

Pacific

TATTOO

armed forces



Inside /

Regulations • Ink Reveals • History of Tattoos

TATTOO ARMED FORCES

Stars and Stripes' Tattoo Armed Forces magazine pays special tribute to a popular, yet underrated, group in our military community – those with tattoos. This one-of-a-kind magazine is designed to not only feature our military audience's ink masterpieces and the stories behind them, but also the work of the artists who bring the art to life. Whether you have tattoos, or are curious about the culture, turn the pages to learn more about this creative, permanent act of self-expression.

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TATTOO REGULATIONS

IN THE MILITARY

If you are an active-duty service member and are considering getting a tattoo, be sure to inform yourself of the rules and regulations. Here is an overview of current military tattoo policies.

PROHIBITED

All branches:

- Tattoos are prohibited on the head, scalp or face.
- Content must not be indecent, sexist, racist, obscene, extremist, gang-related, overtly sexual, discriminatory, incite violence or represent an organization that does.

Army:

- No tattoos on the front of the neck, or front of ears.

Air Force:

- No tattoos above the open collar on the head, neck or face.

Marine Corps:

- No tattoos above the seventh vertebrae on the back or above the collarbone on the chest.
- No tattoo can be visible above the collar of a crewneck T-shirt.
- **NOTE:** Certain duties still prohibit full-sleeve or full-leg tattoos due to interaction with and sensitivities to other cultures.

Navy:

- Tattoos cannot be visible through Whites.

Space Force:

- No tattoos on the front of the neck, front of ears, or hands beyond the allowed ring tattoos.
- Chest or back tattoos cannot be visible through any uniform.

ACCEPTABLE

All Branches:

- No limit—in number or size—for tattoos on the chest, torso, arms, legs and feet.

Army:

- One tattoo on the back of the neck, not to exceed two inches in any direction.
- One tattoo behind each ear, not to exceed one inch in any direction.
- One tattoo on each hand, not to exceed one inch in any direction. One ring tattoo on each hand, and no limit to tattoos between fingers that are not visible when hands are closed.
- Permanent facial makeup must adhere to grooming standards.

Air Force:

- One tattoo ring on a single hand, and one tattoo per hand not exceeding one inch.
- A single tattoo on the back of the neck or behind the ear, not exceeding one inch.
- Cosmetic tattoos to correct medical conditions.
- Permanent facial makeup must adhere to grooming standards.

Marine Corps:

- One ring tattoo on a single hand.

Navy:

- Any number and size of tattoos on hands.
- One tattoo on the neck or behind the ear, not to exceed one inch in any direction.
- Cosmetic tattoos to correct medical conditions.

Space Force:

- One tattoo on the back of the neck or behind an ear that does not exceed one inch in any direction.
- One ring tattoo per hand.
- Cosmetic tattoos to correct medical conditions.
- Permanent facial makeup must adhere to grooming standards.

In South Korea, tattoo parlors and body-piercing shops are off limits for U.S. service members “for safety, health, or operational considerations,” according to U.S. Forces Korea Regulation 190-2.



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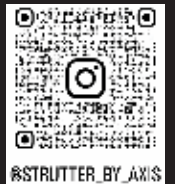


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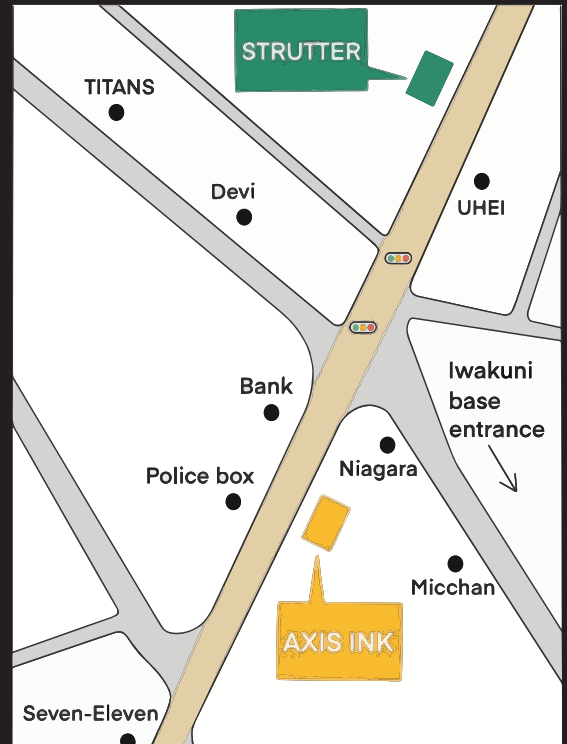


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ARE YOU How to get a Tattoo

By Stripes Staff

Americana and neo-traditional. Americana tattoos consist of bold lines and classic primary colors, such as red, blue, yellow and green. These designs exploded in popularity with service members during World War II. Military insignias and unit crests, iconic red roses, Harley Davidson logos, daggers and skulls are examples of this type of design. On the other hand, neo-traditional tattoos twist Americana artwork by using non-conventional colors and a mash-up of abstract and classical designs.

