

# the **WAR HORSE**

2024 ANNUAL REPORT





“

In an era where social media misinformation can quickly take on a life of its own, it’s good to know quality journalism from hard-working journalists at outlets like The War Horse News can help set the record straight.”

— ERIC PAHON,  
*Public affairs advisor to the deputy secretary of defense*

# A Letter From Our Founder

Dear War Horse readers,

This year has been a whirlwind of excitement, so I wanted to take a quick moment to express my gratitude and reflect on my favorite memories from 2024.

During 2024, we grew our team, doubled our partnerships with local and national newsrooms, and had our most successful fundraising year to date.

Along the way, we earned our fourth Edward R. Murrow Award and published our 400th reflection and dozens of reporting projects that ranged from the legacy of “don’t ask, don’t tell” to misinformation about military policies. One story resulted in the VA returning a mistakenly buried “unclaimed veteran” back to his family in Colorado. Another garnered the attention of The White House. And another resulted in an appearance on The Daily Show with Jon Stewart.

Our team also hosted our seventh writing seminar in San Quentin. Not only did I eat prison taffy and jot down notes on how to make pruno, a fermented jailhouse alcohol, but I also began to better appreciate the challenges faced by veterans before and during their incarceration. The stories they’ve published have been incredibly moving.

But my favorite memory from this year was reuniting my platoon to produce The Fallujah Files. My 16-year-old daughter took photographs and got to meet the men I fought alongside two decades ago. Together, we toured the new Fallujah exhibit at the National Museum of the Marine Corps and watched a sunset parade at Marine Barracks Washington where my daughter repeatedly pointed out the “hottie” lieutenant, who happened to be the son of our company commander. The response to that reporting has been truly incredible, and I believe it embodies the mission of The War Horse—to share the realities of veterans and military families with the people they serve. Thank you to all of our donors and partners who made it possible.

On behalf of The War Horse team, thank you for another incredible, impactful year, and for your continued support. We can’t do this work without you.

Onward and Semper Fidelis,



**Thomas Brennan**  
Founder and Executive Director



# Our Favorite Reporting Projects of 2024



## VA Buried Their Brother as an ‘Unclaimed Veteran.’ Now They’re Working to Bring Him Home.

ANNE MARSHALL CHALMERS | MAY 23, 2024

In April, investigative reporter Anne Marshall-Chalmers came across a GoFundMe post that caught her attention. It was from Patti Pugh, the sister of an Air Force veteran. She was raising money to get her brother’s body exhumed from a national cemetery in New York and brought home to Pueblo, Colorado. Pugh had just discovered that her brother, Alvin Pugh, was dead, even though he passed away in 2022. Though the Pugh family was listed in Veterans Health Administration documents as next of kin, VA

never contacted the family when Alvin died alone in his New York City apartment. Rather, they classified him as an “unclaimed veteran” and buried him thousands of miles from his family.

Marshall-Chalmers discovered that the Pugh case was not isolated. For decades, a lack of coordination between VA and local agencies has allowed tens of thousands of veterans who die alone to pile up in funeral homes and morgues around the country, some collecting dust for more than 100 years. As a result of this reporting, VA ultimately paid for Alvin Pugh’s body to return to Colorado and committed to closing the gaps that allow such errors to occur.



## Far Right Suggests Military Just Authorized Lethal Force Against Americans Ahead of the Election. It Didn’t.

SONNER KEHRT | OCT. 23, 2024

Investigative reporter Sonner Kehrt had been working with researchers from the UC Berkeley Human Rights Center to track misinformation about the military ahead of the 2024 election when she saw a rumor begin to emerge on far-right social media accounts. They claimed that the Pentagon had recently updated an obscure directive to authorize the military to use lethal force against civilians during the election. Before long, well-known figures like retired Lt. Gen. Michael Flynn and former presidential candidate Robert F. Kennedy Jr. had shared the claim, racking up millions of views. The rumor had gone mainstream.

We dug into Pentagon documents, called lawyers, and ultimately convinced the Pentagon to take the unusual step of denying the claim. Our story—one of the most viewed of 2024—was the first to debunk the falsehood. The Associated Press and other outlets from Newsweek to Fox News followed our reporting, and our article was cited by fact-check websites Snopes, Politifact, and the University of Washington’s Center for an Informed Public.



