

Afghanistan

Through the Eyes of a Combat Artist

Illustrations by SSgt Michael D. Fay, USMCR



First Lieutenant Steven M. Ford, 3d Battalion, Sixth Marine Regiment, returned from a long patrol in western Afghanistan during the war on terror, January 2002.

It is not surprising to realize that the Marine Corps is the only service to send combat artists to Afghanistan. In a world where violence can be captured digitally or sent around the world and into our living rooms in nanoseconds, some people may ask, “Why take up precious boat spaces with something as archaic as a combat artist?”

One of the two Marine combat artists sent to Afghanistan was Staff Sergeant Michael D. “Mike” Fay, a swarthy, 48-year-old reservist with eye-to-brain-to-right-hand coordination and motor skills beyond those of digital cameras and satellite links.

Fay is a member of a unique consortium of leathernecks—Marine riflemen who are just as comfortable with pencils, paintbrushes, watercolors and sketch pads as they are with bandoliers of 5.56 ball ammunition, bayonets, gas masks and M16A2 service rifles.

The Corps has had Marines double as artists since World War I, and much of their art, 7,000 paintings, drawings, sculptures and other works, fills the Marine Corps Historical Center in Washington, D.C.

In Fay’s particular case, he brought with him a bachelor’s degree in art from Penn State and, as a Marine, worked on helicopters. His previous combat experience came from action in Somalia and during Desert Storm. Most importantly there is a desire, as he puts it, to capture “that other reality.” He wants to record history, slices of life that in future years will be useful when historians seek to learn what it was like in that war in Afghanistan.

From Kandahar, Kabul and undisclosed desert locations, Fay, through quick sketches and photographs, drew what he witnessed. Since returning in March, he’s been working to bring those images alive on paper and canvas.

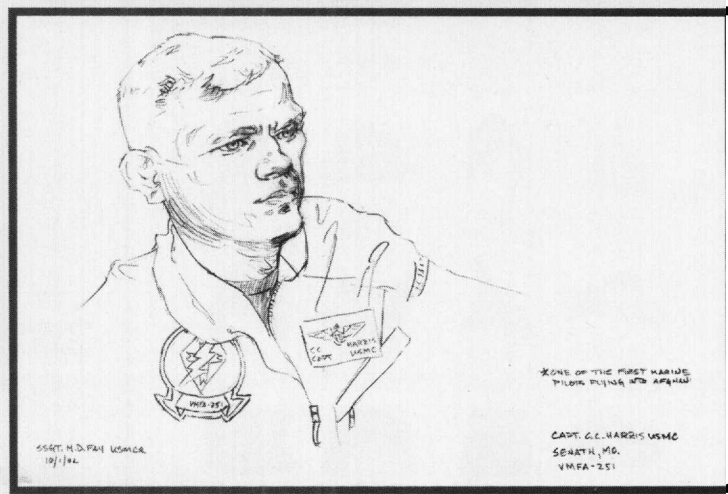
Leatherneck is proud to present several of his works and hopes to publish more combat art in the future.

—R. R. Keene



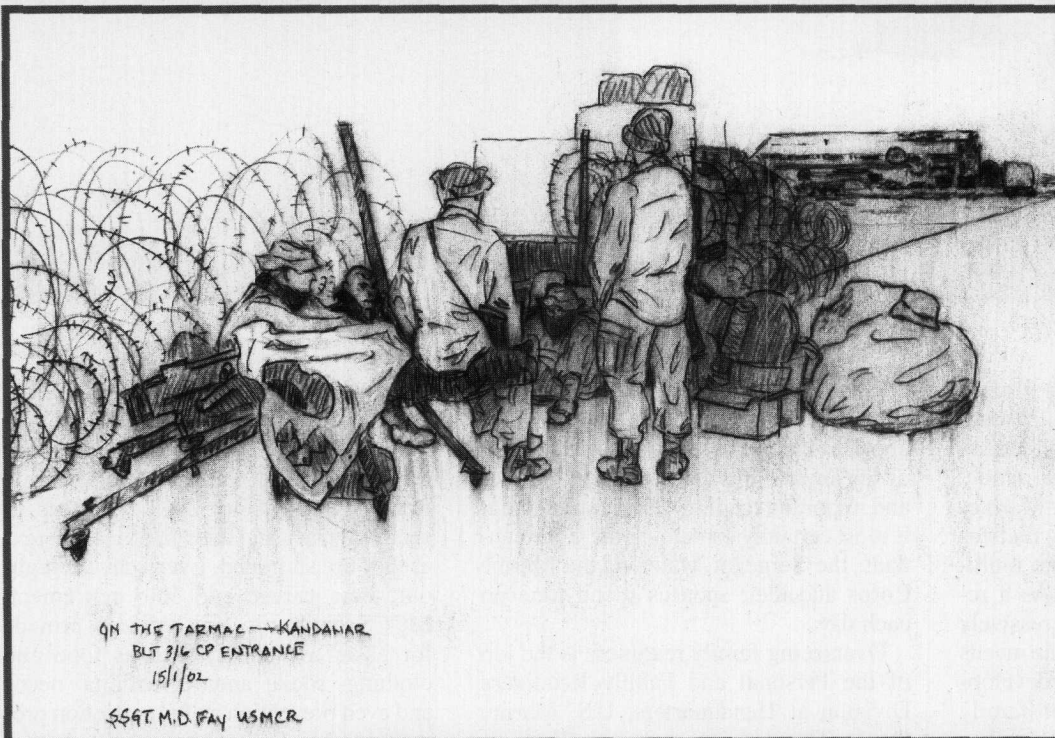
Above: Marines of the Combined Antiarmor Team, Weapons Co, 3/6 set trip flares for local security at Kandahar in January 2002.

Below: Captain Clint C. Harris of Marine Fighter/Attack Squadron 251, Marine Aircraft Group 31, Second Marine Aircraft Wing flew some of the first missions in Afghanistan.





Above: An LAV-25 of 2d Light Armored Reconnaissance Bn, 26th Marine Expeditionary Unit (Special Operations Capable) stood poised for action near the Kandahar International Airport in January of this year.



Left: Marines of 3/6 took a break near the battalion command post at Kandahar International Airport in January.