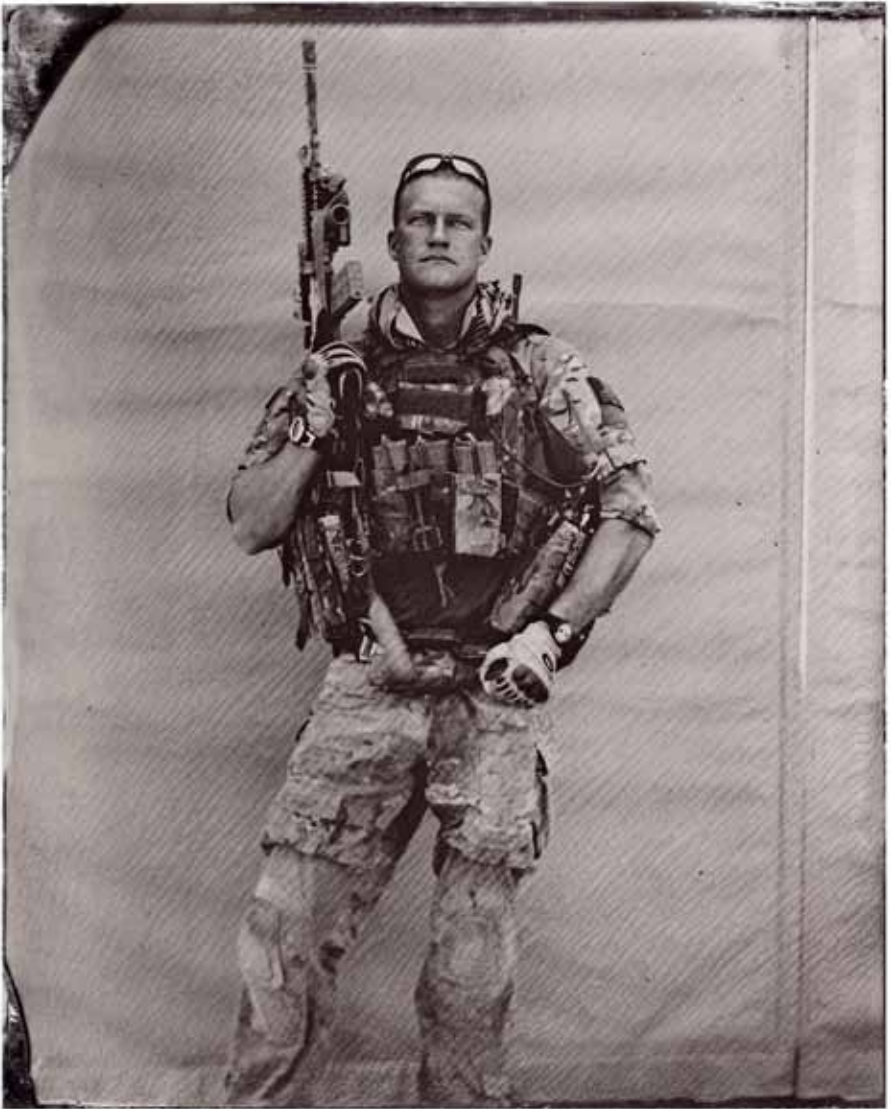


E D D R E W

Afghanistan, Combat Zone Tintype

My work is based on the history of American military members and their involvement in war as part of a brotherhood. While deployed to the Helmand Province in Afghanistan April-June this year, I decided to document my life and the people around me as part of a fine art project. It extended to my own involvement in America's longest war, and it is meant to be a very isolated personal study of those who fight our wars. I decided to employ the antiquated tintype wet plate process, the first time to my knowledge, that tintypes have been made in a combat zone since the American Civil War. Tintypes are a slow and methodical process, which I feel best exemplifies the humanity of the people I work with as well as involves me from beginning to end to the creation of the photograph. Through my tintypes in-theater, I connected to my brothers in arms which helped to translate multiple persons' views of a war, besides my own, through process and subject.











