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## American heroes.

In Iraq, 140,000 U.S. troops who were told they would be greeted as liberators are bogged down in a troubled effort to bring some stability, if not democracy. They won't be getting much Thanksgiving downtime. In the Green Zone in Baghdad, turkey and trimmings will be served from noon on. But it will be a working day. "This is a war zone," Army Maj. Vince Mitchell says.

Some extra efforts are being made to get troops in touch with their families. The [Freedom Calls Foundation](#), a non-profit organization based in New York, is helping to connect troops with [their loved ones in Maine](#) on Thanksgiving night on a giant video screen.

But it's hard to disguise the reality that for the troops in Iraq and for their families back in the USA, holidays such as Thanksgiving are emotionally tough — particularly for those on second, third, or fourth tours of duty.

That's reason enough to be grateful to them. But there's another reason, too.

A generation ago, many people spurned troops coming home from Vietnam. Angry protesters failed — disgracefully — to distinguish soldiers honorably serving their country from the policymakers who so foolishly sent 58,000 of those soldiers to their deaths. War supporters stoked the anger by insisting that support for the troops and for the war were one and the same. War atrocities, particularly the My Lai massacre in which dozens of innocent women and children were killed by rampaging American GIs, deepened the problem.

Thankfully, that doesn't seem to be happening today. Though opinion polls show that most Americans now believe the Iraq war was a mistake, there is no similar anger at the men and women fighting the war.

It's important that it stays that way. For the most part, the U.S. troops in Iraq have acquitted themselves well (the Abu Ghraib prison scandal and two distressing murder cases are glaring exceptions). They signed up for various reasons, but patriotism was high on many of their lists. The blame for Iraq war failures should go where it belongs: to the political and military leaders, not the troops who find themselves in an increasingly difficult and ill-defined mission.

Talk at many tables this Thanksgiving will likely turn to the Iraq war. Debates may become heated. But it's worth also remembering those enduring the holiday in combat fatigues in a forbidding country far from their families, and giving thanks for their sacrifice.