

# Dan Rather Reports

**Episode Number:** 101

**Episode Title:** Coming Home

**Description:** It's been said that war changes everything. On *Dan Rather Reports*, a look at American soldiers returning from conflict in Iraq and Afghanistan and how their lives are forever changed. For the wounded, advances in technology have saved thousands of lives, but is the government prepared for the long term cost of treating returning vets?

**Transcript:**

ANNOUNCER

HDNet presents the premiere of Dan Rather Reports and now Dan Rather.

DAN RATHER

Tonight, in my first report for HDNet, ordinary soldiers and extraordinary men and women coming home.

DAN RATHER (CONTINUED)

This is what it's like to be on the frontlines in Iraq. This extraordinary high-definition footage was shot by a U.S. Marine, it captures the hard reality of what our troops confront on the battlefield. Nearly a million men and women have been deployed so far. Many of our brave soldiers have been sent to fight here for a second, third, and even fourth time. Far from home, they live every day in harms' way. What happens to these men and women when they return home and to others who escape injury but not the transforming experience of combat? These are the stories that haven't always gotten the attention they deserve.

I'm at Ft. Hood, a sprawling Army base not far from Austin, Texas that has supplied many of those troops. About 150,000 soldiers have shipped out here, and thousands more will be going to Iraq in the coming months and other units that have finished their tours are returning to base. So today Ft. Hood is a scene of tearful farewells and joyous reunions.

DAN RATHER (CONTINUED)

It's 4 a.m. Angela Blackmon and her daughter Brooke-Lynn have been up for hours. They've gotten word that this is the day they've been waiting for. *To Angela Blackmon:* Now your daughter is?

ANGELA BLACKMON

She's nine.

DAN RATHER

And her question is: Where's Daddy?

ANGELA BLACKMON

Uh huh, when's Daddy coming home?

DAN RATHER

After all the waiting, suddenly there doesn't seem to be enough time to get ready.

ANGELA BLACKMON

Are we on our way out the door?

DAUGHTER

I don't know.

DAN RATHER

Before dawn, a chartered jet carrying dozens of returning soldiers touches down at Fort Hood. They are all combat veterans now. Among them [is], Chief Warrant Officer Toby Blackmon. This is the last day of a one-year tour of duty in Iraq.

CWO TOBY BLACKMON

It was hard this last time it's being away from your family. To me, that's the worst thing.

DAN RATHER

First an I.D. check - then a hug from the "Hug Lady." She's been greeting returning soldiers here at Ft Hood for a good three years now.

ANGELA BLACKMON

Toby, c'mon it's time to go!

DAN RATHER

With her son Toby, and the entire Blackmon clan, Angela finally gets the family out the door.

DAN RATHER (CONTINUED)

Chief Blackmon turns in his pistol.

SOLDIER

Welcome home, sir.

CWO BLACKMON

Thank you all very much.

DAN RATHER

Angela and the children don't go to the airport to meet Chief Blackmon. Instead they make their way to one of the gymnasiums on the base. In the army, homecomings aren't private affairs, at least not at first.

The scene at the gym resembles a high school pep rally before the big game...and finally, it's official they're home. This is how each and every returning hero is welcomed back at Fort Hood.

The troops get information then the word everybody's been waiting to hear: dismissed.

There are a lot of tearful reunions, and even a few first encounters: some dads are seeing, and holding, their babies for the very first time...These soldiers are among the lucky ones.

But there are other homecomings that families dread. Every day seems to bring news of another one, or two, or three U.S. fatalities in Iraq. In October alone, 105 American troops were killed, making it one of the deadliest months of the war so far. U.S. Army Corporal Timothy Lauer, age 25, was killed in Baghdad October 14<sup>th</sup> by an improvised explosive device just 3 weeks before he was scheduled to return home.

2nd Lieutenant Joshua Booth, age 23, felled by sniper fire in the town of Haditha on October 17<sup>th</sup>. He had been in the country just a month. Lt Booth left behind wife, Erica, and a one year-old daughter. In January, Erica will give birth to a son - who will be named Tristan Joshua Booth. When Lt Booth was laid to rest, it seemed the whole town of Bedford, Virginia turned out to honor him.

Lt Booth is just one of almost 3,000 American men and women who have been killed in Iraq, by any measure that's a horrific number. Yet military experts say - in their opinion - the figure is remarkably low given the scale and duration of this war. Soldiers fighting in Iraq have been saved by protective body armor, and the military's ability to quickly MEDIVAC wounded soldiers to acute care facilities - in this war, 90% of the wounded survive, often with grievous injuries that would have been fatal in earlier wars.

Many end up here - at Walter Reed Medical Center. The wards are filled with young soldiers like Sergeant Brian Fountaine, age 24. When both his legs were blown off by an I.E.D., he yanked off his belt and tied a tourniquet - saving his own life. Staff Sergeant John Borders was on his second tour of duty in Iraq - just 9 days away from his homecoming - when his Humvee hit an I.E.D. Almost a year later, he's still learning to walk again on his new legs.

### SSG JOHN BORDERS

I was doing surgeries every other day for the first six weeks I was here to try to save my right leg. It just wasn't going well and so I opted to have it amputated instead. They were going to have to fuse my ankle and I wasn't going to be able to run and I was only going to be able to walk on smooth surfaces, level surfaces.

