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AS MUAY THAI TAKES THE GLOBAL STAGE, THOUSANDS FLOCK TO THAILAND WITH SHIN PADS AND GLOVES READY TO CHANGE THEIR LIVES AND IN THE PROCESS REINVENT THE SPORT'S IMAGE.

WORDS BY NATASHA HORRELT
IMAGES BY REBECCA GARNETT & COURTESY OF TIGER MUAY THAI

...has a crew of vehicle patrol men stood to one side (not back in 2006, US Marine Lance Corporal Chris Hines didn't think much of it. After all, he'd already dodged grenades and kept the peace, as a memo to that morning, and was eagerly awaiting his promotion to Corporal. It was later that afternoon, he had no way of knowing that, in only a few hours, he'd be clinically dead for over two minutes before a military helicopter crew would finally bring him back to life.

"I remember turning around to say something to my sergeant, and he just exploded with an IED [just went off]," recalls Hines. "It was like being hit in the back with a sledgehammer. It felt like the metal in my arm was boiling, the blood and muscle. The day I got wounded, I got my good walk off into the desert and it just never came back."

The aftermath of his tours created Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), which came with three of his close friends committing suicide and the threat of his own. Hines could simply go on with his life, but his memories in head in combat have scared his breaking point. Hines made the decision to put everything he owned in storage and make his journey to Thailand to study Muay Thai.

"PTSD gives you a movie that plays in your mind every single day," explains the 26-year-old (Age: Austin, Texas). "You know what's coming, and you can't stop it. For some reason, martial arts focuses it for me. I just thought, 'hell, why not peak it all up and go to a part of the world that doesn't want to kill me? Some people call it running away. I call it giving myself a second wind in life. This is my new beginning."

As one of many new beginnings that has bolstered Thailand's tourism industry off the

FIGHTING IS MAN TO MAN, BUT IT IS ALWAYS ABOUT YOU. YOU FIGHT YOURSELF.

THE MUAY THAI ELBOW

Here's how to do a basic Reverse Spinning Elbow.

1. Rith (right) stands in normal guard position.
2. Rith steps forward and across his opponent whilst maintaining his left hand guard.
3. Rith throws his elbow in a circular, spinning motion towards his opponent's forehead whilst maintaining eye contact.
4. Rith turns and steps back into his normal guard position.

MUAY GLOBALIZES MUAY THAI
Thailand's biggest sport, Muay Thai (R.M.M.A. in Phuket has seen its numbers almost double unannounced for the past three years, so much so that they are currently building a second, even bigger camp in Chiang Mai. The growth is something they attribute to the increase in popularity of mixed martial arts (MMA). "MMA is the fastest growing sport in the world," explains Tiger's Director, Will Elliott. "An integral part of MMA is Muay Thai. MMA fans naturally translate the love for its groundwork and Muay Thai as its base for striking. Everyone wants to make a pilgrimage to the home country to study a sport at the source and to get hands-on. Here, it is unfiltered and authentic."

This is a sport, likely the reason why JJ (a former professional fighter) delivered a right hook to his opponent, a pro MMA fighter, has secured in Phuket the training of Tiger Muay Thai with world champion, Thai boxer, six-time three-time professional Muay Thai fighter under his belt, as well as JJ also teaches American wrestling at Tiger Muay Thai in MMA.

Considered the most brutal and effective striking martial art on the planet, Muay Thai is referred to as the "science of eight limbs" because it utilizes fists, punches, elbows and knees allowing for eight points of contact when fighting. Most combat sports allow for two feet or four hands and feet, making them considerably less damaging (ever had a spinning back elbow to the head? It's not, however, only its striking that makes Muay Thai so unique. This sport being with it a sense of disappointed history and an air of imposture.

"It's something that's tough to get into words according to Samruat Sittichai, (Ajarn Mac) Tiger's master instructor. Raised in a poor family, he didn't have many toys or expensive family holidays growing up. Samruat, however, surely remembers the day he discovered something much more valuable.

AN ANCIENT ART REVITALIZED
"There was a plagues called once a year," explains the instructor. "It hit right in the middle of them, and we never forget seeing my face. Muay Thai fight as a

