

The following is a statement by Richard Murphy, a U.S. Army Reservist of Scotia, Pa. This page is sponsored by Cave Junction resident Catherine J. Austin.

The U.S. must face the monster it created



SPC Murphy was stationed in Iraq for 15 months, including several months as an MP (Military Police) at Abu Ghraib Prison. Visit 'Operation Truth' at www.optruth.org/main.cfm



I feel uneasy returning this month to American soil after my 15-month tour in Iraq. This dreadful feeling is inescapable. Every day I must look in the mirror and face the fact that I served in a war based on flawed premises. I was told that Iraq was an imminent threat, that Saddam had weapons of mass destruction. There were no WMD. I was told that Saddam had collaborated with Al Qaeda. He had not. Later I was told that we had invaded Iraq to bring its people freedom and democracy. In my time in Iraq I witnessed the security situation deteriorate daily, and elections have yet to be held. (Incidentally, before the war I believed in the humanitarian cause of liberating the Iraqi people from the evil of Saddam, and I still believe in that cause.) My personal experiences on the ground epitomize broader, and sometimes troubling, issues in the war.

When my company landed in theatre in May, I was one of the few soldiers equipped with body armor effective at stopping powerful AK-47 ammunition. My mother, an elementary school art teacher, shipped the bullet-proof ceramic plates to me from the States. Other soldiers weren't so lucky, having to raid buildings and patrol dangerous streets while wearing inferior Vietnam-era flak jackets. Later I learned that 40,000 troops had been sent into Iraq without effective body armor. We rode in 'soft-shell' Humvees, equipped with flimsy fiber-glass doors. A Volvo has more protection. I saw the blood of American soldiers spilled because of the lack of 'up-armored' Humvees.

After training 2,000 police, and bringing law and order to the city of Al Hilla, my unit was tasked to run Abu Ghraib prison, a mission for which we had no prior training. We were combat support military police, ideal for conducting convoy security,

not administering prisoner-of-war camps. My unit was desperately under-manned, so I was assigned to run an entire tier at the 'hard site'. Even as a junior-enlisted soldier, I was personally responsible for 320 prisoners and a staff of four or five ill-disciplined Iraqi police. At Abu Ghraib, we were not afforded basic necessities such as cleaning supplies, instead prisoners cleaned their cells with water alone. Worst of all, nobody ever knew for sure who was actually in charge of the prison: military police, military intelligence or civilian contractors. All the while, insurgents' mortars rained down on a near-daily basis, killing and wounding scores of soldiers and prisoners alike.

After being promised one year 'boots on ground', and in Kuwait just days from flying home, my unit's tour was extended by three months. We headed back to Iraq. Our new mission was to guard Halliburton truck drivers, civilian contractors who made three and four times my \$20,000 salary. I wondered what on earth civilian truck drivers were doing in a combat zone. Riding with Halliburton on long convoys, we faced roadside bombs, rocket-propelled grenades and small arms fire to protect these high-paid contractors. Finally, we were sent home in August.

I enlisted in the Army Reserve following September 11, 2001, one of the hardest and best decisions I have made in my life. I love the United States, the Army and my unit. Out of this deep love, I ask that we as Americans take a long look in the mirror. We must ask ourselves who we are and what we stand for. We as a nation must face the monster we have created in Iraq, sooner rather than later. We must find a way out of the mess in Iraq with minimal loss of American and Iraqi life. We owe it to the soldiers on the ground and the embattled Iraqi people.