

# Shooting Ghosts: A U.S. Marine, a Combat Photographer, and Their Journey Back from War

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"A majestic book." --Bessel van der Kolk, MD, author of *The Body Keeps the Score*

A unique joint memoir by a U.S. Marine and a conflict photographer whose unlikely friendship helped both heal their war-wounded bodies and souls

"The dueling-piano spirit of *SHOOTING GHOSTS* works because its authors are so committed to transparency, admitting readers into the dark crevices of their isolation." *Wall St Journal*

War tears people apart, but it can also bring them together. Through the unpredictability of war and its aftermath, a decorated Marine sergeant and a world-trotting war photographer became friends, their bond forged as they patrolled together through the dusty alleyways of Helmand province and camped side by side in the desert. It deepened after Sergeant T. J. Brennan was injured during a Taliban ambush, and both returned home. Brennan began to suffer from the effects of his injury and from the fallout of his tours in Iraq and Afghanistan. But war correspondents experience similar rates of posttraumatic stress as combat veterans. The causes can be different, but guilt plays a prominent role in both. For Brennan, it's the things he's done, or didn't do, that haunt him. Finbarr O'Reilly's conscience is nagged by the task of photographing people at their most vulnerable while being able to do little to help, and his survival guilt as colleagues die on the job. Their friendship offered them both a shot at redemption.

As we enter the fifteenth year of continuous war, it is increasingly urgent not just to document the experiences of the battlefield but also to probe the reverberations that last long after combatants and civilians have returned home, and to understand the many faces trauma takes. *Shooting Ghosts* looks at the horrors of war directly, but then turns to a journey that draws on our growing understanding of what recovery takes. Their story, told in alternating first-person narratives, is about the things they saw and did, the ways they have been affected, and how they have navigated the psychological aftershocks of war and wrestled with reforming their own identities and moral centers. While war never really ends for those who've lived through it, this book charts the ways two survivors have found to calm the ghosts and reclaim a measure of peace.

Thomas James Brennan, recipient of the Purple Heart, was a sergeant in the Marine Corps until medically retired in 2012. He served in Iraq during the battle of Fallujah and was a squad leader in Afghanistan's Helmand province with the First Battalion, Eighth Marines. Since 2012, he has been a regular contributor to *The New York Times At War* blog. Brennan was the military affairs reporter at the *Jacksonville Daily News* from early 2013 through mid-2014. He has a master's degree in journalism from Columbia, and is the founder of *TheWarHorse.org*, a nonprofit online newsroom dedicated to chronicling the effects of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Finbarr O'Reilly is an internationally acclaimed photographer who has spent more than a decade working in Africa and the Middle East and who has won the World Press Photo of the Year, the highest individual honor in news photography. He was profiled in the documentary film *Under Fire: Journalists in Combat* (Peabody Award winner, Oscar finalist)

and has held fellowships at Harvard, Yale, Columbia, and the MacDowell Colony. He was a Reuters senior photographer for Israel and the Palestinian Territories in 2014."The dueling-piano spirit of SHOOTING GHOSTS works because its authors are so committed to transparency, admitting readers into the dark crevices of their isolation. Both are sharp minds whose self-awareness keeps their stories from slipping into banality and their lives devoted to something beyond war."

-Wall Street Journal

"SHOOTING GHOSTS is unflinching, yet it is not stoic. It is sensitive, yet not sentimental. ... If you want to know what Trump's decision means for the lives of thousands of Americans now serving in Afghanistan, SHOOTING GHOSTS is a good place to start.... SHOOTING GHOSTS is no easy story of uplift, but one of hard-won wisdom. Brennan and O'Reilly have tamed, if not broken, their addiction to war. Now if only the United States government could do the same."

-Alternet

"A courageous breaking of the code of silence to seek mental health for veterans and the war-scarred."

-Kirkus Reviews

"Brennan and O'Reilly strip away any misplaced notions of glamour, bravery, and stoicism to craft an affecting memoir of a deep friendship."

-Publisher's Weekly, (starred review)

"A majestic book that describes the parallel tracks of a warrior and a photo journalist from different continents, who meet in the hell of Afghanistan and then, separately and together, find their tortuous journeys home. Beautifully written, reminiscent of All Quiet on the Western Front, and What It Is Like to Go to War, Shooting Ghosts ultimately is a hopeful book that shows that recovery always involves a pilgrimage of rediscovering community and reconnection."

-Bessel van der Kolk, MD, author of The Body Keeps the Score: Brain, Mind, and Body in the Healing of Trauma

"An extraordinarily honest and courageous book that takes the reader on a journey through the darkest days of despair, then along the path to rediscovering purpose in life. It reveals what it means to be human, and is a testament to the healing powers of friendship."

-Emma Sky, senior fellow, Jackson Institute for Global Affairs, Yale University, and author of The Unraveling: High Hopes and Missed Opportunities in Iraq

"Peering into the hellish abyss of trauma-induced madness, a marine and the photojournalist sent to photograph him tell how their lives and experiences intertwined on parallel paths of violence, despair, and, ultimately, reinvention. While the two men had different missions and experiences, their stories mingled, compared, and contrasted in Shooting Ghosts make for a remarkable and memorable book."

-Santiago Lyon, former vice president of photography at the Associated Press, winner of

two World Press Photo prizes and the Bayeux-Calvados Award for War Correspondents

"Shooting Ghosts should be mandatory reading for all of us families and loved ones who are 'grateful for the service' of our armed forces. It perfectly captures the aching dissonance veterans feel when they return to a home front they have longed for, but where no one can see their wounds. It's also a sobering reminder that while war correspondents don't carry weapons, they bear witness to the same traumatic events of war."

-Lee Woodruff, Author of the #1 New York Times Bestseller In an Instant: A Family's Journey of Love and Healing

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