



Skills learned from military service translate in civilian life to a rigging career

Troops of Alpha Company 1st Battalion, 8th Infantry Regiment, 3rd BCT, 4th Infantry Division conduct patrols in the city of Balad, Iraq, located in the Sunni Triangle in 2003. In this photo Ian Lilly is on the right.

MILITARY SERVICE HAS ALWAYS BEEN in my family’s DNA. My father was retired Navy, grandfather was retired Navy, and so on. I knew from the start I wanted to do something different with my military service.

The year was 2001, I was in my senior year of high school. I had been staying with my dear friends, Conor and Jeremy Philbin, at the time. I had no idea what they did for a living. It was talked about frequently amongst the family, I simply didn’t understand. One evening after work I was sitting on their couch watching TV. They said to me, “You wanna make a quick \$200 bucks tonight?” With a confused look I said

“Who doesn’t?” “Then come with me,” they replied. Before I knew it, I was backstage at the XL Center Hartford, CT, at the U2 concert during their *Elevation* tour. I was awestruck with the production; I couldn’t believe I was actually backstage with the talent and a member of the crew responsible for load out! I jokingly thought to myself, “This is going to take a month to get this gear out of here. \$200 bucks—I just got set up for failure.” Five hours later, wheels were rolling and I was completely amazed. It was so impressive how fluidly all of the department worked together to get the show out of the building and on the road.

A few months later, I raised my right

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hand to defend my country against enemies foreign and domestic. I enlisted for active duty in the United States Army Infantry and was shipped off to basic training at Fort Benning, GA, and entered the Infantry Training Brigade. The training pushed all of us to our mental and physical limits, then demanded more. The training focused on how much pain could we take, how much we could handle; they were there to break us and prepare us for the most hazardous



Taking a break in front of the Lincoln Memorial between tower rigging for the line arrays that spanned the Mall from the Lincoln Memorial to the Capitol plus all trussing above the stage at the Lincoln Memorial for President Obama's 2008 Presidential Inauguration.

environments the world had to offer.

During basic training, a mere month or so in, the terrorist attacks at The World Trade Center, the Pentagon, and Shanksville, PA on 9/11 were upon us. That morning, we began our training in chemical warfare. We were given extra rations for being a good training cycle (it was part of the trap), we entered the room, removed our protective masks and began to inhale the CS gas. It was awful, my lungs were on fire as if needles entered every pore of my body. We began to vomit slipping in each other's filth, falling to the floor, unable to breath. Our drill sergeants would grab us by the leg and drag us across the floor like a mop. It felt like we were choking to death as we were



The American Legion Post 180 in Lebanon, CT celebrated Veterans Day with the community while honoring and memorializing those who have sacrificed for this great nation. Morgan Himmelstein, 101, served in WW II with the 384th Bomb Group stationed at Grafton Underwood in England pictured with Ian Lilly.

ordered to recite the oath that would define us as soldiers, "The Infantryman's Creed." Moments later the hijackers had carried out their suicide attacks in the US. A sudden silence fell over the drill sergeants while they were shoving us into walls like cattle. Then, the yelling stopped and the chamber doors opened and we crawled out of the building as if we were on fire. That was the moment our drill sergeants instructed us of the terrorist attacks and that the world had changed forever. The training mindset had officially checked out, and now, we were going to war, the reality of hell had now begun. We entered that symbolic gas chamber on the morning of September 11, 2001, passing through it as a gateway leaving behind the world we once knew and exited that room as warriors into a different world. The CS gas washed away our innocence and brought us forward to our destiny: war. The environment went from a nightmare, to hell on earth. Our drill sergeants bellowed at us, while saliva dripped off their chins, some of us would not return from this and, the training we received from our drill sergeants might possibly be the last we had before committing to war. My graduating class was the last class of the "Be All That You Can Be" generation. We would carry that legacy throughout our careers. Our drill sergeants were absolutely right.

