

# WAR ARTIST

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

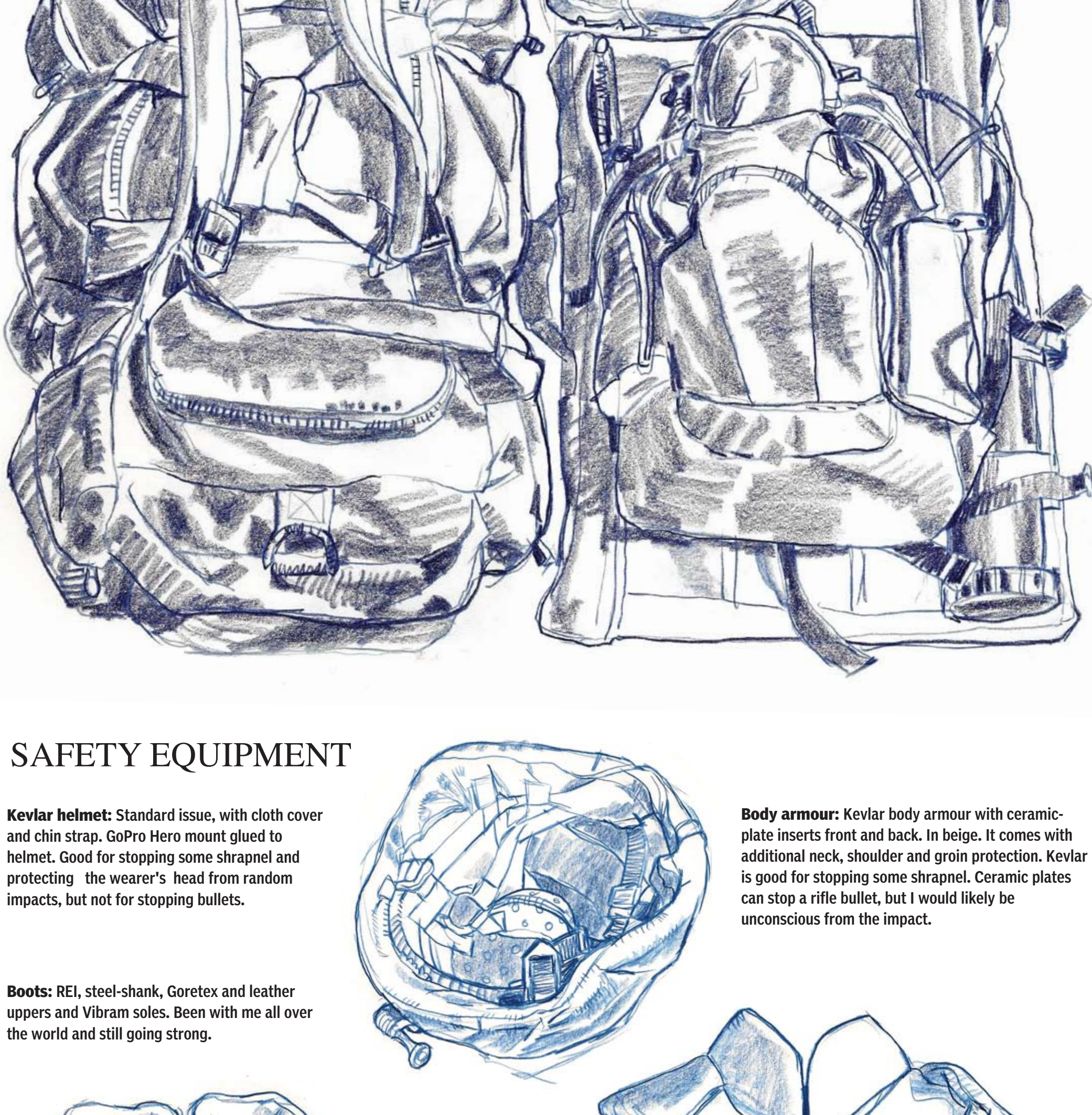
I have two rules when it comes to embedding with the military in a war zone: 1. I have to be entirely self-sufficient (the worst impression you can give soldiers is that you are needy or a liability); and 2. I have to be able physically to carry all my gear for a reasonable distance (soldiers have enough 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.

