

**Statement of John Rothwell**  
**Specialist (Dismount/Gunner) Arkansas Army National Guard**  
**Before the U.S. House of Representatives**  
**Committee On Veterans' Affairs**  
**One Hundred Ninth Congress**  
**22 March, 2006**

Chairman and Committee Members, I am Specialist John Rothwell of the Arkansas Army National Guard and I thank you for the opportunity to speak here today. I will be sharing a brief description of my time in Iraq and of the Transitional Assistance I have received since returning.

After being out of the military for thirteen years I had the good fortune of being allowed to serve in Iraq with the 39th Infantry Brigade. I was stationed at Camp Taji, just north of Baghdad. My first six months there I worked in the Operations Center and was a Company Commanders' Driver. When I came home for my mid-tour leave Congressman and Mrs. Boozman were kind enough to have dinner with me and my family. In fact many people showered me with more attention than I could have imagined, and I returned to Camp Taji "recharged".

The last half of my tour I served in a Counter Improvised Explosive Device ( I.E.D.) Platoon. Our job was to search the streets and highways for roadside bombs. We were honored to patrol downtown Baghdad the day of the historic first election. I must mention that my friend SPC. Lyle C. Rymer was killed while bravely setting up protection for a voting site. At one point during the Election Day, my platoon and I were securing an area around a bomb placed by

terrorists near another voting site. I was in much pain and frustration over the loss of Lyle Rymer. An Iraqi kid came over to me and wrapped his arms around my leg and said, "Hey Mister, I love you!" The Iraqi children frequently brought joy to my day and helped to remind me of why I was there.

When I returned to the United States. I attended many briefings and was impressed by all the assistance being offered. But I didn't accept much help because my heart was set on returning to Iraq. After being home a couple of months I began requesting that I be allowed to return to duty. Soon I was picked up by Bravo Battery 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion of the 142<sup>nd</sup> Field Artillery Brigade and began training at Ft. Lewis, WA. In some ways the training was more rigorous than actually being in Iraq. I was still banged up from my recent tour but did not want to admit that I was having problems. Eventually my difficulties reached the threshold that the leaders of Bravo Battery, though under manned, graciously allowed me to stay behind and get help.

I was then enrolled in the new Community Based Health Care Organization (CBHCO). This allowed me to come home and be seen by local health care providers. Also many of the people who administrate the CBHCO program at Camp Robinson, AR were with me in Iraq and I will always have a special bond with them. This program has insured that I get comprehensive medical care. My specific problems have been rapidly identified and treated. If not for CBHCO I would have had to remain at Ft. Lewis, 2500 miles from my family, for six months. Having the loving support of family and friends has shortened the recovery process and helped me to heal in many ways. Before CBHCO I was fearful that I would be discharged from the military, but now I believe that I have more service ahead. I feel that this program has saved me.

My transition from combat to civilian to training, in just a few months time, has been stressful. But the Arkansas Army National Guard has my best interests at heart and in time I believe that I will be allowed to return to duty. I know that I went into Iraq thinking one thing and left thinking another. For the most part the more I got to know the Iraqi people, the more I understood them and cared for them. I am thankful for the opportunity to serve and to be a part of something larger than myself.

Chairman and Committee Members, thank you again for hearing my testimony today.