



OMS CPT(P) Corbin G. Partridge: 'Iraq service made me a better person'

It was another ordinary day in Iraq—Saturday, August 3, 2006. The rapid-fire sound of distant guns served as a constant reminder that this was a war zone. On any day in Iraq, there is no escaping the violence. Still, a spectator might have been lulled into a false sense of security as a group of Iraqi soldiers laughed and shouted during a friendly soccer match, while their families watched.

CPT(P) Corbin G. Partridge, OMS, 47th Combat Support Hospital and a native of Salina, Utah, had experienced the war, but he wasn't mentally prepared for what happened next. A suicide vehicle with an explosive device detonated in Al Hadr, Iraq in the middle of the soccer game. The Toyota pick-up truck exploded, killing 11 instantly and injuring 24. It turned August 3, 2006 into an unforgettable day for Dr. Partridge.

"I know that I will never forget the destruction these improvised explosives do to the human body," he said.

Human injuries resulting from homemade explosives are especially grisly. They aren't the kind of blunt trauma that results from a motor vehicle collision or a human punch. The explosives in Iraq are ballistic, as one OMS described them. From one explosion, there are often multiple projectiles: metal, dirt, rock, glass, animal parts and garbage. They tear the human body apart.

After the explosion Dr. Partridge helped triage the 24 patients and treated the maxillofacial trauma victim, an Iraqi citizen whose face was badly injured by shrapnel wounds just below his right eye. A piece of shrapnel had destroyed the bottom of the eye socket and cheekbone.

Treating war injuries was not part of Dr. Partridge's training, nor is it part of his practice at Winn Army Hospital where he is stationed at Ft. Stewart, Ga., but he learned to confront gruesome scenes of war and move quickly to treat the wounds.

Sgt. Paul Crisp, surgical technician, assisted as the two first cleansed the wound, removing pieces of shrapnel and dirt. Then reconstruction could begin.

Dr. Partridge used a metal mesh to reconstruct the eye socket. After the mesh was screwed into place and the eye socket was complete, he began to reconstruct the cheekbone with a piece of titanium that was shaped to match the opposite cheek bone and screwed into place.

The OMS was pleased with the results. The Iraqi citizen's face had been restored.

"This gentleman was extremely lucky," said Dr. Partridge. "The surgery went very well."

Despite the many dangers that surround him in Iraq, Dr. Partridge speaks of the satisfaction that comes with providing this type of critical care. The fact that it takes place in such a dangerous environment makes success even more meaningful. He said he is constantly reminded of how lucky he is to have chosen a profession that has the potential to help so many people and so profoundly.

Dr. Partridge joined the National Guard in 1993 as a combat engineer to help pay for college. He graduated from Southern Utah University with a BA in biology. He completed his OMS residency at Indiana University in Indianapolis.

After finishing his undergraduate degree, Dr. Partridge signed up for the Health Professions Scholarship Program. This scholarship gives people seeking health professions the education and experience while serving in the armed forces.

"I was still in the military. They were just delaying my active duty," said Dr. Partridge. "The way it works is, I went through three of the four years of schooling with the Health Professions Scholarship Program, so I have to return three years to the military as an OMS, but I was on educational delay because I went into a civilian residency."

Dr. Partridge noted that one of the most gratifying aspects of his service is the deep appreciation that the Iraqi people showed him. Their gratitude, he said, is so broad and genuine, that it transcends language barriers. They made the hard days bearable.



CPT(P) Corbin G. Partridge, OMS, experienced firsthand the violence and unpredictability of war.

His wife and two children waited eagerly for him to return home for good, and now he has. "They support me while I am away," said Dr. Partridge, "but they are happy when I'm home."

He did go home again—but he knows some things have changed, that as a person, he has changed in fundamental ways.

"I felt that I was a very patient and good man before, but just being in Iraq has made me understand patience even more and to be more humble with what I have," he said. "This experience has made me a better doctor and surgeon, but it has also made me a better person, because I have learned patience and understanding of what people go through in life." ■

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