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WINNER—PROFILE WRITING

Evan Wright's profile of a failed Hollywood agent turned documentary filmmaker chronicles his subject's harrowing but frequently amusing descent into drugs, madness, and violence and, improbably, his resurrection as a hero of the prowar right. "Pat Dollard's War on Hollywood" is a cautionary tale about what happens when Hollywood meets Baghdad.

Evan Wright

Pat Dollard's War on Hollywood

The day before Thanksgiving 2004, Pat Dollard, a Hollywood agent who represented Steven Soderbergh, sent an e-mail to just about everyone he knew containing one word: "Later." Friends worried it was a suicide note. Dollard, forty-two, had spent nearly twenty years in the film business. On a good day he seemed little different than any other successful operator, a sort of hipper version of *Entourage's* Ari Gold. But often in his turbulent career, bad days outnumbered the good. Once a rising star at William Morris, he was fired in the mid-90s for chronic absenteeism brought on by drinking and drug abuse. He attended twelve-step meetings and bounced back, playing a critical role in getting Soderbergh's *Traffic* made. Propaganda Films tapped him to head its management division, and in 2002 he produced *Auto Focus*, the Paul Schrader-directed biopic about the murder of *Hogan's Heroes* star Bob Crane—a film in which Dollard has a cameo in drag. In 2004, Dollard cofounded Relativity, a firm which would assist the Marvel Entertainment Group in its half-billion-dollar production deal and went on to produce, after Dollard's exit, *Taladega Nights*. But Dollard was bingeing again. His fourth wife left him, and his third wife was suing for sole custody of their daughter. News that his daughter would be spending Thanksgiving at the home of Robert Evans—for whom his ex-wife

worked as a development executive—sent Dollard into a morbid depression. Late one night he phoned a friend and suggested that everyone might be better off if he were dead. Then he sent his good-bye e-mail.

But Dollard was not planning a suicide, at least not a quick one. Dressed in what he would later describe as his “scumbag hipster agent’s uniform”—Prada boots, jeans, and a black-leather jacket—he boarded a plane for New York, then Kuwait City. From there he hopped a military transport to Baghdad and embedded with U.S. Marines in order to make a “prowar documentary.” Given the decades of substance abuse, the idea of the chain-smoking, middle-aged Hollywood agent accompanying marines into battle was sort of like Keith Richards competing in an Ironman Triathlon. But Dollard thrived. “My first time in a combat zone, I felt like I had walked into some bizarre fucking ultra-expensive movie set,” he would later say. “I had this vivid clarity, like when I used to take LSD. I felt joy. I felt like I had a message from God, or whoever, that this is exactly what I should be doing with my life. I belong in war. I am a warrior.”

To those at home it seemed that Dollard had entered dangerous mental territory. Around the New Year in 2005, he e-mailed a photo of himself to friends. In it he is clutching a machine gun, surrounded by marines. Dressed in combat gear, his hair in a mohawk and the word “die” shaved into his chest hair, Dollard looks like the mascot of camp *Lord of the Flies*.

The H’wood Warrior

Midsummer 2006. Dollard sits across from me at a hotel restaurant near the Los Angeles airport, tearing into a breakfast of waffles, bacon, and black coffee while talking about his ambition to become a “conservative icon, the Michael Moore of the right.” He is well on his way, thanks in no small part to a terrible incident that occurred last February in Iraq. While filming U.S.

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troops in Ramadi, a Humvee Dollard was riding in was struck by a bomb. Two marines were killed, but Dollard—in keeping with a streak of freakishly good luck—was thrown clear from the fiery wreckage and emerged unharmed but for a two-inch cut on his right leg. The bombing was, appropriately enough, first reported in *Variety*. Dollard was soon invited on Tony Snow's radio show on Fox and spent as much time railing against Hollywood liberalism as he did talking about Iraq. Snow, weeks away from becoming White House press secretary, loved it. He called Dollard a "true believer" and invited him back for two more appearances. Dollard was soon hailed by conservative columnists in *U.S. News & World Report* and the *Washington Times*. The *New York Post* dubbed him the "H'wood Warrior." No small part of his appeal to the right is the fact that Dollard was once a "doctrinaire liberal" who could even boast of close ties to Robert Kennedy Jr., but now speaks of his prowar stance in the most militant terms: "This is a propaganda war, and if I can fight with a camera the same as a marine with his rifle, I will."

Last May he launched a Web site (patdollard.com) and began airing a five-minute trailer of his as yet unfinished documentary, *Young Americans*. The response was overwhelming: 100,000 hits in the first week, hundreds of supportive e-mails, and unsolicited offers of money. "Dude, I'm becoming a national hero," Dollard tells me.

Compactly built, Dollard dresses in clothes—jeans, Wal-Mart work boots, and an olive-drab T-shirt—which look like they were slept in. His hair is close-cropped, but nevertheless manages to appear disheveled. He hasn't shaved in a few days. His teeth are cracked and stained, and, worst of all, from a health standpoint, his right eye is obscured by a milky blob: a cataract that developed in Iraq which he has never treated. Also in need of attention is a wretched cough, which sounds like a snow shovel scraping on the sidewalk. If he were a homeless man, you'd probably wash your hands after giving him your change.

