

Personal Trenches

by Matt DeVirgiliis

He deployed for Iraq February 4th. A quick goodbye in Gmail. No mush; no bravery. Just *see you in six*. I marked each month's anniversary with a countdown — 5 months left, 4 months, so on.

The headlines were my source of information and contact. *Four Soldiers Killed in Baghdad* read one. *Seven Ambushed in Fallujah*. I'd read them, look for his name, and maybe clip it out. It put me there; put me in touch with him.

After the first month, he emailed and gave me an update. He ran late-night patrols — left at about 1am — and got back around 2am Eastern Time. He said he'd be online more because Iraqis were taking the calls. Poor bastards were losing legs, getting ripped in half; their parade now. So I'd stay awake until he logged onto Gchat, until I saw the little green light next to his name. Staring. Waiting. Sometimes he came on. Sometimes nothing. Worrying.

The months passed and the contact slowed. He was busy. I was busy. The articles became sparse. Other, better shit happened — Snooki punched a ho.

It had been weeks and I sat in the back of the theater as the credits for *The Hurt Locker* rolled up the screen. Others filed out, talked about the acting and special effects. I stared for a while. *Bitch of a war. Where's the sacrifice? They ate their popcorn, were entertained. I stayed up until 2 every morning.* I wiped my damp cheek with my sleeve and left.

This story was originally published for 52/250.

