



War. Rugby

FRANCESCO LEVATO

War Rug

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The text of this book is composed in Times Roman, a serif typeface commissioned by the British newspaper, *The Times*, in 1931, designed by Stanley Morison and Victor Lardent at the English branch of Monotype.

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“Francesco Levato’s powerful documentary, *War Rug*—like Eliot Weinberger’s *What I heard about Iraq* before it—detains the language of the perpetrators of global military aggression and redeploys it to indict them. From J.C. Penny catalog copy to counterintelligence manuals and autopsy reports, *War Rug* is a fierce yet unfortunate reminder of the absolute horrors of our age.” —Mark Nowak, author of *Coal Mountain Elementary*

W A R R U G

Francesco Levato

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for Lauren

C O N T E N T S

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A C K N O W L E D G E M E N T S

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With deepest love to my wife Lauren.

A B O U T T H I S E B O O K

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P R E F A C E

War Rug is a work of documentary poetics in the form of a book length poem. Multiple interwoven narratives explore life within zones of conflict as viewed through the lens of current warfare. The narratives range from passages inspired by journal entries, firsthand accounts, and news reports to poetic constructs collaged from military doctrine, Freedom of Information Act released government documents (like CIA interrogation manuals, and detainee autopsy reports), and numerous other sources.

W A R R U G

Flash a body reduced to beads of glass

fused in sand at the blast point's edge.

Filigree

the lace of an exposed cheek
over tooth and jaw;

impossibly white.

Pause the space between light

and the rush of sound that crushes breath
from Kevlar and rib;

a moment of clarity

before the market erupts, before
the Humvee pitches, then drops to its side.

Afterimage

a thickening of scar tissue, the absence
of expression, of an eardrum,

of an iris.

[Definitions

Enucleation: Complete surgical removal of the eyeball.

Evisceration: Surgical removal of the contents of the eyeball with retention of the sclera or cornea and sclera.

Exenteration: Surgical removal of all the eyeball contents which may include the removal of the eyelids.

Ocular Prosthesis: A plastic or glass fabricated eye that replaces volume of the enucleated eye socket.]

It begins with a photograph and a rug; that so much can be woven into both, one in dyed wool, the other scar tissue against the undisturbed surface of her hand. She is in white, he a dress uniform, three-quarter view. The eye facing the camera is glass. [1 »]

The rug is tribal, meant for prayer. It is one of the few things I kept. They say the weaving of bombs into its borders, machine guns and tanks began during the Russian occupation; now the images are of planes en route, buildings on fire, the flag — American. [2 »]

How do you move 1,000 pounds of concrete,
separate bodies from debris,
twisted as steel bar
at the exposed edge of a wound;

in the expanse of aftermath, broken pieces
a uniform shade of red,

how do you know your own;

how do you reconcile

the hand held is no longer attached, phantom pain
is the body missing limb, not the reverse;

that you still wake in your clothing
between adrenaline and exhaustion,

that the year begins as it ended, will end
as it began?

The T-shirt reads *Kill 'em all. Let God sort 'em out*; skull on black cotton, 3XL. They say 20,000 to 100,000 were killed, the exact number in dispute. What makes this a crusade, what number a massacre? In 1209 AD crusaders asked how to tell Catholics from heretics—the response, from the Latin, *Kill them all. God—will know his own.* [3 »]

[IMAGE:

Relatives of the victims with corpses
outside Baghdad's al-Kindi hospital.]

[Emergency Condition Responses

Code Green: cut hand, scrape, broken arm, nausea, and headache.

Code Yellow: decreased level of consciousness, chest pain, unconsciousness for unknown reason, loss of feeling/motor skills in an extremity.

Code Red: penetrating trauma to the torso, severe loss of blood, severe head injury, and chest pain followed by unconsciousness.

Code Blue: no breathing/no heartbeat.

Code Black: Rigor mortis, Post mortem lividity, decapitation, decomposition, etc.]

Black the ash from a burning car

 the color of lung tissue, of sutures,
dried blood where glass

 made ribbons of skin;

it is what deepens over ribcage,
tells of fracture, of the grind

 of bone against bone;

it is a body wrapped in cellophane,
packed in ice, the bag

 in which it is zippered,

the color of digging to the height of a man,
of clawing one's face, that of soil

 held tightly in hand.

[4 »]

[CARTRIDGE, 7.62MM, ARMOR PIERCING

used in rifles and machine guns against personnel
and light armored or unarmored targets;

a hollow cinder block, both sides of a car body,

internal walls, partitions, plaster, floors, ceilings,
office furniture, home appliances,

and bedding can be easily penetrated.]

