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# Voices In Conflict

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## Current Version In Conflict

In today's society so many young people, are a bit clueless as to what's going on our world. With headlines including Tyra Banks gaining 60 pounds or the newest Hollywood hook-up, it's hard to pick up a magazine or newspaper and try to understand what is really happening overseas. Today, we are going to bring you the voices of some of our troops and some Iraqis, too.

"VOICES IN CONFLICT"

Wilton Villager Friday May 12, 2006

Baqubar, North of Bagdad

Hi, I'm just sitting here in my room with nothing to do so I figured why not write home. It is getting hot out now. It's in the low 100's now, and every day it goes up a degree or two.

We'll be sitting in our air conditioned rooms listening to music or doing whatever it is that everyone does and you step out your door and BAM it feels like you are on another planet.

Life here is alright more often than not. On our down days, a lot of guys watch movies and things but what they think about are all the things different in their lives: will their wives and girlfriends still be there at home; will they recognize them, what they regret not doing; what they wish they hadn't done; what they fear; and what they appreciate more being here.

I never thought I'd ever say this but I miss being in high school. High school is really the foundation for the rest of your life, whether teenagers want to believe it or not, it really is. I've been thinking a lot about fate while I've been here. I screwed up in high school, big time, but I can't help but think that maybe I was meant to join the army. It has changed me into a person I would never have become other wise.

It is funny, we got into the first real political discussion the other day, needless to say it was very heated but it was cool to hear all the different points of view on the War from people who had all been put in the same situation and face the same things, literally side by side. Eh, I guess it is just another one of those fleeting thoughts that flutter through a bored mind.

I hope everyone at home is doing alright.

Nick Madaras

Armed Services Characters:

Introductions and Christmas Greetings

National Guard Major LADDA "TAMMY" DUCKWORTH:

I am not going to dishonor the effort in saving my life by saying "woe as me I got no legs." Well I got one knee. There are guys who have none, guys who are blind. I have my arms, my face, my brain. This is a pretty good life I have compared to what it could be. Plus they make prosthetic high heels. I checked into it. Not three-inch stilettos, but at least an inch or two of heel. I'll be good to go.

I wanted a combat job not because I wanted to go into combat, but I didn't think it was fair. How could I be an equal

soldier if I didn't take equal risk? At the time it was 1992, there was a lot of debate about allowing women in combat. In 1993, they finally let female aviators into combat.

I was lucky I got it, and I loved it. There are guys who depend on me, and I depend on them. It's amazing, the most amazing feeling. It's down and dirty, a heavy beast of a machine that I control. What other country would let me do that? Not that many. I am a minority female who got to be a company commander, You know, for all the stuff that goes on in this country, I was given that opportunity, and I am so lucky to have been able to do that.

I like that I can serve my country. I know that's a corny thing to say, but, growing up overseas, I lived in a lot of war-torn countries. I lived in Cambodia and saw refugees. I saw pictures of Amerasian Vietnamese children who were street urchins just thrown out into the street because they were Amerasian. I thought, "But for the grace of God, that could be me living on the streets as a beggar."

I miss my body. I miss my strong, healthy body. The first time it hit me, I was watching a triathlon, and this man, an arm amputee, was doing it, and it made me cry. I was like, "I want a healthy body." I am addicted to America's Next Top Model. I love Tyra Banks. I think she's the greatest. I am addicted to that show. Sometimes I'm like, "I can't wear stilettos anymore." And then I go shopping, I have to compensate for how my legs look under clothes. But then those feelings go away.

We will have a party here at Walter Reed on my one-year anniversary—my alive day. It will be great. I am very blessed. I have a good employer, a good husband who has been here for me. I appreciate every day of my life.

#### IRAQI WOMAN

Another sad day in Iraq...The terrorists have resumed their evil plans as we expected before and their bloody attack today targeted both, Iraqi civilians and American soldiers and unfortunately this is not going to end soon.

Today's attack was the ugliest and most coward one; the butchers murdered children with cold blood and then attacked the brave soldiers who came to rescue the injured. It seems like they used Iraqi children to get to the American soldiers. They will keep attacking Bagdad and to prevent us having a normal life and ...and to stop this country from being a democracy. They will also try to affect the course of the American elections.

God bless the souls of the Iraqis and Americans who fell today and may God help their families. We are so sad today but we will not despair.

