



# WORTH FIGHTING FOR

*The Path of a Patriot*



**STEVE ALPERT**

**GARY COHEN**

## **Library Tales Publishing**

244 5th Avenue #Q222, New York, NY, 10001

Phone: 1-800-754-5016 | Fax: (917) 463-0892

[www.LibraryTalesPublishing.com](http://www.LibraryTalesPublishing.com)

# Worth Fighting For

Published by:  
Library Tales Publishing, Inc.  
244 5th Avenue, Suite Q222  
New York, NY 10001  
[www.LibraryTalesPublishing.com](http://www.LibraryTalesPublishing.com)

Copyright © 2011 by Steve Alpert and Gary Cohen.  
Published by Library Tales Publishing, Inc., New York, New York.

No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, scanning, or otherwise, except as permitted under Sections 107 or 108 of the 1976 United States Copyright Act, without the prior written permission of the Publisher. Requests to the Publisher for permission should be addressed to the Legal Department, Library Tales Publishing, Inc., 244 5th Avenue, Suite Q222, New York, NY, 10001, 1-800-754-5016, fax 917-463-0892.

Trademarks: Library Tales, the Library Tales Publishing logo, Worth Fighting For, Worth Fighting For logo, and related trade dress are trademarks or registered trademarks of Library Tales Publishing, Inc. and/or its affiliates in the United States and other countries, and may not be used without written permission. All other trademarks are the property of their respective owners.

For general information on our other products and services, please contact our Customer Care Department at 1-800-754-5016, or fax 917-463-0892.

For technical support, please visit [www.librarytalespublishing.com](http://www.librarytalespublishing.com). Library Tales Publishing also publishes its books in a variety of electronic formats. Every content that appears in print is available in electronic books.

ISBN-13: 978-0615521169  
ISBN-10: 0615521169

*“From paintbrush to pen, Steve Alpert’s art and life compels us all to reflect on how we can connect our own passions to helping those who have given so much. A deeply moving story about a man transformed 180 degrees by his art, you will enjoy this emotional roller coaster ride of a story filled passion and adventure.”*

Lee Woodruff

*“It’s an extremely powerful story of a journey by both a man and an artist. The man seeks to find the evasive soldier and patriot within himself. And the artist, using his best tools and weapons, fights a battle against personal doubt in a society that has too often forgot its heroes.”*

John D. Williams  
President  
National Scrabble Association

*“Fisher House Foundation is greatly appreciative of the support of Steve Alpert, his artwork is moving and compelling, reminding us all of the sacrifice of our military men and women.”*

Cindy Campbell  
Fisher House Foundation, Inc.

This book is dedicated to my wife, Dorothy Devlin Alpert and my stepson Matthew Devlin Rinklin and all the brave men and women who have served our country in uniform.

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgments	8
Introduction	9
Prelude: The Vietnam Memorial Wall	15
Thank You For Your Service	22
Gas on the Fire	25
The Blackhawks – Mission Accomplished	30
Duty, Courage, Honor	41
Visit to Walter Reed	57
Fisher House	67
Portrait of a Soldier	80
Introduction to Legacy	90
Legacy	93
Epilogue: A Living Legacy	118



