

Edit of piece about serving in Iraq and being Jewish

Red- Edit out

Blue – Add in

Yellow – questions and comments for the writer

() – writer’s comments to me, the editor

During the last nine months of my year in Iraq, I served as a scout platoon leader – commanding 30 cavalry scouts and 9 snipers. on their daily missions. The experience my men and I encountered were not romantic. Some will argue that war is never romantic, but I use the term more in the sense of the idealistic portrayals of heroism, valor, and comraderie that many have come to expect from accounts such as *Band of Brothers*, *We Were Soldiers Once and Young*, or even *Blackhawk Down*. Since the fall of Ba’athist regime, there have been fewer and fewer intense battles against uniformed foes. The scurmishes are usually brief and rely more on the ambush of the IED rather than head to head battles and even IEDs – thanks in part to the implementation of a vast counter-insurgency strategy are more and more rare.

(The opening paragraph is something of an amalgamation. Everything after “The experience...” was an addition from a part of the speech I have deleted. It is perhaps unnecessary and takes away from the real purpose of the topic.) [I agree with this.]

Instead, o Our daily missions revolved around the concept of protecting the populace. We worked to help rebuild the country’s economy and infrastructure [Did your platoon do this rebuilding? If you didn’t, I’d take this first part in blue out.] to develop/developing alliances that promoted security while not alienating us from a rival faction, and worked to flush/flushing out the remaining vestiges of Al Qaeda.[Use the -ing form of develop and flush” if you are keeping the part in blue. Otherwise use the infinitive form.] These conditions created an opportunity for us to have numerous interactions with the Iraqi people, –both their military and their civilians.

Behind closed doors and away from my S soldiers, I often joined with my fellow officers in berating the Iraqis with whom our mission required us to we worked. It was a way to blow off steam, but I felt my religious identity fueled my derision.

My religion had caused a conflict of interests of sorts with my job of which I was keenly aware. Of over 800 men in my battalion, I was one of only two Jewish S soldiers, and each of us, in our own way had attempted to hide our religion from the Iraqi people. The other, a gentlemen a blonde-haired named Lieutenant Schwartz had opted to translate his last name from the German and go as Lieutenant Black. in order to keep Iraqis from guessing that the blonde lieutenant was anything but a Christian. My last name Brewster did not pose the same problem. ,but I too had to content.

My father is a fourth generation Episcopal minister from a staid, blue-blooded New England family who. (Rebecca, this used to read “...Episcopal minister whose

family's veins run with the bluest of blood" but I thought perhaps that was too informal).

I think it could also work to say your father was a from a staid, blue-blooded, New England family."] fell in love with a nice Jewish girl. (also intended as a joke during the speech...perhaps also too informal). [I think it's okay.] Rather than prescribing a religion to any of their children, my parents raised my brother, sister, and me in both religions and allowed us to decide for ourselves. I have considered myself Jewish since shortly after my Bar Mitzvah, but I have not completely shunned ["Shunned" is negative and feels harsh. Does "rejected" feel accurate?] my Christian heritage, nor am I ashamed of it.

In a calculated move, [Ordering two dog tags is clearly calculated, so I don't think you need to state this. But you might have a fuller explanation of why you were making this calculated move. This might be a place to characterize the Iraqis religious stance. Something like: "In a calculated move as I prepared to go to a primary Muslim country that (then express their position on Israel or comment on the level of risk for Jews in Iraq.)] I ordered two sets of dog tags prior to deployment. On each, my name, blood type, and service number were the same, but on the fourth line one set said Jewish, the other said Episcopalian. – the one on which my religion was listed differed. Jewish on one set and Episcopalian on the other. In my first three months in Iraq, while I worked in intelligence— . While I had left the base a few times, I was mostly relegated to a windowless office—, I wore the dogtags that said Jewish. [I'm guessing here, but do indicate which dogtags you wore at this point.]and the reading of thousands of incoming reports and attempting to synthesis them into a coherent picture for the commander. The My switch to platoon leader meant leaving the base daily and the facing increased danger that went along with it. I remember quite clearly t The night before I took over as a platoon leader, I sat— sitting on a chair next to my bed for close to an hour staring at each set of dog tags laid out on my bed. On top of my blanket I laid each set of dog tags and stared at them for a while, floundering in indecision. On one side, I pictured the thought of the Maccabi's— chosing death at the hand of the Assyrians rather than renouncing their faith. On the other, I also recalled the story of Daniel Pearl— the Wall Street Journal [I italicized the WSJ] reporter who had been captured and subsequently beheaded in Pakistan for his being Jewish. [This is not a one side or the other since neither the Assyrians nor Daniel Pearl renounced their faith and both were killed (at least in part for Pearl) for their religious beliefs.] I knew the chance of capture in my case was relatively low, and that my dog tags would likely remained hidden under my uniform. In all likelihood, no one else would know but me. I would know, however, and it But still the idea of hiding my religious identity weighed on me heavily. [Is it this that weighed on you heavily? Or was it something else like trying to measure the risk?] There I sat staring at each for close to an hour before reaching my decision.

