

# A powerful reminder

Brattleboro Reformer

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As we sit down to our Thanksgiving dinners today, we should take a moment to remember the men and women who have served in Iraq and Afghanistan -- the living as well as the dead.

Part of the current exhibit at the Brattleboro Museum and Art Center, "As Others See Us: The Contemporary Portrait," is devoted to reminding us about the human cost of the U.S. invasion and occupation of Iraq.

"Injured Soldiers and Marines: Portraits by Timothy Greenfield-Sanders," is as powerful a reminder as you will see of the emotional and physical price so many have paid.

Greenfield-Sanders, a well-known portrait photographer, was invited to make portraits of 17 Iraq war veterans to accompany the 2007 HBO film, "Alive Day Memories: Home From Iraq." Those portraits make up the exhibit which will be on display at BMAC until Feb. 22. (Some of the pictures may also be seen at [homepage.mac.com/timothygs/Soldiers/PhotoAlbum159.html](http://homepage.mac.com/timothygs/Soldiers/PhotoAlbum159.html)). The portraits are simple, with the subjects looking straight into the camera and engaging the viewer with a direct gaze.

Take the first portrait that greets visitors entering the exhibit. Your eyes meet the gaze of Marine Staff Sgt. John Jones. He is seated. From the waist up, he is wearing his dress blues, medals and campaign ribbons sparkling. From the waist down, you see two prosthetic legs with spit-shined.

shoes on the feet. The San Antonio, Texas, native was wounded on Jan. 3, 2005. He is a double amputee below the knees, and has shrapnel in parts of his thighs and wrists. He also has some memory and hearing loss and post traumatic stress disorder.

You see Army First Lt. Dawn Halftaker, holding her prosthetic right arm, and your eye is drawn to the empty sleeve of her shirt where her arm was amputated at the shoulder. The San Diego native was a military policewoman who was wounded in a bomb blast on June 19, 2004 and still carries shrapnel in her body from the attack.

You look at the face of Marine Cpl. Michael Jernigan and see an empty socket where his left eye was and a prosthesis in his right eye socket. The St. Petersburg, Fla., native was wounded on Aug. 22, 2004, and the bomb blast that took his eyesight also resulted in the loss of his frontal cranium in the forehead area -- ear-to-ear, eyebrow to the top of his head -- and the loss of the bone structure that supports the brain. It now sits on titanium mesh.

A slight, ironic smile is on the face of Army Cpl. Jonathan Bartlett, dressed in shorts, standing on a pair of prosthetic legs as he grips a walking stick. He's wearing a t-shirt with a monkey holding a lighted stick of dynamite in his right hand. You notice the bandaged stump of the monkey's left hand and the words, "I am a slow learner." The infantryman from Norfolk, Va., was wounded on Sept. 25, 2004, just outside Fallujah.

These men and women, like the nearly 31,000 others who've been wounded in Iraq, have a name for the day they narrowly escaped death. They call it "alive day."

The soldiers and marines in Greenfield-Sanders' portraits are strangers to us. They are ordinary men and women facing the life-changing consequences of war, and these portraits show their strength and dignity.

The faces of those who've served in Iraq have faded from the front pages of the newspapers. But it's worth remembering the pain of the 4,200 families who have lost a loved one in Iraq and who now have an empty chair at the Thanksgiving table.

It's worth remembering today the thousands of families who have a father, son, brother, sister or cousin dealing with grievous injuries like the soldiers and marines in this exhibit.

Go to BMAC and take the time to study the faces in Greenfield-Sanders' portraits. Remember them, and give thanks for the sacrifices that they, and countless others, have made in Iraq, Afghanistan and around the world.