

A First Look at 'Last Out'

The *Last Out* cast includes (clockwise from bottom) Scott Mann, Ame Livingston, Bryan Bachman and Leonard Bruce.

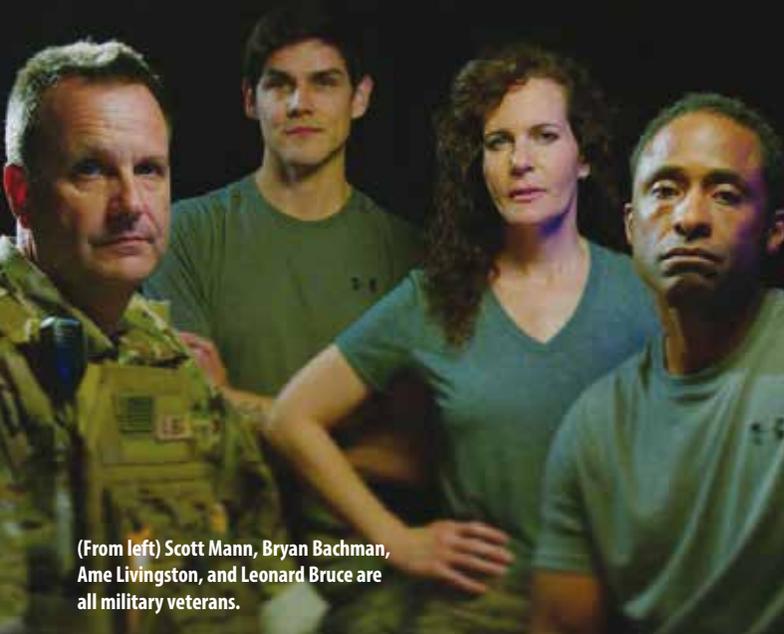
In his play, **Ret. Lt. Col. Scott Mann** shines a light on a military story that Hollywood has left behind

In the play *Last Out: Elegy of a Green Beret*, Army Green Beret Danny Patton is a modern-day warrior fighting battles in tribal Afghanistan as well as his own living room. The gears of war seek to rip apart his family, his integrity, and his soul, and as he is thrust into his final mission, he discovers that combat can be fueled just as much by love as it is by vengeance. Which will he choose?

Last Out, currently touring the U.S., is the brainchild of Ret. Lt. Col. Scott Mann, who not only wrote this raw, emotional play but also takes on the role of Danny, heading up an all-veteran cast that includes Ame Livingston (who serves as director), Bryan Bachman, and Leonard Bruce.

Mann spent 23 years in the United States Army, 18 of those as a Green Beret, where he specialized in unconventional, high-impact missions all over the world including Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Panama, Iraq and Afghanistan. The play is produced by The Heroes Journey, a nonprofit organization founded by Mann and his wife, Monty, that's dedicated to helping military men and women tell their transition stories with free books, workshops, and virtual training—resources that are made available to veterans along each stop on the play's tour.

Last Out began as a one-person show when Mann was a student in Florida Studio Theatre's "Flying Solo" course. Working side by side with FST's theater artist Jason Cannon over the course



(From left) Scott Mann, Bryan Bachman, Ame Livingston, and Leonard Bruce are all military veterans.



Mann (top) wrote the script for *Last Out*.



Mann and Livingston play Danny and Lynn Patton.



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—Scott Mann

of two years, Mann drew from both his combat experience as a Green Beret, as well as others' stories of war and hope, to create the play. He tells *Salute* he wanted to help civilians better understand the cost of combat to veterans and their families, and to help warriors utilize the power of story to let go of their pain and heal the wounds of war.

"When I wrote it, and when we put it together, I thought if we were going to ask civilians to really try to understand war, they've got to feel it. That emotional connection has to be there," Mann says.

"I'm a speaker and storyteller in my for-profit and nonprofit worlds," Mann continues. "I'm a big fan of storytelling, and I feel like this story just doesn't get told—even in the movies—especially

for those who do multiple deployments, deployment after deployment after deployment. There are all these movies about the first in, but nobody every talks about the last out."

Mann says Hollywood has tended to "thin slice" military stories. "They want the flash that's going to sell the tickets," he says, "but that's the beauty of live theater. In live theater, you can go deep. You can go Arthur Miller deep."

Live theater, particularly with difficult subject matter, can be challenging for any actor, let alone someone new to the acting world. Although Mann doesn't consider himself to be a trained performer, he did a deep dive into acting in order to prepare for this role. "About a year ago, I decid-

ed to play the role of Danny, and I started training really hard, like a Green Beret does. If I am going to go into this country, and speak this language, then I'm going to immerse in the training. So I started going to New York to take acting classes, work with breath coaches, go to workshops, and learn how to drop your character on stage. I've had a year of really intense training, but I still feel like it's a very new thing for me. Every time I walk out on the stage I think, *I can't believe I'm about to do this again*. I feel like I'm about to go on a mission. It has that same knot-in-the-gut kind of feel. And I don't want to let the audience down."

Audiences, who typically consist of veterans or military families, have responded favorably and emotionally to *Last Out*, Mann says, which is why psychiatrist and PTSD therapist Dr. Diego Hernandez, who is trained in the protocols for treating PTSD, travels with the cast to every performance. He is available to connect audience members to resources and provide on-the-spot treatment for those who need it.

Mann has even tweaked aspects of the play, including the ending, based on the connections

the cast has built throughout the year with audience members who share their own stories. He says this has enabled him to embody *Last Out* with more of a universal military family experience.

"The changes to the play don't affect the outcome. However, they do affect the emotional delivery in such a way that it gives greater peace and greater hope to veterans and family members struggling with loss and other aspects of war," Mann says. "We've incorporated a couple of love letters between Danny and his family, and according to Dr. Hernandez, all of the vital emotional components for healing and restoration are powerfully covered in the new ending.

"We say no matter who is in the audience—if it's four people, then four people need to hear it—all we have to do is take care of each other as a team, as a cast, and everything else will work out," Mann says. "I can relate to that all day long. That's how I've lived my life for two decades." 

For more information as well as tickets to see *Last Out: Elegy of a Green Beret*, visit lastoutplay.com. For more information about *The Heroes Journey*, visit theheroesjourney.org.