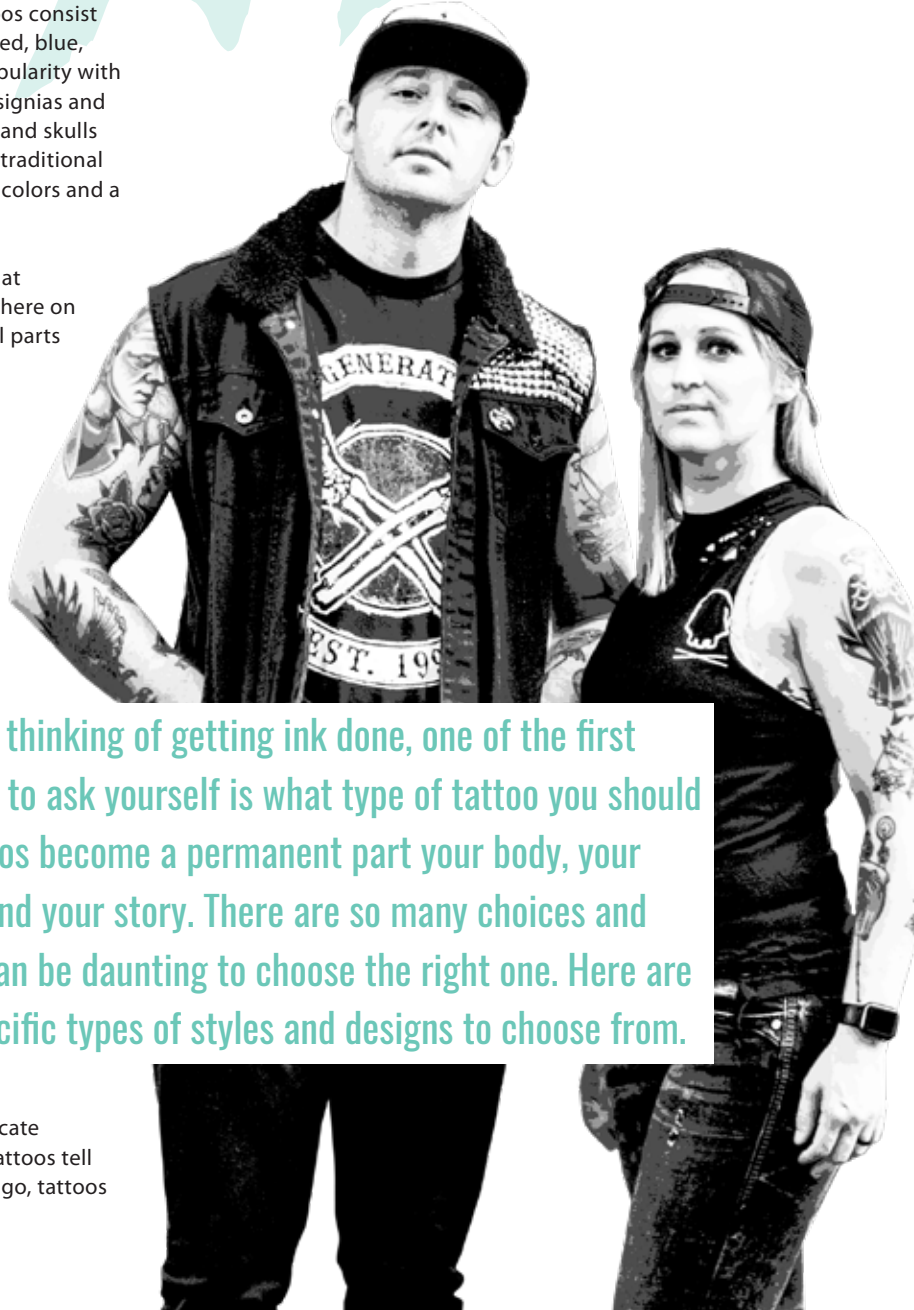
Biomechanical. Biomechanical tattoos create the illusion that mechanical parts are a part of the human body, no matter where on the skin the tattoo is located. Skin tears to reveal mechanical parts underneath are a popular choice for this style.

New school. If you are a fan of the bright and whimsical, the new school type of tattoo may be something worth considering. Lively characters (think of your favorite cartoon or comic hero) and vivid colors are usually used in new school ink work.

Blackwork and black and grey. Although these designs are done using only black ink, the tattoos are striking in their intricate work and etching or engraving styles. Blackwork often features less shading and uses the boldness of the ink to highlight the artwork. Black and grey also uses only black ink but focuses more on shading to make the grey stand out in the design.

Kawaii. These tattoos are all about cute, cuddly and colorful subjects: Think fuzzy animals, cartoons, sparkles and hearts. Kawaii originated in Japan and the style is used outside of tattoos on things like apparel and decorations. In kanji, kawaii translates to "able to be loved, can/may love, lovable."

Tribal. These tattoos are more than just impressive and intricate designs. In Polynesian, Maori and Hawaiian cultures, these tattoos tell a story about the history of the people and land. Centuries ago, tattoos



If you are thinking of getting ink done, one of the first questions to ask yourself is what type of tattoo you should get. Tattoos become a permanent part your body, your identity and your story. There are so many choices and sizes, it can be daunting to choose the right one. Here are some specific types of styles and designs to choose from.

were done by painstakingly hand-tapping the ink into the skin. Although most designs are done via machine today, some studios on the islands perform the traditional hand-tapped method.

Stick-and-poke or hand-poked. Similar to traditional tribal tattoos, stick-and-poke tattoos are done the old-fashioned way. A small, thin needle is inserted into ink and etched into the skin without using electric instruments. The resulting design is often more delicate and creates a hand-drawn effect. Stick-and-poke may be a good option for smaller tattoos.

Watercolor. These modern tattoos utilize brilliant color gradients to create a "painted" effect.

Portrait/realism. This kind of tattoo is just as the name describes; subjects typically involve people, animals and plants.

Irezumi. The Irezumi tattoo is a traditional Japanese style that most often portrays mythical motifs from Japan. Traditional tattoos can still be done by hand using Nara ink.

◆◆◆◆ things to consider ◆◆◆◆

What is the cost? The price depends on many different factors; but to put it bluntly, you get what you pay for. Do your homework and compare prices, read reviews and view photo galleries. Tattoos will likely be with you for the rest of your life. Quality

tattoos are worth the money.

Where to put it and what size? Tattoos can be placed just about anywhere you want and can be as large or small as you desire. Just know the larger the tattoo, the longer it will take and the costlier it will be. You may want to consider factors such as the ease of covering it up for professional purposes, or maybe that your mom still doesn't approve.

Aftercare is important. Follow the aftercare advice verbatim. Your newly inked skin will be bandaged to staunch any bleeding. Remove the bandage between one to three hours later and wash very gently with warm water and mild soap. Pat dry. **DO NOT RUB OR SCRATCH.** Let it air dry and apply a thin amount of aftercare ointment. If the studio didn't provide any cream, any light, unscented lotion would work. Do not use bandages after the initial one. Over the next 10 days or so, you'll need to keep the area away from overexposure to the sun and water, which means no tanning, pools or baths (showers are okay).

Don't scratch! As the skin begins to heal, the tattoo will start to scab over and itch something fierce. Whatever you do, do **NOT** pick or scratch. If you do, you can mess up your beautiful masterpiece or worse, cause it to become infected. We have found that when the itching becomes almost unbearable, putting on a small dab of aftercare ointment or lotion helps immensely. After a few days, the scabs will flake away, leaving your tattoo looking fabulous.

Aftercare disaster

When I got my first tattoos from a professional studio, the artist, Lord Grim, asked me what I do for a living. At the time I was an Army mechanic. Grim warned me that the location of my tattoos may be difficult to keep clean, safe, and properly covered in my line of work. He said it could cause damage to my skin and tattoos and recommended against doing it. Cocky and confident, I said it would be okay. Boy, was I wrong. Back at work, I had to cram my arms deep into engine bays of vehicles, causing my freshly inked skin to be exposed to oils, gasoline, dirt, sweat and scratching. My arms got infected, causing damage to the line and color work in my tattoos. They went from looking fresh and amazing to old and ancient quickly. All the cleaning and ointments in the world could not fix my tattoos. Grim warned me, but I didn't listen. Tattoo artists are experts. They know what they're doing. Don't be like me, Do yourself a favor: Take their advice!

