



presents

HELL AND BACK AGAIN



A Film By Danfung Dennis

- **Winner IDA Awards - Jacqueline Donnet Emerging Filmmaker Award****
- **NOMINEE - Film Independent Spirit Awards - Truer Than Fiction****
- **NOMINEE - Gotham Independent Film Awards - Best Documentary****
- **NOMINEE - British Independent Film Awards - Best Documentary****
- **NOMINEE - Cinema Eye Honors - Outstanding Achievement In Direction****
- **NOMINEE - Cinema Eye Honors - Best Debut Feature****
- **NOMINEE - Cinema Eye Honors - Outstanding Achievement In Production****
- **WINNER - Cinema Eye Honors - Outstanding Achievement In Cinematography****
- **WINNER Alfred I. duPont-Columbia University Award 2012 - Graduate School of Journalism****
- **WINNER World Cinema Jury Prize Documentary – Sundance Film Festival 2011****
- **WINNER World Cinema Cinematography Award– Sundance Film Festival 2011****
- **WINNER – Best Film of the Documentary Competition — Moscow Int'l Film Festival****
- **WINNER Harrell Award for Best Documentary- Camden International Film Festival 2011****

Running Time: 88 minutes

Rating: Unrated

Language: English and Pashtu with English subtitles

For More Information: hellandbackagain.com; docurama.com

<http://www.oscars.org/awards/academyawards/84/nominees.html>

Photos Available at: hellandbackagain.com

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FILMMAKERS

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Producers MIKE LERNER
MARTIN HERRING

Executive Producers DAN COGAN

KAROL MARTESKO-FENSTER

GERNOT SCHAFFLER

THOMAS BRUNNER

Editor FIONA OTWAY

Music & Sound Design by J. RALPH

Original Song "HELL AND BACK"

Music & Lyrics by J. RALPH

Performed by WILLIE NELSON

FEATURING

The Marines of Echo Company 2nd Battalion, 8th Marine Regiment

Sergeant Nathan Harris

Ashley Harris

Lieutenant Colonel Christian Cabaniss

Captain Eric Meador

Lieutenant Edward Hubbard

Chaplain Terry Roberts

Staff Sergeant Doug Webb

Lieutenant Commander Robert Gaines

Lieutenant Commander Matthew Swibe

Sergeant Chris MacDonald

SYNOPSIS

From his embed with US Marines Echo Company in Afghanistan, photojournalist and filmmaker Danfung Dennis reveals the devastating impact a Taliban machine-gun bullet has on the life of 25-year-old Sergeant Nathan Harris. The film seamlessly transitions from stunning war reportage to an intimate, visceral portrait of one man's personal struggle at home in North Carolina, where Harris confronts the physical and emotional difficulties of re-adjusting to civilian life with the love and support of his wife, Ashley. Masterfully contrasting the intensity of the frontline with the unsettling normalcy of home, HELL AND BACK AGAIN lays bare the true cost of war.

LONG SYNOPSIS

In 2009, U.S. Marines launched a major helicopter assault on a Taliban stronghold in southern Afghanistan. Within hours of being dropped deep behind enemy lines, 25-year-old Sergeant Nathan Harris's unit (US Marines Echo Company, 2nd Battalion, 8th Marine Regiment) is attacked from all sides. Cut off and surrounded, the Marines fight a ghostlike enemy and experience immense hostility from displaced villagers caught in the middle.

Embedded in Echo Company during the assault, photojournalist and filmmaker Danfung Dennis captures the frontline action with visceral immediacy. When Sergeant Harris returns home to North Carolina after a life-threatening injury in battle, the film evolves from stunning war reportage to the story of one man's personal apocalypse. With the love and support of his wife, Ashley, Harris struggles to overcome the difficulties of transitioning back to civilian life.

In immense physical pain, Sergeant Harris grows addicted to his medication. His agony deepens as he attempts to reconcile the gulf between his experience of war and the terrifying normalcy of life at home. The two realities seamlessly intertwine to communicate both the extraordinary drama of war and, for a generation of soldiers, the no less difficult experience of returning home.

An unprecedented exploration of the moving image and a film of uncommon intimacy, HELL AND BACK AGAIN comes full circle as it lays bare the true cost of war.



DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

Oct. 23, 2010 - This morning I learned a photographer friend was severely wounded after stepping on a mine in southern Afghanistan. He lost both his legs and is in critical condition.