I thought it was important to me to be able to not just try and tell my kids how to play sports, I wanted to actually be able to participate and show them "This is what I mean."

### DAN RATHER

Sgt Borders' left leg was badly damaged as well.

### SSG BORDERS

The area here on the front of my leg was pretty much - that was like hole -so that was where I was missing the tibia and then they reattached what they could, but I didn't have everything. So they took part of my calf muscle in the back and put it on top and then they put a skin graft on top of it. It was rough.

### DAN RATHER

Despite his injuries, Sgt Borders is still on active duty and has no plans to quit.

Everywhere you look at Walter Reed, you see head wounds. Traumatic brain injury - or T.B.I. - is so common it's been called the "signature injury" of the Iraq war - almost 30% of the soldiers here have some form of T.B.I.

32-year old Army Specialist Claudia Carreon is one of hundreds of women who have been wounded in the Iraq war.

### SPC CLAUDIA CARREON

All I know is that since the accident, I haven't been - my brain hasn't been working properly.

### DAN RATHER

Three years ago, while she was riding in a fuel convoy thru the streets of Baghdad, an Iraqi truck slammed head-on into her vehicle—robbing her of every memory she's ever had.

### SPC CARREON

Probably the memory is in my brain somewhere there, it's just that I don't know how to retrieve the information. I don't know how to make myself remember.

### DAN RATEHR

Even life-long friends are strangers now.

### SPC CARREON

She saw me and she went like "Claudia" and I went like uh, "Hey." I give her a hug and everything. While I was giving her a hug, I ask my mother "Quien?" like, "Who is she?"

### DAN RATHER

Weekly therapy sessions at the VA hospital, name tags and photographs all helped but to remember, she has to write everything down in her journal.

### SPC CARREON

What I do is I journal everything every day and I review it at night and am able to remember the next day. like today I was able to remember yesterday from morning til night and what we are going to do now is see if I can remember the day before yesterday without reading my notes.

DAN RATHER

Notes and photos are all she has left of the most important events in her life, like her wedding day.

SPC CARREON

I don't remember anything of that getting married with my husband how was it when we dated, how did we met, "I do have pictures but I don't remember."

DAN RATHER

Now, she says, the marriage is over.

SPC CARREON

I asked him to give me the opportunity to fall in love with him the way I did when I was married to him and to start all over again and he didn't want to.

DAN RATHER

But her most painful loss is not even remembering the birth of her own daughter.

SPC CARREON

I don't remember when she was born. I don't remember when I was pregnant.

DAN RATHER

Sondra is now two years old Specialist Carreon works hard to remember who this little girl is.

The memories she can hold onto sit literally on a shelf, next to her daughters' animated videos.

SPC CARREON

Let's see the one when you were very, very little. Do you remember baby when she was little?

DAN RATHER

As they watch, Claudia pieces together fragments of her past trying to remember who she was and what is real.

SPC CARREON

"Look at that. Do you remember who is she? Who is she?"

SPC CARREON (CONTINUED)

When I see her pictures, it's very exciting and I tell her, "Why can't you go back, just for mommy and just go back in time and be a little baby, a newborn just for a day or two so I can know or experience what it is to have a newborn?" My mom says that I am very protective with her and sometimes that I spoil her but in a way I feel like I have to makeup for what I don't remember.

DAN RATHER

Her mother lives with her now, helping out with Sondra and filling in the gaps of her past. Still, Claudia worries that isn't enough?

SPC CARREON

How can I remember that tomorrow I am going to wake up and I have to feed my daughter? How am I going to remember that if my daughter cries I have to go upstairs all those little things that happen to children? How am I going to remember all that?

DAN RATHER

The VA doctors, who have worked hard to get her to this point, tell her she may never get her memory back or learn to drive again or return to working a full time job. She once worked in accounting, but now it's a struggle to re-learn how to read.

SPC CARREON

My reading level is probably at 4th grade and I want to improve that because the way I read to my daughter is the way she's going to learn.

DAN RATHER

And, as Claudia Carreon is learning, her main motivation is right in front of her.

SPC CARREON

There's times I get up and I don't even want to get out of bed. It's like, "I give up, I give up, I can't go no more," but then I hear someone knocking on the door saying, "Mommy." I need to do this for myself but I need to do this also for my daughter.

DAN RATHER

To date almost 600,000 soldiers who fought in Iraq and Afghanistan have been discharged from the military and are now eligible for veteran's benefits. Almost 200,000 of them have already turned to the VA seeking care. With hundreds of thousands of combat troops still deployed, this number is bound to increase in coming years. The question is: does the Department of Veteran's Affairs have the money and resources it needs to care for this new generation of veterans?

JIM NICHOLSON

We are taking good care of our veterans.

DAN RATHER

Jim Nicholson is Secretary of Veteran's Affairs, the second- largest department in the federal government.

DAN RATHER (CONTINUED)

Let's talk about money. Do you have the funding -- do you have the money to do the job?

JIM NICHOLSON

We do have the funding. In fact spending on the VA health system has gone up 70 percent under President Bush in the five plus years that he's been in office. Our overall budget for this year is over \$80 billion.

