

## A soldier's story

from page 1

just west of Baghdad. There I was reunited with my original unit and basically did two weeks of nothing. Officials pretty much give you a shakedown and make sure you're solid enough of mind to be part of a civilization that you haven't been a part of for the past year.

Later I went to Kuwait. I was there for three days before I boarded a World Air Flight that flew through Germany, Bangor, Maine, and eventually into Wisconsin. I stayed there for four days before I finally got back to Charlotte.

**Q. How do you feel?**

A. I don't want to watch the news. When I watch the news it makes me sick. I was very close to where the guy was abducted recently and it brings back the images of what I've been through. I just thank God I'm not there anymore. It's good to be home, to be comfortable, be yourself and know where your next meal is coming from.

**Q. I know you must have seen some pretty horrific things while you were there. What do you feel comfortable talking about?**

A. There were some indirect fire attacks and an improvised explosive device that killed 19 people and injured 16 others. Some of the things I saw were so horrible — total devastation. You could smell the burning flesh and there were body parts everywhere. It was really nasty. There was a huge crater where the car blew up and all that was left was an axle.

I was shot at numerous times, but because you're not actually hit it kind of numbs you to what's going on around you. You know you're a target cause you're wearing an American flag. But it always rattles you a little bit.

I knew three Americans that died and a number of Iraqis. One of the Americans was a week from going home.

One of the most difficult things was when

one. I don't wanna know that. It's bad enough when I can still see in my head all these old ladies crying after an explosion and body parts all over the place. I don't want to know I may have killed anybody.

**Q. I've heard a lot about corruption among Americans — civilians working there and the troops. What have you heard?**

A. There are some corrupt Americans that are totally bleeding the system. They're

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overcharging for things they sell and they have third world nationals working for them and living in substandard conditions. They make more money then they would in their own countries, but I don't think people should be treated poorly and forced to live in bad conditions.

**Q. According to a lot of news reports many gay men have been executed by Ali Al Sistani's Badr Corps — do you know anything about that?**

A. Since I came home I've read stuff in *The Advocate* about that. I knew that Sistani had issued a Fatwa against gays and anyone who dressed in western style clothing.

**Q. Did you meet any gay Iraqis while you were there?**

A. There was a gay interpreter on our base. He never left the base. One of the bravest men I know. He lived in a trailer with three other interpreters, so I think he was pretty comfortable there. I'm sure he's petitioned to get the hell out of the country.

**Q. Do you think this war was merited?**

A. I don't know that it was merited. I do think there could have been other ways to get [Saddam] Hussein out of office. President Bush's father is to blame for this predicament. I think it would have been much better if he had gotten [Hussein] out of office back then.

**Q. Do you think this war can be won?**

A. I don't know that there will ever be an achievable mark to say we have won. If we can get this government in control, that's a victory — but I don't think there's going to be an absolute victory, no.

**Q. What are your feelings about our government now, as opposed to how you felt before going to Iraq?**

A. It's changed a lot. As much as I love this country — I think there's a lot of corruption. It makes me cringe to say this — but I was a staunch Republican before I left. Now I'm much more moderate, even liberal. This administration doesn't let soldiers be soldiers.

see next page >

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