[5 »]

Bedding. Penetrated. The Bushmaster Chain Gun™ meets the warfighter's needs. The brochure tells that it is more flexible, reliable than others; among its attributes—scaleable lethality.

Again black; the background of a magazine ad, glossy stock. It reads *Over 120 models with one thing in common... inspired by the human hand*. The image is of fingers curled around nothing, suggesting the grip of a gun. Is it the gloss, the implied wetness that is allure? Or the fingers on the verge of tightening—the spasm that would follow.

Ten paces from this doorway
a hollow of stone
not so much shelter

as a wall against which
to flatten my back
continue to count

a breath of a pause, six round burst
two second hold, one
single crack

and twenty more paces

from this wall to his body,
his body to doorway, my back
to that wall.

[Definitions

Penetration: The tissue through which the projectile passes, and which it disrupts or destroys.

Permanent Cavity: The volume of space once occupied by tissue that has been destroyed by the passage of the projectile.

Fragmentation: Projectile pieces or secondary fragments of bone which are impelled outward from the permanent cavity and may sever muscle tissues, blood vessels, etc.]

[6 »]

She knows this stain its name softer
than shelter

 than the word for concrete
in her native tongue,
 its edge still ragged
 where meat was pressed raw
into blast-proof walls.

Is there language for this

 for a roof that should have held
as bombs fell, a whistle from within

how stillness comes with understanding
this returning
 to such a place

there is a word
it means inhabited means haunted.

[BAGHDAD, IRAQ

The two American “smart” bombs worked perfectly,
striking

what the Pentagon had identified as an Iraqi
command and control center during the 1991 Gulf War.

The 2,000-pound laser-guided bombs burrowed
through 10 feet of hardened concrete

and detonated,

punching a gaping hole in the Amiriyah bomb shelter

—and incinerating 408 Iraqi civilians.]

Inhabited. Haunted. The word in Arabic is *maskoon*. It speaks of both the living and the dead; it is uncertainty, lacks clarity like that of smart when applied to bomb, like collateral as in damage, as incidental—as insignificant.

I can feel the ground beneath me, sense thirst
in the dust that clings to my hands,

in the upturned lip
of a sunbaked crack,

can feel the head of my son
against chest
smell his unwashed hair

how it mixes with sweat
on the tip of my tongue.

The bag allows this;

blacks out vision but lets pass sound

a laceration of wind
over razor-tipped wire,

boots on the perimeter, my son's breath
as it quickens,
nylon chafed against Kevlar
as rifle
is raised once more above head.

[Definitions

Facial trauma: any injury of the face and upper jaw bone.

Symptoms: Difficulty breathing through the nose due to swelling and bleeding; changes in sensation and feeling over the face; swelling around the eyes may cause vision problems; double vision;

missing teeth.]

If a photograph conveyed scent
this would be of morning, burning plastic,
kerosene and hair

it would be the hint of stale breath,
of arousal

cold sweat;

if sound the crack of gunfire

something wet against wall, a body
dropping to the floor

it would be muffled

a hand over mouth, ragged
like the tearing of cloth;

if tactile the point where bodily fluid
turns viscous

where legs splayed can spread no more

it would have weight when released,
within hours stiffen, succumb

eventually to flame.

[She was 14 years old.

According to a statement by one of the accused,
the soldiers first noticed her at a checkpoint.

On March 12, after playing cards while slugging whisky,
they changed into civvies and burst into Abeer's home.

They killed her mother, father and five-year-old sister
and "took turns" raping Abeer.

Finally, according to the statement, they murdered her,
drenched the bodies with kerosene,
and set them on fire.

Then the GIs grilled chicken wings.]

“Whose house is this?”

a flashlight burns
the back of my eye

his voice as distant as rockets fired
well past curfew

“Do you know these men?”

they could be brothers,
a husband, my son

one lost on the roadside,
the other in bed

“Do you understand?”

in that we still have no power,
my doorframe in splinters, that your boots
have left

their mark on my floor.

[SAMARRA, IRAQ

Using sledgehammers, crowbars, explosives
and armored vehicles, U.S. forces

smashed down the gates of homes
and the doors of workshops and junkyards

to attack the Iraqi resistance that has persisted
despite—]

Breadcrumbs and black cumin seeds
scattered fragments
 of dinner plates, sweet
 pumpkin, crushed mint;

an overthrown table, riot of chairs,
 incongruity of angles in a broken leg

its wood splintered, edge frayed

 like clothing torn from body,
 skin from knees, the raw bisection

where eyebrow meets rifle butt, where forehead
meets floor.

