and Its Impact

As our team continues to grow, we remain committed to transparency, efficiency, and sustainability. In 2018, the generosity of our donors allowed The War Horse to welcome aboard talented and thoughtful members to our team.

MEET OUR ADVISORS

Senior Advisor to The War Horse Receives Career Honors

In September, founding War Horse senior advisor Robert Rosenthal was awarded by the Society of Professional Journalists as a Fellow of the Society, the highest professional honor presented by SPJ, for extraordinary career contributions to journalism.

“Robert—affectionately known within journalism as ‘Rosey’—continues to distinguish himself as a consummate leader in journalism ethics and a mentor, leader, and innovator in journalism,” said Thomas Brennan, founder of The War Horse. “Rosey has been the most vocal and proactive supporter and advisor to our newsroom. ... Because of his leadership and unwavering support, our newsroom has the strong moral and ethical foundation on which all newsrooms should be built.”
The War Horse’s Marines United reporting prompted a congressional investigation and changed military and federal law. As of September 2018, 101 service members have been held accountable by the Marine Corps for their participation in the non-consensual sharing of pornographic images of female service members. Sponsors of four pieces of legislation intended to stop this behavior have cited The War Horse investigation. For our reporting, The War Horse team received the American Legion Fourth Estate Awards for Investigative Reporting.

Building relationships with and connections to our readers—both civilian and military-connected—and with the military community at large is essential work for The War Horse. Doing so helps our readers develop a richer understanding of journalism, its impact, and The War Horse’s mission.

In July 2018, The War Horse team traveled to Chicago to speak about the process and power of investigative journalism at the Pat Tillman Foundation’s annual Leadership Summit, an event that brings together Scholars from across healthcare, business, technology, and social impact fields.

In September, our director of seminars and editorial director spoke about the power and craft of narrative nonfiction storytelling at the Air Force Academy’s War, Literature, and the Arts Conference.

These public events have given our team the chance to meet War Horse readers face to face; to introduce ourselves as an organization; to foster conversation about trauma, war, and its aftermath; and to educate our readers and future readers not only about what we do, but about the importance and power of journalism to ensure a more just and equitable society.
Forging the Next Generation of War Writers

The War Horse Writing Seminars are week-long, intimate workshops that bring together world-class journalists, authors, agents, and publishers who work with The War Horse team to nurture War Horse Fellows to become the next generation of military writers.

35+ War Horse Reflections Written by Fellows

The Washington Post’s deputy managing editor, Tracy Grant, gave the War Horse Fellows a newsroom tour. Our women veteran fellows write, work within corporate and education sectors, and serve as executive leaders at veterans service organizations.

A graduate of Dog Tag Bakery Inc.’s veterans entrepreneurship program, Rachael Harris, catered all our meals.

We were humbled to receive 75 applications from an impressive and diverse pool of military spouse candidates.

Guest speakers, including Mark Bowden (author of Black Hawk Down) and Elana Newman (Dart Center for Journalism and Trauma), encouraged our 13 fellows to write personal stories about their experiences of war and to practice self-care while doing so.
The writing programs and first-person narratives are developing a generation of veterans who are finding their strength by finding their voice. We are all better for it.

BRYNNE THOMPSON
SENIOR ADVISOR TO THE WAR HORSE

First-person reflections are the cornerstone of our newsroom and ensure those directly impacted by war and military service continue to have a prominent voice in the national conversation. By providing intimate, personal details, our first-person reflections provide vital context for our investigative and feature stories, and to journalism and the public at large.

VIVID, INTIMATE STORYTELLING

Our first-person reflection writers, who are active-duty and veteran servicemembers and civilians, explore and share their intimate experiences of war and its aftermath. Often this includes some of their most traumatic memories, involving post-traumatic growth, transition, sexual trauma, suicide, and more.

PUBLISHING PARTNERS

Publication partnerships help to ensure our stories reach beyond our current community of readers. Reader’s Digest, Military.com, and Task & Purpose have syndicated our first-person reflections. Reveal from the Center for Investigative Reporting and Vanity Fair have co-published our reporting.

120+ REFLECTIONS

50+ WRITERS
Drew Pham saw his refugee parents in Afghan civilians. Compassion, he thought, was the answer. But a part of his soul hardened as he learned to love war.
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his part is important. Start with good intentions—and a couple of givens: that you’re an idealist, the son of war refugees. You see another conflict fomenting on TV, you see those civilians suffering, and you can’t help but think of your parents. You want to help. On paper you’re middle class—your parents both have degrees, you go to a fancy liberal arts school—but truth is, you’ve been hungry. Dad’s left, Mom’s bankrupt, and when you come home there’s always a stack of past-due notices on the kitchen table. And that fancy school? You can’t afford it. So you join the Army—they pay for college, and when you’re done, you owe them four years.

At school, you argue with your classmates about joining, about the war. They’re also idealists, but what do they know about hunger—about drinking pickle juice and eating instant ramen every night? A hunk of Spam if you’re lucky. And those peers, with their toilet bowl-white skin, have never been handcuffed to a chain-link fence because they were too dark—you have. Never watched trade, and the colonel might dress it up with talk of hearts and minds, and you want to believe him, but that’s not what soldiers do. You want to be that idealist who makes your wife proud, you want to be that warrior your men look up to, but you worry you can’t be both.

So you go to Afghanistan. Try to win those hearts and minds, but doubt yourself every time you visit a village covered in graffiti telling you to go home. Kids pelt your gun trucks with rocks, and the villagers give you hard stares that make the mission seem impossible.