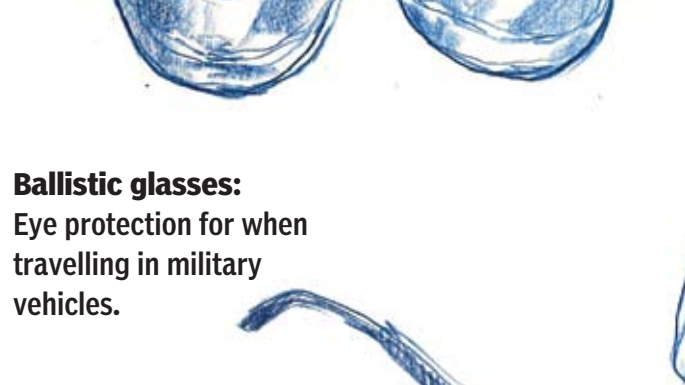
Here's what I'm taking:

## ALL THE GEAR PACKED UP



**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.

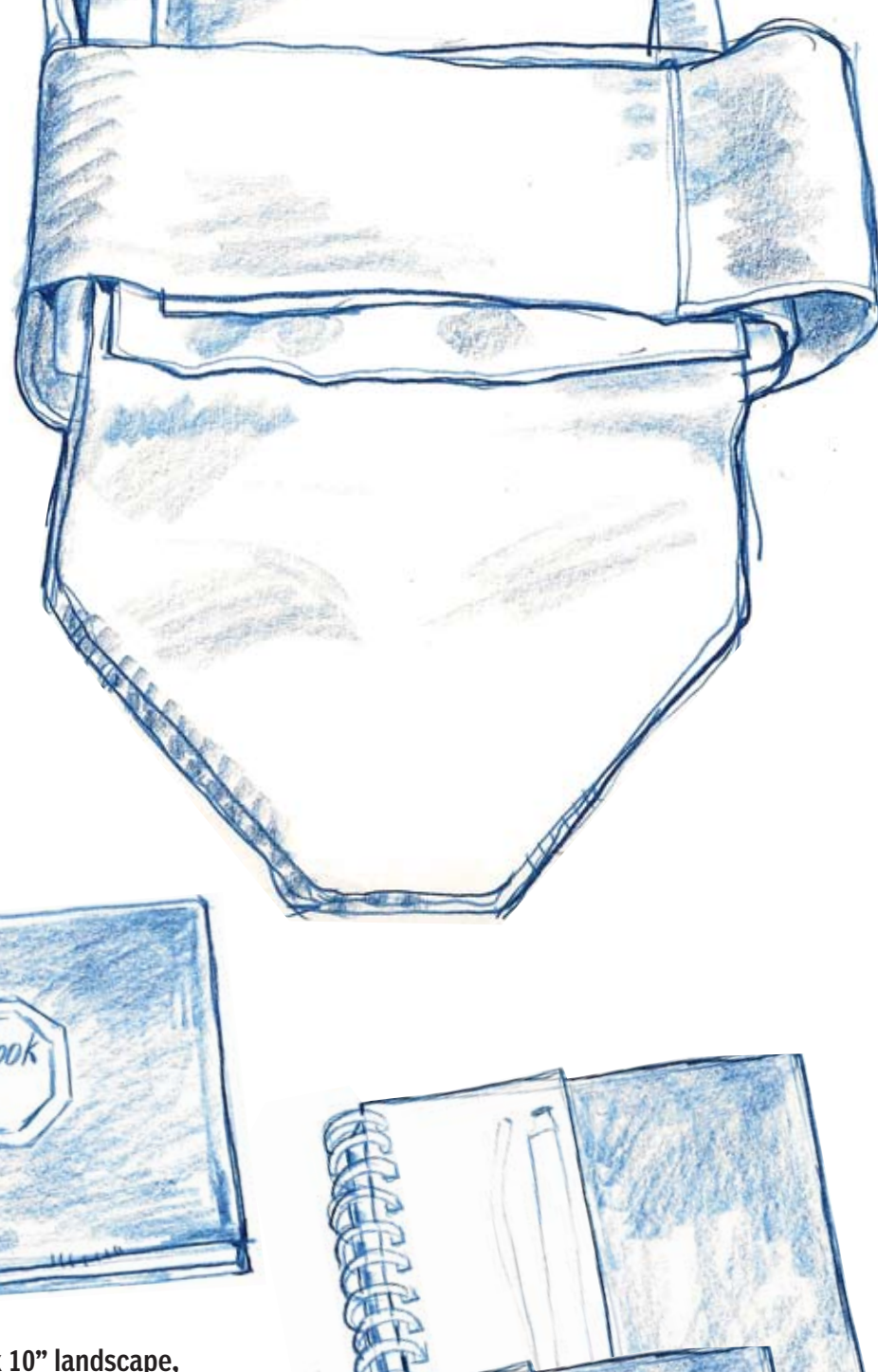
**Boots:** REI, steel-shank, Goretex and leather uppers and Vibram soles. Been with me all over the world and still going strong.