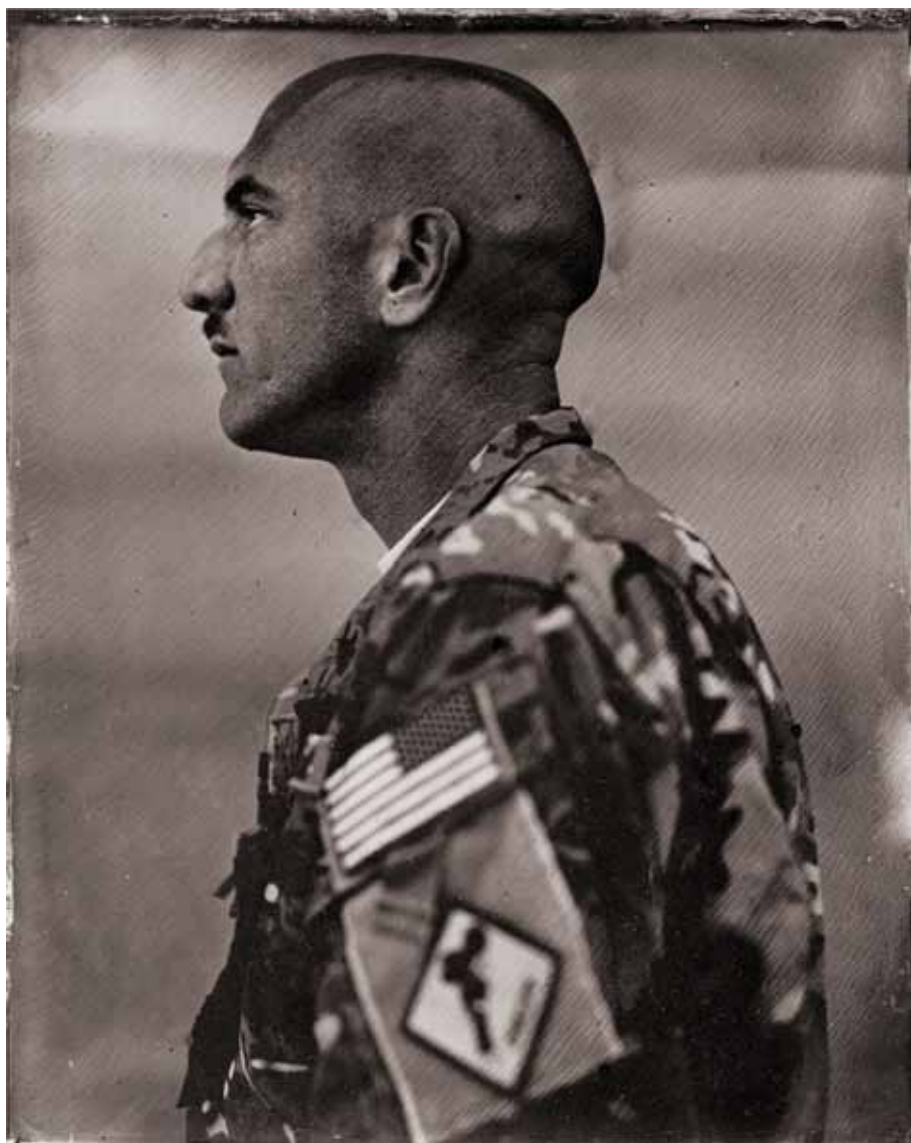












Artist's Note

The process of tintype begins by pouring collodion (a flammable, syrupy solution of cellulose nitrate in ether and alcohol) onto a metal plate or sheet of glass, where it firms slightly and is then put into a dark box filled with silver nitrate to sensitize the plate. The silver combines with the chemicals of the collodion to make a light sensitive film of salted silver. In darkroom conditions you remove the plate from the silver nitrate bath and place into a plate holder, which you will eventually slide into the back of the camera when you are ready to make an exposure. The plate must remain wet, so the period of time from when you remove the plate from the silver nitrate, to the exposure and then the development, is limited. The developer is ferrous sulfate and acetic acid (vinegar), which takes less than a minute to develop, and after which you will see an opaque image appear. To stop development you simply wash away the developer with water. At this point you can expose plate to light. You have then arrived at the most dangerous moment in the process, that of fixing the image. The chemicals for fixing are, historically, potassium cyanide, which removes excess silver and etches the silver that creates the image itself. If the developer is not properly removed, the cyanide will mix to create cyanide gas. In Afghanistan I replaced potassium cyanide with ammonium thiosulphate, which is not toxic. This substitution, however, does not etch the silver, so the image does not have as rich tones in whitest whites, though most casual observers will not detect the difference. Once the fixer has removed all the silver (which is when the image loses its opaque blue color), the image moves to its typical sepia color. At that time you wash away the fixer and the image is complete. The final process for preservation is varnishing the plate with tree sap. Tintype chemicals are temperamental and some are volatile and poisonous. The smallest environmental factors can affect the process to ruin a photo, as was the case in Afghanistan. It took me some time to understand how the Afghan environment was affecting my chemicals in order to adjust and make better, properly exposed photos. Experience is more than useful in wetplate, collodion photography.

ED DREW is an Aerial Gunner and Staff Sergeant in the California Air National Guard. An Afghanistan war veteran, he is also a full-time student at the San Francisco Art Institute. He is working on his bachelor of fine arts degree with a major in Sculpture and a minor in Photography. He is represented by Robert Koch Gallery in San Francisco: www.kochgallery.com.