

WAR ARTIST

Ever wonder what an artist and journalist takes to war? It starts with a few pencils...

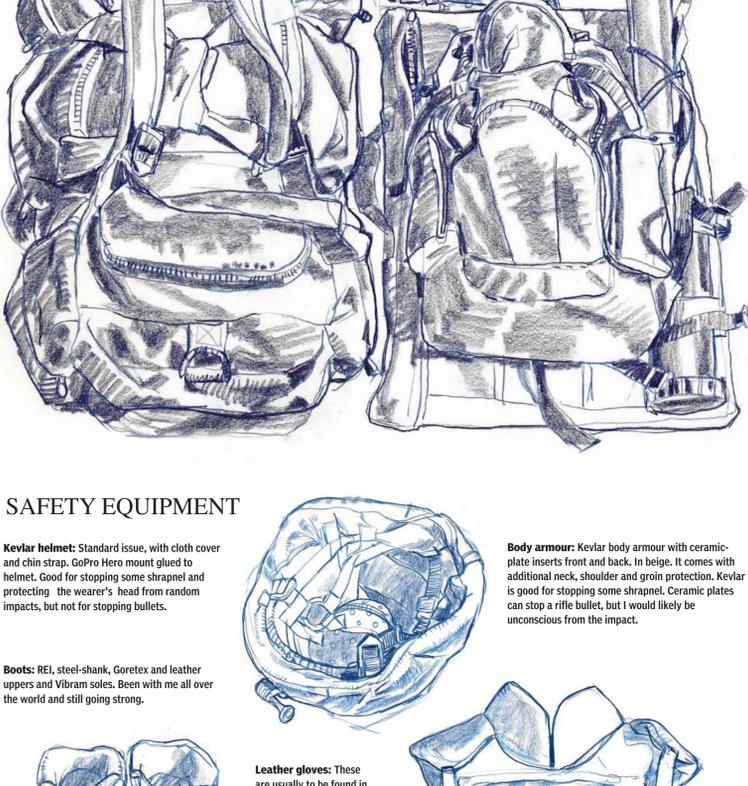
I have two rules when it comes to embedding with the military in a war zone: 1. I have to be entirely self-sufficient (the worst impression you can give soldiers is that you are needy or a liability); and 2. I have to be able physically to carry all my gear for a reasonable distance (soldiers have enough to worry about without some office jockey needing help to lift his bags).

The other day I sat in my basement surrounded by a mass of equipment, desperately trying to find ways to cut down the weight. It struck me: I am packing a lot of necessary stuff; then it struck me people would not believe how much stuff I am trying to squeeze in and carry.

This week, I head back to Afghanistan to spend time with International Security Assistance Force troops. I'll be spending a little time in and around Kandahar City with the U.S. force that took over from the Canadians when they left last year. I'll also be with the almost 1,000 Canadians who remain in country training Afghan personnel.

Here's what I'm taking:

ALL THE GEAR PACKED UP



SAFETY EQUIPMENT

Kevlar helmet: Standard issue, with cloth cover and chin strap. GoPro Hero mount glued to helmet. Good for stopping some shrapnel and protecting the wearer's head from random impacts, but not for stopping bullets.

Boots: REI, steel-shank, Gore-tex and leather uppers and Vibram soles. Been with me all over the world and still going strong.



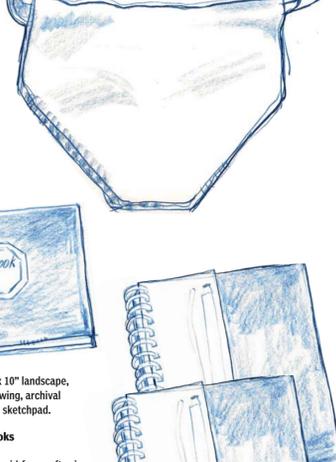
Ballistic glasses: Eye protection for when travelling in military vehicles.



Leather gloves: These are usually to be found in my garden shed. They are a part of the clothing requirements for travel inside any armoured vehicle. In event of fire, some sort of layering is needed to protect the occupants for the time it takes to get out.



Body armour: Kevlar body armour with ceramic-plate inserts front and back. In beige. It comes with additional neck, shoulder and groin protection. Kevlar is good for stopping some shrapnel. Ceramic plates can stop a rifle bullet, but I would likely be unconscious from the impact.



ART EQUIPMENT



One Watson-Guptill 7" x 10" landscape, neutral pH, non-yellowing, archival quality, ring-bound sketchpad.

Sketchbooks

Two DeSerres 8.5" x 11" acid-free, soft erme, ring-bound sketchpads with perforated pages so the good ones can be saved for the Canadian War Museum - just kidding.

