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Media filmmaker's documentary shows Iraq War veterans' path 'From War to Wisdom'

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📺 'FROM WAR TO WISDOM'

'From War to Wisdom' focuses on several members of the Fox Company, 2nd Battalion, 5th Marine Regiment, shown here during the Iraq War, after they return home from war and reintegrate back into civilian life.

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Veterans returning home from war face a host of challenges, and, though issues like post traumatic stress disorder and traumatic brain injury are well-known, a new documentary from a local filmmaker focuses on another element that is less discussed: reintegration.

That is, getting back to life before war, or at least successfully reentering civilian society. For some combat veterans, that means playing music, or starting an organization to benefit other vets, or talking through their experiences, which isn't as simple as it sounds.

All those paths and more are highlighted in *From War to Wisdom* (<https://www.wartowisdom.com/>), a documentary codirected by Media filmmaker Dan Collins (<https://www.dancollinsfilm.com/>) and retired Marine Josh Hisle. The film focuses on several members of Hisle's unit, Fox Company, 2nd Battalion, 5th Marines, AKA Fox 2/5, after they return home from the Iraq war. There, the "real battle begins."

From War to Wisdom is available for rent on streaming platforms such as Amazon and iTunes, as well as on demand through Xfinity.

"One of the challenges we're really facing as a nation is how to transition guys so that they not only survive the transition of coming home," Collins, 42, says, "but then have the opportunity to say, 'Hey, man, I led a squad in Ramadi, I can sure as hell lead a nonprofit in Ohio.' Those skills are applicable to civilian life, too."

From War To Wisdom: Official Trailer



As a two-tour combat veteran of the Iraq war, Hisle, currently a student at Miami University of Ohio, knows that struggle well. He enlisted after the 9/11 attacks and retired after four years in the Marine Corps. After his return, Hisle says, he coped by drinking, but writing and playing music eventually gave him a path back to normalcy, and led him to tour with Stephen Stills and Neil Young, who featured Hisle in his 2008 documentary (<http://neilyoungnews.thrasherswheat.org/2008/09/interview-with-deja-vus-josh-hisle.html>), *CSNY: Déjà Vu*.

"The first few years were rough. I was out of control," Hisle, 35, says. "When I had a goal, something to work toward — it was Neil Young, for Christ's sake — it snapped me back in."

Hisle, from West Chester, Ohio, started touring with his own original music and eventually landed a gig at Common Ground on the Hill (<http://www.commongroundonthehill.org/index.html>), a summer series of arts and music workshops in Maryland where Collins has taught for two decades and that is featured in the film. The pair

partnered up. Hisle had experiences on the road connecting with other veterans through music, so they decided to work on a solutions-oriented documentary that ultimately became *From War to Wisdom* after six years of production.

The pair also started the [Common Ground on the Hill Veterans Initiative](http://www.commongroundonthehill.org/veterans-initiative.html) (<http://www.commongroundonthehill.org/veterans-initiative.html>), an organization that provides scholarships for vets to attend Common Ground workshops. Hisle became a speaker at Common Ground and began leading discussions between combat veterans and civilians as a way to help both groups process the effects of wars.



📷 FROM WAR TO WISDOM

Marine Corps veteran Josh Hisle during his time in Iraq, left, and in his postwar life as a speaker at Common Ground on the Hill.

“[The movie] was really Josh’s brainchild,” Collins says. “Combat veterans generally don’t talk to civilians about what happened in the war. And they don’t even talk to non-combat veterans about what happened in combat. So it was an honor to be able to do that.”

Having a veteran as a partner helped Collins in that regard. Hisle encouraged members of his unit to speak candidly to Collins about their experiences. Combined with original footage of Fox 2/5 Company in Iraq from journalist and Vietnam veteran Mike Cerre, those interviews result in an intimate, honest documentary that presents a unique take on life after war. For Hisle, that element was the most important part of the production, and Collins gained their trust almost immediately.

“They didn’t want to make a bull- documentary,” Hisles says. “If you don’t have true access to the people you’re interviewing, you’re not going to get the truth. You’re going to get what they put on for civilians. But it didn’t take long at all for Dan to call me saying, ‘Hey, me and five Marines are going down the Shore,’ or something.”

The film has garnered significant attention since its debut for several participating organizations, including Common Ground and veteran Kenny Bass’ Battle Buddy Foundation (<http://www.tbbf.org/>). Established to provide highly trained service dogs to disabled veterans, the program went viral thanks to a clip from the doc that has garnered more than 1.5 million views on YouTube, generating media and appearances for Bass and his service dog, Atlas.

Battle Buddy clip from the film From War To Wisdom



Another success story is Marine veteran (and Philly resident) Mike Whiter’s Operation Overmed (<http://www.philly.com/philly/blogs/trending/Local-veteran-Mike-Whiter-spotlights-overmedicated-soldiers-advocates-for-medical-marijuana-with-OperationOverMed.html>), which is featured in the film’s extras. Started in 2015, the photo series highlights the overmedication of veterans after their return home from war through powerful portraits of actual veterans and the medications they have been prescribed. For Whiter, also an Iraq war vet, marijuana was key in his reintegration, but as he says, “it’s not just about weed. It’s about healing. Actually going to therapy, doing the work, talking about your s-, processing it, and becoming a new person.

“It’s learning how to live your life again. We found this path, all of us, and we just want to help other vets find the paths that we found.”

Or, as Collins puts it, we have to take “the rifle out of their hands and give them the tools to create other kinds of change,” some of which are explored in *From War to Wisdom*. If we can start finding ways to help vets get back to society and start living their regular lives again, we likely will be better off as a society, he says. After all, the military, like war, isn’t going to go away anytime soon.

“There is nothing but war ahead,” Hisle says. “We have to live with each other afterwards. We all work together just fine in combat. Why can’t we all do it now for good things?”

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