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'In Their Boots' a revealing look at wounded soldiers

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Photo of Alan Babin courtesy of "In their Boots"

In the first episode of an innovative documentary series "In Their Boots," the sister of a wounded soldier explains why the family cooperated with the filmmakers.

"I think it's important to educate America," said Christy Babin, whose brother Alan, an Army medic, was gravely wounded during the assault on Baghdad in 2003 and still must cope with the debilitating effects of traumatic brain injury and a stroke.

The story of the Babin family, particularly Alan's mother, Rosie, is altogether heart-wrenching. Much of the footage was shot by Rosie Babin, who is remarkably resilient and determined.

What makes "In Their Boots" different from other documentaries is its manner of presentation: A different episode will be shown each week on www.intheirboots.com, followed by an interactive discussion with viewers via webcams and instant messaging. The Babin family episode is set for 4 p.m. Wednesday.

Each episode will tell a different tale of service personnel and their families. The effort was backed by a \$4-million grant to the liberal Brave New Foundation from the Iraq Afghanistan Deployment Impact Fund to raise the awareness of a public that, without a draft, is largely insulated from the grim realities of war and its aftermath.

The Iraq Afghanistan Deployment Impact Fund is supported by the California Community Foundation, one of the oldest, most esteemed philanthropic groups in the nation. For three years the filmmakers fanned out across the country.

They decided that showing their work online was in keeping with how the generation that is fighting the two wars gets its information. This is the YouTube, Facebook, etc. generation and so how better than online to tell their stories?

Brave New Foundation President Robert Greenwald is known for his activist documentaries, with targets including Wal-Mart, Rupert Murdoch and various aspects of the Bush administration's handling of the Iraq war. But the first episode of "In Their Boots" has no evident political agenda.

Instead, the Babin family is shown at work and play, as Rosie and her husband, Alain, help their son with his daily needs and then on a ski holiday. The emotional high point may be when Rosie ponders what happens to Alan when she and her husband are gone.

Alan Babin was wounded while dashing to help a downed colleague. For his bravery, he was awarded the Bronze Star.

On camera at least, the Babin family neither condemns the foreign policy that sent their son to war nor do they support it. If there is a journalistic hole in the story it involves the unanswered question of how much medical and financial help Alan receives from the Veterans Affairs Department.

But that's a quibble. This first try of "In Their Boots" is powerful and goes a long way toward fulfilling Christy Babin's desire that Americans be educated about the uncomfortable truth behind the service and sacrifice required of U.S. troops in Iraq and Afghanistan.

-- Tony Perry

Available: <http://latimesblogs.latimes.com/webscout/2008/07/in-their-boots.html>