

**MINNESOTA
IN THE GLOBAL WAR
ON TERRORISM**

POST-9/11 PROFILES

Published by the Minnesota Military and Veterans Museum

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Preface

Minnesotans were in the World Trade Center towers, on the planes, and in the Pentagon on the morning of September 11, 2001. They were also on the front lines of the war that followed. We at the Minnesota Military and Veterans Museum have explored these facts in detail over the last five years, facts that have taken on an ever-greater urgency and importance. I am grateful for all who shared their stories and photographs.

We were inspired by the work of the 9/11 Commission. They distinguished their report from that of other national commissions by their clear commitment to create a book that people would actually read. After its release on July 22, 2004, the Commission's report became a runaway bestseller.

We were also inspired by the much earlier, local efforts of others who chronicled Minnesotans' war experiences, resulting in the books *Minnesota in the Civil and Indian Wars: 1861-65* and *Minnesota in the War with Germany*. In many ways, we have technological advantages these teams from the 1870s and 1920s did not have. But as a present-day museum professional, I am also aware of the technological disadvantages resulting from our electronic age. The Post-9/11 messages and photographs we cherish are often stored in a virtual 'cloud' rather than a photo album or even a shoebox. There is an ephemeral quality to our post-9/11 narratives that demands our attention before the next computer upgrade or latest social media launch, lest they be lost to time.

The enduring Civil War letters and World War I photos in our Museum archive continue to serve us well but what will we have to share with our great-grandchildren of the post-9/11 experience?

The breadth and depth of these timeless treasures inspired our work. But what informed it was an appreciation for what a researcher might want to know 80 years from now.

In a practical sense, we do this every December as we continue to Never Forget Pearl Harbor and the resulting world war. In many ways, the content we've included in this publication is a response to what we wish we had from the days and months following December 7, 1941, or April 12, 1861. If we could, what would we ask Minnesotans who lived 80 or 160 years ago? What would someone in 2101 ask of us?

Compiling these profiles has been made possible through the extraordinary contributions of Al Zdon and Tim Engstrom, longtime editors of the Minnesota Legionnaire newspaper. As such, they have been reporting these post-9/11 stories for the last 20 years. Much of this content is based on oral history interviews. Some comments have been edited for clarity. Brian Leehan and the 34th Division Association have been an important part of this process as well.

Leading up to the publication of this first edition, we broadcast a statewide documentary, convened a series of virtual roundtables, and hosted a traveling exhibition over a three-year period. A primary objective of the traveling exhibit was to spend time in communities and gather stories first-hand. As a kick-off to exhibit openings, we often stressed the dual purpose of our presence. We hoped to learn as much from the community as they would by seeing and hearing the Post-9/11 Minnesota stories in the exhibit.

We also worked closely with the Minnesota Department of Veteran Affairs' 9/11 and Global War on Terrorism Remembrance Task Force. We were in contact with the state's County Veteran Service Officers and we employed a team of researchers from Minnesota State University Mankato to canvass county historical societies, Legion Halls and VFW posts, local radio stations and newspapers.

Work on the second edition of this book began the day this one was published. A robust online presence complements this completed work. Please use the QR code below to add your own stories and photos and find the latest on Minnesota in the Global War on Terrorism.

Randal Dietrich
Executive Director
MN Military & Veterans Museum



Jack Baumbach

Dr. Kyle Ward



Foreword

By Dr. Kyle Ward

Minnesota State University, Mankato

In September 1990, PBS began airing the nine-part Ken Burns documentary on the Civil War. Like millions of other Americans, I found myself glued to the TV watching each of these episodes tell a series of important and interesting stories about one of America's most important historical events. Having heard rumors about a Minnesota ancestor who had served during the Civil War, I talked to my grandfather who told me that it was his grandfather who had served. My grandfather remembered a couple of random stories that he had heard as a child but beyond that, had nothing else to share about this connection to the Civil War. Since I was a college student, studying to become a future Social Studies teacher, I was intrigued and quickly went to the university library to learn more. After a quick search on the library computer, I was sent to the third floor of the library to find a book titled *Minnesota in the Civil and Indian Wars, 1861-1865*.

There, on page 679, I quickly found my great-great-grandfather's name and learned that he had served with the Third Battery of Light Artillery during the Civil War. Fortunately for me, this book that I held also had a brief history of this unit along with the list of the men who had served in this particular unit. This discovery led to a series of conversations with family members, trips to places he had been and increased my lifelong interest in genealogy and the Civil War.

Fast forward to 1997, when I was a graduate student working on my master's degree in history, I found myself studying the history of America's foreign policy during the late 1890s and early 1900s. After going down a few rabbit holes, trying to find a topic for my thesis, I once again found myself in a university library, this time looking up the subject of Minnesota and the Spanish-American War, with the hope of finding some background information that might inspire my graduate research. Just as before, I quickly discovered a book titled *Minnesota in the Spanish-American and the Philippine Insurrection*. After checking this book out and reading it I quickly learned the story of the 13th Minnesota Volunteer Infantry Regiment and their role in both the Spanish-American and Philippine-American Wars, 1898-99. Much like finding my family in the Civil War, reading the story of the men from Minnesota and their service to the nation during this time, I was inspired to write my master's thesis on the role of the 13th Minnesota and then later have a book published about them.

Today, I am a professor at Minnesota State University, Mankato, where I have the pleasure of working with future Social Studies teachers and several history majors. On one recent occasion, I had a group of students who were taking a course in the history of World War I from another professor on campus. Early in the semester, some of the students came to me and were trying to figure out what their research project should be for that particular semester. Without giving it much thought, I automatically sent them over to the university library and told them to find two books, one titled *Minnesota in the War with Germany*, and the other *History of the 151st Field Artillery*. Each student later came back and reported that they were doing research on topics related to the 151st, disease in the training camps, and Minnesota's reaction to the draft. Without these books on Minnesota and World War I, it is safe to say that these budding historians would have found themselves doing research on something much larger and more generic in scale.

I give these anecdotal stories as a way to introduce this book because what Randal Dietrich and his team of authors, historians and researchers have done is not just compile the stories about Minnesota's role and connections to 9/11 and the Global War on Terror, but rather they are helping inspire future historians, teachers, genealogists and people just seeking to learn more about this topic. Their attempt at trying to write a single volume on what can only be described as an unwieldy and often confusing story about what happened on 9/11 and the subsequent wars that followed is extremely commendable.

As can be seen in the first part of this essay, Minnesota has had a tradition of compiling and writing the history of our state after major conflicts, going all the way back to the Civil War. Without these books one has to wonder how many stories would have been lost to history or how many books, research papers, and articles would not have been written using these books as a springboard for further research. In years past, there was the Minnesota War Records Commission that would help fund and organize the research for each of these books. Sadly, after World War I, no more of these state-commissioned books would be published. This obviously then means that there is no official compilation of records, documents, and eyewitness accounts from Minnesotans who served during World War II, the Korean War, the Vietnam War, and the Gulf War.

Granted, there have been several books written about Minnesota during these wars, as well as biographies about individuals telling their personal stories, but none with an official backing of the state, in which historians and researchers try to tell the broad, extensive, and often confusing stories about Minnesota during these historic times. Therefore, there is no

one book that future generations can go to learn more about their family during this time. There is no one book that historians can go to get an overview of how these wars impacted Minnesota and how Minnesotans impacted events during that time. And there is no one book for anyone just generally interested in these topics to quickly learn more about what happened, from a Minnesota perspective.

This is why it is so admirable that Randal Dietrich and his team have re-invigorated this idea and are writing this book specifically about Minnesota and 9/11 and the Global War on Terror. They have taken on this herculean task with the sole purpose of replicating what the previous state commissions did, which has been a huge help to me and numerous other researchers, genealogists and historians over the years.

To be clear, just like previous books that discussed Minnesotans' roles in different armed conflicts, this book does not profess to cover every story of every Minnesotan who served or participated in these events. With that in mind, the authors of this book decided to try to put things in context so that current and future readers could see some of the bigger picture. Both 9/11 and the Global War on Terror were major global events and understanding the causes and effects of all this will one day take a mountain of researched books, academic articles and documentaries in order to try to piece it all together.

This is what makes this book so important because it clearly and concisely takes all of these major events, what happened on and before 9/11, the major military operations during both conflicts, and even what was happening at home and interjects a Minnesota perspective onto all of it. Furthermore, in order to truly tell this story, they made an effort to be representative of all the branches of the military, found representation from various ethnic and racial groups, interviewed people of different age groups and genders, as well as civilians who served in government or were at home trying to do their part.

As I mentioned earlier, I work at Minnesota State University, Mankato and as I write this (in the summer of 2023) I am reminded that the majority of my students were born after the events of 9/11 transpired. Which means that they have what those of us in Social Studies education refer to as 'textbook' memories of this event as well as the start of both the Afghan and Iraqi Wars. This generation was not alive to have their own memories of these events but rather now have to rely on textbooks, movies, documentaries, or stories shared by older family and friends. Due to the fact that both of these wars lasted a long time, most of my students today are aware that there were recent conflicts in those areas, and/or may have

had family or friends who served, but that is about the extent of their knowledge.

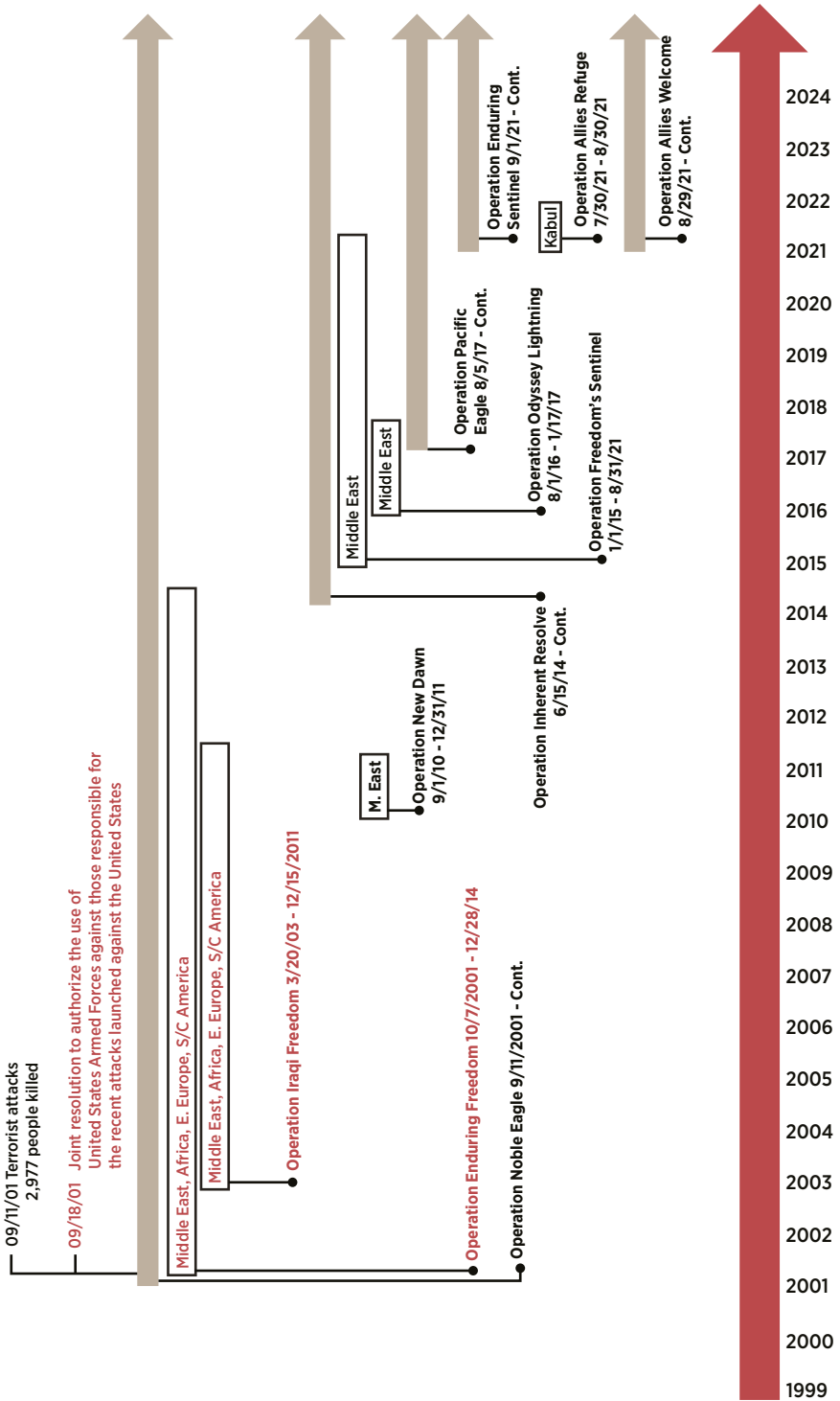
Being aware of all of this, I was therefore thrilled when MSU was able to partner with the Minnesota Military and Veterans Museum and host their traveling exhibit *Resolute: Minnesota Stories of 9/11 & The War*. The exhibit was in the ballroom in the student union, which is in the heart of the campus, making it easily accessible for students and people from the community to visit. What I learned from this exhibit is that our college-aged students have little to no background on many of these events and that there are a number of people from around the state who either have a vested interest or were generally curious about the connection between Minnesota and these historic events. During the four-day run of this event, those of us who were involved heard everything from questions coming from students, who were trying to figure out “which Iraq War” this was (confused with the Gulf War, 1991), to veterans and family members eager to share their stories about their roles during this time.

Again, this is why this book is so important. Due to its large scope and interest in the specific stories shared by Minnesotans, it will, much like the exhibit held on campus, try to introduce these stories to future generations and give more information to a wider community generally interested in this topic. This book deals with how Minnesotans, both civilians and those serving in the military, reacted to the tragic events of 9/11. Readers will also see the stories of Minnesotans who made sacrifices on the hijacked airplanes that day, at the Twin Towers in New York, and at the Pentagon. While other Minnesotans showed up after all the devastation to help try to get things back to normal or quickly joined the military so they could do their part. And unlike the previous state commissioned books, which really pushed a very heroic and mostly positive theme about Minnesota and America’s roles in those wars, this book is willing to dive into topics usually not talked about in works like this. From soldiers dealing with mental and emotional disorders (such as PTSD or post-traumatic stress disorder), to veterans with physical disabilities who had to adjust to a new life once they got back to Minnesota. You will also learn about how these mental and physical traumas impacted families and communities at home who were also dealing with their own stress in their own ways.

Randal Dietrich and his team have taken on a task given to them by the state of Minnesota and have created a document that will survive the test of time, as well as become a testament to the men and women who served the state of Minnesota and the nation, be it either in the military or as civilians.

I truly hope that future historians, researchers, and genealogists find their way to this book, that it helps clarify a rather confusing time, and that it then inspires them to learn more about these topics and continue to research and write about these men and women from Minnesota as a way to keep their stories alive for future generations. For that reason alone, this book deserves to be read and put on the shelves next to all the other great books about Minnesota's roles in various wars as a way to continue to honor and commemorate the sacrifices made by all who are reflected in its pages.

GLOBAL WAR ON TERRORISM TIMELINE OF OPERATIONS



Introduction

Mariah Jacobsen

When I received an emailed letter from Minnesota Department of Veterans Affairs (MDVA) Commissioner Larry Herke on August 31, 2020, I excitedly opened it. “Thank you for submitting your application for appointment to the 9/11 and Global War on Terrorism Task Force,” it read. “Your application stood out to us and we would like to offer you an appointment to the Task Force as one of its Public Members.” Of course, this news was thrilling to me. Within a matter of hours, I responded back, “It is with great humility that I accept this appointment for the duration of the position’s term.”

So began my nearly two year journey serving on MDVA’s Task Force—an experience that I frequently describe as one of the greatest honors of my life.

The Task Force’s mission was three-fold: (1) commemorate the 20th anniversary of 9/11 on September 11, 2021 in Minnesota; (2) identify speakers and provide educational resources to the community; and (3) create a definitive written history of Minnesotans impacted by 9/11 and the Global War on Terrorism that ensued. The Task Force’s formation coincided with the 20th anniversary of 9/11 which was of course a meaningful event in and of itself. But perhaps just as important from a timing perspective was the acknowledgement that countless Minnesotans were impacted by the events of 9/11 or in the ensuing war and their memories and stories were going untold. The Task Force members all understood implicitly that it was our responsibility (at the direction and leadership of Commissioner Herke, Randal Dietrich, and others) to seize the opportunity before us: to capture as many experiences, memories, and reflections from our fellow Minnesotans before it was too late.

To that end, I had an innate understanding that I personally had a unique story to tell on behalf of myself and my deceased father, Tom Burnett Jr. Tom was a native of Bloomington, MN and a passenger aboard United 93 on that fateful morning in September, 2001. He and his fellow passengers heroically fought back against the terrorists aboard his ill-fated flight and although they were successful in thwarting an attack against the plane’s intended target, none of the passengers or crew survived. I was 16 years old when he passed. This loss was further complicated by the fact that he and my birthmother gave me up for adoption in

the mid-1980s through a closed process. When I learned in early 2004 that I had narrowly missed the opportunity to meet him, I was heartbroken.

However, I knew that Tom's role in my life could not end on 9/11 or even in early 2004. I was adamant that his life and legacy would have a lifelong impact on me. So, I immediately sought to connect with his surviving relatives—the individuals who would eventually become much-loved, much-cherished family members to me. They generously shared their memories of Tom with me. As a result, I began to collect data points about the kind of life Tom lived and I learned who the larger-than-life 9/11 hero was during his 38 years on Earth.

I learned that when his plane was hijacked on 9/11, the first person he called was his wife, Deena. I learned that he frequently wrote letters to elderly family members to check on their ailing health. I learned that he owned land in western Wisconsin and would come back every year to take my cousins and other relatives hunting. I learned that he counseled my aunts and grandparents whenever they had a major decision to make. And I also learned that in the late 1980s, Tom wrote me a letter that I would not receive until after his passing. In it, he spoke of his love for our shared heritage and family. "I come from parents that have instilled a strong sense of family as well as loyalty in me," he wrote. "Be sure: I love you..."

All of the artifacts and stories painted the portrait of a man who cared deeply for his family and they now allow me to talk about Tom to my three children--Tom's grandchildren. But Tom was not the only Minnesotan lost too soon, nor was he the only brave individual who helped change the course of U.S. history. There are countless Minnesota families grieving or celebrating the lives of their own family. The family members of those brave men and women deserve to have their loved ones' stories told and re-told for years to come. And if those families are anything like my own family (and Tom's), connection, love, and honor matter. This comprehensive history commissioned by the Task Force profiles the brave Minnesotans who fought, served, and (in some heartbreaking cases) died for their country. I hope the stories told in this book provide peace to the family members of our brave Minnesota heroes. May their sacrifices be remembered for generations to come and may their values and heroism inspire all of us lucky enough to learn about them.

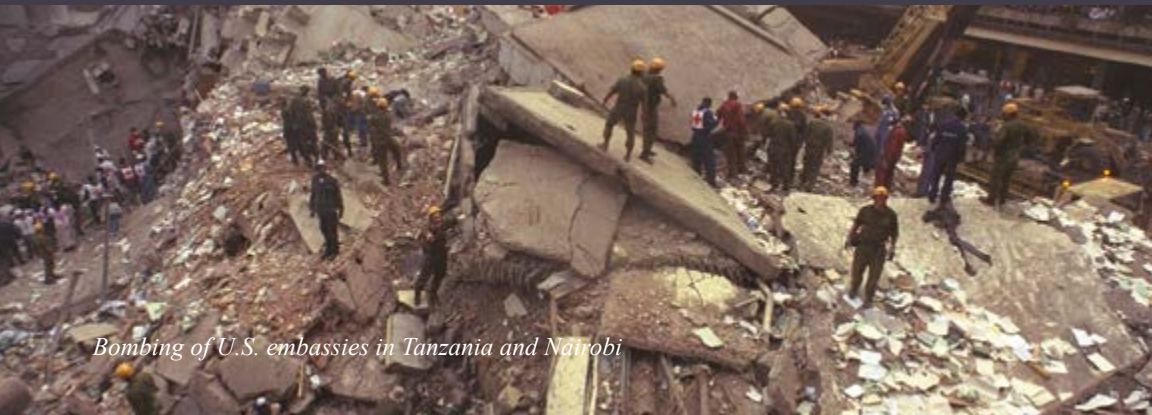


U.S. Embassy seized in Tehran



Operation Desert Storm

Foreshadowing the Conflict



Bombing of U.S. embassies in Tanzania and Nairobi



Bombing of the USS Cole in Port of Aden (Yemen)

Introduction

By Randal Dietrich

In the hours before the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, Minnesotans aboard the USS *Ward* detected, reported and acted on suspicious activity that was to portend the horrific events of December 7, 1941.

Sixty years later, a handful of Minnesotans would again warn of impending peril.

In the hours before the al-Qaeda attack on the East Coast, Minnesotans at an Eagan Flight School and then in the FBI Field Office detected, reported, and acted on suspicious activity that was to portend the horrific events of September 11, 2001. A series of events, stretching back over 20 years, foreshadowed the global conflict that would follow.

- 16 Aug 2001 Zacarias Moussaoui arrested by the FBI in Minneapolis on immigration charges, fearing that his flight training might have violent intentions
- 17 Oct 2000 Bombing of the USS *Cole* in Port of Aden (Yemen)
- 17 Aug 1998 Bombing of U.S. embassies in Tanzania and Nairobi
- 25 Jun 1996 Bombing of Khobar Towers (Saudi Arabia), used by U.S. servicemen
- 23 Aug 1996 Osama bin Laden issues a declaration of war against the United States.
- 2 Feb 1993 Truck bombing of the World Trade Center in New York City
- 2 Aug 1990 Iraq invasion of Kuwait
(followed by Operation Desert Storm on January 17, 1991)
- 23 Sept 1983 Bombing of U.S. Marine barracks at airport in Beirut, Lebanon
- 22 Sept 1980 Iraq invasion of Iran
- 24 Dec 1979 Soviet invasion of Afghanistan
- 4 Nov 1979 U.S. Embassy seized in Tehran

Dr. James G. Breckenridge, Provost of the U.S. Army War College in Carlisle, Pennsylvania, shared his insights with members of the Minnesota Military and Veterans Museum.

There's no way around discussing American involvement in the Middle East without focusing on one particular year, and that's 1979.

That year, at the height of the Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union, events in the Middle East become deeply enmeshed with U.S. politics and military affairs, far more inextricably than at any time in American history:

- 1. The Iranian Revolution led by the Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini*
- 2. The storming of the Grand Mosque in Mecca by radical Wahabis in 1979. The reaction of Saudi Arabia, and the rise of Wahhabism throughout the Middle East after that, had a profound impact and further enmeshed America in its reaction to it.*
- 3. The coup d'état in Iraq leading to the dictatorship of Saddam Hussein*
- 4. The Soviet Union invasion of Afghanistan*

All of these had huge implications for American foreign policy. Each event by itself would've been a major foreign policy challenge for the United States. Taken together, it's impossible to manage. And yet, here we are.

Four years later, on October 23, 1983, the bombing of the Marine Barracks in Beirut killed 241 American servicemen. It is the largest single loss of U.S. military personnel since the Battle of Okinawa deep into World War II. It led to a profound debate within the United States about what, why, and how it happened, and to a precipitous retreat four months later from Beirut.

In 1979, Minnesota native and WWII Navy Veteran Bruce Laingen was on the frontline of history as the senior diplomat at the United States Embassy in Tehran. He later chronicled his 444 days in captivity in a book entitled *Yellow Ribbon: The Secret Journal of Bruce Laingen*. His son, Chip, shared more about his father's Minnesota roots and diplomatic service.

My father grew up on a farm in the Odin-Butterfield area, down by St. James, south and west of Mankato. He grew up during that formative time in the late '30s, early '40s. When Pearl Harbor happened, he was at that age where they said, 'Off you go,' and he left a couple of brothers on the farm since he got the lucky draw to go overseas.

After the War, he wanted to serve overseas, came back, finished his degree, joined the Foreign Service and went immediately to postwar Berlin.

In 1953, he served in the consular office in Mashhad, Iran.

He was assigned (1968-72) as the Deputy Chief of Mission in Kabul, Afghanistan.

The Iranian Revolution was happening in the summer of 1979. The Shah had been ousted and the sitting U.S. ambassador quit. The State Department said, 'We need to replace him.' So they started going down the list, 'Okay, who's an Iran expert?'

My dad was like sixth on the list or something because he'd served in Mashhad years before. And they got to number six and they said, 'Laingen, yeah, let's ask him. He never says no.' And sure enough, he was visiting the family farm in Odin, Minnesota, when the call came from the Deputy Secretary of State. His reply: 'Absolutely. Sign me up. I love the Persian people, let's go.' So within three weeks he found himself in Tehran as chargé d'affaires and was about to be elevated to the ambassador position.

The Shah was ousted in early 1979. What you have then is the 'Den of Spies,' as it was known to the Iranians: the U.S. embassy in Tehran. A huge compound, walled, lush surroundings inside, tennis courts, pools, Marine guards, in the middle of Tehran, which was, however, not the best part of town. And the fervor of the revolution was growing and starting to blame the United States for past ills and for Iran's current situation, which included the Shah himself and all the damage he had done to certain parts of the population.

My dad was told to 'just go there and tell us the situation on the ground and give us some advice on what to do next, because it's still a strategic location because



Bruce Laingen



Gen. John Vessey

Bruce Laingen

Bruce Laingen
going for
...

of the Cold War. And we think we're misunderstood by the Iranian people, which is only half true. We did overthrow a regime in 1953 and we did prop up the Shah because of our own strategic interests. My dad had been there for a few weeks when it became very clear to him what was going on.

He put together a telegram, which has since been declassified, saying, 'Okay, this is bad. And whatever you do, don't let the Shah into the US because that would be the ultimate signal that the US really is the Great Satan and propped up the Shah.' And he repeated: 'Don't let him into the US.' And of course, what happened? The Shah was admitted into the States on October 22, 1979. Two weeks later the revolutionaries stormed the Embassy and took hostages.

Laingen and the other hostages were freed after 444 days in captivity on January 20, 1981, the day President Reagan was inaugurated. Reagan selected Minnesota native John W. Vessey, Jr. as Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff the following year. Together, Vessey, Reagan and the rest of his administration recalibrated how the United States would fight the Cold War.

General Vessey played a direct role in arming the Russian resistance in Afghanistan and the creation of United States Central Command. He differed sharply with the Commander-in-Chief on his decision to send U.S. Marines to Beirut. Like Laingen, he warned of the impending danger.



President George H.W. Bush

Mark Roemhildt

Mark Roemhildt

By Jack Baumbach

The words “Honor, Commitment, and Courage” are familiar to incoming Navy personnel, since they are required to memorize and recite them at boot camp as a part of the “Sailor’s Creed” each year. To Saint Peter resident Mark Roemhildt, though, these words represent much more than something to recite. In his 25 years of active-duty service, Mark served as an example for what Honor, Commitment, and Courage looked like amid the uncertainty and danger of the 9/11 attacks and Global War on Terror. Starting his military career in the Navy ROTC program at University of Wisconsin, Madison in 1988, Mark would eventually get his commission as an active-duty officer in 1992. He would go on to serve as an active-duty officer for 25 years and was involved in a multitude of deployments both before and after the attacks of 9/11.

One of Mark’s pre-9/11 deployments was in the Middle East, to Destroyer Squadron 50 (DS50) in August 2001, just a month before the 9/11 terrorist attacks. Mark was stationed in Bahrain, an island off the coast of Saudi Arabia in the Arabian Gulf. The positioning of DS50 headquarters allowed Mark to make frequent trips to the northern Gulf region to measure, record, and report the status of Iraqi National Oil tankers for a United Nations program called the “Iraq Oil for Food Program.” This positioning also allowed Mark to maintain a maritime presence near the Strait of Hormuz in the southern Gulf region. In a sense, Bahrain provided Mark with “the best of both worlds” until, just one month into his deployment, the 9/11 attacks occurred, sending the United States into a state of extremely high alert.

While President George W. Bush did not publicly announce plans to invade Iraq until two years after the 9/11 attacks, Mark said that he and his fellow sailors were still “terrified of the unknown” due to their proximity to many Middle Eastern nations, including Iraq. Instead of being “the best of both worlds,” the geography of Mark’s base in Bahrain now made them vulnerable to direct attacks. Despite this vulnerability and an increased feeling of uncertainty, Mark was still in charge of making sure that Iraqi National Oil tankers were being boarded, measured, and recorded by the sailors under his command. Regarding this, Mark stated: “Whether it was aboard the oil tankers in the Northern Arabian Gulf, or just walking around Bahrain, all of us were very cautious and careful because we just didn’t know what was going to happen.”

As Mark reflected upon the unpredictability of the 9/11 attacks, he expressed a sense of

Navy pride when talking about the pre-deployment training that he and his fellow sailors were required to complete. He stated that before their deployment to Bahrain in 2001, “no one was necessarily thinking about how to respond to an attack like that of 9/11, but we were certainly prepared to operate as a strike group. With an aircraft carrier and about 15 other ships, we had formidable capabilities to respond to a variety of attacks.” Mark also described a noticeable shift in culture that happened on the base in Bahrain after a Navy Security Council Resolution was enforced in response to the 9/11 attacks. Mark said: “Due to the uncertainty of the situation, for two months we were required to carry our gas masks wherever we went. Every day, I would walk the 200 yards from the base to my apartment with my gas mask by my side. I would have my Walkman, my water bottle, my sunglasses, and my gas mask. It was just a crazy feeling.” More than just an inconvenience though, the gas mask would prove to be a symbol for the lasting changes that the 9/11 attacks would have on global military operations, relations, and the everyday lives of people.

Another significant role that Mark’s destroyer squadron played in his 2001 Bahrain deployment was ensuring that the Straits of Hormuz were accessible to naval forces. The Strait is a maritime passage that provides the only entrance and exit point for the entire Arabian Gulf. Mark stated: “One of our concerns from a maritime perspective was that the Arabian Gulf would become closed off from future naval accessibility. If someone decided to drop a few mines into the Strait, the United States would have zero maritime response capabilities to Iraq if we needed to respond, but the fact was we initially didn’t know what we needed to do. That is why maintaining accessibility to the Strait of Hormuz was initially very important to us, much more important than any of our concerns pertaining directly to Iraq.”

In 2002, Mark would leave Bahrain and transition to a two-year deployment in Italy in the Mediterranean Sea. Throughout the many memories, experiences, and lessons that Mark learned in his Bahrain deployment, his ability to fulfill his duties with Honor, Commitment, and Courage remained true. Despite the increased danger that Mark and his fellow sailors experienced in the midst of the 9/11 terrorist attacks, they continued to relentlessly pursue excellence in their work because they knew how critical of a role they played. The ability of the United States to both prevent and respond to future threats was dependent, in part, on Mark and Destroyer Squadron 50 in Bahrain.

Mission: Naval Supply for Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Red Dawn

Location: Italy, Mediterranean Sea

Just under a year into Mark's Mediterranean deployment, Pres. Bush announced that U.S. forces would be sent to Iraq in what would become known as Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF). The inception of OIF was on March 19, 2003, due to Pres. Bush's belief that Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein was stockpiling weapons of mass destruction, in violation of a United Nations Security Council Resolution. The goal of OIF was "to disarm Iraq, specifically Saddam Hussein, of weapons of mass destruction." While the success of OIF would rest on many moving parts, pieces, and people, there was one thing that it was especially dependent on: the Navy. The Navy ensured that U.S. cargo ships were safely escorted through the Mediterranean Sea on their way to supply American forces in Iraq.

With 93 percent of the necessary military supplies being delivered by maritime vessels, Mark's role in safely directing U.S. Navy cargo ships through the Mediterranean was critical to the success of OIF. More specifically, the ships that Mark was guiding through the Mediterranean were enroute to supply the 4th Infantry Division of the U.S. Army. When asked about the contents of these ships, Mark light-heartedly simplified it: "An old saying we had for these cargo ships was that they were carrying 'Bullets, Beans, and Bombs.'" Mark further explained that these cargo ships were carrying much more than the "3 B's." In fact, these cargo ships were carrying everything— tanks, vehicles, fuel, ammunition, and food—that would be necessary for the 4th Infantry Division to conduct successful operations. One of these operations in 2003 became known as Operation Red Dawn. Interestingly, a Brigade Combat Team from the 4th Infantry Division was assigned to this operation, and after nine months successfully captured Saddam Hussein, one of the most sought-after men in the Global War on Terror. The capture can be tied, in part, to Mark's role in supplying the 4th Infantry Division with necessary combat supplies. In an almost unbelievable turn of events, Mark had aided the capture of the same man that he had been recording oil measurements for in the North Arabian Gulf just two years earlier.

When asked about the close connection that Mark's deployments in Bahrain and Italy had to Saddam Hussein, Mark stated, "That blows my mind a bit to think about it in that way. I think it's easy to get laser-focused on the details of what you're doing each day, week, and month and it gets difficult to see the bigger picture. When I was in Bahrain, I was focused on intercepting the Iraqi National Oil tankers to measure their oil, and when I was in the Mediterranean, I was focused on getting the cargo ships to where they had to go so that

the Army could do their job. I never really thought about Saddam Hussein and how my deployments tied into a bigger picture. I focused on my job, which was in ‘the here and the now.’ When Mark originally declared to serve his country with “Honor, Commitment, and Courage” in 1992, it may have been hard to predict what those words would mean in the era of 9/11 and Global War on Terror. Despite the uncertainty that Mark would face, he was committed to measuring Iraqi oil tankers, maintaining a maritime presence in the Strait of Hormuz, and directing supply ships through the Mediterranean regardless of the circumstances, all of which would play a critical role in allowing the United States to successfully respond to the 9/11 attacks.



Jim Noll

By Al Zdon

Jim Noll, a native of Wabasha, Minnesota, was a decorated veteran of the Vietnam War when he joined the Army Reserve in 1971.

By 1990, he was commanding officer of the 13th Psyops Battalion, a unit dedicated to undermining the enemy's ability to make war. The unit was sent to the Persian Gulf in 1991 and played a key role in getting many Iraqis to surrender before the Allied invasion even began.

The Persian Gulf War was nearly as much a war of words as it was a war of missiles, tanks, jet fighters, and M-16s. A unit from Minnesota, the 13th Psychological Operations Battalion played a crucial role in that war, a role that with the perspective of intervening years looks even larger.

While Saddam Hussein was preparing for the "mother of all battles," the Minnesotans were going quietly about their business of getting Saddam's troops to desert or surrender. By the time the U.S. and its allies took control of Kuwait, there were only about 85,000 troops remaining to fight--instead of the 400,000 Saddam had sent to control his captured nation.

What happened to the rest? Some had been captured, some had been killed, but most of them had just gone home. "We were the only battalion geared to do POW psychological warfare," Jim Noll said in a recent interview. Noll was the lieutenant colonel in charge of the 13th Psyops Battalion when it was called to active duty.

"By the end of the war, seven out of ten Iraqi soldiers had deserted. In some units only ten percent might have been left in the forward positions. In some cases, there were not enough Iraqi soldiers left to drive their vehicles."

Noll is a 1967 graduate of Winona State College, and was a teacher in St. Cloud when he got his draft notice in 1968. "I turned in my grade cards on June 4th, and on June 5th I was in the Army."

After Officer Candidate School, he joined the 101st Airborne and took part in the three-and one-half month battle for Firebase Ripcord in Vietnam as a platoon leader. He was wounded twice during that action. He earned a Silver Star and Bronze Star in addition to his Purple Hearts.

Noll got out of the Army in 1971, returned to teaching, and also joined the Army Reserve at Ft. Snelling. Along the way, over the next two decades, he was named commander of the 13th Psyops Battalion.

The Minnesotans were activated in December 1990 and sent to Ft. Bragg where the unit had two weeks to get organized. It arrived in Saudi Arabia on January 13. Noll was the highest ranking Minnesotan to serve in the Persian Gulf War.

The battalion's job was to make the enemy quit without fighting, but how do you go about getting an enemy to go home? For the 13th Psyops Battalion, it started in the POW camps run by the Allies. A number of Iraqis had been taken prisoner during the early skirmishes of the war. Others trickled in as time went by.

Part of the Psyops job was to get the prisoners to comply with regulations and keep the problems at a minimum. Another job was to interview the prisoners and find out ways to convince their comrades, who were still in arms, to desert or surrender.

"The MPs carried the weapons, and they were the bad guys. We were the good guys," Noll said. "The MPs greatly respected the Psyops people because we made their job so much easier."

For instance, the Psyops people would show movies every night just outside the fence. If the prisoners had not behaved that day, they were denied a chance to see the movie. "We had some Iraqi movies that were made according to strict Muslim laws, but they didn't want to see those. They wanted to see 'Superman.'"

Cigarettes, extra food, and candy were also used to reward good behavior or cooperation. The Iraqis were provided with prayer mats and signs that indicated the direction to Mecca. "We wanted to show them that we were taking good care of them, and so they had no fear in surrendering to Americans."

The psychological specialists would interview prisoners from morning to night. Unlike American prisoners of war who are trained to keep silent, the Iraqis generally had no compunction about spilling the beans about troop placements, missile locations, or other valuable war information. They also didn't mind talking about who might be trying to escape.

“We tried to identify those who had been Republican Guards and secret police. We wanted to isolate those who we felt had the potential to cause problems. They had no code of conduct. They would simply tell all, about underground munitions dumps, or units that hadn’t been in combat yet, whatever.”

From these interviews, a strategy was developed to convince the Iraqis to leave their units.

“You’ve got to remember that many of the Iraqi units were isolated electronically from other units. The U.S. was blocking most of the radio signals, and we were overriding Iraqi radio. In some cases we were replacing their messages with our own messages.”

The U.S. would airdrop little portable radios into an Iraqi unit to help get the word out. At other times, thousands of leaflets would be dropped. Psyops soldiers with speaker backpacks went into the camp where chaos reigned, and with the help of local officials restored order.

In addition to the Psyops units working in the camps, each American unit had three psychological operations specialists assigned to it. The job of these tactical units was to make contact with the enemy and encourage them to surrender. The strategy was especially important because when the U.S. did attack, the armored units raced across the desert to confront Iraqi tank units. In the process, many Iraqi army units were simply bypassed.

It was important to convince those bypassed units to surrender rather than fight. When Kuwait had been retaken by the Allies, Noll entered the city the next day. He urged the command to release his tactical units, spread out throughout the American forces, so they could be used to help control the huge influx of enemy prisoners.

One strategy was to warn the Iraqis of an impending bombing attack and then follow through.

“We would tell a particular unit that we would bomb them within 24 hours and they must leave. A lot of them would do just that. We would follow through on the bombing so they knew we were telling the truth.”

“The next day we would inform the next Iraqi unit in line that we would be bombing within 24 hours. We’d tell them to just leave the area and leave their equipment. A lot of them would go home. They’d just start hoofing it.” Noll noted that the Iraqis had been waiting for war for many months, and many had earned a furlough at home. “Those who had any brains never came back.”

The psychological warfare in the end saved many lives, on both sides. “I know many American lives were saved because so many Iraqis had deserted or chose not to fight when we arrived. Many of them were holding up our leaflets to surrender with.” The leaflets were based on the intelligence the Psyops battalion had gained from prisoners. Some leaflets showed large bombers dropping their payloads.

Others showed tank units how to surrender. Others showed Americans landing from the sea, which was a ploy to divert Iraqi defenses. (The U.S. never landed from the sea.) Others were printed on fake Iraqi money so the soldiers could conceal them in their wallets. In the end, over 14 million leaflets were dropped to Iraqi troops.

Some were even delivered in bottles that washed up on shore. The pictures were important. “Many Iraqis only had enough education to read the Koran, and that was it.”

Once a leaflet was developed, it was tried with the prisoners to find out how effective it might be. In one case, a leaflet went out with a red border. The Iraqi troops had been instructed that the color red meant danger, and the leaflets were not used. After switching to a green border, the results improved dramatically.

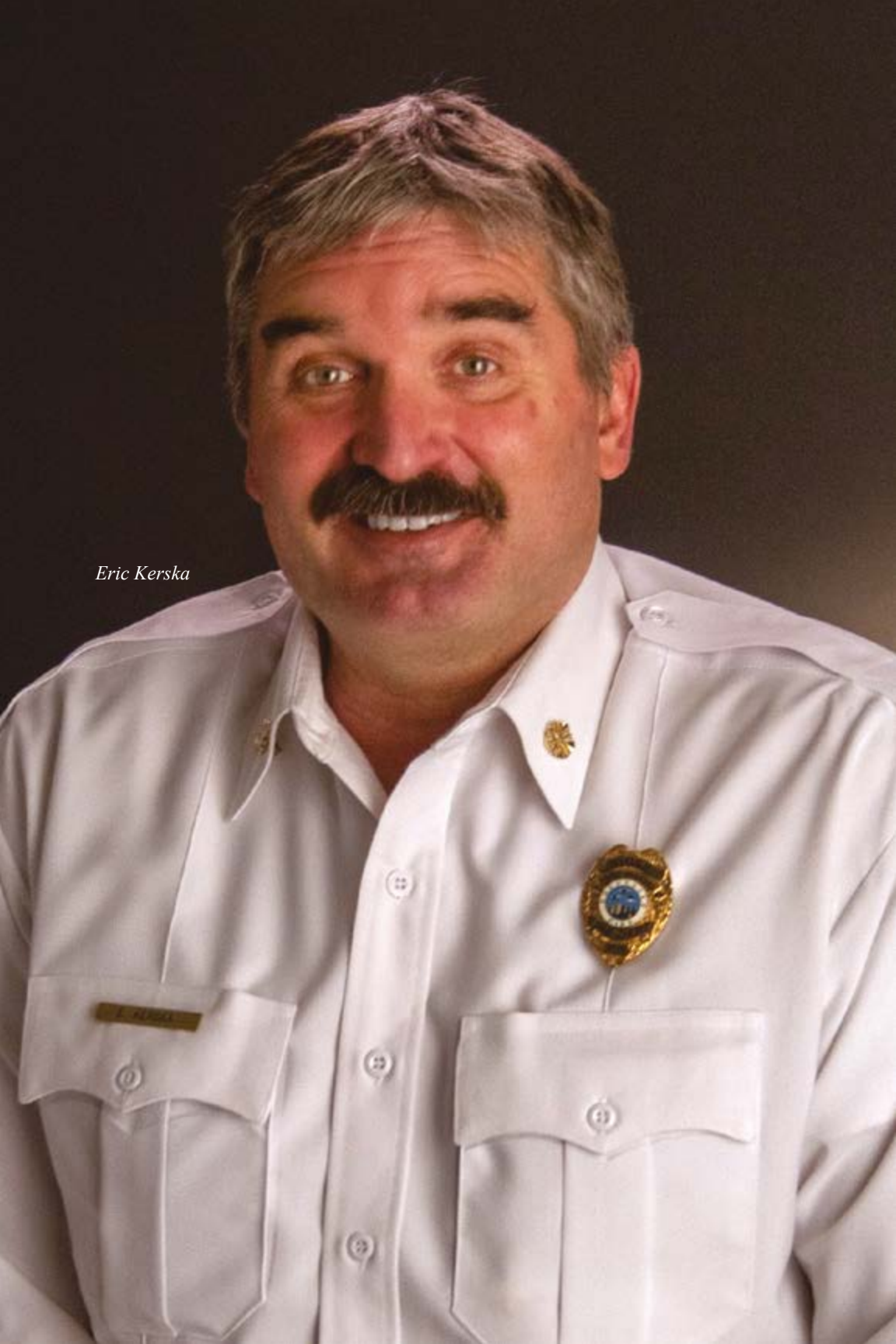
Noll had bilingual Saudi and Kuwaiti soldiers assigned to his unit who helped with the testing of the materials by working with the prisoners of war.

