

## **A GEORGIA SOLDIER TRIES TO GET BACK TO BUSINESS**

It has been one year since I was in Iraq with Georgia's 48th Brigade Combat Team in the infamous Triangle of Death. Unlike any experience I have had before or since, this one gets more vivid with each day that passes.

I got eyeball-to-eyeball with the war when an IED — Improvised Explosive Device — narrowly missed putting some serious hurt on our Humvee while we were on patrol. I can still hear the explosion. The crew yelling, "Get out of here! Get out of here!" Smoke everywhere. Gun ships thumping overhead trying to locate the bad guys who set it off. It seemed like a scene out of a movie, only it was real. Very real. We later saw the crater the bomb had created. It was huge. Thank God, the bombers were about two seconds too slow. Timing is everything.

In our crew that day were Sgts. James Rackley of Montezuma, Eric Farmborough and Mahlon Williams, both of Statesboro, and Bruce Robinson of Buena Vista. Sgt. Robinson was the gunner, a particularly dangerous job because he is exposed and is an easier and more immediate target for snipers.

I called Bruce Robinson at home the other day to see how he is doing and to ask him if he remembered that day. "I do," he said, "because it was not a place where we expected them to have a bomb. Most of the IEDs were on the main roads." When we were hit, we were on a winding ramp leading up to a treacherous highway known as Tampa Road. He added that he had experienced about 10 other such incidents while on patrol. I told him I had received a Combat Action badge, signifying that I had officially been in battle. "Good for you," Robinson said. "You earned it." I thought so, too, but it was nice to hear it from a real warrior.

Robinson was an independent truck driver in Georgia before being called to active duty. He told me in Iraq he wasn't sure what it would be like to drive on our highways when he returned home without worrying about a bomb going off under him, or someone dropping a grenade from a bridge. After all, this was a way of life for him and the other members of Georgia's 48th.

Robinson told me that he was, in fact, on the road again. He is driving a long-haul route throughout the Southeast for Yellow Transportation. How does he feel now that he is back behind the wheel? "I still get spooked," he admits, "I am constantly scanning the road, just like I did in Iraq. I am still looking to see if there is anybody on the side of the road or on the overpasses. It is just something that takes a long time to get over, and I'm not sure I ever will." Robinson says before he could bring himself to get back to his old career, he had to take some "downtime." I'm sure he is not alone.

Robinson recalled for me the bad days in Iraq retrieving wounded comrades in the field and rushing them to landing pads to be airlifted to medical facilities, and the good days of the intense volleyball competition in camp after having spent the day surviving Iraq's mean roads.

He says he still isn't sleeping well, even though he has been home for almost six months. No wonder. In Iraq, you sleep with one eye open. If you weren't ambushed on the road during the day, you worried about being mortared in the camp at night. Who can sleep in conditions like that?

It was good to hear his voice again. Bruce Robinson is an ordinary Georgian who, like his 4,800 comrades from one end of the state to the other, left his job and family, was put in a dangerous situation not of his choosing and did everything that was asked of him while there. I don't know if our paths will ever cross again, but I will never forget that for one fateful moment last October, he and I were brothers. And forever will be.