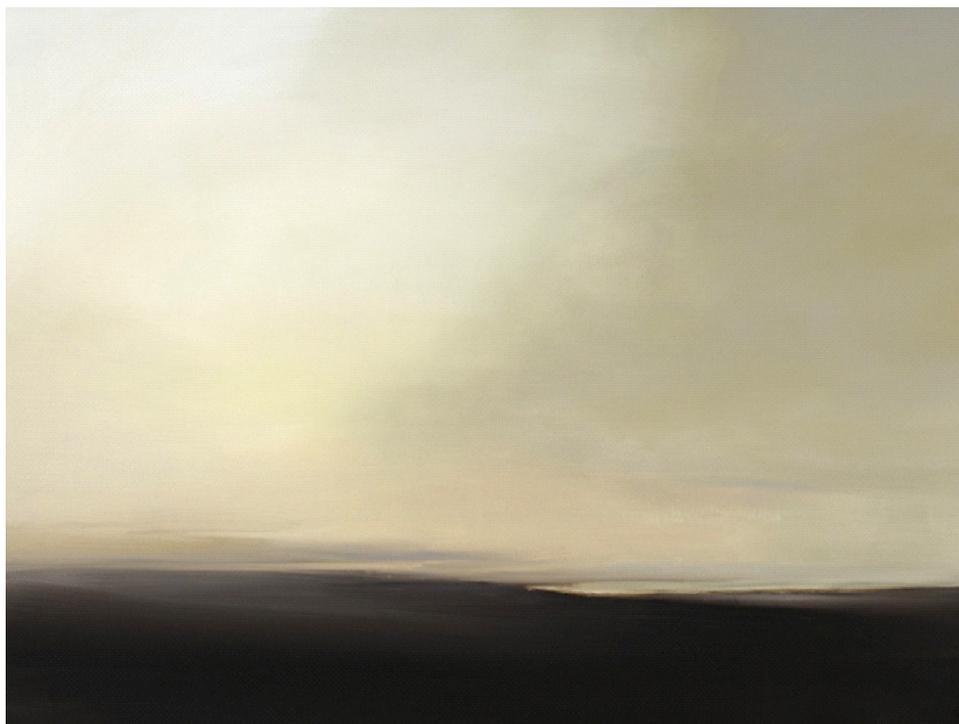
# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

My wife Dorothy said to me one day, “Why don’t you go for the painting? I’ll make the money and you go paint.” There have been times when I know Dorothy has regretted that golden offer, and Dorothy shouldered our financial burdens longer than I would have liked in hindsight, but the genie was out of the bottle and I was off to pursue my life’s dream by arranging ground-up minerals on hundreds of canvases. None of what happened in this true account would ever have been possible had I not had an angel on my shoulder named Dorothy. The gift Dorothy gave me is the gift of a lifetime and I am forever grateful. Dorothy and I are happy to be able to say many good things came of this gift.

Gary Cohen, an extremely talented friend with a versatile and agile mind, suggested this book be written after Gary had set me up to blog. After a number of posts, I wrote about different aspects of what is in this book. Gary said, “Write the book...” I said: *What book?* And over a number of weeks, Gary told me what the book was. Gary has guided and shaped these pages. I am most grateful for his powerful encouragement and spot-on insights.

I must also acknowledge my great artist-mentor, the late Alan Atwell, who showed me how to see the world through the eyes of an artist when I was nineteen. There were eleven other artists in that year-long painting class at Ithaca College, but all along I thought Alan was talking only to me. Atwell taught me how to see the world through the eyes of an artist, and he is the reason that I understood this was my path.

# INTRODUCTION



*Journey's End, 30"x40" oil on canvas, from the collection of Mary Ann Casati & Geoff Judge.*

I am an artist that paints landscapes with oil on canvas. The painting above, *Journey's End*, was completed in the summer of 2008 and is one of my personal favorites. The scene in *Journey's End* was created after a family trip to Ireland in the summer of 2000. I make paintings about the wide-open spaces perhaps as an antidote to having worked and lived in the crowded canyons of Manhattan for thirty-five years. I've traveled a lot around the United States and have been to all fifty states at least twice, except for Alaska, which I have only visited once. The image files in my head are filled with bits and pieces of all the magnificent corners of this country and they invariably turn up on my canvases in oil

paint. Just last year an image from a place in southern Utah called, Lavender Canyon appeared unexpectedly on a large canvas. I traveled through Lavender Canyon at least twenty-five years ago. It's weird. I don't really know how that works; I just know that it does. I never know what will show up. I start working and see what appears in the paint that takes me back to a time and place, and then I go to work to complete the impression of that image as I remember it. The image could be from a few days ago, months ago or even a couple of decades ago. I guess you could say I'm somewhat of a time traveler.

