

STC student, veteran featured on CNN

(courtesy: <http://news.southtexascollege.edu/?cat=7>)



South Texas College student and Iraqi veteran Rey Leal Jr. is featured on CNN's web site in a piece called "Facing enemy fire from behind the lens." The piece profiles the prolific images captured by Leal during his tours in Iraq. Having served in the Marine Corps as an infantryman from 2004 to 2008, he witnessed some of the heaviest fighting during Operation Iraqi Freedom and captured the behind the scenes moments that ordinary Americans rarely see.

"By the time I joined the Marine Corp, I always had my camera with me," he said. "When you look at the news, when you look at newspapers, you always see not the worst, but you always see the action. You never see the calm before the storm. A lot of the stuff I did was not actual combat, it was just the stuff we did; the down time, the stuff you never see.

"I'm always careful to not want to romanticize anything because war is not something to be romanticized; war is ugly, in the end," Leal said in the piece. "And sometimes you need a person that's gone through it to tell you, this is real life. So if a photographer is there and he's documenting Iwo Jima, Guadalcanal, it's very easy to forget that he's not going to his rifle; the enemy isn't not gonna shoot him. The only reason we know, the only reason we have these iconic images is guys like that; their job was to document and they took their jobs seriously. And even in the face of extreme danger, they still did their job and they did it well. And they are dodging bullets, dodging mortars, taking that photo. Not for fame, not for fortune, but because the people back home need to see this."

The profile of Leal can be found at

<http://www.cnn.com/video/#/video/us/2010/05/26/military.photographer.leal.cnn?iref=allsearch>.

And in the mean time, Leal is working to make a better life for him and his family.

"Veterans who come back home not only bring with them unique experiences and memories from the battle field, but they also return with a strong commitment to continue serving their fellow man," he explained. "It took me a while to address my issues with PTSD once I had been discharged, but once I looked for help, I realized that going to college was the only way to get ahead in life. For me, earning my degree and working hard is the best way to continue serving my country and honor my fallen brothers. The men I served with in Iraq, like my squad leader Sgt. Kirk, who didn't make it back are my inspiration. They never got the chance to do what I'm doing now so I feel like I owe it to them to succeed."

Leal has been studying chemistry at STC and plans to transfer to The University of Texas-Pan American next year to earn a bachelor's degree in environmental science. He is also very active in campus life, which gives him a chance to build on his commitment to service.

“I think it's important to get our youth excited about scientific discovery, and this is one of the reasons I joined STC's Pecan Campus Chemistry Club. Our student organization travels to elementary schools to perform science demos to spark children's interest in science, and I am proud to be able to teach these students about the value of education,” Leal said.

“I am also the president of STC's Veteran's Association. We're actively involved in serving our community and fellow veterans,” he explained. “In fact, we started a scholarship fund for qualifying veteran students. It all started about a year ago, when I was looking for a way to give back to other vets. I couldn't figure out what type of project or initiative would have the most impact. The answer came to me after I led a march to San Antonio with a friend of mine, Jesus Bocanegra, to help raise awareness about the health care needs of veterans in the Valley. During the march, we received so many donations from that we decided to put the extra funds to good use by creating a scholarship for veterans at STC.”