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

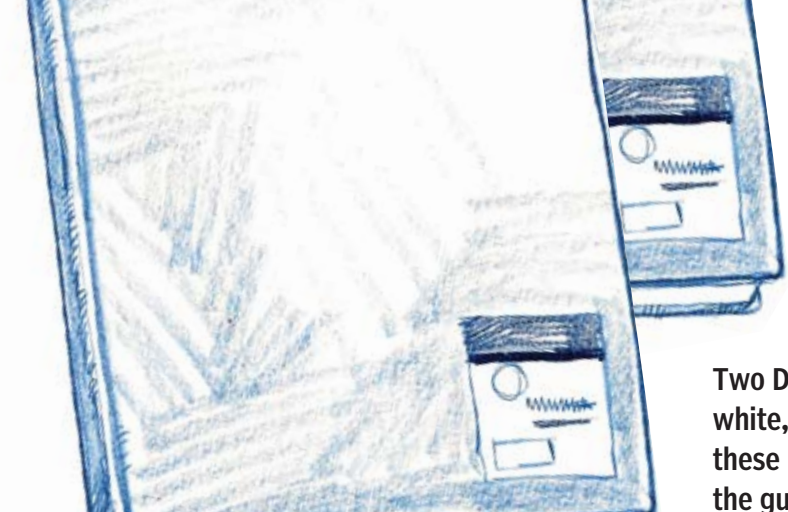


**Leather gloves:** These are usually to be found in my garden shed. They are a part of the clothing requirements for travel inside any armoured vehicle. In event of fire, some sort of layering is needed to protect the occupants for the time it takes to get out.



**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



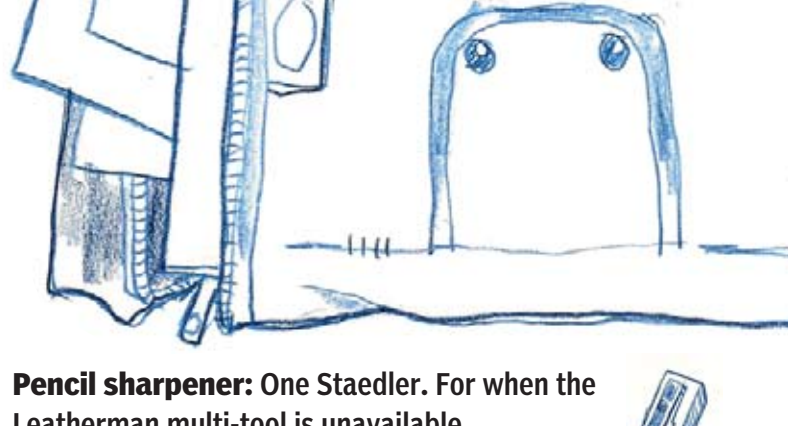
**One Watson-Guptill 7" x 10" landscape, neutral pH, non-yellowing, archival quality, ring-bound sketchpad.**

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

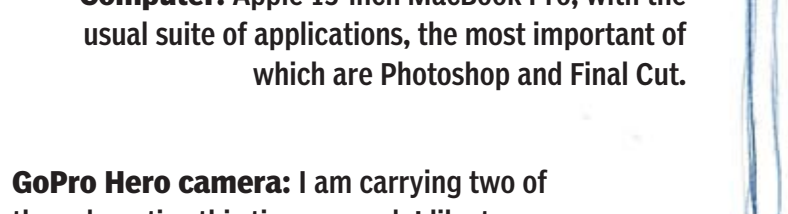
**Two Daler-Rowney 11" x 14" acid-free, soft white, bound sketchpads. The bindings on these pads allow me to draw right across the gutter, which is great for landscapes.**



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



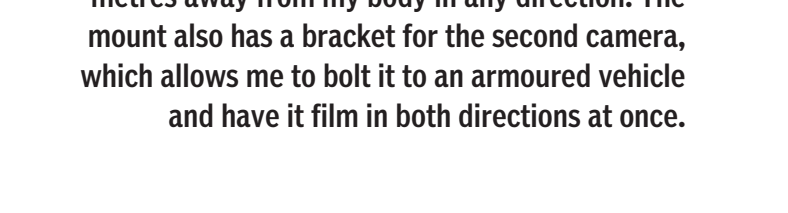
**Pencil case:** Faber-Castell, canvas. Holds about 60 pencils and a variety of sharpening knives. (I've learned not to pack this in my hand luggage).



