



"This is the West, sir. When the legend becomes fact, print the legend."

-- The Man Who Shot
Liberty Valance

THE STORY

The photograph is of a young Marine, shot through the chest, laid unconscious across a board and being evacuated atop a tank. It was taken by Army photographer John Olson during the bloody battle of Hue, the centerpiece of the Tet Offensive and a turning point in the Vietnam War.

It is one of the most iconic photos in the history of war photography. It has come to represent survival, valor

and an almost religious nobility in the face of overwhelming odds.

And it may all be a lie.

Published across two pages in Life magazine in March 1968, Olson's photograph became a symbol of American innocence ravaged by war. It fascinated and infuriated Americans. It helped to change public perception of the war and, in turn, the war itself.

And now, a half-century later, the photograph is at the center of a controversial case of mistaken identity, of two men -- one who survived the war and

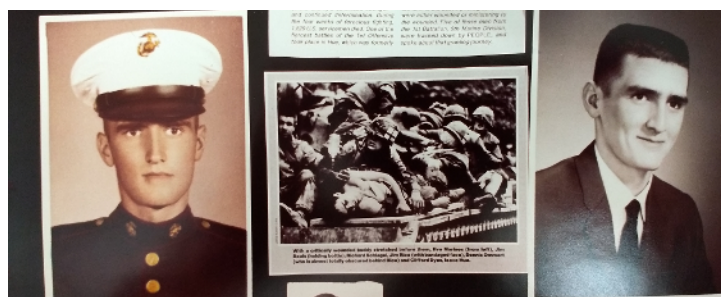
another who likely died moments after Olson's shutter clicked. Both were young. Both had a strong chin and prominent brow line. Both would be identified as the bullet-ridden soldier.

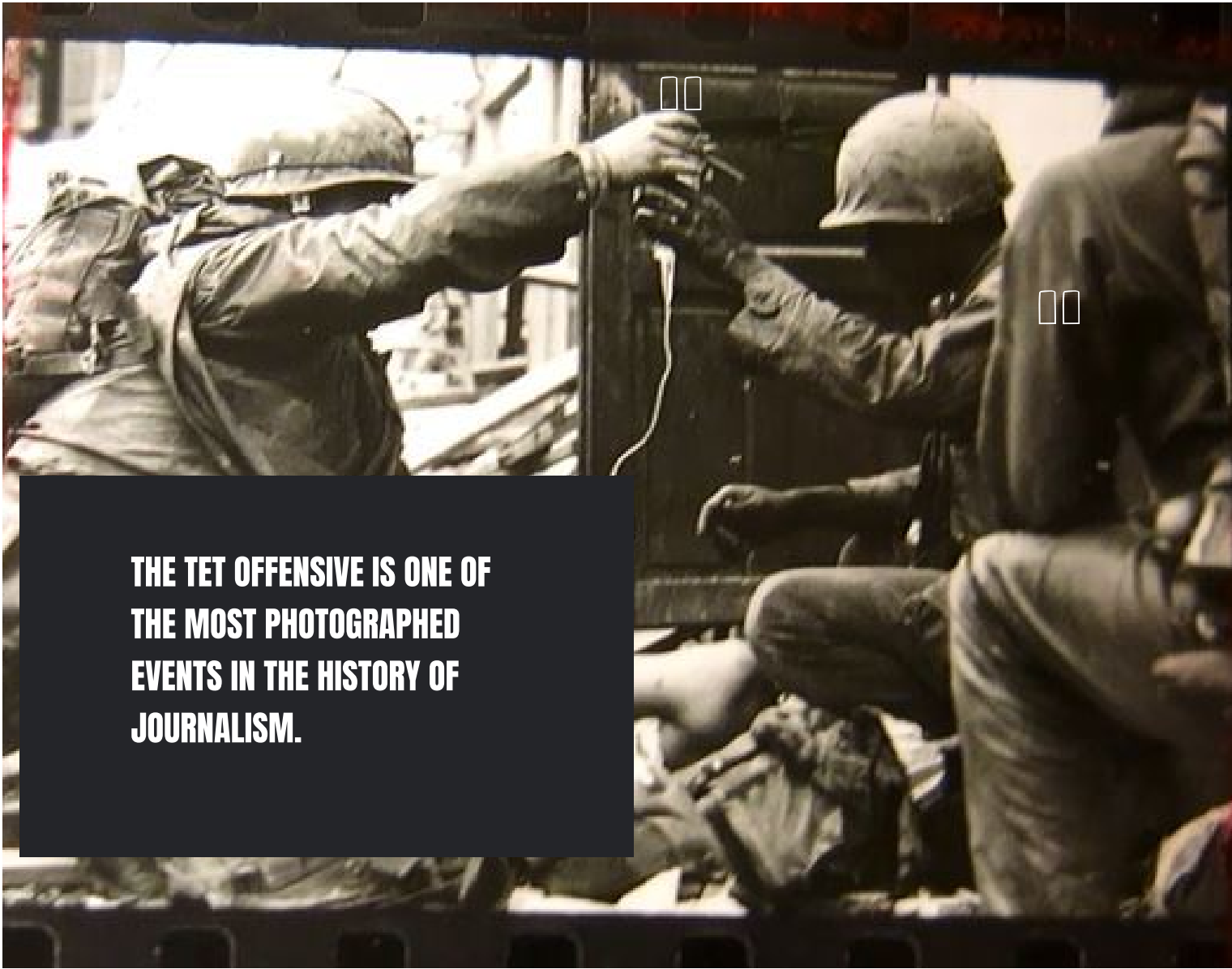
So, who *was* the young infantryman?

