

Chuck Carree - Nixon gets better grasp of war in trip to Iraq

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When Trot Nixon informed people he was going to Iraq in September, they were suspicious.

They sheepishly asked if he were enlisting. He politely replied no.

Instead, Nixon, the former New Hanover High School and ex-Major League Baseball outfielder, went into the war zone during a trip organized by Pro Sports MVP, a sports and entertainment marketing firm.

He and former major league pitchers Jeff Nelson and Andy Ashby spent 12 days touring the U.S. troops. The players were dubbed "Heroes of the Diamond," on a tour of numerous bases in Iraq and Kuwait.

"We just hung out with them and told them how much we cared for them and just appreciate what they are doing," Nixon said.

When he was describing the trip, Nixon's excitement was evident. He told me he would not hesitate, if asked, to go back and visit troops again.

I could tell he had a blast and his patriotism, while already strong, grew a notch once he met some of the soldiers and realized what they go through daily.

The former players signed autographs and talked sports, especially football and baseball with the troops and high-ranking officials.

"It was a tremendous experience," Nixon said.

He called the hospitality first class and one of the thrills for him was riding in a Black Hawk helicopter and C-17 aircraft.

"Flying over Iraq, you could see the areas where war had taken place," he said. "I don't think people fully grasp what our soldiers encounter on a daily basis."

Sure, he would like for the troops to return home, but not until the job is done. The more he talked the more I could detect his strong feelings and views.

“If we up and leave, there will be chaos over there,” he warned. “People do not realize it and I am sick and tired of people who hide behind their American freedom, take it for granted, what the troops provide to make it safer for us. They complain that the people in charge should get the troops out. I don’t like the troops dying over there either from bomb explosions.

“It just shows how unstable the area is over there. They are trying to stabilize it. People have no idea what our soldiers go through mentally and physically on a daily basis. Physically, it was hot as fire there.”

He found it incredulous the troops function as well as they do in heat indexes that reach close to 140 degrees in full gear, which includes helmets and backpacks with ammunition and weapons.

To comprehend the intense heat, Nixon suggests next summer we turn off the air conditioning in our cars, let the motor run for a while and then turn on the heat and sit there for nearly an hour.

“That is how hot it was in some of the tanks when we visited,” Nixon said. “It is easy for us over here to think this war is a mistake, but those people need to shut up and support the troops out loud. I know I have a new respect for what I saw.”

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