**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. I picked up 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 "repurchased" 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.



**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 recording situations, and a bunch of spares to replace ones I break.



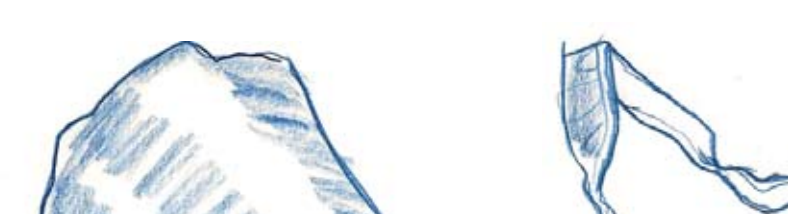
**Batteries:** I am carrying two replacement batteries for the two GoPro cameras. No point in getting stuck after working so hard to get here.



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



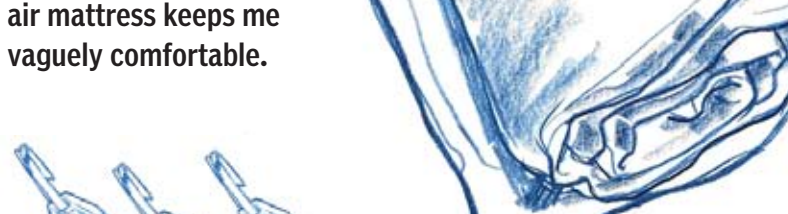
**Lens:** I use a Nikon 18-105mm VR lens, which is excellent in low light and great up close. Great for pulling up to the subject in a hurry. Most of the time I am shooting for reference and have no intention of publishing, but every now and then I take a good picture by mistake.



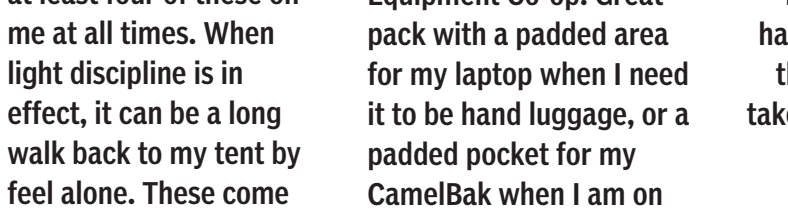
**Second lens:** Tamron 70-300mm Tele-Macro. This lens is relatively new to me. It should enhance some of my candid photography by allowing me to be a little surreptitious.



**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.



**Batteries:** I am carrying about a dozen non-rechargeable AAA and AA batteries for the backup camera and my voice recorder.



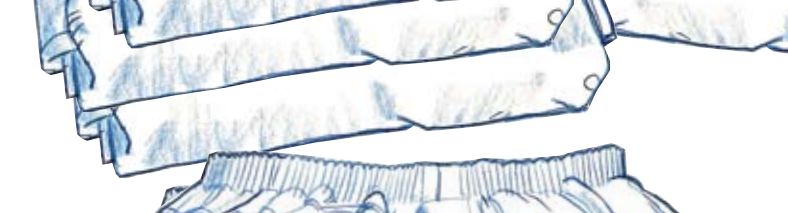
**Headphones:** Three sets; one for the Sony digital voice recorder, one for my iPhone and one as a backup, for when I stand up wearing them and rip the buds off.



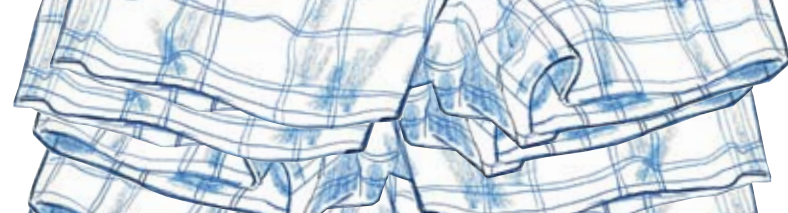
**Storage:** Two LaCie Rugged 1-terabyte USB 3.0 Mini Disk Portable Hard Drive. I'll double-backup everything in tandem as I go. The drives are purportedly shock, rain and pressure resistant.



