

FIGHTING FOR LIFE

PRESS KIT

From two-time Academy Award® winning filmmaker Terry Sanders

*When the battle ends,
their fight begins.*

FIGHTING FOR LIFE



A SANDERS & MOCK / AMERICAN FILM FOUNDATION PRODUCTION
"FIGHTING FOR LIFE" a film by TERRY SANDERS EXECUTIVE PRODUCER TAMMY ALVAREZ
MUSIC BY SCOTT MICHAEL FORD EDITOR BRIAN JOHNSON & ANNE STEIN
PHOTOGRAPHERS ERIK DAARSTAD & BUDDY SQUIRES DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY JENNIFER GLOS
WRITTEN BY TERRY SANDERS & CHRISTINE WISER PRODUCED BY TERRY SANDERS

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www.fightingforlifethemovie.com

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“Fighting for Life”

A Film by Two-Time Academy Award Winning Filmmaker Terry Sanders

Synopsis

“Fighting for Life” is a powerful and emotional feature documentary film, a real-life “MASH” for our times, the story of doctors and nurses fighting on the frontlines in the battle for life, interweaving three stories:

- Military doctors, nurses and medics, working with compassion, skill and dedication in the vortex of the Iraq War.
- Wounded soldiers and marines reacting with courage, dignity and determination to survive and to heal.
- Students at USU, the “West Point” of military medicine, on their journey toward becoming career military physicians.

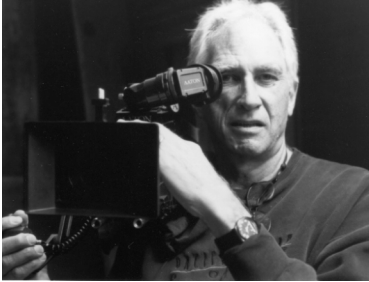
The film also follows 21 year-old Army Specialist Crystal Davis, from Iraq to Germany, and to Walter Reed Hospital in Washington DC, as she fights to recover and “bounce back” from the loss of a leg from an IED blast. The song, “No Surrender”—Bruce Springsteen’s haunting elegy of compassion and determination—plays over Crystal in the poignant last scene of the film.

The filmmakers had extraordinary access to combat support hospitals in Iraq, to medevac flights with wounded soldiers, and to military hospitals in Germany and the United States.

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Director’s Statement



I started out to make a film about the “West Point” of military medicine, USU in Bethesda, “the best medical school no one’s ever heard of,” as its students call it. It was to be an in-depth portrait of this very special place, which has trained over 25% of active duty military physicians serving today. The film was to explore why, in spite of the school’s great value, excellence and reputation, Congress and the Department of Defense kept trying to close it. But the Iraq War intervened, and the film grew until

it became an odyssey through the world of military medicine in a time of war, a film combining elements of “MASH” and “Top Gun.”

Over a two year period, my small crew -- Erik Daarstad, Buddy Squires, Bruce Nolte, Jennifer Glos -- and I filmed with HD cameras in a combat hospital in the center of Iraq, on giant C-141 and C-17 planes outfitted as flying intensive care units, and in military hospitals in Germany and the U.S.

We were privileged to have virtually unlimited access to the entire spectrum of patient care, from the helicopter arrivals of wounded from battlefields in Iraq, to rehab at Walter Reed and the National Naval Medical Center in Washington and Bethesda.

We were also privileged to be trusted to share and film the deep emotions of the military doctors and nurses we met, many of whom were experiencing intense compassion fatigue after years of 80 hour work-weeks, caring for thousands of war wounded patients.

And finally, we were privileged to meet many of the wounded, including Iraqi wounded, to get to know their stories and their feelings, as they coped, both physically and emotionally with their situations—especially emotionally—for as one military doctor says in the film, “There’s nothing normal about war. There’s nothing normal about losing a limb or seeing your best friend die.”

For me, “**Fighting For Life**” is a portrait of the compassion, skill, dedication and bravery of military doctors and nurses, and the courage, dignity and determination of the wounded to survive, to heal, and, in the words of Army Specialist Crystal Davis, severely injured in Iraq by an IED, to “bounce back.”