#### National Guard Sergeant Ben Flanders:

I reenlisted again! There was something profound about serving my country, and although I had been a national guardsman for six years and I was getting paid and getting benefits, I wasn't seeing where I was providing a service--- until I was actually deployed to Iraq. Then my butt was on the line and that readjusted my whole focus that --service to the country is really important. I realized it's really important to have a strong military, and I also realized that we need to keep our leaders accountable. Do I support the invasion? I'm not 100% sure. We need congressional hearings about what led to that.

I believe in this country, it needs people who are critical and analytical and take their own skills and strengths and put them to some use. I have a lot of conviction about staying in Iraq. We should not leave, and that's because of the work we did, and I believe in that work. We confronted an enemy that easily would have chosen to bomb a café or kill innocent civilians.

#### Sgt. Robert Sarra:

I saw "Top Gun" when i was in 8th grade and I just....I knew, I knew what I wanted to do, I knew what i wanted to be. Ummm, And Then I saw a marine in High School and I was like, thats it. They're mean, They're tough and they got cool uniforms and Chicks dig em.

Here's the big book of all the oppurtunities in the marine corps, what do you wanna do? shooosh..... Push it across the desk at me. I looked him in the eye and pushed it across the desk and said I wanna be a grunt, I wanna go blow stuff up. Thats what i wanna do. (pause) That's what i got to do, I got to go blow stuff up.

We had been in a firefight, we had been in an engagement, and the engagement was over and I see this woman walking out in all black, shes got a bag in her arm, shes wearing a berka. Uh and shes walking out towards the armoured vehicle. And the guys on the Amtrack start waving their hands and yelling at her stop stop and their raising their weapons and i went, "ok one or two things are gonna happen: this woman is gonna put up her hands and surrender and start talking to the marines or she's gonna walk up to these guys and explode. And if she blows up, she's gonna kill a bunch of those guys or wound a bunch of them. I've got a clear shot with nothing behind her. And this was all, i mean (snaps fingers continually, while nodding head) the was spilt second ya know? It happens all that fast. Pulled up my rifle, took two shots at her. (takes deep breath) I know i probably missed the first shot, the second shot, I'm pretty sure i hit her. And as soon as that second shot went off, the guys on the other vehicle opened up and they cut her down. She fell to the dirt, and as she fell, she had a white flag in her hand. At that moment there, I lost it, I threw my weapon down on the deck of the vehicle and I was crying and i was like Oh my god, what are we doing here? whats happening? I had a gunnery sargent, who had been in the first war, he said it happens there's nothing you can do to bring her back, it happens we gotta keep going.

Spilt second decision that's all, you pull the trigger, you trigger something else. You cant take it back, no matter what i do, if i got back to Iraq ya know if I become a Muslim, if ya know read the Koran everyday, I cannot bring back that woman and there's nothing i can do.

Army Reserves Sergeant LISA HAYNES:

I don't regret anything I have done in the service. I felt I was accomplishing something. I felt proud. It's just my last experience in Iraq--- I know what a toll it has taken on me and I can't take that back. The experiences I have had in the last two years have brought me down, but hopefully I'll get stronger. I just got to get there.

I joined the Army Reserves right out of high school for the money. It wasn't a lot of money, but I thought it was. I wanted to do something different. I was from a small town, real small, Boynton, Oklahoma. About 300-something people. I wanted to see other places. I wanted to travel, so I joined.

We got trained on what we was fixing to walk into over there in Iraq. It was scary. I was a little anxious. I was getting into something and I didn't have a clue what it was. We practiced worst case scenarios. I have a family and they were scared for me. I told the ...it would be ok, that this was part of life. They understood and they were supportive.

I go to Iraq and on the road we saw a lot of Iraq kids, poor kids, hungry, pretty kids, malnourished with big stomachs. We weren't supposed to give them anything. They would come up to your vehicles hungry, and we couldn't give them anything. It was kind of hard to be sharp and on guard all the time. That by itself is a stress, knowing how on guard you had to be and observant all the time, especially when you saw how hungry the kids were, You wanted to help them, but you couldn't. Everything was chancy because we didn't know what type of people we dealing with.

US Army Specialist Aiden Delgado:

I was one of those people who didn't think about the full picture of military service because recruiters and military people tend to soft peddle all the objectionable parts of the military. You never hear "oh well, you get a chance to shoot prisoners" or "you may get a chance to shoot Iraqi civilians" they downplay that because parents don't want to hear it and people don't want to think about it.