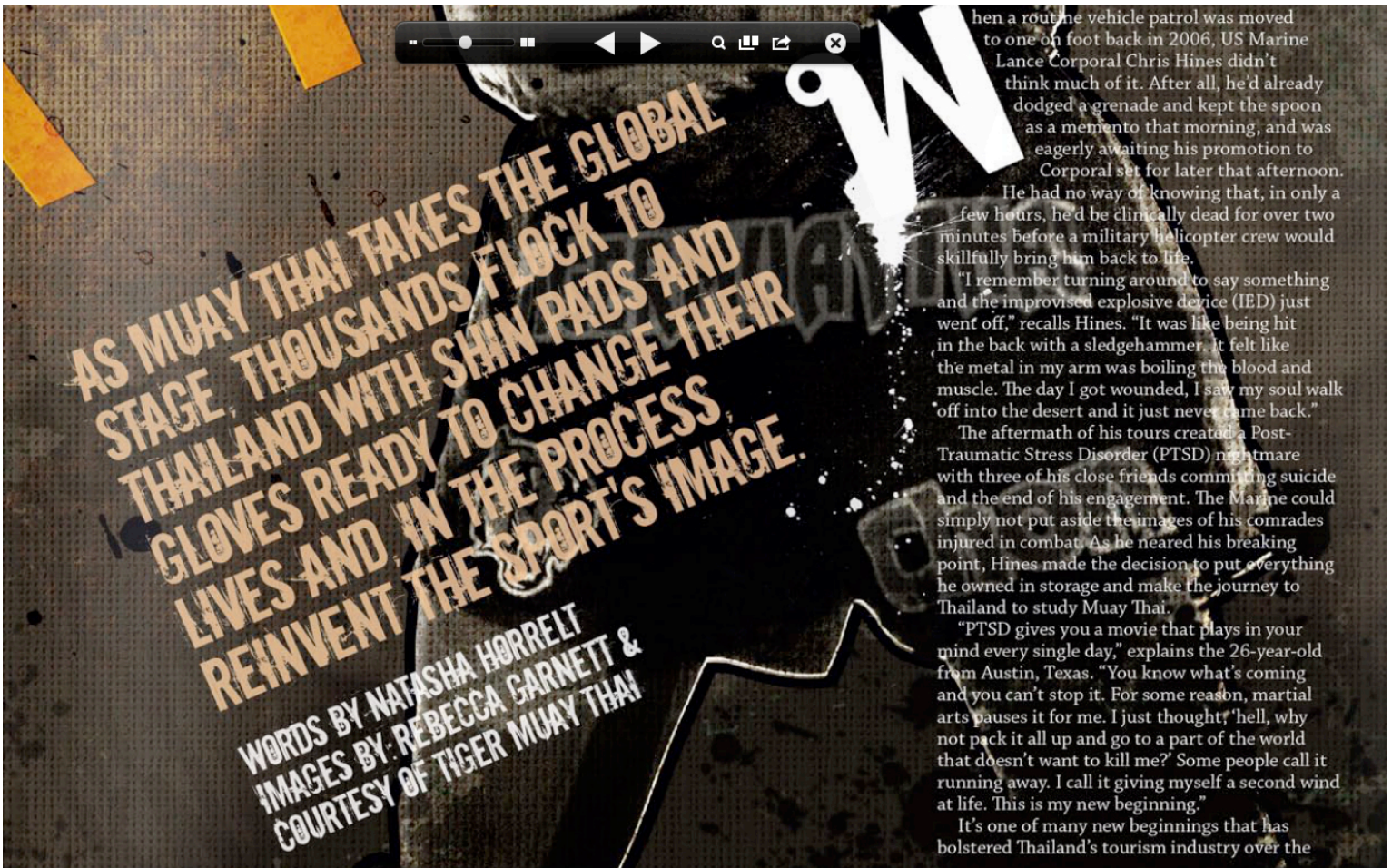
history. It wasn't his speciality to fight. He needed to survive and live. By the age of 18, Samruat had started fighting to help support his family, and he soon became known for his strong elbow which could use with two opponents able to block it. "Fighting is man to man, but it's always about you. You fight yourself. It's about what's inside."

It's a philosophy shared by many traditional Muay Thai gyms in Thailand, including the world-famous Maesai. Titled in Bangkok, a Muay Thai training legend, he's been promoting the sport worldwide for over twenty years and is seeing the fruition of his hard work as he returns to Thailand full time.

"It's a very interesting martial art," says Maesai's Business Development Manager, Nick Knight. "It's just getting to get bigger and bigger. Muay Thai will change our world, but with that we need to have a hold of what is real and real about the sport. Maesai Tully has an 'unbelievable' way of breaking it down for beginners and making it fun, while keeping it authentic. The goal is to have people having close fights."

And it's that reputation former Marine Hines is banking on as he continues his journey to mental and emotional freedom through Muay Thai.

"I'm just worn out from taking my own. Muay Thai is a great fitness and health. What makes more is that you just find that activity that helps. You can't have it all, you need to go, let it evolve and it will be your. It will become something, actually different and uniquely beautiful. (E)



When a routine vehicle patrol was moved to one on foot back in 2006, US Marine Lance Corporal Chris Hines didn't think much of it. After all, he'd already dodged a grenade and kept the spoon as a memento that morning, and was eagerly awaiting his promotion to Corporal set for later that afternoon.