The Iraqis also tried some crude psychological warfare of their own. One of their leaflets told an American soldier that Bart Simpson was at home sleeping with his wife. Apparently the Iraqis didn’t realize that Bart was a cartoon character.

The Americans also trained the Saudis in the aspects of psychological warfare and dealing with prisoners because the prisoners were soon turned over to the Saudi army for safekeeping. The 13th Psyops Battalion left in May, and turned over all the POW camps to the Saudis.

“My unit may have saved thousands of lives during the war, on both sides.” Noll returned to his home south of Forest Lake just in time for his daughter’s first communion. In the next year, he volunteered for the U.S. Army War College in Pennsylvania, and he returned to command the 88th Regular Supply Command.

His last job in the Reserves was as director of personnel for a six-state area, including about 25,000 soldiers. He retired in June 1999 as a colonel. Noll is a teacher at Forest Lake Southwest Junior High School. He and his wife, Rose, have eight children.



Eric Kerska

Eric Kerska

By Tim Engstrom

Operation Desert Storm

Eric Kerska was in the regular Army when the first Gulf War, the recapture of Kuwait from Saddam Hussein, happened. A native of LaCrescent, a Minnesota river town along the Mississippi across from La Crosse, he had gone through the ROTC program.

As part of the 8th Infantry Division, Kerska was an officer in a tank battalion when the U.S. and coalition forces advanced to liberate Kuwait in January, 1991.

Conditions were primitive. “No email, no phone calls, no showers, MREs three meals a day for months straight. We just lived out on the desert. It was something out of an old West movie, except we had tanks. Sometimes you had to choose between drinking your water or brushing your teeth.

“Boots would fall apart and we’d have to use duct tape to hold them together. It was just a tough environment.”

The aerial bombardment of Iraqi forces lasted for 42 days and included 100,000 sorties. They were launched from Saudi Arabia and six carrier battle groups in the Persian Gulf and Red Sea.

Iraq responded by hurling Scud missiles on Israel, America’s ally in the region. An abortive Iraqi raid into Saudi Arabia was short-lived.

American tanks crossed the border between Saudi Arabia and Kuwait on 15 February 1991. The VII Corps, which included Kerska’s Third Armored Division, fought a major tank battle in late February called the Battle of Norfolk. It was the largest tank battle of the war, and the second largest tank battle in U.S. military history.

The 3rd Armored cleared Objective Dorset and destroyed over 300 enemy vehicles. The tanks kept rolling right into Iraq, but were halted when a ceasefire was called. Some observers then and now say the coalition forces should have continued right to Baghdad and ended Saddam’s rule – and the next Iraq war.

Kerska has a simpler explanation for why the tanks stopped in southern Iraq. “When it was over, we had about 80 gallons of fuel in each tanks, so we weren’t going any further. We were out of gas. They say they ended it because it was over (with the capture of Kuwait), but I say we ended it because we were out of gas, but who knows.”

Kerska noted that before Kuwait, there were doom sayers that claimed the U.S. was under-trained and had inferior tanks. “I was thankful to be on the M-1 tank. We had the best training, and the best people, and the best equipment, and the best tank the world has ever seen, and I was fortunate to be in that position.:

The war was essentially over by Feb. 27 when the Iraqi had evacuated Kuwait. The war cost the U.S. \$62 billion, much of which was paid by Arab nations.

Kerska stayed in the desert for seven months and then came home to Rochester where he left the army and joined the National Guard.

Operation Iraqi Freedom

For Eric Kerska, now an officer in the 1st Brigade of the 34th Division of the Minnesota National Guard, it was his second visit to Iraq. Things had changed quite a lot.

“The first time, the Iraqi people loved us. The Shia in southern Iraq, well, they just loved us. We interacted with them. There was no fear. There was no terrorism.”

Fifteen years later, it had all changed. “I was stunned to see the same Shia people how now they hate us.” He said his unit was basically in the same part of Iraq in 2006 as it was in 1991. “I can’t go see those tomato farmers because it’s too dangerous. It was a very lethal time. Every day it got worse.”

As the brigade’s S3, in charge of training for the brigade, Kerska could see the toll the deployment was taking on the soldiers. “I remember telling Colonel Elicerio, the commander of the brigade, that if this keeps up we’re not going to make. I mean, it gets worse every day.”

But at about that point, the Army went through a major change of command. In January 2007, Gen. David Petraeus took command of all the U.S. forces in Iraq. He joined new Secretary of Defense Robert Gates at the top of the leadership team.

“It changed. Overnight. The attitude, the optimism, the rules of engagement changes. We started getting ammunition. We didn’t have to write a report every time we fired a machine gun. We were free to do our jobs.”

Kerska said after that point every day started getting better. “I saw the change in numbers of attacks. This was even before the surge took place. It’s hard to say what it was, but now we were able to use Mark 19s (grenade launchers) again. We were given more freedom to protect ourselves.”

The improvement in the conduct of the war, though, came just when new orders came. As part of an American “surge” in the war, the 34th division, scheduled for rotation home in February 2007, was extended for four months until July. The surge was an American effort to turn the tide of the insurgency, and to stabilize Baghdad.

“That was a real shit show,” Kerska said. “I’m the brigade S3, and my wife found out about the extension before I did.” He said rumors of the extension were rampant in the brigade, and he had to tell soldiers that he talked with Corps everyday, and no extension was coming. And then it did.

The brigade’s replacement, the first brigade of the 1st Infantry Division, was already moving into place, and the 34th Division was showing them the ropes. “So we’re getting ready to go home.” All the talk of extending the deployment was coming from the families of the soldiers who were following the news reports on the surge.

Kerska and other officers tried to keep the soldiers up to date, but the Army was not telling what it knew. “They found out in Minnesota before we were able to tell our own soldiers. And it was wrong. It was a bad move. Something got screwed up somewhere.

The 1st Division never showed up in force, and was eventually diverted to duty in Iraq.

The result of the added months meant the 1st Brigade was the longest serving brigade in the Iraq war, Army or National Guard. During its 22 months, the brigade completed 5,200 combat patrols, and protected convoys over 2.4 million miles. They discovered 462 improvised explosive devices prior to detonation and captured over 400 suspected insurgents. They completed 137 reconstruction projects and helped start to Iraqi newspapers.

More remarkable, over 1,400 of the brigade combat team re-enlisted during their deployment.

The team followed the lead of their Red Bull brethren from World War II when the division served more days in combat than any other division.

5,000 strong, 3700 from Minnesota

Operation New Dawn

Eric Kerska set foot in Iraq a third time in 2010. This time he wasn't the training officer of the Brigade, he was the commander.

The 34th was officially deployed to Kuwait, but had five battalions doing convoy escort duty in Iraq.

“The threat level was much lower. It was a much safer environment. There weren't near as many attacks this time. But there was still a threat.”

As with the first deployment, the EFP was still the most feared enemy weapon.

“The Explosively Formed Projectile or Penetrator was the most lethal weapon in the war in Iraq from '05 to 2011. If you look at the statistics, that's what killed most Americans. It's an Iranian weapon that was used in the Shia parts of Iraq and had like a ninety percent casualty rate. Every time one went off there was like a 90 percent chance that an American soldier would be killed or wounded.”

The EFP was composed of a milled concave plate, usually made of copper. It is fired, often at head level, and when the explosive hits the vehicle, it converts the metal into an aerodynamic projectile that can pierce heavy armor. It has the effect of heavy artillery, but can be fired from close range.

“They're a precision weapon. They're aimed at people's heads.”

The projectile traveled at 5,600 feet per second. “You can't outrun it.”

The Minnesota convoy protectors had a rational fear of the weapon. None of the brigades

vehicles had enough armor to stop an EFP. “The only defense against an EFP was not to get hit by one.”

Brigade engineer Mike Lins worked on the problem and came up with a plan. “Mike was the brains and I was the bulldozer. Mike figured out what to do, and I was the one who enforced it made people do it. We had a very intricate plan, and we continued to refine it. We knew we couldn’t save the vehicle, but we could have the EFP hit the vehicle where the people weren’t and that was our secret.”

During the second deployment of the 34th Division into Iraq, five vehicles were hit by EFPs, destroying the vehicles, but no lives were lost.

Kerska and others tried to inform of the Army of the strategy to make the EFP less lethal. “The Army still hasn’t figured it out. It’s a proud story for us, but it’s a heartbreaker that for whatever reason, we’ve never been able to get the Army to wake up and understand the issue.

“In the Long Deployment we figured it out and our guys defeated it using pencil and ruler and engineering paper. In the second deployment we brought in a CAD software computer program. I had a young Luther College kid, an architectural student named Christianson and he was the guy that plotted every EFP attack in the theater the second time so we knew where the device was zeroed in on every piece of road in Iraq. And that’s how we were able to save those lives.

“I’m so proud of those people.”

During the deployment, five vehicles were destroyed. “But everybody walked away. No casualties.”

In addition, the Minnesotans faced a logistics challenge in getting spare parts for the vehicles because the U.S. was preparing to leave Iraq and there were fewer supplies to draw from. In fact in the last few months before the troops were all out, the convoy escorts had to bring their own spare tires, their own fuel, their own spare parts.

“We’d have to eat MREs because the chow halls were closed. The Red Bulls from 1st Brigade were the last soldiers out of Camp Victory in Baghdad. The security was gone. It was our guys in our MRAPs (mine-resistant, ambush protected) circling the wagon like a

prairie Conestoga train.”

To get parts, the 1st Brigade would have to go to the military boneyards in Kuwait where they could trade one of their worn out vehicles for a fairly new one. “Chief Warrant Officer Turner kept our fleet going through Minnesota ingenuity.”

Kerska said there was a plan to get out of Iraq by 31 December 2011, but the Army kept delaying implementing the plan. “I think it was October, the decision was made. We’re getting out. And now it’s a mad rush.”

The final push in a compressed timeline meant that the brigade didn’t have enough trucks, didn’t have enough maintenance time. “They’d come back from a four-day mission in Iraq, dump off the vehicles they were escorting, and then they would grab chow, refuel, and hit the road for another one. It was just turn and burn.”

And then an order came down that the convoy protectors couldn’t go into Iraq unless they had the MRAP-plus, a vehicle with extra side armor to protect from the insurgents’ Explosively Formed Penetrators (EFPs). Suddenly, forty percent of Kerska’s fleet was gone, not usable. And then it was decided that instead of waiting until the end of the year, the U.S. would be done pulling out by Dec. 18 – in order to avoid a last-minute assault.

A brigade out of Tennessee, the 230th, hauled all the equipment, and five battalions from Minnesota protected them on their missions. Another reserve Army brigade was in charge of getting the soldiers and other people out.

“And between these three brigades, it was so complicated that it never could have been orchestrated from some staff. It was fast, and so furious, and so complicated that it was the relationships of the 1st of the 34th and the other two brigades that pulled it off.”

On Dec. 18th, Bravo Company, two of the 135th out of Rochester, was the last Red Bull convoy escort to come out of Iraq. It was the last mission out of Iraq.

Kerska and the sergeant major accompanied the last mission. “We cross into Kuwait and on dawn of the 18th, the sun came up, we cleared our weapons and took our helmets off. “I had a moment of solitude while everybody over there was hooting and hollering, and I just leaned against the bumper.

“I decided to light a cigar, and the sergeant major walked up to me and said, ‘Where’s mine?’ I didn’t have one, so I cut mine in half. And at the first puff we looked at each other. We did it. Everyone was safe. Everybody crossed the border alive.”

Looking back, Kerska can’t say enough about the soldiers he led. “I was surrounded by Minnesota soldiers. These are good people, good and decent people. Oh, sure there were



some bad apples, every organization has them. But all I saw was kindness and patience and love. We had tough, but kind of and caring people.

“These are truly good people who risked it all and were honorable. They took care of each other. We didn’t accept the Army answer. We dug deeper, and we took care of each other.”

“They handed us kind of a shit sandwich, but we made the best of it. We just figured it out. We just pulled a rabbit out of the hat day after day.”

September 11, 2001



Introduction

By Randal Dietrich

In all, nineteen terrorists hijacked four passenger planes, then crashed them into symbolic landmarks as events unfolded on live television.

The attack originated on the East coast, with the four flights targeting New York and Washington, D.C.

Three flights hit the intended targets, but one crashed in rural Pennsylvania as passengers fought with the hijackers to regain control of the jetliner.

World Trade Center: North Tower (American Airlines Flight 11)

On the morning of 9/11, Scott Wallace (St. Paul) and his Deloitte Consulting team were surprised to learn that their meeting with the New York and New Jersey Port Authority was not, as expected, on the 93rd floor but rather the 63rd floor. It proved to be a blessing, as American Airlines Flight 11 struck at 8:46 A.M. between floors 93-99.

Making his way down smoke-filled stairways, he was able to safely evacuate. He was able to reach his relieved family by phone. His son encouraged him to purchase a notebook and that night, alone in his hotel room, he recorded all that had transpired.

World Trade Center: South Tower (United Airlines Flight 175)

After the North Tower was struck, initial guidance given to most occupants of the South Tower was to remain in place.

Gordon Aamoth (Minneapolis) had just closed a big investment deal on September 10. As a banker for Sandler O'Neill & Partners, he was in his office on the 104th floor when United Airlines Flight 175 struck the South Tower at 9:03 A.M. between floors 77-85. Gordon did not make it out of the tower. His ID badge was later recovered and is in the collections of the 9/11 Memorial and Museum in New York City.

The Pentagon (American Airlines Flight 77)

The hijackers overpowered the crew of American Airlines Flight 77, piloted by Captain Charles Burlingame III (St. Paul), then changed course, passing directly in front of a



Minnesota National Guard C-130 before plunging into the Pentagon at 9:37 A.M.

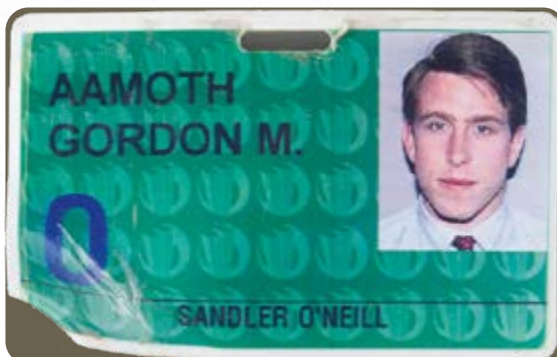
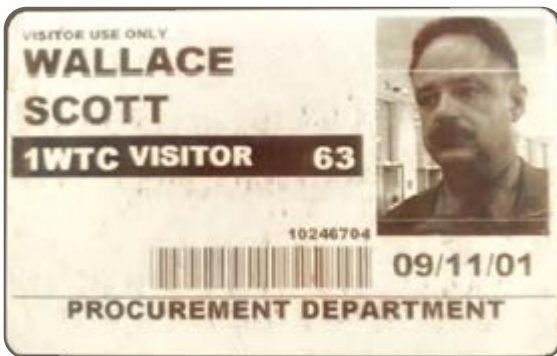
Prior to Burlingame's 20-plus year career with American Airlines, he was a decorated Navy jet fighter pilot. His father was a veteran.

Max Bielke (Pipestone, Minnesota) was among those killed in the Pentagon that morning. Max had the distinction of being the last U.S. combat soldier to leave Vietnam on March 29, 1973.

The unfortunate task of identifying the victims—service members, civilians, pilots, passengers and hijackers—fell to the team of Dr. Andrew Baker (Minneapolis).

Shanksville, PA (United Airlines Flight 93)

Due to the delayed departure of United Airlines Flight 93, Tom Burnett (Bloomington, MN) and the other 33 passengers learned the fate of American Airlines flights 11 and 77 and United Airlines flight 175 through phone calls with loved ones on the ground. Determined to “do something” they fought to retake control of the plane from the hijackers as it sped toward Washington D.C. It crashed in a field outside Shanksville, Pennsylvania, at 10:15 A.M.





Scott Wallace

Scott Wallace

New York City

Scott Wallace grew up on the east side of Saint Paul, near Hillcrest Shopping Center, off White Bear Avenue. He married his high school sweetheart, and they became the parents of three children. While business travel was a routine part of his work with Deloitte Consulting, he had looked forward to this trip in particular as his chance to close a deal and to see New York landmarks.

This trip was a very big opportunity for us with the New York/New Jersey Port Authority. So we went out there on Monday morning to prepare. So we spent the day at our offices which were across the street from the World Trade Center. And then the next morning we arrived at the tower early.

You check in on the ground floor and you get a badge and it's got your picture on it and what floor you're going to. And all of the guys that I was with had met with the Port Authority before and said they were up on 93, where the finance people were. But when we checked in, they said: 'You're on 63 today—a procurement floor, because you're working on procurement for this big project.'

We were in a conference room right off the elevator bank. Got everything set up so we were just waiting. I said 'I'm going down the hall because I want to see the Statue of Liberty.' And so I walked up and down but realized I couldn't see it, and it was when I was walking back from the windows that the plane struck the building many floors above us.

What probably took a couple seconds at most seemed to me like slow motion. We didn't know it was a plane, we just knew it was a tremendously loud, explosive sound above us. The tower tipped quite a ways. I remember stumbling toward one wall and then stumbling toward the other one when it righted itself. And all of us were kind of in shock at that point. And I could see down the hall to the other windows on the East side of the building and all the debris flying by the windows and everybody from that side of the building running towards me.

The plane went into the tower between floors 89 to 91. No one above impact got out.

I remember getting on the stairwell and looking at the stair marker and it said '63,' and I thought 'Oh man, we have a long way to go down.' I remember praying to myself: 'Lord just give me the strength to just stay calm, and get down, and get outta here.'

We went down about a flight or two of steps and all of a sudden you couldn't breathe. You couldn't see anything and you couldn't breathe. It looked like white smoke. And what it turned out to be was jet fuel that had gone down the elevator shafts, where ducts pumped it through into the stairwell.

We got to the 28th floor and we saw the firemen coming up and everybody kind of stopped at that point and let them pass. It was the whole company from Rescue One. I remember patting them on the back and telling them good luck and take care. They gave us hope.

Coming down the stairwell, everything was pretty orderly. And then all of a sudden you could feel the tower shift and creak and moan and everybody in the stairwell stopped and looked up because we all thought: 'Oh my God, whatever hit or whatever happened, this thing has come down on us.' And we all stood there. Probably wasn't even that long, maybe 15 seconds, just looking up, thinking: 'Oh, this isn't good.' And then when we realized nothing was going to happen, we kept going. But we later learned that was when the South Tower was struck, and the concussion rocked the North Tower pretty hard.

We exited the stairs on the mezzanine. When I came around, all I could see was airplane parts and seats and bodies. So we walked through the plaza and then up the stairs at the other end where the end of the plaza was. There was a policewoman up there and she said: 'Don't turn around, don't stop, keep moving.' Later we learned that was the area where all the 200 or 300 firemen were crushed by the falling building while they were in the plaza trying to get organized. The policewoman died on the site, too. She was one of the last bodies they recovered from the site.

In New York at the time, there was a phone booth on every corner. I picked up the phone, I called home collect and it went right through. My wife picked up the phone and she just broke down crying and we cried for about ten minutes. And then she told me about the Pentagon.

Jeffrey Rosenthal

Washington D.C.

Chief Master Sergeant Jeffrey Rosenthal (Lakeville, Minnesota) is a member of the 133rd Airlift Wing in Minneapolis. His C-130 turboprop airplane is a workhorse transport used frequently by the Minnesota Air National Guard. On that particular day his crew was in “Gopher Six,” airplane 96006.

We took off at approximately 9:30 from Andrews Air Force Base with the intention of flying back to Minneapolis. And we had no idea at that time that the Twin Towers had been hit by aircraft because we had left the terminal and were in the transport out to the airplane, then started the plane, taxied out, and that is when it occurred. We took off and nobody knew what was transpiring.

Coincidentally, as we turned northwest towards the Potomac River out of Andrews and then north on the Potomac River towards Reagan National Airport, our first inkling of something that went wrong occurred then when we were notified by Air Traffic Control to get on a certain vector and fly towards an unknown aircraft flying erratically. All they know is that there is an aircraft very close to restricted space—Capitol, the White House—that they can't talk to or identify. They know they have an aircraft that's traveling at 400 knots and is presumably heading straight towards Washington.

This is in the span of seconds, really, because by the time you're over Reagan, you're right on top of the Pentagon. They said: 'Can you see this aircraft?' At that very moment the aircraft, Flight 77, went through our windscreen from left to right and dived right into the Pentagon.

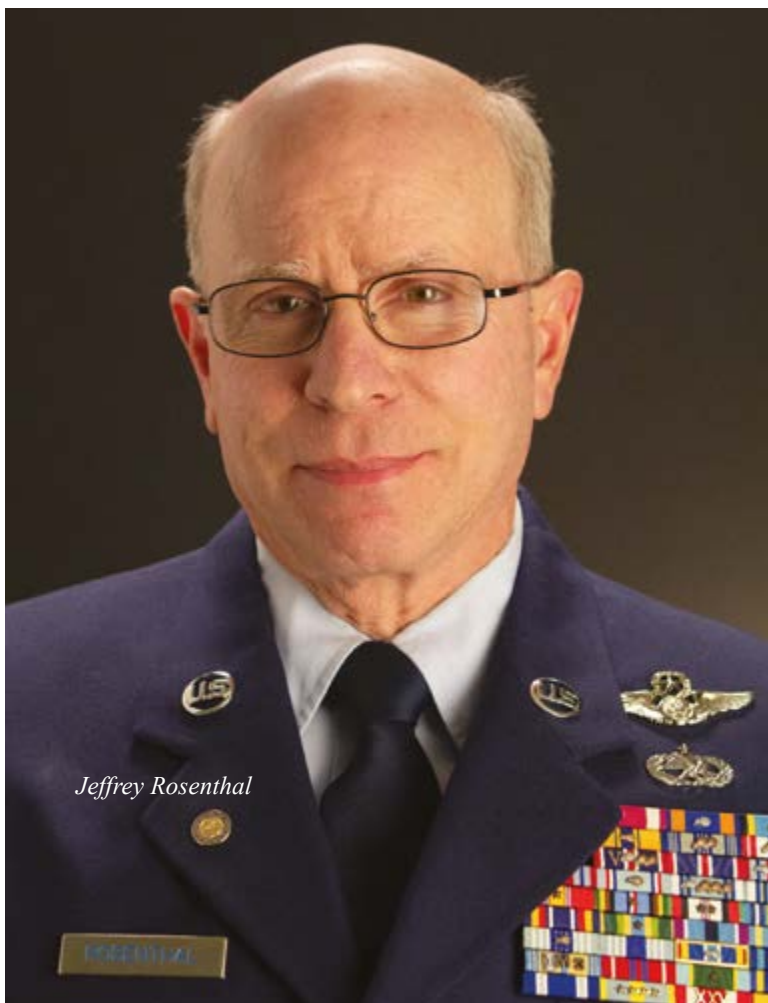
Shortly following the Pentagon incident, they grounded all aviation nationwide. Nationwide. And at one time it was thought that our plane was the only airplane flying. We were those mobile satellite eyes in the sky that were able to give the strategic planners and assessment team what they needed so they could immediately do what was necessary to defend the nation.

So now we're moving on to western Maryland and through Pennsylvania when

we're again notified we have an aircraft: 'Can you identify it?' And our load-master, Robin Todd, looked out the window and was able to identify a large plume of smoke about 18 miles away.

The smoke was from the wreckage of Flight United 93, which had crashed as passengers fought to take back control from the terrorists.

The assumption was that it was bound eastward for Washington, D.C., and that the hijackers were overtaken by the passengers. They did a fine job of protecting the nation's capital. We're just fortunate things didn't unfold as hijackers had intended.



Jeffrey Rosenthal

Tom Burnett

Shanksville, Pennsylvania

Tom Burnett was a 1981 graduate of Bloomington Jefferson High School and earned a finance degree from the University of Minnesota after earlier attending St. John's University. Tom was seated towards the front of United Flight 93 and was traveling home to his wife in San Francisco.

Mariah Jacobsen is Tom's daughter and shared her account of Tom's actions on September 11, 2001.

My understanding is that once the hijackers made themselves known and killed one of the passengers on the flight, Tom called his wife, Deena. He called her four times from the plane. The first time he called, he said: 'Our flight's been hijacked. I don't know what to do.' Deena, trained as a flight attendant, told him to be quiet, sit still, don't draw any attention to yourself.

Deena began to piece together through what she was watching on the news that this was a broader attack, that this was happening on multiple aircraft at the same time.

After the plane crashed into the Pentagon, Tom called back for the final time. He told her he and a group of passengers were going to get together and they were going to 'do something.' And that was the last time she heard from him.

Maybe it would have been easier for them to sit back and just hope for the best. He and other passengers on that plane got together and did absolutely everything in their power to make sure that that plane did not kill more people than had already been killed that day. And in doing so, they sacrificed themselves.

Flight 93 was really a symbol that we as Americans are not going to sit back and let terrorists destroy our country, our way of life. It was a very powerful moment for us as a country.

My oldest son knows Grandpa Tom died in a plane crash because there were

some bad men on the plane. My four-year-old girls are not quite old enough to really understand any of that yet.

Most importantly, my husband and I really try to model the behavior that we hope that our kids will someday exhibit themselves. Be decisive, act boldly, be brave. I just feel so blessed to have him as my father.

Tom Burnett is buried at Fort Snelling National Cemetery.



Tom Burnett

Penny Dierycks

Duluth

Colonel Dierycks retired from the 148th Fighter Wing (Duluth) after 35 years of service. As Logistics Readiness Squadron Commander, her duties included motor pool, refueling the airplanes, and all the supplies and logistics of the base.

On the morning of 9/11, my husband, who was in the Air International Guard, was in Saudi Arabia. He was an aircraft fuel systems mechanic and had a mission to go there and help the Air Force rebuild aircraft fuel tanks.

I had two children. At the time they were seventh grade and fifth? Well, not even. Natalie was probably in third grade. And I'm thinking, now what do I do? I know I had to stay at work. But the immediate decision was to start loading the jets. We've got to get the ordinance on the airplane. Something bad is happening and we're going to get the call.

I called my mom. "Mom, when school's over today, can you go get the kids and get them home?" "Yep, I can do that for you." Super. Then I got all the logistics people ready and said things were happening. Whatever the Wing asks for, we have to provide whatever it is. 'No' is not an answer today. 'No' is not acceptable.

Among the first military operations of September 11, 2001, fighters from the 148th Fighter Wing escorted Air Force One from Florida to Nebraska, and soon flew patrols all over the country.

President Bush was in Florida meeting with the school kids. He got the notice. 'You gotta get out of here. Something bad's happening in DC.' And as he's leaving Florida, the 148th Fighter Wing airplanes that were on alert in Florida at Panama City Tyndall Air Force Base took off and escorted him part of the way because he was going to Louisiana and then on up to Offutt Air Force Base in Nebraska where they had the big national command center. So our jets did escort him part of the way.

Then we were told no one's flying and all planes are shut down across our country. They told us, 'You guys are going to go down and do what they call the civil air control cap,' a cap over the Twin Cities area. Two jets go every four hours. They were up for four hours, and before the two could come back, two more had to go. So we were literally flying 24/7 for, I think it was seven days.

People said they felt so comfortable in the Twin Cities area because they could hear those jets. If you live in Bloomington or Richfield or whatever and you hear commercial jets all the time, and all of a sudden there's nothing, literally no airplanes are moving, but now you could hear those two F-16s overhead always moving. We got letters from people that said, 'Now we feel safe. We know you're there. We know you're protecting us. We know what's happening.'

On 9/11, Cold War thinking collided with a Global War on Terrorism.

The other thing people aren't aware of, because the United States of America keeps thinking, well, we can get things done with technology. We can get things done. At the height of the Cold War, there were 151 alert facilities all over the United States, because we were going to protect ourselves from Russia, right? In 2001, there were seven air alert facilities. Seven. And Duluth was one of them. We were at Tyndall. And then there was Vermont and Massachusetts, one in California, one in Arizona, one in Louisiana. and one in Portland. So there wasn't a lot of coverage for the country. I don't think people thought what happened could happen with an airplane. But of course it did.

Another interesting thing. One of the gentlemen I worked with who was a traditional officer in the Air National Guard called me that day from Minneapolis and he said, 'Are any airplanes flying?' And I said, 'No, the country's standing down. The fighters are the only thing going.' This friend called me because his buddy's an FBI guy and they wanted to get one of the suspected terrorists [Zacharias Moussaoui], who was in Minneapolis, into Washington DC, but they couldn't get him on an airplane. So, I mean, the guard wasn't going to fly out there, so I don't really know. I assume they probably put him in a vehicle and had to drive him all that way. But that's what happened. Those little things you remember on that day.

Then as time progressed, we would get the call, 'You need to go and fly caps [combat air patrols] over New York City and you need to fly over Washington DC.' President Bush was on vacation at his ranch in Texas over Thanksgiving. So that year for Thanksgiving, we sent people to Texas and we flew missions over his home and while he was on vacation in Texas.

One of my personal best stories was when my son was supposed to do a report, and I got his report card and he got a 'D' in social studies. So I went to talk to the teacher. I said, "What's going on and why didn't you call me earlier?" And she said, 'Well, he was supposed to do a report on 9/11.' And I go, 'What?' And he's sitting there. Now, he's in seventh grade, mind. So I looked at Spencer. What was wrong? 'Mom, I didn't have enough information.' What?



Penny Dierycks

FRAGMENT FROM THE WORLD TRADE CENTER

The collapse of the World Trade Center towers on 9/11 created an enormous pile of twisted steel girders. The US Navy used ten tons of WTC steel to build the USS New York, launched December 20, 2000. Nearly 2,000 remaining steel fragments were stored with other artifacts in Hangar 17 at John F. Kennedy International Airport in New York. The Port Authority of New York launched a program in 2010 to distribute the fragments to police and fire departments, cities, museums, and other organizations for use in memorials.

At least ten locations in Minnesota, mostly fire and police departments, received fragments of WTC steel.



This piece (08-0070) belongs to the Lake Crystal Fire Department, and is on loan to the Air Force & Veterans Museum.





Tim Stout

President George W. Bush

Tim Stout

By Jack Baumbach

Tim Stout, who lives now in Mahtomedi, Minnesota, recalls that September 11, 2001, was a beautiful Tuesday morning when he woke up and got ready to head to work. At the time, Tim's workplace was the White House, in the Office of Presidential Personnel under President George W. Bush. In the OPP, Tim was responsible for both the processing of new employees into the White House, as well as looking at any policies before they were passed onto Pres. Bush. Less than a few hours after Tim arrived at work, he was able to see smoke coming from the Pentagon. Tim and his fellow White House staffers did not know what to do until a Secret Service agent came running through the hallways yelling "RUN FOR YOUR LIVES." Tim recalls, "It was like panic. People ran and didn't grab their belongings, purses, or jackets. Many of the women even took off their high heels and left them lying around the White House and the front lawn because they couldn't run with them on.... It was quite alarming." Tim and his fellow White House staff were safe, as a group of passengers aboard the United Airlines Flight 93 took back control of the plane—which may have been headed to the White House or the Capitol—and crashed it into a field in Shanksville, Pennsylvania. Regarding the sacrifice that these passengers made to prevent another attack, Tim stated, "Their sacrifice was absolutely recognized at the highest levels of Congressional leadership. Their sacrifice could have saved myself, my co-workers, and even the life of my wife who was working in the Capitol at the time of the attack."

While the White House did not require any physical repairs, Tim explained that the 9/11 terrorist attacks brought to light gaping holes in various aspects of the U.S. government, such as the lack of attention to what came to be known as "homeland security." Prior to the 9/11 attacks, the government did not have any offices or departments that assumed the responsibilities of the current-day Department of Homeland Security (DHS). For example, the Transportation Security Administration (TSA), did not exist when the 9/11 attacks occurred, and other national security agencies were under a variety of departments within the government. Regarding this, Tim stated, "The biggest problem was the silos that it created. There was not an optimal amount of information sharing between various agencies." Tim further explained that to prevent this, Pres. Bush empowered a small group of White House staff, less than two dozen, to decide which departments, offices, and agencies would get consolidated under the umbrella of Homeland Security. Tim said, "It was a very closely held discussion because if word got out, there would likely be a lot of opposition from the leadership of these agencies or from congressional leadership who didn't

want their agency structures to change.” In fact, these meetings were so classified that they were often held in the bunker of the White House, named “The Situation Room.” Out of the hundreds of White House employees at the time, Tim found himself inside most of these meetings because of his duties as the Deputy Executive Staff Secretary for the newly established Office of Homeland Security. Tim humbly stated, “I was sort of the fly on the wall in these meetings. I would take notes to help prepare the to-do lists, and when those lists had to be done.” After these meetings occurred, Pres. Bush made the official announcement of the creation of the White House Office of Homeland Security on September 20, 2001. This consolidated agencies such as the TSA, U.S. Coast Guard, U.S. Border Patrol, U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, and even the U.S. Secret Service under the Department of Homeland Security.

Through the establishment of the Office of Homeland Security, and later the creation of the Department of Homeland Security on November 25, 2002, Stout experienced the largest bi-partisan reorganizations of the U.S. government since the National Security Act of 1947 in response to the bombing of Pearl Harbor and World War II. Tim said that despite the fear of opposition that was present during the classified meetings regarding the establishment of the Office of Homeland Security, “once Pres. Bush announced the establishment of Homeland Security, there was virtually unanimous support from all levels of government.” In addition to the consolidation of these agencies, Tim was a part of establishing updated policies for the continuity of government. Tim stated, “After we had been attacked, we realized that we needed to properly fund an updated plan for the continuity of government.” A famous example of this is the “designated survivor,” a government official who does not attend some of the larger meetings in case there is an attack on the United States and several officials are injured. Tim explained that establishing this plan required a substantial amount of funding to ensure that they could safely transport and protect these members of government each time they needed to be removed from the local areas of government meetings.

While Tim experienced the physical shift in the post-9/11 U.S. governmental processes, he also had the chance to see the psychological effects of the attacks on people working in Washington where many people were constantly on edge about the possibility of another attack. For example, Tim described that one of his first meetings after the 9/11 attacks took place in the General Administration Services Building. A section of large glass panes created a weird reflection in the window and a random plane looked like it was coming towards their meeting room, similar to what United Airlines Flight 93 may have been heading to just three days earlier. Seeing the plane, one of Tim’s colleagues dove under the table in fear

because he thought that they were under attack again. Regarding this Tim said, “We were so on edge from what had just happened three days earlier. It was a display of how everyone now understood that planes could be used as weapons. It was just the new normal that we would be living in. We realized that we weren’t invincible to attacks and that terrorists were willing to go to any measure to attack the United States.”

Like President Bush’s confidence in the “steel of American resolve,” Tim explained that patriotism, pride, and unity ultimately prevailed as the predominant values throughout Washington. The government was united over the idea of protecting the nation from future terrorist attacks and rallying together to support those communities that had been attacked. In fact, just three days after the attack, Pres. Bush hosted a “Day of Prayer and Remembrance” at Washington National Cathedral. Tim said: “It was extremely moving. For the rest of my life, I will never forget when we sang the ‘Battle Hymn of the Republic’ at the end of the service. We had mourned for three days, and it felt like that song was a defining moment in how we were going to respond to the attacks.” Less than a month later, Pres. Bush gave orders to send American troops to Afghanistan to initiate what would become the Global War on Terror.

Tim would eventually retire from the Department of Homeland Security in November 2006 after working there for three years. After he retired, he used the knowledge that he had acquired over the previous five years working in the post-9/11 government to better help state governments make similar changes. Working at Ridge Global LLC for former Secretary of Homeland Security Tom Ridge, Tim helped state governors build up the infrastructure they would need to ensure security on a state level. Tim explained: “We talked to them about how they could build up their Homeland Security apparatus so that they could strengthen the security around things such as power plants, nuclear plants, dams, bridges, or roads. All these things were often dismissed as possible targets but could create significant consequences if they were attacked by terrorists.” Tim worked at Ridge Global until 2010 and was then offered a job at the Hennepin County Sheriff’s Office.

When asked how that “sunny Tuesday morning” on September 11, 2001 changed his life, Tim shared one last story that encapsulated the sheer unpredictability of the terrorist attacks. Tim said, “I was at the Twin Towers with a buddy on September 8th, just three days before the attack. I distinctly remember being in the south tower and looking south while tapping on the glass. It reminded me of bank-teller glass, and I looked at my buddy and said, ‘this stuff seems like it is almost indestructible with how strong it feels.’ When the

attacks happened, I couldn't help but think about all the workers, restaurant staff, and other people that I had seen just three days prior and how they might have been affected by the attacks." As Tim worked in the highest levels of federal government for six years following the attacks, it became evident to him that nothing, not the Twin Towers, the Pentagon, nor the U.S. government was indestructible. This fact, though, did not define the United States. Rather, what defined us are the ways in which each individual rallied together in an unprecedented support of congressional action to prevent a future attack. Minnesotan Tim Stout was in the midst of it all.

Aftermath



Introduction

By Linda Cameron

An eerie silence descended over the Twin Cities metropolitan area immediately following the September 11 attacks. Life seemed to come to an abrupt halt as residents clustered around television screens and radios, following the unfolding of the horrific events on the east coast. Like people in other cities and towns in Minnesota and across the country, those in Minneapolis and St. Paul initially responded to the attacks with shock and anger, and then quickly looked for ways to help.

Transportation

Immediately after the attacks, the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) ordered all jet airplanes in the country to be grounded at least until noon the following day. Northwest Airlines (NWA), based at the Minneapolis-St. Paul International (MSP) airport, complied by canceling flights and grounding its fleet of 425 jets. The FAA diverted flights in progress to the nearest airport, and hundreds of incoming international flights were redirected to other airports, many in Canada. NWA diverted 105 flights, which, with cancellations, affected some 1,400 of the company's 1,700 daily passengers. Many shops and restaurants at the airport closed and MSP staff worked to assist stranded travelers to find accommodation and transportation.

Minnesota-based Sun Country Airlines waived cancellation fees and gave refunds to passengers traveling between 9/11 and 9/15. NWA also refunded passengers unable to travel. Local Amtrak and Greyhound Bus offices saw a surge in business as travelers looked for alternative means to reach their destinations. MSP, having met the US Department of Transportation's new security guidelines, reopened and resumed flights on September 13. General aviation across the country was not fully restored until September 21.

Urban Centers

The attacks disrupted business all over the metro area. The IDS Center in downtown Minneapolis was evacuated. Bomb-sniffing dogs patrolled outside the Pillsbury Center, and many employees in the Wells Fargo Center were allowed to leave. Government buildings, such as City Hall and the federal building, remained open, but with heightened security. In downtown St. Paul, the World Trade Center, the Children's Museum, and River Center,

among others, closed early. In the suburbs, the Mall of America and other shopping centers also closed early. Closed businesses and grounded flights meant lost revenues and delayed deliveries of goods needed by local businesses, causing concern for the local economy.

Government

Federal, state, and local government buildings throughout Minnesota remained open, but with extra law enforcement personnel for added security. Minneapolis called 25 additional police officers to duty, and St. Paul police patrolled outside their headquarters carrying military-style weapons. Local FBI agents set up a call center to field possible tips and to help ease public concerns.

In St. Paul, Governor Jesse Ventura urged Minnesotans to stay calm, but vigilant. He put the Minnesota National Guard on alert, and mobilized the state's emergency telecommunications center. Ventura insisted on keeping the Capitol open and going forward with scheduled primary elections as a show of the strength of democracy. Capitol Security ordered all buildings in the Capitol complex to lock all doors but one, with guards on duty to inspect deliveries and search visitors' bags. An interfaith "Minnesota Remembers: A Memorial from the Heartland" event held at the Capitol drew a crowd of thousands and featured a laying of wreaths honoring the fallen, remarks by former Vice President Walter Mondale, an ecumenical prayer, and patriotic music.

Hospitals and Blood Banks

Metro health care institutions and morticians quickly prepared for a possible influx of victims from the east coast. Minnesota's Department of Health and Human Services had an emergency response plan in place that could activate approximately 7,000 medical staff, if needed. Hennepin County Medical Center had 250 hospital beds ready within an hour of the attacks. Health care facilities braced for local patients suffering from asthma and heart attacks brought on by stress. On the advice of the FBI, the Veterans Administration hospital in Minneapolis briefly evacuated nearly 4,000 patients and staff after it was targeted with a threatening call that turned out to be a hoax.

The Red Cross put out a nationwide call for blood donations and Minnesotans lined up to help. A UPS plane loaded with medical supplies and blood flew from Minnesota to New York City on the evening of 9/11. In the days that followed, blood banks extended their hours to accommodate as many donors as possible. Even so, many who wanted to help were turned away.

Schools

Educational institutions responded in different ways. Minneapolis public schools canceled all after-school activities, including athletic events, on September 11 and 12. St. Paul schools didn't cancel events and kept TV screens in school buildings off in the hope of maintaining some semblance of normalcy for students, faculty, and staff. Educators encouraged parents to talk to their children about the attacks. The Muslim Al-Amal School in Fridley closed as a precaution, fearing retribution.

The University of Minnesota campuses and Macalester College canceled classes the day of the attacks, as did some professors at other schools. Macalester set up a "nerve center" to communicate with alumni and family members living in New York City and Washington, D.C.

