

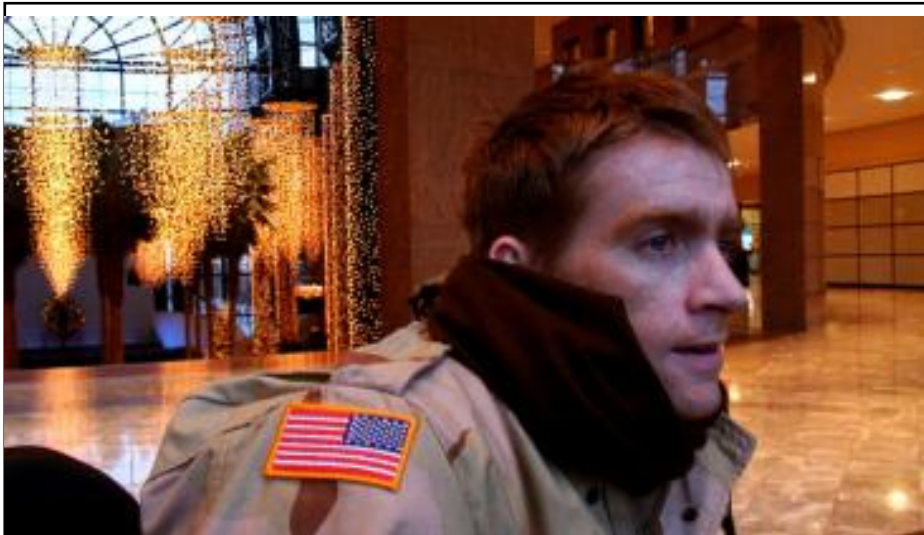
‘Body of War’ Confronts Grisly Realities of U.S. War Mistakes in Iraq

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CHICAGO – They are invisible in the current war, which has lasted longer than World War II. It’s the soldier in Iraq who fights on – in the face of public apathy at home – and who carries out the decisions of an administration that has chosen to hide their caskets in death.



Tomas Young visits Ground Zero in “Body of War”.
Photo credit: Ellen Spiro, Mobilus Media

The face of this soldier is represented in the new documentary “Body of War,” which is produced and directed by former talk-show host Phil Donahue. He’s now an activist and filmmaker.

Donahue aims his camera at two subjects: the U.S. Congress events in Oct. 2002 (recounting the vote that gave the Bush administration the authorization to invade Iraq) and the journey of American soldier Tomas Young.

He’s paralyzed from the chest down after being injured in the early days of the war, which is now at five years and counting.

Using a narrative technique that intertwines the two stories, the camera follows Young from his hospital release after a scant rehabilitation period. He’s embraced by a courageous fiancée who marries him and stands by him while he starts on a path of activism against the war.



Tomas Young in the capitol building in Washington, D.C. for “Body of War”.
Photo credit: Kevin McKinney, Mobilus Media

This soldier’s quest is countered with a flashback to the little-seen war debate from Oct. 2002 where a Republican war-drum cacophony drowns out the reasonable and cautious voices of the opposition in anticipation of a vote that in retrospect changed everything in recent U.S. history.

Donahue portrays Young as an earnest individual who’s, broken physically and psychologically through his injuries and subsequent loss of body function.

While his activism against the war seems tentative, it’s coupled with the emotional roller coaster of hospital bureaucracy, sheer dependence on others to function and the indignities of drug dependency. His mission to help end the war takes its toll on his mind, his energies and ultimately his marriage.

Cut back to the Senate chambers and a passionate speech by the longest-serving senator in history: 85-year-old Robert Byrd of West Virginia.

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He participated in legislating the purposeless war in Vietnam and practically begged his colleagues not to be swayed by the administration on a “war based on falsehoods”. As the film ably points out, virtually all the perspectives offered in opposition of the resolution have come to pass including the death, cost and waste.

The roll call of the senators concludes with only a small percentage voting against the resolution. The film concludes with the two resisters – Tomas Young and Robert Byrd – meeting to speak of their common objection to the continuing war.

The feeble older senator and the wheelchair-bound veteran seem the unlikeliest force to stop anything much less entrenched warfare. Still, the hope in this vital film is that their voices will be raised and they will fight on until their mission is accomplished and the Iraq war is history.

“Body of War” opened on May 16, 2008. In Chicago, the film plays at Landmark’s Century Centre Cinema.



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