## ‘I Had a Body Part Repossessed’: Post-9/11 Amputee Vets Say VA Care Is Failing Them

HOPE HODGE SECK | AUG. 6, 2024

That headline alone says a lot about the power of contributing writer Hope Hodge Seck’s piece in August that profiled three post-9/11 veterans to show their frustrations with VA’s care for young amputees. Army veteran Scott Restivo relied on duct tape and loaner legs for almost a year, awaiting repairs to a chip malfunction in his main prosthetic. Travis Vendela bummed rides for months to the high school where he coaches football until a VA contractor finally installed the retrofits to help him drive his new truck. Matt Brown was shocked when a vendor repossessed an ankle joint that improved his mobility because the VA hadn’t paid the bill.

The story illustrated our growing effort to partner with national and local news publications that no longer have the resources to dedicate to veterans and military affairs. The Tennessean in Nashville and The Salt Lake Tribune in Utah not only provided striking photos of the veterans in their area, they also featured the story on their front pages and websites, and the piece ran coast to coast on the websites of the USA Today Network.

“The War Horse’s story underscores how important it is,” Rep. Mariannette Miller-Meeks said, “to ensure that critically disabled veterans have the tools they need to live active lifestyles as they please, to live life to the fullest.”



# SHADOWS OF FALLUJAH

My Platoon's Fight To Survive—and Heal From—the Bloodiest Battle in Iraq

THOMAS J. BRENNAN | NOV. 10, 2024

Two decades ago, I was an 18-year-old Marine fresh out of boot camp who didn't know the truth about the global war on terror. But there I was, in November 2004, as one of nearly 13,000 American, British, and Iraqi forces ordered to fight Operation Phantom Fury, a 46-day battle during the U.S. occupation of Iraq and the heaviest urban combat since the 1968 Battle of Huế City during the Vietnam War. By the end of the battle, about 110 members of coalition forces were killed, and more than 600 were wounded. Roughly 2,000 enemy fighters died, and 1,500 were captured. An estimated 700 civilians were killed, and by the end of the battle, nearly half of the city lay in ruins.



“

“To paraphrase the beautiful Maya Angelou—now that I know better, I can do better.”

To commemorate the 20th anniversary, I reached out to the men I served alongside, and together, we revisited a street scene of Fallujah at the National Museum of the Marine Corps and the traumas we experienced there. Within hours of our publishing the project, veterans, civilians, and senior Pentagon leaders described the reporting as “required reading” for not only elected officials but the broader American public due to its “heartbreaking, vivid, and brilliantly told” firsthand accounts of combat and its aftermath. Renowned military reporters described the reporting as “stunning” and “simply extraordinary ... a powerful and unforgettable piece.” Journalism school professors described the writing as “masterful,” and “searing, beautifully written and filled with endless, remarkable detail. I don’t think I’ve ever read anything quite like it.”

The week of publication, the project inspired a nationwide conversation with interviews on NPR, PBS NewsHour, CBS, and *The Daily Show* with Jon Stewart. The documentary in the entry was shown at the National Museum of the Marine Corps, and featured at panel discussions at George Washington University and Columbia University.

Marines of all ranks—from members of my platoon to a former secretary of defense—applauded the reporting as “truly marvelous—you poured your soul into this and it shows.” My platoon commander described the story as “absolutely brilliant.” Our company commander said the reporting was “powerful, raw, honest.” Our sergeant major said, “The story is breathtakingly honest about our

experiences.” The commanding general of the battle described the reporting as “a raw and compelling story of the reality of combat.” And the most senior public affairs official at Headquarters Marine Corps described the reporting as “a profound, impactful, and honorable piece of work.”



But most importantly, readers with no military affiliation described the reporting as a public service, demonstrating why Americans must deeply understand their military and the actions it takes on their behalf.

“I see now that by being shockingly under-informed I’ve avoided taking responsibility for how I can impact policy as a voter and missed out on connecting with countless beautiful souls who are in the system both by choice and by circumstance,” wrote one reader.

