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**OSCAR NOMINEE *HELL AND BACK AGAIN*
PREMIERES ON *INDEPENDENT LENS* ON MEMORIAL DAY,
MONDAY, MAY 28 AT 10 PM**

"A tour de force...Hell and Back Again stacks one astonishing shot atop the next."
– *The New York Times*

(San Francisco, CA) — What does it mean to lead men in war? What does it mean to come home — injured physically and psychologically — and build a life anew? As more and more veterans return from deployment these questions must be answered, not only by those who fought, but by their families, their friends and their fellow citizens. Filmed and directed by Danfung Dennis, *Hell and Back Again* seamlessly transitions from stunning war reportage to an intimate, visceral portrait of one man's personal struggle back home in North Carolina. There Sergeant Nathan Harris confronts the physical and emotional difficulties of readjusting to civilian life with the love and support of his wife, Ashley. Masterfully contrasting the intensity of the front line with the unsettling normalcy of home, *Hell and Back Again* was nominated for an Academy Award® for Best Documentary. The film will premiere on the PBS series *Independent Lens*, hosted by Mary Louise-Parker, on Memorial Day, Monday, May 28, 2012 at 10 PM, with an encore presentation on Thursday, May 31, 2012 at 10 PM (check local listings).

The story follows the U.S. Marines Echo Company, 2nd Battalion, 8th Marine Regiment, as they launch a major assault on a Taliban stronghold in Southern Afghanistan. Within hours of being dropped deep behind enemy lines, Sergeant Harris's unit is attacked from all sides. Cut off and



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surrounded, the Marines fight a ghostlike enemy and experience immense hostility from displaced villagers. Frustration grows on both sides, as any common ground, or success, seems elusive.

The parallel story begins with Sergeant Harris's return home to his wife after he is severely injured. He's in terrible physical pain and becomes dependent on his pain medication. But his psychological pain may be worse, as he attempts to reconcile the gulf between his experiences at war and the return to civilian life, one of a generation of veterans struggling to find an identity in a country that is often indifferent.

Nathan and Ashley Harris have shared their most intimate and painful moments for the film in order to illuminate what they, and thousands like them, are going through. Ashley's role in Nathan's rehabilitation is testimony to what thousands of loved ones are experiencing: trying to maintain normalcy while picking up the pieces of the lives of the wounded warriors who return home.

Winner of the Sundance Film Festival Documentary Grand Jury Award and Cinematography Award, *Hell and Back Again* is Danfung Dennis's first feature film and the first ever to be shot entirely with a highly customized Canon 5D Mark II digital SLR camera rig. Despite widespread publication of Dennis's pictures as a photojournalist for several international news outlets, he found that he was unable to convey the brutal realities on the ground — either the public was numb to these same images of war or traditional media outlets were not committed to coverage of the conflicts. This drove Dennis to explore the medium of the moving image. Whereas before he was simply making pictures with movement, in *Hell and Back Again* he combines photojournalism with the tradition and narrative structure of filmmaking.

Hell and Back Again is filmed and directed by Danfung Dennis and produced by Mike Lerner and Martin Herring. Executive producers are Dan Cogan, Karol Martesko-Fenster, Gernot Schaffler, and Thomas Brunner. The film is edited by Fiona Otway, with music, sound design, and original song, "Hell and Back," by J. Ralph. "Hell and Back" is performed by Willie Nelson.

To learn more about the film, visit the *Hell and Back Again* interactive companion website (www.pbs.org/independentlens/hell-and-back-again), which features detailed information on the film, including an interview with the filmmaker and links and resources pertaining to the film's subject matter. The site also features a Talkback section for viewers to share their ideas and opinions, preview clips of the film, and more.

About the Filmmaker

Danfung Dennis has covered the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan since 2006. His still photographs have been published in *Newsweek*, *Time*, *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, *The Guardian*, *Rolling Stone*, *Le Figaro Magazine*, *Financial Times Magazine*, *Mother Jones*, *Der Spiegel*, and *The Wall Street Journal*. The PBS series *Frontline* opened its 2009 fall feature program, *Obama's War* using Dennis's footage. The immersive nature of the footage prompted a

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flurry of comment and inquiry from the Pentagon, the White House, veterans groups and viewers, and the program was nominated for a 2010 Emmy® Award. In 2010, Dennis won the Bayeux-Calvados Award for War Correspondents, was named one of the 25 New Faces of Independent Film by *Filmmaker* Magazine, and one of the 30 New and Emerging Photographers by *PDN* Magazine. Dennis is the founder of an immersive video startup Condition ONE. His background is in Applied Economics and Business Management. Before working as a photojournalist and filmmaker, he consulted for small and medium-sized enterprises in Uganda and South Africa.

About *Independent Lens*

Independent Lens is an Emmy® Award-winning weekly series airing Tuesday nights at 10 PM on PBS. The acclaimed anthology series features documentaries and a limited number of fiction films united by the creative freedom, artistic achievement, and unflinching visions of their independent producers. *Independent Lens* features unforgettable stories about a unique individual, community, or moment in history. Presented by The Independent Television Service (ITVS), the series is supported by interactive companion websites and national publicity and community engagement campaigns. Further information about the series is available at www.pbs.org/independentlens. *Independent Lens* is jointly curated by ITVS and PBS, and is funded by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB), a private corporation funded by the American people, with additional funding provided by PBS and the National Endowment for the Arts. The series producer is Lois Vossen.

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