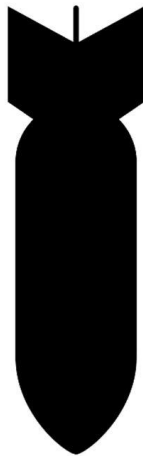


**MILITARY  
ART  
&  
THE IN BETWEEN**



**STORCK**

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MILITARY, ART & THE INBETWEEN

IN FLIGHT GUIDE

**HEADQUARTERS**  
**MILITARY ART GROUP**  
United States Air Force

TO: All Interested

All material contained in this Checklist Booklet has been coordinated with the using agencies. This booklet is a reference publication only and should not be used in place of applicable official publications. Noted errors and/or suggestions should be forwarded to the Military Art Group, Operations Branch.

Andrew Storck, Staff Sergeant, USAF  
Non-commissioned officer in charge (NCOIC)

## **CHANGE INDEX**

THIS HANDBOOK HAS BEEN CHANGED IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE FOLLOWING SUPPLEMENTS:

1. (            )            DATED (            )
2. (            )            DATED (            )
3. (            )            DATED (            )
4. (            )            DATED (            )
5. (            )            DATED (            )

THIS FLIGHT INFORMATION BOOKLET SUPERSEDES THE PREVIOUS VERSION WITH CHANGES.

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# 1. ABSTRACT

I find myself navigating life from the perspective of both a civilian and military service member. Everyday, I am between domestic, civilian spaces and military memories as my military service has impacted every aspect of my adult life. Serving in the United States Air Force allowed me to travel the globe while working alongside people from every class and race, on missions focused on tasks greater than ourselves.

My artistic practice explores how my time in the military has affected my transition back into civilian life by using sculpture and installation to express a variety of emotions. I hope my work sheds light on a culture, former military reentering civilian society, that society often misunderstands and is increasingly disconnected from.

A 2015 Gallup poll found that 72% of respondents expressed "a great deal" or "quite a lot" of confidence in the military. Compare this to a mere 8% who expressed confidence in the United States Congress. Despite this apparent level of relative confidence, I have noticed a lack of understanding from the civilian populace about what the military does, how it does it, and why. I tap into the thought process of attention to detail combined with a sense of urgency to express aspects of military life into my sculptures. I learned these ways of working from my time in the service. I combine these aspects with appropriate visual signifiers from military aesthetics to speak to this dissonance of social perception on a deeper, more personal level. I explore a nuanced conversation around these issues that are normally oversimplified and propagandized. Through initiating conversations between those who have served and those who have not, greater understanding can emerge from both the civilian and

veteran community of each other's position in our collective society.

*"America doesn't lose wars, it loses interest."* -  
Hasain Haqqani, 2013



## 2. RESEARCH

*"Most Americans know roughly as much about the US military as they know about the surface of the moon. It is not that Americans dislike the military – most of us support it wholeheartedly. It is just that we do not have a clue who is in it, what it does, what it costs those who join it, or what current military policies cost us – as a nation or as a democracy." - Rosa Brooks (Schake et al. 22)*

When I started making art about my military experience, it was in an effort to consider aspects of the military and service I had not previously processed. When I served, the daily rigor of my assignments did not allow for the time and space to truly consider the things I was involved in. My main duty was working on aircraft, aircraft weapons, and weapons systems. I accomplished the tasks to the best of my ability and moved on. Artistic practice has allowed me the time to not only consider the objects I am making, but why I am making them, a luxury I was not afforded as a service member. My relationship to objects that carried significance in my military service began to take on new meanings as I began to work with them artistically. This process allowed me to ask myself deeper questions not only about the objects I was making but the connection I had to the objects, how the connections to these objects were made and how my relationship to the objects as I rejoined civilian life.

While serving, I forged intensely close personal relationships with unusual objects. Reimagining hand tools, munitions, canteens, and other objects from daily military life into sculptures has been important for me to process the uncanny relationship I had with

them. The feelings I have about these sculptures are drastically different from those in the community who haven't served. This difference in perception presented me with an opportunity to do research on civilian and military populations. *Warriors & Citizens: American Views of Our Military* is an in depth collection of polling data and commentary that explores the potential costs of what has been termed the "military civilian divide."

One of the most striking facts in the research was the dramatic shift of the size in the military in the last sixty years. According to the Pew Institute, the largest percentage of Americans serving on active duty, 12%, happened from 1940-1945, during World War II. The lowest numbers ever recorded happened in 2020, 0.4% (Schaeffer). I served during a wave of fluctuation, 2005-2013, when there was an increase in force size for war efforts followed by a decrease as a long drawn out war became fiscally unpopular for Americans. This shift in the percentage of Americans on active duty has left the smallest number of Americans ever shouldering the burden of combat during America's longest war. The military has shifted away from sending waves of troops that overwhelm the enemy through sheer numbers. Instead, we now ask a smaller number of military members to possess very specific skills and often require them to have technical experience, scientific and engineering skills, foreign language skills, regional expertise, maturity and good judgment.