I never served my country in uniform. I owe that debt too, but I think basic training for a fifty-nine-year-old would not be beneficial for anybody involved. In 1970, I had a high lottery number, and by the time I left college in '73, the Vietnam War was winding down. My time to serve had moved past me, and I went to work as an apprentice film editor, and on to a career producing TV news, documentaries, corporate video and live theater. Throughout all those years, painting was a hobby. I always traveled with watercolors and paper. Life moved on. I married Dorothy and became an instant stepdad to Matt. After playing with watercolors for twenty or so years, I launched myself into oil painting.

My paintings are created in Quogue, on the East End of Long Island, New York, in a small studio above a garage. I work alone as so many artists do. My paintings hang over mantles and couches, in dens, living rooms, dining rooms, bedrooms and boardrooms all over the world. I paint the wide-open spaces, endless skies, expansive seas and broad horizons. Making these kinds of land/seascapes makes me feel free, and I want to pass along that feeling of serenity and peace to others. This ultimate gift that our compatriots in uniform

have always fought and died for is precisely this freedom!

If I had any doubts about what I wanted to be when I grew up, the attacks of September 11, 2001, sealed it for me in terms of knowing that I would spend the rest of my days involved in art making. September 11 also awakened something else in me. I had seen glimmers of it in fleeting moments, but I buried the thoughts as quickly as they had arisen. I never understood what it was nor did I want to face it, so I ignored it—even though it was slowly eating at my core for the better part of thirty years. That it emerged was a shocking and emotional surprise for me and it would be expressed in a series of paintings over a span of seven years. This totally unexpected direction continues to unfold and broaden my horizons with new connections and experiences that I never could have dreamed of.

Somehow, in the pursuit of making landscape paintings, I started painting military images in 2003. It was totally unplanned and it surprised the hell out of me! In the beginning I had no idea why I was making these images, I just felt compelled to do so. It is one of the crazy things about being an artist. You make “stuff” sometimes without really knowing why. Once I began to make these paintings, I had no clue what to do with them or where they would go. Slowly, as the paintings were completed over the years, the road less travelled was revealed and I would learn the purpose of my journey. The revelation shocked me to the core, and the journey took me on a tumultuous emotional roller coaster ride.

Military Art is different. Who would have a huge image of an ominous looking Blackhawk helicopter in their dining room? How about a nice tank in the desert passing a column of thick black acrid smoke—that might work well in the guest bedroom over the credenza, don't you think? And what about

a solemn Honor Guard squad carrying that flag-draped transfer case (coffin) across a tarmac, that would be kinda' swell over the fireplace, wouldn't it? Not exactly!

No, my military paintings had a special purpose, a special job to do. But where, how, and for whom—that was the part about which I had no idea. In time, I would find out that these paintings were made to honor and to serve. Each one of the paintings was like an individual stone in a path leading to the next. It's still going on to this day, my own little narrow path through the woods that seems to keep opening up to new vistas. Many others have joined me, as you will see. It's as if I am merely the instrument for a force much greater than myself that sped me along. It was almost as if I didn't find *it*. *It* found me. And in so doing, *I found me*.

This book is a record of this unexpected and unplanned adventure. It is also the story of the power of art in the world. In the macro, it is the story of offering honor to our uniformed men and women. In the micro, it is my personal quest to fill a hole in my being that I didn't even know existed. I gained insight into what life is like for the families of warriors on active duty in a momentary yet potent encounter, and spent time with young men who have had their physical and emotional well-being forever altered by injuries sustained in combat. Meeting these fine young men and women undoubtedly changed my life.

The paintings made during this period propelled me out of the studio and into a world that was completely foreign to me. I feel compelled as an artist and communicator to commit this story to words, just as I was compelled to get the images down in oil paint on canvas. I have been most fortunate in that the landscape paintings I make for myself, others have enjoyed

and purchased. For this I am eternally grateful as it has allowed me to continue painting.

My mission is to share my story as a heartfelt tribute to all the fine young men and women in uniform here at home and overseas in harm's way. It is my goal to let them know how much we appreciate their extraordinary commitment, selfless sacrifice and service that we don't fully appreciate or totally comprehend while sleeping soundly every night under our comfortable covers here back home. This book is dedicated to them.

I hope this book serves as inspiration to others, especially artists on their own paths of discovery, who have much to give in service to something much larger than themselves.

