

**“Inviting All Oklahoma Military Veterans to Experience the *Powerful Force* of Artistic Expression”**

**OKLAHOMA CITY --** *FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE* - - As snow and sleet give way to fields of wildflowers and eternal sunshine . . . something else, just as timely and welcoming, is on the horizon for Oklahoma’s military veterans. The Military Experience & the Arts Symposium, hosted at Cameron University in Lawton, scheduled for Thursday, May 14 through Sunday, May 17 is an opportunity to allow artistic inclinations to blossom through more than 70 workshops related to writing, poetry, filmmaking, music, papermaking and performance art. Veterans from Oklahoma, and surrounding states, are invited to register for the educational art symposium – which includes support with lodging, meals, transportation, post-traumatic stress, and most significantly, an open venue for social exchange among fellow veterans of every generation and branch of service. Funding and/or Support of this event is partially provided by the Lawton Fort Sill Chamber of Commerce Hotel/Motel Tax Fund. The Military Experience & the Arts (MEA), is a national 501(C) 3 non-profit organization dedicated to serving military veterans and the artistic experience primarily through honoring creative expression. The Lawton MEA symposium marks the second in the nation, the first being held at Eastern Kentucky University in 2012. Presenters include professional writers and authors, actors, dance troupes, documentary filmmakers – and art therapists, who work closely with veterans, particularly utilizing art as a means to process the internal complexities of war and combat, including the harsher aspects of serving in the military. Benjamin Patton, filmmaker, author, developmental psychologist and the youngest grandson of World War II’s infamous General George S. Patton Jr., will be on-hand educating veterans on the finer points of documentary filmmaking, in a format created to assist with processing traumatic, war-related experiences. Patton will also share excerpts from his book, “Growing Up Patton: Heroes, History and Family Wisdom.”

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“I grew up with a very strong sense of service, particularly with regard to military personnel and uniformed personnel,” Patton said. “We really need to make an effort to acknowledge the service of those who, as my dad used to say, ‘missed a meal or heard a shot fired in anger.’ We do what we can to give back to that community and make their lives as fulfilling and rich as possible.

“My main focus right now is the work I’m doing for the Patton Veterans Project, which is to serve the military community, you might say, in a different way; by providing a therapeutic intervention involving filmmaking to help veterans cope with service-related stress . . . and their families,” Patton said. More information can be found at <http://www.iwastherefilms.org/>

Theater actor and performance artist, Doug Berky, in a similar fashion to Patton, grew up on military bases for most of his life, as his father spent 20 years in the Air Force. Berky will take the stage at MEA Oklahoma utilizing universally-themed, ancient stories to address veterans and military families. “The ‘Tiger’s Whisker’ is an ancient story from Korea. It’s about a woman’s journey whose husband comes home from war and her trying to find the silver bullet that will help him deal with the trauma he suffered in that experience,” Berky said. Additional story selections can be found at: <http://www.dougberkytheatre.com/>

Roman Baca, a dancer, choreographer and former U.S. Marine is on the symposium schedule as well. Baca is the artistic director of Exit 12, a New York City based, dance and performing arts company. Exit 12 is well known internationally for communicating complex military issues and experiences to audiences through movement and expression. For additional background on Exit 12, log-on to <http://exit12danceco.com/>

Popular Oklahoma Arts Council teaching artist and Vietnam veteran Albert Gray Eagle is on the roster to perform music and teach authentic flute-making techniques throughout the entire symposium. “I hope if it is just one person I can reach and give hope to . . . I am blessed to allow that to go through,” Gray Eagle said. “If you can help someone, by all means, that is your duty as a human being.”

Veterans can access additional information about the upcoming Oklahoma MEA symposium, register for the event, and read volumes of veteran-produced poetry and prose at [www.militaryexperience.org](http://www.militaryexperience.org). The symposium is open to veterans, military families, active duty service members and reservists of every branch, age and generation.

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**About MEA**: **Military Experience & the Arts (MEA) is a national 501(C) 3 non-profit organization dedicated to serving military veterans and the artistic experience primarily through honoring creative expression in writing, poetry, music and the performing and visual arts.**

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