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Home for the holidays

Bolingbrook soldier enjoys peaceful days after combat in Iraq

By [Louise Brass](#)
staff writer

Sgt. Aaron Jones of the Illinois National Guard is home for the holidays in Bolingbrook, and enjoying time with his wife, Dena, and infant twins, Emma and Gavin, 20 months.

At last his children realize their daddy is not just a face on a computer screen, he said.

But his other "family" is still in Iraq, Jones said.

When you're a soldier and you're home on leave while most of your military team is still "over there," it's hard not to think about what could happen, Jones said.

This 31-year-old warrior is trying to relax, but he's always mindful of the dangerous situation his fellow soldiers are facing every day.

"It's nice to be home," he said. "But I miss my friends. I miss my buddies who are still over there. You just hope and pray nothing happens to your guys while you are gone, because you'd want to be there to help them."

Jones has served three years in the National Guard since joining in September 2001. He was deployed to Iraq in May.

Getting involved in a war in the Middle East was not a surprise to Jones, after the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001.

"You can't have a tragic attack like that and sit back. America can't get attacked like that, and have no repercussions," he said.

Jones, who in civilian life is a senior safety training counselor with the Illinois State Toll Highway Authority, is with the F-202 Air Defence Artillery, attached to the First Cavalry 4-5 Air Defence Artillery of the U.S. Army.

During his recent tour of duty he helped man a Humvee, handling automatic weapons to help protect the vehicle. His group was assigned to guard Airport Road in Baghdad, and it had to cruise the neighborhoods hoping to lure the terrorists and insurgents out of hiding.

"You take the good with the bad," Jones said.

The bad came Sept. 25 on Airport Road, when his vehicle was damaged by a roadside bomb, and his gunner, Spec. Dustin Hill, was seriously injured. Hill has been in a military hospital since that time.

"He's my hero. I hope people will pray for him," Jones said.

The good came one night when he and his men captured five Iraqis who were firing rocket-propelled grenades at them.

"They told us they were informed it was good for Muslims to kill Americans," he said.

The Illinois National Guard is well trained, Jones said, though you can never really be prepared for someone trying to kill you.

It is surprising, he said, that many of the insurgents are from other countries, including Jordan, Egypt, Morocco and Syria. A few of the fighters are Iraqi extremists, he said.

Things will get better though, he believes. Iraq is a plentiful place, he said, with areas that are green with palm groves and agricultural areas.

His own division of the National Guard recently built a school with 10 classrooms in a rural area, Jones said, and three water treatment facilities for the people to use.

While Iraq has much to be hopeful about with Saddam Hussein gone and free elections coming up, there still is much to do, he said.

But to bring that troubled land into the company of free, peace-loving nations, after 35 years of a dictatorship, is worth all the effort, he said.

"It will take time. We can't just pull out and leave. That would be unconscionable. Iraq may seem like it's in turmoil, because all you hear on the news is about car bombs. But it will rebound. Things will start to take shape," Jones said. "People need to understand, we are not wasting our time over there. We are making progress."

Contact staff writer Louise Brass at lbrass@scn1.com or (815) 439-7557.

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