**Camera bag:** Tamrac. I keep two spare batteries and a charger in here, plus a backup SD card reader in case my laptop SD card reader dies.



**Backup camera bag:** Lowepro. It's also packed with a portable SD card reader, a four-gig replacement SD card and eight AA batteries.



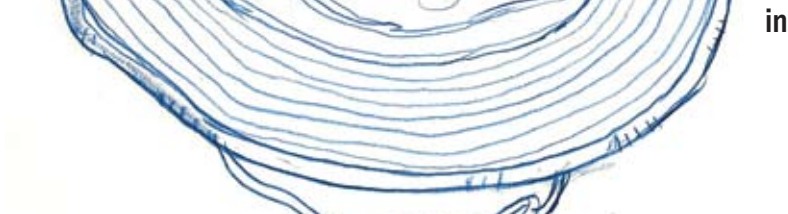
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**Head light:** Petzl. Keeps both hands free for tying down my tent in a nighttime thunderstorm, and comes with a neat switch that allows me to switch from white light to red light. A gift from Corporal Dan Grenon last time out.



**Bedroll:** Thermarest. I can never tell where I might end up calling it a night so this built-to-head-sized air mattress keeps me vaguely comfortable.



**Clip light:** I like to keep at least four of these on me at all times. When light discipline is in effect, it can be a long walk back to my tent by feel alone. These come in red to foil anyone thinking of taking a pot shot over the wall.



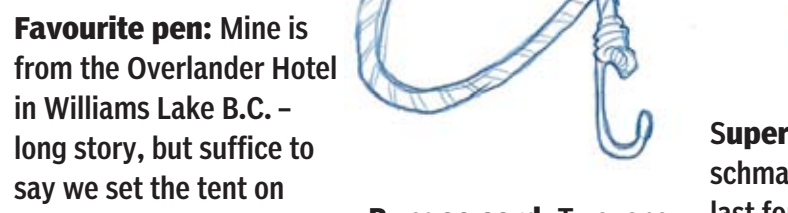
**BackPack:** Mountain Equipment Co-op. Great pack with a padded area for my laptop when I need it to be hand luggage, or a padded pocket for my CamelBak when I am on patrol.



**Sand goggles:** For when you have to see and the desert has taken to the sky.



**Rain cape:** Rain doesn't happen often in Afghanistan, but when it does it can soak everything in minutes. All my electronics are in dry in Ziploc bags, so this is for me.



**Leatherman multi-tool and belt holder:** Needs no explanation. It gets most use sharpening pencils, but it is always right on my person if I need it.



**Sleeping bag and crush sack:** Mostly I just lie on top of this, but sometimes the temperature does drop at night.



**Drinking water:** Camelbak Stowaway. I fit this in the back of my backpack while on patrol. The tube hangs nicely over my shoulder for when I need it. Basically a copy of the infantry rig.



**First-Aid kit:** A souped-up standard household kit supplemented with a variety of additional dressings, and some "quick clot" bandages. Mainly it is the place where I look after myself without bothering the medics.



**Hard currency:** I like to carry a sizeable wad of U.S. dollars in \$100 bills. This is money I hope I will never need.



**For day-to-day expenses, large U.S. bills are almost never seen in the villages here so it can be advisable to get a few hundred singles and fives as well.**



**Notepad:** An essential piece of gear for keeping straight everyone you meet, along with rank, hometown, birthdate and email address.



**Favourite pen:** Mine is from the Overlander Hotel in Williams Lake B.C. – long story, but suffice to say we set the tent on fire.



**Bungee cord:** Two, one short and one long. List of uses is endless. From securing my kit to the outside of a LAVII, to tying the GoPro Heroes to the outside of the RPG fence armour on a tank.



**Watch:** Swiss Army. It has been with me through the last decade of conflicts and has never failed. Strap is Timex brand with Velcro fastening.



**Flash cards:** I rotate four 16-gig Sandisk flash cards through the GoPro's and the D5000, with four eight-gig cards as a backup. I don't like the idea of losing more than that should one fail.



**Super glue, several one shots:** All that fancy schmancy civilian gear I am taking into a war zone will last for about five minutes, so a few tubes of this may help keep me in business when all seems lost.



**Glasses:** I need them for distance. All my drawing would have to be in ultra-close up without them. A sign of my age.



**Sunglasses:** Three pairs. Cheap and nasty for when I sit on them, or lose them.



**Lip balm:** I choose pink. Actually my daughter chose it. It is hot and dry in Afghanistan, even real men need lip balm.