It is also a meditation on war, and a call to action to never forget the wounded, to commit ourselves to their support now, tomorrow, and far into the future.

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Army Spc. Crystal Davis

“I’ve always been self-confident,” says Army Spc. Crystal Davis, “but now I’m actually more self-confident -- I guess because I’m still alive.”

The 21 year old from Camden, South Carolina, was in a convoy in Ramadi, Iraq, behind the wheel of a truck, when an IED blew up and severed her right leg below the knee. It also severely damaged her left leg and left her bleeding to death. A medic stopped the blood loss and Crystal was helicoptered to a Combat Support Hospital for the first of many operations on her journey from Iraq to Germany to Walter Reed hospital in Washington.

In Ward 57 at Walter Reed, she found herself surrounded by others “going through the same stuff,” though many were much worse off. Crystal’s right leg was fitted with a prosthesis and her left leg was surrounded in a “halo” to keep splintered bones in place until they, along with muscles and nerves, could heal.

Crystal’s Dad, Jimmy, dropped everything when the call came that his daughter had been injured, and he has devoted himself completely to his daughter’s support and care. “I always thought she’d be pushing me around in a wheel chair,” Jimmy says. “Now, I’m pushing her.”

“Fighting For Life” captures the emotion and drama of Crystal coming in by helicopter to the Air Force hospital in Balad and stays with her as she is stabilized in the ER and talks on the phone to Stan, her Marine brother, and then as she is air-lifted to the Army hospital in Landstuhl Germany. The film follows her journey to the U.S. and is there at Walter Reed at the moment of Crystal’s tearful reunion with her family and then through the various stages of her slow, courageous, determined recovery.

“It’s all a mind game,” says Crystal. “If you let it get the best of you, you won’t survive.”

Crystal’s favorite stuffed animal is Tigger, the “Winnie the Pooh” character. “He’s a lifelong friend,” she says. Now she loves him even more because, “he bounces, and he bounces right back -- and that’s what I’m doing, I’m bouncing back.”

As for her future, Crystal says, “When I signed up, I signed up to make the Army a career. And I’m not letting this stop me.”

Film Credits

Opening Titles

American Film Foundation Presents

A Film by Terry Sanders

FIGHTING FOR LIFE

Closing Titles

Produced & Directed By

Terry Sanders

Written By

Terry Sanders & Christine Wisner

Co-Produced By

Jennifer Glos

Photographed By

Erik Daarstad
Buddy Squires

Edited By

Brian Johnson
Anne Stein

Music By

Scott Michael Ford

Executive Producer

Tammy Alvarez

Production Coordinator & Sound Recordist

Bruce Nolte

Additional Photography

Eric Martin

Assistant Director in Germany

Brittany Sanders

Production Assistants

Mark Betancourt
Amy Hendrick

Technical Consultants

Col Davis G. Burris, MD, USA
Stanley L. Minken, MD
Norman M. Rich, MD, FACS, DMCC
VAdm James A. Zimble, MD, USN (Ret.)

Online Edit & Color Correction

Christopher Gray Post Production
Kit Gray & Danielle Elliott

Post Production Consultant

Keith Robinson

Post Production Sound

Mercury Sound Studios
Samuel Lehmer, Mixer
Cameron Steenhagen, Dialogue Editor
David Ball, Effects Editor

Music Coordinator

Joe Paganelli

Music Consultant

Curt Sobel

Vocal Artist

Ceci Castelblanco

Fallujah, Iraq footage:

Courtesy CNN

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For the Use of His Song
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Written & Published by Bruce Springsteen (ASCAP)

And Rahim Alhaj
for the Use of Excerpts from “Dream”
from “Iraq Music in a Time of War”

Film Credits

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Johnson & Johnson Healthcare Systems
Northrop Grumman Corporation
Triwest Healthcare Alliance
Frederic G. Sanford, RADM, MC USN (Ret.)
USU Surgical Associates

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Dedicated to the medical personnel of the
United States Armed Forces

And to the tens of thousands of soldiers
wounded in Iraq and Afghanistan.