Forward Command Post \$44.99. The catalog tells us *take command of your soldiers from this fully outfitted battlezone*. This 75 piece set includes combat gear, toy weapons, an American flag, and more.

The battlezone is a house, the figurine a toy soldier—rigid as plastic. In what was once a living room are barrels of oil, a machinegun propped on an ammunition box. There are sandbags and mortars, broken walls with bullet holes, burn marks, even blood. *Order now, add gift wrap—supersaver shipping will arrive in time for Christmas.* [7 »]

[Definitions

Lividity: having a discolored, bluish appearance caused by a bruise, congestion of blood vessels, strangulation, etc.]

There is a way in which the body hangs

when muscles no longer resist

when shoulders finally give, pull
from their sockets;

a way it retains memory

like the imprint of a boot, the smell of urine,
that of concrete, and steel,

how legs dangle too freely from knee,

blood pools at the ankles
leaves feet swollen

and black;

how shackled to the ceiling,

in its stillness bears weight.

[AUTOPSY REPORT

The remains are received clad in a white shirt, white pajama type pants, and white undershorts. Feces covers the clothing from the waist down. The temperature of the body

is that of the refrigeration unit.

Autopsy revealed deep bruising of the chest wall,
numerous

displaced rib fractures, bruising on the lungs,
hemorrhage into the mesentery of the small
and large intestine.

Examination of the neck structures revealed
hemorrhage

into the strap muscles and fractures
of the thyroid cartilage and hyoid bone.

According to report provided by the US army CID, the detainee

was shackled to the top of a doorframe with a gag in his mouth
at the time he lost consciousness and became pulseless.

DOD 00329 refers to this case
as “gagged in standing restraint”.]

[8 »]

Standing restraint. The body is hung from wrists after being handcuffed behind back; it is known as *Palestinian hanging*—and there are manuals for this. [\[9 »\]](#)

[IMAGE: Detainee is lying on the ground in the nude.]

[IMAGE: Soldier gives thumbs up to stain on boot.
Stain appears to be blood.]

[10 »]

[Definitions

Exsanguination: to drain of blood; make bloodless;
to bleed to death.]

[NOTIFICATION

Do not hurry, be as natural as possible in speech, manner, and method of delivery.

“The Secretary of the Army has asked me to express his deep regret that your (*relationship; son, daughter, husband, wife; etc.*) (*died/was killed in action*) in (*country/state*) on (*date*)—

when a rocket-propelled grenade struck his Bradley Fighting Vehicle; when their team came under small arms fire while clearing a village; when mortar rounds hit their camp; when their vehicle hit a land mine; when enemy forces ambushed them; when a grenade was thrown near his foot patrol; when he encountered enemy fire; when he was accidentally struck by a tank;

*

[11 »]

when their Kiowa Warrior came under small arms
attack and crashed; from an explosion during breaching
operations; when insurgents attacked their unit with
rockets; while conducting counter-terrorism operations;
during an air assault mission; from injuries suffered
by enemy grenade fire; in a convoy that was attacked
by a suicide—; when he jumped into the Euphrates River
to take a swim, and did not resurface;

*

of injuries sustained from an enemy hand grenade; from enemy indirect fire; when a landmine detonated near his vehicle; while conducting combat operations against enemy forces; when his traffic control point came under mortar attack; when a vehicle struck them; after being shot by an Iraqi army soldier on a coalition base; when a suicide car bomber attacked their vehicle; when terrorists attacked his patrol; as a result—of hostile action;

*

of injuries suffered when their vehicle was struck by a roadside bomb; when an IED detonated near her patrol; when a vehicle approached their unit, and the driver detonated a bomb; when his tank was attacked with an improvised explosive device; when a makeshift bomb exploded near his unit; when an improvised explosive device struck a nearby vehicle; when an improvised explosive device—detonated.

The Secretary extends his deepest sympathy to you and your family in your tragic loss.”]

Should a limb be bent
in quite that way, an ankle

have so extreme a twist

I know
that boot to be mine

it's the way it hangs
from the steering wheel, how
its laces are still tied

that doesn't make sense.

[Definitions

Amputation: The loss or absence of all or part of a limb.

Bilateral: A double amputee. Both legs or both arms.

Disarticulation: An amputation through a joint: the hip, shoulder, knee, ankle, elbow, or wrist.

Prosthesis: An artificial part of the body.

Residual limb: The remaining portion of a limb after amputation, also called the “stump”.]