**Sun block:** SPF 45. When most of your skin is covered, it is easy to forget about the back of your neck.



## CLOTHES

**T-shirts and a pillowcase:** Six short-sleeved, and two long-sleeved (for travel in any armoured vehicle). Limited to colours found in nature. In Afghanistan, that's grey or maybe beige with the life drained out of it. Shirts become a pillow if stuffed inside a pillowcase.



**Cargo pants:** Two pairs, khaki, made by Mountain Equipment Co-op. They are rugged and durable, have lots of pockets and are very lightweight, and therefore easy to wash.



**Skivvies:** Six pairs of boxers in a variety of plaid. I'll find some kind of laundry facilities or wash them by hand. Everything dries fast in the sun.



**Socks:** Six pairs, real wool. I wash and dry them as you go. I usually bury them somewhere before coming home.



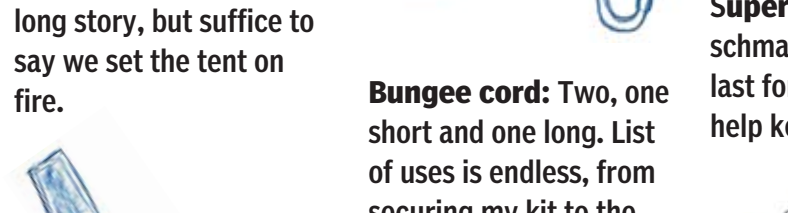
**Sandals:** Tevas. It is important to get out of the hiking boots as often as possible – blisters lead to infections, which lead to missed opportunities. Sandals also are good for knocking around the shaver and back in the middle of the night.



**Boonie hat:** Khaki, for sun avoidance, while inside the wire.



**The foreign correspondent vest:** I am on a budget so I can't afford those fancy photographers' vests. I use my fly-fishing vest. It has the same completely unnecessary dozens of pockets, but at a fraction of the price.

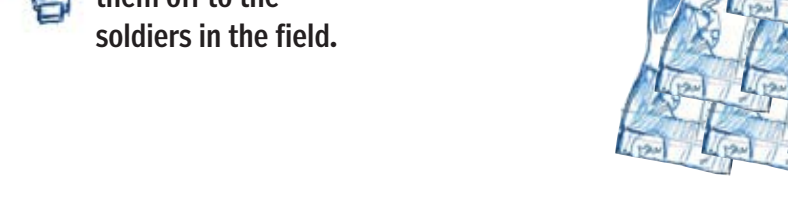


**Passport(s):** I like to carry both mine. I don't know why exactly. I just find it comforting to know I have options. I have a U.K. and a Canadian. The Canadian passport takes the Afghan Visa – Good for three months.

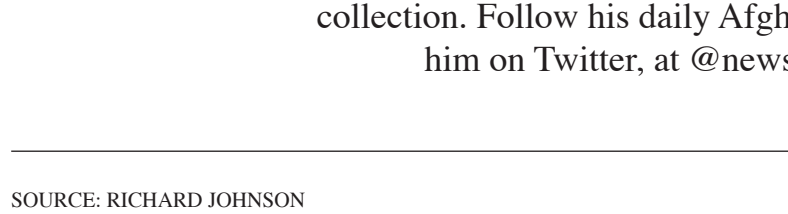
**WHO-Vaccination record:** This keeps everything straight for the medical personnel within the units I may be embedded with. I do NOT want to get inoculated against Anthrax twice.



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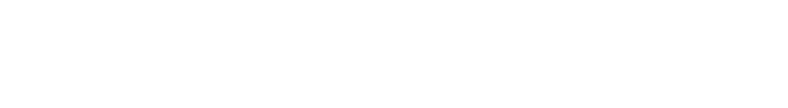
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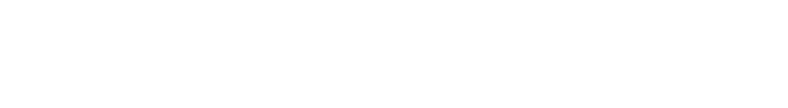
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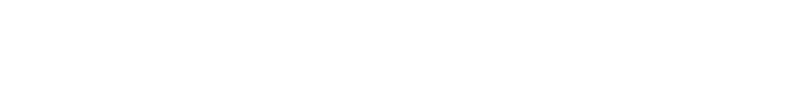
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