“To paraphrase the beautiful Maya Angelou—now that I know better, I can do better.” ■



# A Hero Lived Quietly Across the Street. Little Did I Know He Helped Save the World.

JUNE 19, 2024 | LISA TOREM

Enoch H. Kanaya was my sun-seeking neighbor who plucked red, ripe tomatoes off the vine in his sunny garden on our tree-lined streets in Chicago. He and his family—his wife, Carolyn, and their four daughters—moved into their modest brick home across the street from our family in the late 1960s.

One of those daughters, Barbara, was a petite, vivacious child with a quick laugh who played bongo drums and loved to sing. She was limber enough to do “the splits” after a few deep stretches, and she easily fit into our existing all-girl friend group.

We thrived on silly conversations, sleepovers, and pranks, and like most children, we did not consider parents three-dimensional beings. We took up the proscenium stage; parents hid behind the curtains.

I was too distracted and self-involved to recognize that Mr. Kanaya—who tended to ripe garden tomatoes on humid summer days or tinkered with electronic equipment as we raced in and out of rattling screen doors—was a hero living quietly across the street.



*Enoch Kanaya, center, and his family were sent to an internment camp along with thousands of other Japanese Americans following the bombing of Pearl Harbor. (Photo courtesy of the Kanaya family)*

For me, the Kanaya canon began to unfold through an elementary school lecture and a high school history fair project that required a person with wartime experience, and later, as an adult, through conversations with his family.

Enoch H. Kanaya and his two siblings grew up in rural Clackamas, Oregon, before the family relocated to the bustling city of Portland. Like other children their age, they busied themselves with sports and attended school functions. But after the surprise Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in December of 1941, Japanese American communities got swept up in a discriminatory crossfire.

*Enoch H. Kanaya served in France and Italy during World War II with the 442nd Regimental Combat Team, a segregated Japanese American unit. (Photo courtesy of the Kanaya family)*





Members of the 442nd, a segregated unit of Japanese Americans, ride a jeep in France during World War II. (Photo courtesy of the National Archives)

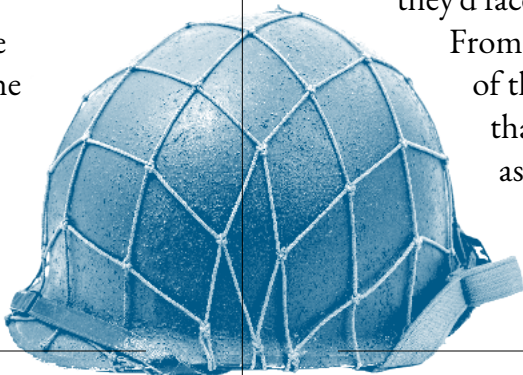
In February 1942, President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed an executive order that led to the incarceration of 120,000 innocent Japanese Americans during World War II and caused many civilians to view neighbors through a suspicious lens.

The Kanaya clan, in tandem with thousands of other Japanese American families, were sent to barbed wire internment camps. With little notice, they were forced to get rid of their possessions and vacate the only homes they had ever known.

The Kanaya family weathered a strange, new world on the outskirts of Hunt, Idaho, called “Minidoka Camp.” Making the best of an unprecedented predicament, the teenaged Enoch worked as a truck mechanic for a paltry monthly sum while completing his high school education part time.

His older brother, who I knew as my friend Barbara’s “Uncle Jimmy,” had enlisted in the US Army before Pearl Harbor. At 19, Enoch was drafted into the 442nd Regimental Combat Team, a segregated Japanese American unit, and sent to the rigorous, 16-week “infantry replacement training” program, where he learned to shoot the US Army’s arsenal. On the massive Aquitania, the 442nd crossed the Atlantic and landed in France. There, they were ordered to safeguard the Alps that separated France and Italy from invading German troops.

In Italy, the 442nd successfully pushed the German troops back. After that victory, the soldiers guarded German prisoners of war before finally returning home, where they received a Presidential Citation.



But it wasn’t until 2011 that this unsung group of segregated soldiers received the Congressional Gold Medal. By then, Mr. Kanaya had raised four daughters with his wife, Carolyn, with whom he’d traveled the globe. He’d tallied up 28 years as a technician at the Admiral Corporation in his hometown.

