

FIGHTING TERRORISM WITH AMERICAN GOODNESS
With Georgia's 48th Combat Brigade Team at Radwaniya near Camp Stryker.

General Stewart Rodeheaver, commanding general of Georgia's 48th, invited us to ride along with him today to dedicate a local health clinic. Why would a general who has a lot of war on his hands these days take the time for such trivialities? Because, it is in health clinics and new schools and public work projects that the war on terrorism can be won. Terrorists aren't interested in the local citizens, except to kidnap their families and threaten to kill them unless they participate in their terror campaigns. We rid a child of a lifelong earache and Daddy just may be inclined to tell us where one of the local bullies is hanging his rocket launcher. Funny how those things work. The clinic is located on property once owned by Uday Hussein, the dictator's late and unlamented son. Driving through the 25-square-mile estate is a surreal experience. Uday's compound contains one of his many palaces, surrounded by lakes, canals, palm trees, guest homes for his cronies and his own personal zoo. (Daddy did so love to spoil his little darlings!) The homes are made of teak and the doors are mahogany and definitely not from Home Depot shelves. Today, the whole place is emptier than George Clooney's head.

In close proximity to this once-palatial estate sits the modest little three room clinic. It is the first clinic to open here in five years. (I guess Uday was too busy buying chimpanzees for his personal zoo to worry about such mundane things as the health of his people.) In the clinic are a few Iraqi citizens waiting to see the doctor. Sounds like a rather benign setting, but four days after it opened terrorists launched a rocket attack to discourage people from coming. It didn't work. On the first day some 30 people showed up, although at first only the men would brave the wrath of the terrorists to visit the clinic. Slowly, they began showing up with their wives and children. Now, the women come alone with their children. Around here, that is monumental progress and a positive sign that these Americans might not be such bad guys after all.

You read about all the turmoil in Iraq, but you don't hear about the good things that are taking place here one small step by one small step. Lt. Col. Steve McCorkle, from Bonaire, is helping make it happen. McCorkle is commander of the 2nd Battalion, 121st Infantry Regiment, a contingent of over 800 men headquartered in Albany. His warriors are fighting the bad guys in the area who terrorize the local families. At the same time they are distributing food, medicine, school supplies and toys to those families. For example, I saw two young children in the clinic today. They were ragged and shoeless. Before they left, they were given clothes and shoes by the clinic staff. This is a good strategy. The locals finally have someone to take up for them and they get food and medicine to boot. Now, they are beginning to tell the Americans where some of the bullies are hiding. See how this works? The clinic director is John Nagel, of Atlanta, ably assisted by medic Angela Gowen, from Palmetto, who is a nurse back home. In two weeks they have treated over 200 local citizens for everything from respiratory ailments to orthopedic problems. Dr. Nagel had a family practice in Dunwoody when he was called to active duty. Since he was in practice by himself, Dr. Nagel had to sell his practice and no doubt took a financial hit in doing so, but he keeps it all in perspective. "It was hard," says the good doctor, "but when I start feeling sorry for myself, I have to remember that the sacrifice I made is nothing compared to the soldiers in the 48th who make the ultimate sacrifice."

After spending a lot of time with the clinic staff and the patients and giving a disabled Iraqi a new wheelchair, General Rodeheaver and his entourage soon were back at their offices planning for Saturday's Constitutional referendum. I sit in my tent thinking about how that little clinic is making life better for a group of people who have been kicked around all their lives. I think about how Dr. John Nagy represents all that is good and decent about America. I think about Uday's palace sitting lost and forlorn. I think about his daddy sitting in a prison cell in his jockey shorts with his memories of the good old days. I think I have had a good day.



PARADISE LOST – One of the empty Hussein palaces in Iraq.

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