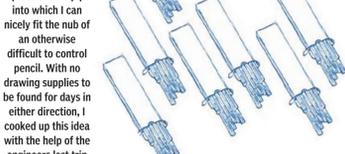
Two Daler-Rowney 11" x 14" acid-free, soft white, bound sketchpads. The bindings on these pads allow me to draw right across the gutter, which is great for landscapes.



Art-board carrier: Like a portfolio or a backpack, this durable canvas carrier can hold paper 24" x 36". I keep 50 sheets of drawing paper clipped to a couple of wood fibre drawing boards inside. The tube can be filled with a 48-inches-wide roll of drawing paper. I usually limit this to a couple of sections 72 inches long, as the weight gain is considerable.



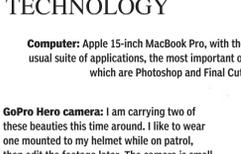
Pencil case: Faber-Castell, canvas. Holds about 60 pencils and a variety of sharpening knives. (I've learned not to pack this in my hand luggage).



Pencil saver: This is no more than a piece of PVC pipe into which I can nicely fit the nub of an otherwise difficult to control pencil. With no drawing supplies to be found for days in either direction, I cooked up this idea with the help of the engineers last trip out.

Pencils: 60 Prismacolor Indigo Blue, and 60 Prismacolor Indigo Blue Verithins. I don't know why, but I just love this colour. I have tried others, but the Prismacolor brand from Howard Brodie (1915-2010). When we met in 2003, he told me how he discovered them: as an enlisted man and correspondent for Yank magazine, he landed with the U.S. Marine Corps on Guadalcanal in 1943 and lost all his equipment. So he "repurpose" these pencils from a command post, where they had been used to mark up maps. He drew with them ever after. To far greater effect than I can now.

Pencil sharpener: One Staedler. For when the Leatherman multi-tool is unavailable.



TECHNOLOGY

Computer: Apple 15-inch MacBook Pro, with the usual suite of applications, the most important of which are Photoshop and Final Cut.

GoPro Hero camera: I am carrying two of these beauties this time around. I like to wear one mounted to my helmet while on patrol, then edit the footage later. The camera is small and fairly unobtrusive, especially when most of the soldiers wear something pinned to the front of their helmets as well.



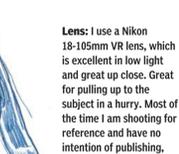
GoPro Hero camera omni mount: The omni mount allows me to dramatically change the shot I am taking. Fully extended, I can push the camera 3 metres away from my body in any direction. The mount also has a bracket for the second camera, which allows me to bolt it to an armoured vehicle and have it film in both directions at once.



GoPro hero bag o' stuff: I am carrying an assortment of different mounts for different recordings situations, and a bunch of spares to replace one I break.



GoPro Hero camera chest harness: I will use this when filming myself sketching in the field. This will be a new one for me. The idea is to speed up the film so people back at home can see the work progress and marvel at my lightning reflexes. I am on the fence about the possible success of this.



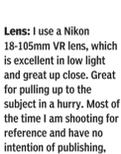
Batteries: I am carrying two replacement batteries for the two GoPro cameras. No point in getting stuck after working so hard to get there.



Camera: Nikon D5000. Even I can be a decent photographer with this camera. I love the six frames per second and autofocus feature.



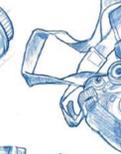
Lens: I use a Nikon 18-105mm VR lens, which is excellent in low light and great up close. Great for pulling up to the subject in a hurry. Most of the time I am shooting for reference and have no intention of publishing, but every now and then I take a good picture by mistake.



Second lens: Tamron 70-300mm Tele-Macro. This lens is relatively new to me. It should enhance some of my candid photography by allowing me to be a little surreptitious.



Batteries: I have two replacement batteries for the Nikon D5000 camera. These batteries last forever, but when they do fade, they fade in a hurry.



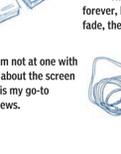
iPhone: It is just my phone. I need it to call my wife. Doubles as interview recording app.



Sony digital recorder: I am not at one with my iPhone yet - something about the screen in bright sunlight - so this is my go-to device for recording interviews.



Backpack camera: Canon PowerShot S515 (8.0 megapixels). At one point this was my main camera so I know it pretty well. If I had to use it exclusively, I'd miss the six shots per second.



Headphones: Three sets; one for the Sony digital voice recorder, one for the iPhone and one as a backup, for when I stand up wearing them and rip the buds off.



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