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E-mails from Iraq lead to book

Galva-based National Guardsman reveals soldier's view of fighting and rebuilding

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BY KEVIN SAMPIER

OF THE JOURNAL STAR

TOULON - The 16 soldiers who had just finished a patrol near Baghdad Airport stood in a semicircle drinking bottled water when the 127 mm rocket crashed to the ground in front of them.

In the midst of confusion, smoke and a shower of rocks created by the 5-foot-long rocket designed to send metal shrapnel flying through the air in all directions, a call came over the radio for a medic.

"I'll never forget it," recalls Staff Sgt. Jason Adams. "He didn't so much call for a medic, he screamed it."

Just a few trucks behind the blast, Adams saw the smoke and felt the concussion from the rocket and quickly went into action doing what he was chosen to do - serve as the medic for his platoon.

His mind racing through several different scenarios and fully expecting to find his friends killed from the close proximity of the rocket, Adams was stunned to find the men dusty, shaken and lying on the ground, but without a scratch on them.

"How do you explain shrapnel just missing people? How do you explain rock just missing people?" Adams asks himself, but for him the answer is simple - divine intervention.

Adams, who turns 32 today, chronicles this event from July 2004 in his new book, "Active Duty: Letters to Home From Iraq," which is composed entirely of e-mails he sent to his family and local newspaper during his 18 months in Iraq as a member of the Galva-based Illinois Army National Guard F202 Air Defense Artillery.

What began as routine e-mails to his parents, Joanne and Howard Adams of Toulon, has turned into a book deal scheduled to go national in September.

After reading the e-mails and realizing other people might be interested in a soldier's viewpoint on Iraq, Howard Adams began

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sending his son's e-mails to friends, family and eventually the local paper, which published the e-mails as a monthly column.

However, Jason Adams didn't know the e-mails were being published for quite a while and was surprised when he started getting e-mails from strangers, telling him they liked his work.

"I heard so many people tell me they were dissatisfied with the national media and the way they were representing Iraq," said Howard Adams, who didn't tell his son he had been distributing the e-mails for about a month.

"I thought, 'Other people need to read these to see what's really happening.' "

It turns out Howard Adams' hunch was right, because the letters spread quickly across the United States, made their way into a Texas newspaper and brought feedback from as far away as Alaska.

"They have absolutely leapfrogged across the United States," said Howard Adams, who wore his dog tags from his time in the military every day his son was gone.

Now, Jason Adams balances his time between school at Black Hawk East Campus in Kewanee, being a volunteer firefighter and emergency medical technician, working as a welder for Kress Corp. in Brimfield and being with his wife, Stephanie, and their two daughters.

But while he was in Iraq, Adams had to find a way to cope with the destruction he saw around him. Writing to the folks back home helped him cope and served as an outlet.

"What I found out was people had no idea of what was going on over there," but the e-mails gave people a firsthand look of what it was really like, both positive and negative, he said. "They didn't feel like they were getting the whole story."

With the release of the book, Adams hopes to educate people on Iraq and show what local National Guardsmen did for the budding country.

"I want people to know what 122 guys from their back yard did and the impact they had on Iraq," including building a new school and refurbishing six others. "I want people to know what we went through and what we overcame."

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