Religious Institutions

Metro area churches and other religious venues opened their doors to those seeking spiritual comfort. Many held formal prayer services, including the Cathedral of St. Paul, its dome draped in a huge American flag. More than 1,300 people attended an interfaith service held at the Basilica of St. Mary in Minneapolis, and an estimated 250 attended a vigil held on Northrop Mall at the University of Minnesota, offering prayers from Jewish, Catholic, Episcopal, Muslim, Baha'i, and Ojibwe spiritual traditions.

Minnesotans of Middle Eastern origins, fearing harassment, condemned the extremist actions of the terrorists, and reminded all citizens that ethnicity and different religious beliefs alone were not cause for suspicion.

Camp Ripley

When the staff and soldiers working at Camp Ripley on Tuesday, September 11, 2001 arrived to begin their day, most assumed it would be just another normal workday. They parked their vehicles, greeted their co-workers and fellow soldiers as they usually did, and began the tasks of the day.

At 8:46 a.m., however, any assumptions about the day being normal were proven to be devastatingly wrong. The news of American Airlines Flight 11 striking the North Tower of the World Trade Center began to filter into Camp Ripley via phone calls, radio, television and the internet. Because there had never been a terrorist attack on this scale in the United

States, many reacted with disbelief and skepticism at first because the news was so incomprehensible. Those individuals whose curiosity outweighed their suspicions wandered quietly into employee lounges or wherever there was a television available in an attempt to see for themselves if the horrifying news was true. Televisions were in use all over Camp Ripley that day in buildings where they had never--or rarely--been used before.

Upon confirmation that an airliner had, indeed, crashed into 1 World Trade Center, some people thought it was most likely an accident, similar to the incident in 1945 when a small plane crashed into the Empire State Building. But once United Airlines Flight 75 crashed into the South Tower at 9:03 a.m., all presumptions of an accident were set aside and the cold, harsh reality that the U.S. was under deliberate attack began to sink in.

Among those working on Camp Ripley that day, there is one consistent recollection: People gathering around televisions, watching intently as the horrifying events of the day unfolded, with little or no discussion or comment—just eerie, stunned silence. Some remained at their desks, listening to the radio and trying—mostly without success--to continue their work. Others tried to convene previously scheduled meetings but ultimately acquiesced and gathered with their co-workers and fellow soldiers to listen and watch as one of the most infamous days in U.S. history continued to serve up more and more death and devastation. As the day progressed, the initial shock and disbelief began to dissipate and those feelings were replaced with anxiety and anger. Some Camp Ripley personnel confessed that September 11, 2001 was the first day they didn't feel safe there. Nobody knew what to think or do about the situation, and the disquieting, uncharacteristic silence prevalent that day was the result of the shock and bewilderment brought on by watching the unbelievable scenario unfold.

Several Minnesota National Guard soldiers were driving some military vehicles from 34th Infantry Division Headquarters in Rosemount to Camp Ripley that morning. As they were driving back to Camp Ripley, people in vehicles they met along the way were honking and waving at them which was somewhat unusual and puzzling--until news of the terror attacks reached the convoy by radio. When they stopped to fuel the vehicles, people came up to shake hands with the soldiers, and many inquired if the Minnesota National Guard was mobilizing in response to the attacks.

Once it was clear the attacks were terrorism, additional security measures were swiftly implemented at Camp Ripley. An increased number of Security guards were stationed at the Main Gate that day, all wearing body armor and with weapons at the ready. Concrete highway barriers were placed in a “zig zag” pattern in front of the Main Gate in an attempt to thwart

anyone attempting to forcefully enter the facility with a vehicle. The Threat Condition level was raised to “D” or “Delta”—the highest of the five FPCon (Force Protection Condition) levels for military installations. Personnel in all occupied buildings were told to lock all the doors and start roving patrols in 15-minute intervals to look for anything out of the ordinary. Access to Camp Ripley was restricted to those with either military or State identification cards, and some of the entrance gates that normally were open were locked. Random vehicle searches were conducted, and Camp Ripley personnel were instructed on how to respond to an active shooter situation. Numerous briefings were conducted to address possible security threat scenarios.

Many Minnesota National Guard soldiers believed that the terrorist attacks would bring unprecedented changes for the United States Armed Forces and many—soldiers and civilians alike—believed that nothing would ever be the same in the United States of America after September 11, 2001.

Camp Ripley Security Protocol Changes Post-9/11

In response to the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, Security operations were expanded at Camp Ripley. Patrols and building checks by Security personnel were increased in frequency. Prior to 9/11/01, Camp Ripley had a parking permit system in place which allowed soldiers and personnel to gain admittance to the facility with a windshield sticker. Thereafter, this system was abandoned, and proper identification was required for everyone in a vehicle wishing to enter the facility, and this is still true today. Random vehicle searches continued for some time thereafter and are still being conducted as part of the new security protocols.

As the result of the 9/11 attacks, additional funds to allow implementation of increased security measures were provided to Camp Ripley through the National Guard Bureau in Washington, D.C. These funds allowed Camp Ripley to purchase additional needed equipment, hire additional Security personnel and to install surveillance cameras. Some buildings had electronic key card reading systems installed—inside and out—to restrict or eliminate access by the general public.

The FPCON (Force Protection Condition) level at Camp Ripley has never gone below “B” or “Bravo” (level three of five) following the terrorist attacks. Many of the increased security protocols implemented as the result of 9/11 still remain in force today at Camp Ripley.

Post-9/11

The terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001 began a drastic evolution in the missions of the Minnesota National Guard. Thus, Camp Ripley had to improve its facilities in order to meet changing training needs. As the result of increased Federal funding provided through the National Guard Bureau, Camp Ripley was able to improve its training facilities to better meet the demands of the new National Guard mission and that of the civilian agencies who utilize it for training.

Immediately following 9/11, there was a dire need for additional security at U.S. airports. Camp Ripley was able to provide immediate training for Minnesota National Guard soldiers to fill this need.

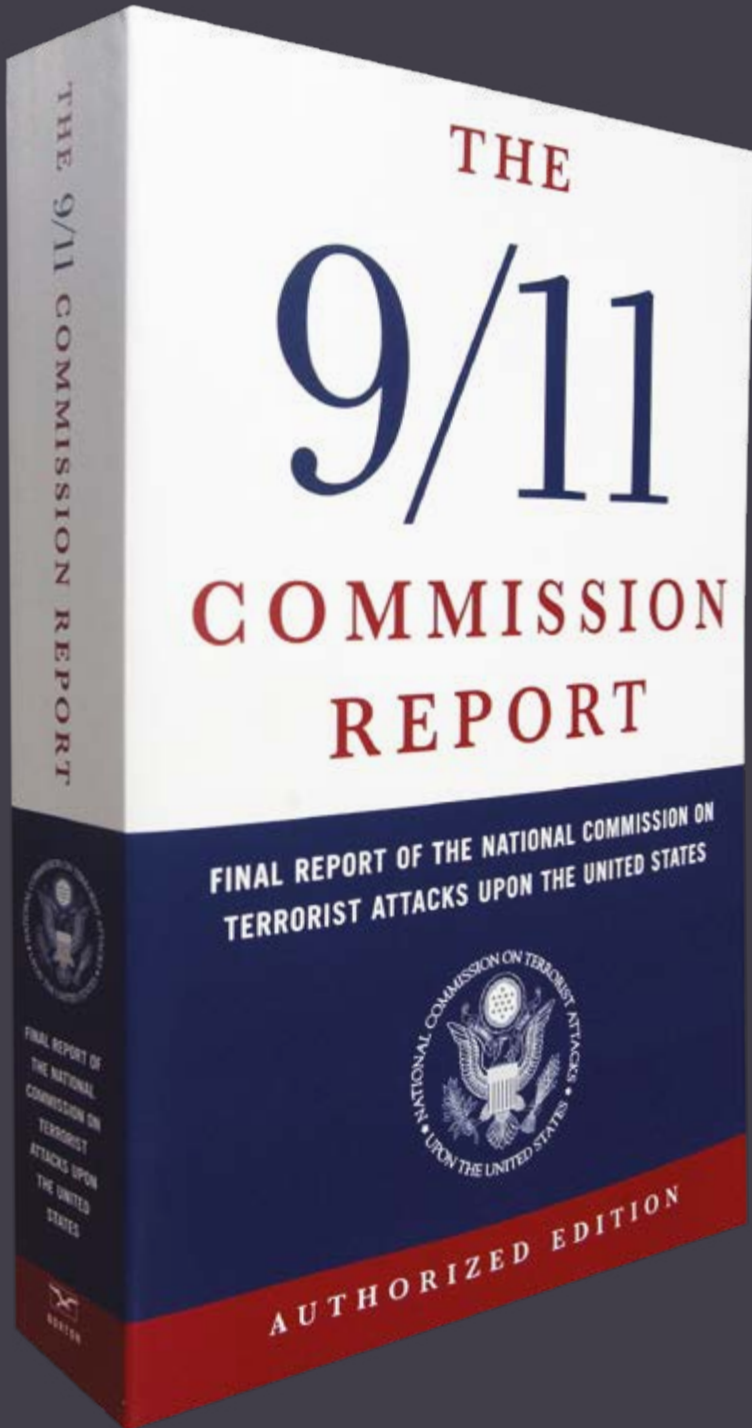
It was evident that Camp Ripley had to add housing facilities for the anticipated large influx of soldiers and civilians that would be arriving for training. Thanks to the Federal funding provided through the National Guard Bureau, new housing accommodations were built.

Some of the additions and improvements to Camp Ripley since 2001:

- A “village” consisting of 26 buildings was constructed for urban warfare training. It is known as the Combined Arms Collective Training Facility (CACTF).
- Improvised Explosive Device (IED) training facilities were created.
- Improvements were made to the Air Traffic Control facilities at Miller Airfield.
- A new Unmanned Aerial Surveillance (drone) facility was constructed and opened in 2013.
- A large expansion and renovation of the Camp Ripley Education Center completed in 2015 added much needed classroom space for both military and civilian agency use.
- The new Emergency Management Training Center was built to provide facilities to train law enforcement, emergency management, fire service and emergency medical management personnel as well as the military to respond to large scale emergency situations.
- The Medical Simulation Training Center which opened in 2015 provides facilities for training and refresher courses for military medics and civilian first responders.

In Conclusion

The terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001 irrevocably changed life in the United States. The mission of our Armed Forces has changed as well. Accelerated training schedules and constant deployments have become the norm for the Minnesota National Guard. Camp Ripley continues to change and improve its facilities so our soldiers are well trained and prepared for whatever tasks they are sent to perform anywhere in the world.



9/11 Commission Report

By Randal Dietrich

In July 2004, the Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States, totaling more than 500 pages, was published. It identified institutional failings and missed opportunities as well as 41 specific recommendations.

“We present the narrative of this report and the recommendations that flow from it to the President of the United States, the United States Congress and the American people for their consideration. Ten Commissioners – five Republicans and five Democrats chosen by elected leaders of our nation’s capital at a time of great partisan division – have come together to present this report without dissent.”

“We have come together with a unity of purpose because our nation demands it. September 11, 2001, was a day of unprecedented shock and suffering in the history of the United States. The nation was unprepared. How did this happen, and how can we avoid such a tragedy again?”

– Thomas Kean & Lee Hamilton

By the Numbers

- 2.5 million pages of documents reviewed
- 1,200 individuals interviewed in ten countries
- 19 days of hearings, with testimony from 160 witnesses

At the Outset

“At the outset of our work, we said we were looking backward in order to look forward. We hope that the terrible losses chronicled in this report can create something positive – an America that is safer, stronger and wiser. That September day, we came together as a nation. The test before us is to sustain that unity of purpose and meet the challenges now confronting us.”

– Thomas Kean & Lee Hamilton

Minnesota Mentions

“Reagan National Airport controllers then vectored an unarmed National Guard C-130H cargo aircraft, which had just taken off en route to Minnesota, to identify and follow the suspicious aircraft (Flight 77). The C-130H pilot spotted it, identified it as being a 757, attempted to follow its path, and at 9:38, seconds after impact, reported to the control tower: “Looks like that aircraft crashed into the Pentagon sir.” - Page 23

“The aircraft that spotted the black smoke was the same unarmed Air National Guard cargo plane that had seen American 77 crash into the Pentagon 27 minutes earlier. It had resumed its flight to Minnesota and saw the smoke from the crash of United 93, less than two minutes after the plane went down.” - Page 30

On August 15, 2001, the Minneapolis FBI Field Office initiated an intelligence investigation on Zacarias Moussaoui. . . . There was substantial disagreement between Minneapolis agents and FBI headquarters as to what Moussaoui was planning to do. In one conversation between a Minneapolis supervisor and a headquarters agent, the latter complained that Minneapolis’s FISA request was couched in a manner intended to get people “spun up.” The supervisor replied that was precisely his intent. He said he was “trying to keep someone from taking a plane and crashing it into the World Trade Center.” The headquarters agent replied that this was not going to happen. - Page 275



Michael Hurley

Michael Hurley

Son of a WWII Navy veteran, Mike Hurley was born and raised in Edina as the second oldest of 10 kids. They all went to Edina High School. Most of them played hockey and other sports. From there, he attended the University of Minnesota, majored in modern European diplomatic history and political science as a second major. He went on to the University of Minnesota Law School and practiced law for a couple of years. He had warm memories of Camp Ripley because his family has a lake home in Nisswa.

A graduate of the University of Minnesota School of Law and a case officer for the Central Intelligence Agency, Michael Hurley volunteered to go to Afghanistan on the afternoon of September 11, 2001.

2001 – 2003

It's an interesting thing to know about the CIA. It's really different from the military in that respect. Nobody forces you to go to dangerous areas. It's all voluntary, and many people do volunteer to go to these places, so I went out there and I did three tours of duty from late 2001 through early 2003.

It's hard I think for people to understand, but when you compare the CIA to the military, we're a small family. We're not hundreds and hundreds of thousands of people. Back then, I think 15, 16, or 17,000, and probably just maybe 2,000 of those were the operational people being sent overseas. That's a rough guess. When those people die, I'm sure it's like the military, you feel like you lost a brother or sister.

I had a small team in southeastern Afghanistan, just a handful of CIA officers, communicators and weapons specialists and so on.

But they put us with what's called the Special Forces A-Team, Operation Detachment Alpha. Later on, as we built up for one of the biggest battles of that first year in Afghanistan in spring 2002 and early March 2002 called Operation Anaconda, we had in the compound that I was sort of in charge of, we had SEAL Team Six, we had Delta Force, we had British Special Air Service and British Special Boat Service, and Australian Special Air Service

there with us because our allies were there helping us as well. And essentially, we took over this compound and I had, literally you've seen it in the movies, but it's true. The CIA would helicopter into me millions of dollars in cash every month in order to pay the \$100 a month that we paid to each member of the Afghan militia to buy the pickup trucks they needed and to fuel them, to pay for the physicians to take care of them, to buy their food.

And then the Green Berets would train them, although they were pretty tough people who had fought in, some of them, in the anti-Soviet conflict. And the agency supplied, that it bought on the world market, the AK-47s and the ammunition and the other stuff that those militias would need. But worked extremely closely with the most elite units in the United States military, from Seal Team Six to Delta Force to Marine Force Recon, Army Rangers. And it was pretty amazing to see. And I had worked with many of them or many of those units anyway in Bosnia and in Kosovo, but it was pretty amazing to work with them on the ground in Afghanistan and to see their talents and their dedication.

My job was to run the intelligence network to try to pin down as best we could to find and fix the locations of our enemy, and then work with the military to deploy whatever forces we needed to deal with them, principally air power. We would call in airstrikes. And that was in the early days. We'd actually used drones in Bosnia against war criminals and things like that to try to locate them. But drone technology had progressed by 2001. And so we'd have our monitors down in our compounds and be able to watch in real time drone strikes against targets that we'd identified.

And our biggest priority was to find out the locations where these terrorists were holed up, but it was also to hunt for what were called high value targets. And that meant Bin Laden, the number two al-Qaeda guy, Zawahiri, the Egyptian, the top people, Mullah Omar in the Taliban, and try to determine where they were. Later on, I was in southeast Afghanistan in Gardez, which was the jumping off point for Operation Anaconda, which started in late February, early March, which was three weeks of intensive air campaign. And I think that I've read that that battle was the highest battle in terms of elevation that the US Army has ever participated in. There was a tragic thing that happened

on the first day of that operation when seven Navy SEALs were killed trying to rescue one of their fellow Seals who got knocked out of a helicopter. It was a very tragic day.

2003 – 2004

I came back from my third tour in Afghanistan in April 2003. So pretty much I'd gone from fall of 2001 to spring of 2003, with just a couple short trips back to the US. And I came back from that and I was thinking about going back out for a fourth time. But the 9/11 Commission had been created by Act of Congress in November 2002. And when commissions are created, they don't just materialize out of whole cloth, you have to build them up and get the staff you need.

So that process really started getting going in January or February of 2003. They picked the commissioners and then they had to pick an executive director and then the staff. So when I was back, someone who was pretty senior in the government and who I'd worked with on the National Security Council staff, earlier learned that I was back and called me up and suggested that I speak to the executive director of the commission, which I did.

I was taking a couple of days off from the agency and I went down to do that. They, I think, liked the fact that. . . I was, I guess, a little bit different from the normal CIA officer in that I had done the CIA stuff on the ground, but I also had the policy experience on the National Security Council staff with two assignments there. I knew how the paper moved, I knew how National Security Council decisions were made at pretty high levels. And so that was a perspective that I think that they liked. And while I was talking to the executive director of the commission, who had just only been in the job for a month or six weeks, he called up the chairman, the co-chairs. The 9/11 Commission introduced me to them and right on the spot, they asked me if I'd like to come and take a senior position on the staff.

And it appealed to me, I guess given my legal background in part. And I thought it was just important work that it was going to be doing. I agreed to it, provided they could get permission. I had to be detailed from my agency. So, right that afternoon, the chairman of the commission called up the director of the CIA, my big boss, and asked him if they would detail me there. CIA didn't



really want to do it, but they didn't want to turn down the co-chairs and the 9/11 Commission. They agreed to it, provided I didn't have a legal conflict of interest. The legal conflict of interest being if I'd been deeply involved in work against al-Qaeda before the 9/11 attacks, which I had not been. I did not have that.

So, I stepped into a really, really interesting position on the 9/11 Commission. It was divided into different teams investigating different aspects. I won't go into all of that, but I was put in charge of the team that investigated the counter-terrorism policy of the United States towards al-Qaeda before 9/11. What did our decision-makers, what did our leaders do about the rising threat of al-Qaeda? And the public, and everybody was really interested in the work of my team because everybody wanted to know who you're going to blame, Clinton or Bush, right? That's what it was in the popular imagination.

I've been on law review and a law review editor, so I knew I had acceptable writing skills and it was going to require that and a lot of interviews and things. I had some of that background from law. It actually made sense, I think, to some people that I do that.

My work was the counter-terrorism policy stuff. That got really, really interesting because my team then had to dive into some of the most secret documents that the United States government produces - Covert Action, it's called. It's all detailed in the 9/11 Commission Report, about what was the CIA doing under presidential order and orders of the president to kill bin Laden before the 9/11 attacks. You can imagine how secret those documents were.

Michael Hurley credits Thomas Kean and Lee Hamilton for setting a tone of not caring about politics, investigating the facts and stating those facts in plain English.

Upon watching the final vote of commissioners to adopt the report without dissent, I felt like I was looking through the keyhole of history. I felt a sense of intense pride and affection for what great leadership can produce.

I really want the folks to know the quality of the leadership of the 9/11 Commission, that they were bipartisan people. There were five Democrats, five Republicans, all of whom had held high office in the United States, political

offices. The chairman, Tom Kean was a two-time moderate Republican governor of New Jersey, highly respected. He's an educator also. And Lee Hamilton, a very plain-spoken moderate Democrat representative, former representative from Indiana who had been chairman of important House committees.

And they really set a tone that we're not going to care about politics. We're going to investigate facts and we're going to state the facts in plain language. Hard to do when you're dealing with so many acronyms and things like that, when you're describing what happened with the military and how they responded to things and CIA and so on.

We had this eminent historian from Harvard who had advised us, who'd advised many commissions in the past. His name was Ernie May, he's deceased now, but he's written some amazing books. He kept emphasizing, and Tom Kean, the chair of the commission, said, "We want to write this book in a way that high school students studying civics, 11th graders can understand it and read it 50 years from now." And I think we accomplished that in the way that it's written. It's actually, any of you who have ever looked at the Warren Commission Report on the Kennedy assassination and all the exhibits runs to 20 volumes. And it's essentially unreadable. This, I think is 300 pages and but it's compact. We did that on purpose and we made it available as a paperback. You could read it online as well too.

We wanted it to be in every bookstore in the United States on the day it came out. And it was. I think the price was \$10. And by the way, none of that money came to the commission, it was government money. But one thing I always take a degree of pride in, and I think it's a funny anecdote, is that, so the 9/11 Commission Report led the bestselling list on the New York Times for almost a year. It was number one in nonfiction, over six months anyway, and I think close to a year. It got reviewed by every major magazine and periodical. And I'll get this wrong, I think it was in New York Magazine or the New Yorker, but it was reviewed by the famous late author John Updike, the famous fiction author, he wrote it.

I'll never forget something that he wrote about it. "Heretofore, there's been exactly one masterpiece written in the English language by committee, the King James version of the Bible. We can now add a second masterpiece to it,

the 9/11 Commission Report." I always liked that praise coming from John Updike and having played a minor part in writing it. It was good affirmation.

Preface of the 9/11 Commission Report (excerpt)

At the outset of our work, we said we are looking backward in order to look forward. We hope that the terrible losses chronicled in this report can create something positive, an America that is safer, stronger, and wiser. That September day we came together as a nation. The test before us is to sustain the unity of purpose and meet the challenges. Now confronting us, we want to thank the commission staff. The dedicated professional staff headed by Phillip Zelikow has contributed innumerable hours to the completion of this report. Setting aside other endeavors to take on the all-consuming assignment, they have conducted the exacting investigative work upon which the commission has built. They have given good advice and faith. We carried out our guidance. They have been superb. We conclude our list of thanks by coming full circle. We want to thank the families of 9/11 whose persistence and dedication helped create the commission.

They have been with us each step of the way as partners and witnesses. They know better than any of us the importance of the work we have undertaken. We want to note what we have done and not done. We have endeavored to provide the most complete account we can of the events of September 11. What happened and why? This final report is only a summary of what we have done, setting only a fraction of the sources we have consulted. But in an event of this scale, touching so many issues in organizations, we are conscious of our limits. We have not interviewed every knowledgeable person or found every relevant piece of paper. New information inevitably will come to light. We present this report as a foundation for a better understanding of a landmark in the history of our nation. We have listened to scores of overwhelming personal tragedies and astounding acts of heroism and bravery. We have examined the staggering impact of the events of 9/11 on the American people and their amazing resilience and courage as they've fought back. We have admired their determination to do their best to prevent another tragedy while preparing to respond if it becomes necessary. We emerge from this investigation with enormous sympathy for the victims and their loved ones, and with enhanced respect

for the American people. We recognize the formal challenges that lie ahead. We also approach the task of recommendations with humility. We have made a limited number of them. We decided to consciously focus on recommendations we believe to be most important, whose implementations can make the greatest difference.

All of us have had to pause, reflect, and sometimes change our minds as we study these problems and consider the views of others. We hope our report will encourage our fellow citizens to study, reflect, and act.

Michael Hurley's motivation was personal. It was a report that needed to serve his WWII-era father, the seven Navy Seals who died in the helicopter rescue attempt, and his CIA brothers and sisters since 9/11.

I should also say that in our investigation, we talked to, I don't know, 1500 people. We interviewed in all aspects of US Government officials and foreigners from the working - level people to four-star generals, to Colin Powell and Condi Rice and Donald Rumsfeld, secretaries of Defense and State, and President Clinton and President Bush. And when I was sitting across from President Clinton asking questions in that interview of how he had responded and just the whole notion that we were representing the people of the United States. They had to answer to the people.

I thought of my dad as this guy who served briefly in the US Navy briefly because he just came of age towards the end of World War II. But in the U.S. Navy, just going through training. And I thought of him and I thought that I was there representing Americans in general and asking these questions that we hold our leaders to account for their actions for what they do and for what they don't do. And we wrote this report in a way to . . . We didn't come out with conclusions to say so-and-so messed up on this or so-and-so messed up on that. But it's very, very clear just in the factual way that it's presented where people fell short. Our view was that the Congress or the American people could then hold folks accountable for what they may have missed.

We interviewed President Clinton and President Bush in private. But the other very high ranking people from both the Clinton and Bush administrations were

in public hearing in Senate hearing rooms. And I'll never forget the day that former Secretary of State Condelezza Rice was interviewed. The photographers were there from every major publication in the United States, and the clicking of the cameras going off then was like the cicadas now in Washington, D.C., that it was like a jet engine sound. There was so much interest in that. I was sitting in the room that day.

I think it was late June or early July of 2004. So the report was published on July 22nd, 2004 when the commission, the five Republicans and five Democrats, took the final vote to give it thumbs up or thumbs down. And I was sitting in there with them as that vote was taken. And I felt a couple of different things.

One, I just felt like I was sort of looking through the keyhole of history at some amazing event that was taking place. And when they all voted to affirm it without any dissent, because they'd all had their chance to go over it and they did in the editing process and making sure that we interviewed all the people we needed to interview, that they were all satisfied with it. But I felt like somehow I just felt great pride in the United States. They understood the heavy burden that had been placed on them. In the summer of 2004, we were right in the middle of a very contentious campaign. We are very divisive today certainly, but it was divisive back then as well, too. And to see them do that, it is a feeling that is that it's is very hard to describe, but one in which I came out of with just a sense of intense , a pride and affection for what good leadership can produce.

I think it stood up quite well. I don't think any of the major conclusions in it have been refuted. One of the things that we do say, and I guess I learned so much from Governor Kane and from Lee Hamilton and their approach to this, but they approached it with humility. And we said what we knew, and if we didn't know something, we made that clear as well too. We tried to interview some of the prisoners that had been taken and it was just bureaucratically that it turned out to be impossible, and we state that. Although we do think it would've been helpful to the overall report. And so I think it stood up quite well. I don't think any of the major conclusions have been refuted in any way.

We also sort of said that, and I think it's true to this day, people probably don't

know it, but the FBI still has an open investigation into the 9/11 attack. We're coming up on 20 years and it's on September 11th. What we said was, surely as more people are taken prisoner or whatever, and we'll learn more, but we had a cutoff date when we had to produce this. You can only say what you know at that point and then you leave it to others to continue the investigation. But I think on most major points it has stood up quite well.

To people that are open to facts, I think it still makes a really good presentation of what we know, and I think it stands as a model of a government commission's works and a very positive model. I should say just another word about the leadership of it as well, too. Because all of the commissioners, they all came from different political backgrounds, but they were able to set that aside under the leadership of the co-chairs, which I think is really important. The other thing that they did is, instead of letting commissioners sort of bring in, I don't know, cronies or something to be on the staff, they strictly brought in people not based not on political backgrounds but on or anything like that, like you get when you're staffing administration. They brought in people based on their experience and what skills they needed to conduct the investigation.

And so I think that that's really important for any commission that gets created stood up is to have people that will just be relentless in trying to uncover the facts, and don't come in with an agenda, and strive as much as humanly possible to get the story right. The commissioners had all kinds of fights along the way. That's for sure. And whenever they got into big arguments about a particular issue concerning the investigation, they would constantly go back, "What's the record say?" "What are the facts?" "Who said what? what" "What happened in this meeting?" And so on and so forth. And then they just let that determine what went into the report rather than to come out and make sort of statements that could not be substantiated. I do think it stands up pretty well. There was, I think back in 2014, the FBI went back to look at how this report stood up in light of subsequent information that the FBI had gained. And their final report from that study or that kind of small commission basically corroborates just about everything in the official 9/11 report.

Operation Noble Eagle

By Brian Leehan (excerpt from *Roaring Bull*)

The primary goal just after the attacks was to secure and protect the U.S. homeland. Operation Noble Eagle was a joint military endeavor between the U.S. and the Royal Canadian Air Force to protect the U.S. homeland and its northern border from terrorist infiltration and activity. The operation began three days after September 11, 2001. Within the United States, there was a combination of federal, state, and local utilization of military resources in the days immediately following the 9/11 attacks.

Combat air patrols were flown over the Twin Cities by the Minnesota National Guard's 148th Fighter Wing out of Duluth. For two full days, the sky was silent of any commercial airline traffic. The Second Battalion of the 135th Infantry Regiment, based in Mankato, Minnesota, was among the first ground units of the 34th Infantry Division to be called to duty in the global war on terrorism, along with Duluth's First Battalion, 94th Armor Regiment, and the 34th Military Police Company out of Rosemount.

The appropriately named Operation Ice Eagle was the Minnesota designation for its part in the larger operation, Noble Eagle. Initially, troops were posted at the Minneapolis-Saint Paul International Airport, as well as airports in Duluth and Rochester. Mobilization began October 1, 2001, and after an initial training period, deployment started on October 5. More than 130 Minnesota Guard soldiers were posted to three main airports in the state—103 at the Minneapolis-Saint Paul International Airport, seven at the Rochester facility, and 13 in Duluth. By mid-November, the number had increased to 176, and airports around this date had troops posted for security, including those facilities in Bemidji, Brainerd, Chisholm, Hibbing, Grand Rapids, International Falls, and Sioux Falls. Six members of the Minnesota National Guard were also sent to Fort McCoy, Wisconsin for special training to assist U.S. Custom Service on the border with Canada. U.S. ports were immediately put on a level one alert, the highest possible, in the wake of the terrorist attacks. The Guard members were assigned to the border crossings at Lancaster, Pine Creek, and Roseau, Minnesota.

Because of the unique nature of the National Guard's mission and the legal utilization, all of the Guard soldiers involved in civilian security were activated by this date and under control of the civilian government, under Governor Jesse Ventura. The 1878 Posse Comitatus Act makes it illegal for the U.S. military to enforce civilian law, except in cases of civilian insurrection, or in enforcing Supreme Court decisions, such as the desegregation laws enforced

by the U.S. Army troops in Little Rock, Arkansas in the 1950s. While the Minnesota Guard troops remained under the control of the governor, they were paid by the federal government for the airport security deployment. In addition to checking vehicles and baggage, the Guard members served as a security presence for air travelers after the trauma of the 9/11 attacks. Dressed in camouflage duty uniforms, armed with standard military sidearms and rifles, the soldiers were there to try to calm any anxiety felt by travelers, and instill a bit of anxiety in anyone at the airport with anything else in mind.

By February 2002, the new Federal Transportation Administration (TSA) was established and plans were made for the drawing down of the National Guard presence in the country's airports. The drawdown was to begin in mid-March, but was postponed until the end of May 2002. The schedule changed again at the end of March with the unexpected Federal Government request that the drawdown be accelerated. On Tuesday, March 25, 45 soldiers were withdrawn from all outstate airports, except Rochester and Duluth, and from the Humphrey Terminal at the Minneapolis-Saint Paul facility. A total of 50 more soldiers were withdrawn from Minneapolis-Saint Paul and from Rochester and Duluth at the beginning of May. By May 10, all remaining uniformed National Guard soldiers were withdrawn from Minnesota airports.



Dr. Andrew Baker

Dr. Andrew Baker

By Randal Dietrich

Andy Baker has served as Chief Medical Examiner for Hennepin, Dakota, and Scott counties from 2004 to the present day.

In 1997, Baker pursued a forensic pathology fellowship at the University of Minnesota. He was fortunate to have his medical school paid for by the U.S. Air Force. The following year he went on active duty and was assigned to the Armed Forces Medical Examiner in Washington, DC.

After 9/11, his team was tasked with the responsibility to identify everything humanly possible at the Pentagon: the pilot of the aircraft, the first officer of the aircraft, and the four flight attendants on the aircraft. There were sixty-four people in total onboard Flight 77, and that includes the five hijackers as well as the flight crew. And there were 125 people in the building who also died.

September 11 started off for many as a beautiful blue morning.

I would've gotten up early, showered, dawned my uniform, packed my workout clothes, and kissed my wife goodbye for the day. She undoubtedly was shortly thereafter getting our eight-year-old twin third-graders and our five-year-old kindergartner ready for school.

After arriving at my office, I would've attended our daily morning meeting and case assignments. The one thing I can recall with certainty on 9/11 is that I had a long run planned that morning. I had taken up running with a fellow officer so that we could meet our fitness requirements, and we got so hooked on running that we hatched the hare-brained idea that we could do a marathon. So we ran the 2000 Marine Corps Marathon in Washington, DC. My friend left active duty the next summer, but I kept running, fully intent on doing even better in the 2001 Marine Corps Marathon scheduled for October 28th.

Following my unit's morning meeting, I was miles away from my office running on a lonely stretch of road. A woman in a minivan, who must have spotted my Air Force T-shirt, pulled over and began screaming about the Twin Towers and

the Pentagon. I couldn't possibly believe it, what she was saying was true, but I ran back to my office as fast as I could. While I had been out running, I was completely unaware of what had taken place in the skies over my head on that beautiful, nearly cloudless fall day on the eastern seaboard.

Flight 77 left an indelible mark on Andrew's life and he chose to examine it closely.

American Flight 77, a Boeing 757, left Dulles and was headed to Los Angeles. The flight was scheduled to depart from Washington Dulles to Los Angeles at 8:10. The aircraft carried five hijackers, 53 passengers, two pilots, and four flight attendants. Flight 77 pushed back from Gate D-26 at 8:09 and took off at 8:20.

Captain Charles Burlingame was born in St. Paul, Minnesota. The son of an active-duty member of the United States Air Force, he was active in the Boy Scouts where he achieved the rank of Eagle scout. He graduated from the U.S. Naval Academy in 1971, going on to fly the F-4 Phantom. In 1979, Burlingame left active duty with the Navy and joined American Airlines, though he remained active in the reserves.

At 8:46, American Airlines Flight 77 reached its cruising altitude of 35,000 feet. At 8:51, 77 made its last radio transmission. The hijacking took place between 8:51 and 8:54. At 8:54 77 made an unauthorized turn to the south. At 8:56, 77's transponder was turned off. The hijacker set the plane's autopilot on course for Washington, DC.

At 9:00 American Airlines headquarters learned the communication had been lost with 77. With two American Airlines aircraft in trouble, and learning that United was also missing an aircraft, the nationwide ground stock was ordered. Air traffic controllers were unable to contact 77 by radio or even locate it on radio.

At 9:29, the autopilot of 77 was disengaged. At 9:32, Dulles Air Traffic Control observed an inbound aircraft heading east at a high rate of speed. 77 was then five miles southwest of the Pentagon and began a 330 degree turn. At the end of the turn, it was descending to 2200 feet pointing toward the Pentagon in Arlington, Virginia.

Reagan airport controllers asked a passing Air National Guard C-130 to identify and follow the aircraft. The pilot told them it was a Boeing 757 or 67 and a silver fuselage meant that it was probably an American Airlines jet. He had difficulty picking out the airplane in the East Coast haze, but then saw a huge fire burn. The crash occurred at 9:37. Flight 77 was traveling at approximately 530 miles per hour.

The rescue and recovery efforts

Initially, rescue efforts were led by the military and civilian employees within the building. The 106 people injured on the ground were taken to area hospitals. There were 124 people in the Pentagon who died at the scene. Another victim was transported to a local DC hospital and later died from injuries. A 95 x 50 - foot section of the Pentagon's outer ring collapsed at 10:10. Because there had been time to evacuate even the highest floors of the Pentagon, no first responders were seriously injured or killed following the attack in Washington.

The school my children attended was evacuated and my wife had to close her office to go pick them up. Our family did not lose anyone in the Towers or at the Pentagon, but we did have a dear friend who worked in the Pentagon and it was well into the evening of 9/11 when we were finally able to reach him.

We found living in the DC area surreal for many months after the 9/11 attack. All manner of government buildings, museums, and monuments which were previously free and open to the public were now closed. Fighter jets and helicopters patrolled the skies of our neighborhood for weeks. Though most American airports reopened within days of 9/11, Reagan Washington National Airport remained closed for three weeks. We lived near Reagan and even the lack of jet contrails over our neighborhood was a jarring reminder of how 9/11 changed our lives.

The remains from the Pentagon and Flight 77 were all taken to the port mortuary at Dover Air Force Base in Delaware.

More than 2,300 fragments of human remains were recovered from the rubble of the Pentagon. Rather than a traditional autopsy what families received was an inventory of everything that was positively identified for their loved one and

how that fragment was identified. Just to show you what the military was capable of even in 2001, for one autopsy report the only thing recovered for that individual was a 15-gram piece of skull, but our DNA identification lab was able to positively identify this and confirm for his family that something had been recovered. How incredible is that, that the US military had a DNA lab 20 years ago capable of identifying something that small?

Coping with it all

I often get asked, how do you survive operations like this without losing your mind? It's very important to have a support system. You need to take care of yourself and the people around you. Don't try to be a hero, and recognize that it's okay to ask for help if you need it. I cannot say enough good things about the support we got from the Army in the days after 9/11. We had psychologists, psychiatrists, all manner of religious personnel gowned up in the morgue with us monitoring our mental and emotional health. For me personally, I've always found it helpful to have something on the calendar that I can look forward to. So despite the long days in the morgue after 9/11, I would find time at night to keep up my running so I could complete the 2001 Marine Corps marathon, which was intentionally routed to go right past the attack site.

Fulfilling his duty

After approximately two and a half weeks devoted to processing of remains and nearly three months of DNA testing, we generated 183 unique identities from the rubble of the Pentagon. Of those, many were based solely on DNA. The remaining identifications were based on a combination of DNA and other modalities. Now, to do the math, you'll see that only adds up to 178. That means we had five sets of remains that didn't match any of the samples families had given us. There were five families out there who didn't send us any dental records to help identify their loved ones. By exclusion, we know who those five individuals have to be, and they are the five hijackers that brought down Flight 77.

Coming Home

Seven days after the 9/11 attacks, anonymous letters laced with anthrax spores began arriving at media companies and congressional offices.

Two postal workers from the mail facility that served our home died from Inhalational Anthrax. And so not long after I returned from the 9/11 operation at Dover, my wife sat me down. She recognized how much I loved the Air Force and how much I enjoyed my job, but made it very clear that she did not want to raise her children in a place where people fly airplanes into a building and put anthrax in the mail. And so I said, 'That's fair. Let's go back to the Midwest.'

Moving forward

The cultural references to 9/11 are everywhere, and I am rarely prepared for them. It took me a long, long time to find the courage to go to the Pentagon Memorial itself. It was only a couple of years ago and I happened to be at a conference in Crystal City that I realized was within walking distance of the Pentagon. Since it was a beautiful summer day, it seemed as good a time as any to go to the memorial. The memorial consists of 184 benches, one for each of the victims murdered in the attack, arranged in rows by the year of the victim's birth. It also took many years before I could talk about 9/11 with anyone except my wife.

Kris Van Amber

Saint Paul

Kris Van Amber and her husband, Jon, were married at a cozy ceremony in St Paul on September 8, 2001. After taking Monday, September 10, off as part of her honeymoon weekend, she was back at work as a master facilitator the morning of Tuesday, September 11.

I remember watching when the first twin tower went down...I couldn't watch it all. I went to the women's restroom and started to cry.

It's almost like it was just a movie playing in front of me. I just emotionally could not feel it. It was just so traumatic to watch other people suffer.

And later you see all the New Yorkers looking for their missing loved ones. They were holding onto hope while the medical and other emergency response people were just waiting to be of service and not having anyone emerge from the collapsed towers.

From their home in Mac-Groveland in St. Paul, Kris recalled the eerie evening that followed.

I remember thinking how odd it was because it was so quiet. There were no planes.

In the spring of 2002, Kris had the opportunity to be of service herself as a call went out for volunteer facilitators to assist with the redevelopment of the lower Manhattan the Twin Tower site.

I was a member of the Minnesota Facilitators Network. I had applied, they were selecting ten facilitators from each state, and I was one of the ten. We were ready to go on July 19. And at the same time, we had talked about, 'wouldn't it be amazing if a news crew could come with us?'

Tom Aviles was a WCCO-TV photojournalist, an amazing guy. He happened to be a New Yorker through and through. He was just a great narrator and photographer along with us. Tom just basically shadowed us the whole time and also gave us some insight into where to go as a native New Yorker.



Kris Van Amber

On July 20, 2002, 5,000 New Yorkers and 500 facilitators convened at the Javits Center in New York City. Organized by the Lower Manhattan Development Corporation, they wanted to make sure that there was a thoughtful process for how to use this property where the Twin Towers once stood.

We gathered input from people in terms of what to do with the site. There were six initial plans or designed to react to. We also talked about the values around a memorial.

Before departing New York City, Kris and Jon visited the Ground Zero site and, later, Times Square.



There's definitely a sense of proportion at the site that you just do not cannot prepare yourself for. When I got there, I just felt so small. I just, it was such a huge site.

It's hard to take those memories of the falling towers and overlay them with the huge hole with really nothing there. It was right at the end of them cleaning it up. They had a very large truck that was still taking things out of the site, but most of it was done.

I had the same kind of feeling at that site that I did at Normandy Beach, the American Cemetery in France. Jon and I did that the year before. You just can't prepare yourself for understanding or feeling that much loss. These are people you don't know, people that you didn't have a personal interaction with, but to see how many people were gone. You could feel it, you could feel the sense of sadness, like this spiritual absence of these people who were gone.

We all need to heal. This was an opportunity to heal, to remember what it was like to watch people falling from the towers. Then to see the towers fall floor by floor until a huge cloud of dust remained hanging in the air. We have all been affected some more than others.

Jon and I went back to the hotel and rested. We decided to go to Times Square. It was just a few blocks away. I loved it. The energy pulsing through the city at night was invigorating. I could have stayed for a few more days to take in that energy. People everywhere and every kind of person. What struck me was the wide acceptance of diversity, different races and ethnicities everywhere. I'll go back. I have become them and they are me.



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Michael Pulis

Mike Pulis had spent 34 years as a sworn law enforcement officer, retiring as Chief of Police for North Mankato. In response to 9/11, he traveled to New York to conduct Critical Incident Debriefings (CID) on behalf of the New York Police Department. Debriefings were for officers who had responded to the crisis within the first two hours of the planes hitting the World Trade Center towers.

Chief Pulis provided the background and benefit of CID and shared his son's service in the war that followed.

Critical Incident Debriefings have been around since 1983 and is a process intended to help first responders manage normal stress reactions to abnormal events. It is a structured, brief intervention in a small group setting to assist in reentering the workplace feeling more grounded and stable. The objective is to get the officer back into work in a more healthy manner.