Then, this May, 80 years after he was drafted into the Army, Enoch H. Kanaya—now one of the last remaining survivors of the 442nd—received France’s highest order of merit, the National Order of the Legion of Honour, in a ceremony in a Chicago church.

I was there to see it.

Childhood memories, like calendar pages swept up by a random wind, filled my mind as I entered a 135-year-old church for a ceremony that included more than 50 attendees and a cross-section of generations—family, community members, politicians, dignitaries, veterans who kept in touch over the span of decades. Consul Gen. of Japan Jun Yanagi and Consul Gen. of France Yannick Tagand were among them.

In preparation for the ceremony, I’d learned all I could about the 442nd, including watching a video created by the Pritzker Military Museum in Chicago in which Mr. Kanaya spoke of his part in the fighting. With few 442nd veterans left, there is a scramble to tell their story.

The motto of the 442nd was “Go for Broke”—put everything on the line to win. Despite the racism they’d faced at home, they’d done just that. From May 1943 to April 1944, the units of the 442nd trained for combat. During that time, many were sent to Europe as replacements for the 100th Infantry Battalion, another Japanese American unit.



Enoch Kanaya, center, and his family were sent to an internment camp along with thousands of other Japanese Americans following the bombing of Pearl Harbor. (Photo courtesy of the Kanaya family)

Eighty years ago, the 442nd arrived in Italy; that September, they were part of the invasion of Southern France that liberated many cities from the Nazis. They went on to fight with the segregated African American 92nd Infantry Division to drive German forces out of northern Italy.

In February 1945, Mr. Kanaya was deployed to the Alps along the border of France and Italy, where he joined the F “Fox” Company, 2nd battalion. In the video, he recounted being commanded to return to Italy. Their mission would be perilous.

“The Germans had fortified the ‘Gothic Line,’” he recalled of the Nazis’ last line of defense in Italy.



“That’s where they stopped the Allied advance even before the 442nd had left for France,” Mr. Kanaya added. “So, when the 442nd came back to Italy, they [the Germans] were still at the same line.”

He has retold the story to rapt intergenerational audiences many times over, yet his tone remains vibrant.

“The best way to attack the Gothic Line was to sneak through the mountains and attack them from the rear, and they gave us that job,” he explained.

In July 1946, he was one of the last men of the 442nd to leave Europe. Soon after his return to the U.S., he was discharged from the Army.

Inside the Chicago church, my eyes focused on Enoch H. Kanaya. Time has turned my friend’s father’s hair salt and pepper. His gait is not nearly as steady. But he is much the same, too. Soft-spoken, articulate. A man who values family.

I watched as he carefully navigated the stairs to accept his award, his eyes constellation-bright, his smile gracious. He paused for photos before heading to the podium.

The consul general of France pinned the gleaming circular disc to Mr. Kanaya’s neatly pressed jacket and embraced him. “Thanks to you, I grew up in a free country. The French people will never forget what we owe you,” he said.

“This medal does not just belong to me,” Mr. Kanaya says. “It belongs to all veterans. I want to thank them also. Tom Brokaw said that the World War II veterans saved the world. They kept all of us free. If it were not for the World War II veterans, we would not be here today.”

His voice was firm, unwaveringly clear, yet rife with emotion. He wore a cap emblazoned with the 442nd’s motto, “Go for Broke.”

My childhood friend Barbara smiled. She confided that she never imagined asking her father for his autograph.

As I watched Mr. Kanaya, I finally took in the whole man—a father, a husband, a soldier, a patriot. He is living history, an educator who has brought textbook battles and triumphs to life for generations of children and adults.

Parents are no longer wainscoting, no longer wallpaper at our giddy pajama parties.

A grown-up Barbara told me that the “H” in her father’s name stands for “Hiroru,” which means “abundant and giving.”

We agree that it is fitting.