This proportion of active military to civilian populace isn't sustainable for combat effectiveness. It has enabled a serious, if not potentially dangerous, lack of understanding of what military service means. The civilian control of the military, a clear separation of civilian political leadership from

military leadership is considered to be one of the cornerstones of American democracy.

The dissociation between civilian society and the military has served short-term political ends (preventing panic after a terrorist attack, rebalancing attention from foreign to domestic priorities). An uninformed public is ill prepared for the steady, long-term commitment necessary to fight wars whose progress will not be immediately evident. We will overreact to the incidents (ISIS executions, for example) and undervalue endurance (progress in Iraq). (Schake et al. 317)

If the majority of Americans are far removed from the sacrifice of war, 99.6% of the US population, do they become more willing to use military force as they become inured to the costs of warfare? Scholars are concerned that civilians may be too willing to use military force while policy makers focus on civilian opinion and may not understand how to utilize military force appropriately or effectively. Civilians tend to misunderstand what military force can achieve, and fail to consider clear and achievable war aims.

Thomas Donnelly, a defense and policy analyst, stated "the familiarity gap between civilians and the military has led to pity rather than respect for the difficulties service members undergo on our behalf." (Schake et al. 18) I think for me, this has been one of the most concerning aspects when talking about service with others. Veterans do not want those outside of our culture to pity us, but we cannot expect them to completely understand what it is like to serve. A willingness to listen to our wants and needs as service members and support us without pity seems the best case scenario. This cultural disconnect between daily life in the military and daily life for civilians raises

questions about the military's ability to connect with the average citizen. For example, once I returned to civilian life, I realized how reliant I was on the collective culture of the military. In my career specifically, work and life were constantly overlapping and interweaving, everyone relied on each other, and work was all encompassing. After returning to civilian life where I didn't have this, I experienced a personal cultural disconnect, I did not know who or what I could rely on. The community and culture I discovered in art helped fill the void I felt from leaving the service. Similar to the military, the methods of sculpture I was drawn to most require a team to facilitate often difficult, potentially dangerous tasks where team members work together and place the needs of the community ahead of individual goals.

Journalist and law professor, Rosa Brooks, said, "if we want a military that is strong, capable and responsive to America's changing needs, we will need to rethink many of our most basic assumptions about the military and its role." (Schake et al. 63 ) A concerning trend in the research I studied is that Hollywood tropes and media highlighting fringe issues in the military become what the average American then projects onto what the average veteran experiences. On one side of the spectrum, there are films like *American Sniper*, which project what some have described as a glorified, propagandistic version of military life (Kang), on the other, news reports on homeless veterans suffering from post-traumatic stress who fail to adapt to post-service life (Stasha). These two opposing portrayals alter the confidence Americans have in those who serve in the military and effects how they view their fellow Americans post service.

In terms of how I address this disconnect in my thesis, especially since these topics can be divisive

and bring up a range of extreme emotions, I make an effort to tread lightly and create a welcoming environment for viewers with my work. Rather than relying on information in the media or external sources, my hope is to provide an opportunity for stereotypes and tropes to fade away and a more authentic experience grounded in reality to emerge through the medium of conversation. My artwork is not a projection of my personal opinions or an attempt to change anyone's mind or views of the military. It is not an attempt to put military members onto a pedestal but instead I wish to highlight the stark differences in culture. I view my work and sharing my experiences as a vehicle for these conversations in a fine arts gallery or public space where veterans may not have previously felt welcomed.

As Admiral Michael Mullen once said, "our work is appreciated, of that I am certain. There isn't a town or city I visit where people do not convey to me their great pride in what we do. But I fear they do not know us. I fear they do not comprehend the full weight of the burden we carry or the price we pay when we return from battle. (Schake et al. 24)" In reflecting on this quote, the present disconnect between civilian life and military service is incredibly complex and not as binary as the media narrative projects. When digesting the daily news, it is easy to forget that with every decision politicians make concerning the collective military, the impacts are felt by individuals. Despite the fact that US enlistment or commissioning is entirely voluntary, once a member enlists or is commissioned, they are not allowed to change their mind until they have fulfilled their service obligation. My work attempts to humanize, what others who have interacted with my art called, the "military machine" and the resulting military experience. While the Declaration of Independence provides Americans with the

right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness, for those who volunteer for the military, their lives belong to the nation.