My son subsequently joined the U.S. Marine Corps for nine years, including two tours of Afghanistan with a Regimental Combat Team and three years in intelligence work, covering combat operations against terrorists in Africa.

Operation Enduring Freedom

Hamid Karzai



Mike McElhiney

Introduction

By Tim Engstrom

Operation Enduring Freedom is marked in the American consciousness by two major events: the beginning and the end. However, it is the 20 years in the middle that most of the Americans who served there remember.

Americans everywhere remember the dramatic details of their day on Sept. 11, 2001, when al-Qaeda operatives hijacked four commercial jets. The 19 al-Qaeda terrorists were hell-bent on committing murder-suicide, believing the West was the reason for problems in their own Mideast countries. They flew two into the World Trade Center in New York and one into the Pentagon in Arlington, VA. The third crashed into a field in Shanksville, Pennsylvania after passengers overtook their hijackers.

The official death toll was 2,996 people, with thousands injured, and many more who faced long-term health effects.

Fifteen of the hijackers were from Saudi Arabia. Two were from the United Arab Emirates. One was from Lebanon. The leader, Mohammed Atta, was Egyptian. None hailed from Afghanistan. However, Afghanistan was the base for al-Qaeda and leader Osama bin Laden. President George W. Bush vowed to win a “war on terrorism,” as it was first described, and he focused America’s military resources on the Taliban regime running Afghanistan.

There are many preludes to 9/11: the assassination of anti-Taliban coalition Northern Alliance leader Ahmad Shah Massoud; the Taliban (which means “students”) coming to power in Afghanistan in the mid-1990s; and the rise of the Mujahideen guerrillas who challenged Soviet occupying forces from 1978 to 1992.

Bin Laden, who was from a wealthy Saudi family, joined the Mujahideen in 1979 and worked to funnel money, arms, and fighters from Arabia to Afghanistan. He founded al-Qaeda in 1988. Bin Laden was banished from Saudi Arabia in 1991 and lost his citizenship in 1994. He then moved on to Sudan, but the United States forced him to leave that country in 1996. It was then that he established his base in Afghanistan and began attacks against the United States.

He masterminded attacks in 1998 on U.S. embassies in Tanzania and Kenya, killing more than 200 and landing him squarely as a high-profile American nemesis. But it was the 9/11 attacks that made him Enemy No. 1.

On Sept. 12, 2001, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization invoked Article V for the first time, coming to the aid of the United States. Operation Noble Eagle was launched. It was the mobilization of North American forces.

Operation Enduring Freedom began Oct. 7, 2001, with American and British bombing Taliban forces. The early war saw airstrikes along with U.S. Special Forces working with the Northern Alliance and other anti-Taliban forces to foster resistance. This timeframe yielded movie-worthy tales like the Horse Soldiers portrayed in the 2018 film “12 Strong” and Minnesotan Mike McElhiney and his Team 574 portrayed in the 2017 picture “Legion of Brothers.”

On Nov. 9, 2001, the Taliban regime lost at Mazar-e-Sharif, and soon after, the Northern Alliance scored many victories: Taloqan, Bamiyan, Herat, Kabul and Jalalabad.

In December, Afghan militias tracked bin Laden to the cave complex called Tora Bora southeast of Kabul. After a two-week battle, bin Laden escaped. Afghan soldiers captured 20 of his men, but he left for Pakistan on horseback.

The Taliban left Kabul in November 2001, and the United Nations invited leaders of various factions, especially the Northern Alliance, to Bonn, Germany, to sign a framework for the creation of a government, with Hamid Karzai as the interim head.

On Dec. 6, 2001, Taliban leader Mullah Mohammed Omar fled his stronghold in Kandahar, and the Taliban sought refuge in the mountains and across the border to Pakistan. This marked the end of their power but not the end of their fight.

Operation Anaconda, in the eastern province of Paktia, involved U.S. and Afghan forces fighting about 800 al-Qaeda and Taliban combatants in early 2002. Other countries had become involved in the war: Australia, Canada, Denmark, France, Germany, Italy, and Norway, among others.

At the Virginia Military Institute in April 2002, Bush announced financial assistance for humanitarian aid and reconstruction for Afghanistan. Congress appropriated \$38 billion in nation building between 2001 and 2009, though more than half of it ended up for military purposes anyway, and the rest was troubled by waste and confusion.

Meanwhile, U.S. attention shifted toward Iraq, and the war seemed to be won with ease. On May 1, 2003, President Bush stood aboard the aircraft carrier USS *Abraham Lincoln* in front of a “Mission Accomplished” banner, announcing “major combat operations in Iraq have ended.”

On that same day, U.S. Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld announced the end of “major combat” in Afghanistan. There were about 8,000 coalition troops in Afghanistan at the time.

October 2004 witnessed the first democratic Afghan elections since the fall of the Taliban, with voters giving Karzai a five-year term as president.

The country penned a new constitution, too, giving it a strong central government and weak regional authorities, contrary to past structures. Despite this, Karzai’s government was beset by corruption, and he struggled with indecision amid occasional assassination attempts.

The Taliban began to reassert itself in 2005 with new tactics. No longer would it directly take on NATO forces in combat, and instead it resorted to suicide attacks and improvised explosive devices, or IEDs. The resurgence coincided with a rise in anti-Western sentiment and a rise in poppy cultivation for heroin production, often funding Taliban efforts. Afghans were unhappy with problems slowing the reconstruction, reports of torture and abuse at the Abu Ghraib prison, and the inability to capture Taliban commanders.

President Barack Obama increased troop levels, modeling the surge strategy used in Iraq. The United States would aim to protect the population while still performing counterinsurgency. Obama’s general in this effort, Stanley McChrystal, called for even greater boots on the ground, saying all would be lost in a year without a surge. Obama agreed to an additional 30,000.

The downside of sending more troops is an increase in deaths. What’s more, the press found civilian death numbers were higher than reported, among other security revelations.

Meanwhile, Karzai and Obama were at odds. Karzai won another term in 2009, but his government was plagued by corruption.

After McChrystal made disparaging remarks about his commander-in-chief, he was replaced by Gen. David Petraeus.



Meanwhile, U.S. intelligence had discovered that bin Laden was living in a compound in Abbottabad, Pakistan. On May 2, 2011, a team of SEALs and other Special Mission Units launched an attack on the compound, and bin Laden was killed in the resulting firefight.

Obama began efforts to withdraw from Afghanistan. He set a timetable for combat forces to return home by the end of 2014. A series of incidents served as setbacks – assassinations, Marines urinating on dead bodies, soldiers burning the Quran, a soldier killing 17 Afghans in a shooting spree, surprise night raids on private homes – heightened tensions.

Talks continued on what would take shape after 2014. Karzai was at the end of his term and refused to sign the Bilateral Security Agreement. His successor, Ashraf Ghani, signed it right away.

NATO and the United States ended the combat mission on Dec. 28, 2014. However, forces remained to support and train Afghan troops.

Operation Inherent Resolve was America’s fight against the so-called Islamic State, or ISIS, militants. This conflict also came to Afghanistan. In 2017, the United States dropped its

largest non-nuclear bomb on a cave complex in eastern Nangarhar Province.

Meanwhile, the Taliban were growing in numbers, and Kabul experienced regular suicide bombings. In August, President Donald J. Trump declared he wanted to end the “forever war,” and later outlined a withdrawal plan that is based on “conditions on the ground,” as opposed to timelines.

2018 was marked by Taliban terrorism, U.S. airstrikes on opium labs, and the Trump administration cutting off assistance to Pakistan for “lies and deceit.” The country had been harboring Taliban militants.

Diplomacy between the United States and the Taliban reached their highest levels by 2019, but then violence would cause setbacks. Taliban attacks even followed days after signed agreements to reduce violence.

President Joseph R. Biden in 2021 called for full withdrawal by September 11, 2021, a full 20 years after the attacks. Operation Allies Refuge was the dramatic evacuation of Kabul, and the largest airlift of non-combatants in U.S. history.

Taliban fighters overran cities across the country and eventually took Kabul. The Afghan government led by Ghani rapidly collapsed. On August 26, 13 U.S. servicemembers were killed by an ISIS suicide bomber. A retaliatory missile strike ended up killing 10 civilians, including seven children.

The last soldier to step on the last U.S. aircraft departing the airport in Kabul on August 30, 2021, was the commander of the 82nd Airborne Division, Maj. Gen. Chris Donahu.



A Minnesotan led America’s initial military response after the attacks of Sept. 11, 2001.

Joseph L. Votel grew up on the west side of St. Paul. He graduated from St. Luke’s Catholic Grade School and from Cretin High School. He was commissioned in 1980 as an infantry officer after graduating from the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, N.Y.

After serving for 21 years, he was a colonel and commander of the Army’s 75th Ranger

Regiment on the day the towers fell. He described the Rangers as “an elite, commando-like force of triple volunteers who represented the cutting edge of our national military response capacity.”

The response began with Votel leading about 200 of those Rangers on a risky parachute assault called Operation Rhino. The jump came on a moonless evening at an airstrip in the Registan Desert of Helman Province south of Kandahar on Oct. 19, 2001, just five weeks after al-Qaeda’s terrorist attacks in New York City, Northern Virginia and above Pennsylvania.

“Each of us was filled with an element of trepidation because we knew what was at stake — the honor of our nation and protection of our citizens. But with that trepidation was a healthy dose of pride and patriotism knowing that what we were about to do was right and just.”

Their mission: Root out al-Qaeda and confront the Taliban-led government of Afghanistan, which harbored al-Qaeda terrorists.

Air strikes cleared several al-Qaeda targets, and the Rangers, at great risk and with no supply chains, cleared the rest. At a remote desert hunting camp, they established Camp Rhino, then handed it off to the 15th Marine Expeditionary Unit. It was the base that gave America a foothold in southern Afghanistan to begin the ground war.

“We all felt pretty proud. Just the sense of unity, the sense of togetherness in the country at the time. There were a number of kids that put NYPD or FDNY symbols on their helmets. It was a fairly stunning military success done with a pretty light footprint on the ground,” Votel said.

By the Numbers

U.S. Troop-Number Timeline

November 2001:	1,300
December 2001:	2,500
March 2002:	7,200
December 2002:	9,700
April 2004:	20,300
December 2006:	20,000
December 2007:	25,000
May 2009:	50,000
December 2009:	67,000
August 2010:	100,000
May 2011:	100,000
September 2012:	77,000
December 2013:	46,000
March 2014:	34,000
December 2014:	16,100
March 2015:	9,800
July 2016:	8,400
January 2017:	8,400
November 2017:	14,000

After 2017, the Department of Defense began withholding Armed Forces levels from public release. However, estimates say there were 2,500 troops in Afghanistan in January 2021. The final troops left Aug. 30, 2021.

— *Military Times* and U.S. Department of Defense



Mike McElhiney

Mike McElhiney

By Randal Dietrich

Mike McElhiney completed special forces training at Fort Campbell and Fort Bragg in the late 1990s and was assigned to Operational Detachment Alpha (ODA) 574 in 2001. In September the detachment was training with an airborne brigade in Kazakhstan. From there, McElhiney listened to the BBC as the events of September 11, 2001 unfolded.

As efforts to overthrow the Taliban government accelerated with Operation Rhino, the U.S. search for a suitable successor began in earnest. The Taliban and al-Qaeda were quick to target these candidates for assassination.

In November 2001, ODA 574 began to operate in southern Afghanistan. Their orders to protect prospective new leaders were, at times, ambiguous and always subject to rapid revision.

And then a couple hours later, somebody'd come back and say, "Well, you're not going with that guy, he just got assassinated." And that happened literally, I think three times before Karzai's name came up. We didn't know who he was. We just knew we were going to go in and work with some warlords and build a force and fight the Taliban. Our mission was to conduct unconventional warfare and sort of start an insurgency.

The Taliban sought to intimidate the locals at Tarin Kowt and dissuade them from siding with the Americans.

We were told we were going to have about a force of about 500 host nation fighters, and really what happened is folks came in, got guns and left. It was quite interesting.

But shortly after that, on our third night, we got the word that the Taliban were making a statement in the town of Tarin Kowt. I guess they knew the Americans were coming and so they were sort of strong-arming the locals. They had hung the mayor just to reinforce who the people of Afghanistan will be loyal to. So that created a mad dash to run in and save Tarin Kowt on our third night there.

Mike's close-knit unit provided around-the-clock protection to Karzai and, together, they casually discussed the future of Afghanistan during talks well into the night.

December 5, 2001 proved a decisive day for Mike McElhiney and Hamid Karzai.

In a deadly case of a friendly-fire incident, a B-52 dropped a 2,000 pound JDAM bomb on ODA 574. The massive explosion killed several U.S. service members and severely wounded Mike.

They picked us up and flew us about 15 minutes west to Camp Rhino. Then loaded us on to C-130 and headed on down to Oman. My right arm was injured and the blast, not saveable and I had a sucking chest wound.

I think there's about 24 casualties as I understand from the impact of that bomb that day.

My dominant arm, my right arm below the elbow - amputated; scars on my legs from shrapnel. Still have shrapnel. I can sit outside with shorts on and what not and see little pieces here and there and scars.

Hamid Kazai, who narrowly escaped injury, learned that the United Nations had appointed him as head of an interim Afghan government later that same day. Years later, Mike reflected:

These things happened, I was proud to do it. If I knew the circumstances were going to be the same, I'd do it again exactly the same way, because I think we did...we did what we were asked to do, and I think we did it well.



Andrew Bundermann

By Tim Engstrom

The next time you think you are having a bad day, struggling with pressure and stress, reflect on how Lt. Andrew Bundermann of Bovey, Minn., remained calm under fire at the Battle of Combat Outpost Keating in Nuristan province in eastern Afghanistan.

Combat Outpost Keating was a strategically questionable base in a bowl, with mountain-sides on three sides and a river on the fourth. Plans to move it kept getting delayed. The 53 soldiers of Bravo Troop, 3rd Squadron, 61st Cavalry Regiment were used to short bursts of enemy gunfire. With them as part of the coalition were a handful of Afghan fighters and civilian guards and two Latvian military advisers.

Bundermann described these as attempts to annoy the soldiers at the post. There had been 47 small attacks in the five months before the battle, with 10 of them in the month before.

But Oct. 3, 2009, was different.

“You saw a concerted effort to continue to maneuver, you saw cruiser weapons, small arms fire, indirect fire, heavy weapons systems; a lot of weapon systems used in concert to maneuver us. They were trying to control the battlefield and do a lot of different things to win the day,” Bundermann said.

Surrounded by more than 300 Taliban fighters firing rocket-propelled grenades, mortars and heavy and light weapons, the soldiers at COP Keating were trapped. Bravo Troop’s commander, Capt. Stoney Portis, was away. His helicopter was shot when visiting an observation post, leaving him unable to return. That left Bundermann, the executive officer, in charge.

Here is Bundermann on leadership during the Battle of COP Keating, also called the Battle of Kamdesh for a nearby village:

“It’s something you need to try and block out in some way when you are trying to maneuver and lead soldiers, because you know what those rounds are and you know what they can do and what the intentions of those rounds are to do. And so, trying to manage that, one, you’re trying to control yourself so you

can control others and help them accomplish the mission you're trying to do. So, those first few hours where that overwhelming amount of firepower was out there, was really trying to just manage the situation and start to bring your assets on line so that you can decrease their rate of fire and you can take control of the battlefield.

"That's what it comes down to — is who can shoot, move, and communicate the best. And for the early onset of that, they shot better than us, and they maneuvered better than us. I would challenge the fact that they didn't communicate better than us, which is what allowed us to start to bring all our assets on line and then just overwhelm them with what the United States Army can bring to a firefight. And then you communicate it. We started shooting better, and then we started maneuvering, and that is what allowed us to counter what they were doing to us."

Bundermann said in the Army of that era, he never imagined he would be in a situation where he would be outmanned or outgunned. He also never underestimated an enemy.

"They are not going to give you a free pass," he said. "But it was different in the sense where you go we're now in a situation where they have more people, they have the higher ground, and they're swinging a bigger stick."

The attack began at 6 a.m. at COP Keating and the nearby Observation Post Fritsche, which had 19 U.S. soldiers and a few Afghan defenders. Within the first hour of fighting, the Taliban attackers overran the outpost's perimeter. They breached it in three places — near the latrines; at the main gate, where the Afghan guards were overwhelmed; and on the eastern side, where the Latvians hopelessly tried to convince the Afghan fighters not to flee.

Over the next two hours, casualties mounted and guns and comms were knocked out. Bundermann and two of his soldiers reestablished communication using a sat phone.

With COP Keating at the maximum range of supporting artillery, the big guns miles away could not strike immediately. Bundermann was left to direct mortar fire to clear the way, which enabled the artillery to act.

He also realized the enemy was acting from the nearby village of Kamdesh, specifically

the police station, and directed artillery to strike key targets.

The Taliban set fire to barracks and other buildings and captured the ammunition depot. Bundermann, realizing his men were spread out, ordered his men to collapse into an inner perimeter they called the Alamo.

“I don’t know any soldier who ever thinks that this could be it, we’re going to lose. I don’t think that goes into your mind,” Bundermann said. “But it certainly goes, OK, I have to do these things to be successful. You’re very much looking at it and saying I need to do this, and then once we do that, I am going to do this, and then I’m going to do this. And then if No. I doesn’t work, it’s not like I’m going to pick up my ball and go home. It doesn’t work that way. It’s, OK, that one didn’t work so I guess I’m going to try this and then we’re going to do that. And so, we very iteratively kept doing those things and had great soldiers and people executing right.”

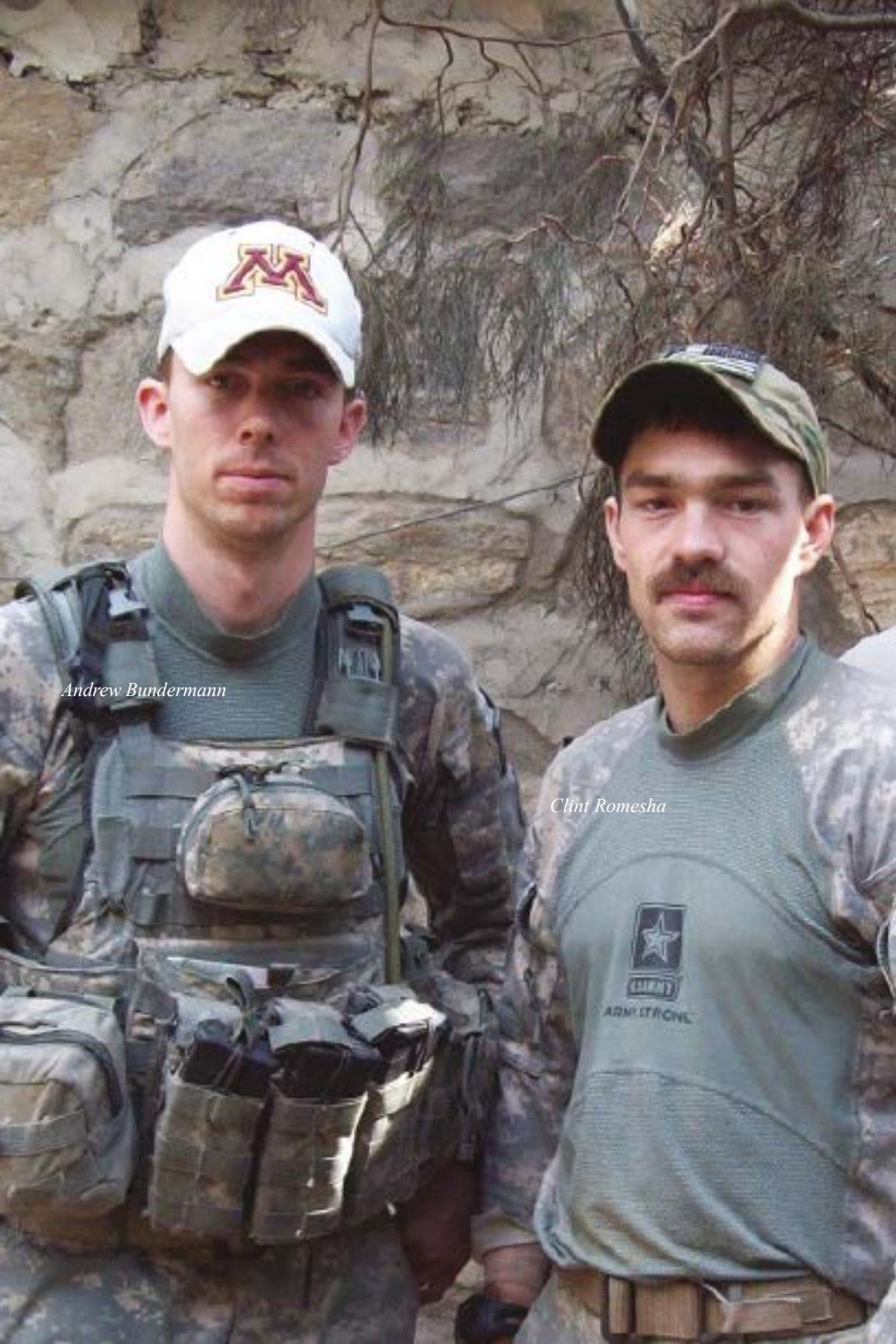
Bundermann wanted to retake the outpost, now that his small force was concentrated. He gives much of the credit to his men, people like Staff Sgt. Clint Romesha of California. He had been in the middle of the fight all morning and now led the charge to retake the outpost and his battle cry when asking for volunteers to join him was, *“We’re going to take this bitch back!”*

Romesha says today he was merely following his training and did what any other section chief would do.

“It’s easy to say, well, that’s what we should be going and doing and that’s what my job is,” Bundermann said. “Actually doing it when there are 300 people trying to kill you, and frankly, they are doing a good job, is really difficult. So, everything that he did before and leading up to it I think prepared him to be successful in that moment.”

Romesha led a force to retake the eastern side, and Sgt. First Class Jonathan Hill led men for the western side.

AH-64 Apache attack helicopters arrived, striking Taliban positions. Romesha’s men and the two Latvians recaptured the ammo depot; then, against overwhelming numbers, they secured the camp entrance.



Andrew Bundermann

Clint Romesha

Meanwhile, Bundermann directed airplanes and helicopters to provide close air support — the Apaches, F-15s, A-10s and B-1s. They delivered 16 tons of ordnance that day. At one point in the midst of battle, Bundermann donated his own blood in an attempt to save the life of a soldier, who later died.

A tree was cut down in an effort to halt the spread of fire near the aid station, but it spun as it fell and smashed the roof of the tactical operations center. At one point, all buildings at COP Keating were on fire except the aid station.

By 12:30 p.m., the enemy was in retreat, and Capt. Portis, along with a Quick Reaction Force from 1st Battalion, 32nd Infantry Regiment of the 10th Mountain Division, arrived via helicopter at OP Fritsche and began working their way down the mountainside toward COP Keating.

By 7 p.m., the threat had ended. Eight American soldiers were killed, and another 22 wounded. Four Afghan defenders were killed. Choppers medevaced the wounded. About 150 Taliban fighters lay dead on the battlefield.

The remaining members of Bravo Troop and the QRF evacuated COP Keating on Oct. 6, and, on Oct. 7, a B-1 bombed it to smithereens.

A constellation of medals was given. Romesha and Spc. Ty Carter were awarded the Medal of Honor. Bundermann's Silver Star was upgraded to the Distinguished Service Cross.

By the time of the upgrade, his stint in the Army had ended, and he was a civilian living in Ham Lake. Because he had gone through ROTC at the University of Minnesota, that's where he let the Army know would be the place for the ceremony.

"It was unexpected and I appreciated it for the fact that my kids, and my wife got to spend time seeing it and meeting some people we don't get to see all the time. It's one of those things you don't expect, but it was nice to be able to share in it with the community," Bundermann said.

He wears a KIA bracelet with the names of the eight soldiers lost on that day. They are Staff Sgt. Justin T. Gallegos of Arizona, Sgt. Christopher Griffin of Michigan, Pvt. 1st Class Kevin C. Thompson of Nevada, Sgt. Michael P. Scusa of New Jersey, Staff. Sgt. Vernon

W. Martin of Georgia, Spc. Stephan L. Mace of Virginia, Sgt. Joshua J. Kirk of Maine and Sgt. Joshua M. Hardt of California.

“I try to make sure that Katy and I and the kids and everybody that we are around understands the blessings and the joy and everything we have each and every day that others might not get to experience as much. So, we really need to be thankful for all those things. Not just occasionally, but more often than we think.”

Corey Goodnature

By Tim Engstrom

Don Goodnature finished a round of golf in late June 2005 and noticed he had missed several calls to his phone.

A few hours later, he and his wife, Deb, found out their 35-year-old son had been in an MH-47 Chinook helicopter crash in Afghanistan. Their son was Army Chief Warrant Officer Corey Goodnature, a chopper pilot with the 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment, based out Hunter Army Airfield in Georgia.

Days later, the couple learned Corey Goodnature and 15 others died. On June 28, 2005, they were on a mission, with Goodnature as the flight's lead pilot, to rescue Navy SEALs who had come under heavy fire in eastern Afghanistan when the Chinook was shot down by an enemy rocket-propelled grenade. They crashed in rugged terrain in the vicinity of Asadabad.

Onboard were eight members of the 160th SOAR, also called the Night Stalkers, and eight Navy SEALs coming to assist their fellow sailors.

Goodnature is buried at Graceland Cemetery in Albert Lea. He was the first Minnesotan to die in Afghanistan.

He and his crew had been participating in Operation Red Wings, named for the pro hockey team in Detroit. It was a joint operation conducted on the slopes of a mountain called Sawtalo Sar about 20 miles west of Asadabad, which is the capital of Kunar province. It borders Pakistan in eastern Afghanistan.

Kunar is the province north of the one with the famed Khyber Pass. Kunar and nearby provinces were part of N2KL, a significant area of strategic importance for coalition forces to prevent smuggling and infiltration of weapons, drugs, money, vehicles and lumber to the Taliban. Possession of N2KL also determined who controlled the movement of common goods and natural resources.

The operation called for four Navy SEALs to be inserted via helicopter rope into the area of a small-but-disruptive band of the Taliban. The missions were surveillance and reconnaissance of certain Taliban-suspected buildings. However, the first few hours after any dropoff

are the most risky, and these SEALs were ambushed by the very band they were to watch.

Back in the States, it was in the news over the Fourth of July weekend that year: Three of the four men were killed, and one of the two Chinook reaction teams sent to rescue them crashed. In the Minnesota news, that was Goodnature's chopper.

"We knew that there was dangers," Don Goodnature told Minnesota Public Radio. "But, see, this was his third tour of duty in Afghanistan. And also, he had one tour in Iraq. So, after that many times over there, we got kind of complacent because we got thinking, 'Well, he's already done this before. He's done this three other times; it's not that big a deal.' And he made us feel real comfortable by telling us that it was OK, too."

The Goodnatures are from Clarks Grove, a small town just north of Albert Lea. Corey graduated from Albert Lea in 1988.

He enrolled at the University of Minnesota and wanted to be an Air Force pilot. With the military shrinking in size, he was cut from the Air Force ROTC. He tried the Marines ROTC. Cut again. He enlisted in the Army Reserves in January 1991 and opted for active-duty service in February 1992. He completed Airborne training at Fort Benning in March 1992, and he went through parachute rigger training after. He was assigned to the John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center at Fort Bragg. He impressed his superiors and was selected for Officer Candidate School in May 1994.

He became a warrant officer in June 1994 and trained to be an Army aviator at Fort Rucker, Ala. His first chopper was a UH-1 Iroquois in South Korea in 1995-96, followed by training to fly the Chinook. He then piloted them while based at Schofield Barracks in Hawaii 1996-1998.

In October 1998, he was assigned as a Chinook pilot with B Company, 3rd Battalion of the 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment (Airborne) at Hunter Army Airfield, near Savannah, Ga. The 160th SOAR is an elite unit that provides aviation support for special operations forces, often at night, at low altitudes and with short notice.

You see why they got the nickname Night Stalkers. These are the best of the best of chopper pilots, from land-nav proficiency to landing on submarines. This is the Army unit that brought the Navy SEALs to Osama bin Laden's compound in May 2011.

Goodnature was married at the time of the crash. He and his wife, Lori, had two children. In Albert Lea, there is an annual golf tournament in his memory. Beginning in June 2006, it has raised funds for scholarships for local graduates. The *Albert Lea Tribune*, for a 2015 story marking 10 years after his death, said the golf outing raised \$24,000 that year. The same story said Lori lives in Mobile, Ala. and sometimes she attends the event in Albert Lea.

“Afghanistan's really on the back burner, I think,” Goodnature told MPR in 2005. “People don't realize what's going on there. We just don't hear about it and I think it's very important. It really brings it home when something like this happens.”

The 17th annual Corey Goodnature Memorial Scholarship Golf Classic took place June 24, 2023, at Green Lea Golf Course. The flier reminds participants: “Night Stalkers Don’t Quit!”

It also says, “Never forget our soldiers who were killed in action defending our country.”

Andrea Jensen

By Tim Engstrom

If you own a car that was built during the early 60s, it probably has special license plates to indicate that it's a classic.

If you have a long-range bomber built in the early 60s, it's probably a B-52 Stratofortress and it's not only still in service, but it's one of the key military planes being flown today.

In fact, the B-52s, despite their antiquity, played a key role in the Vietnam War and delivered 40 percent of all the weapons dropped in Desert Storm.

And one of those B-52s is regularly flown by a woman from Anoka, Minnesota.

Maj. Andrea Jensen grew up in Anoka, and graduated from Anoka High School. But even before her graduation, she was a pilot.

"Actually, I got my pilot's license while I was still in high school. My dad was taking lessons, and he said he would pay for mine when I got old enough. I got my license when I was 16 or 17."

Jensen's family has a military background. Her paternal grandfather and two great uncles served in World War II. Her grandfather served in the Army Air Force.

Jensen, 32, journeyed to Boston after high school to attend the Massachusetts Institute of Technology on an ROTC scholarship. She got her degree in mechanical engineering. "I expected that I'd do my four years of active duty, and then go on and do other things."

Her first assignment was at Edwards Air Force Base as an engineer. Edwards is home of much of the Air Force's flight testing, and is where Chuck Yeager broke the sound barrier for the first time in the X-1.

"It was then I decided that I was in the wrong job," Jensen said. She applied for pilot training, and was turned down. She applied again, and was accepted.

Jensen acknowledges that she had her sights set on being a fighter pilot, but when she

graduated from flight school, she was instead assigned to be an instructor herself on the T-37 trainers. "I'll admit that I was disappointed. I was psyched to go off and do the other thing. "But as it turned out, it was a great asset to me. I developed my flying skills a lot better, and I improved my pilot judgment – my ability to make decisions under stressful situations.

"I don't know that anybody is just born with flying intuition. You develop intuition through experience."

Jensen finished her stint as an instructor, and again hoped for fighter training, but instead was sent to Barksdale Air Force Base, one of two bases in the United States (the other is at Minot, ND) where B-52s are home based. "I guess bombers were just in my destiny."

At Barksdale, because of her experience, she began training right away as a pilot rather than a co-pilot. However, all her flying had been in smaller planes, and so the first time up was a challenge.

"The first time was pretty intimidating," Jensen said. "I'd always flown T-37s or smaller. Once you get the B-52 in the air, it flies like an airplane and it's not as imposing."

Taking off can be interesting, Jensen said. "With eight engines, they may not spool up at exactly the same times. It's something you have to be cognizant about. Taking off is when you really feel the size of it. After that, it's really stable and really reliable."

So why is the Air Force still using 45-year-old aircraft? (For a frame of reference, John F. Kennedy was president when these planes were built.)

"It was a good, solid platform that would last a long, long time. They have upgraded the avionics and the weapons systems greatly, but the framework is still the same. There's so much new stuff that we have trouble fitting into the cockpit."

The B-52, built by Boeing Military Airplane Co., is a huge aircraft. It's 160 feet long with a wingspan of 185 feet. It weighs 185,000 lbs. empty and nearly a half million pounds when its fully loaded. It's powered by eight Pratt and Whitney jet engines.

The only B-52s left flying are the final model made by Boeing, the B-52H BUFF (called the Big Ugly Fat Fellow.)

The Stratofortress can cruise at 400 miles an hour and can fly at 50,000 feet. It can fly 8,800 miles on one tank of fuel, and during long flights it is often refueled en route. During the Gulf War, pilots from Barksdale flew a combat mission that took over 35 hours, the longest ever recorded.

The B-52 can carry up to 20 cruise missiles and is the only airplane the Air Force flies that can carry those missiles. It can also carry traditional bombing loads, and it can carry nuclear payloads.

Major Jensen said that with the variety of roles the B-52 can fulfill, the group has to be ready at all times. "We are always at the highest level of readiness. We stay very busy here."

Missions for Jensen sometimes last for 21 hours. "There's a lot of transit time, time when the plane is on auto-pilot. We can take turns resting."

Jensen has accumulated over 100 hours of combat flying in the skies above Afghanistan.

There are six women B-52 pilots in Jensen's group, and she says there have never been problems between men and women pilots. In the Air Force in general, four percent of the pilots are women.

There are 13,648 pilots in the Air Force, and 582 female pilots.

"I've never felt that my being a woman has made a difference. I've never felt I was treated any differently."

Jensen said she would like to get the word out to women and men in Minnesota about the potential of flying in the Air Force. "I joined the ROTC to do something different, but generally in Minnesota younger people are not exposed to the military like in other states.

"For me, it's really paid off. You can do great things in the Air Force that you can't do in a normal life. If I were a young person, I would definitely explore the opportunities in the military. But I'll tell you, it takes a lot of work."

Jensen's next assignment will be to San Antonio where once again she will be an instructor. This time around, however, she'll be an instructor for instructors.

And she'll get a chance to fly the Air Force's new trainer. "Finally, I'll get a chance to fly a new airplane," she said.

After that duty, she said she'll have to make up her mind. She could stay in the Air Force and complete her career, or she could move on to fly commercially. "I'm definitely keeping my options open."

Jensen tries to get back to Minnesota at least twice a year, and both her parents live in the Twin Cities.

David Nguyen

By Tim Engstrom & Kara Hildreth

Nguyen is a member St. Paul Post 599, the 3M Post. He was born in St. Louis Park and grew up in Plymouth. He is the son of parents who were first-generation immigrants to the United States.

“My dad came to the United States after 35 years serving in the Air Force for the South Vietnamese after the Tet Offensive,” he said.

The Tet Offensive began in 1968 and was North Vietnam’s push to end the stalemate of the war. By 1975, South Vietnam was falling to northern forces, and many people left by any means possible to avoid living under communism.

That’s when his father, Hein, and mother, Van, left with son, Huy, and daughter, Lynn.

“My Dad’s and Mom’s story is unbelievable after the mass exodus from Vietnam,” he said.

Due to limited capacity, only women and children were accepted on boats. His mother and young sister left on a boat, and his dad and brother were still in Vietnam.

“My dad gave my brother to an American soldier, who took my brother, who was a year old, and they exchanged addresses and my dad slipped it into his pocket, and Lord knows how many times he wrote the address down, and that was before smartphones or the cloud,” he said.

“It was quite the odyssey because my mom and sister ended up in Thailand and ended up working in a seamstress shop, and my mom said this is not where we are supposed to be,” he recalled.

His mother and daughter ended up taking a boat to Hawaii, where they were considered political refugees. His father managed to reach Guam before reaching the mainland United States as a refugee. The Hopkins American Red Cross and Lutheran Social Services played a part in placing the father with a foster family in Minnesota.

At the time, his father spoke no English, and he made a living cutting grass.

His father founded a Vietnamese-language publication, which served as a pamphlet to help reunite refugees in the United States

“This was a place where people put ads for loved ones they could not find,” he said.

He posted a photo of his mother in the pamphlet, and they connected. Nguyen joked that he is the happy ending after all the heartache, worry and separation.

“We have a newspaper clipping with my dad in his bellbottoms and his mustache,” he said.

His father passed away in 2005, but he did live the American dream of raising a family in the United States, alongside his mother.

His father worked at Honeywell at first. He took his passion for civic engagement, and he applied for a job with Hennepin County in the social services area. His father worked in the food support program for more than 30 years.

Enlisted on Sept. 10, 2001

Little did David Nguyen know that, when he enlisted, it would be the day before the 9/11 attacks, the day the world changed.

He went through basic at Fort Jackson, South Carolina, in November 2001, followed by jump school at Fort Benning, Georgia.

From there, he served until 2004 with the 82nd Airborne Division, as a supply specialist for the 505th Parachute Infantry Regiment. The famed division is not just about jumping out of airplanes. As a rapid-deployment force, the 82nd goes anywhere in the world in a moment's notice. The saying goes: “Wheels up in 18 hours or less.”

Nguyen was with the 82nd Airborne for 17 days before he deployed to Afghanistan for about eight months. He was among the first to go.

“When we arrived, it was really a barren desert.”

They set up tents by an airstrip near Kandahar.

“It was as authentic to the movies as you can make it, and we slept outside some nights,” he added.

In 2003, he came back and was home for four months before he was then deployed to Fallujah, Iraq, a hot area of combat.

“It was a totally different deployment than Afghanistan, and I spent more time deployed overseas than I spent with my unit stateside,” he said.

Nguyen worked primarily as a supply clerk, helping provide supplies to soldiers going out on missions.

In Fallujah, he was promoted and selected as the commander’s driver.

“My main responsibility was taking care of the commander’s vehicle and driving the commander. It was a completely different deployment for me because I drove conduits and our company drove with the line companies, and so I probably went on just as many missions with our entire battalion,” he said.

Nguyen witnessed violence and rocket-propelled grenades that were fired, as well as fire-fights and mortars launched into camp that exploded at night.

“We were based close by — west of the actual city,” he said.

Pride of patriot son

“In the Vietnamese culture, the big focus is going to college, and you choose among the profession of becoming a doctor, lawyer or engineer,” Nguyen said.

It was a shock and surprise when he told his father how he decided to enlist in the Army. He did so without the permission or blessing of his parents.

The decision to enlist came from a wanderlust place in his heart, Nguyen said, and was somewhat impulsive at 20 years old after he had spent two years at Normandale Community College.

“After I joined, I came home and said, ‘Dad, you are going to have to have a seat,’” he said.

Now that he works on behalf of veterans at MACV, his decision makes sense in the rear-view mirror and gives him a sense of purpose.

“I have always felt there has been some kind of higher power just coaching me along, and I think about the veterans we serve and sometimes the thing that you need, you are not able to see or recognize that thing, and only until you are able to recognize that, then do certain things happen,” he said.

“For me, I needed to go, and I think because I chose to sign up, I think it set the stage for the deployments.”

A short time after he told his father about the enlistment, his dad said to him: “You have chosen your path and I am proud of you. That was really my passion — to want to get out and to explore the world.”

“I think, for me, I needed to go, but I also think since I chose to sign up, it set the stage for the deployment, and I was like, ‘Let’s do this!’ and I was ready to defend my country and fight as a patriot, and I was proud to be what we called at the time, ‘America’s Tip of the Spear’ in the 82nd Airborne rapid-deployment cycle, and I was in Afghanistan within four months of signing up to be in the Army,” he said.

Military service “was what I needed, and I feel like being as far away as we were in Afghanistan, it felt right for me because I had the energy and the motivation,” he said.

The deployment was hard for his parents.

“My dad would go into my room and turn on the night light every night when I was deployed, every night,” he said.

During his deployment to Iraq, his brother succumbed to an aggressive non-Hodgkin’s lymphoma. It was November 2003. Nguyen left the active-duty Army in October 2004. In January 2005, his father died. It was tough to lose two family members in a short span.

Nubia Davis

By Brian Leehan (excerpt from *Roaring Bull*)

In 2014, the 34th Combat Aviation Brigade was represented in both Kuwait and Iraq with a deployment of 216 soldiers. Deployed in support of Operation Enduring Freedom, elements of the brigade in Kuwait would be transitioned into support for Operation Inherent Resolve in Iraq. The brigade headquarters company, along with the soldiers from companies B, C, D, and F of the second battalion, 147th Assault Helicopter Battalion, would comprise the 34th ID's contribution to this deployment.

Handed a unique mission that 2-147th was dubbed Task Force Shield and was reconfigured. Staff Sergeant Nubia Davis, a Readiness NCO with HHC of the 2-147th AHB explained "Our unit was the same, but assigned a very different mission. We were assigned as a general support aviation battalion, which is something that we don't usually do. That means that we are assigned as Air Traffic Service Company and a Chinook company. We had a much larger aircraft than we're used to dealing with, and then people working in the tower were just Blackhawks normally. We were a transport company. We had a ring route around the country that was flown multiple times a day. These were a VIP transport and were ready and able force that was able to deploy anywhere in the region in case of a major accident. We did have occasion to deploy about a third of our force up into Iraq helicopters and personnel. It was post withdrawal of our troops from Iraq, and it was roughly six months."

The need for Operation Inherent Resolve resulted from the Syrian Civil War spillover. In the summer of 2014, there was a relatively new terrorist organization called the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant, attacked across the Syrian border and took control of the large portion of Northern Iraq within the Euphrates River Valley. Even Baghdad itself appeared to be threatened with takeover by summer's end.

Coalition forces provided air support and additional training for Kurdish and Iraqi forces to help stem the invasion by ISO. Like many young soldiers advancing in rank, Davis had the opportunity to learn, in a very hands-on way, the weight of the responsibilities she held over other soldiers' safety and even their lives.

"I was in charge of three people on my first deployment," she said, "And 11 people on my second deployment."

Davis said "They call you mom after a while, you're just your mama bear taking care of them, and you don't let anyone mess with your cubs. My sense of caring for them, of course, increases because I'm making decisions that affect them. Who I'm going to send into Iraq, into an austere environment. Of course, I'm going to be thinking about competencies, the needs of the team, and who will make the best soldier for the situation. But I'm also having to think about if something goes wrong and I'm the person who chooses who is going to get sent up there, I'm going to be the one talking to their next of kin, their parents, their spouses about why I made the decision. So there's, there's a very definite, strong level of comradery that comes out of that experience unmatched by anything else I've ever experienced."

Davis said she takes great pride in the work she does to protect our country, and at a more fundamental level, the lives of every soldier operating in harm's way. The day-to-day work with her fellow soldiers often involve life and death situations for those under fire in combat areas, causing a bond like no other in life. "You are not just a superior at that point. You are the person they spend the majority of their day with, every day."

