

Photographer focuses on soldiers' stories

By Tammy Malgesini
EO Media Group

Jim Lommasson has noticed a disconnect between the American public and soldiers who have fought in the recent conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan.

The Portland-based freelance photographer and writer is on a mission to change that. Lommasson's 2015 book, "Exit Wounds: Soldiers' Stories — Life After Iraq and Afghanistan," is about United States soldiers who served in the wars. The book features Lommasson's photographs and interviews, as well as photographs by the participants. The project includes a traveling exhibit.

Lommasson also has been active with the Oregon Humanities Conversation Project. He will facilitate a discussion titled "Life after War: Photography and Oral Histories of Coming Home." As part of The Big Read, the free event is Thursday, Feb. 2, at 7 p.m. at Wallowa City Hall. In addition, his exhibit will remain at City Hall through the end of February.

Lommasson shares about the words of a Marine scrawled on a wall near Baghdad: "America is not at war. The Marine Corps is at war; America is at the mall."

Statistics, he said, indicate 100 percent of the American people knew a soldier who fought in combat during World War II. And, nearly 100 percent knew someone who fought in Vietnam. As far as the Iraq and Afghanistan wars, Lommasson said the statistics are staggering — maybe two or three percent know someone who was involved in combat.

"We don't know the soldiers that we send to war," he said. "They need to tell their stories and we need to hear their stories."

More than 60 years after the Battle of the Bulge — the



Contributed by Jim Lommasson

"Growing up, my dream was to be in the Army. All I ever wanted to do was to be in the Army and lead men into combat. I got 30 seconds of my dream, I'd give my other leg to live it again." — Lucas Wilson

bloodiest battle experienced by U.S. forces during World War II — Lommasson's father finally began to share more in-depth about his painful experiences on the battlefield. Lommasson's conversations with his father the last couple years of his life served as motivation to document oral histories of recent war veterans.

Conversations with veterans, he said, need to take place sooner rather than later. It provides a better opportunity for soldiers to move forward in

their lives, Lommasson said.

Starting the project in 2007, Lommasson connected with soldiers at Veterans of Foreign Wars meetings, college campuses and social media.

"Sometimes one vet would lead me to a pool of veterans," he said. "I didn't know what to expect when I started this — it started with a basic interest."

Initially, Lommasson envisioned the project as focusing on veterans' homecomings. However, as the conversations progressed, the soldiers kept



Contributed by Jim Lommasson

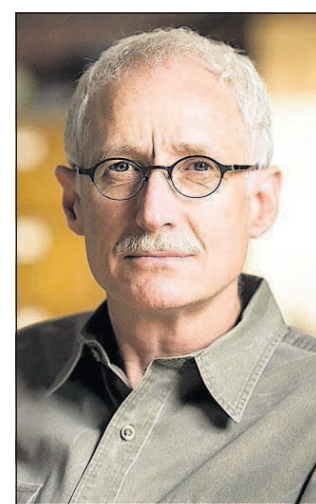
"The convoy killed a girl and two goats. I went out with Civil Affairs and we paid off the family. The going rate for the goat was twice that of the daughter. I think they got \$2000 for the whole package. It was horrible." — Ash Woolson

coming back to sharing about their war experiences, even showing him and giving him pictures.

"I thought, 'I just need to shut up and start listening better.' The stories and photos flooded in — that's when the

project took off," Lommasson said.

During the Conversation Project event, Lommasson will show slides and share stories. The audience is invited to join the dialogue and share their thoughts and experiences.



Lommasson

"I try to make it so that we sit in a circle instead rows of seats," he said. "We want to encourage conversation."

For more about Lommasson's project, visit www.lifeafterwar-soldiersstories.blogspot.com. For a calendar of Oregon Humanities events, go to www.oregonhumanities.org/calendar. And, for more about The Big Read, visit www.fishtrap.org.

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