



What it means to be a Division 1 Athlete!

A Wartime example

(Excerpt from LTC Gadson's Battalion Newsletter written May, 2007 by MAJ James MacGregor
Battalion Executive Officer, 2-32 FA, the week after Greg's incident)

BAGHDAD —

Just about two years ago, your Army selected some of America's finest to join a new battalion; The Second Battalion, 32nd Field Artillery, The PROUD AMERICANS.

At the top of the final roster was #98, Gregory Gadson.



Officially slotted as our Battalion Commander, LTC Gadson, quickly made it clear to all who would listen that he was not building a battalion, he was building a team. Since his days on the gridiron, he has been building teams; it is his calling. I am convinced that, next to his family, he enjoys nothing more than taking a group of individuals and molding them – with dignity, respect, and an indomitable spirit – into something more.

Almost twenty years ago, as his college football career came to a close, someone described LTC Gadson as an All-American. I think they underestimated him. He is All-“People”. Dignity and respect are the words that define him and they define how he performed his mission.

No one in the battalion displayed more trust in the Iraqi people.

No one spent more time in their stores, their homes, and on their sidewalks, just talking or sharing a bite to eat. No one understands better than he that the Iraqi people, like all people, just want a stable job, respect, and peace. No one was quicker to bridge the cultural divide and identify the Iraqi people as the key to accomplishing our mission. Tradition in our Army says that one's success is not defined by how or what we do in our current job, but how and what our team does when we leave. Our Coach trained and mentored each of us. As a result, his success is defined not by our first three months here,

but by how smoothly and professionally his Soldiers and their families performed when he stepped off the field last week. He instilled in us a strong sense of team and developed the plays

we need to react and survive on the battlefield. He leaves us with a game plan focused on the people we serve, not solely on the enemy we fight. He leaves us looking forward, not rearward, focused on the end zone, not the sidelines. He leaves each of us better than we were when we joined the team.

There are many days ahead of us on this mission; some of them may be dark. We will always "continue the mission"; he wants us to do no less. We can grieve LTC Gadson's untimely departure from our huddle, but we must give thanks for his leadership and the "Can Do" fighting spirit he and his family continue to show us. This spirit carried him on the football field, it carried them through the trauma of last week, and it will carry us from the second quarter to the end of this struggle.



University of Dayton and Ohio State ROTC Cadets visit LTC Greg Gadson at Walter Reed Army Medical Center in November, 2007

Injured Iraq war vet inspires Giants

Bob Glauber *January 29, 2008*

PHOENIX

May 7, 2007, Baghdad: Lt. Col. Gregory Gadson is driving back from a memorial service honoring two American soldiers killed by a roadside bomb. Shortly after 9:30 p.m., he notices the flash of light just outside his vehicle. Then he hears the sound.

He knows what is about to happen next.

Seconds after the blast, he is thrown from his vehicle and lay on the ground. He is surprised that there is no pain. He quickly loses consciousness.





Three days later, as close friend and former Army football teammate Will Huff holds Gadson's hand on the airlift to a military base in Landstuhl, Germany, the words Gadson had told Huff keep coming back.

"What I'm doing might get me killed or maimed some day," Huff remembers Gadson telling him. "But it's the only way we're going to win this war."

Huff quietly wept as he sat beside the unresponsive Gadson.

Feb. 3, 2008: As the Giants line up against the Patriots for Super Bowl XLII on Sunday, Gadson will be on the sideline, watching the game from his wheelchair, a million thoughts and emotions racing through his mind as he ponders his unlikely journey: from being minutes away from dying in the streets of Baghdad to one of the greatest sports spectacles on Earth. And why he has somehow come to serve as an inspiration for the Giants on their improbable run to the Super Bowl.

It will be exactly a year to the date Gadson left for Iraq.

"You think about the fact that you might not come back," Gadson said. "You certainly don't think, 'Will I come back with no legs?' It's not anything I could have comprehended."

Life changed in a flash

May 7, 2007. His life had changed forever.

"We're coming back from the service, and I'm thinking about these two young men who won't live their lives," he said. "You think about all the lives that will be affected because they're gone."

"Then I saw the flash, it was instantaneous out of the corner of my eye. We have a noise canceling intercom system with our vehicles, but the explosion was very loud and still, there was a very sharp 'pop.' I knew exactly what it was ...

"I remember being angry and pissed off, because I knew we'd been hit. It's like that scene on the beach in 'Saving Private Ryan,' where there's that explosion and things slow down. That's just what it was like. A thousand thoughts go through your mind, and it's like time slows down ...

"I'm laying on the ground, thinking, 'I don't have my rifle with me.' But I wasn't in pain and I didn't realize I had any leg injuries. On a subconscious level, though, I must have known I wasn't in good shape, because I remember thinking, 'I don't want to die.'"

He came very close. He was evacuated within 45 minutes by helicopter to a hospital in the Green Zone, and doctors needed 70 pints of blood to save his life. The injuries to both legs were severe, though. Both had to be amputated.



Meets with team

Sept. 22, 2007: It is the night before the Giants play the Redskins at FedEx Field, and Giants coach Tom Coughlin is speaking to his players about the importance of the game. The Giants were 0-2 and had given up a combined 80 points in losses to Dallas and Green Bay. Coughlin stops talking and announces to his players that he has asked Lt. Col. Gadson to address the team.