Beneath the unkempt appearance, Dollard projects unnerving vitality. Even with the cataract, his green eyes are alert and engaging. Words tumble from his mouth at a rapid clip, his voice a parched growl acquired from a lifetime of cigarettes and liquor. One moment he is laughing about the time he picked up hookers on the set of *Dragon: The Bruce Lee Story*, a film his second wife worked on as an assistant to producer Raffaella De Laurentiis—a moment later he is pounding the table, railing against Cindy Sheehan's antiwar protests. "Cindy Sheehan is pathologically self-centered. It's a tragedy she lost her son. Anyway, we all lose family members. So, fuck Cindy Sheehan."

From hilarity to rage in less than two minutes. In laymen's terms, Dollard is "intense." Some might use words like "manic" or "bipolar"—a condition Dollard's mother believes he might suffer from—but Dollard bristles at any suggestion he is clinically off balance. "True," he says, chewing a strip of bacon, "I was told to get a CAT scan"—after being blown up in Iraq—"but I feel fucking fine."

And, true, Dollard was pretty much the same before he got blown up. He possesses a quality common among celebrities, children, and the insane. You are compelled to watch him because you never know what he will do or say next. His third wife, Alicia Allain, sums up her ex-husband, saying, "He may be the biggest asshole I've met, but he's got twisted charisma."

Not everyone succumbs to it. When Dollard first posted the story of escaping death in Iraq, his younger sister, deeply opposed to the war, speculated that her older brother was just "too evil to die." (Dollard dismisses her as a "nutcase—even nuttier than I am.")

When it comes to practicing the Hollywood art of salesmanship, Dollard was among the best. Steven Soderbergh says, "Pat has a quality that's essential to selling movies: making people see things that can't be seen yet. I mean, if Pat says he saw a U.F.O., he will convince me it was there, even if I didn't see it."

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Upon returning from his second trip to Iraq, last March, Dollard moved from Los Angeles to an undisclosed location out of state to complete his film. (He is so obsessed with secrecy he recently had the OnStar system yanked from his S.U.V., fearing it might be used by “enemies” to locate him.) He is in L.A. today at the invitation of Andrew Breitbart—longtime contributor to the Drudge Report and self-described “right-leaning Hollywood basher,” but, a free-thinker, who helped create the Huffington Post. Breitbart plans to introduce him to potential financial backers.

Dollard’s film teaser is less like a documentary than agitprop. It opens on two young marines hunched over their machine guns at a roadblock. It’s the winter of 2005. Both are shivering from the cold, warily eyeing the civilian cars which at any moment they may be called upon to shoot. The marines pass the time speculating about what kids their age might be doing back home. One of them turns to the camera, concluding, “They’re over at home smoking blunts, fucking watching MTV, sitting on their fat ass. Well, fuck you.”

A montage of violent clips slides past—an Arab fighter being shot to death by American soldiers; a marine rifleman dancing and clutching his groin, then firing a machine gun into an Iraqi town; the minaret of a mosque being blown to pieces. The violence is intercut with iconic images from American pop culture—the smiling face of *Jackass* prince Johnny Knoxville, college kids dancing at an MTV beach party, antiwar rallies, the faces of arch-liberals Jane Fonda and Michael Moore. The soundtrack is provided by Boston hard-core punk band Blood for Blood. Their song “Ain’t Like You (Wasted Youth II),” with its chorus of “Fuck you, I ain’t like you,” becomes the refrain of the troops as they blow away insurgents and give the finger to antiwar activists and kids at home enjoying the fruits of America’s mindless civilian culture.

There is evidence of a possible war crime in the trailer: a marine clutches the head of a dead Iraqi and raises it in front of the

camera like a jack-o'-lantern. (This footage was given to Dollard by troops, and he claims not to know the provenance of the decapitated man, or why a marine was playing with his severed head.) In Dollard's presentation, the act of desecration, accompanied by the faces of grinning Marines, is treated as a macabre joke. By intercutting this with actual *Jackass* footage, the trailer seems to suggest that, for the young, wild, and patriotic American, war in Iraq is sort of like the ultimate *Jackass*.

When I mention to Dollard that his severed-head scene might turn more Americans against the war, or even against the troops, he laughs. "The true savagery in this war is being committed by the American left on the minds of the young men and women serving over there by repeatedly telling them that their cause is lost." He adds, "My goal is to desensitize young people to violence. I want kids to watch my film and understand that brutality is the fucking appropriate response to a brutal enemy."

Dollard's target audience is the same as any rock band's: kids—the more disaffected the better. He aims to alter the course of pop culture. "What we've celebrated since at least the 1950s is the antihero," Dollard says. "Today, even though our country has been attacked, nothing has changed. If you are a young man in America right now, the coolest fucking thing you can aspire to be is like a gangsta rapper, or a pseudo bad guy. The message of my movie is simple: If you're a young person in America, the coolest, fucking most badass and most noble thing you can be today is a combat marine. Period."

