The military and experiencing war can change a person's life, their family, friends.

You can become a totally different person without being aware of it.

Unaware that you are completely different.

For a very long time.

In some ways it can be a positive thing.

But from my experience it hasn’t been too positive.
I’m not as patient as I used to be.
My kids. I don't take them to the park and play monster like we used to. I don't do that at all now. I am a different father than I used to be. They have to live with that.
Anything that has to do with military, 
I don’t really care for anymore.

I’m not sure if that’s patriotic.

I mean, since I was in the military you would 
think that I would support all things military.

I still have respect for those that serve in the 
military. It's not the same for every veteran. 
But after being in the military my perspective 
has changed.


The way I see how our country operates has 
changed.


Too much is sacrificed in war and combat.
So... the reality of what IS now, and what I anticipated before I got out of the military is totally different.

Two parallels.
I would strongly urge soldiers in the military today to have a backup plan.

After you're released, you're on your own. No matter what happened while in. You are no longer their property. You are no longer a tool to their means. The military no longer cares.

I know this might sound harsh, but it's a pretty realistic feeling for me.
When soldiers are in the military they are required to do certain things that they don't believe in, because they are designed to follow orders.

There were certain protocol I had to follow. There became a point where I felt it was brainwashing.

I understood why they operated with this dynamic.

But for me, being told to do something totally against my character and having to follow through with that...

I think this is why I have such distaste for the military life now.

I have resentment down deep inside of me. There is guilt there, too.
When it has to do with the opposition and protecting the endagered lives of those we are sworn to protect, even at the risk of our own lives, it became a survival instinct.

It was

It was totally

Something that I didn't even recognize that I could be a part of.
I can't recall
Maybe it's that I don't want to recall
I experienced a blast, and since then I haven't really been able to put my thoughts into words.

My thoughts get jumbled up.
And so
I'm not as fluid as I'd like to be with my speech.

The thought gets entangled in the process of thinking with the words I'm trying to convey.
Sharp pain hit me all at once, like lightening.

I'm so used to pain. I guess it's dehumanizing in some way; who is suppose to get used to pain?

Who does that?

I go to the doctor and they ask me the pain level. But there is no adequate definitive to that.

Everyone has different pain thresholds.

What level is acceptable?

Am I suppose to accept pain? Is there an acceptable level of tolerance?
With the physical injuries I have, the future is scary. If my family is in a financial bind, there is very little I can do.

That feeling of hopelessness is pretty emasculating.

I took pride in being a father, a husband, being able to provide and take care of the family.
Relying on disability and the VA for payment is a frightening feeling. The severity of my injury makes me currently unemployable. I depend on someone else.

I was always financially independent.

I guess you never know what's going to happen in the future. I certainly didn't see this coming. It's not something I ever could have anticipated. But it happened. And it could have happened to anyone.

A bolt stripped out from a five ton vehicle that I was on top of. I fell and landed on my back.

As a mechanic in the military, they teach you the three points of contact for safety. I've always followed the safety precautions closely, but nothing that I or anyone else could have done would have prevented this.
Pain is desensitizing. It's hard to think or act when you're in pain.

And feeling that all the time is taking a toll.

However

I am blessed. I can still do things some other less-fortunate veterans cannot do.

I still have my limbs intact. I still walk on my own.

I still go to school.

It could have been worse. It always can be worse.
Leaving the military is when I felt most expendable.

It's very much a used-up feeling.

I don't think I should feel this way, seeing as I'm the one who volunteered.

It's something unexpected. To find out how expendable you really are.
I have developed such a resentment about the military. Our orders were to keep going no matter what.
I was in a convoy.

There were little kids on the side of the road. Apparently, they were accustomed to soldiers throwing MREs (Meals Ready to Eat) to them. They must have seen our convoy coming.

To see little kids hungry on the side of the road is tragic.

Really little children. From toddlers to ten years.
They were the same age as my kids.
How could I do this? What can I do?
How have I changed all of them?
What does his sister think of me today?

I can't don't how
I was too close to the truck in front of me. The truck behind me was too close to me. We were told to go straight through. All driving forward. I couldn't stop. The children were very close.

I heard a thump and the truck kind of bumped.

Soldiers yelled to keep going. I looked in my rearview. There was a little girl crying. And a little body. She might have been three or four. Her brother I hit was probably two.
I am so sorry for what I did.

I feel this every day.

I hope they can forgive me for what happened. Maybe someday I’ll find that forgiveness within myself.
Rediscovering yourself and your family

is a very long process.
My kids are coming into adolescence now.
It's not an easy time.

I think part of the process of love
is trying to understand what we've been
through. And the direction we can go.
COLOPHON

A PROJECT BY
Monica Haller

BOOK BY
Nick

PENCIL DRAWINGS
Monica Haller

TEXT
Nick

COPY EDITING
Monica Haller

TEMPLATE DESIGN
Matthew Rezac
Monica Haller

SOFTWARE DESIGN
Mark Fox

PRINTING
Lulu.com

THANK YOU FOR YOUR GENEROUS SUPPORT
Bush Foundation
John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation
McKnight Foundation

University of Wisconsin
PARKSIDE

MINNESOTA STATE ARTS BOARD

NATIONAL ENDOWMENT FOR THE ARTS
This book is the result of the author’s courage and focus at the Veterans Book Workshop, where we work to make manageable and material personal archives of images, words and memories from the current wars.

This book is one of many made in the Veterans Book Workshop. Each emerged from different circumstances and each finds its own unique use. One veteran may reference this book regularly, while another may set it aside in order to move on.

Regardless of the ways they are used, no dust settles on these archives. This book contains a powerful living collection of data, memory, and experience that is so relevant it trembles. You must pay very close attention to hear its call.

We made this book for listening. Please accept our invitation. We made this book for deployment. Please pass it along and invite someone else to listen.

Thank you,
Monica Haller

If you would like to purchase your own copy of this book please order online at lulu.com.

Go to veteransbookproject.com to share your thoughts and questions about this book, or to see other books from the compilation.

We have worked to credit the images in this book, as well as the texts that have influenced the authors here. Please contact the Veterans Book Project about any unintentionally omitted credits.

©2012 Veterans Book Project & Monica Haller
L. Nickerson (Nick) is retired from the U.S. Army. He has been stationed in Germany, El Paso, TX and Lawton, OK and was deployed to Kuwait and Iraq in 2002. Nick currently lives in Kenosha, WI where he studies studio art at University of Wisconsin-Parkside.