- Luis Samayoa



Tat stats & facts



3 in 10 Americans have at least one tattoo.

45
million

45 million Americans have tattoos.

36
%

36% of U.S. adults aged 18 to 25 have at least one tattoo.

\$50
billion

The global tattoo industry is worth over \$50 billion.

\$45

The average cost of a small tattoo is \$45.

21
%

21% of Americans regret getting a tattoo.

40
%

40% of tattooed Americans have more than one tattoo.

13
%

13% of people with tattoos have had them removed.

32
%

Tattoo removal procedures have increased by 32% in the last year.

72
%

72% of people think that visible tattoos are unprofessional.



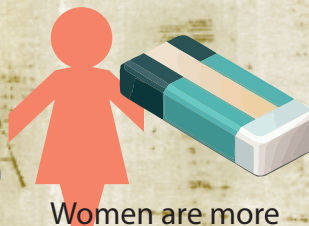
The most common reason for getting a tattoo is to honor a loved one.

35
%

35% of people find a tattooed person less attractive.

27
%

27% of tattooed adults say their tattoo makes them feel rebellious.



Women are more likely to have a tattoo removed than men.

26
%

26% of Americans aged 30 to 39 have tattoos.

Source: WORLDMETRICS.ORG



FIRST TATTOO SHOP IN UNITED STATES OPENED IN 1846

The tradition of tattooing and body marking goes back in history to at least 4000 BC, as seen on ancient mummies. The connection between tattoos and warriors, or those defending their home, may be just as old. In ancient Rome, soldiers were tattooed with ident Societies around the world have had special tattoo designs for their warriors such as the blue patterns used by the Picts of Scotland and the black patterns created by the Maori of New Zealand. In the Middle Ages, the Catholic Church, which is not known for allowing body art, encouraged Crusader knights who tattooed the Holy Cross on their bodies.

The tradition of American military tattoos begins with the Navy. Exposure to Polynesian tattoos in the 1700's may have led to an explosion of tattooing among British, and then American, sailors. The word tattoo is Polynesian and entered the English language following Captain Cook's voyages in the South Pacific. Sailors used tattoos to show their achievements: an anchor meant he had crossed the Atlantic Ocean, a turtle indicated an equator crossing, and a ship meant he had sailed around Cape Horn. Tattoos were also used as talismans against superstition, and many of these motifs are still used by sailors today.

During the Revolutionary War, a sailor's tattoos were listed officially on their protection papers, which helped identify them as American if they were being pressed into the British Royal Navy. By the time of the Civil War a hundred years later, tattooing had spread to the Army. Each regiment was known to have at least one guy who could tattoo, with flags and weapons being popular. Tattoo artist Martin Hildebrandt, who opened the first tattoo shop in the United States in 1846, also traveled around the country tattooing soldiers.

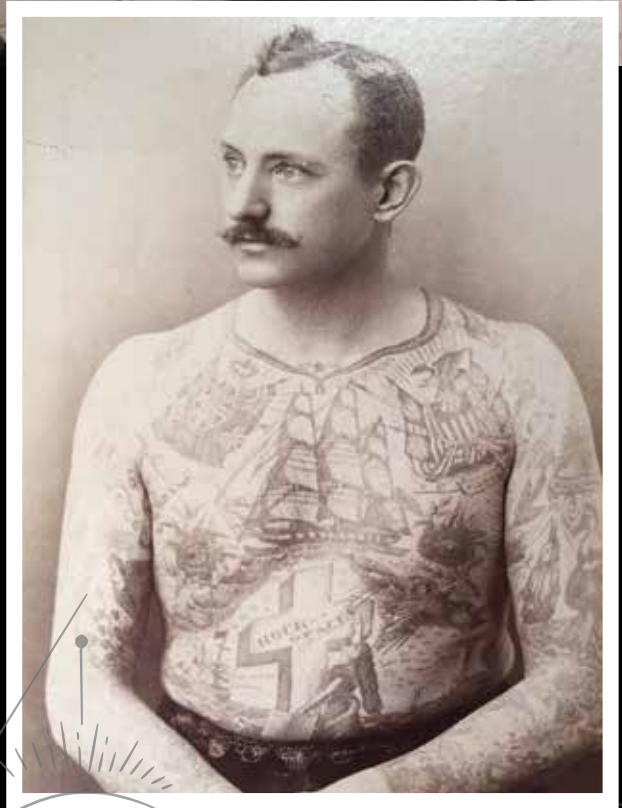


Photo of Jacob Hildebrandt displaying tattoos thought to be the work of Martin Hildebrandt ©www.artworldconfidential.org.

“The connection between tattoos and warriors, or those defending their home, may be just as old. In ancient Rome, soldiers were tattooed with identifying information to show membership to a certain group or unit.”

Continues on Page 10

RIGHT: Navy Tattoo featured in "400 Photographs of Tattoos from the Last Century" by David McComb.

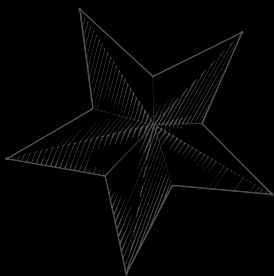
BOTTOM: La Belle Irene French postcard 1890 ©www.artblart.com



In the U.S., tattooing was synonymous with sailors and soldiers until the 20th century when it became popular with countercultural groups like gangs and circus sideshows. This changed the view of body art into one associated with deviant behavior and the popularity of tattoos waned, even amongst the military. During the World Wars, official policy required tattoos to be covered by the uniform. Finally, in the 1970s body art became acceptable in the mainstream culture and military tattooing also saw a resurgence with art that reflected ones' field of service, experiences, and patriotism. Recently, tattoos have also been used as therapy for service members handling post-traumatic stress or chronic pain.



In the U.S., tattooing was synonymous with sailors and soldiers until the 20th century when it became popular with countercultural groups like gangs and circus sideshows.”



MEANING BEHIND CLASSIC SAILOR TATTOOS



Full-rigged Ship - The sailing era tattoo of a sailing ship under full sail signifies that the sailor circled Cape Horn, the southern tip of South America.



Nautical Star - is a symbol of a sailor who can always find his way home.



Anchor - A single anchor indicates that a sailor has crossed the Atlantic or was a member of the merchant marine.



Swallow - Sailors earn a new swallow tattoo for every 5,000 nautical miles they traveled.



Crosses - They are believed to be applied on the soles of the feet to ward off hungry sharks.

