

Walls by Corey Minatani

Sometimes I am asked whether I saw any combat action in Iraq. What does it really matter when I'm in prison? Do other inmates think I might have been a hero? Do they ask because they have a criminal agenda? I never know. Every now and again, a correctional officer will ask me about my service or training; the officers have access to my military record (DD214). Many correctional officers are veterans just like me, but they kept it together. Do they feel shame that one of their own fell and went to prison? Do they feel veterans like me let down our country? I think so.

Before I came to prison, before I went to Iraq, I remember doing a promotional event in my hometown on behalf of the National Guard. The National Guard sometimes orders Soldiers to attend various events such as rodeos, car races, etc. I hated it; this is work for a "weekend warrior." I was, formerly, an active-duty Infantryman (Read: part of the "real" Army). The event was a Post-9/11 event at our local air port with all the fixings of cheesy marketing for recruiting guardsman: tables, flyers, gifts, retired war planes, climbing wall for the kids, national anthem singer.

The singer. I will always remember the singer. In a few month's time, we were to leave for Iraq. This beautiful woman raved on and on about all of us Soldiers being heroes and so brave. So brave? We were just a simple unit working in transportation;

our primary duty was to relieve the previous unit and transport food, water, and various supplies. A hero? I didn't think so at the time. Now having come to prison, I especially don't think so. Then, as now, I put a wall around me. The first one was of the mind; the second one was of concrete by way of prison. Oddly, our camp in Iraq had concrete walls to protect us from the insurgents. Also, we kept up our mental walls, imagining everything was well with the kids, wife, and the home.

Walls. Do I have them here? On the occasion I do venture outside, the walls of the prison are there. As I approach the end of my sentence, will I carry those concrete walls of the prison in my mind? I'm sure I will. The walls we had in Iraq, mentally, are still there today after almost a decade. So many tales of recidivism bringing drugs, violence, and pain haunt many other men here in the prison. Will I make it on the outside? I hope so...

I think back on the singer, as she beautifully sang the last verse, "... land of the free, and the home, of the, brave!" I didn't feel like a hero back then, nor did I feel brave. Maybe once I leave, I can live up to that singer's expectations. Maybe, just maybe, I can muster enough courage to be that hero and to be brave.

- "Follow Me." U.S. Army Infantry motto. Fort Benning, GA