

Thursday, January 3, 2008

Alumnus earns national Emmy for documentary

By **Dawn Pauli**, staff writer

As a reporter for the Detroit Free Press, John Masson (CAS '92), earned a national Emmy award for his work on "**Michigan Marines: Band of Brothers**," a 23-part video series.

Masson and Free Press videographer Stephen McGee reported from Michigan on the war's impact on local families, while colleagues Joe Swickard and videographer David Gilkey deployed with the Michigan-based reservists of the 1st Battalion of the 24th Marines during their training in California and service in Iraq.

Masson learned of the Emmy nomination from the National Academy of Television Arts and Sciences after leaving the Detroit Free Press to become a media relations officer for the University of Michigan Law School.

The video won in a new broadband category of the News and Documentary Emmy Awards, beating four other national news organizations: PBS' Frontline, National Geographic, Newsweek, and The Washington Post.

"An Emmy is not the sort of thing a print journalist ever expects to win," said Masson, who joined the Free Press in 2001 and moved to U of M in 2007 looking for a new challenge. "It's a nice way to cap things off."

Masson drew on his experiences as a time-crunched commuter student at Oakland University to meet the challenge of completing the eight-month "Band of Brothers" project while he continued his usual duties covering news in the Grosse Pointes and cases in Macomb Circuit Court.

As a student at Oakland, Masson worked the midnight shift as an Oakland County deputy sheriff. "There are two sets of things you learn in college, the first is academics, the second is how to manage your time and get things done," he said. "Learning to handle multiple tasks, and do them well, is an important skill I learned."

His time at Oakland was interrupted when he served in the first Gulf War on the USNS Comfort, a Navy hospital ship deployed to the Persian Gulf.

He completed his bachelor's degree in history after his deployment, then worked as a reporter for the Flint Journal and Indianapolis Star. "My background propelled me toward covering cops, crime, and the military," explained Masson, who is currently a Coast Guard reservist. "Once I came home to Detroit, I covered cops and courts in Oakland and Macomb counties, and picked up a lot of military news locally."

The "Michigan Marines: Band of Brothers" series came about after Masson got a call from one of the battalion's officers months before the Selfridge-based unit deployed. The officer told him that approximately 700 Michigan reservists were going to California for training, and then to Iraq, and wondered if the Free Press was interested in covering them. Masson pitched the story to his editors, who decided to cover the Marines' stories through videos on the Web and print stories in the newspaper.

"We thought it would be nice to bring the global picture down to a local level that people can reach out and understand," said Masson. "You got a picture of the local impact in Michigan, and the impact on the guys who were fighting the fight."

At the time, the Free Press was beginning to expand its video work for the Web.

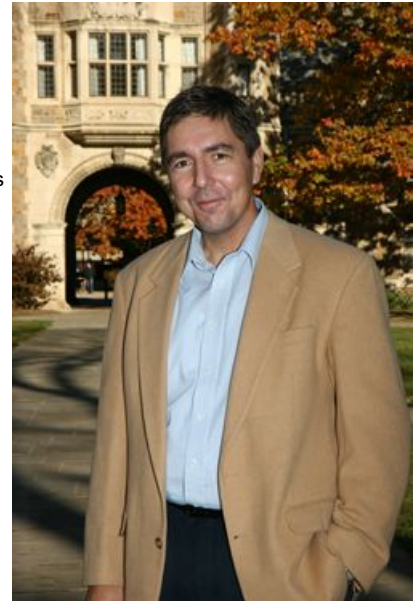
"Our news product was changing, and we were developing this multi-media aspect on the Web, and we were figuring it out as we went along," said Masson. "It left us with a lot of interesting options."

One of his favorite segments highlighted Thanksgiving. While Masson spent part of Thanksgiving dinner with a Marine's family, his colleagues in Iraq spent part of the day with the same Marine in Fallujah. "The two stories were combined for a print and electronic piece in real time," he said. "We were newspaper people, we didn't used to think in those terms. We began to realize the potential when we were in the middle of the project."

This same type of coverage was also used for the funeral of one of the 22 members of the battalion who died in Iraq.

"I've covered a lot of sad, tragic and painful stories in 20 years of journalism, but this funeral was the thing that moved me most," said Masson. "It was difficult to cover, yet worthwhile, because it helped readers see the reality of the war."

Masson believes "Michigan Marines: Band of Brothers" resonated with people because it brought the war and its impact on the soldiers and their families close to home. "These are our friends, these are our neighbors, and this is what they go through," he said. "That's what gave the piece its power."



John Masson, CAS '92, earned a national Emmy for his work on the video series "Michigan Marines: Band of Brothers."

Photo by Gregory Fox

Links:

Emmy award

SUMMARY

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Created by CareTech Administrator (webservices@caretechsolutions.com) on Thursday, January 3, 2008
Modified by CareTech Administrator (webservices@caretechsolutions.com) on Thursday, January 3, 2008
Article Start Date: Thursday, January 3, 2008