DAN RATHER

By all accounts secretary Nicholson is a good and decent man and a strong leader. But Nicholson's confident assertion is at odds with a just-released report by the U.S. government accounting office. It found "unrealistic assumptions, errors in estimation and insufficient data" caused the VA to under-estimate the cost of serving veterans returning from Iraq and Afghanistan by \$3 billion over the last 2 years. According to the GAO report, projected savings "would have required transferring or discharging potentially thousands of veterans, many of whom had severe, chronic, physical or mental impairments."

DAN RATHER (CONTINUED)

It's my understanding the GAO report said additional funding is needed and not been requested.

JIM NICHOLSON

That's correct. And—there have been—several prominent—members of Congress that have said the same thing.

DAN RATHER

In fact, Barack Obama who is on the Senate Veterans Affairs Committee introduced a bill this past September that he says will address a "looming crisis" in veteran's health care.

JIM NICHOLSON

"We're getting the job done and if I felt for a minute we were not, I'd be in there agitating for more money.

DAN RATHER

Barack Obama says that he did not think the veterans were getting the care they needed. Your response.

JIM NICHOLSON

When you treat over a million veterans a week there it will be on any given day, or any given week you know, glitch or two in that system. But, overall our care is world class, and that's our goal.

DAN RATHER

You know that he disagrees it's just a matter of glitches. The thrust of his criticism is that there's not nearly enough funding for the wave of veterans that will eventually come back from Iraq and Afghanistan.

JIM NICHOLSON

We're working on the '08 budget now. It will it will have a significant increase, because we're gonna have more veterans coming into our system.

DAN RATHER

I don't want to leave any ambiguity, is it fair or unfair to say that you flatly refute and deny that the VA is under funded.

JIM NICHOLSON

Yes, I flatly say today that we have the resources, currently, to do our mission.

MAJ TAMMY DUCKWORTH

When you have a Secretary of the VA that says that he has all the money that he needs, but that we have veterans going without the care that they need, something's wrong there.

DAN RATHER

Meet Major Tammy Duckworth: she's one of the VA's most vocal critics, she's an Iraqi war veteran flew Blackhawk helicopters over Baghdad and she's a double amputee.

DAN RATHER (CONTINUED)

I interviewed the present head of the VA. He said, "Number one, that he has the funding he needs. That he doesn't need additional funding. Your reaction to that.

MAJ DUCKWORTH

I invite him to come and visit my VA hospital. I invite him to come talk to some of the veterans in my district, come to come to the prosthetic lab at my VA hospital and explain why none of those prosthesis's have had a chance to work on a state of the art artificial leg like I have.

DAN RATHER

Duckworth has spent much of the last two years on artificial limbs. Her right leg cost more than one hundred thousand dollars. On it she wears an American flag, a symbol of her deep patriotism. *To Maj. Duckworth:* It's one thing to go into the military service, it's another thing to wanna become a Blackhawk helicopter pilot. Why would you wanna do that?

MAJ DUCKWORTH

I just thought it was inherently unfair that here I was as a female I didn't have to face those dangers. I wanted to be equal and if that meant that I should face combat or at least have take the risk. I love it though. I've made it my first choice and I, I, I'm so glad I got it.

DAN RATHER

Even though things turned out the way they did?

MAJ DUCKWORTH

Even though they turned out the way they did.

DAN RATHER

November twelfth, 2004, started out routinely enough for Major Duckworth and her crew ferrying troops in and out of Camp Anaconda, north of Baghdad.

MAJ DUCKWORTH

Well, we had a good day. I was flying with Dan Milberg, my friend, someone I hadn't flown with in a few months and I was really looking forward to it.

DAN RATHER

But on the last run of the day, out of the Green Zone, the Blackhawk came under enemy fire.

MAJ DUCKWORTH

I heard tap, tap, tap on the side of the aircraft. I swore. I said to Dan I think we've been bleep, bleep bleep hit, and then boom there was a fireball in front of my face. We were hit by a rocket propelled grenade that hit just right about where I was sitting, just to the right of my right thigh, basically obliterated my leg, my right leg on impact, there was nothing left. I think I was passing in and out of consciousness and I remember trying to shut off the engine, trying to lift my left hand and that was the last thing I remember. And then Dan got me out of that field, carried me to safety and saved my life. For some reason I survived the 20 minutes to go up to Baghdad ER. I should have bled out in about four and a half minutes. There's no earthly reason why I survived.

DAN RATHER

Like so many injured soldiers before her, Duckworth was flown to Walter Reed hospital. She awoke there in her hospital bed, devastated, believing that she had crashed the Blackhawk until a crew member set her straight:

MAJ DUCKWORTH

...and ever since then I've been okay because I know that with everything that I had, I tried to do my job. So, it wasn't a crash, it was a landing. Probably not the most elegant landing we've ever made, you know? But we got the job done.

DAN RATHER

Tammy's recovery was painful, and slow. More than 30 surgeries repaired her damaged body a muscle graft from her ribcage saved her arm. After months of intensive physical therapy, she took her first steps with her new legs. Constantly by her side, her husband Bryan Bowlsbey - himself a Major in the Army National Guard. *To Maj. Duckworth:* Was there a time, which you may find, when you thought your marriage wouldn't make it through because of this?

