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## Film

Time Out New York / Issue 593: February 8-14, 2007

### Review

# Operation Homecoming: Writing the Wartime Experience

★★★★★

Dir. Richard E. Robbins. 2007. N/R. 81mins. Documentary.

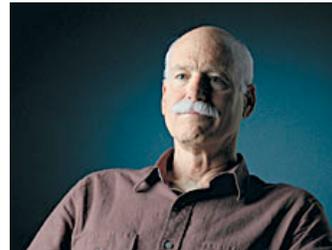
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A collection of devastatingly blunt adaptations of prose and poetry from American soldiers serving in the Middle East, this companion doc to last year's NEA-sponsored book captures the gamut of battlefield experience with problematic aplomb. Contextualized by talking-head testimony from the various authors, as well as by commentary from war-writing heavyweights like Tobias Wolff and Tim O'Brien, the soldiers' narratives graphically elucidate the terror, boredom, rage and sense of loss that characterize life in a war zone.

The accounts gain extra immediacy from director Richard E. Robbins's inventive reenactments and reconceptions: One harrowing combat piece is presented in frenetic comic-book-style panels, while a nurse's description of a routine medevac flight—the film's most wrenching segment—is composed of gruelingly tight, hypersaturated close-ups shot during an actual airlift. The effect does justice to the writers' distinctive voices, and the readings by actors like Beau Bridges and Robert Duvall are commendably understated.

Still, *Operation Homecoming's* slick approach is generally at odds with the project's thesis that war ultimately defeats all warriors, and at times the film crosses the line into gung ho glamorization. A possible remedy, and a logical offset, would be a similar collection of testimonies from the war's Iraqi civilian witnesses. (Opens Fri, [Film Forum.](#)) — *Mark Holcomb*



THIS GRUNT'S LIFE Wolff remembers life during wartime.

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