The technology is considered breakthrough; an ankle that rotates, a foot that can flex. Its internal battery will propel you forward, its steel spring—support your weight.

[Wound Ballistics

The Skull and Brain:

Ballistic wounds of the skull and brain are often grossly destructive—

The cavity formed by a missile in the brain of an intact cranium is of finite size,

partly because brain tissue is forced through regions of less resistance (such as the frontal sinuses)

and partly because of the stretching of the cranium itself.

When the energy delivered is very great, skull bones are actually torn apart
along suture lines.

Fig. 4-34. This casualty was killed when an M43 ball fired by an AK47

blew his skull apart.]

[\[12 »\]](#)

Another photo. It looks to be a face peeled off and tossed in the dirt. And there are others; a head resting near severed leg, someone kneeling as if to position it; a selection of incomplete torsos, the pulp in which they end; and again a boot, this time standing near a pool of blood.

What is the fascination with boots and blood, the image of a lug bottom in reference to body; that what remains is underfoot, like stone wedged between tread—like something to be removed?

The bad thing about shooting them, reads one caption—is that we have to clean it up. [13 »]

It has become ritual this running
to the rooftop

 in search of smoke, divination
in how its column contorts

 writhes up from a point
a little too close.

 What does it say

that from its charcoal stained black
I can tell a neighbor

 gestured wrongly,
asked too many questions,
may have spoke out of turn;

that I am thankful the flames
haven't touched my house, welded fingers
together as I covered my face

that I won't
be one to pick meat from bones,
 sift fragments from cinders
to assemble a whole,

 that all I need
to know of fire
 is unrelated to warmth.

[IMAGE:

A civilian tries to extinguish a flaming van
with a bucket of sand.]

[Definitions

Oblique: a fracture which goes at an angle to the axis.

Comminuted: a fracture of many relatively small fragments.

Spiral: a fracture which runs around the axis of the bone.

Compound: a fracture (also called open) which breaks the skin.]

[IMAGE:

Jassim was returning from his work at an Internet
café in Baghdad,

walking along the sidewalk when a mortar round
suddenly slammed into the road,

spraying deadly shrapnel that shattered
both his legs and sliced into his head and chest.]

[Procedure

- a) one or more screws inserted across the break to hold it.
- b) a steel plate held by screws drilled into the bone.
- c) a long fluted metal pin with holes in it, is driven down the shaft of the bone from one end, with screws then passed through the bone and through a hole in the pin.]

I know this car
 though blackened and bent I sense
the familiar
 in its patchwork repair
its halo of scorch marks, bloodstains
on the backseat

 whose springs had this way
of grating your spine.

 I remember the morning
they packed it to leave

 sweet tea on the burner
its flame tips gone orange
 with the last bottled gas,

how he shaved
by kerosene lamp, how her head-scarf
hid more
 than the back of her neck.

 Three weeks since their photos
left white squares on the wall,
since rockets fell
 in the garden
out back, and their promise
the road
 would be safer than home.

[Two witnesses said they heard a single shot first,
which apparently punctured
the Oldsmobile's radiator, spilling
coolant onto the street about 50 yards from
where the convoy was parked.

As the car continued rolling, the guards opened up
with a barrage of sustained automatic fire.

The car finally came to a stop
about 10 yards from the convoy at a point that,
three hours later,
was marked by blood stains, broken glass
and tufts of brown hair.]

The caption tells of an Iraqi boy, how he peered inside a car that was towed after those inside were killed. The car door is white, blood runs from an open window, opposite the camera the boy looks in. His expression wants for something, maybe connection; a way to tie the stains, the clumps of hair to a tangible form, to something he can touch, something — he can understand.

[IMAGE:

Amala before and after the attack.]

The name means hope. That she survived attests to something—maybe trajectory, the angle of a single piece of shrapnel, or the influence of a gaseous medium, like air; maybe it was the turn of her face, her downcast eyes, or the anonymity inherent in random selection.

How practiced
the way firefighters
hose blood from the street

how a shopkeeper gathers glass,
collects fingers
in a plastic bag;

the way we maneuver
through scattered debris, an overturned
bushel, birdcage twisted
body bent
not to escape
but wait out sirens,
a path to be cleared

so we might return with our baskets, do
what we must.

5 a.m. *Black Friday*, the start of holiday shopping season. Doors open, a woman throws herself on a palette of digital picture frames—emerging with six. *I didn't think I could reach down and bend over and get it*, she explained. The photograph shows not this, but a mother and child in a sleeping bag; the asphalt on which they lay waiting for the store to open.