Steve Alpert  
New York City

*When we see flags affixed to fences over highway bridges welcoming back hometown heroes, we can't know the horrors they may have experienced. All we can do is love them, thank them and help them back into a life and a future.*

\*

\*

\*

\*

# PRELUDE: THE VIETNAM MEMORIAL WALL

It was the summer of 1985. A friend and I were in Washington, DC, wandering around the Mall. The oppressive heat and humidity was vintage Washington weather. Your clothing stuck to your body. Looking way down to the right, there was this black thing like a gash in the earth, like something had burned and smoldered there. As I got closer, there was something in the gash—a long, high wall of black granite—it was the Vietnam Memorial Wall. As you approach The Wall, it slows you down and envelops you. You don't just walk up to this memorial—you *descend* into this hushed netherworld, leaving the world you knew behind. The other visitors speak softly if they speak at all. You realize you are in a place like no other. Park Rangers assist visitors in finding the names of their loved ones. Under the spell of this overpowering mountain of polished black granite that serves as a partition, a boundary between the world of the living and the world of those who didn't make it home from Southeast Asia, you are overcome by the tens of thousands of names perfectly and respectfully engraved in the rock. *All those names...* I kept scanning the names on the shiny surface. *The names, the names...*

My shirt was soaked through. Something was activated in my head as I scanned the names on the next column and the next. The names blurred into one another and my gaze passed through the outer layer of the smooth granite deep into the rock unleashing a flood of memories from that time and place.

I flashed on the long line of troop transports rolling along Pennsylvania Avenue at two in the morning in spring of 1970, the prelude to the first March on Washington. The trucks all in a perfectly spaced convoy, the helmeted troops sitting erect and silent. There was no doubt in their bearing; they were there ready to do their job in the days ahead, whatever that might be. A montage of images of black and white Vietnam combat scenes flickered through my head, choppers dotting the skies, men plodding across rice paddies, the scenes I had watched on our black and white TV in the 1960s that brought back a sense of helplessness and confusion. I heard echoes of my very likeable and hawkish high school American History teacher, Mr. William Clarke, beating the war drums during yet another heated debate with his sardonic smile, telling us Hell-No-We-Won't-Goers, "This is America, where you have the right to be wrong!" Deep and twisted feelings lay in my gut still raw and undigested.

I stood frozen to The Wall as the temperature seemed to climb even higher...

February 1970. It was unusually warm and sunny for a day in February in Ithaca, NY. Guys had their huge speakers propped on windowsills around the lower quad at Ithaca College. The first lottery drawing was on the radio. As college students, we had the 2-S deferment. But, when you graduated you became 1-A, eligible to be drafted, sent to boot camp and beyond. The lottery would determine who got called by their local draft board and in what order. It had the attention of college students across the nation. I had just turned eighteen as a second semester freshman. The whole thing was entirely surreal.

The first date was read off, reverberating around the

quad. A very loud scream came down the hall. It was Jeff Burris—number one in the lottery—and Burris was drinking free for the next couple of weeks, like many other unlucky lads on that day in 1970. I don't know what ever happened to Burris except he was rumored to have figured out a way to break his foot to get out of the draft when he graduated in 1972. But that was only a rumor, and the world at that time was thick with rumors of all kinds of crazy stories about what guys did back then to flunk their physical. You heard of guys going into the induction physical tripping on LSD, not having slept in days, and God knows what else. Guys broke bones, cut off fingers—if you could think of it, guys were doing it. Insanity became the norm. Not to mention running away to Canada...

You never forget your lottery number the way you never forget your Social Security number. My birthday, November 16, drew number 197; high enough not to be called by my local draft board as it turned out. My thought was that had I been drafted, I would have gone into the service and taken my chances.

Sweltering at The Wall, I wondered what happened to the wild-eyed shaved-head hitchhiker guy that I gave a ride to on the California coast in '73 who was ranting and raving, "*Gotta get back to Da Nang, man!*" He was ranting about re-uppin' and gettin' back...he was one of those guys who when he was home all he could think about was being back in-country, and when he was over there, all he could think about was being back at home. Or, the brother of a friend who I drove to Stewart Air Force Base to begin his journey to Nam in the summer of '69. What happened to him? Was he on this wall? What was his name?

