

Prisoner of War  
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Tif Holmes (U.S. Army)



Composite Photograph with Digital Drawing (2013), Courtesy Tif Holmes

## Description:

*Prisoner of War* (2013) is a composite image that is very personal to my own military experience and yet encapsulates a shared suffering within the veteran community: the internal (and oft times silent) costs of war and military experience. The black shadow-figure standing behind the soldier in the image represents any combination of a multitude of captors, physical and mental, that keep veterans prisoner: shame, regret, fear, intimidation, anger, depression, PTSD, psychological responses to physical wounds and limitations, physical beings, or the military institution itself—the list will vary from veteran to veteran, but the concept remains that something or someone keeps us prisoner beyond the battlefield. On my own very personal level, it represents a physical being—a comrade—who betrayed my trust and sexually assaulted me repeatedly during my military service.

The gun represents violence: captor against veteran, veteran against others, and veteran against self in a perpetual cycle of fear and manipulation. The shadow-figure's hand covers the soldier's mouth representing the veteran's silence, enforced by the captor. The flag represents the veteran's pure and honorable conviction to serve, though that conviction is soiled by the atrocities of war and the harsh reality of military culture; therefore, the flag does not extend fully across the image behind the shadow-figure. Instead, we see only dirt and grime behind the captor. Lastly, and on a more personal note, the image of the veteran is actually a blending of my own Basic Combat Training photo with an image of my

perpetrator. This is to illustrate how entangled we become with our captors, how we continue working with them (physically and mentally), how we actually try to reckon with them and negotiate with them in desperate attempts to survive. We try to out-think them, and even to understand them so that we might answer the question we all inevitably ask: "Why?"—That entanglement is the most threatening and destructive captor of all.