MAJ DUCKWORTH

No. My husband has been my rock. There was never any question. He he's gone through things that no husband should ever have to go through for his wife. No spouse

should ever have to see their partner the way he found me, and make the decision that he had to make for me in the hospital. But there was never, ever any question.

I joke about the fact that, you know, I was lucky that my husband wasn't a leg man. (laughter)

DAN RATHER

You must have gone through periods of being despondent, being down?

MAJ DUCKWORTH

Of course it's tough. And there are times when you get up in the middle of the night and and and you wanna get out of bed and and you can't and and nobody likes to sit in a wheelchair. But, you know what? There are 2800 other kids who didn't make it home and they and their families would rather have them back with all four limbs missing and so who am I to question this gift that I have been given.

DAN RATHER

She also saw the courage of young injured vets recovering around her. *To Maj Duckworth:* What were your impressions of the others who were there with wounds?

MAJ DUCKWORTH

I was 36 when I was shot down. The average age of the war wounded is between 19 and 24. I remember looking at them and going "Gosh these are just kids."

DAN RATHER

Her difficult road to recovery lasted over a year yet just a few months after losing her limbs, Duckworth was asked to testify before the Senate Veterans Committee. *To Maj Duckworth:* And what did you tell them?

MAJ DUCKWORTH

I told them that the men and women who are wounded in this war will need healthcare and will need support from the VA for the rest of our lives, for the next 50 to 60 years, that we would need access to the very best technology and that-- this can't be something that is just promised in passing while there is a war and then you just forget about us when the war is over. This country needs to keep that promise to its veterans.

DAN RATHER

Keeping that promise, experts say, will require more than a hundred billion dollars in the years to come. Department of Defense statistics show that over 10 thousand soldiers fighting in Iraq and Afghanistan have been too severely injured to return to active duty. Many of those will require a lifetime of around-the-clock care. With over seven million veterans already in the VA's health care system the task seems daunting.

But, Duckworth says, despite her testimony, she soon learned that in fact, funding cuts for veterans care were being considered.

MAJ DUCKWORTH

I'm sitting in a wheelchair waiting for my artificial legs and I thought: "These politicians have no idea. These politicians are not making their decisions based on the sacrifices that my buddies and I have made."

DAN RATHER

Duckworth got angry with those politicians and decided to run for Congress herself.

MAJ DUCKWORTH

*To audience:* This is the most patriotic thing anybody can do. Remember that our troops cannot speak for themselves.

DAN RATHER

She was one of seven recent war vets on the ballot this year. They are a new generation of politicians, making it their mission to shine a spotlight on the issues facing returning veterans and on the war itself.

PATRICK MURPHY

*To audience:* ...and when our country was attacked on 9/11, I deployed twice for our country.

DAN RATHER

Patrick Murphy, a paratrooper with the 82nd Airborne, had Senator Barack Obama by his side, and soon to be Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi.

NANCY PELOSI

He will ask the tough questions of the Bush administration about this war.

VAN TAYLOR

*To audience:* We have the greatest military in the world, I know because I've served there side by side.

DAN RATHER

Van Taylor was the only Republican candidate. His district includes President Bush's hometown of Crawford, Texas.

MAJ DUCKWORTH

I was talking about veteran's benefits even while I was still at Walter Reed.

DAN RATHER

On the campaign trail, Duckworth met with vets, who told her they worry about their future.

AUDIENCE MEMBER

I had heard that the Chicago office of the VA had been under funded by about 200,000 dollars.

DAN RATHER

From what she hears, and what she knows first hand, Duckworth believes the VA is indeed facing a crisis, as more and more soldiers return home. *To Maj Duckworth:* As you and I sit here, the war goes on.

MAJ DUCKWORTH

Yes, sir.

DR

So it means there are going to be more there will be thousands more down the road. Question: are we prepared to care for them, to give them the very best care? The kind of care that people pay the price that they have paid, deserved?

duck

Not through the VA system. No, we're not. We simply are not. We have not dealt with a number of these veterans and a number of them have not even signed up for care and they're not even talking about veterans who right now are not showing any health problems who may have health problems 20 years down the road.

For example, I think we're gonna have respiratory illnesses in the next 20 years that's gonna crop up at the result of this war that is not showing right now.

And I'm just deeply, deeply worried about my buddies who are wounded who are not going to get the care that they should have.

DR

Duckworth's race for Congress was tighter than Springsteen's headband. In her traditionally Republican district, the Democratic party's big guns came out to help but in the end, Tammy Duckworth did not win.

TAMMY DUCKWORTH

*To audience:* And today and this past year you made this country a little bit better and for that I that I thank you.

DR

She's not ready yet to say if she'll respond to the call of "Tammy 2008," but she says whatever she does, she will remain a force to be reckoned with.

TAMMY DUCKWORTH

It comes down to this: does this country value the promise that it makes to its veterans? To its all-volunteer military? The people that are on the frontline in Iraq right now, today need to be able to know when they put on that armor and they put on that helmet and they climb into that Humvee, that if they're injured in the line of duty, they will be cared for, for the rest of their lives.

So that they can focus on mission, so they can get out there and put themselves in the line of fire.

DR

It must happen, I know it happens. People who don't know you, look at you and say what happened to you, what do you tell them?

