



# Highway to Hell: Dispatches from a Mercenary in Iraq

*John Geddes*

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“They come from across the globe: former special forces soldiers from Britain, the U.S., Australia, Canada, New Zealand, and every country on the European mainland. There are Gurkhas from the Himalayan foothills and Fijians from the South Sea Islands. There are men who learned their skills with the Japanese antiterrorist paramilitaries and many from southern Africa. There was even one guy who’d served in the Chinese People’s Army and Chilean commandos and Sri Lankan antiterrorist experts who joined the mercenary gold rush to Iraq. They don’t share a common ideology or common loyalty, but what they do share is a thirst for adventure and a hunger for big bucks; Iraq is the one place they are certain to find both...”

For the first time a private military contractor delivers a frontline report on life as a hired gun in Iraq.

*“Anyone entering Iraq must travel the road from Amman to Baghdad along the Fallujah bypass and around the Ramadi Ring Road. It’s the most dangerous trunk route in the world, used as a personal fairground shooting gallery by insurgents and Islamists with rocket-propelled grenades and Kalashnikovs. For newcomers to the country it’s terrifying – but hell only really begins when that first journey ends...”*

Amidst the ongoing controversy over the widespread employment of private military contractors in Iraq, *Highway to Hell* is a mercenary’s graphic, first-person exposé of life in “the second biggest army in Iraq.” Not since the days when the East India Company used soldiers of fortune to depose fabulously wealthy maharajas and conquer India for Great Britain, and mercenaries fought George Washington’s Continental Army for King George, has such a large and lethal independent fighting force been assembled. Hired to do everything from securing American bases and supply routes to guarding the thousands of government officials, executives, aid workers, journalists, and other civilians now populating the Middle East’s most notorious target range, today’s clandestine soldiers of fortune earn up to \$1,000 a day, while remaining almost entirely immune from government oversight, military authority, or Iraqi law

John Geddes, a former warrant officer in Britain’s elite SAS and veteran of several wars, became a private military contractor in Iraq immediately following President George W. Bush’s declaration of the end of hostilities in early May 2003. In *Highway to Hell* Geddes gives an unsparing account of his harrowing, often bloody, and occasionally absurd adventures in the wild west of Iraq. After a chaotic chase on the Ramadi Ring Road, he takes out insurgents with a sniper rifle (while nursing the mother of all hangovers). He provides security to a cameraman during to a shootout on the rooftop of a Baghdad hotel alongside Kalashnikov-wielding Iraqi waiters (and accepts a marriage proposal that is almost drowned out by RPG fire). He witnesses American contractors shooting and pushing other vehicles off the road first and asking questions later (or, rather, not at all). From rushing a TV crew into the mayhem of a suicide bombing’s aftermath to accompanying an oil executive to a meeting in the heart of darkness of Sadr City, Geddes presents a stunning, chilling inside look at the face of contemporary warfare.

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