You look for things to sink all that compassion and good intention into. When you befriend an Afghan lieutenant, you worry for him. You think of your grandfather, that handsome colonel of the Army of the Republic of VietNam. He died in a reeducation camp after the war, and you cross your fingers your friend won’t share that fate. But hoping isn’t enough. The lieutenant wishes his countrymen were educated, so you go to the girls’ school. You put in new windows because the old ones were shattered by AK bullets and roadside bombs. The children are beautiful, and you want to give them school supplies and coloring books and toys and all the things little kids should have but that they do not. You meet a young mullah who you know is Taliban, but cannot arrest for lack of evidence. His fervor reminds you of your mother’s when she told you stories of resisting the most powerful nation on earth. Your interpreter guides you through it all, and you tell him that one day, when the war is over, you’ll return to visit him. Your wife writes to say she’s proud of you.

When the fighting season starts, the veterans say that you must stifle the soft thing that is your heart. You won’t listen. But when you discover the drug of combat, you know that they were right. Being that close to death is better than liquor or speed or sex—and 10 times more addictive. There will be days that getting into a fight is all you can think about. Your good intentions get swallowed whole when you start to use the word hajji the same way GIs used to use the word gook. Your friend, the Afghan
always be there for you. She says this, the heat of the day as you stand over thinking. Remember the summer sun, had been beat into your muscles without reaches for a grenade. And you do what And there will be a firefight. Pay close work. machine gun fire, undoing all of your rake those windows you installed with that you poured so much love into, you feel like you've failed your country or and you wife tells you that being around you is like walking wine in your lap, not when your wife tells pass out by the curb with an empty box of yourself or the Afghans you sought to feel like you've failed your country or or the Afghans you sought to help, not yet. Not when your platoon out by the curb with an empty box of wine in your lap, not when your wife tells you that being around you is like walking on glass.

When summer comes, your body remembers the fighting season, and you learn to hate summer forever. Because you've seen combat, because you've killed a man, they send you away to train West Point cadets. You wonder if a single one of them is ready; if you could bear the idea that they might one day lead your little brother into battle; he's in Afghanistan now, continuing what you started. Here, you try to whip the cadets into shape. On exercise, you feel the simulacrum of war, the burnt gunpowder and artillery blasts and the breathless rotor wash of a Chinook. You can't bear it, and on a weekend pass you fuck a woman who reminds you of your wife but isn't. When you return to your unit, you steal from the supply room and get caught and dump all your antidepressants into the toilet and your wife learns what you've done.

You wonder if you planned all this, pushing everyone away, sabotaging your career, giving yourself a reason to finally do it. This is when you try to kill yourself. You wait until you're alone, but your wife walks in on you, and you push her away, but she persists, grabbing the needle in your hand, and you pin her to the wall trying to get it back, but she's crying and you're crying and next thing you know, the police come, guns drawn, to take you away to a psych ward where you stay drugged for a week. There are days you wake and the breathless rotor wash of a Chinook. You can't bear it, and on a

Top right: A man with a mortar strike—one of them is a newlywed, and you think of your wife when he hears you use those toxic words to refer to his countrymen.

Then one night the man who'd incited your country's wrath is killed; the next day and the day after that, the war goes on. Your doubts grow. You vaporize three men with a mortar strike—one of them is a newlywed, and you think of your wife the Taliban occupay the girls' school when you poured so much love into, you feel like you've failed your country or or the Afghans you sought to help, not yet. Not when your platoon out by the curb with an empty box of wine in your lap, not when your wife tells you that being around you is like walking on glass.

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The War Horse reaches across the civil-military divide and shows the public the emotional landscape of the people who must bear the burdens of America’s longest war, and forces them to consider the human consequences of warfare.

“...”

DREW PHAM
ARMY VETERAN & WAR HORSE WRITER
2018
FINANCIALS

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In addition to hosting two writing seminars and publishing a weekly first-person reflection, the financial support we received in 2018 enabled us to welcome new members to our team, begin redesigning our website, and dedicate funding to develop necessary business, board, and media insurance.

We’re excited to carry this momentum over into 2019 and work to further diversify our revenue streams.

The War Horse is grateful to our diverse donor community. Thank you to the following foundations, corporations, and major individual donors for their continued financial support and belief in The War Horse mission.

The War Horse is committed to financial transparency. The War Horse is a project fiscally sponsored by the Institute for Nonprofit News (EIN: 27-2614911), a 501(c)(3), and hence donations are tax-deductible to the extent received in excess of goods and services.

Review our reports at thewarhorse.org/financials.
This year will be a big one for us.

We will further develop crucial business infrastructure and welcome additional team members to our newsroom team. In 2019, we will formally announce founding board members and launch our redesigned website, an upgrade that will improve user experience and broaden story distribution—all in service of publishing vital reporting.

We’re excited to join News Revenue Hub in the coming year and to work with their team to grow our audience, furthering our reach and sticking true to our mission of educating the public on military service, war, and its impact.

After standing up two programs—writing seminars to train military writers and first-person reflections to provide the emotional context for why talking about the military and defense is essential—The War Horse newsroom is turning its sights on further building the true heartbeat of any newsroom: the news division.

We will begin regularly publishing rigorous, in-depth reporting focusing on the community of people who serve and the impact that service has on their lives and the lives of people they know. Marines United was just the beginning.