I used to ask guys "What are we doing here?" or "What are we doing in Iraq?" And by and large they said 'because of September 11th. There was a disconnect between the facts or, y'know, the reported news and the emotional justification. Most soldiers felt that what they were doing was related to terrorism; either revenge or prevention.

1st LT MARINE PAUL REICKHOFF:

I grew up in a family where my father was drafted during Vietnam, my grandfather was drafted during World War Two and spent three years in the South Pacific and they hated the military in the large part but they got a lot out of their experiences so I felt I had (pause) an obligation to give something back. Just because I didn't have to go doesn't mean I shouldn't go.

The thing you have to understand about Iraq is that there are no front lines or rear lines the--the moment you get off the plane you're in harm's way / this is a new war and the action is kind of everywhere.

We found out yesterday that there's more information that's been revealed and how the--the Department of Defense took 167 days just to get the bulletproof vest ordered, just to get them started took 167 days. It was a time when people were getting wounded and people were getting killed and body armor could have saved lives. / If you sat with me and five guys in my squad I could have told you about this problem a year and a half ago, it didn't need a Congressional testimony it didn't need a New York Times investigation but, all too often they listen to the bureaucrats and the general gives them the thumbs-up and says well sir everything's great.

Sgt Kelly Dougherty:

I was 17 and a senior in high school. I was looking at my options for college and I really didn't know how I was going to pay for my education. I had been encouraged to talk to a recruiter for the National Guard, and so I... thought that it would be a good way to get some money for school and also learn medical, some medical skills, and I went in as a medic... I joined as a medic. And I thought that would also be good for me -- to get good training and further my civilian career, and also pay for my education. There was a change in transit: I went to Iraq as a military police [officer] rather than a medic.

It's really hard too, when you're down low in the chain of military command. I was a Sergeant and that's a little higher up -- it's above the privates and the specialists -- but it's still low. Everyone on the unit level is pretty low so you don't really know what's going on. You hear a lot of rumors. And when we first got there, we thought we might be there for four months. And then we thought, 'Oh six months, the longest.'

The enemy could be anyone that you see, you don't know where to focus your attention, you don't know where to focus your anger--the aggression and the hatred that would be focused on a clear enemy gets focused on every single Iraqi.

Sgt Demond Mullins:

I've been on over 150 combat missions and on most of those missions it had no purpose. I grew up in Brooklyn, I been in a lot of fist fights, and the one thing that I know is that if somebody hits me first, I'm pretty much done, ya know, if they get a good hit in, and that's basically what it was like in Iraq; you wait for someone to sucker-punch you, so you can punch back.

The hardest thing about being in Iraq is being in Iraq. Those people live in fear every day. They don't know if a bomb is going to drop on their house. They are scared to walk in the streets. You can see it in their faces. I felt sorry for them. These people believe that when they die they are going to get 18 virgins. They believe that, so how do you take over a land like that? This is a religious war for them. You can't change these people. This is a never-ending fight unless you just throw a nuclear bomb and annihilate everybody because these people---the men, women, and even the kids--- they will all just keep coming at you.

Islamic Woman:

Don't blame it on Islam. Every religion has its extremists. In times of chaos and disorder, those extremists flourish. Iraq is full of moderate Muslims who simply believe in "live and let live". We get along with each other - Sunnis and Shi'a, Muslims and Christians, and Jews and Sabi'a. We intermarry, we mix and mingle, we live. We build our churches and mosques in the same areas, our children go to the same schools...it was never an issue.

Someone asked me if, through elections, the Iraqi people might vote for an Islamic state. Six months ago, I would have firmly said, "No". Now I'm not so sure. There's been an overwhelming return to fundamentalism. People are turning to religion for several reasons.

The first and most prominent is fear. Fear of war, fear of death and fear of a fate worse than death (and yes, there are fates worse than death). Encroaching Western values and beliefs have also played a prominent role in pushing Iraqis to embrace Islam. Just as there are ignorant people in the Western World, there are ignorant people in the Middle East. In Muslims and Arabs, Westerners see suicide bombers, terrorists, ignorance, and camels. In Americans, Brits, etc. Iraqis see depravity, prostitution, ignorance, domination, junkies, and ruthlessness. The best way people can find to protect themselves, and their loved ones, against this assumed threat is religion.

