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## REFLECTIONS ON IRAQ TWO YEARS LATER

It has been two years since my trip to Iraq to see the war through the eyes of Georgia's 48th Brigade Combat Team located in the aptly named "Triangle of Death", south of Baghdad. The longer I am away, the scarier it seems. Would I do it again? In a heartbeat.

Happily for them and their families, members of the 48th are back home and back to as normal a life as one can have after dodging roadside bombs and mortars shells and not knowing if the person on the side of the road is going to wave at you or try to kill you. All of this and more dirt, danger, boredom and stark terror than you can fathom.

I have kept up with some of the Band of Brothers (and Sisters) who let me share the dangers of their Iraqi patrols with them. The 48th BCT, a part of the Georgia National Guard, was commanded by Stewart Rodeheaver. At the time of my visit, Gen. Rodeheaver was a manager for the Georgia Power Company. He is now a deputy commanding general in the United States First Army, headquartered at Fort Gillem, south of Atlanta. The army's gain is Georgia Power's loss. He is one of the best leaders I have ever been around.

One of Rodeheaver's key commanders in Iraq was Col. John King, who has been in the news recently because a couple of City of Doraville council members tried to fire him from his post as chief of police. The politicians were upset after he was sent to Iraq, one calling him a "part-time police chief." Naturally, they were snug in their beds while King was involved in some of the heaviest fighting in the Triangle of Death. The voters of Doraville, a town of 15,000 northeast of Atlanta, gave the council members a swift kick in their egos. One resigned after being threatened with a recall petition. King not only retained his job but Doraville's mayor has promised him a contract extension. Good guys do occasionally win one.

Bill Huff of Gray wrote me recently. Sgt. Huff was the driver who escorted me to city of Mahmoudiyah, one of the towns that form the Triangle of Death. It was my first day in Iraq and I went there to sit in on a meeting between Gen. Rodeheaver and members of the Iraqi military and law enforcement officers prior to Iraq's upcoming vote on a new Constitution. I was too polite — and scared — to comment to Sgt. Huff that his driving seemed erratic until he told me later that we were dodging IEDs (Improvised Explosive Devices), or roadside bombs. That I am here two years later telling you this story says that Bill Huff did his job well that day.

We found an IED a couple of days later — the hard way. We ran over one. I will never forget the sound and how the backend of the vehicle rose up off the ground right under where I was seated and the smoke that engulfed our Humvee. Someone said later that had the bad guys been five seconds faster or had we been five seconds slower, it would not have been a happy ending. For me, this was a unique experience. For the troops, it was their daily version of Russian roulette on wheels. Business as usual.

I will always be grateful for the privilege of being with a group of dedicated men and women who left jobs and families and came to Iraq because it was required of them. No whining. No second-guessing. No guarantee that they would ever make it home. They were schoolteachers, police officers, secretaries, physicians, welders, truck drivers and marketing managers from one end of the state to the other, and they served at great personal sacrifice and with distinction. Each is a hero.

Two years later, I am safely at home, but the war in Iraq remains up close and personal. A young friend of the family, Kristina Allen, recently shipped off to Iraq with the Marines. Pray that she and all the others return home safely. War is hell. So is Iraq.