She continued, "You are a life guidance counselor in a sense. You don't get a break from people. You are around them 24-7. You see people at their best and you see them at their worst. You really get to know the core of who people are. I always like to say that deployments don't show you who you want to be. They show you who you actually are, the inability to hide the worst parts of your character. It's essentially impossible after that amount of time and under that much stress. So you're really getting to know people on a different level. You're experiencing very unique, sometimes catastrophic things that really creates a bond."

Davis reveals a keen sense of the arc of military and societal history, noting the sensibilities of the United States citizenry today in contrast to another time and another war. "How incredibly grateful I am to be a soldier in this era. When a man in a Vietnam-era hat comes up to thank me for my service, it's very difficult to come back with the words. It's "Are you kidding me?" Basically that I am so appreciative and thanked by the public, by the media. I've received nearly zero negative attention as I've walked around in my uniform after work for the last 12 years."

By the end of the deployment, this element of the 34th Combat Aviation Brigade had performed 2,500 rotary wing missions, tallied 6,500 rotary-wing flight hours, along with 700 fixed-wing missions, and 2,500 fixed-wing flight hours.



Dr. David Hamlar

Dr. David Hamlar

By Randal Dietrich

When David Hamlar was born in 1955, his pediatrician was a Tuskegee airman. His father had served in the Navy and David attended college at Tufts University and Howard University on a Vietnam-era GI Bill. He deployed during Operation Southern Watch to keep Saddam Hussein in-check. He was father to two young kids, a member of the MN Air Guard's 133rd Airlift Wing and an assistant professor at the University of Minnesota in September, 2001. On 9/11 he was presenting a research paper in Denver, Colorado.

Of course, all planes were grounded. So me and another doc who was there found a rental car, one of the last ones, and just hightailed it across the country back to Minnesota. I had already made some connections with some of the folks at the 133rd. It was a shock. It was something that brought immediacy to our positions, well, to my position in the guard, especially in terms of what might happen, and taking care of folks. I was commander of the 133rd medical group.

I was a full bird at the time, and I looked at my other docs. They were much younger than I, I had young kids, but they had babies, and they had new jobs. They were fairly new and couldn't really deploy. So I decided I would be the one to take on that duty. I had the most leeway, of course, it'd be a burden to my family, it'd be a burden to my practice. But I had the most leeway in terms of getting off, because I was somewhat in control of my position at the university. So I decided I'd be the deployer. I went to Ali Al Salem Air Base.

At Bagram 2004, I was just a surgeon. We just took incoming, and got them out of harm's way. Many times we would deploy to places like Pakistan.

Where I really took care of the soldiers was that year-long deployment with the army. We were in Al Asad, but we were there, I was, "Drafted," to use that word lightly after volunteering to take care of what really was a construction group. So there's all these in-lieu-of missions. For example, if the Army is over-tasked, they will come to the Air Force, and we have our vertical and horizontal guys and they're called Red Horse. So these Red Horse construction guys will go in lieu of missions for the army. So we did a hub-and-spoke out of, it was basically out of Balad, but for any larger area within CentCom, we would deploy folks to go there to build, repair, whatever. So that was the



mission, to support Red Horse. But because of my surgery skills and everything else, everywhere I went, I became an operator in the operating room and it went to all levels.

Hamlar worked to improve the life-saving skills of those on the battlefield.

I'd start off with just the day-to-day care for these guys who were going out on convoys, coming back, and literally getting blown up. So it's one thing to take care of them in the physical sense, where we're in the operating room and in the hospital. And the other is taking care of them after they've experienced that, and they're good to go. So there was a lot of mental support we had to give them, and their buddies did it, their battle buddies did it just as well as us.

One of the things I really feel good about is taking our special ops guys through life-saving techniques. They come in the OR, and especially the guy who's deemed the medic. I showed him how to do tracheostomies, how to get the airway open, how to get venous access if there's no limb there, that sort of thing. We took them through the basics so when they're up by themselves, at least somebody has a fighting chance to take care of folks.

When you actually are in the hospital working, there are things that we just assume that would happen stateside. And a lot of it is just customary care. You always hear about triage. Triage means you're going to take the most important person first. We didn't triage anybody, we took everybody. So that meant that mindset to sit somebody in a corner and say, "Well, he's expectant," that didn't happen. In other words, that might be days of yore, when people talked about triage. But obviously if there was somebody hurt, you're going to take care of him. If there's someone more hurt, then we just get more resources. That might mean that you wake up Dr. Joe Blow, even though it's not his turn right now or he's off sleeping, you go get him and bring him back to the fight.

In previous wars, they knew they couldn't transport someone from the battlefield in 24 hours and get them home. But I knew that if they could reach a battalion aid station, I could stabilize them. And they'd have a 90, I want to say it's 99%, I would say 98.2, 99% chance of survival, because of the self buddy aid they do on the scene, and everything else. So to me, no one's expectant.

I expect everybody to live. Now, they might have injuries beyond what they want to have, and those kinds of things. But the expectation was that we're going to save everyone.

So there are things happening real-time that I think we made a difference looking at future wars, or even in the continuity of what we saw between the start of the war and the end of the war.

Still, in cramped quarters, there was a nuance to care in a combat zone:

One tent had capacity for three different operations going on at the same time. However, the injured enemy might be in there as well. I'm not ashamed to say it, but if my guy's sitting here and that other guy's over there, I'm not leaving my guy. Whereas in medicine, we're told to treat everybody. It was common among us to make that distinction. We're going to take care of our guy first. We'll go back and take care of the bad guy, but our guys come first. So that's a little bit of mental gymnastics that we did as doctors versus combatants.

Walking blood banks saved lives

The other thing was you always think that blood is in good supply. Here in the States, we're spoiled. We have the Red Cross, we have all this. Over there we had walking blood banks. So if I knew from an administrative standpoint that we are low O-negative and somebody's hurt down range and I asked their blood type, O-negative, I automatically start a walking blood bank, "All O-negatives report." So guys start lining up, coming through. And that became very routine, especially in places like Al Asad, which didn't have facilities. Al Asad was a glorified cache. In other words, caches, or the army's same thing we have for Emeds, and everybody's got different connotations for it. But we couldn't store blood. We weren't a hospital, but we needed the product.

From the frontlines to the homefront

I've always been an adrenaline junkie, and I love to be part of it. I wanted to be part of the picture. I came home between each deployment, and I started driving down the street and somebody's honking at somebody for, I don't know,

too slow or too fast, and somebody's yelling over here, and I just tell my wife, she used to always get a kick out of it. I said, "These folks don't even know that a war is going on." It just amazed me, the difference between in-theater and back home. That was the biggest thing. It wasn't mentally debilitating to me, but it was frustrating. I know they support us, they love us, they love their military, but it's not reflected in their everyday actions.



Denis McDonough



Denis McDonough

By Randal Dietrich

Denis McDonough (Stillwater, MN) served as President Obama's Deputy National Security Advisor during a crucial period in the Global War on Terrorism. He was present in the White House Situation Room on May 1, 2011 as the United States Armed Forces launched Operation Neptune Spear to bring Osama bin Laden to justice. He is pictured here to Hillary Clinton's right. McDonough went on to serve as Chief of Staff and is currently President Biden's Secretary of Veteran Affairs.

We can say to those families who lost loved ones to al Qaeda's terror: Justice has been done.

– President Obama

I thought a great evil had been removed from the world.

– Mike Hurley

You close doors, you close books, grief never ends. But did it bring some vindication? A feeling of liberation, like yes, we got him! Absolutely.

– Jill Stephenson

I certainly think that it was a highlight, and it was an important operation to do. Bin Laden had perpetrated atrocious attacks on our country and was responsible for a lot of American deaths. He had to be dealt with. I think everybody recognized that this was not someone who was reconcilable.

– Joseph Votel



Operation Iraqi Freedom



Introduction

By Al Zdon

It would be impossible to understand the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003 without some kind of grasp of the events in the years prior.

The year 1979 was a critical milestone in the Middle East when the Shah of Iran, a strong U.S. ally, was ousted by Islamic fundamentalists who then seized the U.S. Embassy. That same year, Saddam Hussein took power in Iraq, and he promptly started a war with Iran that lasted eight years and ended in a stalemate. During the war, the U.S. largely sided with Iraq based on the notion that the enemy of my enemy is my ally.

Saddam used poison gas against Iran, and at the end of the war did an ethnic cleansing of the Kurds in northern Iraq, killing as many as 100,000 civilians.

In order to pay for his war with Iran, Saddam had borrowed over \$14 billion from its neighbor Kuwait. Rather than pay back the money, in 1990 Iraq invaded and overran Kuwait, declaring it as Iraq's 19th Province.

With a military buildup ten times larger than the invasion of North Africa in World War II, the U.S. plowed into Kuwait and retook the country in 100 hours in early 1991. Should the attack proceed and try to take out Saddam's rule altogether? Many wanted to, but some of the thinking was that it would be better to leave Saddam's Iraq in place to stabilize the region, particularly as a counterforce to Iran.

It was wishful thinking. A peace process involving the major players ground to a halt and Saddam's brutal regime continued. As a result, a 'No fly zone', enforced by the United States, was instituted over the north and south of Iraq to protect the Iraqi people from their own leader.

Meanwhile, terrorist attacks by Islamic radicals continued throughout the world. Bin Laden's al-Qaeda increased its terrorist activities through the 1990s. In 1996, a bomb in Saudi Arabia killed 19 Americans and wounded 372 others. In 1998, simultaneous bomb attacks on embassies in Kenya and Tanzania killed 244 more. As the world moved into the 21st century, an attack on the USS *Cole*, tied up in a Yemeni port, killed 17 sailors. Bin Laden called on all Muslims in all countries to engage in warfare with the West.

He also conceived perhaps the most daring and diabolical terrorist act in modern times when he had 19 terrorists infiltrate America with many of them taking courses in how to fly jet airliners. Even when one of the terrorists was arrested in Minnesota in possession of 747 flight manuals, the U.S. seemed not to react. A government commission later declared the ignoring of the threat of a massive act of terrorism was a “failure of imagination.”

On Sept. 11, 2001, with a new George Bush as president, those 19 terrorists hijacked four U.S. airliners and flew them into the Twin Towers in New York City, the Pentagon in Washington D.C., and, when opposed by a heroic group of passengers, a field in Pennsylvania.

The Global War on Terrorism had begun.

Still shocked by 9/11 and stunned by the recent Anthrax attacks, the U.S. invaded Iraq in 2003 citing Saddam’s stockpiling of weapons of mass destruction in violation of U.N. resolutions. No such weapons were ever located and no anthrax link was ever established.

The U.S. won the war quickly, but fared less well at the peace. All of Saddam’s Ba’ath party members were excluded from any government positions, leaving the government operations in chaos. Almost as soon as the U.S. had declared victory in Iraq, strong insurgent forces began to attack the United States and its allies across the nation. In 2005 alone, there were 35,000 insurgent attacks. Many involved roadside bombs, Explosively Formed Projectiles, and rocket and small arms attacks.

The situation didn’t get better, and in 2007, President Bush ordered a “surge” in American troops, bringing the number to over 170,000. Some stability was achieved, and by 2011 the war was declared over and the American troops went home. Still, nearly 30,000 embassy and private contractor personnel stayed in the country.

The rise of Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant in 2014 brought American troops back to the nation, and ISIL was defeated. The U.S. has kept about 2,500 troops in Iraq to this day.

The United States relied heavily on National Guard and Reserve troops to fight the war.

Minnesota played a major role in the Iraq War. Regular military from the Gopher State were among all the units involved since the beginning of the war. Reserves from Minnesota filled out many Army units. Right after the terrorist attacks on Sept. 11, 2001, Guard units

provided protection at Minnesota's major airports. And in 2004, National Guard units began fighting in Iraq.

Perhaps the most noteworthy deployment was the 2005-2007 effort of the 34th Division's 1st Brigade Combat Team consisting of some 4,000 troops from Minnesota, Iowa, and surrounding states. In January, 2007, the "surge" tacked on four more months to the combat team's service, and became known as the Long Deployment. In all, the team spent 22 months on active duty, perhaps the longest deployment by any large Guard unit in the war.

Minnesotans continued to serve in Iraq, and Minnesota families continued to support their loved ones. Some of the nation's best programs, such as Beyond the Yellow Ribbon, for supporting the troops and bringing them back home were developed in Minnesota.

In all, the war was marked by 4,431 deaths of U.S. military personnel, and over 32,000 wounded. Estimates of Iraqi military and civilian losses vary from over 100,000 to over one million. The number of Minnesotans killed was 29.



In the Iraq war, Joseph Votel was a regimental commander during the invasion. He was in charge of the special operations unit that rescued Jessica Lynch from Iraqi forces in April 2003.

An American convoy made some wrong turns and ended up in an ambush in the city of Nasiriyah. A number of American soldiers were killed, and two women had been taken captive. Private Jessica Lynch was in a Humvee that was hit by a rocket-propelled grenade and was severely injured when the vehicle rolled over.

"I was basically told to organize a task force and go in and get her out of there because we had some intelligence that was pointing to the location where she was. So it was my job, along with some others, to organize this operation, to go in and get her out."

To accomplish the mission, Votel had to work with the Marines, who were fighting in the sector Nasiriyah was located, and a task force that included Rangers, Marine and Navy aviators, and Navy Seals. Votel gives huge credit to the Marines who not only provided most of the assistance for the mission, but created a diversionary attack to draw the Iraqi army away from the hospital. "To this day, I have an incredibly high opinion of the U.S. Marine Corps."

IRAQ



The U.S. team “went straight in. The intelligence was pretty good in this case, and we went right to where we thought she was. Found her quickly, got her out and evacuated her. It was a very good story at that point of the war.”

The other prisoner, Lori Piestewa, died of her injuries. The rescue operation also recovered the bodies of eight soldiers who had been killed in the convoy attack.

“Makes you feel good to be part of an operation like that, to be a part of something like that. That you got to take someone out of a very vulnerable position, got them back where they can continue with their life.”

Votel rotated out of his command position and was promoted to general officer. He was put in charge of a Pentagon-level effort to combat the enemy’s use of Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs) which were becoming common and lethal in both Iraq and Afghanistan. “It was becoming a very potent threat to our troops and one for which we had no defense, frankly.”

Votel had to work with the Army, with businesses, with Congress, and others in lessening the impact of the IEDs. “I think it was a very noble cause, and I do think we saved some lives in the end.”

His last tour was commander of the United States Central Command, overseeing the continuing war on terrorism in the Middle East. Part of his charge was to defeat the ISIL caliphate that ruled in parts of Syria and Iraq. He retired five days after the climactic battle that saw the collapse of the Islamic State in Syria.

Patricia Baker



Patricia Baker

By Al Zdon

When Patricia Jean Baker enlisted in the Minnesota National Guard in 1992, they taught her how to hook phones to junction boxes and make sure the radios worked.

Ten years later she was flying helicopters for the Army and was in charge of her own company.

Baker had joined when she was 17, following in the footsteps of her father who had a career in the Guard, later retiring as a First Sergeant.

When terrorists flew airplanes into large buildings on Sept. 11, 2001, life changed in the military and for Baker. Her military career had already taken a large swing as she became a commissioned officer and learned how to fly helicopters.

She had just been assigned to the 4th Infantry Division, Aviation Brigade as a young captain after 9-11, but much had changed. “Because now we were on a war footing. All the training we did was for combat operations in Iraq. All we did in that time frame (2002-03) was preparation for war.”

When it got time to leave for the invasion of Iraq, her father drove to Texas from Minnesota and the two had a portrait taken, she in her flight suit and he in his camouflage uniform. “My father was a Vietnam veteran, serving in the 101st Airborne no less, and he was keenly aware of the realities of entering a combat zone.”

“Two more months go by and you’re training constantly, going to briefings, and getting shots, getting extra uniforms and equipment. At first, you’re eager, then you’re excited, and you’re waiting to cross the border.”

Baker and her group were sent to Kuwait to get ready for the push into Iraq. In March 2003, they got in their helicopters and became part of an invasion force that was larger than Operation Torch, the invasion of Africa, in World War II.

“Then you cross the border, and its nothingness. You’re flying a helicopter a few hundred feet above the Iraqi desert, and for hundreds of miles there is nothing but Iraqi desert.”

She made her first excursion into war with a grizzled, veteran chief warrant officer flying in the right hand seat. “His name was CW4 Martin and he had that typical bushy mustache that you would have expected of an older warrant officer on his way back into combat. And he was flying across the border with a young company commander named Captain Baker. He turns to me with his aviator shades on, he pulls out a cigar, passes one to me, and he continues to fly that airframe for a bit as I’m monitoring the radios.”

The elder pilot looked at Baker. “You’ll never fly across that border again, Captain Baker. And he’s staring at me with the wisdom of a CW4 with probably 20 years in the service by this time.”

There was a great deal of acclimation to Iraq for the Minnesota Guard people. “It’s dusty, it’s gritty, it’s sandy wherever you go. It’s constantly in your eyes, in the cracks of your fingers, in your ears, in your hairline. It’s about 50 degrees hotter than it should be.”

Baker and her company flew into Baghdad International Airport. If they were expecting trouble, there was none. “It was absolutely deserted.” Baker’s crew shut down their machines near the terminal and walked in, expecting somebody to be there. “It was vacant and ransacked.” They waited for further orders.

The orders finally came a day or so later and told them to fly farther north, and so they hopped to Balad, a major air base about 40 miles north. “But it was the same at Balad. Gigantic airport, absolutely abandoned.”

Balad, however did still have massive craters from the first Gulf War in the cement, sometimes right in the middle of the runway.

In a way, Baker said, the lack of an enemy was expected. “We thought it would be a very short war. We were convinced. It would be a lot like the Persian Gulf War I. We’d be out in a hundred days, just like they were. But it didn’t unfold that way. The fight came, just not at first.”

The unit moved on to Tikrit, about 90 miles northwest of Baghdad, to inhabit another abandoned air base. They set up tents and spent the next 62 days flying over the expanses of Iraq, tracking the progress of the 4th Infantry Division. “And that meant flying generals, diplomats, the media and combat forces.”

In May, a couple of months since the invasion, they were told that it wouldn't be a hundred days, it would be a full year. On May 1, President George Bush visited the aircraft carrier *Abraham Lincoln* and declared "mission accomplished" saying the major combat operations in Iraq were over.

To those in the desert at Tikrit, it didn't look that way. "Although the banner was unfurled on that naval vessel that declared, you know, success and kind of gave a sense of finality... Exactly the opposite was true. It went from flying from location to location in the country, to prepping for and executing large-scale air assaults. It shifted to kinetic. Now we were in a war fight. Now were doing four-in-the-morning type of air assaults. Infiltration and exfiltration type of air assaults.

"It was door guns blazing."

By July, the missions were constant. The infantry division was in the business of clearing towns and villages. From transporting generals and diplomats, the choppers were now transporting troops, and bringing back prisoners and the dead.

Baker's Army background, like her father's, was in the 101st Airborne where she had done extensive training on assault missions. That training came in handy.

"Now every aircraft was filled with my fellow soldiers that needed to be on time on target at a certain location on a military grid. I had to hit it with my GPS with every airframe in my company because another wave of helicopters and another wave of helicopters were bringing in more soldiers." After the soldiers had been brought to the battlefield, the helicopters would often have to come back to get them in a few hours or a few days.

Baker was in charge of ten helicopters, the UH-60 Sikorsky Black Hawk, and then later two prototypes were introduced into each mission, and Baker and her pilots were doing beta testing with those.

From July on, Baker's unit saw action in 38 named battles and campaigns. One day in mid-December in Balad, "Everyone was acting strangely." Baker figured it out. The 4th Infantry Division had captured the "Ace of Spades." The soldiers were given playing cards with the various enemy leaders depicted on them. The card for Saddam Hussein was the Ace of Spades.

“It happened 8.8 miles from where I was sitting. The people in my command post were celebrating. They thought that was it. We were going home. That we just won the war, right?”

But Christmas came and went, and no orders home came. “Capturing Saddam didn’t end the war, it only made the news.”

By February, the division got the news that it’s year was over, and it would be heading home to Fort Hood, Texas. “I got back in March, 2004, and I was changed. After that many months not sleeping in a bed, after eating that many MREs and flying that many combat missions, I was different.

“I didn’t get these lines on my face from sitting on the sidelines. I was old. I was suddenly old before my time. I was very serious, very stoic.”

Nothing was the same. “I couldn’t even sleep in my own bed for a few days. I laid on the floor with a blanket and a pillow because it was more comfortable. I was 29, but I could have passed for 50.” Her son was suddenly three years old. “How did that happen?”

Her relationship with her son went smoothly, but not so smoothly with her husband. “He was displeased. He was displeased with the Captain Baker that came home. I wasn’t supposed to be different. I was supposed to be like that overachiever, eager captain with light reddish hair cut in a bob and looking forward to the next military adventure. Now I was stoic, leathery, had my chain mail on. I was impenetrable. I was not the vulnerable, sweet, eager wife anymore.”

Baker’s dad could sense the difference too. “He had horrible vision, but he picked up on that fast. I was different.”

But now both were combat veterans, and it was bond they could share. “All of a sudden we had so much more in common.”

Baker went back to college at Marquette to get her master’s degree. Still on active duty, she had reached the end of her eight-year obligation. She came home to Minnesota and joined the National Guard.

Mike Kulstad

By Randal Dietrich

A graduate of Red Wing Central High School in 1992, Mike Kulstad then attended the University of Wisconsin River Falls. A short stint in television news reporting took him to Duluth and then to Richmond, Virginia, before he refocused those skills in support of the U.S. Attorney's Office in Manhattan and the Justice Department in Washington D.C. While working in public affairs for the U.S. Marshals Service, a colleague asked him one day if he still had his security clearance and what he thought about going to Baghdad to help with the trial of captured dictator Saddam Hussein.

At first I thought it was a joke. But then he told me they needed someone to help put Saddam's trial on TV. So I asked my wife, I said: 'They want me to go to Baghdad, what do you think?' And she said: 'Well, you are aware that I'm pregnant with our third child? But you can't say no, because an opportunity like this doesn't just come around. You have to go.'

I talked to my father back in Red Wing and said: 'Dad, I'm going to Baghdad.' And he said: 'Have you told your mother?' And I said: 'No, I'm gonna need you to do that for me, because you're better at breaking bad news than I am.' Our son Jack was born on September 22, 2005, and I was on a plane to Baghdad on September 25th.

The world was watching as the Saddam Hussein trial got underway in October 2005.

We first got there in September, and the trial was starting in October, but we had a problem. I had access to the trial, but I didn't have any equipment.

It couldn't be a public trial. You couldn't have the public in a normal courtroom because of security concerns. So they wanted to make sure that the trial was on TV and that anyone had access to it. I had to work with the media to get that access.

So I called together the media representatives from NBC, ABC, FOX, CNN and I called their bureau chiefs. And I said: 'Alright, we've got a problem. You want a trial on tv. I want a trial on tv. I can get you access. I just need

your equipment. 'So I felt like Monty Hall on Let's Make a Deal. I said: 'Okay, who can give me a switcher? Who can give me an audio mixer, who can give me a satellite dish?' We trucked all that into Baghdad and built a television studio, complete with a satellite link on the roof.

The day before trial, it was like one of those home improvement TV episodes. We were doing it up until the last minute, until my boss said: 'Saddam comes in at two o'clock in the morning and I gotta sweep this place. If you're not done by 11, you're out.' We finished at 10:55.

We had to work with the Iraqi High Tribunal. This was their trial. We were advisors to them. And so we did what we could to try to help them because they had never done it before.

The trial was conducted from the relative safety of Baghdad's Green Zone.

The trial was in a building that I think was the former Ba'ath party headquarters. They had set up a small courtroom inside this rather large building. The building was huge, but the courtroom itself, and our portion of it, was rather small.

Day One of the Saddam Hussein trial:

On the first day of the trial we were on a 30-minute delay in case anything bad happened. If it did, they wanted to make sure that it didn't happen live.

When the first day wrapped up, the deputies weren't just gonna let everybody go at once. They dismissed the journalists first. We got them into a separate room so they could file their stories. Then the judges went back to their chambers. Then they took the prosecutors, dignitaries and defense attorneys out in order.

They called for me and I said: 'Well, we're still working. We're still on delay, so don't worry about us. After our 30 minutes finished up, we packed up everything. I remember there was an engineer from NBC who looked at me and he said: 'You do realize about a few billion people are watching what you're doing right now?' I told him I was glad he told me that at the end, not at the beginning, because that would've completely freaked me out.

We closed everything down and I told my camera crew to leave. We started to walk down the stairs and out through that back door, but when we got halfway down, I heard in my radio earpiece: 'Nope, you've gotta come through the courtroom.' I stood at this door and I looked and I said: 'You want me to come through there?' because Saddam was still in the courtroom. And there was a deputy US Marshal from Detroit who just waved us through. I looked back at my crew and said, 'Guys, Saddam's still in there. Just walk past him and don't do anything.' So we walked out that door and around to that door leading outside. I looked at Saddam, he looked at me. I nodded, he nodded. And that was the strangest thing that even happened.

Once underway, Kulstad was there for the duration.

So then the trial fortunately took about a one-month delay. They needed to get witnesses together, and during that time, we built a studio. We hired a company out of the US who did a lot of court TV work. We set up robotic cameras in the courtroom. It was much more professional. We had a lot more space, and it was much easier:

Every day before court, we had to test out the microphones. We all rotated that duty. And one of those days Saddam's microphone broke. So we paused the trial and went down to fix it. That was the second time I was in the same room with Saddam Hussein.

One of our other jobs before court was to go sweep the cells to make sure that nobody had a knife or anything else in there that could have been used to either hurt the defendants or the defendants to hurt someone else.

Courtroom challenges

So there were some challenges of working in a war zone. I am not a member of the military. This was a new experience for me. There was a lot of culture shock. The world became very small. I lived in the Green Zone. I had it relatively easy compared to our brothers and sisters in the military. There was a sense of isolation there but that was kind of what I signed up for:

There was a lack of control. We would go to court to broadcast the trial, and the judges would take three hours to have tea. We had a defense attorney that was murdered. We had outbursts from the defendants.

Departure and reflection

I went home in April 2006. I'm grateful for the opportunity that I had. I had a certain skill set that I was glad I could use. It was my opportunity to contribute to the mission. I'm not a member of the military, but it was my way of doing my part that I could contribute to holding Saddam accountable in front of the world and to be a part of that history. As my wife said, you have to go because if you don't, you would regret it. I am grateful for the people that I got to serve with. I was fortunate to get on one of Captain Baker's helicopters, because if I didn't, I would have had to ride this big, old armored Israeli bus called the Rhino.

I took that bus once on a return stateside for Christmas. It left at two in the morning. I remember being grateful, and that there was this U.S. soldier, a 19-year-old kid, who was on a gunner going alongside our big old Israeli bus, to make sure I got home safe. That gave me a perspective of how fortunate I was and how grateful I was for those people that had served.



Deanna Germain

Deanna Germain

By Al Zdon

Lt. Col. Deanna Germain, in her book *Reaching Past the Wire: A Nurse at Abu Ghraib* (with Connie Lounsbury. St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 2017) summed up her deployment to Iraq in 2004:

“I was a 52-year-old wife, mother, grandmother, nurse practitioner and Army Reserve lieutenant colonel living the American dream in Minnesota. I went from comfortable, middle-class suburbia to sleeping in Saddam Hussein’s old prison at Abu Ghraib, caring for Iraqi prisoners and praying every day to stay alive.

“Yet I would do it all again.”

It started on a February day in 2003 when she received a certified letter telling her that she was being activated for a year. Germain, who grew up on a dairy farm near Fairfax, Minnesota, had been activated for Operation Desert Storm in 1991, but this felt different. She knew it would be a “life-changing event.”

Germain was assigned to the 801st Combat Support Hospital based in Chicago, and sent to Ft. Stewart, Georgia, for training. “There we received physical training, weapons training, combat training, convoy, and gas mask training.”

She was appointed chief nurse of the unit, and they were soon on their way to Kuwait on a Delta Airlines flight. When she stepped off the plane it was 120 degrees outside. “I felt like I was hit in the face with the force of a giant hair dryer.”

She began her overseas time at a hospital in Kuwait City. She also got her first exposure to U.S. troops who had recently left the fighting in Iraq. “They looked disheveled and acted impatient. Their language was crude. They seemed hard-hearted, their attitude toward everything was hard and rough.”

Germain was moved from Camp Wolf to Camp Doha, a major army base in Kuwait. She learned there was a Starbucks on the base, where she became a constant customer.

Her unit’s tour was extended several times, but then they were informed that they would go

home in April 2004. The medical personnel had their bags packed and tickets in hand when it was announced that 20,000 reservists would be extended for 120 days. In fact, some of the unit had already flown to Germany and had to be flown back.

Germain's next orders were to Abu Ghraib prison, about 20 miles west of Baghdad. The facility was built in the 1950s, and had been used by Saddam to hold political prisoners, thousands of whom disappeared.

She arrived at Baghdad International Airport and was greeted by an Army sergeant. "Welcome to Baghdad, ma'am. You have accepted the worst assignment in Iraq." Just then a mortar shell exploded nearby and Germain found herself with her face on the scorching hot tarmac. She asked the sergeant, "What are the rules here? When do you duck?"

For her trip to the prison, she donned her 28-pound vest, her three-and-one-half pound helmet, her weapons, her ammo, and her rucksack, adding 38 pounds to her five-foot-four frame. She climbed into the back of a truck for a long, hard ride.

Just days before her arrival, insurgents had fired 40 mortar rounds into the prison, killing 24 prisoners and injuring 92 more. As Germain arrived, soldiers were still searching prison areas for body parts.

The prison was a shambles. "This was a different planet—one devoid of life. Ugly, broken-down buildings riddled with mortar fire, not much more than rubble, stood in the oppressive heat of mid-day. Reality set in."

And the scene wasn't just visual. "The horrible smells are hard to describe and harder to forget. Someone later told me that they were from the bodies buried in the landfill in Saddam's day."

At that point, the prison held about 4,500 Iraqi prisoners housed in tents surrounded by razor wire. The Army had used an old warehouse to set up tents inside as a CSH or "cash" unit. There were 20 cots in the main ward, and all of them were filled with Iraqis, each restrained to the cot by an arm and a leg. Two armed military policemen stood guard.

At the prison, Germain was no longer in a leadership role, but was a staff nurse. Her room was an eight-by-ten-foot cell with a small window with iron bars. That area of the prison, she was told, was called the "Shadows" and it was said to be haunted by Saddam's victims.

There were daily mortar attacks.

“It was such a dirty place. Everything was dark and covered with a film of grimy dust. The floors were covered with worn and heavily-stained canvas; the ceiling housed bats which flew around the heads of the night shift.

“How could we prevent open wounds from getting infected in this filthy place?”

Germain outlined in an email home to her sister a list of things that could be sent: Clorox wipes, Shout packets, paper towels, small plastic tablecloth, a few Tide tablets, lotion, bug repellent.

“Our camp had no amenities. We had no PX because of the dangers to the Army and Air Force Exchange Service who would have to run it. Food from the prison kitchen was unidentifiable and barely edible. Water and electricity were rarely available at the same time.

“I tried not to complain, but I did. I missed my husband, my daughter and her family, my sisters, my parents, and my friends. Most of all, I missed my little granddaughter, YaYa.

“I felt every bit as much a prisoner as those on the other side of the fence.”

Not long after her arrival, a young Marine was brought in who had been shot in the head. His chances at survival seemed minimal, and he was cleaned up and whisked to the helicopter pad where he was flown to a hospital in Baghdad.

At the same time, an Iraqi was brought in with an abdominal wound. “The obvious was on all our minds. Was he the guy who shot the Marine who was now dying and on his way to Baghdad?”

“His name was Mohammed and at one point he acknowledged that he was married with two little girls and he missed them. One of the nurses standing nearby said, ‘Well, you should have thought of that, you son of a bitch, before you shot one of our guys.’”

In the end, both the Marine and the insurgent died. “Did Mohammed shoot the young Marine? None of us will ever know. How did I feel about that? It didn’t matter. We did our best for both of them.”

It was about this time that reports of prisoner abuse at Abu Ghraib were making big headlines in the press. Suddenly, there were reporters everywhere and visits from Iraqi sheiks. The nurses, who normally worked in their brown t-shirts, had to put on camo blouses every time a dignitary came through.

Conditions improved somewhat for the prisoners. They had a call to prayer five times a day, and each was given a copy of the Koran. “With all the world watching, the U.S. military now began paying a great deal of attention to Abu Ghraib.”

In the end, it had little to do with Germain. “I did not witness the abuse at Abu Ghraib or meet anyone who did.” She wondered if the hospital set up was a response by the military to show it was taking good care of the prisoners.

“Focusing on caring for my patients was more than just my professional priority. It was a way to survive.”

An email from a friend back in Kuwait helped Germain improve her attitude. The friend, who was very spiritual, told Germain that “God would not have sent you there if he did not have plans for you to make a difference at that place.”

Germain agreed. “I needed to start thinking about how I can make a difference here.”

Particularly troublesome for her were the attitudes of some of her fellow soldiers. They were hard and erratic, and the military police often threatened the prisoners. Germain couldn’t change the world, but she could change her own shift.

“We needed some rules. I announced: ‘On my shift here are the rules: No foul language. We will not use the F-word or F-bomb in front of the patients or translators. We will treat everyone the same and be respectful in body language.’”

“It was not a popular move.”

Some young nurses and medics had to be pulled from the ward and given jobs in the supply room. Training was increased. Schedules were changed to help the patients.

Germain recalls that sometimes the prisoners would ask them why they were being treated

so well. “My answer always was: ‘In the United States, we take care of all people the best we can with the resources we have. I will do the same here. I am not your judge or jury. I will give you the same care I give everyone.’”

Still, there were questions since the hospital also cared for American soldiers who had been wounded. Suppose there was only enough blood at the hospital for the U.S. soldiers?

Even the Army tried to change the atmosphere by renaming the hospital Task Force Oasis. It had been Task Force Alcatraz. Many of the soldiers continued to call it by its original name.

One day led to another, and Germain called it “Groundhog Day” because of the sameness of the shifts. There were distractions and things to look forward to, like getting your turn at the one computer at the hospital to email people at home, or standing in line to get your 30 minutes on the phone. Staff organized games and celebrations.

A major breakthrough came when the Mortar Café was opened so the staff didn’t have to eat the prison food. The quality of cooking didn’t improve, but a soldier could get a cheeseburger or grilled cheese sandwich.

And there was no shortage of MREs, officially called Meals Ready to Eat, but known by the GIs as “Meals Refused by the Enemy.”

Germain said her personal source of strength was coffee. It was a form of comfort, and it reminded her of home.

Twice while she was at Abu Ghraib, the military police caught insurgents trying to put explosive devices inside the hospital area, one set to detonate in the Mortar Café.

Germain said she became very close to the translators in the ward, both because they provided an essential service in communicating with the patients but also because they worked so closely together over a long time.

She had two breaks during her stay at Abu Ghraib. One was a day trip to Baghdad where she and others got to shop, eat American food, and even do some sightseeing. In June 2004, she was allowed to take a short R&R back in Minnesota where her husband was having surgery.

On the trip to Baghdad, the convoy had to make many stops, and at each stop the passengers in the back had to get out and then climb back in in full battle rattle. Germain was exhausted.

She told a young private that if they stopped one more time he'd have to push her up into the vehicle.

“ ‘You’ll make it ma’am,’ he said.

“ ‘No, I won’t. You’ll have to push me into the vehicle,’ I said.

“ ‘Ma’am,’ he said, ‘I can’t be touching you like that.’

“ ‘Specialist Evenson,’ I said. ‘I give you permission to touch any part of my body you need to touch in order to get my ass back in this truck if I can’t make it on my own.’ ”

She concluded, “It was his lucky day. I was able to make it back in the truck one more time.”

When new people arrived at the camp, they were horrified at the conditions, saying things like “you people live like animals here.” Germain replied, “What are you talking about? It’s not so bad.” But she admitted the newcomer was right. “We did live like animals. Everyone



of us was hot and sweaty and filthy.”

Finally on August 21, 2004, 18 months into her one-year activation, Germain went home.

She was ordered when back in the States to wear the Army green uniform as was standard for the reserve unit. She wanted to wear her desert camo, the uniform she earned that was her identity for 18 months.

It was great to be home, but still a challenge. “I thought I knew what the adjustment would be like, and that I would have some control over the process. But I had thoughts, feelings, and inner chatter that could not be rationally controlled. My mind was in Iraq, but my body was here, where it quickly felt like it didn’t belong.”

Even in her quiet suburb, she sometimes felt unsafe because she didn’t have her weapon.

The attitude of people in Minnesota was also troubling for Germain, at least at first. “Meanwhile, no one in the United States seemed to care that we were fighting a war.”

But the process got better, and she was back at her job as a nurse practitioner at a pain clinic. In September 2005, she retired from the Army Reserves.

People would often ask her about her experience as a combat nurse in a strange land. “I simply said, ‘It was a hard life, and I’m happy to be home.’ I couldn’t explain 18 months of my life in a few words.”

All the royalties from Germain’s book go to the Fisher House, serving military families.

The Long Deployment

By Brian Leehan (excerpt from *Roaring Bull*)

Michael Soman

The second battalion, 135th Infantry initially deployed 210 soldiers. Sergeant First Class Michael Soman is military, down to the soles of his combat boots. He said, "The minute I turned 18, I swore into the Marine Corps. I was born into the Marine Corps in 1989."

With a total of 11 deployments in his career as far back as the Gulf War, Somalia, and Panama, Soman had finished his Marine career, but joined the National Guard because of 9/11. For this Iraq deployment, Soman was transferred from the line to Alpha Company's headquarters.

"There were a lot of soldiers who were already combat vets, so they wanted people there who understood being deployed overseas, understood how to be security for the commander and for the first sergeant and so forth. So I was put in HQ and fell under supply", he said.

Soman explained, "We had two basic missions while in Iraq. Security escort team missions, convoy escorts, and then the radio relay points. So my job was to get the supplies they needed out to each of them. And we had a huge company. An average infantry company has 131 people, and I think we were at 260 or at one time because of all the replacements. We were really large and constantly moving. We had seven RRP's and 11 SET's, basically gun truck sets (two trucks) to do convoy escorts." Soman's philosophy of supplying an army in the field was simple, and no doubt heavily influenced by his own experience as a combat veteran in the field.

"I base everything off of the private. If the private has everything he needs, well then, we're going to win." He continued, "It's amazing what they want. The army would say, "You have this kind of truck. You should have 800 rounds." And these guys, when they'd get engaged, 800 rounds would last them four minutes. So we would load up the trucks with as much ammo as they could possibly hold, because you never knew how long the engagements would last or what the enemy had. I mean, we were one of the first units to carry AT4s, soldier fired recoilless rocket launchers, similar to the old bazookas over there, because the enemy was starting to fight from bunkered positions. We started off with the biggest pieces of shit equipment that the army had, and by the time we were done, we had the top-of-the-line equipment. The original HMMWV's that we fell in on, it wouldn't really even be

considered armor, but it was armor. I mean it was steel, but you'd shut the door and the ballistic glass would fall out and it was just raggedy stuff. They were still creating and fabricating what up-armor is today. So there was a lot of backyard, we'll weld this piece of steel here and make this work. A turret was really basic. No pope glass like you see now. No surround around the turret gunner, just the plates in front with the gun sticking out", he said.

Command Sergeant Major Chris Stroner of the 2-135th said, "I remember welding in old bulletproof windows. They call it Pope glass. When we first got to Iraq, there were still a lot of busted up vehicles, so we had to go to the junkyard and get these five-ton trucks. And we were Light Infantry, we don't have five. We didn't drive five-ton trucks, and they didn't have any turrets on them. So you couldn't have a gunner up there. And I remember my guys waiting at the well. I call it the junkyard. It wasn't really a junkyard, it was the maintenance shop. When they towed in a vehicle that had been blown up by an IED, my guys were there washing off the blood off the turret so they could unbolt it and mount it to another vehicle. By the time we ended, the Property Book officer for the first brigade, he got us the best equipment, whether it was ASVs (Armored Security Vehicle) or up-armored."

"I remember the fielding of 70 new gun trucks coming right off the ship just for us. It was like Christmas. Somebody pushed a button and wrote a check, because it was top of the line equipment for that time and age.", Soman said with a smile. Stroner said, "Alpha Company and Charlie Company were deployed to backfill the 133rd Infantry out of Iowa during the train up. We went to Camp Shelby, Mississippi. We did a six-month train up before heading overseas. By that time we had been transferred to the BSB, the Brigade Support Battalion. Charlie Company went north with 133rd, so they had a totally different mission from us. We went to Camp Adder Airbase and we ran convoy escorts all over Iraq to escort fuel trucks and food trucks. The other thing we did was to start and to run three or four RRP's.

They're these little Hesco barriered deer hunting camps in the middle of the desert sort of thing. You do daily patrols up and down the road looking for IEDs and then do basic security patrols. You never really got a day off. It was kind of a continual thing." He continued, "The day before emission, you'd PMC your vehicle, pack up all your gear, and you'd make sure all your stuff was working. Day two would be the morning you're leaving on the mission. You'd go to the convoy commander, go to the intel briefing, basically seeing where the IEDs were the night before, who got killed where and what was going on. You'd come back and do a convoy briefing. You'd inspect all the vehicles. You'd drive to the next base north, which is where you'd meet up with all the trucks that you were escorting. You'd wait until

dark and then based upon the convoy order, you might be the first convoy or the third convoy.

"You'd wait until it was your turn and then you'd head north. It depended if you were going to Baghdad, which was pretty much a one-day up and one day back trip. If you're going someplace like TQ, which is Camp Taqaddum, that could be a four-day trip. It was the miserable son of a bitch. That was terrible. You could go to Taji, you could go to Camp Spiker. You'd drive up there. You'd hope you weren't the guys getting blown up tonight. Frankly, most days you'd hope somebody would shoot at you so that you could shoot back, because the shit gets old after a while. You get up there, you drop off your trucks. You might get there at four in the morning, you might get about six hours of sleep, you clean your guns. The next morning, there might be a convoy to take you back south. If not, you drive back south, but there was usually a convoy to take you back. So you're talking maybe three days round trip and you'd get back at six or seven in the morning. You'd clean your guns, fix your trucks, go to sleep, when the next day you'd plan your next mission."

A video that Stroner shot before night mission shows soldiers cavorting in the headlights of an HMMWV. They dance and jump and swirled around and laughter and buffoonery. Stroner chuckles and says of the video, "Here's the truth. You looked at that video and you see how silly those guys dancing around. In those videos, we were at Camp Taji about an hour north of Baghdad. And that's right before we're waiting to go, time to leave, and escort the convoy south. The reason that... And I hope I don't get too emotional here." Stroner teared up and paused a moment to compose himself.

