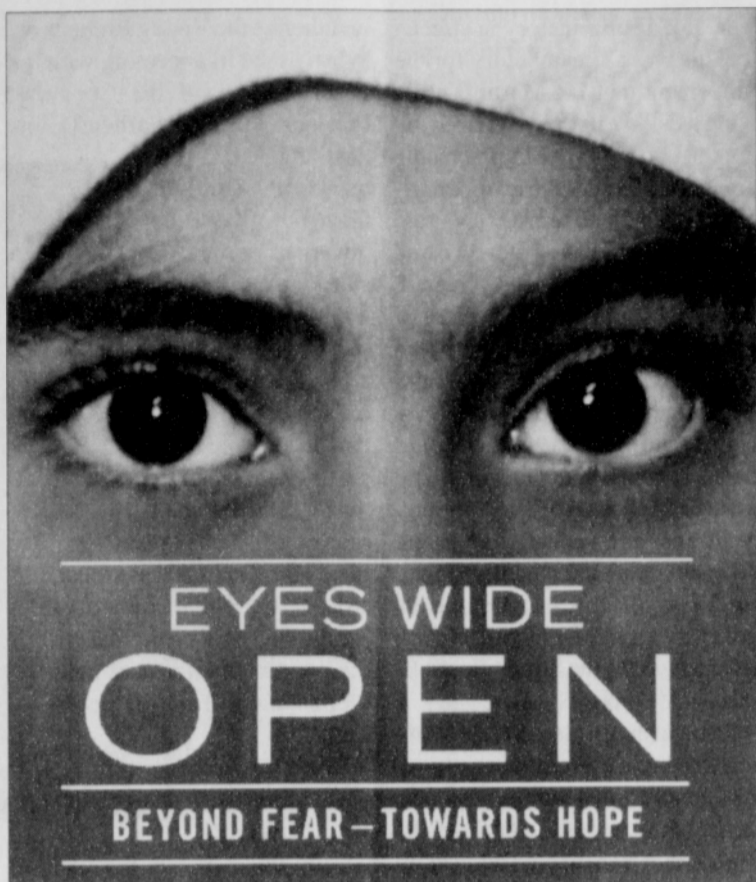


# Honoring Fallen Soldiers and Citizens



A close-up view of a pair of boots from a deceased U.S. soldier that was on display in New York recently.

*Exhibit aims to materialize loss in Iraq*



These are some of more than 1,000 shoes of dead Iraqi citizens whose lives have been lost in the war.

BY KATHERINE KOVACICH  
THE PORTLAND OBSERVER  
A mere five days after being deployed from Tacoma, Wash., 23-year-old Joseph Blickenstaff drowned in an Iraq canal. For Portlander Eric Blickenstaff, the pain of losing his close young brother was beyond excruciating and disheartening. He wouldn't be able to talk with Joe anymore, to hang out, to give him a hug.

and Iraqi civilians that have died during the War on Terror and raise awareness of its high human cost. "When I went to see my brother's boots, it was very sad to see him with the other deceased soldiers. I met other families there and realized how many there are like us," Blickenstaff said. "My brother had everything to live for."

This is why his boots are one pair of many in a memorial exhibit touring nationwide called "Eyes Wide Open."

Pairs of boots that led soldiers through the trenches in Iraq are some of the only things left now of more than 1,400 deceased men and women who served. These haunting mementos will make a tour of duty through Portland next week.

Through the moving memorial, organizers of "Eyes Wide Open" hope to honor American soldiers

and 32 Washington soldiers are among those memorialized in the touching exhibit.

The piece was put together by the American Friends Service Committee, with features of the exhibit including more than 1,400 pairs of boots honoring U.S. military casualties, a 32-foot wall of names and incidents of Iraqi civilian deaths, 1,000 pairs of shoes memorializing a small fraction of numerous Iraqi citizens killed in conflict and an interior multimedia display exploring the history, cost and conse-

*We as a nation are sponsoring this war and it's important that we see its effects with eyes wide open.*

— Susan Segall, regional director for American Friends Service Committee

quences of the war through slide shows and photos.

Joseph Blickenstaff was married with plans to become a counselor when he got out of the war.

"He's the first thing that enters my mind when I wake up," Blickenstaff said. "I tell him 'Joe, I'm remembering you and that you can't be here during my day.'"

One of the hardest exhibits Blickenstaff has seen was in Santa Monica, Calif., where the boots were

laid among the sandy shore of the beach as people passed by enjoying the ocean weather.

"It's a beautiful beach and a beautiful day and you see his boots and realize he should be here on vacation," Blickenstaff said.

Many families who don't approve of the war still have support for their son or daughter, Blickenstaff said. The exhibit brings together people with different political beliefs in the simple support

of a loved one.

"I didn't want him to take a chance on anything that would separate us," Blickenstaff said. "That was the hardest thing for me to take. What a waste."

For those who haven't lost their loved one from war, Blickenstaff urges them to see the display and imagine what it's like to be in the shoes of the soldiers, the Iraqi citizens and the people at home affected by the losses.

Beyond those that have already passed, Blickenstaff reminded that for every family represented, there were hundreds more who are worried about their soldiers in Iraq, not having the proper equipment, meals and care they need.

"We as a nation are sponsoring this war and it's important that we see its effects with eyes wide open and don't blindly support something that we have felt the effects of," said Susan Segall, regional di-

rector for American Friends Service Committee. "We hope that people emerge from it asking some new questions and to talk about this and to not let this be in the background."

Hopefully the exhibit will, if anything, encourage dialogue about the war.

"It's our belief if the general public does more speaking of the profound loss of war, they will ask about the necessity of war," Segall said. "Many people don't necessarily share our views about war. The exhibit functions as a memorial, we do hope people will talk about those losses with their friends, their family members and will turn their grief into reflecting on war. We hope to generate wider reflection and dialogue. It's imperative to find ways to find non-violent ways to solve conflict."

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