



Journalist, UNH Adjunct Professor Discusses Three Tours In Iraq At UNH Nov. 17

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Joined by an Iraqi policeman during a July 2007 patrol, U.S. soldiers from the 82nd Airborne Division pause underneath a railroad bridge on the outskirts of Bayji, Iraq.

DURHAM, NH – Nathan Webster, a graduate of the University of New Hampshire MFA in Writing program and an adjunct professor of English, will present photos and share his thoughts about his three tours as an embedded photojournalist in Iraq at UNH Tuesday, Nov. 17, 2009.

In his talk, Webster will discuss controversial U.S. decisions, the stories behind “the surge,” and the morale of U.S. troops. The event begins at 5 p.m. in the Memorial Union Building Theatre I, and is free and open to the public.

Specifically, Webster will discuss the controversy surrounding the formation of the U.S.-financed Sons of Iraq security force in 2007 and how it affected troop morale. “U.S. soldiers were not impressed with their own government paying people they had been fighting against just months before,” said Webster, who teaches first-year writing at UNH.

By 2008, the Iraqi security program had experienced a fair amount of success so the soldiers generally were more supportive of it, he said. And in 2009, the Iraqi government assumed oversight and funding of the Sons of Iraq. “The question now is whether the Sons of Iraq can be successfully brought under the control of the central Iraqi government. That will be the key to long-term success,” he said.

“Six years we’ve been in Iraq,” Webster said. “Despite all that time, I’m not sure Americans have any concept what this sacrifice and effort looks like up close. I know I didn’t.”

Webster’s first reporting trip was with the 82nd Airborne Division in Bayji, about 125 miles north of Baghdad and home to Iraq’s largest oil refinery. He lived with 100 soldiers for three weeks under almost daily mortar fire. “There was a constant sense of dread,” he said.

In 2008, Webster returned to Iraq, this time to Tarmiyah, about 30 miles outside of Baghdad where he was embedded with the 25th Infantry Division. In 2009, Webster rejoined the 82nd Airborne for his final tour in Iraq in Salman Pak, about 15 miles south of Baghdad.

The Stratham resident’s writing and photography have appeared in newspapers nationwide. He also has written for [longwarjournal.com](#). He is completing his book, “Can’t Give This War Away,” which chronicles his trips to the war zone.

“I went to Iraq because I wanted to write about the average soldiers who were there, for their hometown newspapers. It’s important to tell their stories,” Webster said. “In the classroom, I hope I can use this experience to help inspire and teach young creative non-fiction writers and potential journalists. I think it’s an exciting time for journalism, for those with good ideas who are willing to work hard.”

"But that first night I flew into Iraq, looking down at oil flares venting into the sky? I didn't think it was such a good idea right then," he said. "It was like flying into hell."

The MFA in Writing is offered by the UNH English Department and is the terminal degree in the field of creative writing. Candidates concentrate in fiction, nonfiction, or poetry. The program emphasizes craft, learned in small workshops, and seeks students who plan to become professional writers after taking their degrees.

The University of New Hampshire, founded in 1866, is a world-class public research university with the feel of a New England liberal arts college. A land, sea, and space-grant university, UNH is the state's flagship public institution, enrolling more than 12,200 undergraduate and 2,200 graduate students.

PHOTOS

<http://www.unh.edu/news/img/bridge.jpg>

Joined by an Iraqi policeman during a July 2007 patrol, U.S. soldiers from the 82nd Airborne Division pause underneath a railroad bridge on the outskirts of Bayji, Iraq.

<http://www.unh.edu/news/img/rooftop.jpg>

A morning sandstorm clouds the view of Bayji, Iraq's horizon, as a U.S. soldier weaves through sandbags to descend to his combat outpost's ground level.

<http://www.unh.edu/news/img/82airborne.jpg>

Soldiers of the 82nd Airborne prepare for a morning patrol across Bayji, Iraq. During the 2007 "surge," soldiers manned small outposts like this one, within Iraqi city limits.

<http://www.unh.edu/news/img/morningpatrol.jpg>

Alongside a rural road in Salman Pak, Iraq, a U.S. soldier waits for the start of an early morning patrol in June, 2009.