Army Captain PATRICK MURPHY

I trained 600 Iraqi soldiers in small class settings. I taught rules of engagement, but I also taught them what it meant to be a soldier. I'd tell them about the seven army values: loyalty, duty, respect, selfless services, honor, integrity, and personal courage. I told them to be loyal to their country. I spent a lot of time with them. I told them, "You are my brothers now. We are brothers in arms. In history we fought like the dickens with the Japanese and the Germans and look now. Ten years from now, I'm going to come to Iraq on vacation and visit my brothers. We are brothers now in the same profession, with the same goal: a better Iraq. This is a defining moment in your country's history, and you are true patriots for your country."

IRAQ EXILE:

I left my country, Iraq, 7 years ago! During all those years I lived in the US and I longed for the fall of the dictator. In exile I worked for it.

And now the American dead are counted, their numbers recorded, their coffins draped in flags. How many Iraqis have died? How many civilians? No figure is given. Our dead are uncounted.

I mean, if there's a word, Iraq has been crucified. By Saddam's sins, by ten years of sanctions, and then this. Basically it's a story of a nation that failed in only one thing. But it's a big sin. It failed to take charge of itself. And that meant that the worst person in the country took charge. Until this nation takes charge of itself, it will continue to suffer.

I mean, Iraqis say to me, 'Look, what is happening here. Tell America'. I tell them: 'You are putting your faith in the wrong person. Don't expect America or anybody will do it for you.

'If you don't do it yourself, this is what you get.'

Cpl. Sean Huze:

Well, he talked about health care and talk about pay, and, and your benefits and y'know and all these things that, that are positive. Without a doubt. All your educational, uh, benefits all these things, hah, I mean they're great, uhm, but that's not what your purpose is in the military.

(about killing) I mean, I did it. I wanted to do it. I wanted that experience. I wanted to know what it was like. We got into a lot of fire fights where we didn't lose a single marine. It was because, in certain areas, uh, everything was considered hostile. Taking fire from that general direction there are fifty frigging people there, it's one guy shooting at us, y'know we can't find that one guy... Frigging kill everything y'know, hah, lay fire down there- suppression fire- area target uhm, y'know... You don't think, 'Oh, okay, there's a lady in a pink dress, let's take her out. There's a kid, y'know, let's take him out. No, we're taking fire from over there, blanket the frigging area... (long pause) It works. It's effective, y'know, you don't take fire from over there anymore. Hah, y'know, threat's eliminated and, uh, you keep, you keep going.

We all become casualties of war- who we are when we leave is not who we are when and if we're lucky to physically return, because psychologically, you, you, you're completely changed by it.

1st LT. MELISSA STOCKWELL:

I was a transportation officer which basically entails moving a certain number of trucks from point A to point B with supplies and we were on a routine convoy through central Baghdad, and I was in a humvee behind the driver and it was an unarmored humvee, it had no doors and we went under a bridge and a roadside bomb went off. And that caused our vehicle to swerve where we hit a guardrail and from there that took off my left leg from the knee down. And from there I was subsequently rushed to the aid station where they did my first amputation. I was awake the whole time, and I knew something was wrong. I wasn't quite sure how serious it was. In my head I was kind of playing it out to be oh, its probably not that bad, not too bad. When they put the tourniquet on I knew-they put the tourniquet on my femur and I

knew then that is was probably a little more serious that I thought. But I'd go back. I wouldn't WANT to go back -but I would go.

Stephanie Parker:

Hey, I'm Stephanie Parker. My brother is Army PFC Daniel Parker from Lake Elsinore,CA. Dan is... is 18 years old. He sends us a lot of letters. Here's one of my favorites...

Hey guys, what's up? Love you and miss you al. I'm doin' okay, just really bored. Sitting in the middle of the desert writing this. How is it back home? Sorry, haven't wrote lately. It's been busy. We crossed the Border on the 27th. W went to a city called Najaf (look it up). It took about 3 days to take that city. We had more resistance than expected. Now we are outside of a city called Curballa. Looks like we will move in tonight. The field artillery has been hitting them hard today.