TAMMY DUCKWORTH

I tell them I served my country in Iraq and I made it home.

DAN RATHER

Some soldiers come home with wounds that can't be seen. Sergeant Coby Thomas was an auto mechanic and a weekend warrior in the South Carolina Army National Guard when we went to war in Iraq two years ago.

A few months later, he nearly died when the Humvee he was riding in plowed into another Humvee. When his wife Debbie visited him in the hospital, she was shocked by what she saw.

DEBBI THOMAS

I didn't even recognize him.

DR

Sgt Thomas suffered multiple injuries including a broken jaw and brain damage.  
*To Sgt Thomas: Could you walk?*

SGT COBY THOMAS

Yes.

DEBBI THOMAS

He could not walk, okay? He was not able to walk.

DR

How long did it take you to regain your ability to walk?

SGT COBY THOMAS

Just a short time, 30 minutes, (snap) an hour.

DEBBI THOMAS

He doesn't remember, it was several weeks.

DR

After more than four months in the hospital, Sgt Thomas was discharged. *To Sgt Thomas: Did you feel you were ready to come home?*

SGT COBY THOMAS

Yes.

DR

Physically?

SGT THOMAS

Yes.

DR

Mentally.

SGT THOMAS

Yes.

DR

Psychologically?

ST THOMAS

Yes. (01:29:01:16)

DR

Debbie, do you think he was ready to come home?

DEBBI THOMAS

No. He was not ready. I saw a man who was still at war, who was still ready to fight. There was a lot of anger. I didn't know how deal with it 'cause Coby had never been an angry person. Apart from his brain injury, there was something else contributing to Coby's strange behavior. Like one in five Iraq war veterans, he was suffering combat related psychological problems. Coby didn't sleep. He felt like he always had to be 'guarding his perimeter'. He would walk for hours and hours. Just pace back and forth on the porch. He would walk up and down the driveway. Just looking at everything, watching all the time. And he kept a weapon on him all the time. What kinda weapon did you have? I'd take a pistol. When you asked him what he was doing, what did he say? He said, somebody has to stay on guard all the time." was this the same Coby that had gone away. No. I said, "you look like Coby." and, I said, "but, you're not you're not the man that left July the 15th. You're not that man." and, I wanted him back so bad. Coby Thomas' sleeplessness, and anger, his hyper-vigilance and denial are all classic symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder, or PTSD a serious condition that affects tens of thousands of Iraq war veterans. I was very adamant that there was nothing wrong with me. Well, fair to say or not that you were in denial? Oh yes. Yes, very much. Nothing wrong with me. Exactly. I'm perfectly ok. Yes. When I met Coby Thomas he had just returned home after two months in rehab - for awhile, at least, he seemed like his old self. He can joke again. He he's got his one-liners and he looks healthy. Coby could joke about problems he thought were in the past. You know, it's lucky someone didn't either kill me or have me committed, the way I acted when I came home. But in the weeks since I sat down with Debbie and Coby things have not gone well. Debbie says she had to move out of the house, and Coby is again overwhelmed by anger. For Coby Thomas, the war is far from over. How to treat Sgt Thomas and thousands of soldiers like him has become a top priority for behavioral scientists and this is the cutting edge. Perhaps the most promising new treatment for post-traumatic stress disorder is virtual reality therapy. Typically this is done in stereo Dr. Anthony "Skip" Rizzo is a research scientist at the University of

Southern California. Its institute for creative technologies is in the forefront of developing virtual reality V.R. therapy for our troops. The idea was that if we can put somebody back in a combat environment that eventually the person will deal with the emotional memories that have been perhaps suppressed, or that are causing them problems. There are sets designed to mimic war-scarred Iraq copters roar overhead burning vehicles litter the street. This certainly gives you a sense of being there every correspondent who has been in Iraq and out of there has seen this scene. Dr. Rizzo hopes it will reach and help soldiers who are uncomfortable seeing a therapist for psychological problems. It takes the onus off of the deep, interpersonal component of therapy. The clinician is still using all the typical things that they would do in therapy. But they've got this centerpiece that attracts a person in a way that might not be possible with traditional therapy. He based his 'virtual Iraq' on a 'virtual warrior' a reality program the army developed to train soldiers headed for combat. When I first saw it I said, "wow, they have a graphic environment that looks like Iraq or Afghanistan. Why not take that already existing environment, modify it to our needs, and build a treatment tool for PTSD?" well, question. Since you're recreating so vividly the very scenes that have caused the soldier to have post-traumatic stress disorder there's some risk of making his situation worse because he has to relive it and keep on reliving it. I think the issue of worrying about whether you're gonna traumatize the patient further is a legitimate concern. And this is why it the hands of a good clinician, you do it in a very managed and progressive fashion, so you don't push somebody over their limit. These full scale mockups are used for training purposes. For now, V.R. therapy sessions utilize a head monitor display. Dr. Rizzo fitted me out look straight ahead. Now you're looking out the window and you can turn your head any way you want. Amazing. And before long, I was riding down a highway in Iraq in a Humvee. If you look up in the air you'll see a helicopter fly over. I may have be driving the Humvee, but it was dr. Rizzo who controlled the level of stress. In the course of your driving I'll ramp it and then all hell will start to break loose. Where did that thing come from? He could decide when to launch a mortar round or set off an I.E.D. now I'll start to add more things. Each time a bomb went off, my chair would shake. We've taken 3 more holes through the windshield, captain. When working with patients, the therapist monitors heart rate and respiration. We don't have to worry about whether they really are imagining the scenes in graphic detail. We can deliver the scenes in a very clear way so we know what they're seeing and what they're experiencing. Dr. Rizzo's program is now being tested at Camp Pendleton and several VA centers around the country. Well, key question. Does it work? We've just started our clinical trials over the last three months so I don't know what the actual end status is of the people that are in therapy now. But are reporting a drop in they symptomatology over the progression of of the treatment. And they enjoy it. They wanna come to therapy. That's a big difference. Every soldier who goes off to war comes home changed by the experience some are wounded physically or psychologically, others discover reserves of courage they never knew they possessed. In Sgt Kevin Benderman's case, the war ended his military career. Desertion. Strong word. Are you a deserter? No, I'm not. I did not desert my unit. But Sgt Benderman was charged with doing just that. It's not what you would expect from a soldier who won army accommodation medals and spent more than 7 years in the U.S. military. But seeing the war up close changed everything. When you get down to the bottom line war is about this group of people killing this group of people for whatever