A recent and nearly yearlong investigation by

The New York Times Magazine suggests a version of events in which a Marine's "soul was carelessly mislaid." *The Times* concluded that the soldier in the photograph had long been misidentified and was, in fact, Pfc. James "Jimmy" Blaine, a rifleman who died in Hue.

But for years, the accepted story was different.





The keepers of the narrative passed down by history are led by Olson himself; by Mark Bowden, a revered author and war historian (“Black Hawk Down”); by a national museum dedicated to journalism; and -- perhaps most compellingly -- by Pfc. Alvin Grantham, the man thought for a generation to be the soldier pictured on the tank.

For them, the photograph is a poignant image of American valor. For them, military records prove that it is Grantham in the photo, a young man who survived his near-fatal injuries to return home and lead a full life.

In our fake news-challenged age, the confusion raises questions about when

facts matter. It shows us how we come to understand the world through images and how we sometimes claim history in the service of comforting falsehoods and well-worn narratives about war and country. And to what extent is our urge to memorialize for the dead... or the living?



OUR APPROACH

March 1968. *Life* magazine. Leaf through the pages and explore a year unlike any other in American history. Slick ads for cigarettes. A feature on urban poverty.

More ads -- TV sets and the new Oldsmobile. Readers will turn the first thirty pages before they come across the Vietnam War.

We will use these pages as our entry



into the story, and then dive deeply into the central mystery. We will break down Olson’s photograph forensically, at an almost granular level, speaking to surviving Marines who were there on the ground in 1968.

The photograph will be a doorway into the hellish events of that day, where we find ourselves in the heart of the Tet Offensive and of war itself, told through the memories of the soldiers and war correspondents, and illustrated through the bloody, chaotic photographs of Olson, McCullin and others.

“We were losing everyone from lieutenants to staff sergeants to people who were running the squads,” says Joe Lopez, a squad leader at the scene. “Everyone was blown up or medevaced out or died. We were fighting block by block, inch by inch.”

“Jimmy was young and very aggressive,” says Lopez, who is certain it was Blaine and not Grantham in the photograph. “I mean that kid was fearless. And when he took the assignment of going into the command post to relay a message -- we were really strapped at that point, I mean we were really getting our butt kicked and needed support. He got up to relay a message, and that’s when he





got shot.”