Breitbart believes Dollard is onto something important. "There needs to be a confrontation at the pop-culture level of the kids who are over there fighting versus the kids at home who are totally disconnected, immersed in this mindless Abercrombie & Fitch–MTV culture." Breitbart adds, "There needs to be a revolution, and Dollard is the man who can kick it off. I don't care if older conservatives are offended by Pat Dollard. I was not

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looking for someone pristine. He brings to our cause this whole spirit of, like, the Merry Pranksters Two.”

Perhaps it's no surprise that Ann Coulter adores his work. Like Breitbart, she recognizes his ability to reach young people in ways that other conservatives don't. She says of his Web postings, “What's great about them is that they have the panache of a professional MTV video with a very un-MTV message.” In an e-mail she sent to Dollard after an initial viewing of his trailer, she simply gushed, “wow! wow! that certainly is attention-grabbing! I like it—especially the ‘fuck you’ melange with michael moore and [former Democratic Party chairman] terry mccaulliffe. I like it!”

The reaction to Dollard from soldiers and their family members has been even more enthusiastic. One marine officer he encountered in Ramadi expressed his admiration in a terse note: “Thank God and Chesty Puller for people like you, Pat Dollard, who truly get us. Semper Fi.”

As for those Americans who believe in the conspiracy of a liberal-controlled media, Dollard tells them that their worst fears are true, that the entertainment industry is run by a form of reverse McCarthyism. “If you're conservative in Hollywood today, you're not necessarily getting blacklisted, but you essentially are blacklisted. You are reviled and treated like shit.” That a former Hollywood big shot would descend from the heights and admit to the people that he was once part of the liberal cabal electrifies them. The father of a marine Dollard met while filming in Ramadi wrote him, “[My son] told me that you were one of those very rare media types that didn't suck and had nuts equal to that of any Marine infantry rifleman. [Your film] will be mighty powerful ordnance deployed against the bed-wetting peaceniks on the left.”

Most important from Dollard's standpoint, he is reaching his target audience—the MySpace crowd. Typical of the many e-mails he receives is this: “Hey Pat im a 17 year old high school

student. I lived most of my life as a liberal and over the last year realized I was only a product of the leftist school system and the media. The clips I've seen of 'Young Americans' are an inspiration and it's time someone tells the truth. Thanks for putting your life on the line for the better of the country."

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When you consider that just eighteen months earlier Dollard was a confessed whore-loving, alcoholic, coked-out Hollywood agent, his transformation into the great hope of conservative America is nothing short of astonishing. "It's fucking crazy, dude," he admits as he stands at the entrance of his hotel, smoking and watching planes take off from LAX. "I was afraid conservatives wouldn't have me, but they're fucking all over me."

He brings up George Clooney and Steve Gaghan, both of whom he knew through his work with Soderbergh. In Dollard's view, the two of them represent everything wrong and shallow about Hollywood liberalism. Dollard claims that he was having lunch with Gaghan—who wrote *Traffic*—a few years ago when Gaghan was struck by his inspiration to make *Syriana*. "He literally held up the bottle of olive oil on the table and said, 'Oh, my God! It's all about the oil.'"

(Though Gaghan remembers the lunch, his version of events differs from Dollard's. And by that point, Gaghan says, he was already a few years into his research for *Syriana*, which was based on Robert Baer's 2002 book, *See No Evil*.)

Nothing irks Dollard more than the praise Clooney received for making *Syriana* and *Good Night, and Good Luck*. "Clooney actually goes around letting people say he was 'brave' for making those movies. Everybody in Hollywood is obsessed with wanting to be perceived as tough. Is it brave making films that serve the agenda of every liberal in Hollywood, when real heroes

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are spilling their blood in Iraq?" Dollard sputters. "Clooney is a pompous jackass."

Another plane takes off from LAX. Lighting another post-breakfast cigarette, Dollard turns to me and laughs. "Dude, I spent twenty years being a pimp for the stars—now I'm becoming a political star."

The Young Turk

Billy Bob Thornton, a former client of Dollard's, once told a mutual friend, "Pat Dollard is the only person I know in Hollywood who's crazier than me." When Dollard was a teenager his goal in life was to become a "stoned artist." Inspired by his hero, Jim Morrison, Dollard dreamed of spreading a "metaphysical message throughout the world."

He grew up, the second eldest of five children, in a "Puerto Rican–Irish welfare family." When Dollard was three his mother, Eva, packed up the kids and fled from their alcoholic, Irish American father in New Jersey, moving to Paramount, California, a smog-bound blue-collar city on the southern fringes of the Los Angeles basin, where Eva took a job as a night-shift switchboard operator.

Dollard's father stalked the family to California. Living on skid row, the elder Dollard would show up at his ex-wife's house and terrorize the kids. As Dollard remembers it, his dad would inevitably end up leaping onto the cinder-block wall in the backyard to punch and threaten imaginary enemies. "My dad thought we were being attacked by pirates, and the police would come," he says. "But it wasn't my mom who called them. My dad would call the police to help him fight the pirates."

His mother again moved the family, but Dollard's father found them. Dollard was in first grade, a scholarship student at a Catholic elementary school, when his dad took a job parking