### **3. MATERIALS**

As a sculptor and a former armament systems specialist, I find the ability to work with a variety of materials not only exciting, but an opportunity to learn about new tools and techniques. The process of troubleshooting a complex issue on an aircraft is not dissimilar to the troubleshooting I do when sculpting. In both fields, materials communicate to us on a conscious and subconscious level. We experience emotions not just because of an object's form but also the materials that make up that object. The objects we have in our homes, and things we see out in the world are often constructed with specialized materials like aluminum, carbon fiber, wood, foam, and cloth. The materials I select have uses in both civilian and military life, often originating in the latter before migrating into the former. Carbon fiber, for example, started as an aviation specific material before being adopted into civilian uses like bicycles, cars, and boats. These materials not only give texture, tone, and durability to form as we use these objects, but they also connect to memories we have and feelings we associate with the materiality of the object. As I have explored sculpture, I have stripped down forms to their most basic shapes and removed most of their original coloration and traditional use value. I then start to experiment with the emotions I experience from the colors, forms, and materials independently of the objects as a whole and how rearranging these things can

make us not only question how we feel about them but also their function.

My sculptural practice involves recontextualizing military objects and materials and injecting them with domesticity. This allows me to contemplate the personal experiences I have with these objects and what they mean to me through my perspective as a former serviceman. I'm interested in how these objects can make someone feel emotionally and physically, when interacting with them in an immersive space, in the tension between their interpretation and my own. I aim to provide an experience with these objects much like how storytelling can allow an outsider to time travel through someone else's memory.

Shifting our expectations around an object is one aspect I enjoy exploring in my sculptural practice. For example, by keeping the form the same, but recreating the object using softer or harder materials and shifting colors, these changes can make us question the object while it remains recognizable. This allows me to shift expectations in an uncanny and unsettling way. These slight changes present an opportunity to the viewer, the possibility of an "ah ha!" moment, when they realize that the object is not what it seemed, an emotional shift occurs. That moment as a creator is what I am forever hunting. In retrospect, this feels like the most honest form of reflection on both my time in the service and my time as an artist. The mundane objects I used daily in the military became extremely important and reflecting on them as sculptures I hope they take on a feeling of power that is often overlooked when using them in daily life. In contrast, as I became more comfortable with dangerous objects like munitions, objects that feel overwhelmingly powerful on their own, they became part of my everyday life in the military. Translating these objects into a

sculptural vernacular, they too become muted, shown for what they are, a normally hidden and obscured, but essential part of American life.



## 4. PROCESS

The way I construct and finish each sculpture impacts how it is perceived. Similar to my process in selecting materials, the choice of the tooling and techniques used in the work's construction contributes to creating a tension between expectations and reality. While I am sketching and coming up with the first ideas for a sculpture, material choice often dictates the tools and techniques that can be used yet within this limitation, there is still room for experimentation. Once the choice to work with a certain tool, technique, or combination has been made, I make decisions about how to finish the object. I can choose to refine the finish, or break down the sculptural material and make it feel degraded and worn. These choices leave the viewer with a range of emotions when interpreting the works. For example, broken down concrete will have a much different impact than smooth, refined concrete. While each person will react to these materials, and process choices differently, our life experiences and perspectives impact how we process this information.

The relationship between material choice and process, how one informs the other and how each alters the other's signification, is the most important part of creating my work. Staying flexible is a crucial part of the creative process. By creating a loose framework of an idea and then responsively executing that plan, I let the materials and form dictate the final product. Working in this way has allowed me not only to learn more about the materials I am working with, but to problem solve in a meditative and pleasurable way. The process of creating these sculptural objects is one of the most cathartic experiences of my adult life and has allowed me to engage with my past and present experiences.

Additionally, as I have adopted more digital fabrication methods into my practice, I have begun to experiment with how to best show my hand in the making process. I find myself asking if the aesthetic of a handmade object is more important to me as a maker alone or if it is also important to the viewer. While I have in the past relied on computers to take my thoughts and translate them from digital to analog, I struggle to impart the feeling of a handmade object. Being able to impart a human feeling to objects and subjects where evidence of individuality is erased is my attempt to help remind viewers that there is a human aspect to the military. This work seeks to ask the question of digital fabrication: does the removal of the human hand in the making process feel like removal of the maker's individuality from the narrative? The ability for the viewer to witness these objects and view them as both handmade and manufactured, where the individual is removed from the making process, is critical when viewing and processing how and why my artwork is made.

## 5. DISPLAY

At some point in the planning process of any artwork, the choice of where and how it lives must be made. Sculpture, being an object based medium, implies that this choice not only impacts how viewers feel about the piece but how they interact with it. I have experimented with single pieces being displayed from standard white plinths to custom extensions of the work that feel less like a pedestal, to installation works that include multiple works and shift away from the traditional discrete sculptural object on display to an immersive installation.

