

FORWARD MARCH

25 years later,
veterans reflect
on their service in
the Gulf War and
their lives after

By Matt Alderton

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Veterans of the 1991 Gulf War are humble to a fault. They say they had it better than the generation before them — the Vietnam vets whose service the country so often rebuffed — and had it easier than the generation that came after: the men and women who fought in Iraq and Afghanistan, whose war, they say, was much longer and infinitely harder than theirs. Their modesty hugs them like a wet towel on a hot day, keeping them both comfortable and cool. It's as if they've forgotten the dirty smell of burning oil, the haunting thunder of heavy artillery and the terrifying glow of missile fire in the night.

But, of course, they haven't. They never will. Twenty-five years later, the memory of war is fresh.

So is the legacy. Because while most of them would never rush to repeat it, many of those who fought in the Gulf War say the experience put them on paths they're thankful they took. Here, meet three such people. Their stories reflect a generation of veterans whose lives were not merely touched by war, but forever shaped by it.



Geoffrey Frankel as an Army medic during Desert Storm.

GEOFFREY FRANKEL: THE ARTIST AT WAR

Geoffrey Frankel wasn't the sort you'd expect to enlist. An artist since the age of 3, he spent his youth engaged in peaceful pursuits like drawing, painting and sculpture. When he graduated from art school in 1989, however, he came to recognize that true artists had more than talent going for them; they also had life experiences that inspired them. His job waiting tables at a Jewish deli wasn't exactly inspirational, so he decided to join the Army.

"I wanted to see the world but didn't have much money. I got it into my head that this was the only way I'd be able to do it," recalls Frankel, who at age 23 enlisted as a combat medic.

Frankel was stationed in Zirndorf, Germany, until he was deployed to Saudi Arabia for Operation Desert Storm. "I joined the Army because I wanted to see Europe. Going to war wasn't part of my plan," Frankel says. "I was pretty scared."

Frankel was a specialist attached to the 1st Armored Division and drove an ambulance during the ground campaign. Although he wasn't on the front lines, he remembers vividly the dead bodies and destroyed vehicles left by those who were.

"You saw a lot of stuff you don't want to remember," says Frankel, whose wartime journal and photographs were later published as a book, *Desert Storm Diary: An American Soldier's Personal Record of the Gulf War in Words and Pictures*.

Inspired in part by the advent of technology — the Gulf War was the first conflict in which the military leveraged GPS navigation, and the first war broadcast live on U.S. television — Frankel used his GI Bill to go back to school for filmmaking after the



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war. He subsequently started an advertising agency specializing in digital storytelling and branded content, commencing a 20-year career in advertising. Now 48, he's senior vice president and group creative director at the Chicago-based PR firm Edelman, where he leads veterans initiatives in areas such as mental health and employment.

Reflecting on his career, Frankel attributes his success both to his service and his ability to transcend it. "Everyone who's been in the military has had to figure out

how to lead themselves out of a situation, and that ability to problem-solve is why I've been able to navigate a path to leadership," he says. "At the same time, I don't have my job because I'm a veteran. I have my job because I'm good at it ... My advice to veterans is: Figure out what your brand is, and sell your value that way. Don't be a veteran first; use the skills you have to be a valued asset to whatever industry or organization you want to join."

Geoffrey Frankel today, as a top executive with a major Chicago PR firm.

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“It’s not something I wish to repeat, but I wouldn’t trade the experience.”

Troy Lane



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TROY LANE: A UNIFORM SUITS HIM

By the time he was 16, Troy Lane knew he wanted to be a police officer. There was just one problem: Police recruits in his home state of Kansas had to be at least 21 years old to become sworn officers. So when an Army

recruiter guaranteed him the chance to train as a military policeman fresh out of high school, he jumped at the opportunity.

“I joined the military to learn a trade,” says Lane, who began in his Army career in 1988 as a military police officer assigned to the 89th Military Police Brigade at Fort Riley, Kan. “It never crossed my mind that we might actually go to war.”

When he found out he was being deployed to Saudi Arabia in 1990, it came as a shock.

“The prospects were pretty grim. This was a huge military we were going to face, and we were told to expect a lot of casualties,” Lane recalls. “To say I was nervous would be an

understatement.”

During his deployment, Lane provided airbase and highway security in Saudi Arabia, followed by supply-route security in Kuwait, where his company eventually encountered waves of surrendering Iraqi soldiers as it approached Kuwait City.

“We lived in the middle of the burning oil fields that Saddam’s troops left behind when they fled,” Lane says. “Some days it was sunny and light, although you could see the fires and smoke. Other days it was literally pitch-black; by the end of the day, all your clothes and vehicles were covered in oil.”

After Lane was honorably discharged in late 1991, he immedi-

ately went into law enforcement and ultimately pursued a career in campus police departments at colleges and universities. Now chief of police at the University of Tennessee in Knoxville, he says his military service got him exactly where he wanted to be: in uniform.

“I knew I wanted to be in law enforcement, and the military was a foot in the door toward that goal,” he says. “It’s not something I wish to repeat, but I wouldn’t trade the experience. I met some lifelong friends, discovered a bit about myself and learned a lot about leadership — good and bad — which has served me well in my career.”

Troy Lane was an MP in the Gulf War and is now chief of the campus police at the University of Tennessee in Knoxville.

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Marilyn Gibson

MARILYN GIBSON : PASSIONATE FOR PEACE

When she was a senior in high school, Marilyn Gibson got pregnant. Because she didn't want to be a burden to her parents, she joined the Army for the salary and benefits that would help her care for her infant son.

“That was in 1986,” recalls Gibson, 48, who spent the next four years at Fox Army Hospital in Redstone Arsenal, Ala., where she worked in hospital administration. When Saddam Hussein's forces invaded Kuwait in 1990, she knew the U.S. military would be going to war — but assumed it would do so without her. “I worked in a hospital and hadn't touched a weapon in four years. I wasn't ready to go to war.”

Although she wasn't ready, she was willing: When her unit received its orders in 1991, she took her son home to family in Buffalo, then deployed three days later to Saudi Arabia.

“We got attached to the 82nd Airborne Division,” Gibson says.

Her job during the war was to monitor, order and guard pharmaceuticals and other medical supplies at military bases that were far from the front lines — but still alarmingly close to battle. “It was scary because we were in artillery range,” she says. “I cried every day.”

Gibson remembers the Scud missiles most of all. “One night, a Scud missile came in no less than a mile from us. It was bad. Everything shook,” she says. “I really thought we were going to die.”

Gibson went on to get a degree in business management and accounting with the help of the GI Bill. Her military training helped her get a job as a medical clerk at

the local VA hospital, after which she began her current career as a tax auditor for the New York State Department of Taxation and Finance.

Now a mother of three, Gibson says her military service gave her a new appreciation for life. She's using it to promote peace as a member of the Western New York Peace Center and co-founder of Women Against Violence Everywhere (WAVE), a nonprofit providing mentoring, prison prevention services and entrepreneurship training to young women and girls.

“I left one war only to witness another,” says Gibson, referring to youth violence and gang shoot-

ings in her hometown. “Some of the violence taking place with our young people is because they don't have caring and loving adults in their lives. We created WAVE to give them what they're missing.”

Gibson can relate to the at-risk girls she mentors. Abandoned at birth, she was adopted at age 10 by her long-time foster parents and discovered she had 11 brothers and sisters when she obtained her birth certificate to enlist in the Army.

“That's one of the best things that came out of my being in the military,” she says. “Now I have a huge family with all these wonderful siblings.”

Marilyn Gibson was a hospital administrator in the Army. Now she works for a state agency.

