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'Where Soldiers Come From' Premieres at Texas State

By [Jordan Gass-Poore](#) on January 31, 2012 - 11:30am in [Local Cast and Crew](#)



Austin-based documentarian [Heather Courtney](#) chronicles four years in the lives of small-town childhood friends in the award-winning movie *Where Soldiers Come From*. The film begins with their decision to enlist in the U.S. National Guard after graduating high school, and continues through their deployment to Afghanistan and their adjustment back to civilian life. [Jette reviewed the movie](#) after its premiere at SXSW in 2011.

The [Texas Independent Film Network](#), an Austin-based statewide coalition of film societies, universities and independent theaters, sponsored the San Marcos screening of *Where Soldiers Come From* on Jan. 25 in the Texas State University- San Marcos Theatre Center. Courtney attended the Texas State screening.

Setting out to make a documentary about rural America, Courtney said she changed her mind after reading an article in her hometown newspaper -- in Michigan's Upper Peninsula -- about the recent return of National Guard soldiers from Iraq. She said she didn't know there was a National Guard unit there until reading the article.

Where Soldiers Come From was filmed primarily in the Upper Peninsula area. Courtney attended a monthly National Guard unit training there, where she met 19-year-old Dominic Fredianelli and his friends. The young men had recently enlisted and were placed in the same unit. The documentary takes an intimate look into the lives of Matt "Bodi" Beaudoin, Fredianelli and Cole Smith as they come of age in the deserts of Afghanistan.

Courtney said Fredianelli thought the idea of her filming a documentary about him and his friends was "interesting." She said she did not begin to film him and his friends until two months after initially meeting them. She said Fredianelli and his friends were told that they should not worry about deployment because it only occurs every five years.

About a year-and-a-half into filming *Where Soldiers Come From*, Courtney said the three young men found out they would be deployed to Afghanistan. Their National Guard unit was sent to Afghanistan to find improvised explosive devices (IEDs). Courtney followed her subjects to Afghanistan where she was embedded in the U.S. military base.

During her time in Afghanistan, Courtney learned about traumatic brain injury (TBI), which has been referred to as the signature wound of the Afghan War. TBI is the result of repeated concussions. Courtney said during the first five years of the Iraq War, U.S. military troops only drove Humvees, which if driven over an IED, would result in loss of life/limbs.

Courtney said the military now utilizes Mine Resistant Ambush Protected all-terrain vehicles that are built to better protect the troops inside. However, troops are still getting concussions when bombs hit their vehicles. The soldiers do not show signs or symptoms of a concussion at first and will continue to be sent on IED missions. She said many soldiers with TBI are misdiagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder because the signs and symptoms are similar.

Beaudoin was diagnosed with TBI. Courtney said he experienced 10 explosions during the course of his deployment because he was in the lead gun vehicle. Even though Beaudoin was not outwardly physically injured, he suffered from multiple concussions, likening it to being a "professional football player for 20 years." Courtney said he continues to have

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trouble sleeping, focusing and concentrating; he has to deal with headaches, irritability and anger.

The lives of Beaudoin, Fredianelli and Smith have been changed forever by their experiences in Afghanistan. Courtney said the friends traveled with her on *Where Soldiers Come From* promotional tours to personally share their stories and answer questions from the crowds. Beaudoin is now co-managing his girlfriend's mother's bar; Fredianelli will have an upcoming solo art show; and Smith is working to re-enroll in higher education. All three continue to live in Michigan.

Texas Independent Film Network screens a different Texas independent movie each month. Co-founder Ryan Long said TIFN connects students with filmmakers by bringing them to the screenings of their films throughout the state.

"Here's a filmmaker who's maybe only a few years older than you who's doing it," Long said. "How did they get there? Well, ask them because they're in the room."

TIFN will continue their relationship with Texas State throughout this semester with screenings of *Slacker 2011*, a double feature of *Barbecue: A Texas Love Story* and *Something's Brewin' In Shiner*, and *An Ordinary Family*.

[Photo credit: "Director Heather Courtney" by Justin Hennard, found via the *Where Soldiers Come From* [website](#).]