MOST POPULAR MILITARY TATTOOS

Flags, units, branch logos, dog tags, rank insignia, Maltese crosses, and deployment-related tattoos are common amongst all of the branches. But some motifs are held tightly within the culture and superstitions of certain military branches and units.

Navy:

Anchors, swallows, nautical stars, compasses, ships, rope, dragons, turtles and pin-up girls.

Army:

Camouflage, berets, field crosses and tanks.

Air Force:

Jets, pilot wings, the Air Force logo, jolly green feet.

Marines:

Bulldogs, "Semper Fi," Crash Fire Rescue insignia, "USMC."

Coast Guard:

"USCG", anchors, cutters, life preservers, "Semper Paratus," helicopters.

The Space Force hasn't existed long enough for popular tattoos to emerge as iconic amongst its members, but we'll see what develops in the future.



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TOP:
Marine Corps
tattoo in the
American
Traditional style.
BOTTOM:
Fully rigged ship
tattoo worn by
Corey Warner.
Photo by Brittany
Atkins.

Tattoos in the Land of the Rising Sun

刺青



For centuries, “irezumi” 入れ墨/刺青 (tattoos タトゥー in Japanese) have been frowned upon as body art marking criminals and gang members.

Though originally used as an identification method for firefighters, construction workers and mail couriers in case they died in the line of duty during the Edo Period (1603-1867), the body art’s bad reputation endures still today.

Due to this, body ink was banned in onsen (hot springs) and sento bathhouses, pools, beaches and even gyms.

However, as younger generations begin to embrace the art of tattooing as an act of self-expression and not of criminality, Japan is slowly starting to adapt. Events like the 2019 Rugby World Cup and the 2020 Tokyo Olympics held in 2021, which brought an influx of international athletes with tattoos, were a sort of turning point on views of outward displays of ink.

Though you may still find there are many places that do not allow tattoos, you may see some that allow entry if tattoos are coverable. Be mindful of the local culture and understand that some places may be strict on their no-tattoo policy.



Soaking in Kofu Onsen.
Photo by Rosie Ortiz-Torres

Covering it up

Here are some tips for enjoying Japan’s hot springs and other activities if you have tattoos.

- Before visiting onsen/sento/beach/pool/gym, check if tattoos are allowed. This info is usually on their website or Google reviews.
- Usually only guests with tattoos small enough to cover are allowed to enter.
- Full-body tattoos are usually not accepted at onsen but are okay at most sentos. Check first.
- Many establishments will post a sign out front that says “no tattoo” in English.

- Use this Japanese phrase at entrance: “Tattoo wa daijobu desu ka?” (Are tattoos allowed?)
- Some bathing facilities allow guests with tattoo covers/stickers.
- Some bathing facilities provide tattoo cover stickers, but just in case, be prepared and purchase some ahead at Don Quijote or any pharmacy.
- “Hada kakushiito” (<https://hadakakushi.jp/>) and “caxel” (<http://caxel.jp/>) are some of the most popular skin cover tapes for tattoos available in Japan.



- At the beach, wear a rash guard if you have full sleeves or large torso tattoos.
- Most large onsen hotels have private baths. If shared baths don’t allow tattoos,

consider booking a private one.

- Some onsen allow tattoos during low attendance hours (usually one hour after the opening time and right before the closing hours).
- Refer to Tattoo-GO webpage (<https://en.tattoo-go.in/>) to pick tattoo-friendly onsen hot springs.
- Search タトゥーokな温泉 or 入れ墨okの温泉 online for onsen facilities that allow tattoos.



- Takahiro Takiguchi



NICOLAS CORCORAN

I think my tattoos have mostly impacted my life in a positive way. Don't get me wrong, sometimes I've gotten bad looks. But I've come across plenty of people who appreciate the art. It's been a great conversation starter over the years.

I got my first tattoo when I was 19. If I have a regret, it might be the hermit crab. I was bored while eating lunch at Denny's in Guam and decided to get a big flash tattoo.

I favor Balinese style tattoos. My favorites are my Balinese Barong and the Balinese Randga –

“bringer of good” and “bringer of evil,” respectively. It reminds me of my times traveling to Bali and the amazing friends I've met there.

My Japanese Daruma doll represents good luck and fortune. In the Japanese household, the doll is placed somewhere on a shelf and the owner will make a “wish” or a “goal” that they want to accomplish, and mark one of the eyes. Once the goal is accomplished, the next eye will also be marked in. My goal has been set for nearly 5 years now and I have yet to accomplish it, but I work every day to do so!

Artist's take



HIROSHI NISHIMURA

Hiroshi Nishimura is a tattoo artist based out of Kobe, Japan, who also travels overseas to share his craft with others. Nishimura, who says he joined the profession because he thought being a tattoo artist would be “cool,” shared his thoughts on the tattoo culture in Japan.

Q What is it like being a tattoo artist in Japan?

A It's about spreading traditional Japanese embroidery and designs to the world. I am doing it now and will continue in the future.

Q How do you view the evolving perception of tattoos in Japan and the influence of increased tourism on its tattoo scene?

A I see acceptance of tattoos is significantly increasing in Japan.

Q What challenges and opportunities arise with being a tattoo artist in Japan?