In 2003, I was standing on the Kuwait border looking into the desert of Iraq with my brothers in arms. We wrote our last will and testament on a piece of an MRE box, tucked that document into the plate carrier portion of our body armor and took an oath to each other to let our families know the truth in the event of our demise. It seemed like the logical thing to do at the moment. We were in our mid-twenties making decisions people should never have to make. Our theatre of operation would become known as the Sunni Triangle. I was a part of the invasion element into Iraq in 2003. I was a mechanized infantry soldier with the 1st Battalion, 8th Infantry Regiment, 3rd BCT, 4th Infantry Division from Fort Carson, CO.

We returned from Iraq in 2004, after 12



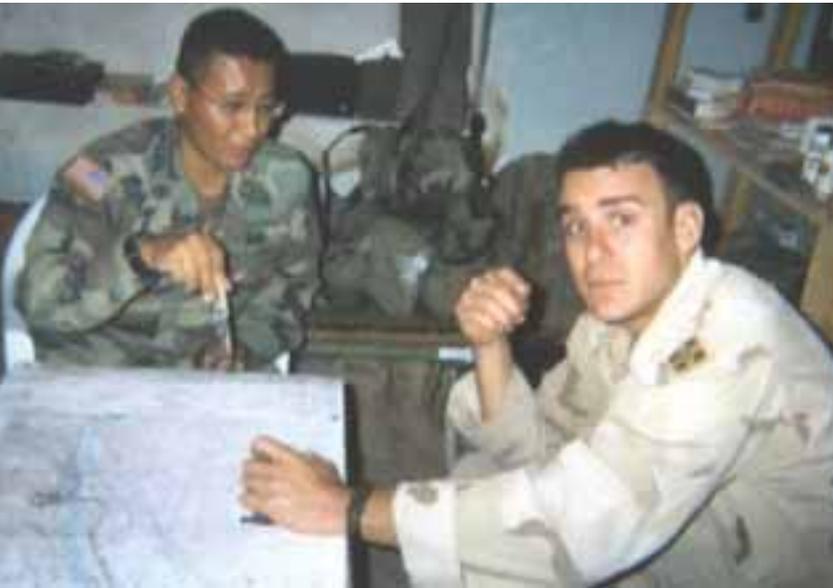
Ian Lilly working the load-in for an outdoor concert venue.

months and one day, where we had fought long and hard. We witnessed the worst humanity has to offer, and the best in all of us. We buried our brothers and tried to give ourselves some type of closure. It was time for me to move on.

“This [ETCP] program provides the educational pathway of our industry.”

Transition was extremely difficult, there was no assistance at all in 2004; you went through out-processing, you received a report of separation, and you were done. The rest you had to figure out on your own. I was a high school graduate with a Combat Infantry Badge.

I fell flat on my face, hard, during my career search, nothing had worked out. I turned back to stagecraft—and learned decades later it to be the best decision I ever made—it changed my life forever and I will



Reviewing reconnaissance intel, performing pre-combat checks, and preparing for night raids against Saddam Hussein's forces and paramilitary factions aligned with Saddam Hussein in 2003.

always be indebted.

I never considered being a stagehand as a career option. I never thought becoming a stagehand would have potential long-term employment opportunities, entertainment is what you make of it. I reached out to IATSE Local 84 who put me back to work when no one else would. IATSE Local 84 gave me the job skills to transition back into civilian life. I started out pushing boxes, respectfully, like everyone should. I would look up and hear the comraderies of the riggers yelling profanities at each other tossing lines and climbing as high as they could. I knew that was where I was supposed to be. Earning the trust and respect of my peers, I was finally given an opportunity to rig and that is exactly what I did. This was an opportunity where the skills I had learned in the Army would carry into the civilian sector, fully. I soaked it up, I was now mastering my new weapon systems—rigging systems. The values instilled in me by the Army were part of what I carried into entertainment rigging as I developed myself as a professional within the industry. When you have full working, intimate knowledge of your weapon system, you fully recognize the hazards when the weapon system is improperly maintained and/or employed. The unintended consequences attached to that system, when you fail to act, results in catastrophic failure. These values and the understanding of the potential unintended consequences during war and humanitarian relief transcribe, for me, into entertainment rigging—when a rigging system isn't inspected properly—it can lead to failure that can result in the death of others. As entertainment riggers within our industry it is our moral obligation, a Hippocratic Oath if you will, to respect the gear we use; understand the strengths, limitations, threshold values; and employ the gear properly always putting those around us before ourselves.