"The reason that's so important is that these guys know, in 45 minutes, I'm going to be driving past Checkpoint Alpha. Every night, someone dies there, so it's going to be us tonight or it's going to be someone else. And that's why when I see those stupid guys acting silly and making me smile, it's because they know bad shit's going to happen tonight. Let's hope it's not us." Stroner spoke of the mental frame of mind a soldier must have to get enough to get through combat and the threat of death or injury. "It's a case of my fate is in God's hands", he said. "During the middle of this surge, there were a hundred to 110 guys dying a month. That's three or four guys a day, and ironically, they're all in the same 4, 5, 6 places. You could park a tank on a bridge to watch it and it wouldn't matter.

"They figured out a way to put an IED in there. When we first got there, the IEDs were MRE (meals ready to eat ration packages) bombs, or they'd put an artillery shell in a dead dog in the middle of the road and would laugh at them, because we were in armored HMMWVs

and unless you were lucky, they weren't going to bother you. Then the Iranians brought in those EFPs, and they'd punch through the flipping anything. Tanks, whatever. Checkpoints 52, 53, 54 were all just north of Baghdad. They'd plant them there every night. You try to look ahead and I had this moment of clarity. *Why the F are you looking out the window? I don't want to see my own death coming.* By the time you spot one out of the window, it's too late," he said.

This kind of stress gnaws on all soldiers and it affects every person differently. Ultimately, every individual has his or her limit. That knowledge brings out one of the most fundamental aspects of the deep and abiding bond and comradery-ship within the brother and sisterhood of arms.

Stroner explained, "If you could tell when a guy was tapped out and needed a break, somebody would come up and say, "Hey, you've got a convoy tomorrow, you're going to Taji. You know what? I've got an old army buddy who's going to be up there at Taji tomorrow. Do you mind if I take your place?" Now, it's all a silly dance. He may or may not have had a buddy at Taji. The dude might have been up there the entire time, but it was this unwritten script that we're going to take care of each other and you need a break, and then I'm going to take your place. And there's something so pure about somebody risking their life to give you a break."

Staff Sergeant Colin Anderson, or Ason as he prefers, was a specialist in the 2-135th in the long deployment to Iraq. "Ason is my nom de guerre. I got it from a couple of guys on my first deployment. It's a variant of my name, Anderson", he said with a smile. Posted at Al Asad Air Base, Ason explained the mission of his unit. Our primary mission was full spectrum logistical convoys. We were escorting vehicles to and from Al Asad Air Base to different bases around Iraq, like Rawa and Al-Qaim, Al Taqaddum and Camp Korean Village. At the end of those rotations, we'd bring empty vehicles to the Jordanian border of Trebil, and also receive vehicles at the point full of fresh supplies, food, fuel, et cetera."

Ason described the nuts and bolts of his deployment workday. "Depending on the rotation, we'd do manifesting and main body security, flanking rear or within the convoy. They helped because it kept you engaged. Some of it was not very engaging. You get locked up in miles of convoy with trucks ahead of you and behind you. It can get pretty boring. If you're out flanking or rear guard, you have a bit of more autonomy. You have some different experiences. When the trucks went into Trebil, you weren't part of the main body anymore. You

could take up security positions and you could go and explore the desert, see what's out there. That's a little variety and some mental stimulation."

"We had recovery vehicles with us, but if we didn't have any available and another vehicle went down, we'd take it out into the desert and destroy it. You're denying access to the enemy of any goods you may have had. I'll tell you what, the people in Iraq are very resourceful. They will take the tires off of a flaming semi's cab while it's burning. They can get off the front tires, the back tires. It's incredible how quickly they can strip anything and everything," he said.

Ason spoke of the insurgent activity at this time and the trouble that caused the convoys. "The time that we were there was the hottest, and by that I mean the highest number of attacks, IEDs, small arms fire. If you don't have a way to go around that threat such as an IED on the road, you have to hold up and wait until the threat is neutralized. In 32 or a 33-hour period, we came across nine or 10 IEDs. It was slow moving problem after problem. The semi brakes lock up and you've got to stop and you blow out their tires. It can turn into a debacle. The insurgents were not the only enemy in Iraq. The environment coupled with the necessary precautions needed to protect the soldiers caused endless physical suffering for the 34th IED troops accustomed to a cooler climate. You're sitting in the desert in a tin can," said Ason. "You've got your full kit on, body armor, weapons, your ammo."

"The vehicles are supposed to have air conditioning, but it never works. And even if it did, you've got this opening on the turret for the gunner so it just turns inside of the HMMVW's convection oven. For a while, they put us in these Nomex flight suits because the insurgents were putting an accelerant in the IEDs so it would cause flaming material to stick to your skin. The flight suits won't melt your skin. Would sweat so much that the salt deposits would build up on your clothes. I saw a couple of occasions in the chow halls. A couple of guys thought it would be funny, so they seasoned their food with salt. They were cracking this white crust off of their tan colored Nomex suits," he said. "We were fortunate. In my platoon, no one was killed. We did have some injuries, but they could have been a whole lot worse than they turned out to be," said Ason. "Some of my worst memories are seeing people who clearly had been tortured and executed and it wasn't a one-time deal. It was pretty common."

People who had the power drills in their knees with the spirals of their flesh and bone that had come out, you could tell that they had not been captured and then just executed. They

were abused", he said. "Perhaps the biggest morale below the 34th ID in this deployment was the circumstances leading to the name, The Long Deployment. In the vernacular of an earlier war, everyone in the division was a short timer, only to have at minimum 125 days added to their deployment due to President George W. Bush's surge strategy in Iraq. A certain insult to injury event marked the beginning of The Long Deployment, one officially acknowledged by the US Army as being poorly handled. Before any official word came to the soldiers about the extension, they were learning of it from family and friends back home who heard about it on the news through public statements of army officers." Sergeant First Class Soman detailed his own experience of learning about the extension and how that led to one of his proudest moments as a soldier.

"We could communicate at home - phones, Skype - usually, it was just about the daily things going on. I call my wife and it's, "How are you? How are the kids?" And she'd say, "You're being extended." Now, we were getting ready to go home. Supply wise, we were gearing down, packing up, waiting for the new unit to come in. I mean, we were all excited. I'm like, "What are you talking about? We're not getting extended. We would know before anybody else if we were getting extended. I even know the unit's name, the one that's coming to replace us, so we're not getting extended." She's all, "Okay. You're right. You're not getting extended. It's gossip or what have you."

The next day, I call her up, "Hi honey, how are you?" "It's on the news back here. Your general just said on the news you're being extended", she said. "What the hell are you talking about? We're not getting extended." "Yep. General Nash came on TV and said the first brigade's tour is being extended in Iraq." "So we're on the fricking internet. What's going on? Holy shit. We're being extended. Why isn't anyone telling us?"

We have a meeting later that night. The captain wanted everybody. We were all there. Raggedy ass shorts, t-shirts, ripped out of bed or whatever you have. We didn't have formations. Our commander was not big on formations, attention, or whatever kind of officer, and he cocked his hat back and said, "Okay, look, we're being extended. I'm going to give you three minutes to get all the bitching and complaining out of your system, and then we're going to go back to work." And we looked at each other left and right. Nobody said a fucking word. Then, "Roger, sir."

"And that was it. Flip the switch back on. We're getting the gun trucks back up and ready to go. Everybody in their heart was like, "Fuck." But nobody said a word because we had each

other. It's like, keep us here as long as you want, as long as it's all of us and you're not just going to take half of us home. We've been doing it this long, we'll just keep doing it. For a company commander, an infantry company commander, to even give the option, "You've got three minutes to get your bitching out, your complaining", it's unheard of. Here's your orders, do what you want. But Captain Dietrich, he was like, "Well..." He was a Marine. I liked him already. He believed in his soldiers and he understood it was getting to the point that it was like every day was, "This is my last mission. I hope nothing happens."

Stroner spoke directly to soldiers under him about the situation and the constant anxiety he felt about the wellbeing of his Joes. There was a point in time during The Long Deployment when I called my guys together and said, "Do you realize from the first day we came to Iraq, if we landed on Normandy beaches on D-Day, the war would be over now?" And I felt like after that extension, I really felt like we were being screwed out every day because anything bad happens from now on shouldn't have happened. We should have been home. And any time someone knocks on your door, it is because so-and-so got killed.

In the run-up to Iraq, Soman had an experience that crystallized for him the fundamental reason for his service in the National Guard and to our country. Not surprisingly, it centered on the people he serves with. You want to see something that will absolutely get you to your core? We were in the Camp Ripley Barracks, we got notified we're going to Iraq, and that company commander came straight out and said, "All right, everybody that wants to go to Iraq, take one step forward." And when you see an entire infantry company in unison take a step forward, that is the most emotional thing you will see in your life from a military aspect, an infantry unit, a personal aspect. They were combat units, yes, World War II combat units. We were proud of our regiment, but 90% of those people had never seen combat before. For all of them to take a fucking step forward and "Roger, I'm in", that will follow you forever. They ask me, "Why do you do what you do?" It's because I've seen the infantry company take that step forward, plain and simple.

Eric Kerska

Colonel Eric Kerska was the first brigade combat team's S3 for the long deployment. With the brigade mission of convoy and base security, Kerska invested himself fully in creating protocols for convoys to follow that would decrease or eliminate the chance of being hit by an IED (Improvised Explosive Device) or other newly introduced EFP Projectiles. The EFP (Explosively Formed Projectile) was a deadly device smuggled into Iraq from Iran or

made onsite by insurgents from discarded ordinance they found "The EFP is a precision cannon" said Kerska. "There is a 90% chance that it will kill if it goes off. We had over 100 vehicles destroyed and three soldiers killed by them," he said. The statistically low death rate is a tribute to the protocols created by Kerska and his team.

In preparing the brigade for the upcoming deployment, Kerska spent time in Iraq. "I did an in-country ride-alongs for six weeks with the Texas Guard and then I went back to Camp Shelby for six months waiting for equipment. We received good training but were not accurate for what we faced when we got there. Everything had changed once we got there, but our training was for what was happening before the IFP started to appear. I heard about them in '05, but they were not well understood and not much was known about them." he said.

The relative simplicity of the EFPs is clearly one of the reasons it became a favorite of the insurgents. A solid copper disc is placed in the muzzle of a short tube barrel. Inside the tube it is an explosive charge and detonator. According to Kerska, "The device is detonated by a heat detecting sensor. It went off when the sensor detected the front bumper of the front vehicle." The heat of the charge going off would immediately soften and melt the copper disc as it was ejected from the tube and as it traveled to its target, it would form into a semi-liquid bolt able to penetrate armor. "You had a molten copper disc traveling at 5,000 feet per second and precisely at the head of a soldier," Kerska said.

Once inside the compartment of a HMMWV or other armored vehicle, the red hot bolt would be cool enough to splinter and scatter hot shrapnel throughout the inside of the vehicle along with flying armor shards from the initial penetration. Kerska knew what was needed was specific detailed information and data, "In time, enough was collected to create notebooks of very solid information about each convoy route. They showed the stretches where you had to be very careful and stretches where you didn't have to be as vigilant. It showed where every IED and EFP had been located or had gone off. Every piece of Intel on every kilometer or route was included and updated regularly. Each commander had one of these notebooks on his lap inside the vehicle."

The effectiveness of the notebooks took a giant leap forward, and Major Mike Lins, Brigade Engineer Officer studied the Intel. "You've got to get them out of the center of the road" Lins told Kerska. Lins drew a bird's eye view schematic, utilizing the information they had and then fed it into the computer. The computer program calculated where they needed to be to avoid EFPs. "It was all based upon geometry," said Kerska. "The EFPs were positioned to

hit a specific vehicle in a specific place while it was in a specific spot on the road. It would penetrate the vehicle at the level of the occupant's head, using a different vehicle than they expected or moving the vehicle from its regular position in the road thwarted the aim of the EFP."

On June 9th, 2006, the first KIA in the brigade caused by an EFP occurred. Specialist Ben Slaven was struck while manning the turret gun of his HMMWV. "I made an edict at that point," said Kerska, "The lead vehicle would not be an HMMWV, but an LMTV (Light Medium Tactical Vehicle) The new Deuce-and-a-Half, 2.5 ton truck." Evidence supporting Lins' theory and calculations had already been found when a building had been flushed of an insurgence, "We discovered the insurgents were manufacturing these EFPs by calculating distance and heights on a wall inside the building. They made various configurations to hit vehicles at different distances," he said, "They'd have EFPs on the trunk of a car and they're talking to each other via cell phones. Spotters telling those with the EFPs what kind of vehicle was coming, what distance, speed, and the like. They'd pull out the one they needed for the vehicle coming and set it on the left side or the right side of the road. It would be camouflaged to look like curb garbage, maybe a rock or sage brush around it," said Kerska, but with a continued gathering of information, the analysis and calculations were paying off.

"Everything clicked. Everything came together. We were beating the EFPs. They weren't getting us," he said, "We had a Staff Sergeant in the brigade's S2 shop. Intel folks don't like to get pinned down in specifics of predicting what will happen. It eventually became a cat and mouse game with insurgents and I pressed her to say what she thought and let her know that there would be no negative ramifications if she was wrong." She said, "This is what they're going to do. I think they're going to put it on the left side of the road or the right side of the road, whichever," said Kerska. He then got on the radio to the convoys and told them to do what she said. "I learned you sometimes have to push someone to commit. Also, however hard you try, someone will not get the word. Unfortunately, one vehicle got over too late but was far enough out of the path that it damaged the HMMWV. Wounded some but no one was killed. The HMMWV burned to the ground, but no one died," He said.

Of the three soldiers killed by EFPs during the deployment, Kerska said, "Two of them count" by which he meant that they didn't know enough to defend against them when those soldiers were killed. "The third died because he wasn't following what he was supposed to do," said Kerska. Clearly saddened by the thought. The team worked hard to convince the army that they had information for soldiers to utilize what would help protect them from

IED/EFP menace, but the rest of the army was reluctant to adopt it. "A lot of soldiers died needlessly," Kerska said with regret in his voice. Kerska did get buy-in literally from the local leaders to help keep the roads cleared of IEDs.

"We set up a program with local sheikhs to clean up roads, similar to where a local group will keep a road section clean with a sign saying, "This road maintained by the Lakeville Elks Club," or whatever. They were given payments if they kept them clean, but if an IED went off, they wouldn't get paid. That turned things around quickly. When they saw guys planting IEDs, they told them to take them away and not plant more. On this deployment, Captain Adam Stock was an E5 Sergeant and would leave the Iraqi theater as an E6 staff sergeant, a member of the 34th MP company, attached to the 634th Military Intelligence battalion. Stock was detached from the 634th MI and attached to the HHC of the first brigade troops, special battalion.

Stock explained the structure of his team's deployment admission. "When we were in our train up, we weren't exactly certain what our mission would be. We trained on everything from close combat in town, setting up observation posts and convoy operations. We ended up doing... what we ended up doing with convoy operations, convoy escorts. We'd have a squad of 12 soldiers. We'd have four HHMWV gun trucks and we do the security escort. We started escorting 20 semi-trucks from south to north. Most of what we transported was class one, which was food and water, class three, which was fuel, diesel and gasoline and class four, which was building materials.

"Most of the company's missions were to the Victory Base Complex (VBC) which was also known as the Baghdad International Airport. There was one point... There were at one point, five army bases around Baghdad International Airport. I don't remember all the names of the bases, but the army just referred to it as Victory Based Complex. We also ran missions to Camp Taji, which was little further north of Baghdad, and we ran missions to LSA, the Logistical Support Area, Anaconda. The army base was called Anaconda. The Air force base was Balad Air Base. The camp I was based at was Camp Adder by the town of Nasiriyah. We'd bring full trucks north and it would take empty trucks south." As a truck commander or team leader, Stock had a driver and a gunner assigned to him.

He continued outlining a day in the life of the convoy scrutiny, security HHMWV commander, "The first day, we would SP or start our mission. Our missions typically started from Nasiriyah, anywhere from 1200 to 1800 hours. We'd start from our base. We'd drive

over the little base called Cedar II that was right next to us. It was basically a truck stop, and we'd pick up the convoy there. Then we'd drive about four hours through the blazing hot southern desert of Iraq to a little camp called Scania."

"Again, that was another little truck stop where we'd refuel vehicles, get more rice and water for your cooler, grab a meal and wait until dark, and then you'd leave from Scania to your further destination. We would leave Scania and head to either the Baghdad International airport or Anaconda and we'd plan to get there around midnight. It was typically between three and four in the morning when we did get there. On all the missions, the idea was we were going to drive our convoys through the night. The worst case scenario, I remember getting to our destination at noon the next day. So we'd been on the road for 24 hours and that happened several times. We would get to our destination base and we'd bring our convoy to the truck yard and then we'd stay in temporary housing. The next day, we'd basically do it all over again from north to south. The problem in the north is that you'd have to start much later because you couldn't start until after dark. So you take off at 2100 or 2200, drive south and get to Scania. Take a quick break and then continue heading South."

Stock explained the environmental challenges of a Mideast military deployment and the body's adaptation and response. "The HMMWVs we had were all air-conditioned. We had upped armored, the HMMWVs. We started with M114 variants. The ones we got were beat up because it'd been there so long, so the air conditioning really didn't work. Then we ended up with M115 ones, which were better, but the strain of those vehicles in the desert heat, it just killed them so fast, and there were a bunch of those vehicles we had that just didn't have cooling. I remember a buddy of mine, he had a thermometer he got from his dad who was a science teacher. He put the thermometer down by the doghouse next to his left leg."

"I think it read 175 or 180 degrees next to his left leg, and since you have a gunner and a turret, any air conditioning that you have goes straight up and out." He continued, "I would just have a big bottle of water on my knee as we were driving down the road and we would just sit and constantly drink water. You'd get to your base and you'd still not have to urinate. It just sweated out of you. You'd get out of your truck and you'd sweat head to toe and you'd go, try to find a quiet cool place. There was one night in the middle of the summer where it was 120 or 130 degrees in the day and at night you're thinking, 'wow, it cools off.' This is nice and it's still 95 degrees. On Christmas Eve 2006, I was sitting on my HMMWV in a stocking cap, overcoat and long underwear. If it were any colder, it would have snowed. You go from one extreme of nearly sweating to death to nearly freezing."

Explaining the day-to-day life of a soldier in the field during wartime Stock voiced a common observation written and spoken by soldiers throughout history. "I would say 95% of our time was extremely boring and the other 5% was complete chaos. We're driving. It was at night and typically when the army operates at night, we're blacked out. There's no lights, but we had our trucks full of lights trying to find the IEDs because that was our biggest problem, IEDs. So we're driving along going about 45 miles per hour on a four-lane highway, and I knew this was in the area where there was going to be IEDs, and I saw one, I was about to say stop the convoy and we hit another one and I hadn't seen. I found out afterwards that it was a 105 millimeter round that was somewhat buried off on the shoulder and it had a crush wire detonator."

"They'd take two wires and separate them by a piece of foam and then wrap that in black electrical tape and when you drove over them, you'd crush them together and cause it to go off. It's called a victim operated IED, because you're the one who sets it off. So we hit that and it wasn't a catastrophic thing. Our truck came shuddering to a halt and I was hit in the face by a tiny piece of shrapnel that snuck in between the door and the frame. The front end, the hood, was basically ripped off. The tires were blown out and all the engine compartments were leaking whatever fluid they held." The piece of shrapnel hit Stock in the corner of his lip, and after extrication, the medic put it in a baggy for him as a souvenir.

"When we are in that area, south of Baghdad, I never really felt an imminent danger. I knew there were IEDs, but all the insurgents around there who shot couldn't hit anything. So the weird thing is you almost wanted to get shot at so you could return fire because you couldn't shoot unless you got shot at."

When he got north of Baghdad on the way to Balad Air Base, "They were shooting RPGs at you and they would go whizzing past your head. We got pretty lucky that none of our soldiers were hurt. But we had a bad experience of trucks blowing up, lifting off the ground because they were empty tankers and you had all those fumes inside that would come back down in front of you... And they'd come back down in front of you. We were pulling dead TCN drivers (Third Country Nationals) out of the trucks. They don't get taken back to the Medivac. They get strapped onto another flatbed and taken back to base so their body can be sent home. We were in armored vehicles. They were driving around in regular semi-trucks," said Stock.

Like every war, the GWOT has been a vast laboratory of weapon, munitions and overall

defense experimentation and development. Stock can testify to the fact that some innovations are more successful and worthwhile than others. He said, "I remember one day they needed a team leader in one scout vehicle. The team leader for that vehicle had to go out and do some training or something, and I had to go on this mission. It was a big convoy later on. We ended up changing to six gun trucks and 30 supply trucks and things went fairly typical until about Scania," said Stock.

At that point, Stock and his vehicle crew began to feel the effect of new anti-EFP technology that his vehicle had been equipped with because EFPs were triggered by passive infrared sensors, the equipment on the HMMWV was designed to disrupt the triggering mechanism. "They had this system, I don't know if I'm at liberty to talk about, but it was supposed to set off this PIR, Passive Infrared Detonator and shoot the EFP in front of you. Anyhow, it gave you extreme headaches. I remember they had a bottle of Advil there and they had a headache and took Advil and the gunner had an extreme headache. You had to switch them out because this system gave everyone extreme headaches. What it was doing to set off that EFP was giving everyone an extreme headache. There were a lot of things over there that were fielded that in my opinion, weren't fully tested," he said.

Stock said, "As a soldier in a combat zone, you take your comfort, your enjoyment, and catch a laugh as you are able and often the simplest things can get you through. I have a picture of two of my buddies. When you'd sit and wait for your convoy, you'd just sit and wait and wait and wait. Some nights you never left the base because the routes were red and you couldn't go anywhere," he said. Stock continued, "A couple of my buddies got a couple of folding chairs from somewhere. They'd just sit on top of their truck like they were lounging on a patio. They'd sit on top of the roof and have some tea or water, smoke cigarettes. My squad, it seemed for that first year, went on every holiday. On Independence Day, we had the little flares, you could shoot from your 203 grenade launcher, and we shot a bunch of colored flares for Independence Day."

Sharing Deployment Stories

More than 1,000 soldiers of the 34th ID were mobilized in mid-February 2009 for deployment to Iraq in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom. This included 425 soldiers from the 34th ID headquarters, 400 soldiers from the First Brigade 34th Infantry Division Special Troops Battalion, 43 soldiers from the 34th ID band, and 170 soldiers from the 34th Military Police Company. Division HQ provided command and control leadership for 16,000 soldiers of the multinational task force in theater at that time. The 34th ID was responsible for half of Iraq's 18 provinces and partnered directly with more than 40,000 Iraqi security forces encompassing Iraqi army police and border police forces.

The deployment coincided with a critical time in the war on terror within Iraq. The structure was being set to allow for withdrawal of forces from the country, and the 34th ID had responsibility to put this structure in place for the southern portion of Iraq. This required the building and maintaining of civil and economic capacity and stability. In addition, it was essential to ensure that the Iraqi security forces were capable of maintaining internal and border security for their country. These elements would ensure a successful and safe drawdown of US forces from Iraq.

The 34th division MP Company was in theater in May, stationed at COB, contingency operating base, Basra. The unit had the broad mission of maintaining law and order within their AO, which broke down into specific duties of force protection, route security for convoys, and overall base defense for the COB. Commanded by First Lieutenant Philip Jergensen, he would have the distinction of being the first officer to command the entire deployed unit in a combat zone. The 34th MP Company manned the entry control points for COB Basra, checking vehicles for hidden IEDs, as well as checking local Iraqis who worked on the base for contraband. This could include anything from prohibited cell phones and any devices for storing digital information to phones or documents of any kind they might be taking from the base. The MPs also performed general policing duties related to vehicle accidents, lost identification cards, general crime and theft, and rocket attacks, working with multi division South Provost Marshall.

They would investigate points of impact for all rocket attacks confirming whether there were casualties or a loss of military equipment. These rocket attacks had a very direct and personal effect on the 34th MP Company. Specialists Daniel Drevnick, James Wertish, and Carlos Wilcox were killed by a 120 millimeter rocket during an attack on Thursday, July

16th, 2009. The unit returned to Minnesota for demobilization in January, 2010. Sergeant First Class Ben Houtkooper, broadcast operations manager with the Minnesota National Guard, has spent his career in the medium he loves while serving his state and country. A member of the public affairs team, the 34th Infantry Division's HHB Houtkooper was one of three 34 ID soldiers to perform a pre-deployment site survey in 2008, spending three weeks with the 10th Mountain Division at Victory Base Complex in Baghdad, Iraq.

The 10th Mountain Division was the unit the 34th ID would be replacing in theater the following year. The division's headquarters unit had undergone a transformation before the deployment. Houtkooper explained, "What used to be HHC was expanded before the deployment. We had more and more capabilities and expanded to about the size of a battalion, so we had an immediate commander who was a lieutenant colonel for the battalion, the HHB, but our ultimate commander was Major General Nash. Commanding the division, Alpha Company was now used to be HHC, intel folks were formed into Bravo Company. Most of the IT infrastructure had been changed into Charlie Company and the HSC headquarters supply company provided the transportation, maintenance, and life support elements."

Mobilized on February 10th, 2009, the unit did pre-deployment training at Fort Lewis Washington before heading to Iraq in the spring. Stationed at COB Basra, the battalion's commander was in charge of the base, basically serving as the mayor, as Houtkooper put it. The 34th division had command of the entire southern section of Iraq for this deployment. "Lieutenant Colonel Kevin Olson, who was the division's public affairs officer, asked me to serve as their operations non-commissioned officer, planning and executing all the logistics involved in acquiring our broadcast team's equipment, and getting it into Iraq. When we got to Iraq, I was the broadcast operations chief, leading a team to produce a weekly newscast and other video products. We had a really talented team of people. We also did a daily audio podcast, which gave us the opportunity to go into a little more depth on topic."

"This was the beginning of high definition and live video. Prior to this, it was mainly posting things to YouTube through Armed Forces Network, AFN. But we now had a new piece of equipment called the Norsat NewsLink, which was a broadcast satellite transmitter that connected back to DVIDS, the Defense Video and Imagery Distribution System, a communications hub in the US." DVIDS allowed Houtkooper and his team to broadcast live around the world. The base Thanksgiving festivities were broadcast live that year back in the US. "We produced video for in-country TV and also sent back video to the states for local and national newscasts," he said.

The process of news gathering in Iraq provided logistical challenges that news teams don't usually face in the US. Weather was an enormous factor, since most things that needed covering were somewhere else and usually required helicopter travel. "Generally, we were able to hop on a convoy or take the last seat in the helicopter. It made it easier being on the division staff because we had the clout to take seats on the commanding generals and deputy commanding generals helicopters. Part of what they did was called battlefield circulation, so they would be going out and meeting with brigades in the field. That made it easier to get out to the troops."

Of course, like all war correspondents, the team faced all the dangers and challenges of operating in a war zone." We were rocketed pretty regularly. That was really the only method of attack that the insurgents had at that point. It was almost always on Thursdays. We came to call them IDF Thursdays, Indirect Fire Thursdays. We had that kind of wry sense of humor you develop as things progress over time. We had t-shirts printed with IDF Thursdays on them. I've still got mine," Houtkooper r said. "I don't know if it was true, but the rumor, the speculation was that they would do these attacks on Thursdays so they could go to the mosque on Friday and boast of what they had done and try to gather more cash for buying more rockets to shoot at us next week," he said.

"Rockets came in one particular Thursday. The alarms had gone off and we were locked down in order for them to try to find the point of origin of the firing and get to the site to make sure no more rockets were coming in. Reports started streaming in that evening of a mass casualty event on the base. There were three guys who had been almost directly hit by the rockets. Wilcox, Wertish, and Drevnick had been killed," said Houtkooper. "That was certainly a low point for the deployment. Our darkest day. You could tell talking with everyone after that that things had changed."



JOHN KRIESEL

STILL STANDING. STILL SMILING.

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John Kriesel

By Randal Dietrich

John made the decision to join the United States military as he absorbed the wall-to-wall television coverage of the First Gulf War (Operation Desert Storm) in 1990-91. He was just 10 years old.

That was the first televised war in my lifetime that I really was old enough to pay attention to. And so a switch flipped. There was something about it. At that moment, I knew this is what I wanted to do. I made that decision, and I held onto it.

When I was 16, I started going to all the different recruiting offices to talk to all the different branches, and then made the decision to do the National Guard because I was not a patient person back then. I could join at 17, start going to drill weekends. And if I really liked it, I could move up to active duty. I went to basic training the summer after my junior year in high school. And came back for my senior year, graduated, then I went back down to Fort Benning to complete my job training.

At the end of the summer of 2000, I got back to Minnesota. My parents were awesome, and supportive. Neither of them had had a great upbringing, so they wanted to make sure mine and my sister's were awesome. With that, there weren't a lot of left and right limits. So, the military was good for me to really teach me the things that I needed to be a responsible adult.

On September 11, 2001, John and his work crew listened to the radio reports of the terrorist attacks.

I worked at an ink manufacturing facility in Minneapolis. And much like the military, things started on the lowest rung. My job was a tub scrubber. I'd have to scrub the big empty tubs. I'd start early in the morning. I was listening to the KQRS morning show at the time. This was a job that if you went to take a restroom break and took 30 seconds too long, they're hollering at you to get back to work. So, it was weird to see. Everything stopped.

Following a deployment to Kosovo, the long lead up to the Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) deployment was followed by the sudden shock of arriving in Iraq.

I feel like we over-trained. Six months of a train-up was way too much time. You start to lose your edge and get to a point where you just want to get over there. And there's no way to prepare you for just the feeling of being over there. A few of our guys had been on other deployments, they'd come from active duty. But then getting there...it felt so foreign. Not just that we were deployed to a foreign country, but I'd never worked alongside Marines in my life. It had been Army, some Air force, occasionally. Total culture shock, total difference, we were the outcasts. But we answered directly to the Marine Colonel, Bristol. It was a very weird dynamic. In our Kosovo deployment, we were given to a brigade from the Iowa National Guard. Here, we were given to the United States Marine Corps.

We were just about the only Army unit on-base. And it was very weird at first. We were doing just force protection, towers. And it was boring. And we thought, Why did we volunteer for this deployment? But there was a method to it, we eased into it. And that's when Colonel Bristol saw the threat increasing, where they're launching attacks into Camp Fallujah (not direct attack, but indirect fire) and the IED threats increased. He saw that we were more than capable, potentially the most capable unit of any branch of service on that base. He put us to work and started getting us out there, taking the fight to the enemy rather than having them bring it to Camp Fallujah.

The mission was to expand the perimeter and provide greater security from those attacks.

They back-filled all of our stuff on-base with Marines, into the towers and all of that, once they saw what we were capable of. And they didn't want those Bradley Fighting Vehicles collecting dust, obviously, those are powerful machines. It was a versatile piece of equipment that they wanted to put them to use out there. Yeah, we started taking it to them.

There was great dependence on water pump houses for crops and the camp

They would pull water from the Euphrates River through a series of irrigation

canals, which also allowed the locals to grow crops. Before I went there, I pictured it was just going to be a big open desert. There was plenty of that. But the primary portion of the area that we were dealing with looked very much like Southern Minnesota, but with palm trees sprinkled in. Irrigation is obviously important to the locals, to be able to grow their crops. But then once that water gets through those canals through the pump house, it's pumped to Camp Fallujah to supply the base with water. So, the insurgents, knowing that if they cut off the water supplied to a major military compound in Western Iraq, that's going to greatly impact our mission readiness.

Insurgents would often take shots at the pump houses. There was a very large complex attack when the second platoon was out at Pump House Flanders. That's something that's been documented in the National Guard magazine and all kinds of stuff because of the heroism that they showed...

They were calling in danger close mortars almost onto their position. They were outnumbered but they didn't have our guys outgunned, or thankfully, out-trained. That was, I think, really, where they were trying to test us. It's like a boxing match. The first couple rounds, you're feeling each other out. And at first, when we were in those towers and on-base, and then starting to go out, that's why they didn't just have us, all of a sudden, go into heavy patrols. It was, you got to crawl before you walk.

Those pump houses were a very important part of the mission over there. And as our mission changed and became more of an offensive operation, then the pump house, they built more living quarters because it was usually a squad out there that would be on two week rotations. Besides them, just providing security for the pump house. Patrols would then station themselves there to be closer to where enemy activity was. Then if something was up, they could get down there quicker than leaving Camp Fallujah, dealing with the front gate, all of that stuff. So, they became forward combat outposts, essentially.

December 2nd 2003

We were on foot patrol in the morning. We were going to watch an intersection where they'd been placing IEDs. We needed to catch who was doing this,

and take care of them. So, we went out in the middle of the night from Pump House Flanders. Got in our spots. We split into two groups and we sat there and waited. They never showed up, obviously. It was their lucky day.

Once the sun came up, we knew that they weren't going to pay us a visit, but we still had to stay there. Shortly after that, we got spotted by a goat farmer. So, we had to leave our spot just in case he was cooperating with them. Not because they wanted to, but because they were forced to and their life was on the line.

We went back to Pump House Flanders. When we're there, we ate chow, took a nap, and watched He-Man, Masters Of The Universe cartoons on DVD. And our lieutenant was up on the roof pulling security. And he came and he woke us up, said he needed five volunteers to ride in the up-armored or in the brand new up armored Humvee. This thing was a month old. We had ripped plastic off the seats when we got it. So, it was new-new. As good as they made them at the time. And then with us as a Bradley Fighting Vehicle and a three man crew ahead. So, five of us volunteered to be in the Humvee.

We went down to check out that suspicious activity. I was sitting in the right front passenger seat. Because of the nature of this thrown together, taking volunteers to go on this mission, everybody was in different spots than they normally would be. Normally, I'm the lead vehicle commander. So, I'd be in the right front passenger seat of the lead vehicle.

They didn't appear to be up to any good but it was nothing dangerous. There was nothing that would put anyone in danger. They just were probably doing some illegal market type stuff. None of our concern. We've got bigger fish to fry.

So, we went back to the vehicle. You always leave your gunner in the vehicle to pull security for you. It was Marine Lance Corporal Bruce Miller. He said that headquarters had just called and said that one of our Raven drones spotted somebody digging in the road at Checkpoint 34. That was about two miles from our location. We knew they weren't planting flowers in the road, so we had to go and check it out.

We were headed that direction. Bradley Fighting Vehicle to the front. We're

the second vehicle. I remember calling in the checkpoints. As we called in Checkpoint 33, we had this 90 degree turn at the South for the last stretch of road before where that individual had been digging. And as we rounded that corner, I remember hearing this metallic plink-like sound. It was like if you threw a big heavy rock into an empty 55 gallon steel drum, just a big echo, clink. And then there was this loud whooshing sound. I don't remember flying through the air. I don't remember actually landing on the ground. But I remember waking up on the ground. I hadn't yet opened my eyes. I heard rocks falling. Rocks into the ground, rocks hitting metal. It sounded like a massive hail storm. So, I knew what had happened.

I joked that I didn't want to believe what had happened, but I've been a Vikings fan my whole life. So, I'm always prepared for the worst case scenario. I felt myself in a twisted, contorted position. I knew I'd been injured, but I didn't know how badly because I didn't really feel any pain. My femur was broken and sticking out. It was essentially gone. I'm pretty sure my pant leg is what was holding that leg together. My right leg below the knee looked like I stuck it in a wood chipper and was bleeding profusely. So, I was quite certain that that's where my life was going to end.

Thankfully, we all go through combat lifesaver training. So, the Bradley ahead of us came rushing back. Todd Everson, Adam Gallant and Adam Seed. Adam Gallant was the first one that applied tourniquets to my right legs. That's the one that was bleeding a ton. He got that to stop and was keeping me calm. Todd Everson came up, put a tourniquet on the other leg, really got that part under control. And then Miller had been shot out of the vehicle, but was mostly fine. He had a brain injury because he just kept repeating himself. Probably started the deployment with the brain injury though. Great kid, awesome Marine. They sat him down next to me and said to keep me talking. I needed to stay awake. But they had to deal with the other casualties too.

And the sounds I heard to my left, I knew that I was not the most severely injured. I could hear one of my friends fighting for their life. And so, obviously, I just tried to... I had to focus on my situation, and I knew I didn't want to see that. But I knew that that's what they were having to deal with. So, they moved me away from that spot, and had Miller keeping me alert and awake. He was

asking me the same questions over and over and over. So, I'm arguing with him in a sworn statement after the fact. I got to read a thing that Todd wrote up and he said, when he heard me swearing at Miller, he knew Miller was doing his job, keeping me right awake and alert. So yeah, I said my prayers not too long after that. Well, I remember Adam was running by. And I grabbed him and I said, Tell my family I love them.

And he said, 'Shut up. You were going to tell them yourself.' And it really gave me hope. And I thought, I have to survive. This is the only chance I get. Shortly after that, the CH-46 Sea Knight Navy helicopter and our QRF arrived. Our medic clearly hadn't seen anything like this before because when he got out of the ground ambulance, he comes over, Hey, sir... Oh, whoa. I'm like, Okay, thanks for that.

Life saving procedures

I knew I was in tough shape. They loaded me on the helicopter with stops at two field hospitals in Iraq. At Al Taqaddum Air Base, they shocked me back to life three times. And then the second one was Bala, they stabilized me there for flight to Landstuhl, Germany. Essentially, my situation deteriorated enough that my family was flown over to say goodbye. And so, thankfully, I held on. Those doctors are amazing. They didn't give up on me. So, then I woke up eight days later at Walter Reed Army Medical Center in Washington DC, in the ICU, that's when reality really set in.

After a long recuperation, John was able to thank just a few of the people who helped save his life.

They were happy to see, after the fact, how my life has turned out and that it was worth keeping me alive. Hopefully, they think so. But yeah, just amazing. People will say how unlucky I was. People will be like, Man, you really drew a tough deal. Two of my friends were killed in the same blast. I survived, and I have a life that I can't even imagine. But none of that would've been possible without all of the people who, with zero room for error, nailed it and were absolutely perfect in their training, their bravery. They didn't flinch. They did what they had to do. And that is why when I woke up eight days later, then

reality sat in. It was absolutely crushing to learn that two of my best friends, Corey Rystad from Red Lake Falls, Minnesota and Brian McDonough from Maplewood, Minnesota, both had been killed in the blast.

But that's truly the moment that I feel like I started living my life because I realized how lucky I was. And it'd be crappy of me to sit there and feel sorry for myself when I got a second chance at life that two of my best friends did not get. And in the meantime, my unit, my brothers are still over there in harm's way. Having to go back to work after dealing with something like that, so, that was a heck of a moment. There was a lot to really fall on you at once.

Walter Reed is the best in the business. And there's no place I would've rather have been besides back in combat with my buddies. But considering my injuries, I was very lucky to be where I was.



2005 Iraqi National Election

Shaun Riffe

By Randal Dietrich

Shaun was born in Sioux City, Iowa and grew up in Jamestown, North Dakota. Both his grandfathers were in World War II. His dad was commissioned as an officer the day Shaun was born - February 26th, 1970.

Shaun joined the National Guard part-time in 1989 and served the first part of my career in the North Dakota National Guard. He later moved and was full-time with the Minnesota National Guard as an officer.

On September 11, 2001, Shaun was serving on state active duty.

September 11th, it's always these days that you can remember what happened. I happened to be serving in the Minnesota Guard. I was in the Cloquet unit in 216-38-88. I had volunteered because there was going to be a healthcare worker strike in that time period in Minnesota. So the National Guard had been called up to fill in for a lot of those positions. So we were up at Camp Ripley and I was on the leadership team to help organize all the different throughput of people coming out and going into all the different state-run nursing homes and facilities throughout the state.

And that morning, I remember we only had one TV and it was up in the cafeteria. I remember seeing the news that a plane had hit or something had happened at one of the towers in New York, but because we were busy. I remember walking away, coming back, I don't know, an hour later and then seeing the news.

A good friend of mine that I served with in the Guard was actually doing some contract work for his business out in New York. So I called him and he lived in the World Trade Center complex. I think he lived in building seven. And I called him and got through because for some reason, all the phone lines in New York weren't going through.

But I called from Minnesota and he picked up his phone and I remember him just being like, "Oh my God, can you call my wife and tell her that I'm okay?" And I was like, "Have you talked to anybody?" And he goes, "No. This is so

weird." He goes, "I was across the street from the building and we heard a big loud thud." And he mentioned to the people that he was with, he's like, "Man, that sounds like a grenade simulator." And a few minutes later someone came in and said, "Yeah, we might want to leave the building." So he went down and the next thing he's running for the Hudson River, and I happened to call him. He didn't have a place to stay, so we had called some friends that he could connect with. And he also handed the phone to me because there was a number of other people that he was with that couldn't get through. So he's like, "Could you call these people? Could you call these people?"

And then I called his wife right after and she was very grateful that I had talked to him. So it was a pretty busy day. And then, I remember not much else happened the rest of the day and they ended up postponing the strike. We all ended up going back home after that and just kind of waited from that point.

So not long after, I switched units. So our sister unit was in Cloquet. I had moved down to become the XO for the Delta 216-88 in Monticello.

At that time, there were a lot of unknowns about what was happening. 9/11 had happened, there was still Saddam Hussein who was the worst person in the world. People that were in the military were getting ready to deploy because that's what we'd signed up to do.

Then a couple months later, we got the phone calls. And so Delta 216 was one of the first units individually to deploy and be activated. In October 2003, we were called to go deploy with the 81st brigade out of Washington. And then we went through our train-up period and we were in-country at the beginning of April 2004 to Baghdad. We had the mission of providing security for the airport.

So we went out and met up with the 81st Brigade and that train-up was very good. And our mission was very... We didn't know where we were going. We didn't know what we were going to do exactly because we were an air defense unit. And air defense units, the Iraqi army didn't have a lot of aircraft.

They knew they had a lot of anti-aircraft weapons, and because the military would be flying a lot of those in, we would provide the security with stinger

missiles around that area and be able to find and secure those areas before an unfriendly organization could take over that area and shoot down those kind of airplanes. So that was what we did and that was our mission for the first path of our rotation through there.

It was a big change deploying at that time. So 2003, 2004, the initial Army units, active units had rolled in and we were in Iraqi Freedom Two, officially kicked off that. We were one of the first units in during that transition. And the Army had gone through a whole RFP upgrade. So new gear, new helmets, they were transitioning into all the up-armored vehicles.

"You have all this new equipment, everything brand new." From day one, they just couldn't fathom it. So there was a lot of change. So we were in-country in Kuwait and they were putting on bulletproof doors on all the vehicles and got our first up-armored vehicles. We'd never seen them before. So it was a lot of change.