My college roommate's previous roommate dropped

out and was drafted and went to Vietnam. He'd send us audio cassettes from Vietnam every couple of weeks. In each successive tape he became more and more weird. We'd huddle around the cassette player with a touch of voyeurism and dread. We would look at each other as if to say, "You ready?" We took deep breaths before stabbing the play button that took us to hell on the other side of the world. Each tape had an in-your-face sign-on theme song, usually Hendrix or The Doors. He spun his lurid and wild battle tales with explosions and artillery in the background. Years later the surreal quality in *Apocalypse Now* captured that feeling of terror and madness on those tapes. I can't recall any specific thing he talked about, too many years have gone by, but I do vividly remember the fear and wildness in his voice. When he came home, a few of us helped him move. I had the VW Bus and so I was invited. He was quiet, somber, but on edge like a trip wire and you knew there was a whole lot of stuff going on inside this guy, stuff you didn't want to know about. And you knew he had seen horrible things, maybe had done horrible things. We were real careful around him like you would be around a bomb that might go off at any moment, like if you moved too quickly or said something weird, he might freak out. I don't think I said much more than, "Nice to meetcha," "welcome home," and "you're welcome," after he thanked us for helping.

I was brought back to the present by the sounds of a woman behind me, hunched over and sobbing quietly. She was alone.

Fifty-eight thousand, two hundred sixty-seven names; the names of the men and women who gave their lives in that country. They would never know a full life in their own country and they would never know their children. Sweat ran down my back and down my legs. Then, a series of quick flashbacks:

the assassinations of Martin Luther King and Bobby Kennedy in '68, the unbelievable murders of the students at Kent State by the Ohio National Guard in 1970 that ignited such anger and division within the country—this was the thing that spun the whole situation completely out of control—then, both demonstrations in DC in 1970 and '71, and on and on...makes you wonder if all the sex, drugs and rock 'n' roll that went along with it were just a natural expression of mourning, anger, fear and terror. And then with all the peace and love beads, how did we Baby Boomers allow the returning Vets, our brethren, how did we allow them to be treated so badly, how is it possible that a woman in uniform walking through the Port Authority bus terminal in New York City was spit on by another American?

I felt like I had eaten something rotten. The heat pressed on my head, pushing me deeper into the ground. The wall rose up, hulking over me like a shroud. All these guys killed by sniper fire, mortars, being ripped in half by machine gun fire, stepping on land mines, booby traps...and what the hell was I doing during all that time? Farting around in college. I felt small, guilty and wimpy for not having been there, a coward not strong enough to stand up to the challenge.

Scanning the black rock across all those names, I wondered how come my name wasn't up there. It could have been, it *should have been*. They call it "survivor's guilt." What a completely crazy thought! But then, everything about the War in Vietnam seemed absolutely crazy and everything at that time *was* completely crazy. The truth is that I would have had to leave high school before graduating and run to that war in time for the big action. Clearly, it was not my time. Even so, I carried with me the guilt for not having served my country. I discovered this emancipating motivator that moment

at The Wall. This was the war of my era, and I missed it.

As I stood transfixed at The Wall, *all those names were weighing on me*. A young man climbed a ladder and was tracing a name on The Wall. I couldn't tell if my eyes were sweating in the heat or were they tears? *My name was not on this wall and it could have been, it should have been.*

Looking around, I saw stuff on the ground, offerings that people left behind: flowers, a baseball, a model of a boat, a letter in a plastic stand. I bent down and began to read: "Dear Joseph, Today is your birthday and I'm thinking about you..." It was as if I was hearing the mother's voice reading the letter aloud, a mother that lost her son. Where had she travelled from? Who *was* her son? How and where did he die? I could not read another word of that letter...and I could not get up. I lost it right there hunched over in a ball soaking wet and shaking, covering my face with my hands as all of this long buried emotion came to the surface. I tried to hold it in, but that only created the fits and sobs, the sounds of a dam breaking under the pressure. A puddle was forming under me. I tucked my head into my chest as far as it could go, maybe if no one could see my face they wouldn't notice I was having this moment heaving there in a dripping wet ball. And I *did not even know any of the names on The Wall!* It was nuts, all of it crazy.