I'm flooded by feelings of rage, sadness, helplessness and isolation. I think of my friends and colleagues who have lost their lives while doing their job. It all seems utterly senseless.

Unless you have a personal connection, the war in Afghanistan is an abstraction. After nearly ten years since the initial invasion, the daily bombings and ongoing violence has become mundane, almost ordinary. It is tempting to become indifferent to the horror and pain. It is much easier to look away from the victims. It is much easier to lead a life without rude interruptions from complex insurgencies in distant lands. But it is when we take this easier path, the suffering becomes of no consequence and therefore meaningless. The anguish becomes invisible, an abstraction. It is when society becomes numb to inhumanity; horror is allowed to spread in darkness.

Visual imagery can be a powerful medium for truth. The images of napalmed girls screaming by Nick Ut, the street execution of a Vietcong prisoner by Eddie Adams, the shell-shocked soldier by Don McCullin - these iconic images have burned into our collective consciousness as reminders of war's consequences.

But, this visual language is dying. The traditional outlets are collapsing. In the midst of this upheaval, we must invent a new language. I am attempting to combine the power of the still image with advanced technology to change the vernacular of photojournalism and filmmaking. Instead of opening a window to glimpse another world, I am attempting to bring the viewer into that world. I believe shared experiences will ultimately build a common humanity.

Through my work I hope to shake people from their indifference to war, and to bridge the disconnect between the realities on the ground and the public consciousness at home. By bearing witness and shedding light on another's pain and despair, I am trying to invoke our humanity and a response to act. Is it possible that war is an archaic and primitive human behavior that society is capable of advancing past? Is it possible that the combination of photojournalism, filmmaking and technology can plead for peace and contribute to this future?

It is these possibilities that motivate us to risk life and limb.

--Danfung Dennis, Director

EVOLUTION OF HELL AND BACK AGAIN

Danfung Dennis has been covering the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan for many years as a stills photographer for newspapers and magazines. Despite widespread publication of his pictures, he found that he was unable to convey the brutal realities on the ground, the public was numb to these same images of war and the traditional media outlets were not committed to their coverage of the conflicts.

This drove him to explore the medium of the moving image. For some time, he was simply making pictures with movement. It was a natural progression to combine photojournalism with the tradition and narrative structure of filmmaking.

He needed new tools, so he built customized camera rigs using still cameras that allow him to follow the same methods and ethics of being a photographer - purely being an observer and letting events unfold in front of the lens - while building sequences and anticipating the next event in the story.

HELL AND BACK AGAIN is the first feature film to be shot entirely with a highly customized Canon 5D Mark II digital SLR camera rig. Canon most likely did not intend people to shoot feature films on it and certainly nobody could have envisaged the results this rig would achieve on the front lines.



Danfung didn't go to Afghanistan with the intention to make a film. He had no script, no shot list, no financing. He simply had body armor, a backpack and a camera to try to convey what was happening there as honestly and truthfully as he could. The story only began to emerge after many trips to different provinces with various units and when he learned of a major offensive that was going to take place in the Helmand River Valley.

Accredited as a New York Times photographer, he was dropped deep into enemy territory with The US Marines Echo Company, 2nd Battalion, 8th Marine Regiment to seize a key objective. Within a few hours of landing, they were surrounded by Taliban insurgents and attacked from all sides. The fighting focused on a pile of rubble that became known as Machine Gun Hill.

Despite the raging battle and 130-degree heat, a Marine handed Danfung his last bottle of water. This is how he first met Nathan. By the end of the first day, one Marine was dead, and a countless number had collapsed from heat exhaustion. Cut off and isolated, he spent the night in a one-room mud compound, with a Marine kneeling at the door with his weapon raised in case of an attack.

Over the next days and weeks, he followed Nathan as he led 2nd platoon deeper into the insurgent stronghold. They came to trust each other as they ate the same instant meals, slept in the same dust, and endured the same difficult experiences. He watched Nathan's growing frustration turn to desperation as he lost buddies during a protracted and violent fight with a ghostlike enemy who was invisible, yet everywhere.

Six months into the tour, and days away from rotating out, Nathan was shot in the hip during an ambush. He nearly bled to death before he was medivaced out and underwent blood transfusions and multiple surgeries.

