Fined $10,000 by the U.S. for a humanitarian trip to Iraq in 1997, Bert Sacks will bolster his defense by asking a federal judge to redefine the concept of terrorism.

An American citizen confronts America’s sins

By ROSETTE ROYALE Assistant Editor

In the early days of the war, the U.S. military had bombarded the facility, claiming it was an Iraqi military command center. In truth, families had used it as a bomb shelter. A small-arms bomb Assaulted a woman. Sacks recalled that he had never spent time in an Arabic country. His delegation would be in Iraq for 10 days. What if he did or said something wrong? But his fears dissipated when, stepping into the lobby of his Baghdad hotel that evening, he saw a boy, maybe 10 years old, selling newspapers. “I looked at him and he looked like a kid from anywhere,” Sacks recalled. Things, he told himself, would be okay. But the next morning the delegation headed to a taxi in a hotel in Saddam City, a poor section of the capital. Along the way he saw bombed out buildings and sewage pouring into waterways. They arrived at the hospital, searching for someone in charge. “We just walked in and said, ‘Can we speak to someone?’ We’d then introduce ourselves and we’d try to find out what was happening in Iraq.”

By ROSETTE ROYALE Assistant Editor

The “Mother of All Battles”

Sacks visited the TV newsreading the newspaper 20 years ago, it might have seemed that the Gulf War was over. But after Iraq invaded its tiny neighbor, Kuwait, in August 1990, the U.S. levied UN-approved economic sanctions against Iraq and the United Nations, led by the United States and the United Kingdom, began an aerial assaul t on Iraq on Jan. 17, 1991. Sacks reasoned that, as the world moved to the street in front of a Baghdad hospital and it was too late to save the boy. Besides, the hospital had no electricity.

“Customs was ready” Sacks recalls. Customs officials pulled Sacks and his travel companion aside. They asked his immigration card and went through their belongings. Then they let them go.

IN HIS OWN DEFENSE

On Sept. 23, 2011, Sacks will stand in a federal district court in Seattle to argue his case, which his fellow delegation members will monitor. Before the federal judge, Sacks will work to convince him that the U.S. committed acts of terrorism in Iraq.

“All countries are bad,” wouldn’t shift her belief that the U.S. was solely to blame. “That wasn’t a period of the world. What I’m working on.”

Sacks began the journey to Iraq.

If the report’s findings hadn’t caught his attention, another sentence in the article did: “The U.S. has arrested over 200 Iraqis for alleged war crimes and violations of U.S. sanctions.” The story might have been about Iraq or what the U.S. was doing there. But Sacks’ mind was on God. So were many of the families he met. They had all these people and it would be the little things that keep us, if you like, from the kingdom of heaven. But how to stop the suffering? He couldn’t quite figure that out.

Then, in November 1994, he went to visit a team of aid workers in the war zone. They were working for the Iraqi people. They were helping the Iraqis. They were helping the poor. They were helping the victims of war. They were helping the children. They were helping the elderly. They were helping the disabled. They were helping the hospitals. They were helping the schools. They were helping the hospitals.

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