Enter Anthony Loyd, a Hunter S. Thompson-like war correspondent, who recently discovered a series of photographs by Don McCullin that document the same event. McCullin’s contact sheets reveal what happened before and after Olson took his famous photograph on a moment-by-moment basis, the most compelling new evidence in the case.

“It was terrible...it was all a big blur,” says Richard Schlagel, who is identified in both the Olson and McMullin photographs by the rubber octopus slipped into his helmet band, part of a care package from his mother along with a Porky Pig puzzle. He is also sure it was Blaine in the

photograph

“For years, I thought it was my fault,” says Lopez, who helped lift Blaine onto the tank. “If I had just told him to stay put...”

We will also explore the impact of Olson’s photograph over time. We’ll see how the entire foundation of Grantham’s post-war life is invested in the belief that he was the injured soldier in the photograph, of which he was first convinced almost a year after its publication, while recovering in a military hospital.

But for Blain’s comrades, the identity of that wounded soldier is equally essential.

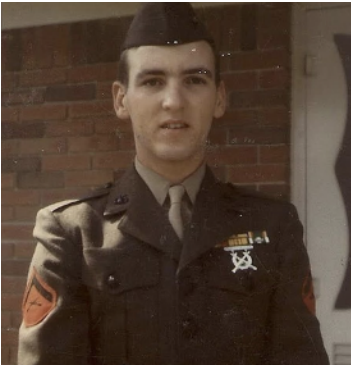
We’ll hear about how some -- but not all -- of the Blaine family believed they saw “their Jimmy” in the pages of Life. We will learn how crowdsourcing

by People magazine in the 1980s seemed to confirm Blaine’s identity and how that was later ignored.

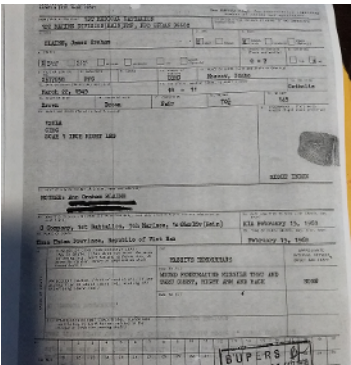
And for Olson, whose photo inspired books and exhibits -- and perhaps a myth about war, the stakes are even higher.

We have been reaching out to soldiers who were there that day in Hue, as well as family members and friends of Grantham and Blain. We have discovered that, despite the passing year, this is an emotionally raw topic for our subjects. And they are anxious to tell their story about that bleak day, through the fog of war, more than 50 years ago.

And while doing so, we will explore the nature of memory and myth, legends and facts, patriotism and heroism.