Danfung rejoined Nathan when he returned to his hometown of Yadkinville, North Carolina. He was in incredible pain and distress from having his left his men behind. He introduced Danfung to his friends

and family by saying, "This guy was with me over there." With that, Danfung was welcomed into a rural, conservative, Baptist community and lived with Nathan and his wife Ashley.

The story became less about counter insurgency doctrine as Danfung began to document Nathan's most difficult mission: his struggle to transition back into a community that was completely disconnected from his experience; his transformation from a warrior and leader to a man who required help with even the smallest daily tasks, while clinging to the dream that one day he would rejoin his men in combat.

As a witness to the difficult struggles of just one Marine, Danfung feels he has a responsibility to share Nathan's story and help shake people from their indifference to a long war.

IMAGE CAPTURE: DANFUNG TALKS ABOUT HIS CAMERA

I've been inundated with questions asking what camera rig was used, so I will keep this technical to try to answer them. The Canon 5D Mark II is capable of unprecedented image quality, but since it is a stills camera, there are several limitations that I had to address before using this camera in a warzone.

The first problem is with audio. I used a Sennheiser ME-66 shotgun mic and G2 wireless system running into a Beachtek DXA-2s (I've since upgraded to a Juicedlink DT-454), which converts professional XLR mics into a minijack suitable for the 5D. I built custom aluminum 'wings' to hold this audio setup.

The second problem is stabilization. The design of the Canon 5D Mark II makes hand-held video shooting difficult. I mounted my whole system onto a Glidecam 2000 HD with custom rubber pads on the mount and a foam earplug to suppress the vibration of the lens. The rig is very heavy and it took about two months to get my arm strong enough to shoot extended shots. I cut up a Glidecam Body Pod to make it fit with my body armor and used it to rest my arm when I was not shooting.

To achieve a cinematic look when shooting in bright daylight, I shot at f2.8 at 1/60th or slower, which requires a drastic amount of reduction of light that hits the sensor. I used a Singh Ray Variable ND filter. While the filter can reduce the amount of light by 2 to 8 stops, I had serious problems with uneven coverage, so part of my frame would be darker than others. I have tried Fader ND filters, but also have the same problem.

Another issue is that all focus must be done manually after recording begins. The only way to address this was a lot of practice racking focus. I was not able to rack focus when running, so I often had to try to stay the same distance from my subject to keep them in focus. The most frustrating problem was that the camera would overheat after about 15 minutes of continuous shooting in 120-degree heat. I had no option other than to turn it off and let it cool. I did not have a spare body.

When I returned to the US, I completely rebuilt my rig to make it as small and compact as possible so that I could work unobtrusively while in intimate situations with Nathan and Ashley. I used a Zacuto Stryker rig with custom mounts to hold the audio equipment and a custom follow focus built from a skateboard wheel by Bruce Dorn. While I had almost entirely used a single lens - a Canon 24-70mm f/2.8 - which provided versatility during combat in Afghanistan, I shot primarily with a Canon 35mm f/1.4 and a Canon 50mm f/1.2 while shooting in North Carolina. These prime lenses provided exceptional image quality and performance in low light.

The final serious problem is that the files straight out of the camera are difficult to edit with. I used a 2.93 GHz Macbook Pro 17in, 256gb SSD HD, 4 GB RAM and convert the files into Apple Prores 422 HQ using Compressor (the program often crashes when handling many files, but the quality is better

than with mpeg streamclip). I used two 8TB Sonnet D400QR5's set at RAID 5 to store the 100 hours of footage and Prores files.

I carried five 16 GB Sandisk Extreme IV cards and so many various batteries that I often felt like I was powering a small space station.

--Danfung Dennis

EDITING PROCESS

HELL AND BACK AGAIN was edited from roughly 100 hours of footage over the course of about six months. From the very beginning of the editing process, the biggest challenge was finding an experiential framework that could somehow translate the gravitas and complexity of a still-unfolding history. In order to weave the parallel story lines encompassing the marines of Echo Company during their deployment in Afghanistan along with Sergeant Nathan Harris' homecoming in North Carolina, the filmmakers had to craft a delicate structure that jumps back and forth across different chronologies, physical geographies, subjectivities and psychological landscapes.

The beauty and uncommon intimacy of the footage provided a powerful palette for this work. But at the same time, it imparted a huge responsibility. The footage demanded a constant re-examination of common mythologies surrounding the representation of war and an unraveling of the filmmakers' own personal assumptions and biases. Ultimately, the visceral immediacy of the footage insisted that they always seek out a more observational, more specific truth. In the end, they tried to embrace these challenges, and discovered that in doing so, the footage would lead them to find natural ellipses and layers of subtlety that opened up a world of expressive possibility.

