

# A Returning Salute

Tia Fichera

On December 30, 2004, my father, Fabio Falorni, started serving his first tour of duty in the Diyala Province in Iraq. There is no way to describe the feeling of having your father, or any loved one for that matter, getting deployed to Iraq. It is possibly the worst feeling you could have. Instinct tells you to kick and scream and cry your heart out, begging that person to stay. There is no kind of education that could teach you how to cope with this major change. Nor is there any way to help your loved one transition from civilian to soldier.

If you are used to seeing your father everyday, it is hard to comprehend that he is gone. It starts to sink in when all you get is the occasional phone call. If you're lucky, you get to hear the voice of your father. The best way to deal with this loss is to surround yourself with people who know exactly how you're feeling. Take it one day at a time. Meanwhile, support your soldier. Let them

know you care about them, and that you cannot wait for their return home. It gives them hope.

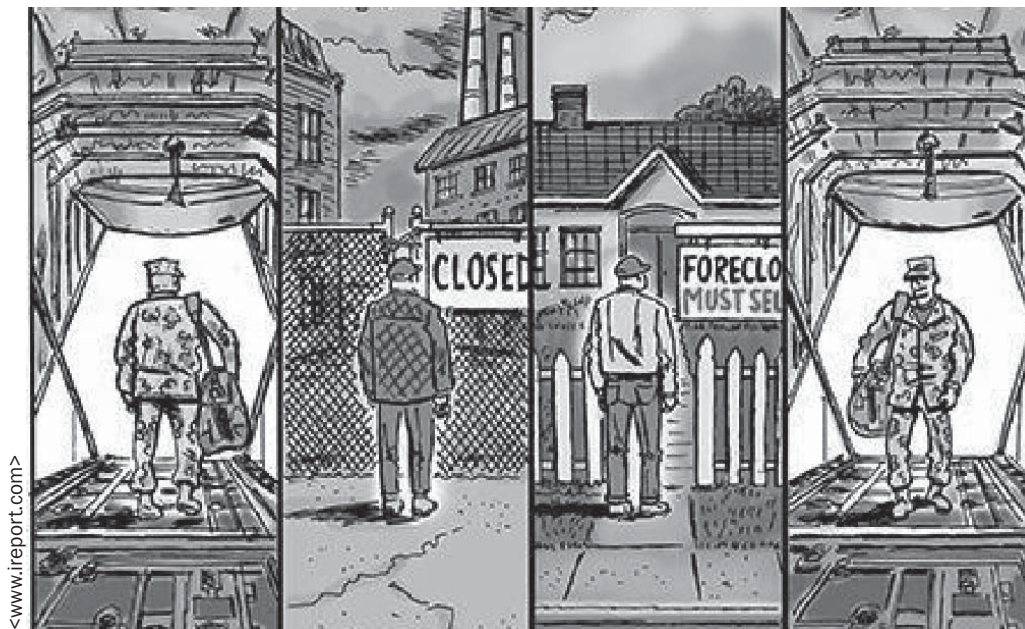
For me, the worst part of this ordeal was how much the war changed my father. When soldiers return, they're forever scarred by the memories of what they have seen. It really takes an emotional and physical toll on a person's mind, body, and spirit. Fabio came back from Iraq on December 3rd, 2005. He was more appreciative towards the things we have, but he was also more jumpy and on edge. When he first returned home it was very important that we didn't pressure him into talking about his experience, not unless he wanted to. We had to walk on egg shells around him.

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On July 6, 2007, Fabio was called to serve a second term in Iraq. He was located in the "Green Zone," in Baghdad. The Green Zone was said to be a place of friendly forces. While there, he was as safe as he could get. It was hard seeing him leave again because my first thought was that you just shouldn't test your luck more than once, and maybe this time around, he wouldn't be so fortunate. My family



Military historians say that today's soldiers "are quietly making history, serving in combat longer than almost any U.S. soldiers in the nation's past," according to <www.navytimes.com>. What is the cartoonist above saying about multiple deployments? Why do you think today's soldiers are serving so many tours of duty?

and I knew of the loneliness and sense of loss to expect, so it was easier than the first deployment, but still discouraging all the same. Despite the hardships he faced, Fabio again returned home safely on March 16, 2008. Finally everybody could breathe normally again.

War is hard on a person. I think society should most definitely be doing everything in its power to ensure that the returning veteran is a) capable of re-learning civilian status and b) able to develop people skills once more. Unfortunately, only recently have these issues been brought to the attention of the Veterans' Administration and the society in general. People have started to realize how war can leave a person emotionally unhinged. The problem of PTSD is slowly getting more attention, and to the best of my knowledge

### Thinking about the War in Afghanistan

**On September 11, 2001** a terrorist organization known as Al-Qaeda carried out devastating attacks on the World Trade Center in New York City and the Pentagon in Washington, DC. Almost 3000 people were killed. In retaliation, the U.S. invaded Afghanistan, which Al-Qaeda used as its base of operations.

**The author's father** will be deployed to Afghanistan in November 2010. Why do we still have troops there? Why is the President sending more? What do you think about it?

**Look at the map** on page 7. Find Afghanistan. What do you notice about it?

**Tracking casualties:** From October 7, 2001 (when the war started) to the present (Feb. 2010), 1000 Americans have been killed in Afghanistan. In the first 10 months of 2009, 2021 Afghan civilians died.

**Source:** <[www.icasualties.org/oef/](http://www.icasualties.org/oef/)>

soldiers with PTSD (post traumatic stress disorder) are now able to get free counseling and therapy sessions granted by the government.

I find some American people naïve. They think they can sit at home safe and sound and not worry about the war returning to America. In the end, the war *has*

come home. It has forever tainted every soldier's heart and memory. Just because the soldiers *look* okay when they return

home, doesn't mean they are okay. Soldiers need help easing back into the civilization they knew before they left for war. They need to know that people love, care, and appreciate them, and we want to help banish their memories of war. You cannot sugar coat the word "war." Although not pretty, I believe it is necessary so that we can continue to live the way we have been.

My father is a veteran of war. He has seen things most people would weep at the sight of, yet he has never turned his back on this country or my family. He may have seen and witnessed acts that are inhumane, but he is not broken. He has proven his dedication as a dad, a brother, a husband, and a soldier, but mostly an American. Some people do not accept the idea of war, but the least they can do is appreciate the soldier's devotion. My father has changed, for better and for worse, but he is a hero in my eyes, always.

Following orders, Fabio will be deployed to Afghanistan in November 2010. He will join his fellow soldiers back for his third, and I pray his final, tour of duty. No matter how terrifying it is to have him leave the safety of our home, it makes me proud to call my father a hero. He will forever be that way in my eyes. Thank you for keeping America safe.

*Tia Fichera, 17, is currently attending classes at the Methuen Adult Learning Center in Methuen, MA where she hopes to obtain her GED and then attend college to study Criminal Justice.*

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