I have no clue how long I remained in that state but I finally pulled myself together and dragged my ass out of there, passed the Thomas Hart sculptures and slowly returned to the world. The imprint of that day was now lodged in my psyche like a seed. But I buried it, not yet ready to own it, understand it and grow from it. Not yet ready to do anything with it. The seed would remain dormant for the next sixteen years until that day in September in 2001. September 11, 2001. Can any

American read that date or hear it spoken without a flood of memories?

Oh, that day changed everything and everybody in America. For me, it affirmed that I would commit myself to becoming a professional artist and develop a new career as a fine art painter. Two years later in 2003, the seed took root and began to push up flowers in the form of the Blackhawk paintings and all the other paintings that followed.

# THANK YOU FOR YOUR SERVICE

On Veterans Day, 2003, I again found myself in Washington DC. I was taking a Metro toward Silver Spring on the Red Line. The car was almost empty save for a few people at the end of the car on my left. A heavy set and tired looking man sat directly across from me. He wore the neutral expression on his face that you see in public transit spaces and a navy blue baseball cap clearly announcing in gold embroidery: "Vietnam Veteran." I'm sure you've seen guys of a certain age wearing hats like this. He was my age, maybe a few years older. My impulse was to shake his hand and thank him for his service but he seemed unapproachable. I had second thoughts about breaking the boundary of public space privacy but I felt strongly that I had to do it, maybe more for me than for him.

As the Metro rolled down the tracks, I stood up, grabbed the pole and said, "Excuse me, Sir, did you serve in Vietnam?" *Stupid question you jerk, of course he served in Vietnam—why do you think he's wearing that hat?* He looked at me blankly and nodded. I pushed my hand out into the space between us. "Thank you for your service, Sir," I said feeling like a child to this man. My hand was hanging out in the air catching the attention of the few passengers who watched attentively. He just looked at me blankly. I felt suspended in mid-air, and clearly I had pulled this fellow into my awkward moment.

He slowly moved his hand from his side and took my hand without changing his facial expression. He looked at me with what felt like ambivalence and indifference, possibly even

disdain. We held each other's hand, not tightly, not loosely, and only for a single beat, maybe two. He retracted his hand and turned his eyes away from me. He was done with this exercise that he did not invite or particularly welcome. Pain and bitterness still lived in this man, I thought. Whatever went down for him in 'Nam and between then and now, there was unresolved stuff there and he wasn't talking about it to anybody. I was projecting all of this, of course, who knows if any of it was true. When he looked at me in the brief moment that we were connected, he looked at me with impersonal displeasure as if to say, "Hey, it's way too late for thank you's. Where the hell were *you* when all of it went down, in college drinkin', smokin' and chasin' tail and havin' a good time?" I made that up in my head, he didn't say anything, but that's what I *was* doing when guys like him were slogging it out in the jungle. Maybe he was one of those quiet guys who never says boo to anyone about anything. It was impossible to know.

What I wanted to say to him when I was shaking his hand, the hand of a man who served in Vietnam all those years ago and experienced God-only-knows-what, was, *"I'm so sorry, man, we messed up big time not thanking all of you guys when you made it home, we should have but didn't, goddammit. Thank you from the bottom of my heart, from all of our hearts; we didn't know any better, we got caught up in all of that Hawk and Dove crap, Nixon, and then Watergate, and everything else at that time. You know, there's no damn good excuse for forgetting about all you guys who gave everything you had. We didn't want you to even be there but you were there and all that happened to all of you while we were screaming, 'Hell no, we won't go!' with good reason, or so we thought. And then the war was finally over and all you guys came back and we didn't show an ounce of appreciation for you going and doing*

*what you were asked to do. The whole thing was just so damn wrong... and still is."*

I wanted to say all this and more, standing right there in front of this man with a Vietnam Veteran cap. I didn't say anything except, "Thank you for your service, Sir."