Forced to even consider hiding my religious identity in the first place, was one thing, but my feelings came to head in t This past winter, . T when the Israelis had launched a brutal incursion into the Gaza strip, and I was faced for the first time with true anti-Semitism. My patrols encountered anti-Israeli protests. Asking my My

interpreters to translate their told me the chanters said were, [It would be effective to quote the kinds of things they said] I knew then that that the protests were not in support of justice or interested in addressing Israeli use of force but rather were a thinly veiled attack on Judaism in general. I soon realized that they often derided the Israelis for their religion rather than attacking the point at issue – their use of force. I saw the protestors as hypocrites. I knew that many Iraqis had little to no benevolence [I would choose another word besides “benevolence.” You might consider “good will”] toward the Palestinians and only supported them because they considered them of them and the Jews, the Palestinians were the lesser of two evils in their minds. The idea of Pan-Islam or even Pan-Arabism is a relatively recent construct having only resurfaced in the twentieth century after centuries of dormancy following the fall of the caliphate. The protests I encountered were not a proclamation in the name of J justice but rather a thinly veiled attack on Judaism in general. (This paragraph was meant as an explanation of sorts, and I think I could pair it down.. in particular taking out the sentence “The idea...”). [I agree with your comment here.]

Upon returning from Iraq, I was describing an aspect of Iraqi culture to my girlfriend when I had an out of body experience. [“out of body” isn’t quite accurate, though I know what you mean. I think you could take this phrase out and what you’ve got left would flow logically into what I’m suggesting should follow.] I heard myself describe Iraqis as lazy, corrupt, bigoted, and backward words, saw her reaction [Give a descriptor for her reaction.], and realized that I sounded like a bigot myself. ed, hateful man. I had to come to hate Arabs and their culture. I was making broad generalizations based upon my experiences with a few. I called them lazy and corrupt, bigoted and backward. I hated them for seeming to undermine our every advance with their corruption; , and I hated them for keeping my S soldiers and me there while they failed to quell their governmental infighting. From my own perspective, it My hate and my broad generalizations based on my experiences with a few Iraqis was unacceptable to me, especially because I am Jewish. [I know you have the analogies below, but you could say something more directly about why you believe being Jewish made you a worse offender.] and I vowed to stop talking about Iraqis and their culture all together until I got some distance for the experience and perspective on my feelings. I felt that a As a Jew it made me an even worse offender. I was the old white judge of the Jim Crow south spouting off the “n-word” during the trial of a black man. I was no better than the Iraqi in the street who had lost sight of the nuance of argument and derided an entire people on the basis of their religion and culture. [I like the last sentence better than the previous one. The previous analogy, I think, doesn’t hold up as well. Jews have reason to feel persecuted and to be wary of the hate they face in the Middle East. A racist white judge is not in the same position.] (Last sentence of paragraph superfluous?) I vowed to stop talking about Iraqis and their culture until I gained some perspective on the experience and my feelings.

I knew I was acting irrationally, and I needed the overcome and internalize my lessons I came to see that [after how much time?] these people the Iraqis I

encountered, while often behaving condemnably, [Can you find an easier word than “condemnably”?] only did so as an evolution [The word “evolution” in this context isn’t quite the right fit. You evolve from something and you evolve to be able to do something. I would suggest changing “evolution” to “response” or “adaptation.”] to their surroundings. They knew that we Americans [Don’t you mean “soldiers” and not “Americans” since its units and not nationalities that are being replaced?]—while talking a good game—would be replaced in short order with new units and the tiresome cycle would begin anew. Promises made would be forgotten as new commanders surveyed the political landscape and often came to their own conclusions of about the best path forward. The Iraqis knew that while our intentions may be have been good, our follow through was often lacking, and they had to take things into their own hands when and if they could. Lining their own pockets may have been corrupt in my eyes, but how would I have acted had I been in their shoes, never knowing when the next American dollars would flow their way or toward that of their a rival tribe? Where too was my sense of history? Here was a fellow monotheistic culture—born too of the seed of Abraham who had suffered millennia of atrocities for their beliefs, just as we had. (This was to play to the all Jewish crowd I was talking to. Should it go?) [No, keep this. It is relevant and an important point.]