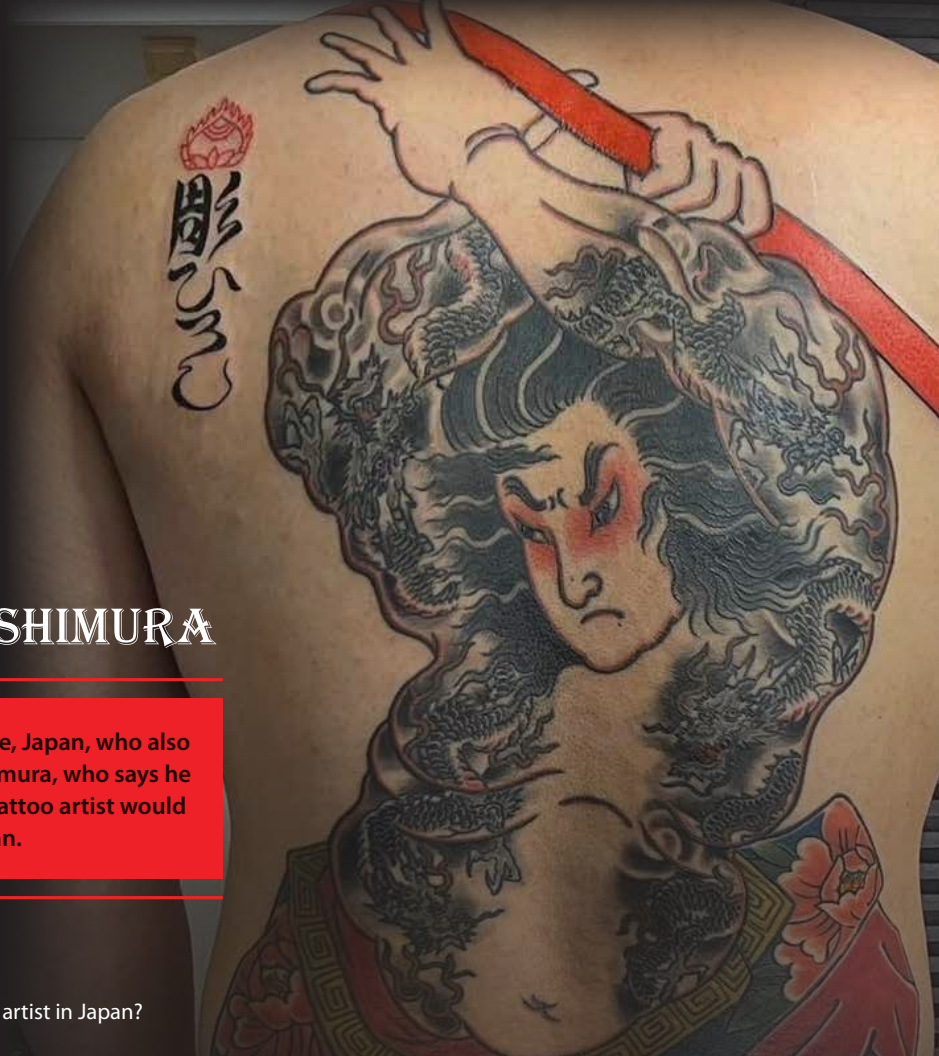
A Setting up tattoo shops and paying taxes.

Q Can you share the historical significance of tattoos in Japan and how it's evolved into today's world?

A Called “tebori” (hand carving), traditional Japanese tattoos are processed not with machines but by hand. Tattoos by tebori are much clearer, more colorful and last longer, which, I think, fascinates people overseas and is highly rated in the world. Foreigners often visit tattoo artists in Japan since they want to brag to their friends that they have been as far as to Japan to ink authentic traditional tebori tattoos.

Q Have you ever tattooed anyone in the Yakuza? What is it like?

A Yes, I have. When it comes to Yakuza, I always visit their home or have them visit my shop. They always want traditional tebori Japanese hand-inking tattoos, and it takes a long time to complete.



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Q Many service members get stationed in Japan, can you share the insights and procedures for them on getting a traditional-style tattoo?

A Traditional Japanese tattoos based off an integrated design theme, regardless if they are done on the back, arms or the whole body. Once we decide on a main design theme – for instance, karajishi (Chinese-style figure of lion) – we still add another design, such as botan (peony) blossoms, around the main theme to make the traditional Karajishibotan (lion and peony) pattern. So, even though each design of the inked tattoo, such as clouds or waves, is beautiful by itself, they work interactively with each other to create a profound meaning of four seasons, a legend or the universe. So, we, tattoo artists, plan and design how such a profound theme looks best in the client's body before starting to tattoo.

Q What advice can you give someone who is planning on getting a tattoo in Japan?

A Choose the most experienced tattoo artist as possible. And, I recommend tebori hand-carving rather than machine carving because it can make your tattoos more beautiful.

- Translated by Takahiro Takiguchi



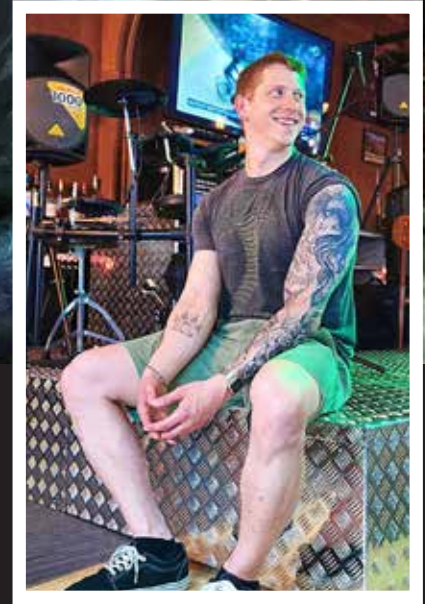
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SAMUELE RATTA



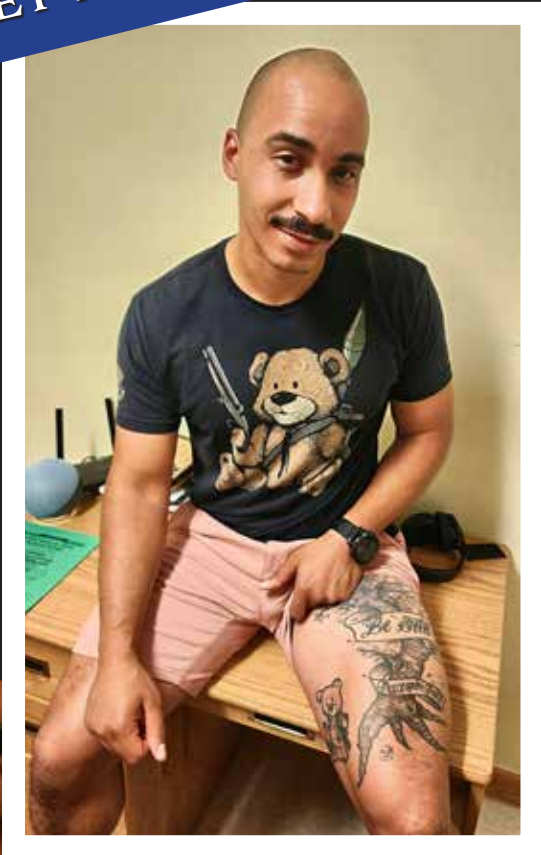
My favorite tattoo is hands-down my left sleeve. It's comprised of the four animals for the four cardinal directions from Korea's version of yin and yang. It both symbolizes the direct impact that spending the formative years of my life in Korea has on me, and reminds me to strive to maintain a sense of balance in my life. The most important tattoo I have though, is the lion pawprint on my right forearm. It's a subtle tribute to my Italian heritage, referencing the lion from my family crest. I got it as a matching tattoo with my brother after a period of separation with my family as a permanent reminder of the importance of family.

CARLOS BAEZ



The two tattoos with the most meaning to me are my Polynesian sleeve and Halo one. The polynesian tattoo blends their traditional meaning with some Taino symbols to tie it to my Puerto Rican heritage. I wanted to make sure that it was cultural appreciation and not appropriation. The tattoo tells a story of new beginnings and going through the trials and tribulations of life. My Halo tattoo was done by a friend I've known since the 4th grade with whom I grew up playing video games with. Knowing each other for so long and having him be the one to tattoo something from a game that became such a staple of my daily life, gives it a really special character to me.