The riggers who took me up my first time were RJ Fields (Local 84), Al Lopez (Local 84), and Tanya Thompson (Local 74 and Local 1). I found my new calling as an entertainment rigger—and to this day with no regrets. I can never thank them enough for that positive learning experience and opportunity to shine.

Along my journey which continues today, I have met an enormous amount of veterans in the entertainment industry. It's amazing and comforting to see the number of veterans within our industry. Veteran Duncan MacPherson, Army field artillery and a former drill sergeant, is one who stands out in my mind, teaching me how to handle the rigors of transition through his own success and failures. It was always a treat to work with him and I looked forward to the opportunity to work on the same calls. Now he tours and I occasionally see him online; he is a good soul and I am sure his tour is blessed to have him on the crew.

I will always be indebted to IATSE Local 84 for the opportunity I was given to learn and excel.

When I first heard about the Entertainment Technician Certification Program (ETCP), I was highly motivated to learn and study! A program designed and put in place specifically for the individuals in our industry. An internationally recognizable way for personal development that provides tangible documentation to reflect our training, knowledge, skills, and abilities. Providing measurable competencies, educating our employers to validate competitive wages as we construct and operate their productions. The ETCP certification program instills trust in our employers and our fellow coworkers. Many of us work in multiple venues and meet people for the first time continuously. These certifications tell our newly met coworkers that they can rely on us; we are not an average worker skating by at the minimum requirement. This program conveys to the employer that the individual cares enough about themselves, they will go above and beyond what is necessary to exceed the minimum requirements of the contract. These certifications give the employer confidence, trust, and closure between the two parties. This program provides the educational pathway of our industry.

For me, the ETCP program in a sense was vindication for all of the climbing, pulling, and critical thinking skills to solve problems with sometimes unrealistic deadlines, the sleepless nights during back to back load ins and outs, while maintaining the physical stamina required to make the show go on. This certification exemplifies each of our technical disciplines and the skills required to complete the task at hand. It is documentation that makes our organizations more marketable in increasingly competitive labor markets. Those who choose not to become ETCP certified are only cheating themselves, their coworkers, the industry, and, their respective employer who establishes the contract.

I want to send a special thank you to the individuals and firms who have made the ETCP program possible. I am certain it was an uphill battle from the start for everyone—thank you for continuing that fight for the betterment of the industry and the individuals who choose to

do better themselves. It is very easy to sit back, do nothing, and contradict the accomplishments of others. The contributors that worked to make this program possible, and continue to grow the program, reflect exceptional character upon themselves, the industry, and set the example for everyone to follow. What the ETCP program organizers have accomplished probably began as a thankless job with much resistance and opposition. In my opinion, this industry should thank you for the foundation you have built for us. In the words of Steven Tyler and Aerosmith: "Life's a Journey not a destination."



Just another day at the office for Ian Lilly.

Get on board with ETCP: encourage those studying for the examinations, learn from the certificate holders around you, and help spread the word of the value of certification. We are all stronger together.

Steadfast and Loyal. ■

As I continue this journey, I want to thank Past National Vice Commander of the American Legion Paul Spedaliere, Director of Constituent Services Jody Trestman, Veterans District Aide Sherri Vogt, Past President of IATSE Local 84 Ken Trestman, College Professor Mary Jean Thornton, and Congresswoman Elizabeth Esty for seeing something in me that I couldn't see and creating opportunities that I never knew were available. Their encouragement and support has taken me further than I thought was possible.



Ian Lilly is a member of IATSE Local 84 in West Hartford, CT. He was a part of the rigging team with IATSE Local 22 for President Obama's first inauguration. Ian served as a Veteran District Aid for Congresswoman Elizabeth Esty advocating for disabled veterans against the challenges within the Veteran's Administration. Ian currently works as an entertainment rigger with IATSE Local 84, Foxwoods Casino and Resort, and Saint Joseph University. He is finishing his Bachelor's degree in Manufacturing Management with a minor in Business Administration through Goodwin University; after graduation Ian will continue with his Master's in Business Administration at the University of Connecticut.



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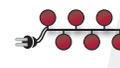
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