I stood awkwardly in the middle of the car, grasping the pole. At the next stop the man got up and slowly left the train without looking at me, a relief for both of us. The encounter felt sad, so very sad. Through the glass door I watched him, a solitary figure. I felt the same standing alone with my thoughts in the subway car.

The guys on the ground in Vietnam who took the orders and did their best to carry them out, it was as if the whole thing was *their* fault. They were not about the politics and the heady chatter of politicians who sent other people's kids to battlegrounds. They had their orders and went into the field hoping to survive. They fought to stay alive and to keep each other alive. The grunts, the tunnel rats, the guys in the jungle, they weren't about debating the merits of the Domino Theory or the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution or the shape of the table at the Paris Peace Talks. It took about six months to decide the physical shape of the negotiating table while hell was being played out all over North and South Vietnam. How many soldiers and citizens died while the table debate raged on? Maddening. And then they came home to be reviled, ignored and even spat upon. How more wrong could anything possibly be? It is embarrassing, shameful and disgusting how we treated our returning Vietnam Vets who served so bravely. There is a permanent stain on all of us, forever etched in blood in the history books and in black granite at the Vietnam Memorial Wall in DC.

# GASOLINE ON THE FIRE



*Blackhawk study, 9"x12" oil on canvas, purchased by Jim & Nancy Campbell.*

On that fateful day, September 11, 2001, everything and everyone in America changed. Surreal is the only word to describe what life was like here in Manhattan immediately after. Dorothy and I were home that morning, five miles from Ground Zero. Dorothy's office is located less than a mile from Ground Zero and a few of her employees walked up to our apartment on that day. One of Dorothy's employees witnessed Flight 11 screaming low and fast moments before ramming the North Tower.

Practically overnight there were American flags everywhere, on cars, in store windows. There was a period of collective shock and quiet on the streets of Manhattan. People spoke quietly and politely to each other; there were very few

fight and arguments. You hardly ever heard a horn from cars and trucks, completely the opposite of what was the norm prior to that day. The whole place quieted down. It was completely weird, like you were in a place that was unfamiliar. No commercial aircraft in the skies for the first few days, only fighter jets and Blackhawk helicopters. For the first three or four months I felt completely unsafe in my hometown. Every time I heard a siren I assumed it was another terror attack of some sort. But in time, the fear subsided for me. The thoughts of dying in the subway or drowning in one of the tunnels under the Hudson River began to leave me and life drifted back to, well, not "normal," but a sort of "new normal." And, something was awakened in all of us and we would never be the same again. All of a sudden there were a plethora of American flags all over. And, we would go to war.

**March 2003–The invasion of Iraq.** I watched the fall of Saddam and his regime, riveted with all of you. Good riddance for sure. I could see Saddam Hussein as tyrant and torturer that he was, not to mention his insane and murderous sons, but I never really understood the connection between Saddam and the attacks of September 11.

I was glued to the TV like so many others, including the citizens of Baghdad that were seemingly thrilled to be liberated from Saddam's regime. For as long as I live I will remember that big statue of Saddam being brought down by our troops. There we Americans were, once again the good guys helping free a nation from a despot. Our men and women in uniform did a magnificent job in ridiculous conditions. I can only surmise that this is always the way of war.

I was going about my bread and butter business making landscape paintings. Having left the world of producing television and video programs, my new career as a fine art

painter was going well with lots of exhibitions, and business was brisk. I had converted a bedroom upstairs into a studio and it was, well, just like a studio—a totally uninhabitable place except for the person who works there. A miracle happened when my wife Dorothy said, “You really need to get out of the bedroom upstairs.” Rick Mincher, a close friend who married Dorothy’s best friend growing up in Schenectady, NY, is a retired engineer with exceptional construction talents who told me that he’d always wanted to construct an art studio space. And we went at it.

In March 2002, Rick made the first of many five-hour drives to Quogue out on the east end of Long Island, NY. Rick and I spent three days looking at the raw space above the garage. He asked me a million questions while taking measurements and asking more questions. And then Rick went home and worked up plans for what would be my studio. I had no construction skills whatsoever and happily settled into the drone work. By the end of June a lifelong dream came true and I had a working art studio at less than half the price quoted to me by three contractors. Another friend told me that my work would change as a result of having this new workspace. He was so right.

