

To Sum Things Up...

By ROB ADAMS
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Nine-year-old Bridget is very happy dad is home

I guess things just kind of ended when I got home and I started back into my normal, regular life. I took the month of July off to spend with my daughter and get back into the swing of things before going back to work at the golf course. A month off during the summer – I haven't had one of those since before high school. Believe me when I say you can find things to occupy your time.

Jack asked me to do an article about getting back from Iraq. I guess it must be hard to come up with articles for *Hole Notes* but I thought I could give it a shot. I guess the easiest way to write this would be to answer the questions I get from people who know me and those who find out I was in Iraq. I don't mind talking about it because I think it really opens people's eyes to how things really are without the spin of the news agencies and politicians. After I read the *Hole Notes* updates I sent back it just kind of ended and I didn't write anything else about my experience. People are curious and have a lot of questions about the war and what things are like.

Where were you and how long were you there?

I was in Ar Ramadi, Iraq that is about 90 miles west of Baghdad. It is part of the Al Anbar Province, which includes that lovely city of Fallujah and a few other towns that are in the news a lot. I was there for 11 months, 19 days, 13 hours and 45 minutes but I wasn't really keeping track.

Were you ever scared?

Yep. To start things off when we flew into the air base near Ramadi we were going to be picked up by the commander of the unit we were replacing the next morning at 9:30. It is about a twenty-minute drive from Ramadi to the air base but you have to take the 2 1/2 hour long cut because it is much safer. Well, the commander and his convoy didn't show up until 3:30 that afternoon, a little late especially by Army standards. He told us that when they left at 7:00 in the morning they

got hit with an IED (Improvised Explosive Device) about a half hour into the trip and had to recover vehicles and get people to the base for medical treatment before setting out on round two to come and get us. You could see the shrapnel and burn marks on the Humvees they picked us up in. The commander had a big slice under his lower lip where he was hit with shrapnel. So besides the 110 degree heat I was sweating a lot on the way back to base. Welcome to Iraq!

I spent the first three weeks sick to my stomach. We were replacing a high-speed active duty unit that had 125 more soldiers than we did. They lost nine soldiers and had about another dozen shipped out for battle and/or other injuries. I really thought we were in big trouble. I feared for the soldiers that were going to be doing these missions and that I didn't screw something up and get someone hurt or killed. In addition to fearing stuff "outside the wire," inside the base the bad guys were hitting us with mortars and rockets on a daily basis. So yes there were times when I was a little scared.

So how did soldiers deal with the stress and fear?

If you ever watch some of the better documentaries or war movies about WWII, Korea or Vietnam, one of the things you will hear the soldiers say about how they survived and functioned in that environment is that they "accepted the fact that they could be killed at any second" or "they were dead already;" morbid but true. Once you can accept that and stop thinking about it you can function and do what you were trained to do. I realized the truth of what these soldiers said and went from there. Whether I was inside or outside "the wire" you just accept the fact that your next step could be your last.

This thought process worked for me and most of the soldiers I was with. It is

interesting to see how different people handle the stress. Some of the big macho guys fold when the *#@% hits the fan and the timid meek guys and gals perform like studs.

So do you think it was worth it?

For me I think it was worth it. When I was there the focus of our mission (The 5,000 plus Soldiers, Marines and Sailors in our Brigade) was to provide enough security for the people of Ramadi to hold elections. As part of that mission we trained the Iraqi Army and Police and disrupted insurgent activity. The turnout at the elections improved substantially. We trained about 400 Iraqi soldiers that would later take over some of the areas we were in. We hired and trained 200 plus Police that would eventually return to the area when it was safe enough for them to operate in a police-type function and not as a combat unit. As far as insurgent activity, we eliminated a lot of insurgent cells, caught or killed many bad guys and recovered literally tons and tons of ammunition that was out in the open for anyone to use.

Do you think we should still be there?

This is the one that's tough to answer. We did a lot of good when we were there and I am sure that the units that replaced us were and are doing a good job. If you read about Ramadi and the Al Anbar Region now in the news, it is considered a success because the local Sheiks have banned together, stood up and taken control of the area. When we were there the insurgency was much too strong and coordinated to allow that to happen. The

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people needed our help to fight off these "bad guys."

