

## Back From Iraq

Originally an opponent of the invasion of Iraq, local attorney and National Guardsman Mathew Tully, who recently returned from a tour of duty in Iraq, now feels the United States should not pull out until the war on terror is won.

Tully said he disagrees with the strategy of preemptive strikes. However, he said the war in Iraq quickly changed from one he felt President George W. Bush should not have gotten the United States involved in, into a war on terrorism.

"I don't think we should pull out until the job is done," Tully said during an interview last week. He said the terrorists are on the run and he is hopeful the war will be over in six months to a year.

A major with the 42nd Infantry Division of the New York Army National Guard, Tully volunteered for active duty. He reported for duty in July and arrived in Iraq on Sept. 1. Until his return to Fort Drum on Dec. 4, Tully had been stationed at forward operating base Danger in Tikrit, the hometown of former Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein.

While stationed at Danger, Tully said there were attacks on the base on a nearly daily basis by some sort of mortar rounds, rifle rounds or grenades. On his first night there, Tully said he saw a mortar round land approximately 5 feet from a man enlisted in the Navy. The ensuing explosion blew off both the man's legs.

That night was probably the most traumatic, Tully said.

While the mortar rounds and attacks were common, injuries were not, Tully said. He said the bases are heavily protected and when a mortar round is fired it is accompanied by a whistling noise for two to three seconds. Anyone hearing the noise drops to the ground to avoid injury, as mortar rounds blow up and out, Tully said. He added that radar on the bases allow soldiers to know when attacks are coming, which also helps reduce the casualty rate.

Tully, the founding partner of the law firm Tully, Rinckey & Associates of Albany, said he believes the highest casualty rate is from improvised explosive devices, which are set on the sides of roads. He said that while those devices are not that effective - one in 10 damages equipment and four or five out of 100 cause an injury - people get in the habit of driving down the center of roads to avoid them.

In fact, the first traffic ticket Tully received in his adult life came after he returned home. Tully said he had not realized what he was doing until he was stopped by a Greene County sheriff's deputy for driving in the center of the road.

Tully said returning from Iraq also took some other small adjustments. He said buying his coffee and food rather than having it provided, the change from 85-degree weather in Iraq to 15-degrees in New York and not constantly having to think about safety issues took some adjustment. He said he hopes to help other veterans of Iraq make that adjustment and plans to become more active in the VFW in Catskill.

Additionally, Tully said being home with his family at the holidays makes him feel conflicted leaving his fellow soldiers behind. He said he left people like Lt. Kyle Tafel in Iraq continuing to fight. Tafel's unit of 100 soldiers had suffered eight casualties, Tully said.

"I think people like him are modern day American heroes," Tully said. He said most people do not realize that there are 18-, 19- and 20-year-olds making life-and-death decisions every day, watching their friends be maimed and killed and then going back to their work the next day.

While serving in Iraq, Tully was the chief of operations for the 42nd Division, which had 25,000 coalition troops under their command. As chief of operations, he was responsible for the day-to-day operations of the troops.

The division was located within the so-called Sunni Triangle, the area of Iraq from which Saddam drew his strongest support. Tully said they were responsible for monitoring the arrests of terrorists and insurgents, basically acting as back-up to the Iraqi police. He said the division suffered 80 casualties and had 850 people receive the purple heart award for being injured.

"I did not suffer any battle wounds," Tully said. He said he suffered some hearing loss because he failed to wear hearing protection in an area where guns were being fired.

Now that he is home again, Tully said he planned to spend Christmas alone with his wife, Kimberly, and their dog, Oslow. He said he also plans to concentrate on the law firm he started out of the back bedroom of his house in Hunter.

Tully said the firm, which has an office in Catskill, has an application pending with the small business administration due to a loss of money while he was away. He said he is the highest earner at the firm, charging \$300 an hour.

"So there was definitely some problem with me going, but I'm not in the National Guard for the money," Tully said. "I'm in it to serve my country."

Tully's law partner, Greg Rinkey, said the firm was happy to have him home again. He said it was a shock when Tully left even though the employees had been preparing for it for awhile. Rinkey said that as managing partner a lot of work fell on his shoulders, but the associates stepped up and took more cases and worked longer hours.

"It's great to have him back," Rinkey said of Tully, whom he has known since they went through ROTC together at Hofstra University. He said having Tully back in time for the holidays was the greatest Christmas present.

The firm has 11 attorneys and Tully said he hopes to add another three within the next 12 months. The firm was recently voted the best place to work in the capital region.

A 1995 graduate of Hofstra University, Tully attended Brooklyn Law School at night while serving as an active duty paratrooper with the U.S. Army from 1995-98. After leaving the Army he joined the National Guard.

A former New York City resident, Tully previously said it was the terror attacks of Sept. 11, 2001 that brought him and his wife to Greene County. At the time of the attacks he was working as a paralegal for Morgan Stanley in an office on the 65th floor of 2 World Trade Center. He and his co-workers made it out of the building safely after the twin towers were struck by hijacked jets. By that evening he was back in his soldier's uniform, serving a month of active duty with the National Guard.