reason in the most brutal way they can. Sgt Kevin Benderman's unit deployed at the start of the war and was ordered to take up a position south of Baghdad. Did you believe in the mission? When you get your orders, you do what you're supposed to do. Important to understand in the military. That's the way it works. Yes, sir. Yours is not to reason why; yours is to get it done. Yes, sir. Definitely. But, almost immediately, he says he felt overwhelmed by the suffering he saw. We were traveling north on highway one and we saw girl of probably about 10, 11-years-old begging for help. Her arm was burned black from her hand all the way up to well, past her elbow. And we just had to leave because the mission dictated that we continued to march. I went to my company executive officer and said, "why didn't we stop and help the girl? I mean isn't that what we're here to be doin'? Helpin' these people?" Sgt Benderman says there was one incident that shook him to the core. He says it happened after his unit set up headquarters in an abandoned building in the town of Khaniqan. (kon-e-kon) it had a brick walk built around it. And the little kids in Khaniqan would climb up on the wall, you know. And they would laugh and point and probably throw some small pebbles. And our commander came out of the building one day and told us that if those kids got back up on the wall to shoot them. We all looked at him like he was crazy. The more I saw what was really goin' on the more I started saying to myself, "well I can't do this. By the time Benderman returned home from a six-month tour in Iraq, he says he knew he could never go back. He hoped to get assigned to stateside duties for the remaining months of his enlistment. He also did something extraordinary he filed for conscientious objector status. Some people are gonna say I don't see how you become a conscientious objector after you volunteered for the for the army. The army has a regulation ar 600-43 that's set up for people to file a conscientious objector application. If the army didn't think that that that could happen why would they have a regulation for it? And how did the army respond to your application? You're supposed to submit the paperwork to your immediate company commander. He threw the form back at me and told me to get out of his office. He didn't literally throw it back at you? Well yes. He threw the form back at me and told me to get out of his office. You knew you were gonna catch hell for this. Or did you? Well. I kinda had the idea that a lot of hell would be coming down the pipes as a result. My first sergeant called me a coward. I even got a letter back from the chaplain after the fact that said that he was ashamed of me were you on the verge of being sent back to Iraq at that time or did you know? Well we had no concrete date but we had been told that entire year that we would be going back to Iraq. He knew full well he was required to deploy. Ft Stewart spokesman Lieutenant Colonel Randy Martin agreed to discuss the Benderman case. On the eve of that deployment he said, "I don't wanna go because I am a conscientious objector can you understand, do you understand that the timing of it makes it, to some people, look suspicious? Oh, well, I can understand that. But they don't understand that I had contemplated this for a year prior to filing my application. When Sgt Benderman's unit shipped out to Iraq, he stayed behind. Benderman insists he was told to stay on base, the army says he disobeyed an order to deploy. He was charged with desertion one of the most serious breaches of military discipline. While awaiting court-martial he continued to report for duty, but now he had a new assignment processing the paperwork for soldiers who had gone AWOL. This is kind of a funny thing to me because they had put me in charge of a group of soldiers that had been arrested from being absent without leave and brought back to Fort Stewart. Benderman says these AWOL soldiers