Are the Iraqi Army and Police ready to take over for themselves?

I give most of them high marks for bravery but as far as being well-organized and disciplined units, they are nothing like the Soldiers and Marines we have. It is a cultural thing and I don't see them coming around very fast. There is also so much corruption in every level of leadership that it is hard to say how they will function. I think we gave the soldiers and policemen some of the basic skills and tactics they need to do well, but they need to further develop that into what works for them in Iraq. As some of our senior military leaders said to us, "At some point we will have to say close enough." That doesn't mean we are going to leave them in disarray, but that at some point we will have given them enough equipment, knowledge and training and they need to use what we gave them or find something else that does work for them.

The government is a whole different story. I don't know if they will ever be able to sort out that mess. When all is said and done, I don't think Iraq will look like what the American government would like. The Sunnis, Shiites and Kurds have been fighting for thousands of years and for them to come together as a functioning government may be a bit of a stretch. We may need to say "Close Enough." We have given them money, equipment, training, supplies, and, most important, time. They need to put the pieces together for themselves and figure out what works for them.

Is there any chance you will have to go back?

No, the Canadian border is only about five hours away. Actually, right after I was deployed, they changed the law so that it was optional for military officers that had fulfilled their initial obligation of eight years (which I had) to be called up to

Active Duty. It of course also said that anyone currently deployed needs to finish their tour. When I got back to the States, I submitted the paper work "again" to get out. I figured they could change their minds. After 13 plus years of service in the Minnesota Army National Guard and over a year on active duty in Iraq I got an email that said simply "You are discharged." A month later I received the official paperwork. I am officially out of the Army.

"I guess to sum this whole thing up... being in Iraq for a year was an experience I will never forget. I learned a lot about myself and other people in general. There are always bigger problems and issues out there. I don't take the little things for granted. I am also grateful for modern plumbing, something that is not a high priority in some foreign countries!!!"

Are you adjusted to being back?

Yes, for me it was pretty easy to get back into the swing of things. As I drive down the road I don't look for IEDs or scan the area for bad guys. I have only jumped a few times at loud noises. Once when a low flying jet came over it sounded like an incoming rocket and once when they opened up at the police firing range, which is adjacent to my golf course. Other than that I am OK with what I did and everything I saw. I think about being over there everyday but it is not about bad stuff, more about the people I was with and some of the cool things that we did or happened. It was a pretty memorable year and I don't think those memories will fade too quickly.

Do you think you are different now?

I don't think I have changed who I am or the things I believe in. I do think that I have changed in a couple areas though. First, I am more appreciative of family and friends. I missed an entire year of my daughter's life. I left when she was in Kindergarten and got back right before she started 2nd grade. I missed a lot of her growing up and don't want to miss anytime I can be with her. I just appreciate

the time I spend with my family and friends more.

I am also more grateful for the things I have and the things we have in this country. As screwed up as things can be with our government and in this country you can't imagine how the majority of the Iraqis lived under Saddam and his sons. At any moment you, your family or your friends could be taken and never seen again. It was a story I heard several times. I think we as Americans have a sense of basic security that gets taken for granted.

I also realize what a great job I have. I truly love what I do. There were many times in Iraq when I would think back to where I work and what I do and just smile. It's hard to beat being out on the course early in the morning watching the sun come up. It's pretty peaceful and beautiful. There are people and places in the world where the biggest problems aren't greens speed, budgets and high golfer expectations. I think I can

deal with those issues.

I guess to sum this whole thing up... being in Iraq for a year was an experience I will never forget. I learned a lot about myself and other people in general. There are always bigger problems and issues out there. I don't take the little things for granted. I am also grateful for modern plumbing, something that is not a high priority in some foreign countries!!!

I also want to thank all the people and businesses that support the troops. It was awesome to be able to email companies and ask them for things that could help us out over there. I don't think we were ever turned down. Talk about brand loyalty. The other thing was whenever I was in uniform walking through an airport or where ever, people would come up and thank us for our service and what we were doing. I appreciated that more than anything. Now whenever I see a person in uniform, I thank them for their service. The Soldiers, Sailors and Marines are doing their jobs and they aren't easy.

Thanks again for all the support.

- Rob Adams
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