SOUND DESIGN

Danfung felt strongly that absolutely no external audio or sound effects were to be used in order to retain an authentic, brutally honest experience of war. Given this mandate, J. Ralph created the sound design for HELL AND BACK AGAIN using only recordings that Danfung actually captured while in the field. The sound recording gathering process was limited to a shotgun mic and wireless lav mic recording sync sound onto a still camera, the Canon 5D Mark II. To translate the intense isolation and disorientation that Nathan experienced coming home from war, atmospheric soundscapes were achieved using only basic EQ, reverb, and speed changes at key moments. J. Ralph and Danfung applied this process to a selected set of sounds from the film - metallic war machine and human emotional sounds - to help convey the incommunicable personal experience of psychological war injuries.

THE "STARS" OF THE FILM

Although this film has an epic and historic sweep, it also has a great intimacy. The stars of the film, Sergeant Nathan Harris and his young bride Ashley, are not perfect. They struggle with their lot. But they ultimately overcome and defeat their enemies - pain, fear and doubt. They are funny, self-aware, articulate and generous. They have shared their most intimate and painful moments with the world in order to help us understand what they and hundreds of thousands like them are going through.

Ashley's role in Nathan's rehabilitation is a great testimony to what thousands of women are going through, trying to maintain intimacy and normalcy while picking up the pieces of the lives of their husbands, sons, fathers or brothers.

Whatever happens in this war, the fact remains that men and women will return to the USA - to the homes and lives they left behind - and that is a harder thing to do than we can ever imagine.

BIOGRAPHIES

Nathan & Ashley Harris

US Marine Sergeant Nathan Harris, 27, grew up in the small town of Yadkinville, North Carolina and married his high school sweetheart, Ashley, before his first of three deployments to Iraq and Afghanistan. A champion wrestler, he was trained from a young age by his father to be a fighter.

Decorated for his service, Nathan is now in the Wounded Warrior Regiment at Camp Lejeune recovering from a gunshot wound to the hip with the help of Ashley. They live with their two dogs in Jacksonville, NC.

Danfung Dennis (Director)

Since 2006, Danfung Dennis has covered the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. His still photographs have been published in Newsweek, TIME, The New York Times, The Washington Post, The Guardian, Rolling Stone, Le Figaro Magazine, Financial Times Magazine, Mother Jones, Der Spiegel, and The Wall Street Journal.

PBS's Frontline opened its 2009 fall feature program, 'Obama's War' using Danfung Dennis's footage. The immersive nature of the footage prompted a flurry of comment and inquiry from the Pentagon, the White House, veterans groups, viewers and the program was nominated for a 2010 Emmy Award.

In 2010, Danfung Dennis won the Bayeux-Calvados Award For War Correspondents, was named one of the 25 New Faces of Independent Film by Filmmaker Magazine and one of the 30 New and Emerging Photographers by PDN Magazine.

Danfung Dennis directed and filmed his first feature-length documentary on the war in Afghanistan, HELL AND BACK AGAIN and is the founder of an immersive video startup Condition ONE. His background is in Applied Economics and Business Management. Before working as a photojournalist and filmmaker, he consulted small and medium-sized enterprises in Uganda and South Africa.

Fiona Otway (Editor)

When Fiona Otway edited her first movie fourteen years ago, it was love at first slice. The magic of the editing process continues to fascinate her and feed her insatiable curiosity about the world. Fiona thrives in crafting nuanced stories that examine the big social issues of our time.

Her work is strongly influenced by a background in cultural anthropology, critical social theory, and experimental filmmaking and often explores themes related to globalization, community-based social change, and cultural identity. Fiona's work has been featured in top-tier film festivals and television broadcasts in multiple countries. She was awarded the first-ever prize for 'Best Documentary Editing' at Sundance Film Festival. In addition, two of her editing projects IRAQ IN FRAGMENTS and SARI'S MOTHER have been nominated for an Academy Award.

Mike Lerner and Martin Herring (Producers)

Roast Beef Productions (Mike Lerner / Martin Herring / Havana Marking) is the award-winning film production company responsible for Havana Marking's AFGHAN STAR, which won World Cinema Documentary Best Director and Audience Award at Sundance 2009 as well as the Prix Italia, Grierson Award and Rotten Tomatoes Golden Tomato Award for being 100% fresh!