He had no way of knowing that, in only a few hours, he'd be clinically dead for over two minutes before a military helicopter crew would skillfully bring him back to life.

"I remember turning around to say something and the improvised explosive device (IED) just went off," recalls Hines. "It was like being hit in the back with a sledgehammer. It felt like the metal in my arm was boiling the blood and muscle. The day I got wounded, I saw my soul walk off into the desert and it just never came back."

The aftermath of his tours created a Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) nightmare with three of his close friends committing suicide and the end of his engagement. The Marine could simply not put aside the images of his comrades injured in combat. As he neared his breaking point, Hines made the decision to put everything he owned in storage and make the journey to Thailand to study Muay Thai.

"PTSD gives you a movie that plays in your mind every single day," explains the 26-year-old from Austin, Texas. "You know what's coming and you can't stop it. For some reason, martial arts pauses it for me. I just thought, 'hell, why not pack it all up and go to a part of the world that doesn't want to kill me?' Some people call it running away. I call it giving myself a second wind at life. This is my new beginning."

It's one of many new beginnings that has bolstered Thailand's tourism industry over the

past five years. Although specific statistics are hard to nail down, the common consensus is that a record number of foreigners are flocking to the country in an effort to learn its national sport. According to the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT), over 19.1 million people - an all-time record - came to Thailand in 2011 despite massive flooding in central parts of the nation. TAT expects 2012 to be a bumper year with many of those tourists carrying shin pads and gloves.

TAT statistics also conclude that less than three per cent of those training Muay Thai ever pursue the sport professionally, leading to the conclusion that the majority do it to further their fitness and to learn a new skill.

MMA GLOBALIZES MUAY THAI

Thailand's largest camp, Tiger Muay Thai & MMA in Phuket has seen its numbers almost double consecutively for the past three years - so much so that they are currently building a second, even bigger camp in Chiang Mai. The growth is something they attribute to the increase in popularity of mixed martial arts (MMA).

"MMA is the fastest growing sport in the world," explains Tiger's Director, Will Elliott. "An integral part of it is Muay Thai. MMA uses primarily Brazilian Jiu Jitsu for its groundwork, and Muay Thai as its base for striking. Everyone wants to make a pilgrimage to the home country to study a style at its source and to pay homage. Here, it is undiluted and authentic."

This is most likely the reason why JJ Ambrose (pictured at right delivering a right hook to his opponent), a pro MMA fighter, has settled in Phuket and trains at Tiger Muay Thai with world champion Thai boxers. He has three professional Muay Thai fights under his belt, all wins. JJ also teaches American wrestling at Tiger Muay Thai & MMA.

Considered the most brutal and effective striking martial art on the planet, Muay Thai is referred to as the "science of eight limbs" because it utilizes kicks, punches, elbows and knees allowing for eight points of contact when fighting. Most combat sports allow for two (fists) or four (hands and feet), making them considerably less damaging (ever had a spinning back elbow to the head?). It's not, however, only its striking that makes Muay Thai so unique. This sport brings with it a sense of deep-rooted history and an air of mystique.

It's something that's tough to put into words according to Samurn Suttitwiset (Ajarn Mac) - Tiger's master instructor. Raised in a poor family, he didn't have fancy toys or expensive family holidays growing up. Suttitwiset, however, vividly remembers the day he discovered something much more valuable.

AN ANCIENT ART REVITALIZED

"There was a temple festival once a year," explains the veteran of 196 fights - 146 of them wins. "I'll never forget seeing my first Muay Thai fight as a

little boy. It seemed like a gentleman's sport. It looked honorable and fair." By the age of 10, Suttitwiset had started fighting to help support his family, and he soon became known for his strong elbowing technique with few opponents able to block it.

"Fighting is man to man, but it is always about you. You fight yourself. It's about what's inside."

It's a philosophy shared by many traditional Muay Thai gyms in Thailand, including the world-famous Master Toddy's in Bangkok. A Muay Thai training legend, Toddy has been promoting the sport worldwide for over forty years and is seeing the fruition of his hard work as he returns to Thailand full-time.

"It's a very intriguing martial art," says Master Toddy's Business Development Manager, Nick Knight. "It's just going to get bigger and bigger. Muay Thai will change and adapt, but with that, we need to keep a hold of what is solid and real about the sport. Master Toddy has an incredible way of breaking it down for beginners and making it fun, while keeping it authentic. The goal is to have people leaving class inspired."

And it's that inspiration former Marine Hines is banking on as he continues his journey to mental and emotional freedom through Muay Thai.

"I'm just worn out from faking my own happiness around friends and family. What matters most is that you just find that activity that helps. You culture it, let it grow inside you, let it evolve and it, as well as you, will become something entirely different and uniquely beautiful." ①