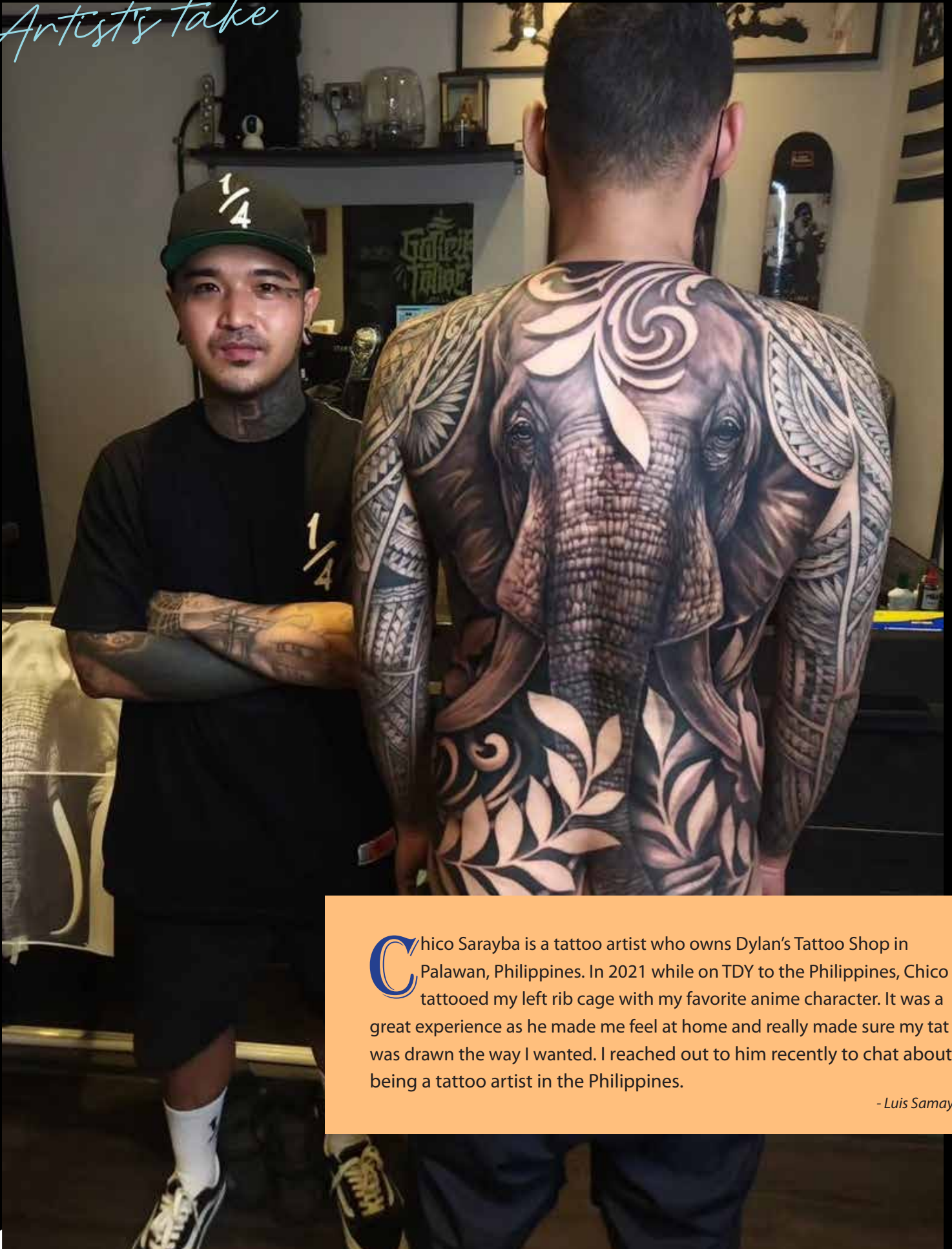
JEFFREY LEWIS



It wasn't until I graduated tech school that I got my first tattoo and now, 12 years later, I have covered most of my left thigh. The reason that I chose that location is because I wanted my tattoos to be for me only, to remind me of the places I've been and things I love. My favorite tattoo by far is Creasy Bear from the best movie of all time, "Man on Fire."



Artist's take



Chico Sarayba is a tattoo artist who owns Dylan's Tattoo Shop in Palawan, Philippines. In 2021 while on TDY to the Philippines, Chico tattooed my left rib cage with my favorite anime character. It was a great experience as he made me feel at home and really made sure my tat was drawn the way I wanted. I reached out to him recently to chat about being a tattoo artist in the Philippines.

- Luis Samayoa

CHICO SARAYBA

Q. Can you describe the tattoo culture in the Philippines?

A. The tattoo culture in the Philippines is getting better and continues to grow. Our elders are starting to accept it and realize it's art.

Q. What can you say to U.S. military personnel who come down to Palawan on TDY looking to grab some ink?

A. Tattooing military personnel is awesome. I have learned good things from them and have become friends with many. Some of them have become like family. If they are looking to grab some ink, I will say "this is the right moment to get it." I will surely recommend getting some ink because for me, it's like a souvenir. Getting a "I love Palawan" t-shirt is cool, but getting a tattoo in Palawan is quite an experience.

Q. What is the most rewarding thing about being a tattoo artist?

A. The most rewarding thing about being a tattoo artist is it keeps me alive and it's how I make a living.

Q. If you could change one thing about the tattoo industry, what would it be?

A. Maybe instead of competition, let's make a collaboration so tattoo artists can share ideas, learn new techniques from one another, and be friends with respect.



Chico Sarayba's work is featured on the front cover of this magazine.

Q. What is it like traveling to different countries to give tattoos?

A. I learn new things, but not just about tattoos. It's awesome meeting new tattoo artists and sharing ideas. I do miss my family though, but sometimes if you wanna see more, you have to go outside. It's a blessing to be able to travel.