Gadson rolls his wheelchair to the front of the meeting room. The players fall silent.

"I remember that meeting like it was yesterday," Giants guard Rich Seubert said.

"He talked about the importance of sticking together as a team, that you're going to have some tough times, but you have to just battle your way through it. He talked about fighting for every yard."

In the back of the room, Giants receivers coach Mike Sullivan grew emotional as he listened to his former Army teammate. It was Sullivan who had asked Gadson to speak to the players, not only as a way to inspire the team but to help Gadson work through the physical and emotional difficulties.

Sullivan and Gadson were teammates at Army in the late 1980s, Sullivan a defensive back from Santa Maria, Calif., and Gadson a linebacker from Chesapeake, Va.

They were nearly inseparable as teammates, and were on the Army team that nearly shocked Alabama in the 1988 Sun Bowl.

"Greg was one of those players who probably could have played at a lot of [big-time] schools," Sullivan said. "Most service academy players are the tough, smart overachievers, and Greg had those qualities. But he was strong and fast and was a playmaker. He stood head and shoulders above the rest of the freshmen."

Gadson might have played elsewhere, but was never asked.

"I was a 190-pound defensive end and I played with my heart, but no other Division I schools wanted to give me a chance besides West Point," Gadson said. "So maybe if I'd played at Virginia, I wouldn't have been as successful."

Gadson shared some of his football knowledge with the Giants during that team meeting, but it was more about how the players needed each other to succeed as a team. And after sharing his personal story of how he'd nearly died, the players and coaches were left in awe. Receiver Plaxico Burress, who grew up not far from Gadson in Virginia Beach, seemed particularly moved.

The next day, with Gadson on the Giants' sideline as their honorary guest, the Giants rallied from a 17-3 halftime deficit to beat the Redskins. Burress, playing on a sore ankle, had three drops and no catches in the first half, but produced five receptions for 86 yards in the second, including a 33-yard touchdown catch with 5:32 to play.

His spirit touches all

After he scored, Burress ran over and gave Gadson the ball.

"You see a guy go through the things that he has been through and he is in such good spirits," Burress said. "It was just unbelievable to come across a person like that who went through a tremendous change in his life. I have never met somebody like that who had a high spirit like nothing was wrong and I was like, 'Wow. I have a little ankle injury, I have to go



Gadson speaks to Tom Coughlin and the Giants in the locker room before the Giants started their 10-game road win streak at the Redskins on Sept. 23.

out here and give it my best.' I tried to go out and play, not thinking about it and all I thought about when I scored that touchdown was that I wanted to find him to give him that football."

Burrress isn't the only Giants player touched by Gadson's spirit.

"He's very inspirational for us," center Shaun O'Hara said. "To see a guy going through all the things he's going through, and despite all that, he's back out there pushing forward. Great men are too rare in our society today. It's great to have a guy like him in our corner."

Gadson's deeply emotional impact on the Giants is no surprise to Huff, a former Bay Shore High football player who is now in the Army's Asymmetric Warfare Group and regularly travels to Iraq. Huff believes the Giants - or anyone else, for that matter - don't know the full extent of what Gadson's experience has meant. Mostly because Gadson himself would never admit it.

"Greg's battalion was trained to provide artillery support when the infantry needed indirect fire," Huff said. "But when it came time to be deployed in Iraq, they gave him a whole different set of missions, more of what was given to traditional infantry. That meant he faced a much more difficult set of circumstances. That's when he told me that line that I still think about to this day. 'What I'm doing might get me killed or maimed some day, but it's the only way we're going to win this war.'"

Huff said Gadson regularly engaged local citizens in an effort to tamp down violence, and the efforts paid off.

"Because of his contact with the locals, the violence was reduced greatly, and it was a microcosm of the success that 'the surge' is now showing," Huff said. "Greg was ahead of his time, and it was like that because of his own willingness to share the hardships."

Huff recently visited the area where Gadson was in charge, and reports that his efforts continue to reap benefits.

"That's something I know he's very, very proud of," Huff said. "The true impact of Greg Gadson lasted far longer than his physical presence."

Gadson insists his story is not unique.

"I'm one of many soldiers and Marines, airmen, and sailors that are fighting for our nation and I'm one of many who has been injured," said Gadson, who has been fitted with prosthetic legs and through extensive rehabilitation has resumed walking on a limited basis. "It's important that we don't forget there are a lot of folks out there like me. Just remember us. And remember those who are continuing without fanfare to do what our nation has asked us to do."

Honorary captain

Jan. 23, 2008: Gadson, an honorary Giants captain for the NFC Championship Game against the Packers at frigid Lambeau Field, sat on the sideline next to his 13-year-old son Jaelen. He was offered a spot in a luxury box, but Gadson chose to remain on the field for nearly the entire game.

He watched as the Giants staged a remarkable upset of the Packers. The game went into overtime, and Giants cornerback Corey Webster intercepted a Brett Favre pass. Webster ran off the field and handed the ball to Gadson.

"That was his ball, and I know it meant a lot to him," Gadson said. "It was very touching."

On the Giants' next series, Lawrence Tynes kicked a 47-yard field goal to win the game and put the Giants in the Super Bowl.

Gadson was welcomed into the winners' locker room, clutching the ball Webster had given him. "I've been able to draw strength from my newfound family with the Giants," he said.

"The inspiration goes both ways."



Eli Manning celebrates NFC title with Gadson and his son Jaelen.