Also that year, I saw the retrospective exhibition of the great modern master painter Gerhard Richter at the Museum of Modern Art (MOMA) in New York. I went twice, and wish I had gone back a few more times. Richter grew up in Germany during WWII. In the exhibition there is a chilling black-and-white portrait of Richter’s uncle Rudy, a Nazi officer, standing on a city street in winter smiling broadly in his winter greatcoat and officer’s hat. In one room there must have been at least ten large paintings of WWII aircraft: Stukas, P-38’s, a squadron of

RAF bombers, and other warbirds of the era. The paintings were masterful and extremely realistic, yet they had the painterly soft-edged quality that is Richter's signature approach in his magnificent landscapes. Richter's compelling aircraft paintings to me are a poignant mix of boyish fascination with machines of war and the cold reality of combat.

On November 11, 2003, I was walking downtown in Soho as three Blackhawks streaked across the narrow slit of sky between buildings at a ridiculously low altitude as they headed uptown to buzz the Veterans Day parade on Fifth Avenue. The Blackhawks were low enough to catch a quick glance of the features of the crew while they obliterated the sky. Their impressive and deafening roar reverberated in the canyon of Wooster Street and shook everything around me.

Five days later on November 16, 2003, I woke up on my fifty-second birthday to a New York Times headline reporting a mid-air crash of two Blackhawk helicopters over northern Iraq. Seventeen of our people were killed in a matter of seconds. The article was accompanied by a long and narrow image of a little Blackhawk helicopter in a massive airspace. That image is imbedded in my memory and I can still see that little Blackhawk looking completely defenseless in all that space, the crew seemingly hanging up there in the air armed only with their wits, guns and a prayer should there be trouble. As formidable a fighting machine as a Blackhawk is, to me they still seemed highly vulnerable.

Close to my new studio is the Francis S. Gabreski airbase that is home to the Air National Guard units that fly the C-130 Hercules transport planes and Blackhawk helicopters. There seemed to be Blackhawk helicopters all over the sky just like when I got my first VW Bug in 1968—all I saw was VW Bugs all

over the place. Suddenly, my world was filled with Blackhawk helicopters.

I was motivated and inspired to make a large 42"x60" painting of a Blackhawk helicopter. And so my journey began. While the big canvas was being made up, I researched Blackhawk images and their unmistakable shape and form on the Internet and in bookstores.

Soon I was ready, and I painted a small 9"x12" Blackhawk study. "Going In." It was still wet when I called my friend Jim Campbell to come over and see it. Jim came by on a Sunday morning and bought it on the spot as a graduation gift for his godson, a retired Blackhawk pilot about to graduate from Harvard Business School.

After Jim left the studio, I was dumbfounded and astonished. That first little painting of a Blackhawk helicopter had found its way to an actual Blackhawk pilot! What are the odds on that happening? I was completely blown away. The fire had already been lit, but this was like pouring gasoline on it. I could not wait to get my hands on that big canvas.

[WWW.WORTH-FIGHTING-FOR.COM](http://WWW.WORTH-FIGHTING-FOR.COM)  
[WWW.STEVEALPERTART.COM](http://WWW.STEVEALPERTART.COM)

# Library Tales Publishing

If you enjoyed this book, there are several ways you can read more by the same author and make sure you get the inside track on all Library Tales Publishing books.

Visit [www.librarytalespublishing.com](http://www.librarytalespublishing.com) and find out first about forthcoming titles, read exclusive material and author interviews, and enter exciting competitions.

It's never been easier to read more with Library Tales Publishing.

Library Tales Publishing  
[www.librarytalespublishing.com](http://www.librarytalespublishing.com)



## **Library Tales Publishing**

244 5th Avenue #Q222, New York, NY, 10001

Phone: 1-800-754-5016 | Fax: (917) 463-0892

[www.LibraryTalesPublishing.com](http://www.LibraryTalesPublishing.com)