

From the Front

David Medlin is an Officer with the United States Army Corps of Engineers, 326th Engineer Battalion, 101st ABN Div (AASLT). Graduated from Furman University in 2000 and was recognized as the Distinguished Military Graduate. He received the Bronze Star Medal in 2003 for his service in Iraq. He was the Sapper School Honor Graduate and also earned his Ranger Tab. This is his story.

Why did you choose the Army?

“It was the best combination of things. I wanted to get a good education and to serve my country. That is exactly what I got. I received a great education with the ROTC scholarship. I was able to serve my country and after serving my country, with the training in the Army, I was guaranteed a great job when I returned to the civilian arena and I have no college debt.”

Tell me about your introduction into the Army.

“At Furman University I was in the ROTC program for 4 years. Furman is ranked in the top 10 ROTC programs in the country. They have great officers and great trainers. Once I graduated, I enrolled into Officer School. The Engineer Officer Basic Course is a 6-month program in “nowhere land”, Missouri. Actually it is located in Ft. Leonard Wood Missouri. This course educates you in all aspects of Army training.”

“Once I finished there I started Ranger School. This was a 2-month, no sleep and not much food program. This is 2 months of intense leadership skills for those units whose primary mission is to engage in the close combat, direct fire battle.”

“Those 2 months were much easier for me because of the great training I received at Furman. A lot of the guys were not prepared and a lot did not graduate. We were lucky to get 3 or 4 hours of sleep a night and lucky to get one full meal a day. We were up performing operations from 4:00 am until midnight or 1:00 am daily. The real challenge was to stay focused. It was a real mental challenge to get your body adjusted and to get use to being sleep deprived with little food. Many guys who were not as tough mentally would end up sleep walking and talking to the trees and doing crazy things. We called those guys “zombies.” It was pretty entertaining to watch those guys. The key to surviving was to stay mentally focused.”

“Once I graduated from Ranger School, I had a couple of weeks before going to Ft. Campbell. There I took over a Platoon, 326 Engineer Battalion. I was with this unit for 1-½ years. After that I spent 1 year as Company Executive Officer and then spent 6 months in Iraq.”

What was it like in Iraq?

“It was an incredible experience. It was the most difficult thing I had ever done but also the most rewarding thing I have ever done. The challenges were Huge! To be able to deliver logistics and supplies and to accomplish all the objectives in the combat zone is still amazing to me.”

What did your unit do in Iraq?

“Our jobs as engineers were to rebuild the infrastructure, rebuild the water and power supplies and rebuild hospitals and schools. We also had our fun times when we got to blow up weapons and ammunitions. Our unit went from Kuwait to Baghdad. Once there we worked with university students to teach and help them learn what to do when we were gone. From there we traveled to Turkey and Syria. By covering that much ground we really got a feel for the entire country and the different clans and ethnic groups.”

“It was so rewarding to see Iraqi girls look at our women soldiers and know that one day they could be a soldier. Once the power and water was restored, you knew that the hearts and minds of the local people had been won because little kids would give us flowers and old men and women would cry and hug us. These were every day occurrence that I’m sure the media didn’t show on TV because that wasn’t as entertaining as blood and gore.”

War is hell - but is there a good new story that you experienced while serving in Iraq?

“Well, besides the moments when water started running and power was restored, we got to experience the joy of handing out school supplies. We experienced the thrill of finding the teachers and bringing them back to a rebuilt school and setting up a pay system and seeing the students return to school. We saw tears of joy when a mother gets her child the needed medical treatment from the hospital we rebuilt.”

“But the grandest project was our “House of Hope.” This is a huge orphanage located near Mosul. So many people had their homes destroyed or had their homes taken over by terrorists groups, forcing them to leave. Many were separated from their children. This project helps relocate families and helps many find their families.”

“The Iraqi people are so happy being out from under the yoke of terror. I believe one problem we now are experiencing is that we cannot get enough jobs set up quick enough for all the people. A terrorist can give someone \$100 to set off a bomb by the road. People will do anything for money.”

Would you do it again?

“Yes, I definitely would. But this time it would be a little more difficult for my family to see me go. My wife may have a different opinion than I do on this subject.”