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Book recounts experiences of Norton Commons veteran

By Melissa Poore

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When Fred Minnick returned home after serving in the Iraq war, he said he faced a new enemy — Post Traumatic Stress Disorder.

He suffered from nightmares, depression, anger issues and a growing drinking problem.

"I wasn't the same guy anymore," he said. "It was tough readjusting. I couldn't deal with simple things."

But he said therapy was helpful, and as a writer, he found putting his experiences on paper also helped.

So he penned "Camera Boy: An Army Journalist's War in Iraq," which chronicles his time serving in an Army public affairs unit — a time he spent with a Nikon camera slung over one arm, an M-16 over the other. The book is scheduled for release on Nov. 1 by Hellgate Press, which publishes military history books. Two book signings are scheduled: one at Carmichael's on Frankfort Avenue at 7 p.m. Nov. 5 and another at Barnes and Noble at The Summit at 7 p.m. Nov. 11.

Minnick, 31, lives in Norton Commons with his wife, Jaclyn Engelsher, whom he met after returning from the war, and their two cats, Basil and Thurman, and dog Remo. Minnick is a freelance writer and photographer whose work appears in a number of national publications, mostly in the food and wine categories. It's good to take pleasure in the little things again, he said.

Minnick credits his wife, who is from the Louisville area, for giving him the support he's needed to overcome some of the pain that comes with being a veteran, and he said he now understands how so many Vietnam veterans have ended up begging on the streets. He deals with survivor's guilt, and also the memories of bullets ricocheting all around him.

He said his job in Iraq was to tell the Army's story. "It's a very big story to tell," he said. And at the same time, "I just really tried to survive every day."

He was deployed to Iraq in 2003 while serving in the Wisconsin Army National Guard. While there, he took about 10,000 photos, some of which were sent to military briefings and seen by Donald Rumsfeld, at the time the secretary of defense. He photographed everything from firefights and car bombs to the opening of a girls' school.

He returned home in January 2005, and several months later he retreated to a lake cabin in northern Wisconsin and began writing. Some of his writing appeared in a book called "Blog of War," a collection of essays gleaned from different blogs.

Minnick said he wrote Camera Boy for two reasons — for therapy and to preserve the memory of his friends who died in the war.

The 200-page book is dedicated specifically to 1st Brigade 25th Infantry Division soldiers Sgt. David Mitts and Staff Sgt. Salomo Tuialuuluu, Sgt. Ryan Jopek and an Iraqi interpreter named Samir, who was assassinated.

The book, he said, shows they are more than just a number on a list of war casualties.

“Unless the personal side of them is told, it's not really remembered,” he said.

Reporter Melissa Poore can be reached at (502) 582-4117.

Additional Facts

BOOK EVENT

Fred Minnick will be reading from and signing copies of “Camera Boy” at 7 p.m. Nov. 5 at Carmichael's Bookstore, 2720 Frankfort Ave. and at 7 p.m. Nov. 11 at Barnes & Noble at The Summit, 4100 Summit Plaza Drive.