Enoch Kanaya, center, with two of his daughters, Carola Kanaya and Barbara Kanaya, and his great-grandson, Quentin. Enoch Kanaya was recently awarded France’s highest order of merit. (Photo by Lisa Torem)



Enoch Kanaya receives the National Order of the Legion of Honour from Consul Gen. of France Yannick Tagand in a ceremony in Chicago. (Photo by Lisa Torem)

The Nisei generation, the first group of Japanese Americans to call North America home, had to live up to extraordinarily high standards. They fought bravely and honorably for a nation that viewed them with suspicion and incarcerated them.

Sometimes heroes exist solely in the mind of the beholder. Mr. Kanaya has been generally dismissive about his herculean accomplishments. The “real” heroes, he says, never came home.

But Enoch H. Kanaya did come home and started a family. He lived across the street from me.

As one of the youngest and last surviving members of the 442nd, he symbolizes the heroism of the World War II generation and the courage and sacrifice of the Nisei volunteers.

In the Greatest Generation’s victory garden, his legacy is evergreen. ■

*Writer’s note: Special thanks to Enoch H. Kanaya, Barbara Kanaya, and family; and to Pascale Thome, Christopher Torem, and Stephanie Sunata.*

*This War Horse reflection was written by Lisa Torem, edited by Kristin Davis, fact-checked by Jess Rohan, and copy-edited by Mitchell Hansen-Dewar. Abbie Bennett wrote the headlines.*





# Our Writing Seminar for Incarcerated Veterans

This spring, The War Horse hosted our seventh writing seminar in our most unique setting yet—inside the San Quentin Rehabilitation Center, formerly known as California’s San Quentin State Prison. We helped give voice to the powerful stories of 18 incarcerated veterans, thanks to the generous support of donors to The War Horse. The unofficial slogan of our writing seminars is to give the underserved and underrepresented an opportunity to tell their stories. We thought this overlooked population helped us truly achieve that mission.

The 2024 War Horse Fellows represented the Air Force, Army, Navy, and Marine Corps and brought a remarkable breadth of experiences. This was among the most diverse cohorts to date, and we are proud to increase the number of male reflection writers.

- Before the workshop, more than two-thirds of 2024 War Horse Fellows reported that they did not know people who could help them publish their stories and wanted to keep their stories to themselves. After the writing seminar, 89% of fellows felt confident they had gained mentors they could approach for help.
- Before attending, 67% of fellows believed they couldn’t convey what they wanted to say or didn’t have the ability to share their story. After the workshop, 83% of fellows reported a stronger ability to tell their story and left feeling good or very good about telling their story.
- Before attending The War Horse Seminar, 67% of the attendees reported that they didn’t believe their stories were important. Following our week together, 89% of the cohort believed their stories were important and wanted to tell them.



## What the Fellows Had to Say:

“The entire process and performance of staff was humanizing, professional and very powerful. Your time, consideration and willingness to listen is appreciated. The time management and logistical layout was flexible and professional. Thanks to staff and volunteers of the War Horse for leaving no one behind! Semper Fi!”

— Shane Goddard

“The War Horse staff was awesome some of the kindest, professional and helpful people i have ever met. They were extremely insightful.”

— Donald Edge

## What the Mentors Had to Say:

“The workshop at San Quentin was extremely powerful. During the weeklong visit, I kept thinking about how much the experience reminded me of a college classroom—diverse opinions, deep intellectual conversations, reflections on life and senses of optimism about the future. The men at San Quentin were very introspective and showed empathy to one another, as well as all of the mentors. In the weeks since our time at San Quentin, one word consistently comes to mind when reflecting on the whole experience: gratitude.”

— Kurtis Lee,  
2024 Incarcerated Veteran Mentor

“The War Horse’s first outreach into the prison system was extraordinary in its ambition and effect. Over four remarkable days, 18 men turned their haunting stories into memoir, growing to better understand not only the writing process but also themselves. The seminar’s design avoided the pitfalls of what I have found in other short courses, which often leave participants with knowledge but no clear path for how to apply it. The first two days were built around teaching, the next two around doing. The culmination unfolded over several afternoon hours in San Quentin’s still chapel, through tears at times, in joy at others, as the men read their work aloud. It was one of the most moving, profound and inspiring experiences I have witnessed—of any kind.”