I think it's always nice to have new stuff. There was a lot of peace of mind. And because not every vehicle was an up-armored vehicle initially, there was a lot of transformation. So if you take standard vehicles and there was a lot of add-on armor, a lot of different variations that people had. So I remember we took the doors off two or three different types of bulletproof doors and we took them out to a range in Iraq and shot at them just to see what worked and what didn't work. And there was some metal door that some company had provided as a replacement. I remember just shooting straight through them. I'm like, "Well, this doesn't do anything." So that gave me peace of mind knowing we didn't have that equipment anymore.

Shaun was in Iraq for the much anticipated, and closely monitored, national elections.

We were there during a really interesting time. The first thing was the transition of American military personnel. It was the first left seat, right seat ripped from the first year of soldiers to the second year, which the local nationals that were hostile towards the Americans caught onto very quickly. And so during that transition period, it was a time they called the Battle of the Holy Week and they figured out real quickly that there were supply trains running back and

forth every day bringing in new troops from Kuwait. And they got really good at putting in roadside bombs. And that was a pretty hectic time.

And then, after things stabilized that summer, is when they had the first election. And that was an interesting day because for their elections, they had this ballot and they had hundreds of names on it. And then everybody would dip their finger in ink once they were done voting. So you knew they had voted, but when they shut down the entire city, that was one of our jobs. Every road, every street in the city, no vehicles could drive that day so people could walk peacefully back and forth to the election sites. And people were very excited. I remember just being... It was very quiet that day, but you could tell whenever large areas where people were voting and stuff because they'd be cheering and people were really happy it was a ton of celebratory gun fire just lights up the night sky, everybody takes their guns out and... Not us... The locals... And shoot them up in the air, just lights up the night.

A heightened state of readiness

That day, we'd been briefed that this would probably be the most opportune time for the most amount of time for insurgent activities to happen. So I remember we had gone out and kind of pre-staged and we'd actually usually had one patrol out, one patrol in and they would rotate. And for the week leading up to it, we put out a hundred percent of our units on the main road that we were patrolling and then set up encampments where our guys would just live right there. So you didn't have to come back in and you would just do your rotation. So we were just a presence in force right on site for that week. And there was a lot of preparation for it. So it went off exactly as expected. So there wasn't a lot of trouble on that day.

And leading up to it, though, we had already gone through a lot of the worst of some of the things that had happened. So I think at the high point prior to the elections when we were patrolling Route Irish, we were seeing, I think the average was around 40 car bombs or IUDs per month. And by that time, it had tapered off to maybe half a dozen a month. So things had actually been cooling down a little bit too. So it just made things a little easier. So we kind of knew things were going the right direction and it kind of stabilized after that.

A sense of national pride was on display but was ultimately short lived

This was a very new thing. I think they'd had elections from what history has told us but they were very rigged. This was the first time I think that it happened where people could really just go out and vote. Now, the end state is a lot of people got voted into positions that they didn't realize they had to get voted in for. So if you were the mayor of a small town because it was your family and now you didn't realize you really had to run, that would cause some unrest, especially in the small communities.

But people in general were very excited they had a part and a vote. And it didn't feel like it was fraudulent or people were coerced into voting for a certain thing. It was just new. It was a new concept. Everything was new to them. So when you take a regime and a dictator style of leadership, plus historically years of tribal leadership systems from the area, and then you put a whole new system on it, but conceptually, the idea is really good, it just didn't... I don't think in the long term, it didn't hold the way that they thought it would.

And I think going into it, that was a lot of the discussion was like, "What's the turnout for the vote going to be? Are people going to be too afraid?" There were a lot of insurgent forces that had put out messages that, "If you vote, you'll be in trouble or we're going to attack this stuff." So I think initially we just weren't sure. We didn't think it'd be a huge turnout. But through the course of the day as we started running into people and that kind of stuff, and we'd see people walk by, they always held up their finger and they would hear the next day that there was an extremely large turnout in the area. I was in Baghdad, so I can't tell you what it was like in other areas, but they had a great turnout and people were very excited to do it. And it didn't seem like they were... While we had heard that they might be scared or threatened, it didn't seem to affect what people wanted to do that day and what they ended up doing.

Coming Home

So you go down to Kuwait for a while, hang out, and you start just reversing, bringing everything back. And we left a ton of equipment, like everything

because it was all new. So you basically came back with your gear and your equipment and then had another charter flight home. Both directions, it was always funny because flying there and back, it was always on charter flights. And so it was just funny though, you always run into the flight attendants being from Bloomington or whatever.

They would come over, drop people off, then come back the next day and just be back in Minnesota and you're gone for a year. It's just like, this is always a weird conversation. We flew back as a unit and then went to Fort McCoy, Wisconsin. We were there for about 10 days. There was a reintegration process. And then, man, I remember that, I don't even think it was a week. They went fast, didn't listen to a lot and just came home. The next day, you're just back. That was a little surreal.

Phillip (Buddy) Winn Jr.

Chaplain Phillip Winn Jr. is currently the 34th Infantry Division's command chaplain and served as the Battalion chaplain for the 2nd Battalion 147th Aviation (Air Assault) in the 2007/ 2008 Iraq deployment. Winn, a minister in the non-denominational Pentecostal tradition, entered the ministry on September 11th, 2001. As an army chaplain candidate, he entered the seminary at Bethel University in St. Paul, Minnesota, graduating in 2006. In November, 2006, "The army pinned a cross on me", as Winn put it. And he became both chaplain and captain. Our motto in the chaplaincy is we bring God to soldiers, and soldiers to God, said Winn. And it's perform or provide. That's what we do if you're not in the same religious tradition as the soldier. If you're a Buddhist, if you're a Muslim, if you're Jewish, if you're a Mormon, if you're a Wiccan, we would be happy to provide you with the resources and hopefully a chaplain that has been keeping with your tradition, he said.

Winn explained the importance of the two-way street of accommodation, cooperation and respect that is practiced in the army chaplain service. "At the same time, it is cooperation without compromise. No one is ever put into a position of compromising their beliefs, principles, or traditions. And that's only come up in the past maybe three years, with the repeal of the don't ask, don't tell policy. And especially with the new policy of open acceptance, and the law pertaining to same-sex marriage. It's created a potential for conflict with chaplains. But I'll tell you, there hasn't been a single incident or issue with the Minnesota National Guard of a chaplain being required or requested or asked to do something that violates their own religious conscience. It's equal respect for all. And we recruit or answer questions of those interested in the chaplaincy. We're very upfront about that. We're not going to ask you to violate your conscience, but we certainly don't discriminate. And we'll do all we can. Because we have this incredible honor of helping our sons and daughters of America to defend this amazing right we have a freedom of religion. So we'd be pretty hypocritical if we discriminated against someone who wasn't like us."

As battalion chaplain for the 2-147th, Winn's primary mission was direct religious support to all soldiers of the battalion. We started in Fort Sill, Oklahoma in April of 2007 and patched in soldiers from Hawaii and Washington State National Guard to round out the unit. We needed a total of three flight companies, and we had 10 Black Hawks per flight company. Minnesota supplied one company, and Hawaii and Washington State the other two. We formed up at the mobilization station. We did not go organic from Minnesota. We were a hodgepodge. That created challenges.

"I knew most of the soldiers and families from Minnesota and had four months at the mobilization station, April to August, to get to know these soldiers and their leadership. Earn their trust, and then make our way into Iraq as a team." Posted to Balad Air Base, Camp Anaconda, Winn described it as a huge mini city with upwards of 40,000 soldiers. Winn noted that the base was less than affectionately known as Mortaritaville. Playing to the popular Jimmy Buffett song, while acknowledging the routine and almost perpetual mortaring of this base by insurgents. There was a low-grade stress level. I was there because of the mortaring, he said. I always went by air when I left base. Never in a wheel vehicle, since there's an aviation unit. My assistant was a 19-year-old kid at the time, Peter Mogck. Sixteen months deployed together, and the kid never complained one time. He was the product of good parenting. A good young man of character. Now he's married and owns his own business, Winn said with obvious pride in his voice. We didn't have a chapel that was assigned to our unit. We were tenants on the installation. And just like we had a separate requirement for our unit, we also had an area of coverage. So we had for example, small units that would come and stay at the FOB for a few days. Maybe resting, re-arming and refueling before going out on another mission. But if they needed a chaplain we might get the call, he said. Winn was pleased that they had the good turnouts for major religious holidays, but was concerned about often not having much participation in services in between those holidays. There was also frustration in the incoming alarms going off. Which always, of course, ended the service. If it went off 15 minutes before the service, they'd get in what they had time for after the all-clear signal.

"One of my initial frustrations was we didn't have good turnouts for our programming," said Winn. His XO told him not to take it personally since it was a case of the better part of his flock being exhausted soldiers. He told me, "what people really need is to go back to their quarters, relax. Maybe read some sacred texts, and then sleep. So don't take it personally. Keep it up. Don't give up," he told me. "We got permission to accompany the crews when they went out on their ring routes. They were very predictable routes, flown on a regular basis. Maybe to pick up a distinguished visitor in Baghdad, or fly officers into the airport. Or to the green zone and back to Balad."

Their missions were around the clock. So if they were not flying, they were prepping or being debriefed. Or sleeping. This gave Winn the opportunity to minister while they worked. He would also visit with crews on the flight line at least weekly. Winn told of a time when he went to the Fallen Angel mission. These were solemn occasions when a chaplain was asked to pick up a soldier's remains at the FOB, and escort them back to their mortuary

affairs. In this case, it was two soldiers at FOB Grizzly. About 15 minutes by air, northeast of Balad. That was probably one of the top three most impactful things that happened to me as a chaplain in Iraq. You'll never forget the look on the faces of those marines. You're taking from your commander, the sergeant major, the company commander, the first sergeant, the platoon sergeant, and the platoon leader. All of the buddies. And I still wear the bracelet every day with the names of those two young men: John Hicks and Carlos Gil-Orozo. And I think I compartmentalized for a number of years, the reality of what happened. I think there were three or four years just reflecting on September 10th, which was the anniversary in 2007, when I did that mission. Looking back, I had the incredible privilege of helping these fallen marines on the first leg of their journey. Their sacred journey back home to their families, and their final resting place. "We had people have to go home for family reasons, and to be released from active duty. Thank God we had no one killed or wounded, due to combat action. And to say that during the surge around Baghdad, that is a miraculous thing" said Winn.

The chaplain noted a unique aspect of ministering to soldiers in a war zone. He said, you get to the point where everything is normal because everything is abnormal. We had a young soldier show up. A replacement, so he hadn't been to Fort Sill with all of us. Now in our common area, you could walk around without body armor. Without your Kevlar helmet. You had to have it with you. It was always within your arms reach, but you didn't have to wear it in the common area. So he was new. And I walked up to him. Shook his hand, and introduced myself. Let him know where my office was. But I noticed he was wearing *everything*. His helmet, his body armor. I didn't know if maybe he just hadn't heard the word, and he was just chatting. Just casually shooting the breeze with a battalion's executive officer who was a major. And when you're a specialist, you don't casually walk up and start shooting the breeze with the executive officer. He's a busy guy. You don't talk to him. He sends for you.

The young replacement continued conversing with Winn, but finally asked to speak privately with the chaplain. They sat down in Winn's office, and Winn closed the door. I could smell booze on his breath. And I said hey, is there something you want to tell me? Giving him an opportunity to bare his soul. He said to the chaplain, I'm drunk as hell. You don't expect that. I was an enlisted guy for 15 years, and the old surgeon in me rises up. And my initial reaction was my wanting to say, how dare you put the rest of us at risk by being incapacitated? But very quickly the pastoral side of me said, let's get this kid the help he needs. Let's get his leadership in here, and try to get him some care. And I think he was in Landstuhl, Germany that night.

"In another instance, Peter, my assistant, was knocking and telling me chaplain Winn, you got a phone call from the TMC. Troop Medical Clinic. Now that was literally a five-minute walk away. They said they had a soldier in need. I told them to take a message, and I'd be right back with them. You're often doing spiritual triage, deciding who is in crisis and needs immediate attention. After the third time that Peter interrupted me on this, I told the person I was with that I'd get back with him. And that there was more of a crisis than I thought. So I quickly rescheduled with him, walked over to the Troop Medical Clinic and asked the person what was in charge, what was going on. He said, we've got a young man who really wants to talk to the chaplain. He took me out back to the smoking area, and there was a soldier who was smoking a cigarette and he had a weapon. I asked him how I could help him. What was he struggling with? He said, I want to go full metal jacket on my unit. This clinic is driving me crazy. I can't take it anymore.

Winn talked the soldier down, and persuaded him to give up his weapon and go with him to see the doctor at the Combat Stress Center. Winn checked the weapon. It was locked and loaded. A full magazine in it, and live rounds in the chamber. Winn related a story that speaks directly to the spiritual issues that an army chaplain struggles with in ministering to soldiers. "Chaplain John Morris was the division chaplain before me. He's a once in a generation kind of chaplain. Legendary, as being a member of the team that created the Beyond the Yellow Ribbon Program. He was on a public radio program with Krista Tippet, called On Faith. And I remember him saying, we are asking our sons and daughters, men and women of our state, these are our neighbors and our friends and our coworkers, to pick up a weapon and point it at another human being and pull the trigger, until that person doesn't get up. That's going to have an effect on you for the rest of your life." Winn added. "You put folks in a high-pressure environment under austere conditions, the heat, the body armor. Not to mention the people going off the FOBs, and being engaged with the enemy. Even the people in the rear with gear. It's incredibly stressful, and it does affect you. It changes you. It had a profound effect on me, and I'm the chaplain."



Phillip Morris

Paul Braun

Paul Braun & Phillip Morris

By Al Zdon

The American military relied heavily on Iraqi translators to communicate with the people, both in military operations and in peaceful interchange.

It was often just a business relationship, but occasionally it became more as the translators became closely attached to the American units. Sometimes it was like family.

When the 34th Military Police went to Iraq in 2009, Paul Braun was one of the older guys. A career law enforcement officer, he didn't join the military until he was 34 years old in 2004.

Growing up in Fargo, Braun said he had a wonderful childhood. "I was adopted into a wonderful family. I was the youngest of five kids. They raised me truly as their own."

His reasons for joining the Army post-911 were simple. "It was time to serve my country in a different capacity." He served in the Army, the Army Reserves and finally in the Minnesota National Guard where he was with the 34th Military Police Company, assigned to the 34th Division.

His unit was deployed in 2009 as the Iraq war dragged into its sixth year. "The war was winding down. The enemy is still out there and they're still trying to kill us. We were trying to help nation building as much as we could so at some point Iraq could stand on its own."

The Minnesotans were sent to Basra, city of over a million people in the southeastern tip of Iraq. It is the nation's major port, just upriver from the Persian Gulf.

The 34th Military Police had an interpreter assigned to them when they arrived, but it turned out he was also working for the Iraqi militia. "He was actively trying to harm us or kill us." A problem with interpreters was that the Iraqi insurgents would sometimes capture their families and threatened to harm them if the interpreter didn't cooperate in attacking the U.S. troops.

"You always had a standoffishness with the interpreters," Braun said. In fact, American units would have someone assigned to "terp duty," to watch over the interpreter for signs that he was working for the other side.

Khalid grew up in rural Iraq in a small town named Samawah. “I spent my childhood and early adulthood in the desert. We were 20 miles from the nearest highway.” His father was a soldier in the Arab Council Army.

Growing up in Iraq under Saddam Hussein, only one view of America was taught. “They forced us to know one thing about America. America is the greatest devil, and the American people are our enemy, everywhere and always.” It was an absolute truth in his life, “until I found something absolutely different.”

Khalid got a job at the local base searching vehicles for weapons and bombs at a security checkpoint, and then later he became an interpreter as his language skills improved. He was hired to be an interpreter with the 34th MP. After their experience with the last interpreter, the Minnesotans were a little apprehensive.

“We thought, ‘Great who are we going to get this time?’” Braun said.

The first thing they noticed about Khalid was that even though Basra was in Shia territory, he was a Bedouin, a desert native. “The Bedouins definitely stuck out,” Braun said.

Khalid recalls his first meetings with Braun. “He scared everyone at the base, all the local nationals. He had a unique hair style, a Mohawk. It’s hard to tell if he’s serious, mad, angry, or happy. So he scared everyone. But I had this feeling that he was a good man.”

The first days with Khalid as their interpreter were a little tense. But as time went on, the element of trust with Khalid – originally called Phillip Morris by the Guard people because of his propensity to smoke cigarettes, and later just Phillip -- grew and strengthened.

Braun recalls an early conversation with Khalid. “As we were becoming friends, and we were getting closer, I told him, ‘Please don’t forget that if you are going to harm any of our soldiers, or harm me, I’m just going to shoot you.’” Khalid started to laugh. Braun said, “Oh you think that’s funny?”

Khalid replied, “Someday you and I are going to sit back in America and laugh about this conversation over tea.”

Time went by, though, and the trust factor grew. “He was living with us. He was fighting

with us. He was with us every step of the way. And when you spend 16-18 hours a day with someone in the adverse conditions of war, you become very close,” Braun said.

The 34th Military Police lost three soldiers about this time and Khalid had been close to them. “Watching him mourn with us was very powerful,” Braun said. “He literally became one of us. He became part of the brotherhood.”

But the Minnesotans’ nine-month tour came to an end, and Khalid moved on as an interpreter to another deployed unit.

Braun knew firsthand what happened to some of the interpreters that continued to work for the Allies. A group of British interpreters were simply abandoned when the British Army pulled out. In the next two weeks, without British protection, 19 interpreters were killed by the Iraqi militia.

Calling him Phillip and not using his real name gave Khalid some protection, but the heat in the region meant that he did not use a mask. “They were able to figure out who he was and because he was a Bedouin, he kind of stuck out.”

Braun took Khalid aside. “I said, ‘If you stay here, they are going to kill you.’ And he said, ‘Yes.’ So I asked him why he did this, and he said, ‘I do this because your country is helping my country and my country can’t stand up on its own yet. This is why I’m helping the Americans help my country.’”

Still, the future looked dim for Khalid. “It was hard on me. I was confused.”

Braun had no idea what kind of paperwork and other challenges he would have to make to bring Khalid to the United States. “It was a very difficult and long process, and I really had no idea where to begin.”

As the Minnesota company left, Braun and Khalid shared one last hug. “I thought that would be the last time I would ever see him. We hugged each other. We said our goodbyes. We said ‘See you later.’”

Braun did some research to find a good unit where Khalid could work as an interpreter. “An interpreter like Phillip is like gold.”

Back home, Braun could not let it go. “That’s when the battle with the State Department took place. It was months of paperwork going back and forth and having Phillip try to fill out the documents over there.”

Technically, someone who worked for the U.S. could get a letter of recommendation and paperwork to come to the United States, but Khalid didn’t qualify because he worked for a private company that was hired by the U.S.

Braun didn’t quit in his efforts to get Khalid out of the country. It took three and a half years, but the paperwork finally went through, and Khalid arrived in Minnesota when it was 22 degrees below zero outside. Talk about culture shock. The first step was to get Khalid to a store to buy winter clothes.

“I had a job within ten days of when I arrived. I got all my legal documents within two weeks. It was all because of Paul.”

The happiness of getting Khalid out was great, but it was tempered by the fact that his family was still in Iraq. Because women in Islamic countries cannot do immigration paperwork themselves, Khalid had to go back to Iraq, at great peril, and do the paperwork. Making it worse was that when he was there Iraqi television picked up the story, which had become newsworthy in Minnesota, and broadcast it, including a picture of himself and Paul Braun. His secret mission was no longer a secret.

Another three and a half years went by, but Khalid’s wife, son, and three daughters were finally allowed to immigrate in 2016. It took a major effort by several Minnesota organizations and donations of money to make that happen.

Times were not easy, and Khalid had to work three and sometimes four jobs at a time to try and achieve his vision of America. Braun put it this way: “He represents America for who we are. He’s an immigrant who came to America with the clothes on his back. He had a dream of what America is.”

Khalid said when his kids first went to Minnesota schools, Braun was there. “He introduced himself to the other kids in school as their uncle. Their father was his brother.”

Khalid said his vision for his children is that they succeed in whatever they choose to do.

“We are lucky because we had the bad life, and now we are tasting the great life. It’s the people that make it great. So now it is on us, as immigrants, to prove ourselves.”

The journey has had its high points. Khalid was sworn in as a citizen at home plate before a Twins game with the governor and the mayor standing by his side. And when the president visited the state, Khalid got to meet him and he was asked to do the pledge of allegiance.

His remarkable story began with a friendship that formed between a soldier and a foreign national during a time of war. They still consider each other brothers.

“We are lucky,” Khalid said about himself and his family. “Because we have tasted the bad life and now we are tasting the great life. America is a great country. That’s my own opinion. I love Minnesota and I want it to stay nice.”

Braun says the U.S. still has a ways to go in helping those who work for the country at their own peril find a way to get out. “We need to do better. We need to do better for the interpreters. As Americans, we go to war to help. We never go to war to take over a country or conquer a nation and take their resources. We go there to save other countries, save other lives. We go there to liberate.”

But the problem will always remain that we don’t speak their language. “We don’t follow through and help the interpreters,” Braun said. “We don’t keep our promises.”

Braun teases Khalid by calling him a terrorist. “Some guys came back from Iraq with a tea set. I brought back a terrorist.”

And yes, the two of them did sit down and have tea and laugh about the hard times in Iraq.



Ryan Sabinish

Ryan Sabinish

By Tim Engstrom

In the Iraq War, being a quartermaster could be just as dangerous or more so than being in the infantry. Just ask Ryan Sabinish, a resident of Albert Lea, Minnesota, and a member of Albert Lea Post 56.

He is the former commander of the Military Order of the Purple Heart and advocates for younger veterans to get to know their local veteran organizations by joining them all.

Sabinish graduated from Albert Lea High School in 2000. Three years later, he enlisted in the Minnesota National Guard, knowing that three previous generations in his family had served. He felt the duty, he said, to have military experience.

In January 2004, he went through basic training at Fort Jackson in South Carolina, then he went to quartermaster school in Fort Lee, Virginia. His military occupational specialty (MOS) is petroleum supply specialist. The 224th Transportation Company in Austin, Minnesota, is filled with truck drivers, mechanics and the like, and Sabinish wanted to drill locally. Austin is only 20 miles from Albert Lea.

He arrived in Austin, and in September 2005 he volunteered to deploy to Iraq with the 134th Brigade Support Battalion out of Brooklyn Park, part of the 34th Infantry Division. He spent six months in Fort Polk, Louisiana, then arriving in "the Sandbox" on the last day of March 2005.

Being in the Quartermaster Corps in the post-9/11 military wasn't like the olden days. "I never really did my MOS besides going to schooling," Sabinish said.

Halliburton Company, a Pentagon contractor, handled the fuel supply. That meant Sabinish would play a security role. The 134th was stationed at Tallil Air Base in Iraq near An Nasiriyah and the ancient city of Ur, and he was a .50-cal gunner on a Humvee scout truck for convoys.

Sounds exciting, but Sabinish said being a .50-cal gunner can get boring on convoy after convoy during the Iraqi summer. He had to fight sleep.

"It's easy to fall asleep standing up when it's 150 degrees out," he said.

He would see infantry soldiers at guard points and small bases along the routes. Because of the roadside bombs, many soldiers concluded that any transportation role was more dangerous than a stationary role, such as infantryman at a guardpoint.

Sometimes the convoys would get hit. One time, Sabinish's convoy came to a halt because the convoy in front had a truck blown out and the one behind them did, too. Their convoy somehow was safe.

The roadside bombs were generally two kinds: IEDs and EFPs. Most people who followed the war news knew about improvised explosive devices. However, some might recall explosively formed penetrators, too. They look like little barrels on their side and can shoot a round metal lid into an armor-penetrating slug. They can get used for fragmentation instead, sending shrapnel toward a chosen direction.

On March 23, 2007, the safety of Sabinish's convoy was disrupted by a fragmentation EFP while on a patrol around An Nasiriyah.

"No one in my company had a Purple Heart until that day," he said.

He was the gunner for a group of four Humvees. Nearby was another group of four Humvees with a soldier who controlled an unmanned aircraft called ROVER, which provided video from the sky.

The job of Sabinish's convoy was to go through the Iraqi army and police checkpoints while the ROVER flew overhead. The camera allowed the U.S. military to tell whether Iraqi security members were making suspicious phone calls, likely to enemies.

Before the first checkpoint, the convoy approached a T-intersection among heavy traffic and, because the U.S. military had priority, the scout truck had to push its way to the front. Sabinish was warning people to back up and had lifted his hand to shoot a pen flare when — BOOM!

"I came to and I was on the floor of the Humvee, and my poor driver Emily was screaming, 'Omigod! Omigod!' and she looked at me and she stopped screaming," Sabinish said.

The EFP came from the driver's side and was intended for a taller Australian truck, so much

of the shrapnel had gone above their upgraded-armored Humvee, but with the gunner being in a turret at the top of the truck, he was hit the worst among the four people in the Humvee. They wore headsets to communicate, and one piece of shrapnel hit the microphone in front of Sabinish's mouth, saving his teeth.

"I was trying to communicate, and she thought, well, they thought I was dead because they noticed blood, and I wasn't talking back, not realizing my headset was hit."

He started to realize he was bleeding and couldn't feel his fingers or his arm. Soldiers from other vehicles noticed the bomb's triggerman off in the desert and fired rounds at him. Sabinish, despite bleeding and a concussion, climbed back in the turret.

"Everybody in the vehicle said I was pale as a ghost, and I had been in Iraq for so long that you kind of get a little tan going," he said, "so I guess I was pretty pale from all the blood loss."

They got him out of the vehicle and gave him medical attention. They put an Israeli tourniquet—a trauma wound dressing that uses pressure to stop bleeding—on him, yet he continued to bleed. About 10 or 15 minutes later, a medevac helicopter flew him to Tallil Air Base.

Emily Pesta, the driver, was left with a slight concussion. Mike Peterson had a bit of ricochet shrapnel in the face.

When the 134th got to Iraq, it had Humvees from the first Gulf War, some with holes in the floors.

"And then a couple months before we got blown up, we got brand new, up-armored Humvees, so that probably saved my life," he said.

Sabinish credited his body gear for stopping shrapnel from hitting his heart.

At Tallil, they gave him morphine, then a chaplain came. He had heard that Sabinish had lost his arm.

"I'm like, what's going on here? I've got a concussion and just had morphine for the first time, and I'm like out of it anyway," he said.



Doctors cleaned out the wound. Still, seven pieces of shrapnel remain in his arm. Removing them, doctors told him, would cause further nerve damage. He still has nerves that never fully healed, and the scar tissue causes arthritis in his elbow.

From the Tallil hospital, he downplayed the injuries in a call to his mother and sister back in Albert Lea. “I could only really say so much at the time.”

He was out of the hospital in a day, and he spent a couple of weeks in his room at Tallil while treating TBI, or traumatic brain injury. There was talk of sending him to Germany, but that was scratched, and Sabinish was eager to stick out the deployment with his unit.

“I went back up in that turret and gunned again,” he said.

The Department of Veterans Affairs later said the Army should have sent him to Germany.

The deployment ended in July 2007, and Sabinish returned to his Austin unit. After a promotion to sergeant a year later, he drilled with the Brooklyn Park unit. He got out of the National Guard in 2009, spent one year on Individual Ready Reserve before entering the

Army Reserve. He was all done in 2011.

At the time he went through the federal VA, the agency was overwhelmed with claims, and Sabinish had to fight again to get his combat injuries cared for, but these days, he has the status of 100 percent service-connected.

He joined the American Legion, Veterans of Foreign Wars, and Disabled American Veterans when he got home in 2007. In 2012-13, he became involved with the Military Order of the Purple Heart chapter in Rochester, Minnesota, whose area included Austin and Albert Lea. He became an officer for four years and in 2018-19 was the commander.

There are 12 chapters and 1,400 members across the state. In 2017, Ryan Sabinish, along with Korean War paratrooper Paul Overgaard and other Purple Heart recipients, helped Freeborn County become the first Purple Heart County in Minnesota. The idea was introduced by the American Legion Riders in Albert Lea and brought to the county commissioners.

Thanks to a grant from the Support Our Troops license plates, Freeborn County posted “Purple Heart County” signs along entryways. The American Legion Post 404 in Alden, in turn, worked with Sabinish and MOPH to become a Purple Heart City, much like many other cities in Minnesota.

Ceremonies bring together the service organizations to honor “Purple Heart veterans who didn’t make it home and the ones who did,” he said.

Jeremy Doesken

By Al Zdon

Jeremy Doesken grew up in Coon Rapids, Minnesota, and joined the Army Reserves to have money to go to college.

In 1994, the reserve units were combined with the National Guard, and by 1997, Doesken had joined the 477th Ambulance Company out of Duluth where he and his wife, Ann, lived. He had choices during that tour: stay in and try to become an officer, stay in as a non-commissioned officer, or get out.

He chose the officer route, and in 2000 he was commissioned as a medical corps 2nd lieutenant.

It was still the old Guard in those days, with few call-ups. That would change after September 11, 2001. “I remember exactly where I was. I was at the Army Reserve Center on Park Point making up a drill. Somebody came in and said we should come down and look at what was happening on television.

“I told him no, we were too busy, but he insisted. We got there just in time to see the airplane hit the second building.”

The base was locked down and Doesken wasn't allowed to go home until later in the day. He and Ann talked about the likelihood of being called up, and they got their finances in order.

Time went by. Doesken got his master's degree, but then found he had priced himself out of most school districts' pay scales. Instead he took a job as a foreman at the Potlatch paper mill in Cloquet.

Still time passed, but in early 2003 his unit went through a readiness process, the first step in being called up. Still nothing happened, and the unit went through the same process in late 2003. By now, Doesken was a first lieutenant in charge of an ambulance company.

On November 11, Veterans Day, the call finally came. Doesken was out deer hunting. “We had heard inklings that we would mobilize. We watched on TV as other units were called up, but it didn't happen to us. And then it was us.”

Almost immediately, he went to work full time for the Guard. His employer, Potlach, only asked how they could help. It was a skein of 12 to 14 hour days until the unit left on December 7, Pearl Harbor Day.

“The hardest part was coming home after a long day and saying goodnight to the kids,” he said. The Doeskens had three small children. “I had to act like I was happy.

“But I wasn’t that happy. There’s a lot of anxiety before you go. I wasn’t sleeping well and I wasn’t eating well.” The unit left for Fort McCoy in Wisconsin and it actually got better.

“As soon as I left, I was fine. I didn’t have to act anymore.”

The unit tried to train for the desert in the middle of a Wisconsin winter. “How realistic is that going to be?”

On January 25, they departed for Kuwait. In the desert, the training became more valuable. On February 16, they packed their vehicles and headed for Baghdad. “We used our ambulances like U-Hauls. We had everything in them. Our equipment, our medical equipment, our personal stuff. We were lucky to be in a convoy with a military police company. They had a lot more firepower than we did.”

Doesken’s platoon of six ambulances was sent to the 31st Combat Support Hospital in the Green Zone in Baghdad. It had been Saddam Hussein’s personal hospital. The Duluth unit’s initial job was to transport patients from the hospital to the airport to be flown out to hospitals in Germany. “After a while, though, they decided that was way too long a drive and way too dangerous.”

The unit continued to move patients, but also started working shifts in the hospital.

Meanwhile, on the home front, Ann became the leader of the Family Readiness Support Group for the Duluth area. Ann and Jeremy would work together through computer communications to keep families as closely tied together as possible.

“I’d make sure that the soldier kept in contact with his family back home. Sometimes they don’t do that,” Jeremy said.

The Green Zone in Baghdad was a large chunk of the city, three miles by five miles. Mortar rounds were common. “It was unlikely a round would hit near you. After a while you got used to it. You didn’t even flinch or stop your conversation. Unless it rattled the windows, you didn’t pay much attention to it.”

Doesken’s most harrowing time in Iraq came when the Minnesota unit had to send two ambulances to each of two towns where a Shiite pilgrimage was planned. Doesken was to be a medical liaison officer in the city of An Najaf, about 75 miles south of Baghdad. It was his job to coordinate medical services with other allies from Poland, Spain, and El Salvador.

He made his way as far south as Babylon, but could go no farther because a large force of insurgents was attacking An Najaf. “It was too hot, and they didn’t want me to go down there.”

Doesken was determined to get to his mission, even though the Army told him to stay put. He wrangled a helicopter flight to a base in An Najaf, but it turned out it was a Salvadoran base. With more wrangling, he got a ride to a base in the city.

“I walked into the camp, which had been a college campus, and instead of all these other liaison officers and local officials, there were only about five U.S. soldiers.”

He asked where everybody was, and was told that when the attack came, everybody had been evacuated. “I called the company headquarters and they were not happy that I was in An Najaf. As soon as I hung up the phone, mortars started landing in the camp.”

For the next five hours, the small band of Americans was in a firefight with the insurgents. They positioned themselves atop a three-story building that faced the main entrance to the campus.

“At least I had my M-16, and I’d had some infantry training. The officer with me was a psychiatrist and this was a whole new experience for him.”

Over the next several days, the insurgents would creep in close behind parked cars and buildings to fire their mortars and then retreat quickly when the Americans began returning fire.

From being a foreman at a paper mill, to being a medical officer, to taking part in a firefight was a quick evolution in Doesken’s life. “Most people never think they’ll be in that

position. What do you do? Well, you do what you have to do when you do it. As soon as you pull a trigger and try to take someone's life, you change. It's a huge decision you have to make. It's a life-changing experience."

The attacks kept on coming. "You'd like to think that you didn't hit anyone, that it was the guy next to you who shot the guy who went down. But that's just a rationalization so you don't have to deal with it. And at night who knows what you hit. You're just shooting at muzzle flashes."

Another realization was the strangeness of war. "Here we are having a firefight with these guys, and all of a sudden there would be three ladies walking down the street with their groceries. What were they thinking?"

Looking down from the top of the building, they would see the insurgents firing rockets and mortar. Looking in another direction, you could see the hustle and bustle of the city including traffic jams. "Life goes on."

Two helicopters finally arrived to rescue the little American force, but there weren't enough seats. Doesken volunteered to stay behind, and he did for two more days at the camp. Two more mortar attacks were launched at the campus in those days.

Finally a Polish helicopter arrived. Doesken had one more major challenge. He was very susceptible to motion sickness. "I had taken a lot of Dramamine, but the helicopter was taking evasive action for about 25 minutes. That was tough."

Doeken's next mission was to Fallujah in November 2004. The U.S. forces had decided to wipe out a hotbed of insurgents in the city. His job was to command a group of ambulances that would be needed for civilian casualties. He was bivouacked right under the American artillery.

"I think they fired 4,000 rounds in 48 hours. It was just barrage after barrage. It was like being downrange at an artillery practice area."

In the end, the civilians had paid attention to the evacuation order, and there were no casualties. Most of his time was spent in the Green Zone, and the toughest part of that was just being away from his family. "I got used to the heat, because most of the spaces are air conditioned,

but I never got used to being away from my wife and kids. The internet is a life saver.”

At home, Ann was keeping in close contact with all the families in Duluth. “We try to take care of them so the soldier can focus on the mission,” she said. The Family Readiness Group would try and keep tabs on a variety of potential problems including health care, leaky roofs, and doing taxes. Veterans from the American Legion and VFW provided both funding and hands-on help.

It had been tough on Ann when Jeremy left. “For the first 24 hours, I’d cry at the drop of a hat,” she said. “But then that was enough of that. I had to get on with life. I didn’t want to mope around with three kids.” Working with the other families kept Ann busy and provided some camaraderie.

Planning the homecoming for January 29, 2005, was a big event for the families, and they were able to use the Duluth Entertainment and Convention Center. They brought in a lineup of dignitaries including Governor Tim Pawlenty, Rep. James Oberstar, and Kenneth Preston, sergeant major of the Army, who gave each returning soldier a medallion.

Over 500 people turned out, and the streets were lined with people.

“It’s huge, especially for the younger soldiers. Some of them didn’t necessarily have a positive experience in the war. They didn’t feel like they did a lot. They didn’t understand that in the medical field, that’s a good thing.”

For Doesken, the re-acclimation to civilian life went surprisingly well. “It took the kids a little while to get used to me again, especially the youngest, but after a week that was all okay too.

“In fact, the transition went so well that I considered going back to work early. But then I came to my senses and I didn’t.”



Jeremy Miller

By Jack Baumbach

Jeremy Miller, Assistant Principal at Cambridge-Isanti High School, knows a thing or two about leading amid the pressure of life-threatening circumstances. Before becoming an assistant principal, Jeremy was a part of multiple deployments to Iraq. He deployed with the Marines, as well as with American private military contractors. In 2001, Jeremy had just begun his freshman year at Hamline University in Saint Paul. After the 9/11 attacks, he dropped out to enlist in the Marine Corps. Jeremy said, “I originally enlisted as an infantryman because my goal was to fight. That’s why I signed up. Within the infantry division, I wanted to become part of the Special Operations division, which at the time was known as Force RECON.” Two years after Jeremy joined, the Sniper Platoon within his Battalion took note of his work ethic, and they offered him a spot in Sniper School. Jeremy completed the training and became the leader of Sniper Team 2 in the 3rd Battalion, 8th Marines. While conducting an estimated 100 operations over his eight total years of overseas service, one thing became very apparent to Jeremy: often more important than the ability to fight was the awareness to know when NOT to fight.

When Jeremy arrived in Iraq in January 2005, the first job that he and his battalion were assigned to was providing security for the first Iraqi “Free and Fair Elections.” Stationed in Camp Fallujah, their area of operation was from the west side of Baghdad to the eastern border of Fallujah. Operation Valiant Resolve, which was a major U.S. military campaign in Fallujah in 2004, had dissolved by the time Jeremy and his battalion arrived in 2005. According to Jeremy, this made their time “relatively peaceful.” After the election, Jeremy’s battalion was assigned to clear two American mobile supply routes called Route Michigan and Route Mobile. These routes were extremely important in ensuring that American forces could safely move through central Iraq. Jeremy explained, “We lost people from roadside bombs and indirect fire every day. The challenge was, there were hundreds of miles of road that we had to cover. It was very challenging to determine where al-Qaeda was going to drop these bombs along the road, while also worrying about the indirect fire that was hitting us.” This indirect fire would become one of Jeremy’s first wake-up calls about combat in Iraq.

Jeremy said, “There was a skilled Iraqi general in Saddam Hussein’s military that was able to drop indirect fire into our outposts from miles away. He would lob these bombs with very rudimentary targeting equipment, but just one bomb would often kill multiple U.S. soldiers.” On one occasion, Jeremy and his team had gotten back from an operation around



Jeremy Miller

3 or 4 in the morning, so they slept in. That morning, Jeremy remembers being rocked out of bed by multiple bombs that had been lobbed into their outpost. Jeremy would come to find out that the rounds landed exactly where he and his team usually ate breakfast every morning. If it had not been for them recovering from their extended operation the night before, they very likely would have been hit. Jeremy remembered thinking, “Holy crap. It just helped me realize that I could never really know what was going to happen each day.”

In addition to the realization that anything could happen, even within the confines of his outpost, Jeremy understood the unpredictability that came along with stepping into zones of heavy combat fire. Since Jeremy was a Sniper Team Leader, his team only comprised himself and two other guys. Moving with stealth was critical in ensuring their safety. Jeremy said, “It was myself, my ATL, and my point man. We did almost all our operations at night. We would get dropped off and would go with very little support. We had to be stealthy because three guys by themselves aren’t going to survive if they get caught without any air support.” Considering the pressure-ridden nature of these circumstances, Jeremy’s ability to make “shoot or no shoot” decisions with confidence is nothing short of remarkable. Jeremy shared one story that epitomized this point.

“My team and I were on top of a roof, and we saw three or four young kids drop what appeared to be a roadside bomb. I have no idea exactly how old they were, but they looked young. They were initially too far away to engage or shoot at, but then they hopped into their truck and started driving right towards us. They were coming from about a mile away, so I had a minute to think about what I was going to do. I wasn’t 100 percent sure that what they had dropped in the road was a bomb. My teammates, though, were confident that they had seen the kids drop roadside bombs and were ready to eliminate the threats. It was such a difficult decision. I knew that if I was wrong, I would be responsible for the deaths of innocent kids and would likely go to jail. In the end, I decided to call it off and hold all fire.” From this, Jeremy learned a very important lesson that would inform his future career in private military contracting, as well as education; situations often appear much different when you are the one that will ultimately be responsible for the decision.

Just one year after Jeremy had finished his four-year stint with the Marines, he was back in Iraq with the American private military contractor Blackwater. Instead of planning offensive attacks, Jeremy’s role was to safely transport U.S. diplomats around Iraq to meet with Iraqi officials. Despite not being on the frontlines of combat, Jeremy and his team still found themselves in a variety of dangerous situations. Jeremy said, “On one mission, we went to the Ministry of Health as the advance unit to clear the building before our diplomat arrived. I was the Tactical Commander, so I led the convoy. I oversaw the route planning, route navigation, gathering of intelligence, and coordination between units so we had support if we needed it. My job was to make sure that the exterior of the building was secure while the team leader and five other guys entered the building to secure the inside. In this case, we knew that many of the Ministry of Health officials were involved in the Mahdi Militia, a Shiite group. As soon as six of our guys entered the building, ten of the Iraqi officials walked out with assault rifles and there were two more Iraqi machine gunners on the roof pointed down at us. It was a standoff because everyone knew if something happened, even if it was the detonation of a roadside bomb, everyone would be on the triggers, and it would get ugly. A lot of our team had prior experience in Special Operations so if we were going to get into a fight, these were the guys to do it with.” Jeremy would further explain that he had everyone in position to eliminate the threats, including helicopter air support to help with the Iraqi machine gunners on the roof. It was like the “shoot or no shoot” decision that Jeremy had made just a year earlier in Baghdad, except now he was not the one making the decision. Jeremy recalls, “I was leaning towards the thought of ‘let’s just do this’ because I knew we were surrounded by a group of dangerous guys. I knew that if these guys were not in their diplomatic roles, but instead were out on the streets, they



would have absolutely tried to kill us. I called my team leader and he felt that the militia members were simply trying to assert their power to embarrass us and get us to leave. He told us to hold fire. Thankfully, we left without incident, but it was quite a scary standoff.” As Jeremy reflected, he knew that his team leader had made the right decision and he was thankful that they all made it home safely.

