



## D.C. Judge Returns from War Duty

By Dorothy Rowley

AFRO Staff Writer



Judge Robert R. Rigsby (Courtesy Photo/Rigsby Family)



Judge Robert R. Rigsby, who spent six months deployed in the Middle East, was reunited with his family three weeks ago. While on tour he tried about 25 court martial cases and was the only judge in the theater of Iraq, Kuwait and Afghanistan. (Courtesy Photo/Rigsby Family)

(December 2, 2009) - When Judge Robert R. Rigsby, 48, was sent to the Middle East six months ago, "It was the first time the District of Columbia ever had a judge deployed so no one really truly knew what to expect," said the U.S. Army Reserve colonel.

Now, having resumed his bench at the District of Columbia Superior Court, the longtime jurist told the 'AFRO' in a candid interview that he has nothing but pride when it comes to serving his country. He also said that unbeknown to many, that's the same sentiment expressed by the thousands of young men and women being hurdled to duty in the war-torn nations of Iraq, Kuwait and Afghanistan.

While away on tour, Rigsby missed both his wife and his son's birthdays as well as his son's last and first days of school this year. But he said neither ever said to him, "Don't do this." Said Rigsby, "They were committed to the idea of their husband and father being a soldier and that we have to do what we have to do...because the oath that [I] took as a judge, is the same oath that I took as a United States Army officer 28 years ago."

**AFRO:** Welcome home...What were your duties?

**Rigsby:** "I was the full military judge for the theater of war for Kuwait, Iraq and Afghanistan. I tried cases in every courthouse that was on a military base and it was the first time the Army had ever put a judge in the middle of a war, full time. I tried about 25 courts-martial and I'd get on a helicopter or airplane or convoy and I'd go to these different places and try cases. I was very, very busy for the time that I was there."

**AFRO:** Did your deployment put you a unique position? Just how many judges get deployed during a war?

**Rigsby:** "Before I did this, the Army would send judges down for specific trials and then they would fly back to Germany, Europe—wherever they came from. But I was the only judge in the theater of Iraq, Kuwait and Afghanistan, so my job was to go around and try all those cases. But I guess the experiment worked because now they're deploying a judge there full-time for a year at a time."

**AFRO:** What's it like over there now?

**Rigsby:** "It's an active embattled area. The war is an asymmetrical war, which means that it's all around you all the time. In Iraq it wasn't as bad as it was, from what I understand, a couple years ago. You'd hear the mortars going off and the bombs and all that stuff so it's not as bad as it was. In Afghanistan it's a little bit more dicier, but our kids who come from all over the country from Mississippi to New York, California to D.C., are doing a wonderful job actively participating in the war. It's like 130 to 140 degrees at times in summer and they're wearing full jackets and battle vests and not complaining at all. They are some of the bravest people that I have seen in my entire life."

**AFRO:** What's the sentiment among Black soldiers serving in the war?

**Rigsby:** "It's no different than anybody else. Overseas, there's no color – soldiers are soldiers. My wife will joke with me about this, but a number of my fraternity brothers were over there with me and it feels like Qs [members of Omega Psi Phi] kind of gravitate to war. They're all very committed from the sergeants I met to the truck drivers to the frat brothers who are aviators that I met, to the doctors – they're all committed to prosecuting the war."

**AFRO:** What kept you going the six months you were deployed?

**Rigsby:** "You learn to rely on your faith when you're overseas. I got a number of e-mails from my church and fraternity brothers back here."

**AFRO:** Are you up for another tour of duty?

**Rigsby:** "When I was asked to go, the chief judge of the Army said they wanted to do something they'd never done before. They wanted to put a judge in theater and asked if I would go. I said, 'absolutely,' and I would go again in a heartbeat because of the tremendous respect I have for our country and for the tremendous respect I have for the oath that I've taken. Also, because of the support my family received while I was gone. My church family, my court family and my fraternity really looked out for my family. It was just unbelievable."

**AFRO:** What words of encouragement would you offer our young people who are being deployed?

**Rigsby:** "I'd tell them to remember why we're doing this; to remember the reason why we're fighting a war. Remember that we were attacked and that it's important that we all participate in the safety and security of our country. Also, that it is important that we continue to make an impact in our community. It doesn't necessarily have to be in the military. They could be a lawyer or street sweeper, but the idea is to do something that is greater than yourself."

[Share](#) |