— Scott Wilson,  
2024 Incarcerated Veteran Mentor



# What Our Readers Say

“(Shadows of Fallujah) was simply extraordinary. What a powerful and unforgettable piece. Thank you for the courage to write and remember.” — **Martha Raddatz, ABC News**

“As the mom of a 3 times deployed veteran, I so appreciate the work you are doing and can’t thank you enough.” — **Kim Adkins**

“I’ve only now had time to read and watch (Shadows of Fallujah). It is heartbreaking, vivid, brilliantly told. I can only imagine what it took to do this, and the toll must have weighed heavily on you. It is an important historical record, and I hope that the telling and the writing has helped soothe some of the old wounds.” — **Sheila Coronel, leader of the Toni Stabile Investigative Reporting Program at Columbia Journalism School**

“I’ve read [the Fallujah story] twice. It is searing, beautifully written, and filled with endless, remarkable detail. I don’t think I’ve ever read anything quite like it. You should be very proud. It is an unsparing look at war and its impact on you, your fellow Marines, the Iraqis in Fallujah, and the souls of those who were called to fight.” — **Charles Kravetz, former CEO of WBUR**

“Your story hits hard, which makes it great. It’s sad how much the military used us and got rid of us, and if not for your reporting, no one would ever know how bad it is. Your work has brought up many emotions and things I never dealt with. They ingrained in us that obedience is the most important thing, but never taught us how to deal with the consequences of obedience.” — **Daniel Jayne, featured in Shadows of Fallujah**

“In an era where social media misinformation can quickly take on a life of its own, it’s good to know quality journalism from hard-working journalists at outlets like @TheWarHorseNews can help set the record straight.” — **Eric Pahon, public affairs advisor to the deputy secretary of defense**

# 2024 Financials & Donors

## Financials:

2024 Revenue & In-Kind Support: **1,508,495**

- Membership:
- In-Kind: \$274,663
- Foundations
- Major Gifts
- Earned Revenue:

2024 Expenses: **1,440,116**

Platinum  
Transparency  
2025

Candid.

## 2024 Major Donors

### Organizations

A-Mark Foundation  
Acton Family Giving  
Angelo Family Charitable Foundation  
BakerHostetler  
Brobyn Foundation  
Charlottesville Area Community Foundation  
Drue Heinz Charitable Trust  
General Atomics  
The Heinz Endowments

The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation  
Jewish Communal Fund  
Jonathan Logan Family Foundation  
The May and Stanley Smith Charitable Trust  
The Miami Foundation  
The Murphy Family Foundation  
National Philanthropic Trust  
The Pritzker Military Foundation  
Reva and David Logan Foundation  
The War Heroes Initiative

## Individuals

Fred Smith	Michael Hemphill	Richard L Daly	Patricia Godfrey
Michael Hirsch	Carey Lohrenz	Clark Ballard	Karen Brennan
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Kim Lewis	Teri Reid	Kenneth Catandella	Ron Rand
Daniel Woodward	Jon Krakauer	Sibylle Coe	Darci and Jeb Wyman
Linda and Norm Harris	Robert Kunzig	Kenneth Fleit	

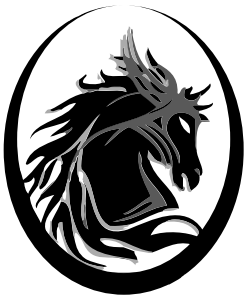


# A MESSAGE FOR THE YEAR AHEAD

Nearly 10 years ago, The War Horse was brought to life on Kickstarter by more than 500 donors. I can still remember a mix of anxiety and excitement, energized by the donors who were the first to believe in—and invest in—our newsroom.

The War Horse has grown a lot since 2016, but we’re still just getting started. Over the next year, our team will reflect on the last decade and develop an ambitious strategy to begin our next 10 years that will continue to grow our team, partnerships, programs, and impact.

*Thank you for standing by our side. We can’t do this work alone.*



**Invest in Our Success  
for the Years Ahead.**

Support our storytelling today.  
[thewarhorse.org/donate](https://thewarhorse.org/donate)





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Cover photo:

*F-16 Flyover*, by MSgt Tristan McIntire