In the two months since I have returned home, I have lost some of my bravado and gained a little more perspective. and lost a bit of my bravado. But I it is a work in progress, and I not sure I will ever completely put those my hostile feelings behind me or forget the hatred in the eyes of the Iraqis protesting Israel. ; I do not know that I will ever put hatred in the eyes of those I saw protesting Israel and the Jews completely behind me. But I did gain a bit of solace comfort that day. [How about “comfort” instead of solace since gaining solace feels like an awkward phrase?] For although What they the Iraqis were not aware of it, there stood was that an American officer in their midst who worn wore the name of Judaism on his dog-tags. And that day, they listened to me and respected my authority and dispersed peaceably when I that Jewish American soldier told the angry Iraqis it was time to go home, they dispersed peaceably. [It feels more powerful to end on “dispersed peaceably.” At the end here, it also makes sense to stay with the third person reference to yourself. What I’m not clear on is why this event gave you solace since the Iraqis did not know they were listening to and respecting the authority of a Jewish soldier.]

Revision of the original

During the last nine months of my year in Iraq, I served as a scout platoon leader commanding 30 cavalry scouts and nine snipers. Our daily missions involved protecting the populace and helping to secure those working to build the struggling economy and government. The missions were tiresome, but they created opportunities for

interactions with the Iraqi people, both military and civilian.

Behind closed doors and away from our soldiers, my fellow officers and I often criticized the Iraqis. Initially, it was a way to blow off steam, but I came to realize that my religious identity fueled my complaints.

Of more than 900 men in my battalion, I was one of only two Jewish soldiers. While serving in this predominately Muslim country, Lieutenant Schwartz had opted to translate his last name from the German and go instead by Lieutenant Black. My last name, Brewster, did not pose the same problem, but I had my own difficult choice to make.

My father is a fourth-generation Episcopal minister from a blue-blooded New England family who fell in love with a Jewish girl. Rather than prescribing a religion to any of their children, my parents raised my brother, sister, and me in both religions and allowed us to decide for ourselves. While not rejecting my Christian heritage, I have considered myself Jewish since shortly after my bar mitzvah.

But for safety's sake, I ordered two sets of dog tags prior to deployment, one that identified me as Jewish, the other as Episcopalian. In my first three months in Iraq, while I worked in intelligence—mostly relegated to a windowless office—I wore the dog tags that said Jewish. My switch to platoon leader meant leaving the base daily and facing increased danger. The night before my new duties, I sat for close to an hour staring at each set of dog tags. I thought of the Maccabees— choosing death at the hand of the Assyrians rather than renouncing their faith. I also recalled Daniel Pearl—the *Wall Street Journal* reporter who had been beheaded in Pakistan in part for being Jewish. I knew the chance of my capture was relatively low and that my dog tags would likely remain hidden under my uniform. But the idea of hiding my religious identity weighed on me heavily.

This past winter as the Israelis were launching a brutal incursion into the Gaza strip, I faced blatant anti-Semitism for the first time in my life. My platoon was among the forces sent to ensure the anti-Israeli protests didn't become violent. On my request, one of the platoon's interpreters translated the words of the protestors: "Push the Jews into the sea," and "It is time to rid Palestine of the dirty swine." The protests were not supporting justice or addressing Israeli use of force, but were rather an attack on Judaism in general. I was angry, and I had to work to control my emotions in front of the men.

After returning home, I was describing an aspect of Iraqi culture to my girlfriend and heard myself describe Iraqis as lazy, corrupt, bigoted, and backward. As she stared at me shocked, I realized that I too was being a bigot who had come to hate Arabs and their culture. I hated them for seeming to undermine our every advance with their

corruption, and I hated them for keeping my soldiers and me there while they failed to resolve their governmental infighting. But I knew my broad generalizations based on experiences with a few Iraqis were unacceptable. I was no better than the Iraqi in the street who had lost sight of the nuance of argument and derided an entire people on the basis of their religion and culture.

Weeks later after considerable thought, I came to see that some of the Iraqis behavior I criticized was in response to their surroundings. They knew that American units talked a good game but would soon be replaced with new units. Promises made would be forgotten as new American commanders surveyed the political landscape and came to their own conclusions about the best path forward. For Iraqis to line their own pockets may have been corrupt in my eyes, but they lived forever questioning when American dollars would flow their way or toward a rival tribe? Where too was my sense of history? Here was a fellow monotheistic culture— born too of the seed of Abraham who had suffered millennia of atrocities for their beliefs, just as Jews had.

In the months since returning home, I have lost some bravado and gained more perspective. It is still a work in progress, however. I am not sure I will ever completely put my hostile feelings behind me or forget the hatred I saw in the eyes of the Iraqis protestors. But from this experience, I also carry something more positive. That day, witnessing the protestors' hatred toward Jews, I felt the courage of my beliefs and the confirmation of my decision to wear the dog tags that identified me as Jewish.