

# a soldier's story

Can you imagine having four kids in high school and college and then finding out that you had a fifth on the way? It was certainly a surprise for Charles and Doris Provost twenty-seven years ago. However, that "baby" is now serving in Iraq and these retired grandparents of eleven grandchildren, anxiously wait in their home nestled in The Woodlands, for the safe return of their son, Jared.

Our nation is at war. Maybe you are in agreement - maybe you're not. However, the fact remains, lives are impacted from this war right here in Montgomery County. This isn't a war that is fought by nameless faces. This is a war that is fought 24-hours a day, seven days a week, by husbands and wives, sons and daughters, of families that we come into contact with each day through our neighborhoods, workplace, church, shopping for groceries, or strolling through the mall. Unfortunately, these families, who are burdened by the absence of a loved one who has been placed in harm's way, can easily bypass us undetected. When a soldier has a name and a face, and a family at home that is praying for his safe return, the war takes on a completely new dimension. It isn't as easy as simply turning off the television set after the evening news. Such is the case with Jared Provost's family.

In 1995, Jared graduated from high school and headed off to college to study Forestry at Louisiana Tech University. While in college, he opted to join the National Guard with a commitment to participate in training exercises once a month. That pledge to the military, Jared was certain, would encompass nothing more than at most, working disaster relief following a hurricane. And for several years, that was exactly the case. His unit was called upon to provide assistance following hurricanes, and on one occasion, he served for a short time in Belize to clean-up the aftermath of a damaging storm. It never occurred to him when he signed-up for the National Guard at 20-years of age, he would be called upon to fight a war.

However, several years later, the world changed on that fateful Tuesday in September. By this time, Jared had graduated from college and was working for Roy O. Martin Lumber

Company in Louisiana. It wasn't until December 2003, that he announced to his parents that there was a possibility that he would be deployed to Iraq.

"He was quite anxious to go," says mother Doris. "You would be amazed at how these soldiers feel about serving their country."

Jared received his deployment papers at the end of April 2004 and set about to put his affairs in order. Before his May 18th departure, his four siblings, and their families, gathered at Charles and Doris' home, where they told Jared how much they loved him. Their hearts swelled with pride for this brother and son who was rising to the call to serve his nation. And then he was gone.

From May until July, Jared was trained in Fort Hood. He then departed for the Mohave Desert, to a climate that simulates the harsh extremes of the Middle East. Five months of training and this young man, now 26 years of age, was ready by military standards, to fight a war.



On October 2, 2004, Jared was deployed to Kuwait where he would remain for several weeks before beginning the journey into Baghdad. As a member of the 1st Platoon, Company A, 1088th Engineering Battalion, 256th Brigade Combat Team, and now a Sergeant, Jared is in the heart of the battle. Part of the battalion's mission includes combing the streets of Baghdad looking for unexploded bombs. Jared, along with a team of three other members, maneuvers a new warhorse called "The Buffalo" - a monster sized 23-ton vehicle that scours the landscape looking for improvised explosive devices (IEDS) - in simple terms, homemade bombs that are made with every kind of gadget, from a washing machine timer to a radio pager, along with ammunition. These IEDS are the latest technique the insurgents are using to fight the U.S. Military and the new Iraq government. A common attack maneuver is to plant one bomb and then use gunfire, grenades, or a second bomb to catch troops off guard. This is the root of Jared's daily combat.

The Buffalo drives at speeds of no more than 15 mph, examining the roadsides for suspicious looking trash, boxes, and even dirt. When a closer look is necessary, The Buffalo is equipped

These missions are serious and quite dangerous. Jared's battalion has been impacted by injury and loss of life. And there are times, when those attacks have been much too close to Jared.

"Our son was in a vehicle behind his roommate," says Charles, "who was severely injured by an exploding IED."

Jared, like his fellow soldiers, is dedicated to this war. He was in Iraq during the elections and saw first-hand the droves of people that came to vote.

"Jared was overwhelmed by the turn-out of the Iraqi people," continues his father. "He told us the people were desperate to cast their vote, even to the extent that there was an old woman being pushed to a voting site in a wheelbarrow."

Jared has lived amongst the Iraqi people and he knows beyond a shadow of a doubt that they desperately want a nation of order and freedom.

During his downtime, he lives on a makeshift base with 3,000 other soldiers. There is a PX (a place to purchase necessities) that is the size of Wal-Mart, and trailers with well-known fast food name brand signs, where soldiers can get a taste of home.

The Provost family and their wide circle of friends have sent



with a 30-foot extension, called an "Ironclaw," which is operated from within, allowing further investigation without leaving the vehicle. When there is confirmation that an IED is present, an explosive team is called to the scene for detonation.

care packages to Jared. But it is one package in particular, that tells Jared and his family, that his needs are being met on a larger scale.

The Iraqi climate is extremely challenging for the soldiers. While the days can be atrociously hot, once the sun sets, the

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desert temperature plummets, and Jared was cold. One day a box arrived from a woman with a return address in New York. Not a person that Jared or any of his family knew. In opening the box, Jared discovered a brand new comforter. It was exactly what he needed.

Tucked away in The Woodlands, Charles and Doris watch the news, read internet update news sites, wait expectantly for an email from Jared, and they pray for his safety.

A support group at Timber Ridge Presbyterian Church meets every Wednesday at 10:30 am. It is here that Doris has found a place where she can share her heart about the emotions that arise from having a son who is in combat. This group also

tries to meet the needs of families with husbands and wives in Iraq. For many of these families, their primary source of income was severely impacted when jobs had to be temporarily left to serve overseas. Although by law, these men and women

must be allowed to return to their positions once back in the states, the families back at home are financially strapped by the enormous decrease from a working salary to a soldier's salary. In most cases, that is only a small percentage of what their day-to-day budget requires to stay financially afloat.

You can assist these families by making a donation to the Timber Ridge Presbyterian Church. If everyone in Montgomery County would make a small donation, needs could be met. Simply enclose a note to indicate your donation is for military family assistance and send to:

Timber Ridge Presbyterian Church  
7575 Alden Bridge Drive  
The Woodlands, Texas 77382

Another way that you can show your support is to send a soldier a care package. These men and women would first and



foremost, appreciate nothing more than a card. If you would like to take it a step further, pack a small box with any of the following:

Wet Wipes	Soup Mix
Cookies in individual packages (big bags often fill with dust)	M&M's
Smoked oysters and sardines	DVD's
Squeeze Butter	Newspapers
Pringles chips	Magazines
Individually wrapped licorice	AA batteries
Microwave Popcorn	D batteries
Ramen Noodles	Air Freshener
Cereal Bars	Board Games
Hot Cocoa Mix	Cotton Socks
	Razors
	Ink pens
	Word Puzzle Books
	Icy/Hot Patches
	Foot Powder

Packages are shipped to a U.S. base address so the postage will not be outrageous. The military takes care of transporting the packages overseas and the delivery time is about 2-3 weeks. You don't need a specific name to ship a package. Simply address it as follows:

Thank You Soldier Package  
1088/256 BCT  
APO AE 09326

As for Jared, he is scheduled to come home in September. His parents, brothers, sisters, their husbands and wives, and the crew of nieces and nephews, anxiously await his return, with the desire to see this boy that blessed their lives in such a special way 27 years ago, back on American soil, healthy, and ready to get back into the rhythm of life at home. ●