were either returned to their units or dismissed from the army within a matter of months and that none of them got a long prison sentence or the dishonorable discharge that the army sought for him. Do you think the army singled you out? I think my command singled me out. I won't say the entire army. Sgt Benderman's wife Monica decided to fight for her husband. She started a web site and worked to bring media attention to the case. It became important to be able to make people aware of what could happen to soldiers. Human rights groups and anti-war activists took up the cause and letters of support poured into the Benderman home. We've actually got about 15 boxes full of letters from all over the world. Some of them from Italy. This one's from Japan. This is really important to me. Because it's a letter from a retired marine captain, 24 year career marine. He says "i was skeptical. But the more we talked I came to see that he had given these subjects much thought and experienced a profound change of heart. Sergeant Benderman is the genuine article. I commend his courage and commitment to his ideals." but the army came to a different conclusion. His case was investigated. Due process was applied. And the judgment of the command was that he did not fit the criteria of a conscientious objector. Mainly, that he did not have true moral or ethical opposition to war or being a combatant in war Benderman was found not guilty of desertion, but convicted of a lesser infraction missing movements by design. He was stripped of his rank and sentenced to 15 months in the stockade at Fort Lewis, Washington. Would Sgt Benderman have been better off if he had simply gone AWOL? Consider this: every year thousands of soldiers do just that. After 30 days they are classified as deserters - but fewer than 10% of them are even court-martialed. Why would the army have singled out Sgt Benderman? It might have been that he just didn't shut up. His website prominently featured his account of being ordered to shoot children. And he violated military regulations when he wrote president bush, his commander-in chief, telling him that he wasn't worth "the dust off [the] boots" of the soldiers who had been killed in Iraq. Benderman was released from prison last august, after serving more than a year behind bars. His conviction is still under appeal. If he loses, he'll be given a dishonorable discharge. The Benderman's are now working to assist other soldiers whose legal problems they say are not being properly handled by the military. I don't wanna see the next guy getting the same kind of treatment after he's served honorably in combat and realizes that he cannot you know no longer participate in war with a good conscience.

If you assume that all the American troops fighting and dying for the united states in Iraq are American citizens, you would be wrong. Today, nearly 40-thousand non- citizens serve in the U.S. military. They hail from virtually every country in the world. But the majority are of Hispanic origin. They represent a population that has struggled to get into this country. And now they are literally fighting for the right to stay here permanently. U.S. Marine Corporal Yerandys (year-ran-dees) Martell-Carrasco arrived from Cuba 9 years ago, when he was 12. In 2001, at the beginning of his high school senior year, he watched with the rest of America the horrors of 9/11. And the very next day after that I joined. I went to the recruiting station and signed in for the marine corps. I knew we were gonna go to war. I knew that. And who was better to protect my family than me? Your mother didn't want you to come in? My mother didn't want me to come into the military period. Cuz - she- that's the reason we left Cuba, cus- when you're in Cuba you gotta go mandatory to the service for three years. So my mother didn't want that. Ironically, I

wanted, I joined the service. So she was kind of mad about that.

For Corporal Martell, the typical highlights of youth have been consumed by marine corps life. He turned 18 just before starting boot camp; he celebrated his 19th birthday during his first tour in Iraq. Last year, he re-deployed for a second tour. Did you see combat? Yes, sir. I saw combat. Have any close calls? Just a couple, sir. Today, Martell is an infantryman stationed at Camp Lejeune North Carolina. He's only 21, yet he's one of the more combat experienced marines responsible now for training and preparing the newest recruits for the war in Iraq. You're a corporal now, leader of 13 men. In terms of the Marine Corps, does the fact that you're a resident, not a citizen work against you in any way? Not at all sir, they don't look at that at all sir. When you get promoted, it's what you do. It's how you do for the marine corps, it's how you present yourself. At a time when our military is struggling to meet recruiting goals, non-citizens, like corporal Martell, are a recruiting godsend. After 9/11, president bush signed an executive order making all active duty non-citizens immediately eligible for U.S. citizenship. The application process has been streamlined and nearly 26-thousand servicemen and women have become naturalized citizens since the war on terror began. We were with corporal Martell as he went to fill out his paperwork at an office on base. You know this is free the only thing you're going to have to spend money on is two passport pictures. He hopes to become a U.S. citizen before again returning to Iraq. "Has being a Marine helped you become a citizen?" it definitely speeds up the process. So you don't have to handle much of the paperwork yourself. "Not at all sir, pretty much they take care of you sir main thing I need you to do is make sure you sign it because that is the one thing I can't do for you." but some critics claim that luring non-citizens into the military with the promise of citizenship almost guarantees they will be sent into combat zones -putting them directly in the line of fire. That's because non-citizen soldiers can't get the security clearances that U.S. citizens do, so they wind up with riskier jobs that don't require clearances. Like those on the front lines. While non-citizens make-up three percent of the overall military; seven percent of our combat fighting forces are immigrants. For dozens of them, citizenship came after they died serving our country. I don't wanna say a lot of people, but some people would say, you know, here's a young man who could do a lot of things. But he chooses to go to Iraq, not once, not twice but three times and gets shot at as a marine. And he's not a citizen he doesn't have to go why do it? If I can make a difference and I can make somebody come back alive, that's all I really care about sir. Are you afraid of dying? I'm not afraid of dying. I'm afraid of my Marines dying. That's my biggest fear losing one of my marines and having to call their parents and saying your son is not home with us. On veteran's day weekend in ceremonies here and in Iraq and in Afghanistan more than 200 servicemen and women were sworn in as new U.S. citizens. Congratulations. You're our nation's newest citizens.

Like Corporal Martell, they say they've always been proud patriots making the united states flag their own, only reinforces it. " the day I raised my hand and I said yeah, I wanna be a united states marine, I was proud sir. I had a feeling in my stomach. I get to do something not everybody else gets to do.

I did two tours for this country; I'm going to do three tours. I'm not going to live

anywhere else but this country. So I will be proud to live in the country y forever .  
Corporal Martel heads back to Iraq soon. Like thousands of other soldiers.

