Replace a Background

Use Refine Edge to blend a subject into a new background

When you're shooting public events, you have little control over your subjects' movements. In this image, the naturally posed soldier looks good in profile, but the partially obscured vehicle and figure in the background are distracting. We could have repositioned ourselves to cut out the background clutter, but the main subject might have moved by then. Thanks to selection tools and layers, we can isolate the soldier from the background, and improve the composition by dropping in something more interesting from another photo taken at the same event.

When you select a person or object, they can look obviously 'cut out' because they have a hard edge, and by feathering the edge of a selection you can make a subject blend in more naturally and effectively with the new background, to create a more convincing composite. This tutorial will show you how to soften an initial selection using "Refine and Mask," and how to ensure that no tell-tale pixels from the original background are left clinging to the outline.

Kick off by opening a picture containing a figure. Choose the "Quick Selection" tool, tick Auto-Enhance, and brush over the figure to select him. You can now fine-tune the selection by following the steps below…

### Create a Seamless Composite

1. Soften the Edges

After selecting the figure, click "Refine and Mask" in the Options bar. Choose the On Black preview, so that you can see the traces of background pixels. Set Smooth to 11 and Feather to 2.5 to soften the edges, and set Shift Edge to - 15%.
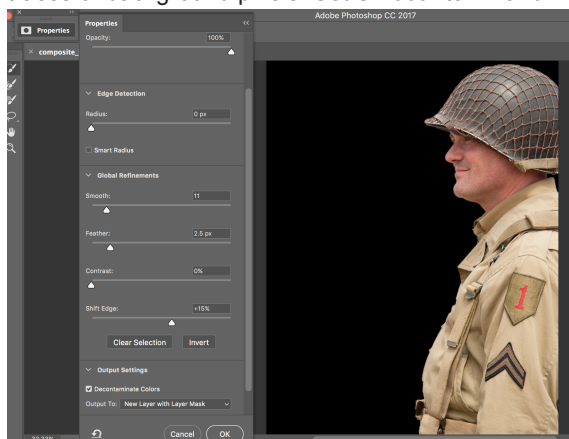
2. Decontaminate

Tick Decontaminate Colors, and set Amount to 45%: this shifts colors of the background still clinging to the subject's edge closer to those of the subject, so they' re less noticeable. Set Output to New Layer with Layer Mask. Click OK.
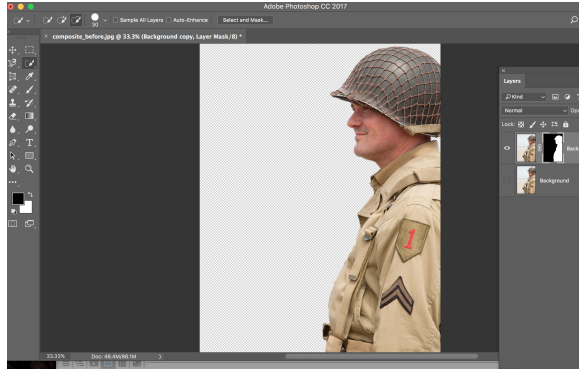
3. Add a New Background

Open "Composite Background.jpg" image. From the menu bar go to "Select > All," then "Edit > Copy." Target the main document, from the menu bar go to "Edit > Paste," and move the layer below the subject. From the menu bar go to "Filter> Blur > Gaussian" and set an appropriate Radius to make the images match. Radius to make the images match.