

The Quiet Heroes  
By Lori Dunn

Often times, when we hear news reports of military personnel fighting overseas to protect our freedom, it is the story of the “visible hero’s”. Those men and women on the front line, driving the Humvee’s, or flying Chinooks’ over enemy territory ferreting our insurgents, or the elite forces tracking down the worst of the worst.

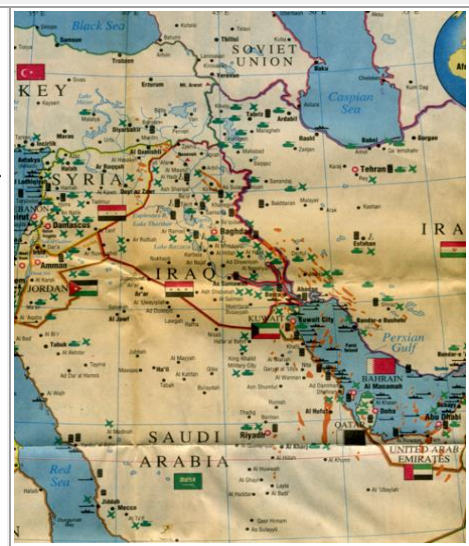
Yet, there is an equally important, but often overlooked hero who also sacrifices time away from family and friends, who works in unimaginable conditions and who is unfortunately often overlooked. These folks form a critical safety net, put in place to ensure our wounded soldiers and local civilians not only survive, but return home safely - the army medic.

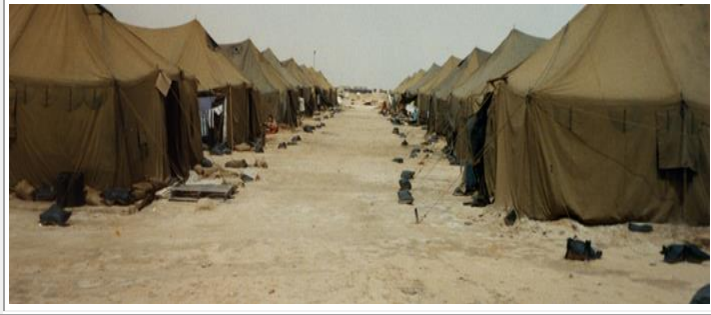
Rob Risley and his wife Kathi have been part of the St. John’s congregation since 1993. They have two grown daughters who enjoyed the idyllic childhood of our quaint community. But, life wasn’t always so ideal for Rob and Kathi.

Shortly after college, and before marrying Kathi, Rob joined the National Guards as a means to earn extra money to pay off college loans. For those of you who are like me, and aren’t familiar with how the National Guards operate, the easiest way to think of them is as a ‘mini civilization’ amongst themselves. Every unit is outfitted with skilled tradesmen of every type – doctors, nurses, plumbers, electricians, IT techs, cook’s, even reporters. They live in their homes with their families and go about their ‘civilian jobs’ and family activities as you and I would. But, unlike you and I, they can be called into active duty on a moment’s notice, flown around the world within 48 hours, and be asked to do a super hero’s job in the middle of a sandstorm.

Although he graduated with a degree in Anthropology, Rob trained at Fort Sam Houston to become an operating room technician. After 3 months of training, he returned to Madison where he joined the 13th Evac Hospital, a team of 460 people that together, make up an entire hospital. Their mission? To stabilize the wounded –whether in a tent, on a helicopter or on the battlefield, so they could be transported to a better hospital.

When the United Nations called on the US and other NATO allies to pull Saddam Hussein out of Kuwait in the early 90’s, Rob and the 13th Evac unit was one of the first US units on the ground. Their task? Turn a piece of barren desert in Saudi Arabia into a fully functioning hospital, including triage, radiology, labs, operating rooms, post op’s and more within 24 hours. After flying around the world, supplies and personnel endured a 6 hour convoy from Dhahran to Hufur Al Batin, Saudi Arabia. Wells had to be dug, electricity generated, sewer systems installed, tents put up to house the make shift hospital, as well as soldiers and other support crew.





Rob's responsibility? To keep 60-70 operating personnel running around the clock, as well as to ensure all necessary supplies were available. Thanks to Rob and his unit's hard work, untold thousands of soldiers received proper care for their wounds and returned home to their families, safely. Perhaps the best part of their teams work however, is what we never hear about in the popular media. The "goodwill" and charity that was done. The makeshift hospital quickly become known as a place of refuge for Iraqi soldiers, prisoners of war, and civilians- whether their injuries were war-induced or not. They tended wounded bodies and spirits.



Oftentimes, they did whatever they could to ensure young Iraqi soldiers, some only 15 years old when forced into Saddam's army, find safe refuge in neighboring countries. Why? So that these young men could be spared the brutality of living in Iraq under Saddam's ruthless regime.

After five months in the desert, Rob and his unit safely returned home in May, 1991. Rob's only regret? That they couldn't finish the job they started and eradicate Saddam from Iraq. This Veteran's Day, as you remember your loved ones who served, and the countless stories about our hero's in uniform, please take a moment to think about our "quiet heros". Those individuals quietly work behind the scenes helping those who help us all.