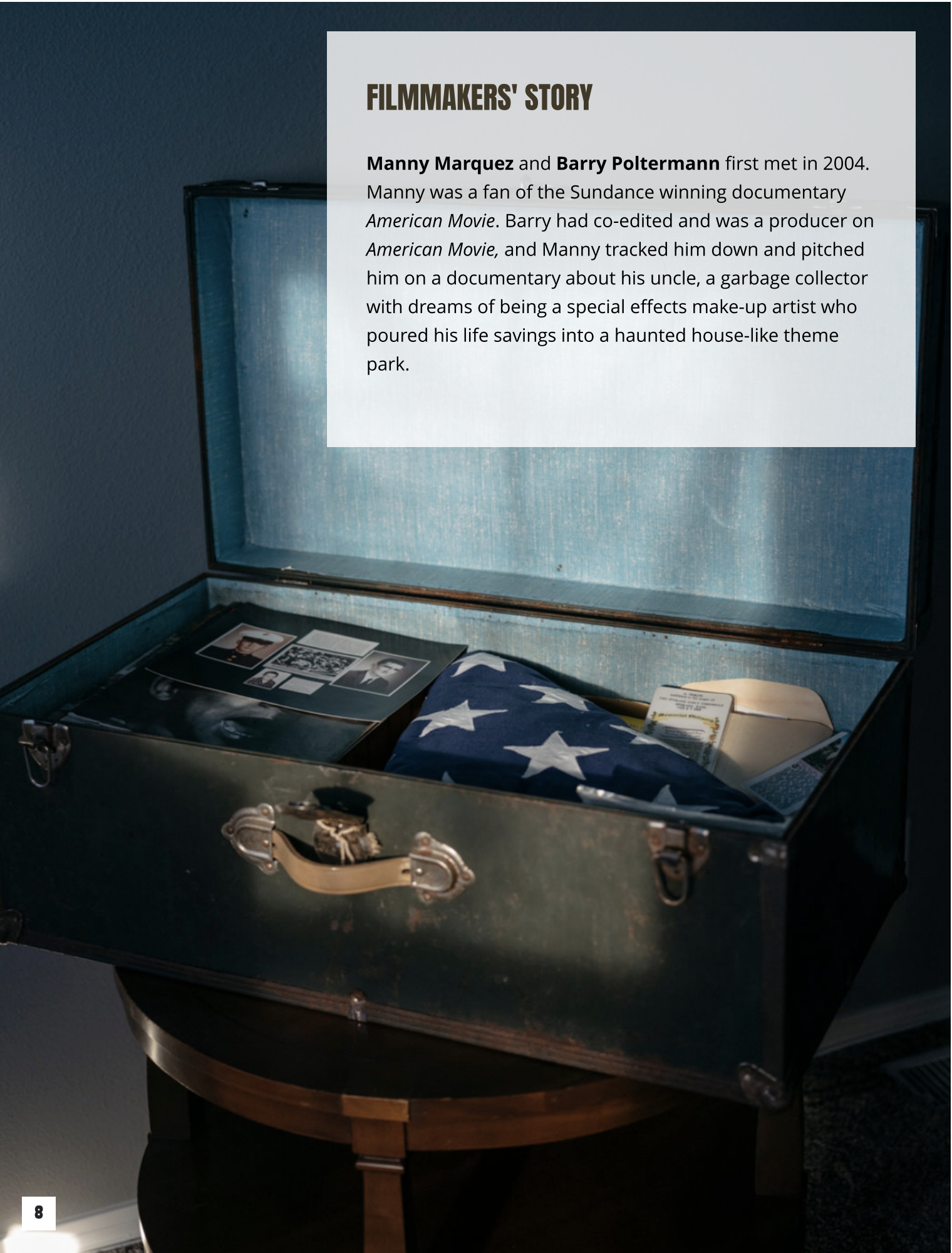
Alvin Grantham after returning home in 1968



Grantham release from Army.



Blaine’s brother, Robert, at his home.



FILMMAKERS' STORY

Manny Marquez and **Barry Poltermann** first met in 2004. Manny was a fan of the Sundance winning documentary *American Movie*. Barry had co-edited and was a producer on *American Movie*, and Manny tracked him down and pitched him on a documentary about his uncle, a garbage collector with dreams of being a special effects make-up artist who poured his life savings into a haunted house-like theme park.



The documentary *Psychopath* would eventually be directed by Manny and produced and edited by Barry.

Manny and Barry wanted to work together again. Both being fans of westerns and war stories, they wanted to make a documentary that had an element of myth and history.

And then one day Barry stumbled across the New York Magazine article on Grantham and Blaine and sent it to Manny. They began doing research, working out elements of the story that go far deeper than the New York Magazine article.

And they began to wonder... could this be their war story? Their western? A documentary of myth and history, that nonetheless speaks to us today?

Double Exposure is directed by Manny and Barry, and will be filmed by Manny and edited by Barry (*Jim & Andy*, *American Movie*, *I Am Not Alone*) and produced by Jeremy Coon (*Napoleon Dynamite*, *Raiders! The Story of the Best Fan Film Ever Made*).



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