Just got done with lunch. It was a good one today. Grilled beefsteak. Those damn MRE's are getting old. I would kill for some hot food. Ya, it's like 105 degrees here. It gets pretty cold with the wind though. It gets really windy and makes sand storms a lot. These days stink cause sand and dust gets everywhere. Mostly in out eyes. Out weapons get sandy so we have to constantly clean them. The flies are real bad when it's jot, not to mention the snakes and scorpions. Cool, huh?

Well, please send some stuff:

- 1) those powder packs of Gatorade that make like a gallon. Send a lot of those.
- 2) "AA" batteries
- 3) Candy
- 4) Lotion. My hands are so dry they are cracking, bad.
- 5) This one is not for me but for my team. Chief said send some cigarettes. He said Marbolo Red (I don't know) Okay
- 6) More girl scout cookies
- 7) Anything you feel like sending, okay?

Remember, I'm not sending it back. Haha.

I got your other package. Thanks, I liked it a lot. And I got Mom's, Steph's, and Dad's letters. Wow, I can't believe I missed all that snow! I got those pics and Kayla is sooooo beautiful. I can't wait to see her. Congratulations Steph on making honor roll. I'm so proud of you. Keep doing you best.

Well, anyways, I guess Bush wants Baghdad by the 17th. Huh, well tell him to get an M16 and fight. I doubt that very much, be we'll see. We still have 2 more major cities to take out first after this one, but we'll see... I'll talk to you guys late, okay? Oh ya, send bug spray. Love you.

Lt. Charlene Anderson:

It was very hard on us over there in Iraq. We'd go days without sleeping. We would shower every couple of days, wash our clothes every few weeks. Just do enough to keep alive. I was usually up all night. I'd sleep on a cot. There were five of us to one room. No air conditioning and 130 degrees. Every day we would get hit by mortar attacks.

I heard it takes 11 or 12 years to adapt to being home. I remember hearing that and laughing. Now, I believe its true.

You meet with your friends and their whole thing is what are they going to do that night or on the weekend. I used to go and just sit home at home. Our priorities were different. It was hard finding friends. People were boring to me, not that I was an exciting person. I didn't fit in anywhere. I thought they talked about stupid stuff.

I think I may have post traumatic stress. Never thought I would have something like that. You can't function. My symptoms didn't show up right away. Then everything just caught up to me and hit me all at once. Overseas there is no time to be scared or frightened, but you experience all this high stress. Then you get home, you relax, and then it just comes rushing up. I have nightmares. I can't sleep.

Army Specialist Darryl Anderson:

I was in Iraq doing this big sacrifice, and I come home and no one even cares. No one understands what we go through. They say, "Oh, thank you for what you have done." But what have I done?...Just terrible stuff. If you really cared and really supported me, you'd say, "I'm going to make it so that you don't ever have to go back." That would be really supporting me. Sending me out there for another year and a half is not supporting me. People put those yellow ribbons up and they say they support us. I can't see them from Iraq.

But now I'm back home. And I'm pretty happy because I'm actually doing something positive now. I've talked to thousands of people about my experiences. I went to Iraq to help the people there, but I wasn't helping, but now I'm actually helping stop the war and make the Iraqi people's lives better. Iraq War veterans who speak out against the war are called cowards. I believe in America; I believe in my country. If you speak out against the war, you're considered to be unpatriotic, but I have to speak out against the war. I still dream about it. I can't stop thinking about it.

Marine Resevres Sergeant SAMUEL WHITE:

This is my country. I wake up everyday, and I think I am so glad I am an American. Yeah, we have problems. A lot of countries don't like us, but for the most part, we are a good country with good people, who do a lot of good in this

world. I can't put into words how much I love this country.

One night, I was over at a friend's house watching the movie Black Hawk Down, and I'm thinking while I'm watching "I gotta get over there I gotta get over there". That night I prayed to God that I could go to Iraq. Whatever the different ideologies on the war, I wasn't concerned with it. I am so in love with this country I was like, "Man, I have to do my part>" I knew I could do some good over there I wanted to be part of it

I'd rather be fighting over there than over here. I think it's something we needed to do. WE need to stay the course. They are having the same problems we had while putting together the Declaration of Independence. Its' going to take time. More people will die, innocent people will die, and anyone who thinks otherwise is crazy.

I saw progress when I was there. People were helping us out more. Tribes started their own guard to look for insurgents. I saw things were rebuilding and repairing. I don't mind people having an opinion. I just hate when they don't know what they are talking about.