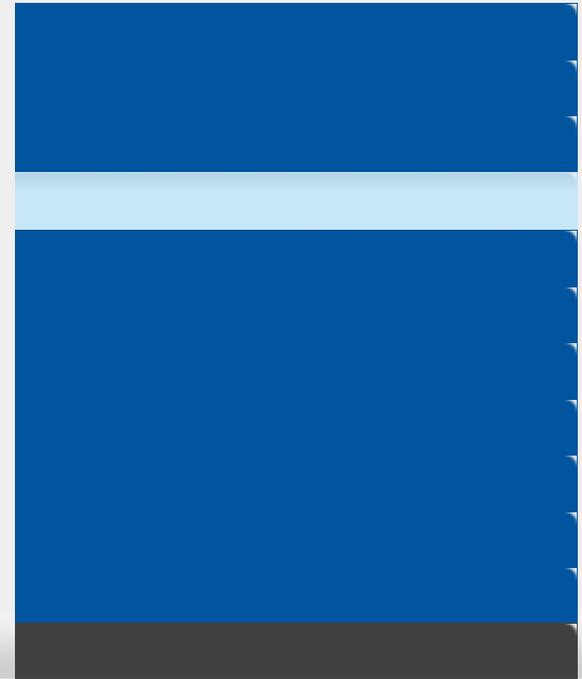


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Opinion



Friday, December 30, 2005

Guest Opinion: Soldier proud to serve, to tell of Iraq . . . to know us



Photo courtesy by Tammy Herbster

During a civil affair mission, Sgt. Tammy Herbster given candy to an Iraqi boy.

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| December 2005 | | | | | | |
|---------------|----|----|----|----|----|----|
| S | M | T | W | T | F | S |
| | | | | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 |
| 11 | 12 | 13 | 14 | 15 | 16 | 17 |
| 18 | 19 | 20 | 21 | 22 | 23 | 24 |
| 25 | 26 | 27 | 28 | 29 | 30 | 31 |

Multimedia

- Audio/Video
- Photo Galleries

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- Obituaries
- Public Records
- Weather

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TAMMY HERBSTER

Tucson Citizen

It's not too often we hear the inside story of the soldiers who are deployed overseas. We ask questions like, "What are they going through?" "What is it like to be away from home?" "How do they feel about the war?" "Is it worth it?" "Are they scared?" "What are they experiencing?"

Today I have the opportunity to share my story with you as a deployed Army medic in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom.

I was called to duty, as a National Guard soldier, in September 2004.

I was very fearful about being deployed because all I knew about the "War on Terrorism" was through the news media. I was scared that I would lose my life or encounter

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dangerous situations.

At the same time, I was proud to serve my country.

I didn't know fully what the mission was as a medic. Would I be out patrolling with the infantry? Would I be on convoys bringing supplies to other camps? Would I be in a trauma hospital working endless hours to save the lives of soldiers? Or would I do a job other than medicine?

Questions ran through my mind over and over. Only when I arrived in Iraq did my questions get answered.

I was attached to unit whose mission was to run a facility providing medical, dental, optometry and mental-health services.

I was part of the evacuation (ambulance) platoon, which consisted of 22 soldiers. Our mission was to provide emergency medical support on convoys. If anything happened, we were the first responders.

The convoys are one of the most intense experiences. You never know when a vehicle might get hit by an improvised explosive device, commonly known as a roadside bomb.

It could hit your truck or my truck and there is no way of knowing when and where. As a medic, I don't



top jobs

know what type of injuries I might have.

It's very intense not knowing the fate of your convoy. Convoys are necessary, however, because supplies such as water, food, mail and fuel are brought to other camps.

The question that ran through my mind was, "What if . . . ?"

Aside from the convoy experience, I had the opportunity to leave the camp and visit local homes, mostly farmers, in civil affair missions.

We went to different homes to provide medical care and medicine to help with minor sickness or wounds. They were very grateful.

Sometimes the Iraqis invited us for lunch. We usually declined, but would have chai tea with them. These were my most memorable moments and most fulfilling.

It was children, mostly, who touch my heart. Through them I learned to appreciate everything I had - a home, food, education, clothing, shoes, even toilet paper.

They were living a rough life compared to what I had. They taught me to appreciate life and not take things for granted.

The children were happy to receive toys we brought. Sometimes they ran after our vehicles to ask for more food. I was happy to see this side of

the Iraqi people, and not identify all of Iraq with those who are a threat. It made a huge difference.

I felt blessed being able to experience some of the goodness we have brought to Iraq. It's not often mentioned, but when you see these children's glowing faces, smiling, laughing and trying to recite our alphabet in English, it makes the deployment all worthwhile.

There was so much support from Americans. I had signed up to receive packages to distribute to soldiers through www.AnySoldier.com. Several letters and packages came from Tucson. It was a morale booster being thanked and acknowledged. It made me feel proud. So thank you.

NEXT PAGE» [1](#), [2](#)

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