Mike and Martin have been making international documentary films for over twenty years for BBC, Channel 4, HBO and Discovery. Roast Beef are currently in production with THE MIRACLE BABY OF HAITI, PET DETECTIVES, CHINATOWN and Havana Marking's latest feature, SMASH AND GRAB, THE STORY OF THE PINK PANTHERS.

J. Ralph (Music & Sound Design)

J. Ralph is a self taught composer, singer, songwriter and producer from NYC who's career began at 22 with the signing to Atlantic Records. He is well known for his documentary scores including the back to back Academy Award winning films THE COVE and MAN ON WIRE as well as the autism documentary WRETCHES & JABBERERS, for which his end title song "The Reasons Why" was short listed for the Oscars Best Original Song. J. Ralph's music encompasses a variety of genres and mediums and his work is part of the Museum of Modern Art's permanent collection in New York City. In addition to the score and sound design for HELL AND BACK AGAIN, J. Ralph wrote and produced the end title song "Hell And Back" which is performed by Willie Nelson.

Dan Cogan – Impact Partners (Executive Producer)

Impact Partners is a film fund and advisory service committed to financing independent cinema that addresses pressing social issues. We bring together financiers and filmmakers so that, together they can create great films that entertain audiences, enrich lives, and ignite social change. Since its inception less than four years ago, IP has been involved in the financing of over 25 films, including: THE COVE, which won the 2010 Academy Award for Best Documentary Feature; THE GARDEN, which was nominated for the 2009 Academy Award for Best Documentary Feature; FREEHELD, which won the 2008 Academy Award for Best Documentary Short Film; and THE GHOSTS OF ABU GHRAIB, which won the 2007 Emmy Award for Best Documentary Special.

Karol Martesko-Fenster – Thought Engine (Executive Producer)

Karol Martesko-Fenster has a 25-year track record in the motion picture, broadcasting, publishing and Internet industries. He has produced 6 feature films, 25 television and satellite broadcast music programs, and he co-founded indieWIRE.com, *FILMMAKER Magazine*, *RES Magazine* and the media content enterprises cinelan.com and ConditionONE.com. Previously, Karol was was SVP&GM / Film & Animation at Babel Networks US, Head of Film at Palm Pictures, President of RES Media Group and President/Publisher of *Silicon Alley Reporter*. Karol is also executive producer on Phil Cox's THE BENGALI DETECTIVE, James Allen Smith's FLOORED, JJ King and Peter Mann's DARK FIBRE, and collaborating with Harry Belafonte and Michael Cohl on SING YOUR SONG. Karol is currently in production on Havana Marking's SMASH AND GRAB, THE STORY OF THE PINK PANTHERS, David Casey's AMBERGRIS and James Allen Smith's QUANT.

Gernot Schaffler and Thomas Brunner – Sabotage Films (Executive Producers)

Sabotage Films was founded 1998 in Vienna, Austria by Thomas Brunner and Gernot Schaffler. Thomas is the financial director as well as head of production and Gernot works between Vienna and Los Angeles looking for new projects for the company and takes care of the in-house art gallery. Sabotage's work reaches from TV commercials, web specials, short films, music videos, and documentary films to high-end art shows, and the company has won multiple awards at advertising festivals from Cannes to New York. Before 1998, Thomas and Gernot worked shoulder-to-shoulder in another production company as Executive Producers for more than 10 years. Gernot and Thomas are also executive producers on Phil Cox's THE BENGALI DETECTIVE and Havana Marking's SMASH AND GRAB, THE STORY OF THE PINK PANTHERS.

Channel 4 BRITDOC Foundation (Executive Producer)

The Channel 4 BRITDOC Foundation is a not-for-profit titled sponsored by Channel 4 Television and supported by a number of UK and US Foundations. Since 2005, its mission has been to build a creatively ambitious and diverse future for documentary. In its first five years, it has co-funded and produced over sixty documentaries—films that have won audience awards at Sundance, Berlin, Tribeca and Edinburgh Film Festivals, played at SXSW, Berlin, Toronto and London Film Festivals. Titles include: AFGHAN STAR, THE END OF THE LINE, WE ARE TOGETHER, THE YES MEN FIX THE WORLD. The resulting films have been shown around the world on C4, Arte, HBO and released by EMI, Dogwoof and Warners.