Q. What inspired you to become an artist and eventually open a tattoo parlor?

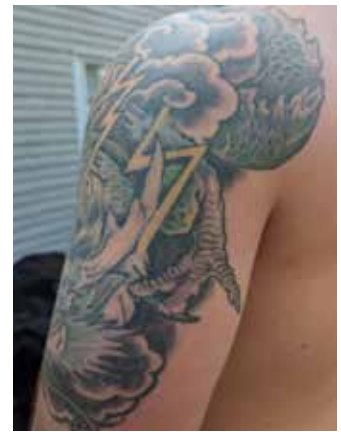
A. When I was young, I always loved to draw. I dropped out of school after 8th grade. My big brother had a tattoo booth in my Grandma's resort. I would work there every summer. We did temporary tattoos, and it was fun. I really loved it. One day, we ran out of material, so we went to visit my brother's friend, Onat Buenaventura, who owns a tattoo shop. We went there to buy materials for tattoos, and we became friends. Onat is a Master in tattoo, so I asked if I could be his apprentice. Master Onat and my big brother, Harry Sarayba, were my inspiration to become a tattoo artist. I opened my tattoo shop when my son Dylan was four months old. I decided to leave my hometown in Cavite and flew to Palawan to start a new humble beginning in June 2015. I need to make sure that my kids will be okay when I'm gone, so I decided to open a tattoo studio.



DAVID CADE JR.

Out of the eight pieces of artwork on my body, my leg sleeve tattoo is the one that I am most proud of. To me it represents family. The 35 characters that make up my sleeve are a mixture of mine and my two children's favorite characters. The movies that these characters come from have created unbreakable memories for my family.





AUSTIN ZUDEL

My tattoo is a yin-yang on my chest that has a dragon coming out of it and going half-way down my arm. The dragon is also flying through storm clouds and this whole design was built from different symbols that I felt were very meaningful to me. To start, the yin-yang represents balance and was placed over my heart. Dragons symbolize strength and storm clouds represent struggles or changes. When you combine all of these, to me it means: "If you have balance in your heart/life, it will give you the strength to endure the struggles and change in your life." The tattoo is important to me as I got it during a very difficult part of my life.



LEAH STAMBAUGH

My mom got tattoos when I was young, and she got a dragonfly tattoo for my 18th birthday because when I was born, she had painted my room with dragonflies. I always thought it's really cool to have art on your body. This tulip tattoo on my arm is my favorite. My best friend and I have matching tattoos, and the two tulips represent us. Her wife is actually the one who gave me the tattoo.



LORD GRIM

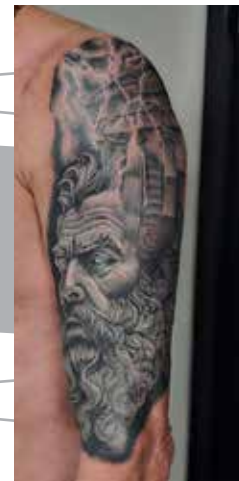
I got my first tattoo when I was like 12 or 13 years old (I kept it a secret from my parents). It was a garage-style tattoo from a friend with a nearly broken needle gun. I still remember how much it hurt and how much I hated needles (still do). I'm not a fan of going to the clinic for immunizations, but oddly enough, I still get tattoos.

My first studio tattoo took place when I met Lord Grim. I was stationed in Fort Bragg (now Fort Liberty), N.C. My roommate, Hunter, blasted through my door to show me his Nirvana In Untero 1993 album cover tattoo on his forearm. I saw how detailed it was and got me thinking of giving tattoos another shot. We ended up going later that same night and got with Grim. Soon after our first session, I began getting tattoos on a yearly basis.

One thing I loved about going to Grim for my tattoos was his guidance and mentorship. It felt therapeutic every time I got a new piece from him. I remember the last tattoo he gave me before PCSing. I went in after re-enlisting and told him it's my selfish gift to myself. He called me a dumbass and gave me my favorite tattoo at a discount rate. We have stayed in touch ever since I left North Carolina.

I recently reached out to Grim to share his journey on becoming a tattoo artist and his take on life.

- Luis Samayoa



Q. Can you tell me a bit about your military service and why you became a tattoo artist?

A. It has been a long time. You're one of my favorite clients. As for the military, it was an experience. I went into the Illinois National Guard first before joining Army full-time. I didn't stay in long, lol. I was a troublemaker... the Chicago attitude from my youth was a lot tougher to break in Fort Benning. So many article 15s... I got booted in 2002. I didn't get into tattooing until 2008, and it wasn't to pursue a career, it was done purely out of spite. My first tattoo was done just out of the main gate at Benning (Fort Moore now). I was going to get a tattoo I drew up, but the guy messed it up completely and thought he was gonna scare me into paying for it. Got into a tussle... Long story short, I sold my motorcycle to buy tattoo equipment, tattooed myself, got a job two days

later a few blocks away from that shop. Everyone knew me in the area, so I ended up being completely booked. The other guy made no money and had to close his shop, lol. Then I quit tattooing because I achieved what I wanted. But a few years later I went back into tattooing with a clearer train of thought. I had matured and studied tattooing and different styles of tattoos... I fell in love with the craft and pushed forward to get where I'm now.

Q. What's it like tattooing the military community?

A. I love it because I get to do awesome tattoos on my brothers and sisters. But it gets hard at times because people never stay, and I continually fight to gain clients, especially with so many shops in the area. Not all of them are even good, and a lot of soldiers don't know any

better and just go to whomever is the cheapest, which isn't the best decision... and 9 out of 10 times a bad decision ends up getting it covered up by me. But then I get those soldiers that see my work and they are like, "Hey, your work is awesome, here's my idea, you do your thing." I go all out to make them more than happy.

Q. What advice do you have for service members interested in getting a tattoo?

A. Research shops in the area, look at individual artists' actual tattoo work. Ask about hourly rates. Set up a consultation and go over your idea in great detail, but don't dictate. The artist will have to see how it'll all fit together and might change things to make it look good. Don't try to put so much in something really small. It won't look good in the long run. Aftercare is key. Take care of your tattoos! Have something like Recovery Dermshield wrap or a good all-natural aftercare

cream... No petroleum-based products!

Q. What is the most rewarding thing about being a tattoo artist?

A: Seeing peoples faces glow after I'm done with the tattoo. Makes me happy that I added something to their lives that they're truly happy about.

Q. The military has lots of regulations on tattoos. Do you constantly check the regs to prevent issues with service members?

A. I pay attention to when new regs are put into effect. Plus, I still have a lot of brothers and sisters in, so when things are being talked about, I always get word ahead of time so I can be prepared.

Q. If you could change one thing about the tattoo industry and community, what would it be?

A. Lol! This is a loaded question. Gatekeeping. I think there should be some form of gatekeeping. Waaaaay too many wannabes after COVID bought cheap equipment on Amazon and started tattooing with no real prior knowledge. Had money, opened shops and started havoc on people's bodies. They shouldn't be allowed because it's basically a form of light surgical procedure. I've seen waaaaay too many occurrences where people got MRSA, scarred, etc. Also, the cutthroat bullying mentality... it's childish and I think it should definitely be nipped in the butt! Oh, and art classes! To this day, I still take art classes for different mediums. There's always room to learn and progress my art!