The decision to have an object live in the world in three dimensions is a conscious choice for me and simply placing such an object onto a white pedestal leaves the work feeling flat in my opinion. When I have the opportunity to extend the pedestal or display methods, both physically and conceptually, in a more meaningful way, I try to do so. I believe by incorporating display creation into the making process, the work feels more grounded in the world, and the viewer is more inclined to engage with the work in a meaningful way. Incorporating display considerations into my aesthetic process can strengthen the narrative I wish to convey. By immersing the viewer in work that extends into space-making, installation art has the possibility to fully encapsulate the viewer rather than being presented with something to witness. While I plan my display methods, the true joy of building the entire work for me is responding to my emotions and acting as the viewer around the objects while I am creating them. Being flexible with initial plans and responding to the immediacies of an installation allows for a more natural response to the work and more fruitful changes. As I have created art over the years, I have become more interested in how environments

impact us, not just individual art works. We can see an art object and feel a certain emotion, but when we enter into a space, sit down, and feel like we are a part of the art, it makes the work effective in a social manner. The space not only provides the potential for me to share stories about my military experience through my sculptures, but it invites other veterans to do the same.

## 6. CONVERSATION

Once the creative work on a project is complete, I have the opportunity to find a place for these objects in the world. This allows for a conversation with others about the work to take place. The life experience I discuss in my work allows me to converse with those who share these experiences and with those who are unfamiliar with them. Ideally, my works are not projecting a specific view point, but rather they are conversation starters, environments created through my experiences that engage other's memories and expectations. Over the last two decades of warfare, political and cultural shifts around the globe have intensified partisanship, making it more difficult to have respectful conversations with whom we disagree. By using politically and culturally charged objects that reflect divisive, violent, but real aspects of American culture in domestic ways, I hope to create spaces and environments where people can open up and hear one another.

In an article published by *Time* magazine in 2011, written by Author Mark Thompson, he states, "...if Americans were unhappy about half their wealth belonging to only one percent, should they not also feel that it is unfair for the entire defense burden to rest on only one percent of the people?" (Schake et al. 97) Military experience is uncommon in America, but by sharing how it has informed my view of life, I hope that openings are made, an environment for all types of stories to interweave becomes established within the installation. I think that especially around such emotionally loaded themes it's easy to gravitate towards extremes, but my experience is too gray to have a distinct feeling.

My feelings around many of the things I experienced daily in the military are complicated, and those who have not served have complicated views about the military's purpose leading to what is often a mutual silence. I hope that by presenting opportunities for conversation between civilians and veterans that these topics can become less stigmatized and comfortable to talk about, especially with those with a different perspective. I couldn't be more thankful for the opportunity to talk about my experiences in the military with those who share them and with those interested in learning more. I hope that instead of people coming into a space to change minds or opinions, we can just be open to hearing from others, and be respectful of other's experiences and perspectives.

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**NEW WORK - STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURES**

1. Sketch 5 potential forms
  - a. **NOTE** - 2 potential materials for creating each form
  - b. **NOTE** - 2 potential techniques for creating each form
  - c. **NOTE** - 2 different ways to display each form
  
2. **DECIDE** on form, material, technique and display method
  
3. **BREAK** the sculpture project process into manageable sections that are able to be fabricated on a realistic time frame that also matches your overall deadline.
  
4. **KEEP CLEAR** documentation of each step so they can be tracked and verified as they are individually completed and overall progress can be tracked simultaneously.
  
5. **DO NOT** overcomplicate the creative process more than it already is.
  
6. **WORK TO CODE**
  - a. Adhere to the system of production already in place. Making decisions on the fly is discouraged. Inventions and developments must occur within the



existing vocabulary, do not jump ahead.  
Work to code.

b. Refer to ten bullets by Tom Sachs

7. If you face a technical problem, you may **SHIFT** to physically making another part/component. This is beneficial for two reasons: while you continue to make **PROGRESS** on another element of the project, the break from the technical problem often gives the opportunity to think about things less in the moment and come up with a **SOLUTION**.
  
8. **LISTEN** to your creative instincts. If the work isn't feeling right. **PAUSE**.
  - a. **DO NOT** keep working if something is not feeling right
  - b. **VIEW** the work from a distance/different angle
  - c. **DO NOT** overthink things, a half finished work won't feel the same as a finished one. **FINISH** the **WORK** and then reassess.
  - d. **REMAKE** work with changes if required
  
9. Work should **NOT** leave the studio **WITHOUT** proper documentation.
  - a. Documentation should **INCLUDE**
  - b. Photos - 360 degree view/detail shots
  - c. Notes from work, hours to make work, materials used, sketches, etc.

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