Same day, another headline, *Bomb at market shatters lull for Baghdad*. A store owner tells how he was standing in his shop 30 meters away from the blast—how he saw guts and limbs, a head resting on the sidewalk.

[IMAGE:

X-ray picture of a 17-old girl, who was killed
by a suicide-bomb's nail

penetrating her skull.]

[Pathology of Primary Blast Injury

Next to the damage they do to the respiratory system, pressure waves from air blasts most often

injure the gastrointestinal tract, causing hemorrhages and tearing some organs within the abdominal cavity.

Perforations. In the most severe blast exposures, the intestinal wall may actually rupture,

resulting in blood and ingesta
spilling—]

[14 »]

Ending as beginning. The frustration of a circle, its unbroken line bars entry and exit, allows no fixed point of reference, no resolution — redemption.

Vest. 100 ft. radius, steel ball bearings,
C-4 against skin, trigger.

[1]

“Marine Wedding” is a photograph by photographer Nina Berman and referenced in sections 1 and 3. The groom in the photo was left disfigured after a suicide bomber attacked his truck.

[\[« back\]](#) | [\[view »\]](#)

[2]

War rugs are traditional Persian rugs that have images of war like tanks, guns, bombs, etc. woven into them. They originated in Afghanistan in the 1980s during the Russian occupation. Recently, due to the American occupation, weavers have begun to incorporate imagery from American propaganda leaflets, like the American flag and planes crashing into the Twin Towers into these rugs.

[\[« back\]](#) | [\[view »\]](#)

[3]

“Kill them all. God will know his own.” is what Abbe Arnaud Amalric is alleged to have said to crusaders before they massacred the inhabitants of the city of Eeziers during the siege of July, 1209. While the quote “Kill ’em all, let God sort ’em out.” is commonly believed to have been said by an actual soldier in the Vietnam war it was, in fact, made famous in the movie Apocalypse Now.

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[4]

“... digging to the height of a man” refers to the recommended depth of a grave as taken from the *Camp Delta Standard Operating Procedures* manual in reference to Muslim Funeral and Burial Rites.

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[5]

CARTRIDGE, 7.62MM, ARMOR PIERCING... taken from *Army Ammunition Data Sheets, Small Caliber Ammunition*.

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[6]

Penetration, Permanent Cavity, and Fragmentation are terms used in Terminal Ballistics; the study of the behavior of a projectile when it hits a target.

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[7]

“Forward Command Post” is a toy that originally appeared in the 2002 JC Penny Christmas catalog and later reappeared in their offerings in 2005. The picture was of a bombed-out dollhouse converted into a command post with an armed soldier on the balcony. The original catalog copy read “Forward Command Post. Take command of your soldiers from this fully outfitted battle zone. 75-piece set includes one

11 1/2”H figurine in military combat gear, toy weapons, American flag, chairs and more. Assembled dimensions; 32x16x32”H. Plastic. 10 lbs. Ages 5 and up.”

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[8]

The section “AUTOPSY REPORT” is taken from the autopsy of an Iraqi detainee who died while in U.S. custody in Al Asad, Iraq. The report was released to the public because of a Freedom of Information Act law suit filed by the ACLU.

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[9]

The monologue that begins “Standing restraint” refers to CIA manuals and U.S. government memoranda that deal expressly with interrogation techniques, some of which are considered torture under the Geneva Conventions. The manuals referenced include *Kubark Counterintelligence Interrogation*, and *Human Resource Exploitation Training*.

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[10]

Image captions taken from Army CID files posted in Salon.com's "The Abu Ghraib files."

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[11]

The section that begins "NOTIFICATION" is taken from a speech template used for notifying the next of kin about the combat related death of a family member. The guide referenced is the *Casualty Notification Guide for the Casualty Notification Officer*. The body of the section uses DOD death notices pulled from five years of DOD press releases.

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[12]

Wound Ballistics text taken from "Conventional Warfare: Ballistic, Blast and Burn Injuries" by the U.S. Army Medical institute.

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[13]

"The bad thing about shooting them is that we have to clean it up." This caption originally appeared on the web site nowthatsfuckedup.com accompanying a series of photographs of dead Iraqis uploaded by U.S. military personnel. The web site initially featured amateur

pornography until it started allowing U.S. military personnel free access to the site's content in exchange for proof of military employment in the form of photographs from the war zone.

[\[« back\]](#) | [\[view »\]](#) (Warning: explicit content)

[14]

Pathology of Primary Blast Injury text taken from “Conventional Warfare: Ballistic, Blast and Burn Injuries” by the U.S. Army Medical institute.

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B I O G R A P H Y



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