Q. Do you have any memorable tattoo events you would like to talk about?

A. I've been tattooing since 2008 and struggled to make a name for myself... I brought my kids with me to a tattoo convention and won my first award... I was happy, but when I saw my children's reaction to me winning, that's what hit me hardest: Seeing my kids proud of me. Since then, I haven't just tried to make a name for myself in the industry, but to keep showing my kids that no matter what, I will continue to push to become someone they can look up to and be proud of... not to follow in my footsteps and tattoo, but the footsteps of never giving up and achieving everything I set myself up to do. And they have. We're always trying to make each other proud, and I think that type of value was much needed for us since I have raised them by myself since 2010. Being there for all their achievements has trumped anything I have done, but they also say the same in return.

Q. Any final thoughts?

A. I'll be turning 42 in July. My life has been a really tough struggle. I had felt alone through everything and even thought about suicide. But things changed and I joined a Veteran organization of tattoo artists called Operation Tattooing Freedom. We're here to help other Vets who are going through a tough time, depression, anxiety, thoughts of suicide, etc. We have a .org where Veterans can sign up and get appointed a tattoo artist who will set up a tattoo session. While tattooing, we just talk about anything. For example, if you're stressed out, want to vent, that's what we're here for. Or if you need help and our input, we can provide it. Or even talk about how we worked through similar problems and what we did to get through things and move forward. I know we're hardheaded, but remember you're not alone. And we should stand up for each other.



Learn more about
Operation Tattooing Freedom





JOEL PEREZ

Black is modest and arrogant at the same time. Black is lazy and easy - but mysterious. But above all, black says this: "I don't bother you - don't bother me" - Yohji Yamamoto

My tattoos are mainly just art. There's no inherent meaning, but I love the way they look. I love the lines, symmetry and the black and white. In a sense, my tattoos represent the concept of yin and yang. The designs of my tattoos are made up on the spot and it's all done freehand by my artist. That's my favorite part, the collaboration and creating something from nothing.



CONNIE GUEITS

In February 2018, we almost lost my father. He had colon cancer and he was having some complications. My father has a lot of tattoos, but his very first he did himself when he was 13 years old. My mother never had a tattoo in her life. She was 71 at the time, and when we held my father's hand, we always looked at the tattoo. We both felt we should get the same tattoo as a tribute to him. It's my mom's one and only. I have a nephew who also got this exact tattoo. And one of my boys also wants it. I'm so glad we did it together for my father. He's doing well and we have our matching tattoos.

As for my children, they are my absolute world! And I wanted their first tattoos to be done with me. We'll share them forever and have a constant reminder of our love for each other. When we get our tattoos together, I let my kid decide what we're going to get and where we are going to get them.

Jennifer and I wanted to have matching tattoos of the infinity sign.

Jocy had to wait a bit longer. She had already moved back to the States while we were still in England, so we didn't get our tattoos as soon as we wanted. For Jocy's, she chose a mix of some of our favorite things: our faith, love and the sakura in Japan.

JENNIFER GUEITS

When we saw the tattoo, it clearly showed a mom and daughter hugging each other into an infinity sign, which showed the bond we have with each other and will forever.

JOCY GUEITS

Our faith is something so important that we share, and the cherry blossoms for Japan because we miss it. So, It was combining the two things I love most that we share. The tattoo artist combined three designs and came up with that.



Ink at work

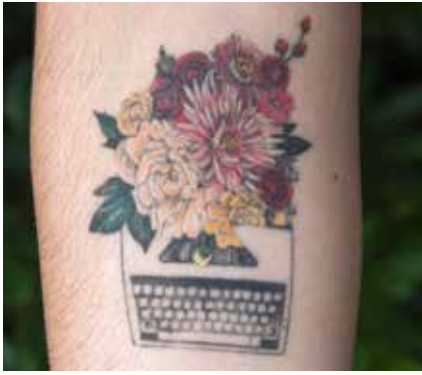
We asked our staff to weigh in on their tattoos and the meaning behind their masterpieces.

KELLY AGEE

I wanted to get tattoos because I love art, and what better way to show your love for art and different things, whether it be TV, movies or military service, through ink on your own body. My favorite part about getting a tattoo is being able to show off my interests. I always get people asking me, "Is that a Star Trek tattoo?" It's a conversation starter into the best show of all time. It's a Starfleet Insignia from the original Star Trek. It was my first tattoo and I got it in Texas in 2012 along with my sister, Kathryn, so we have matching tattoos. We used to watch Star Trek together. She passed away in 2020, so when I look at it, it reminds me of all the fond memories we had together and our nerdiness over the show.

I also have a bat tattoo of Eddie Munson from Stranger Things, and a lot of fans take notice. Another one I have is a very Navy tattoo, a Shellback, which I got in 2016 when I was stationed in Okinawa. I got it because I went on deployment on the USS Nimitz in 2013 and we went through the Shellback ceremony when we crossed the Equator. Since I got it in Okinawa, I wanted to add something to the tattoo that reflected the culture, aka why there are colorful flowers beside the turtle.





DENISSE RAUDA

I waited a long time to get a tattoo. But, as soon as I got my first one back in 2018, it was pretty easy to grow my collection to the seven I have now. I chose each carefully, even the ones I've matched with loved ones.

One of my tattoos spells out "eternal love" in Spanish, which I put together by photoshopping my dad's handwriting I found when sorting his belongings after he passed away in December 2018. My little sister also has one in my dad's handwriting, but hers says "love is patient," after a reading I did at his funeral mass. My dad had interesting penmanship, and we get to preserve and wear it every day. My most recent tattoo is a design I copied off a print I bought a long time ago. This tattoo represents my career and my passion for writing as it is an old-school typewriter with flowers blooming from within. I don't presume my words are always flowers. However, for me, the art of writing and creating does take time and patience to bloom.



JEREMY STILLWAGNER


I got my tattoo in the summer of 2021 on the tail end of a TDY supporting Exercise Swift Response. I was in Wiesbaden, Germany, regrouping with other members of my unit before returning to Fort Campbell, Ky., and wanted to bring something back to remember my time there. I had no room in my suitcases, so I got a tattoo! I went to Purple Ink and decided to get a tattoo of a bonfire from the Dark Souls video game franchise. In the game's story, bonfires act as a sort of home for the player and other characters and are scattered across the world. Getting this imagery as a tattoo is a reminder to myself that home doesn't necessarily have to be a single place, it can be wherever I want it to be, and can change as I travel.

Camp Carroll
Waegwan

Camp Walker
Daegu

MOLTEN




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- Camp Walker (Daegu) : Available for appointments on weekdays.
Plan ahead and book your session.

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