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📅 Oct 17, 2014 👤 Posted By Joe Sills ([Http://Point5digital.com/Tn/Author/Joessillswnws-Com/](http://Point5digital.com/Tn/Author/Joessillswnws-Com/)) 🖨️ 👁️ 667

## For Bryan Hayes and the Retrievers, Hatchie Fall Fest a Long Journey Home (<http://point5digital.com/tn/brownsville/brownsville-news/bryan-hayes-fall-fest/>)

MOSUL, Iraq — A sandstorm whips around the 278th Armored Cavalry Regiment. Inside a [MRAP](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/MRAP) (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/MRAP>)—an armored gun truck designed to withstand improvised explosive device attacks—Bryan Hayes wipes the sand from his goggles.

“We always dealt with sandstorms,” he says. “Always wore goggles or sunglasses.”

At almost 40, this is Hayes’ first deployment to Iraq. By day, he serves as an infantry officer in the 278th Tennessee National Guard, his hands gripping a gun, his eyes scanning the desert horizon for America’s enemies. But by night, his hands grip a pen, and his mind’s eye turns to the horizon of a cotton field in West Tennessee. The dusty mire of sweat and sand at the 278th’s firebase south of Mosul give way to the sweet smell of honeysuckle and the blaze of summer sun touching down over rolling hills.

In his mind, Hayes pictured the scraggly beard and long hair he had back home; in his hands, he pictured his father’s 1976 Fender box guitar. The one found at a yard sale. That guitar was his first taste of music; his first roadmap to songwriting. It was 6,000 miles away.

That was 2009.

Five years later, Hayes and his band will headline the stage at Brownsville’s Hatchie Fall Fest.

The old box guitar will likely be there. And yes, some of his songs are the product of that pen so many miles away in Mosul; others though, sprouted just feet away from the main stage on the east side of court square.

Hayes grew up in Brownsville, played ball in Brownsville, started playing music in Brownsville, and got to Iraq from Brownsville.

“Holy cow, it’s a big deal,” Hayes says. “We’ve wanted to play Fall Fest for several years. Once we got booked we were super excited. It’s going to be a blast. You’ve got two stages, you’ve got stuff going on all day long. It’s a big deal.”

## The Music

The music of Bryan Hayes and the Retrievers isn't rock—it's got a twang. But it isn't country either—it's got a groove. What Hayes plays then, is the perfect personification of his roots in a town stuck between the gritty rock and soul of Memphis and the twangy songwriter's paradise of Nashville.

Hayes calls it Americana. You can call it the sound of Brownsville.

Inside "What is Gone," (<http://bryanhayesmusic.com/track/704320/what-is-gone?autostart=true>) you'll hear work shifts turning to years at Haywood Company. You'll see a young boy growing up by changing ball cap colors and pitching styles at Volunteer Park.

"Mississippi" (<http://bryanhayesmusic.com/track/704321/mississippi?autostart=true>) could be the story of everyone who ever left their hometown. When Hayes pines, *Oh riverside, your lights they do shine, but through the glow my soul I don't find*, you know what riverside he's talking about.

It's the story of every Brownsvillian seeking fortune in Memphis or Nashville, *trying to make it out here on their own*, then discovering that the country—all along—was where their fortune had been all along.

Lyricaly, Hayes channels a lighter side of Jason Isbell, or a grittier side of Drew Holcomb. Where Isbell often delves into the bitter side of heartbreak (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zUedNbfQFSs>), Hayes will grab a lesson from it. Where Holcomb might opt for a softer metaphor, Hayes plays his best hand by "keeping it real." When he does, Hayes can hang toe-to-toe with the more well-known Alabama and Tennessee lyricists.

The songwriting, Hayes says, came from an old college neighbor in Memphis. "There was this guy from Dallas who lived next door, and he would play those old Texas songwriters like Guy Clark, John Prine and Robert Earl Keen. One Christmas, I decided to learn how to play guitar and it only took learning two or three chords before I started the songwriting."

By now, the sandstorms of Iraq have given way to the sands of New Mexico and Texas, where the Retrievers take to the road playing venues across America. Hayes says the band just got back from a 10-day Texas tour, but they go as far north as Wisconsin and still smooth the roads of the south's old blues trails in Mississippi, Alabama, Georgia and Florida. You can follow the journey on the band's Instagram account (<http://instagram.com/bryanhayesmusic>). Hayes estimates the full band plays 50-60 shows a year, but acoustic gigs from solo, duo and trio shows bring that total up to about 175. At full-strength, the Retrievers are a seven-piece band, but Hayes says the group is constantly evolving. "Some of them have been with us for ten years, some of them just came on this year."

"We try to be on the road somewhere every weekend," says Hayes. "Our goal is to be full-time blue collar musicians, consistently doing 200 shows a year as a full band."

Some of those shows are long forgotten towns under the shade of a local farmer's market. Others take the band to lighted venues packed with thousands like the Levitt Shell in Memphis.

This weekend, they'll bring their blue-collar Americana music back to the place where it all began—the epicenter of Brownsville, Tennessee.





Bryan Hayes and the Retrievers take the stage at 8:00 p.m. on Saturday. You can listen to and download their songs at [bryanhayesmusic.com](http://www.bryanhayesmusic.com/). (<http://www.bryanhayesmusic.com/>)

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### About Joe Sills

Joe Sills is a staff reporter for WTBC 95.3FM in Browns Valley, TN. You can hear him on-air weekdays at 8am on 95.3. You can find him on Twitter @joesills.

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