

Jake Lapointe

Dr. Maxwell

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Vivid Accounts of the Middle East:
An Interview with Cameron Felsher

The seeds of service were planted early for Cameron Felsher. Growing up and playing in the woods of Indiana as a child instilled a desire to one day be in the United States Army. Some time after he moved to Goose Creek, South Carolina, and started courses at Trident Technical College, he realized that he wanted to do more with his life than sit in a classroom. With the conflict in the Middle East escalating daily, Mr. Felsher decided to enlist in the Army to take on something larger than himself. He went to basic training and advanced infantry training in Fort Benning, Georgia, before being assigned to an airborne unit.

He was deployed to Iraq, seeing Kuwait before going to his new patrol base with his unit. He describes the military hub in Kuwait as “one of the strangest places” he had ever seen. He says it is as if it were built out of nothing, having newly formed cities with weird-looking western infrastructure that were seemingly constructed overnight. He remembers how obsessed the children were with American soldiers in the countryside outside the cities of Iraq. They would rush the Americans begging for anything like a soda or candy. He traded one child a soda for some money, which had Saddam Hussein’s face on it, money that had become useless except as a reminder of the fallen dictatorship. He remembers how grateful

most Iraqis were to the Americans; several of them told stories of family members were tortured or went missing for speaking out against Hussein. These stories made him realize the value of the U.S. involvement in Iraq for the Iraqi people.

Upon returning, he decided to stay in the Army with his current unit even though it was gearing up for a deployment to Afghanistan. It turns out that Afghanistan was very different from Iraq. He remembers waking the first day after they landed in the area and looking up at these large mountains, which were the largest he'd ever seen, and the bitter cold, which was nothing like the desert environment he experienced in Iraq. A short helicopter ride brought them to a climate that was warm—still not the desert, but very different than the cold foggy mountains he had first seen. Mr. Felsher spoke of the tribal allegiances in Khost, which made the fighting very difficult there. The Afghan people lived in villages that were fiercely independent and each was different from the next. These villages would feud all the time, and most saw the Americans as outsiders. The locals were wary about giving useful information to the Americans and would sometimes even help the enemy.

Mr. Felsher's accounts taught me some of the most important history of the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan. His insight into the local perception of the conflict in both theaters is invaluable, and his description of the scenery and of the bases set up by NATO forces provides a vivid picture of being on the ground. This is without a doubt an important account of U.S. involvement in the Middle East.