Nine-year-old Aristide glass is always trying to get his dad to play ball with him. Since there's no net - he scores points like this:

but the clock is running out on this game. Within just a few weeks sgt antino glass will be shipping out to Iraq for a second one- year tour of duty. Leaving behind his son aristede, his wife, christine, and a baby boy amanti. I'm away but eventually i'll be back. That's how I look at it. I like I use that a part of my motivation. You know that gives me the extra drive to go on and on each day. It's almost like a calendar, marking a calendar. You know it's like at the end of that calendar is the prize which is our family. Your younger son is how old? Four months today. You will probably miss seeing his first steps? Yes. I am. I try to get him to do everything I know I'm gonna miss. On his second tour, sgt. Glass will once again be charged with supplying the army's Humvees, tanks and bradleys with fuel. It may sound fairly safe, but in Iraq, even the ordinary can be fraught with danger. It was a sunday afternoon, quite calm, peaceful. I wasn't doing anything spectacular, nothing like that. I was just washing my laundry in the bucket. And all of a sudden mortar rounds came in on the camp. And I just put my hands over my face and I said uh ok I seen the blood in my hand. Sgt glass wasn't permanently scarred in that attack, but his wound was serious enough that he was awarded a purple heart. I hate that he's leavin' again. And it's no guarantees that he's gonna come back the way he leFt. And with our military stretched thin, there's always another worry for christine sgt glass may have to stay in Iraq beyond his scheduled tour of duty. They say a year, but then you know you can get a phone call and they say, "okay well, they extended for six more weeks." it's not easy explaining extended tours to a 9 year-old. I can't promise him that he's gonna be back when they say. Well I'm gonna ask each of you, who in this arrangement has the tougher job? I would say me. (laughter) yeah, I would say me. Well, what about it, sergeant? She got a tougher job than you have? (laughter)

she got me beat. She has me beat by a long shot. Everywhere we went at Ft. Hood, we saw families about to be separated by war. Families like that of sgt john kerkhoff. We have a beautiful two-year old baby boy, ty. It's it's harder to leave this time. His family has been in a state of flux for the past week. He's due to ship out for a second tour in Iraq, but over and over, the time and the date of his departure has been changed. Sgt kerkhoff seems to take it all in stride. I'm very ready to go back to Iraq. I know what to expect this time. But it's taking a toll on his wife, darlene. It's all just roller coasters. Not knowing exactly when he's leaving. This last week has been a flurry of activity. Packing. Gettin' storage, gettin' u-haul. Making sure everything gets shut off. Making sure we get out of our lease. With her husband leaving, there's really no reason for darlene to stay in Texas. So she'll drive back to california where she has family and friends. Despite all the changes in schedule, sgt kerkhoff's mother, marilyn, is determined to stay until her son ships out. I am here 'til the last minute. Because I'm gonna see him off. And if it takes changing my plane ticket five times, i'll do that. Orders have come down. Weapons pull a 15:30. Departure at 18:00. There will be no more delays.

It just gets harder. I don't know where he's going. (crying) as one family is separated another family begins to take shape.

Going back for another glorious time. I feel very comfortable going back and knowing that i' come home safe and keep my squad safe and alive.

Darlene wants to support her husband I'm excited for him. It's what he wants to do. So we just back each other up. But when the conversation turns to re-enlistment and future tours of duty - fault lines in the family start to appear. I haven't decided if this is gonna be my last tour. We talk about it all the time. It's always an on/off debate whether or not I should stay in. But darlene seems to think that they have an understanding. We decided we want him home. It's very hard to me to leave my family i'll come home and he'll be older. And talking more. And i'll get to catch up everything I missed.

During his first tour in Iraq, sgt kerkhoff served in a support position with the air force. I think I felt the first time around that he was, I don't know, safer. This time's different. He's a calvary scout and of course that's a combat role. It's right in the thick of things. And he did that on purpose. That's what he wanted. I love you baby. You know I'm going to come home. I know. Sgt kerkhoff enlisted after 9/11 he knew exactly what he was getting into. I knew that I would be going to be war. I was 100 percent dead sure that I would go to war, at least, once or twice. There's just time now for one more phone call hi dad

as it gets closer reality kind of sets in. I just can't help but think about all those men and women just like him. You know, there's 130,000 troops deployed. They're all my family. I can't help but be proud of them all. These are young men and women who did not choose an easy path. They all have families. They're all going through what we go through.

So this nation owes them a debt of gratitude.

And so another soldier who came home returns to Iraq. One veteran who served in the war keeps sign on the wall in the office where he counsels veterans with post traumatic stress disorder. It reads. Poor is a nation that has no heroes. Shameful is a nation that has heroes and forgets. America continues to be a land rich with heroes, and we owe all a special debt. How we meet that debt says and will say a lot about our national character. With this in mind, one might ask: where is the national conversation about how we will provide, in the short and the long term, for the veterans of Afghanistan and Iraq? Some will require expensive medical care for the rest of their lives and all deserve the dignity they have earned in the hardest way possible. We've heard a lot about how our leaders didn't, quote, " plan for the peace" in Iraq. Will it also be said that we didn't plan for the day, and the day after, our troops finally come home? For hd net, Dan Rather reporting thank you for tuning in i'll see you again next week.