

Introduction

The dust has settled over the memories of my time overseas, but the throbbing pain in my back from the weight of my flak vest will never let me forget. As a staff sergeant in the Ohio Army National Guard's 1486th Transportation Unit, I crisscrossed Iraq hundreds of times over the course of a year in a convoy of semi trucks delivering supplies to fellow soldiers stationed throughout the country. It amazes me to think I was fighting a war in Iraq, because I joined the Guard when I was a seventeen-year-old kid looking for direction.

It became pretty clear we were going to be sent to Iraq after September 11, 2001. I was working as a mediation specialist in Dayton, Ohio when I was called to active duty. My civilian job revolved around finding peaceful, agreeable solutions to problems, so it was a little disturbing to think I was headed to a place where passion seemed to strangle logic. I didn't go to be a hero. I went to take care of my guys. I was in command of anywhere from twenty to fifty soldiers in my unit and I was responsible for making sure all of us came home together. There were times I thought some of us wouldn't make it and other times when I thought none of us would make it, but my job as a squad leader was to see to it that we protected each other.

Just days before I was scheduled to leave the United States, my mom sent an email to our local newspaper to see if they were interested in writing a story on my departure. That email landed in the mailbox of a friend from college who was working as a reporter for *The Gazette*. I agreed to write letters home to be published in the newspaper while I was away so that I might be able to show people at home what the life of a soldier was like.

After a year of writing letters, I was sick of it. I didn't want to share what was going on anymore for a myriad of reasons. There were times when I called home and asked my family not to ask questions about where I was or what I was doing because I couldn't answer them for security reasons. When I was home on leave, and shortly after I returned home for good, I dreaded the questions because I didn't want to answer them. These days I pray no one asks questions because I don't remember the answers or I'm trying to forget.

There are hundreds of stories like mine, or rather, thousands. Somewhere in Iraq, a soldier is sleeping on top of a trailer dreaming of the innocence he or

Wheels On Fire

she will never regain. And for those who will never make it home to tell their story, and others who can't express the details of such a humbling experience, I hope this represents the hardest journey for us all.

This is the most accurate recollection I have of my days in the desert.