

Soldiers of Peace-

Self-reflective

The task of completing a six-minute assignment (as was the original time frame) was an extremely daunting one. My worry was on what exactly I was going to do something. Exciting and interesting ideas seemed to evade me, and thus I decided to pick a topic that would explore who I am, where I come from and where I might go, all in terms of religion.

Originally I aimed to explore and to provide insight into the life of a veiled, Muslim female on Rhodes University campus. At the same time I wanted to gain insight into my own notions and beliefs with regards to religion as someone who is called Muslim due to her family and background, but I do not practise Islam and thus cannot surely be called Muslim? In my proposal i stated that i wished to complete “a six minute documentary that aimed to reveal the woman who lives behind the veil. Western society has misconceived and mostly misrepresented Islamic culture and specifically Muslim women who veil themselves. I aimed to give those women a chance to tell their side of the story and to hear what they have to say. At the same time, I wish to explore my own notions of Islam, my confusion with regards to religion and my understandings of it in terms of my family and my experiences.”

These objectives would have been difficult to achieve due to the fact that due to the small number of Muslims in Grahamstown, the fact that there is no mosque in Grahamstown, meant that I felt that I would not really be able to capture the essence and beauty of the religion, and the culture that I knew in Egypt with my family would be impossible to capture here. However, one of the most important reasons why I did not choose to continue with this assignment was that I was not and am not yet ready to explore where I am in terms of religion and I did not want to merely embark on an exploration for the sake of this documentary, because once I go down that path, I can not stop half way or turn back.

However, now I was left yet again without a topic for my documentary. I wanted, as does

everyone, to explore something entirely new and exciting, but with a department that swarms with over 300 hundred “wanna-be” journalists milking this town for all that is worth, there is not much that has not yet been done, that is actually worth doing. One of class mates did come to my rescue however, and suggested I do 'something' on the army base here on Grahamstown. And so I did.

My army documentary aimed to explore the 'goings-on' at the military base here in Grahamstown as well as get to know three of the soldiers on personal level, one female, one young male and one male with a family. I wanted to get to know them on personal level and to find out why it is exactly that they decided to enrol for the military and more specifically what it means for them to be sent on peace keeping missions. This documentary aimed to explore their lives in full and wanted to include assimilated helicopter missions and various training sessions.

Once I had been to the army base and met with the Officer commanding, Lietenent Colonel du Preez and the Captain in charge of Charlie Company, Captain Sampson, I then only realised what a massive task I had ahead of me. I felt that I was really out of my depth in terms of filming grenade throwing, obstacle courses, section attacks, and getting my subjects to spill their guts to me whilst doing all of these things. I felt out of my depth, and indeed I was. I had never done anything like that before! My hand held camera before that had been really basic and was mostly too shaky too be considered one of my skills. Not only that, but with previous assignments we had always worked in a group so we ould ask each other for help when it came to doing camera work, sound, interviewing, editing and just generally throwing ideas around. Now I had an entire army company setting up and completeing strenuous exercises simply for my now five-minute assignment. The pressure was huge!

But I think that my first step in the right direction was admitting to Paul that I did indeed feel out of my depth. For some reason that then gave me the courage to prove that I could do it, or I was at least going to try on my own, even though I had never done anything like it before. My first day of filming was my longest and hardest, but it also a lot of fun. I think that is what I had never learnt until this assignment- I have got to enjoy camera work and to not be so intimidated by the

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equipment. The adrenalin that I felt on that day made me feel so confident and excited about what I was doing that I realised that it did not need to be so daunting. The days after that included exercises that were even more heart-racing and exciting. I was so lucky that the equipment did not cause any footage to be lost on any of the days when exercises were being done. Sound did not record and the quality of footage was not good enough when I filmed off the hard-drive during my interviews with my subjects. I was so frustrated because they had really said some powerful things and I did not like re-doing things as I feel like I am wasting everybody's time- which of course I was. But on the other side, by re-doing the interviews I had been given a second chance in terms of setting up the shots, all could be filmed on a day when the weather might be better and their answers might be better the second time around. And it was so.

In terms of editing, I was really looking forward to it. I like editing, I feel like that that is the one place where you have absolute control over what you want your piece to look like. The problem was- what did I want my piece to look like? I knew I wanted the army colours to really stand out against the background, but I felt that if I carried this out though the whole piece it might be too distracting and so I decided that my cutaways and my interviews would look different. The colours all looked good during the interviews so I did not add any effects to them. Once I had decided on structure and content, it all fell into place.

I am extremely happy with the way my piece turned out. This assignment gave me the confidence to want to go out into the world and perhaps do some freelance work for a few years. But it also made me realise that I have got to be able to find out what it is that interests me so that I can find stories to tell. Once I have a good story to tell, the rest will make itself apparent to me. I love this medium and am enthusiastic about the future.