Over his eight years of service in the Marines and with private military contractors, the impact that Jeremy had in Iraq is undeniable. Whether it was providing security for Iraq’s first “Free and Fair” election, clearing road bombs to ensure that American forces could safely travel on Route Michigan and Route Mobile, or completing over 100 missions as a Sniper Team Leader, Jeremy did so with immense integrity, honor, and courage. Through this, Jeremy was constantly reinforced with the idea that making decisions is often a lot harder when you are in command and are responsible for the outcome. Applying this to his career working as an assistant principal, Jeremy can now appreciate both the decisions that his superiors must make, while also fulfilling the duties of his own job with the same integrity, honor, and courage that he displayed while in combat. It is evident that Jeremy Miller has had a tremendous impact on both the battlefield in Iraq, as well as the lives of students in Minnesota.



DRONE
NOT DRONES

Keith Deutsch

By Tim Engstrom

Keith Deutsch grew up on a farm outside New Prague, Minnesota, the fourth generation of his family to work the land.

He was an active youth and a competitive wrestler, with his dad a coach. He was snowboarding before he was nine.

His father, Ron, got cancer, fought it off, and then got it again. This time, it was everywhere, and the chemo and radiation did little to help.

“His mind was strong, and he never cracked even up to the end. I’m sure seeing him fight is where I developed my insatiable appetite for it. Dad was my greatest teacher. Today I am actively learning from and guided by his memory.” Ron died of cancer when Keith was 10.

“After dad died, I just started running. It was simple, like Forrest Gump. I ran a half-marathon when I was 11 years old. I couldn’t control how I felt. I couldn’t control the rage. But I found out that nothing hurt as bad as the pain of losing Dad. No matter how hard I ran.”

And through the years, he learned more and more about snowboarding, becoming a professional instructor while in his teens.

On September 11, 2001, terrorists crashed giant airplanes into the World Trade Center and changed Deutsch’s life. After the towers fell, recruiters came to his high school in New Prague from both Army and Marines. The army recruiter could see how eager Deutsch was to sign up, and afraid he’d lose him to the other side, he told Deutsch, “I can see you’re way too smart to be in the Marines.” Deutsch just wanted to get in the military. “I was ready for a fight.”

He graduated from high school and immediately joined the Army Reserves. He was sent to basic training at Fort Jackson in South Carolina. Most of his comrades loathed boot camp, but Deutsch loved it. “I called it Relaxin’ Jackson. The food was good and I went from 130 pounds to 160 pounds while I was there. I would be the first one in the chow line and then I would go around and get in line again. The second time around, they had me sit at a table with the ‘fatty guys’ who were on a restricted diet, and they would have to watch me eat.” His next duty was at Fort Leonard Wood in Texas where he trained as a heavy equipment

operator. After the advanced training, and because he was reservist, he was sent home to await the pleasure of the Army. Deutsch was assigned to the 367th Engineering Company in Mankato for monthly drills. “I went to one drill, and I wanted to get to know these guys, so I’m buying every drink all night long. The problem was, that was my last drill there. I never saw those guys again.”

Instead, as the U.S. geared up for the invasion of Iraq, he was activated and sent to Colorado.

“I had a relative in Boulder and I asked to be sent there for pre-deployment training.” The relative was in a fraternity house two blocks from the hotel. “They made me an honorary member of the frat. There was a lot of debauchery. I trained during the day and hung out at the frat house at night. The army had given me a hotel room, but I didn’t spend much time there.”

The Army did not tell the reservists where they were being sent or what they were preparing for. “But they were painting some of the equipment for desert camo, so we kind of knew where we were going. We were using a lot of old equipment, and none of it was up-armored.” (In military vehicles, up-armored means an extra layer or two of metal to protect soldiers from attack.)

By April he was with the 244th Engineer Battalion in Kuwait assembling for the invasion of Iraq. Deutsch turned 20 while there.

On March 20, U.S. troops crossed the border into Iraq and headed north. “We traveled on the ‘Highway of Death.’ All the stuff from the invasion of 1990-91 was still on that highway, for a hundred miles. Some of the equipment still had bodies in it, or depleted uranium.”

Deutsch’s unit saw no fighting for a couple of months. “We thought we had won their hearts and minds. We were giving coloring books to the kids. It wasn’t the Iraqi people that wanted to do us harm, but then the Taliban got involved.”

Suddenly the convoys that Deutsch was protecting became targets of insurgents, with improvised explosive devices (IEDs) and rocket-propelled grenades (RPGs) beginning to take a toll on U.S. forces.

The convoys were instructed to pick up speed when attacked and leave the area if possible,

but some of the soldiers wanted to be a little more aggressive than that. “I was a country boy. I could shoot and I didn’t miss. I think me and Staff Sergeant Mark Lawton were the two most aggressive.”

The RPG attacks increased as time went on. “For one of my friends, the RPG came into the vehicle, hit him upside the head on his helmet, went straight up through the roof and exploded about 20 feet up. All he got was whiplash.”

On August 29, 2003, Deutsch was in the back of a truck manning an M249, known as a squad automatic weapon, or SAW to the soldiers. It was the last truck in the convoy. He had his machine gun resting on the tailgate of the “deuce and a half” 2.5 ton truck. “I remember the heat of the sun-soaked metal scalding my right leg as I positioned it, cornered against both the bed and tailgate. Surely this would be a safe barrier from small arms fire.”

The convoy started taking fire on the right side. Deutsch could hear the by now familiar rattle of enemy AK-47s. “It was standard operating procedure to step on the gas and get away as fast as you could. We were Army, not Marines. So we’re taking fire and the convoy is picking up speed.

“I had been trained to only fire short bursts, three to five rounds. If you fire short bursts, the enemy can’t tell the difference between you and someone firing an M-16. If you fire more they know it’s a machine gun, and you can become a target for the RPGs. But I was firing at person who was about a thousand yards away behind cover who was firing at me. I was firing long bursts.

“Then there was a ball of light coming at me. I had no time to react.” Deutsch was hit.

“I could not hear, touch, taste or smell. I was aware that I didn’t have my weapon. That was my first thought, I don’t have my weapon.

“My senses started to come back and I could determine that I was trapped, I was trapped and sitting in a puddle. I wondered if I had peed on myself.

“My leg was trapped. The RPG had hit a sheet of metal and forced it inward. The metal pressed on my leg like a guillotine. But it wasn’t a clean cut like a guillotine, it was raggedy.



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“My guys put down the tailgate and I could feel my boot slip off. That was the first thing I could feel. I knew my leg was mangled. In fact, from the very first, I knew my leg was gone. There was a lot of damage to my foot, but my knee was totally mangled. I had no delusions. My first thought was how was I going to snowboard on one leg? It can’t be done.”

Deutsch never blacked out. “I was yelling at Big Mac, one of our guys, ‘They blew my fucking leg off.’”

Tyler McWilliams and other comrades worked frantically to get a tourniquet on Deutsch’s leg. “Big Mac ripped his shirt off and frantically wrapped it around the leg. He told me, ‘Man, I think you’re going to bleed out.’”

At some point Deutsch realized the puddle he was sitting in was his own blood. Many soldiers survived horrific wounds in Iraq because blood was available in the field, not in the form of plasma bags, but in the form of their fellow soldiers, their “battle buddies.” Before the invasion, the whole group was taken into a building where they were promised liquor and snacks, but on their way in a soldier wrote their blood type on their foreheads on permanent ink. The thought was that on the battlefield, another soldier with the same blood type would be a donor.

Crystal Woolen was his battle buddy. They loaded Deutsch in the ambulance, he on the bottom bunk and another soldier on the top bunk. Woolen was in the front of the truck giving blood for Deutsch. “She’s still one of my best friends today.” Deutsch says he was a mad man. “When you go into shock, you don’t feel much, but that only lasts about 10 minutes. Now I’m in real pain. Our medic, Sgt. Ryan Anderson, was trying to get me settled. I was trying to punch him and I was spitting on him. But he just had that steely look on his face. He was doing his job.” It was a 45-minute drive to the Combat Support Hospital, known to the soldiers as a CSH and pronounced “cash.”

Deutsch was screaming at Anderson demanding to know who was in the top bunk. Anderson just said, “Nobody.” He asked again, and he asked again, but the medics wouldn’t tell him. “They would only say ‘You’re going to be all right.’ But I was full of rage. It was cold and it was dark. I didn’t think I was going to make it.”

The truck hit a bump, and a hand fell down from the top bunk. Only a hand but Deutsch could see the wedding ring and the calloused fingers. He knew it was Sgt. Lawton, his boss and his hero.

“Lawton was one of those guys who didn’t try to be first in line when the fighting started, he was just there. If there was firing, he was automatically running toward it.”

And now Deutsch knew Lawton was dead.

“He saved my life. It was the last thing Sergeant Lawton did on earth. He showed me his hand and saved my life. I was giving up at that point. You reach a point where you just say ‘fuck it.’

“But he showed me how he felt. It was his last act.”

Up to the time he got to the hospital, Deutsch was given no pain medication. As he was being wheeled in, he asked for a blanket, but the nurse, a major, wouldn’t give him one. Again Deutsch started cussing and demanding a blanket saying he was cold.

“I was in such pain by then, I was delusional. I didn’t care what anybody’s rank was. I kept yelling ‘how are my boys?’ meaning my comrades. And I kept asking where my weapon was.”

The nurse was silent to Deutsch’s questions.

“Then I remember the drugs. I was probably put into an induced coma. They took off my leg in Iraq, and I know the people in my platoon came to see me, but I don’t remember much. Then I was in Kuwait. I would wake up now and then and ask where my weapon was.”

And then he was the Army hospital in Landstuhl, Germany, and soon thereafter in Walter Reed Hospital in Washington DC. “During the plane ride back to the states, a nurse put a ‘hug me’ sign on my chest, and so everybody who walked by gave me a hug.”

Deutsch remembers being on kind of a table at Walter Reed, and it was open at the bottom and a doctor was under him trying to do something to his back that wasn’t working. It took a long time.

The doctor was trying to give him an epidural to stop the feeling in his lower body, and it finally worked.

“It shut off the pain, and it was the first time I was without pain since I was blown up. I went right to sleep. It was my first real sleep since I was in Iraq.”

He was also riddled with shrapnel. “I figure I was hit with shrapnel in 80 percent of my body.” One large piece was in his abdomen, and it led to bowel obstruction, and the need for a colostomy bag.

“I was only at Walter Reed for a month, but they gave me really good care. But they change the dressings at midnight no matter how you feel about it.”

“I also met the president. He only wanted to see the worst of the wounded and so they brought us all to this place. We had to wait five hours. None of the guys got their medications because their nurses weren’t there. I thought my colostomy bag was going to burst, and I didn’t know how to change it.

“I finally got to see the president. I was trying not to cry, but it wasn’t just the emotion of the moment. All these wounded men hadn’t had their medications in over five hours.

“After he gave me my Purple Heart, he went over to my mother and said he was surprised that the men all seemed down. She told him, well, they’ve been here for five hours without medications. He said, ‘Well, I’d better get the heck out of this room.’ And he did.”

Immediately the nurses were let back in, and the guys got their meds.

By his own admission, Deutsch was not an ideal patient. When Army Chief of Staff Eric Shinseki came to visit, Deutsch just saw it as a “photo op” and chased Shinseki out of the room with some choice words. “I was lucky I didn’t get court martialled.” Later on he found out that Shenseki was a combat-wounded vet from Vietnam who had lost most of a foot to a land mine. Deutsch said when he found that out, he wanted to apologize to Shinseki.

Mostly, though, Deutsch recalls just an atmosphere of caring at the hospital. “I healed quickly because of the constant recurring love and support that I had surrounding me and projected on to me.”

Two people he remembers particularly well. One was Major General Jim Collins, his commanding officer in Iraq. Deutsch tried to give him the bum’s rush, as he had Shenseki, but



Keith Deutsch

Collins would have none of it. He told Deutsch that he was the first of the 4,000 soldiers under him to get wounded.

Deutsch was still aggravated at the visit, but then Collins asked what he was going to do with the 1969 Mustang his dad had left in the barn back on the farm. Deutsch was astounded that Collins knew about the car. Turns out, Collins had visited Deutsch's mother at the farm and had seen the car. His concern got Deutsch's attention.

Another key person was an amputee vet named Kirk Bauer, another Vietnam vet who had lost his leg to a land mine. He opened the door for Deutsch to think about winter sports again.

And he thanks his mother, Judy. The two ran a half-marathon together in New Prague in 2018. "Mom always inspires me to excel because she doesn't make excuses."

With the help of U.S. Senator Mark Dayton, Deutsch left Walter Reed early and was transferred to the VA Medical Center in Minneapolis where he received his prosthesis. There he had continued surgeries to repair the shrapnel wounds, including one where they took out all of his intestines, patched them up, and put them back. "They stapled me back shut like I

was a piece of construction paper. Most of my body looks like a map of the great railroads.”

He also had to deal with traumatic brain injury, or TBI. He has lost many of his memories of his youth.

Deutsch was wounded on August 29. By October he was able to walk his sister down the aisle at her wedding. By November 29, three months after he was wounded, he was in Colorado and tried snowboarding again.

His first attempt going down the mountain was a disaster. He fell off the lift and had to drag himself out of the way. On the slope, the only way he could control his speed was to slide on his butt. “By the time I got to the bottom I was devastated. I was in tears being fully aware that I’d never be the same again.” He knew he only had two choices, quit or move ahead.

By 2007 he began racing competitively. By 2011, he was the United States national adaptive snowboarding champion. He raced all over the world.

He later worked in the aerospace industry for a number of years, including work on the James Webb Space Telescope. He has a daughter named Ava.

He is now the club manager for the New Prague American Legion Post. Deutsch recalls how at a snowboard meet some years back, a young lad came up and began asking questions about his prosthetic leg. He explained that he was hit by a rocket-propelled grenade in the Iraq War. The young boy turned to another snowboarder with a prosthetic leg and asked, “What’s worse, a rocket or a grenade?” The snowboarder responded, “I don’t know, kid. They both kill people.” The boy turned and pointed to Deutsch and said, “Huh, well it didn’t kill this guy.”



Jeremy Wolfsteller

By Jeremy Wolfsteller

The Minnesota veterans community know Jeremy Wolfsteller from his years of work as the department service officer for The American Legion of Minnesota.

People who know him typically are aware that he had been shot in Iraq. Some even know that he survived a nine-hour surgery and years-long recovery.

But few know the full and difficult journey Wolfsteller has been through. Here is his story:

Wolfsteller grew up in the greater metropolitan area and graduated from Osseo Senior High School in 1997. He was an avid skateboarder and frequented 3rd Lair, an indoor/outdoor skateboard park and shop in downtown Minneapolis (now in Golden Valley).

It can be hard to believe today seeing Wolfsteller walk with a slight limp that this guy could catch six or seven feet of air off 12-foot ramps. He skateboarded semiprofessionally, even with some big names like Tony Hawk. He also had played hockey from first grade to his senior year.

Looking for more direction in life, he enlisted in February 2001 with one year in the Delayed Entry Program.

Then the Twin Towers fell in New York on September 11.

“My family became concerned that I’d be going to war,” Wolfsteller said.

He entered the Army in February 2002 and went to basic and AIT at Fort Knox. Drill sergeants had adjusted training to prepare recruits for war.

His military occupational specialty was 19D — cavalry scout. Wolfsteller, in June 2003, became part of the 3rd Armored Cavalry Regiment at Fort Carson, Colorado.

Cavalry in combat traditionally meant horse-mounted troops. The 3rd had horses at the outbreak of World War II and turned in their trusty steeds in February 1942.

In modern warfare, cavalry units still fulfill many of the strategic purposes of soldiers on horseback but without the horses: scouting, reconnaissance, forward security, flank moves, busting enemy lines. The terms “shock troops” and “cavalry” have been interchangeable. Cavalry can move with tanks, armored personnel carriers, Humvees or other trucks and even helicopters. You see mechanized cav, armored cav and air cav. To be flexible, they often operate without additional support from other units.

Wolfsteller said the commander of the 3rd asked top brass that his regiment enter the Iraq War. “Unfortunately, he got what he requested.” They left in March 2003 for Kuwait.

In this war, there was no scouting around the backwoods picking out terrain features and mapping them. The soldiers of the 3rd Cav went house to house, “clearing cities,” as they called it. They had Bradleys, and the scouts worked closely with the tankers.

Wolfsteller described hours in the desert heat with limited amounts of water. A private first class at the time, he drove Bradley Fighting Vehicles to Baghdad, Faluja, Ramadi, among other cities. After the defeat of the Iraqi conventional forces, the well-known Iraqi Republican Guard no longer wore uniforms. It became difficult to tell a civilian from an enemy.

He was promoted to specialist in Iraq and returned unharmed — well, physically — from his first tour in March 2004.

“It was life-changing,” Wolfsteller said. “I wasn’t the same. I was very standoffish. It took months to figure out you’re not in a combat zone.”

He suffered symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder: always on high alert, drank heavily and was “all over the place” for about six months. He was preparing to get out of the Army in February 2005 — but then a stop-loss order came down. The 3rd ACR would return to Iraq in one year.

Back in the Sandbox by March ’05, he was promoted to sergeant and became a senior scout. He ended up the gunner of the lead Bradley within his Scout Platoon — operating the M242 Bushmaster, a 25 mm chain-fed autocannon firing up to 200 rounds a minute, and an M240C, a coaxial weapon firing 7.62 mm rounds.

Sgt. Wolf had a passion for it.

“You have to be really good at multitasking while scanning your sector with the turret

gun,” he said.

The Army’s logistics were rather lacking during the first tour. Wolfsteller said soldiers had to get by with low or no supplies. The second had better amounts of water, food and toiletries along with improved living quarters.

The 3rd first went to the Triangle of Death, a name given to a region south of Baghdad with major sectarian violence. A change in orders sent them to Baghdad for a month.

His squadron then was sent to take over Tal Afar in northwestern Iraq 35 miles west of Mosul, joining the local Kurdish fighters. They learned the city’s troublesome situation by working with a Stryker brigade slated to pull out.

“They did recon by gunfire,” he said.

The regional commander, then-Col. H.R. McMaster, wanted U.S. troops to win hearts and minds, rebuild the city and build an Iraqi version of the National Guard. Iraqis often acted like guardsmen but would be insurgents.

“It was really hard to figure out who was true,” Wolfsteller said.

By June 2005, they had done many missions into the city, with many soldiers injured by roadside bombs, rocket-propelled grenades and small-arms fire.

On June 25, the cavalry scouts were sent to a hilltop citadel in Tal Afar, where they coordinated operations with the Iraqi military and guard and U.S. Army Special Forces before heading out. This time, Sgt. Wolf was told he would be a dismount that day — going without the Bradley. He was assigned hand grenades, one on each side.

They walked to the Sarai district. With its narrow streets, the ancient neighborhood was known for heavy insurgent activity.

Wolf and others suspected not all the allies were allied. When they arrived in Sarai, gunfire was instantaneous.

“When we did that dismount, the insurgents were waiting for us. They knew we were

coming that day.”

At that point, it was “scattered chaos,” Wolfsteller said. Soldiers took cover where they could: some behind a courtyard wall, some were caught in an alley. Enemy fire was coming from all sectors including rooftops.

His platoon sergeant was on the opposite side of an intersection, shooting down an alley and yelled for a specialist to lay cover using a grenade launcher. Wolfsteller found a huge truck tire in the dirt and lay in the prone position, firing toward a nearby rooftop to provide cover. He didn’t have much for cover behind him.

Pop.

“When I got shot, I didn’t know what happened,” he said. “The impact was so great, I just thought ‘bomb.’”

He quickly realized it wasn’t.

Wolfsteller wore a lot of protective gear. He looked at his body and didn’t see blood or a missing body part.

“I yelled for help. That’s the first thing you do in that situation, is yell for help,” he said. “I knew something wasn’t right. I couldn’t feel my legs anymore, and it was really hard to breathe.”

His platoon sergeant heard him and called for two soldiers to come over. Spc. Hoby Bradfield and PFC Eric Woods, a combat medic, pulled him out of that area.

The gun battle lasted two and a half hours, and the 28-year-old was injured in the first 10 minutes. Woods and Bradfield administered first aid and IVs as their battlefield patient wandered in and out of consciousness.

The insurgent who shot Sgt. Wolf was believed to be in a courtyard, and soldiers were able to lob a grenade in his area. It is unknown whether the injured insurgent was the one who shot Sgt. Wolf.

Wolfsteller said the insurgents must have been trained to fire at soft spots in the armor of Americans, just underneath the interceptor vest where the femoral artery is. The 7.62 mm round hit him above his 9 mm pistol and below the hand grenade on his right side, striking right on the hip bone.

Woods and Bradfield ran with Wolf on a stretcher about 50 yards downhill to a set of Bradleys. “They were returning fire as they were running with me,” he said.

Wolfsteller recalls the tail dropping on the Bradley and Spc. Ruperto Estrada saying, “You’re naked, Sgt. Wolf.”

The Bradley team medevac’d Wolf to outside the city where a Black Hawk helicopter landed. Wolfsteller recalls the sound of the propeller and the door opening. About 25 minutes had passed.

“At that point, I was like, ‘Oh, I made it this far,’” he said. “‘I’ll be in surgery soon.’”

The chopper took off, and, feeling safe, Wolfsteller let go and blacked out. He woke up, gasping for air, to the surprise of the medics. They landed within 30 mins at a combat support hospital in Baghdad. Doctors came rushing to the Black Hawk, brought him in, got him on life support and performed a nine-hour, life-saving surgery. Around 10 a.m. Iraq time and 1 a.m. in Minnesota, the rear-detachment casualty assistance office contacted Wolf’s family to let them know their son had been critically injured. Everyone gathered at his mom’s house in St. Louis Park.

They got another call nine hours later. Their son was in stable condition.

The bullet had traveled through his hip to his tailbone — shattering it — and went up L5 to L1 vertebrae before veering off a little left to hit the lowest left rib, then narrowly missing his heart as it punctured his left lung, finally settling in his scapula.

“It just never exited,” Wolfsteller said. “Initially it was difficult for everyone to understand the severity of the wound.”

The Army reported back to his unit that he had survived and flew his family to Walter Reed Army Medical Center in Washington, D.C. Meanwhile, Wolfsteller flew to the Army’s



Landstuhl Regional Medical Center in Germany while in a drug-induced coma. (The American Legion created Operation Comfort Warrior originally for Landstuhl, later expanding the program.)

A day later, he was flown to Walter Reed, where he was kept intubated and in a coma for two weeks in intensive care.

“I didn’t even know I was back in the U.S.,” he said.

In that first week, his parents had to make one of their biggest decisions of their lives. The surgeons explained they could install screws in his hip, tailbone and spine or they could lay him flat in a custom airbed for three months without moving. His parents chose the latter. There was a 50/50 chance he would walk again.

When he was conscious by the third week, he would fight his doctors and nurses, thinking they were trying to kill him. He’d pull out his IVs and yell, then intubated all over again several times.

“I was still in survival mode,” Wolfsteller said.

Nurses log-rolled him four times a day to prevent bed sores. The back of his head went bald. Three other people from his platoon were at Walter Reed, too, and they would come in to talk to him, providing moral support.

He also learned the men who saved his life, Bradfield and Woods, were killed in a tragic incident two weeks later on July 9, 2005. Wolf has a tattoo with their initials, that date and a fallen soldier cross.

Bradfield was shot during a raid while walking up a stairwell of an old school that was being used by insurgents to teach IED training. PFC Woods was the driver that day of the medevac M113 armored personnel carrier, which carried Bradfield out of the city. On the way to a medevac helicopter, the 113 APC struck a powerful improvised explosive device, lifting the vehicle off the ground and flipping it over. Woods died in the explosion, but Bradfield remained alive with a gunshot wound in his neck. The M113 commander, a staff sergeant, suffered a leg wound.



Jeremy Wolfsteller



The platoon, in addition to the ongoing fight, had to cater to the rescue of the two men. They got them out, but Bradfield died in transport. The staff sergeant survived, and his leg had to be amputated while at Walter Reed.

“It was hard to be told the two guys who saved your life died and that you are not able to see them and thank them,” Wolfsteller said.

The staff thought he might die. While motionless on the custom airbed, he suffered bacterial infections, became sick and couldn’t eat. He atrophied from 225 pounds to 150 over three months.

But the plan worked. The medical staff sat him up in bed slowly — as in 5 degrees a day.

He couldn’t feel his legs and still wasn’t sure if his spine and sacrum would hold. He had thoughts of being paralyzed. After a few weeks, he reached 90 degrees and began physical therapy, such as the staff bending his knees while he lay in bed.

“They finally got them to bend after a week of bending. That was so painful,” Wolfsteller said. He did the parallel bars and while his left leg worked, the right one just flopped around. After three more months, he took his first step.

“From that moment on, there was no turning back,” he said.

In December 2005, Wolfsteller came back to Minnesota for a week. Gov. Tim Pawlenty and other high-profile politicians were there for the welcome-home party.

“All the news channels were coming to my mom’s house in St. Louis Park,” Wolfsteller said.

What’s more, there was a welcome-home parade in Hopkins, with him riding in a Humvee and people lining the street. He called the experience “overwhelming.”

After 10 months at Walter Reed, Wolfsteller asked to go to Evans Army Community Hospital at Fort Carson. In a wheelchair when he returned around April 2006, he became a casualty assistance officer, helping families when a service member has died.

“This responsibility hit home with me.”

He has two coins from meeting George W. Bush twice. The first time Bush gave a coin to his dad when Wolfsteller was early in his treatment at Walter Reed and instructed the father to give it to the son when he recovered. The second time was four months later, when Wolfsteller could stand with help. Bush came in, closed the door, and seemed genuinely interested in how Wolfsteller was doing. He handed him the second coin.

When Sgt. Wolf finally reunited with his unit, he gave his platoon sergeant — Ed Malone, the one who had answered his call for help — the second presidential coin.

Wolfsteller left the Army with a medical discharge in April 2007. He went to Normandale Community College, where he found a passion for helping veterans.

“I wanted to learn everything I could to help them with anything,” he said.

After college, he worked at Normandale as a student counselor, then found out a department service officer job was open with The American Legion.

“I thought, ‘This was it,’ he said.

That was 10 years ago.

“The thing that keeps me going is the soldiers who didn’t come back. Because I was given the opportunity by two soldiers who didn’t make it back. I owe them my full effort and share this with my fellow veterans that might be struggling to find purpose.”

John Hobot

By Al Zdon

John Hobot knew he would be joining the military as soon as the terrorist attacks happened in 2001.

His grandfather served as a Marine in the Pacific in World War II. “I have 27 cousins and not one of them joined the military. It seemed like kind of a slap in grandfather’s face that nobody in my generation had served.”

Up to that point, Hobot had done well in creating a civilian life for himself in Minnesota. He had been born in Edina, grew up in Brainerd and then moved to Chaska when he was 14 years old. At Chaska High School, he played football and hockey and a little golf. He was captain of the football team his senior year as an undersized running back and defensive back. He graduated in 1996.

At St. Thomas University, he majored in political science and minored in business. “After 9/11, it took me a while, but I finally made up my mind.” His decision was to join the National Guard in Minnesota in December 2002.

“There I was in basic training at 25 years old. I was a little out of shape, but after a couple of months I think I was in the best shape of my life. Basic came pretty easily to me. I was used to having coaches yell at me, and so the mental part was not hard.”

As soon as basic was over, Hobot enrolled in the officer candidate program at Camp Ripley, and was commissioned in August 2004. Then it was off to the field of his choice—tanks.

“I knew when I was in the officer’s basic course that I was going to Iraq or Afghanistan. It was real. I’m going to war. And so everything you studied, everything you learned prepared you for war.”

In April 2005, the call came to Hobot’s battalion in the 34th Division that they would indeed be heading off to Iraq. In October, the 1-194th Armored and several other battalions from the 34th headed off to Camp Shelby, Mississippi, for more training.

“It was a very long six months to train, but we had a lot of things to learn as a brigade. It’s

rare that a whole brigade combat team gets deployed. There were 5,000 of us to get ready, and we had to learn everything from individual soldier skills to the unit level, battalion level and brigade level.”

Still, the process dragged on. “After a while, I was saying, ‘Just send me to Iraq. Let’s get this deployment going.’”

After a short leave during which he got engaged to his future wife, Amanda, Hobot joined his comrades in the journey over the ocean to Kuwait for, you guessed it, more training.

“For one thing, we just had to get used to the climate. Plus it just takes a while to get all 5,000 troops there. We had to go to the ranges and re-zero our weapons, and get used to going around in full battle rattle.”

A soldier in Iraq will carry gear and wear protective armor that can weigh up to 70 lbs. “Eventually you get used to it, but you do sweat a little bit.”

On March 27, 2006, C Company traveled to Iraq. Hobot was a platoon leader. The possibilities for his unit varied from running checkpoints to doing patrols to “kicking in doors.” Their assignment, they found, was going to be in providing security for supply convoys.

“It’s one of the most dangerous jobs in Iraq, right up there with patrolling. It’s in the top three most dangerous anyway, and I don’t think anybody can argue with that.”

Charlie Company was assigned to Tallil Air Base in southern Iraq, about 310 kilometers southeast of Baghdad. Supplies would come into the base and have to be shipped to Baghdad and other points in Iraq. The supplies would be loaded in a 38-truck convoy.

Hobot’s job was to make sure those supplies got to where they were headed, and to make sure nobody got hurt along the way. It was a difficult mission with the Iraqi insurgents determined to stop them.

The unit lived in tents for a month, and then moved into small trailers.

“It seemed to be hotter in Iraq than it was in Kuwait. Maybe because it’s out in the flat desert with no trees or anything. But it wasn’t unusual to have days where it would hit 140 or 145 degrees.

“The only thing I can compare that to is when you walk outdoors in Minnesota and it’s 30 below and your nostrils instantly freeze. In Iraq in mid-August, you walk outside and your nostrils burn. It’s like running a hair dryer into your nose. It makes you want to breathe through your mouth.”

In Iraq, there was more training in cultural awareness and heat awareness. “You just have to drink a lot of water.” And there was getting used to the idea that this was going to be your situation for the next year. “You can see what’s coming. For the first time, it’s real. You might say, ‘Holy smokes, this is not a joke.’”

The Minnesotans were replacing the 648th Engineers out of Georgia, and went through a period of “right seat, left seat” on-the-job training. For several convoys, the Minnesotans rode in the right seats just observing what the Georgians did. The two teams then shifted places with the Georgia soldiers observing and offering advice as the 1-194th took over the vehicles. In the end, the Georgians went home.

“You have to be careful because a unit that’s been here a while starts to cut corners. They know what they’re doing, and they know where they can cut corners, because it helps them do their job better. As new guys, we couldn’t afford to cut corners.”

Hobot’s platoon consisted of 22 soldiers. They drove large, heavily armored and heavily weaponed vehicles to protect the semi-trailer trucks in the convoy. At first, the men had Humvees and LMTVs, a large truck. Later, they got ASVs (Armored Security Vehicle) to go along with the Humvees. “The ASV is like a little tank on wheels. It was as close as I was going to get to tanks in Iraq.”

On May 5, 2006, the Minnesota Guard unit was on its own, and for a month Hobot’s platoon lived a charmed existence. “All the other platoons were getting hit left and right, but we had a little bit of luck.”

The technique the unit used was to have two scout vehicles head up the road in front, one on either side. Hobot’s command vehicle would be next and the other vehicles would be interspersed with the convoy, with Hobot’s second in command bringing up the rear. There would be six gun trucks in all. The trips were often 300 miles one way, and so the Iraqi insurgents had a lot of territory to use in planning an assault.

The main danger were roadside bombs, or IEDs. The attacks might simply consist of one bomb going off. More likely, there would be small arms fire after the bomb stopped the convoy. And in some cases, there would also be rifle-propelled grenades—called a complex attack because the enemy was using several means to try to kill the Americans.

The main thing, Hobot said, was to get the convoy moving again as quickly as possible and get out of the “kill zone.” “They want to confuse you and then attack you.”

As officer in charge, Hobot had several options once the convoy was attacked including fighting back, immediately heading off down the road, or changing to the other lane to continue forward. “You just have to make a decision, what you think is right.”

On June 6, one of the scout vehicles was hit by a roadside bomb. “I had to quickly assess the damage and check out the guys. They’ll be checking each other out too to see if everyone’s all right.”

In this case, the vehicle had to be transported to Baghdad for major repairs. Another unit took the convoy to its destination.

“On June 6, it all sunk in. The reality and the seriousness sunk in. We could have lost three guys out there. Thank God they were not hurt.

“We felt pretty safe in our vehicles. The Army did everything it could to keep them armored, and they were upgrading all the time. It was about as safe as it could get, but still in the back of your mind, you wonder. If an insurgent wants to kill you, they’ll build a big enough bomb to do it.”

Again, the platoon had another “lucky” streak, going a month without another incident. But following another IED on the 4th of July, the pace picked up—considerably. Hobot estimated that from that point on, one out of three convoys was attacked. “It was ‘game on’ after that.”

The Independence Day attack was one Hobot won’t forget. “It was a 130-mm mortar round about 10 meters from my truck, near the Baghdad airport. There was a loud boom and a huge fireball came across. I checked on the guys, making sure they all had their fingers and toes and that nothing inside was hurting.”

The bomb shredded three tires on the truck, but the “run-flat” air system kept the tires inflated until the convoy got to a safe point. “There were holes in the truck, and the bullet-proof glass was cracked.

“That was a big wake-up call for me. In the back of my mind it occurred that I might not make it out of here. After that, I was more in a life-or-death mode.”

The Minnesotans learned through experience to get better at their jobs, including knowing the likely spots for attacks, assessing the damage quickly, and returning fire quickly. The intelligence unit that helped the platoon, Hobot said, did an outstanding job in keeping the team informed about what it might encounter.

The platoon also changed its speed. They had been taught by their forebears to hustle down the highway at a good speed. As time went by, though, the platoon changed the speed of the convoy to a more moderate rate. “By going slower we were able to find the IEDs rather than hit them.”

Communication was essential. Hobot’s vehicle was known as “Bastard 1” and the other trucks were “Bastard 2” and so forth. All the trucks would know instantly where the attack was coming from.

“We always shot back. Our brigade was known for stopping and fighting the enemy. When we got attacked we got busy. Later on, I learned from interpreters that the insurgents were learning to avoid attacking the trucks with the big red bull (the 34th Division’s logo) on them.”

The enemy might be in a building, in a grove of trees, in the tall grass, on the canals, or in the wadis (ravines) that are common in the Iraqi countryside.

The Minnesotans would fight back with 50-cal. machine guns and guns that fired explosive charges. The latter weapon was especially feared by the enemy. The platoon could also call in attack helicopters to the scene.

And so on it went for 80 missions. Eighty times the platoon got in their trucks and headed north to protect a convoy, and the reports on the missions fell into a dull and deadly cadence: IED, IED, small arms fire, complex attack, IED, IED, IED, complex attack, small arms fire, IED, complex attack.

“You get better and better at it, but at the same time you realize that you could do everything right and still get killed out there.” Several in the brigade did get killed. “That was always very tough.”

One of the toughest things, though, besides the enemy attacks, was the news near the end of the brigade’s year in combat that they were going to be extended for four months.

“We all kind of knew it was coming. We were good at what we were doing, and why would they send us home? They needed us to support the surge.”

Still, when the news came, Hobot said morale went into the toilet for a couple of weeks. “The way I told them was that I knew they were all looking forward to spending that tax-free money they were earning. I said they were going to have a lot more of that tax-free money. They just looked at me like, ‘Are you kidding me?’”

Hobot said the brigade went through the classic phases of anger, denial and finally acceptance. “All you could do was suck it up and drive on. You had to turn all that anger back into the mission.”

The Minnesotans were due to go home in March 2007 and instead stayed in Iraq until July and August.

Hobot’s platoon got a new job for a time guarding a radio relay station, and then did route clearing assignments on Iraqi roads.

It was during these later months in Iraq that Hobot often worked with an interpreter, and was able to hone his Arabic speaking skills that he had learned through a special Army course at Camp Shelby.

“I got to be pretty decent at speaking the language, although I was limited to what I needed for the job. I could say, ‘Do you have weapons?’ and, ‘Are you lying to me?’ and, ‘I know you’re lying to me.’

“It would throw them for a loop to hear an American speaking Arabic. And even though I didn’t know that much Arabic, I made them think I did. I would spend an hour each day with my interpreter, improving my Arabic and improving his English.”

The last month in Iraq was spent guarding convoys again. It was tense duty. “After 16 months of seeing my guys get attacked, just living in that operating tempo, seeing what we saw, when we did that last mission, it was like having the weight of the world lifted off our shoulders.”

Despite the continuous bomb and weapons attacks, not one person in Hobot’s platoon was seriously hurt.

The journey home was wonderful for the brigade, with warm welcomes in Maine where they landed, and at Camp McCoy and Volk Field in Wisconsin. There was a police and motorcycle escort to the Sauk Centre armory for the final ceremony.

“The first month back was kind of like a dream world. Am I really out here fishing?”

The hardest adjustment back home for many was simply running their lives again, Hobot said. “In the military, everything is pre-planned for you. You don’t have to do anything except do your job well. Back home, all of sudden you have to make choices about what you want to do with your life.”

Another area of adjustment was the fact that 22 months had gone by. “For us who were deployed, it was like 22 months of a dream of how things used to be, but guess what, life moves on. People and things change in 22 months, and can be much different than the dream world you left behind.”

John and Amanda got married three weeks after the lieutenant got home. “It was good for me. All I had to do was get my tux; Amanda had done everything else for the wedding.”

Hobot went back to work at General Electric in Eden Prairie, where he had worked for six years, but the job wasn’t the same. “I didn’t feel right, I wasn’t enjoying it any more. Plus I was used to the responsibility of 22 guys.”

Hobot did some part-time work with the National Guard and then applied and won the job as public affairs officer in 2008. “I’m loving it. I know I’m an armor officer and PA is not the norm for that, but it’s something new every day, different things. I enjoy it.”

Derek Farwell

By Jack Baumbach

Shakopee resident Derek Farwell joined the active-duty Army in 2005 as a 21-year-old, and his transition from civilian life in America to combat in Iraq was quick and unforgiving. Regarding this Derek said: “Almost all our drill instructors were former combat veterans in Iraq, so they were able to share extremely valuable information with us. We would train, train, and train some more. They would provide us with the most realistic training in the world but there is absolutely nothing, anywhere, that can prepare someone for the kind of stuff that we would end up experiencing in Iraq.” Just nine months after enlisting, Derek found himself being deployed to Iraq in June 2006, during a year that would become known as the deadliest for U.S. military personnel in the Iraq War.

The city of Mosul in north central Iraq was the setting for Derek’s welcome to the war. “First of all, just getting into Iraq scared the heck out of us. We had to do straight up, straight down takeoffs and landings. Once we got in there, though, it was the smell that really became imprinted on my memory. It smelt like burning garbage everywhere, and it’s a smell that I will never forget.” While Derek’s company did experience some combat during their time in Mosul, Derek said that it was relatively little compared to what they would experience in the coming months. “In Mosul, we did a lot of single-day operations. We mostly went out into the city and talked to the local people to help track down al-Qaeda terrorists, who were often harder to find than in places like Baghdad or Baqubah. We would occasionally experience attacks from small groups of al-Qaeda fighters but the local Iraqi Army at our base was often capable of dealing with that. We also did a lot of work dropping food supplies to the local schools and community. Over the five months, we got familiar with the area, and it often got repetitive. Looking back, it was a great introduction to the Iraq War.”

When asked about how the Iraqi citizens in Mosul viewed U.S. forces, Derek replied: “There is not a single answer that is correct because everyone has different experiences. What I can tell you, though, is that most of the citizens were understanding of why we were there, and they didn’t want us to leave. I would guess that 98 percent of Iraqi citizens were good people, no different than you and me. The other 2 percent were some of the most violent, vile, and harsh individuals this world has. They did not discriminate when it came to harming people. They would harm women, children, old people, and young people. It did not matter to them. The choice that many Iraqi citizens were left with was to either live under the al-Qaeda terrorist rules, or to put up with us trying to eliminate the threats in their community.”

Over his 15-month deployment, Derek would begin to realize that while Iraqi citizens in Mosul were willing to share information with U.S. forces, al-Qaeda was using fear-based tactics in other cities around Iraq that would make this building of relationships between Iraqi citizens and U.S. military personnel much harder. This difficulty became prevalent when just five months after arriving in Mosul, Derek and his company were told that they would be moving to Baghdad.

One of the first things that Derek realized once he got to Baghdad was the sheer size of the city and the population living within it. It was evident that the repetition and familiarity that Derek and his company had experienced in Mosul would not be present in Baghdad. “At the time, Baghdad had a population of around 10 million people, and it was an enormously sprawling city. In Mosul, we had a specific ‘Area of Operation’ but in Baghdad, we did not because of how large it was.” This made it very hard to conduct daily operations because they never felt comfortable or familiar with any of the communities they were patrolling each day. “We would go neighborhood to neighborhood, house to house, looking for guns or equipment that people shouldn’t have, or evidence that they were part of al-Qaeda.”

The combination of increased al-Qaeda presence throughout Baghdad and constant change in patrol locations made it extremely hard to establish relationships with the local citizens. “The struggle was trying to get the Iraqi locals to trust us enough to give us intel. We never had time to establish relationships with them like we did in Mosul. We were in and out of neighborhoods every day, so the locals never really got to know us. Al-Qaeda was also watching us while we were doing patrols. They didn’t have their weapons, so we didn’t know who they were. They would watch and if they saw someone talking to us for an extended period, they would assume that they were giving us important information and that family or person might very well end up being killed by them.”

In addition to the increased difficulty of establishing relationships with the Iraqi locals in Baghdad, Derek and his company were often caught in the middle of gunfights and explosions planted by al-Qaeda members. “Our enemy in Baghdad was unpredictable. Car bombs and suicide bombs were a common tactic while I was there, and I often found myself near both. There were multiple groups of people fighting each other all the time in Baghdad, and we got caught in the middle of that a few times too.” To Derek, Baghdad proved to be much more violent, dangerous, and difficult than he had experienced just months earlier in Mosul. But in March 2007, he realized that even Baghdad was not the worst he was going to experience.

Due to the American troop surge into Baghdad, al-Qaeda forces were expected to start evacuating to Baqubah, the city that they had proclaimed as their new capital. Derek and his company were redeployed there.

Describing their arrival Derek said, “Baqubah was unlike anything else that we had experienced. Al-Qaeda had experienced fighters, defensive positions set up, the entire city mined with bombs, fortified machine-gun nests around the city, and training and torture camps.” On March 14, one day after Derek had arrived in Baqubah, he was injured when the patrol vehicle he was riding in hit a large bomb that detonated under the vehicle. He ended up fracturing a vertebra in his low back. When asked about his return to combat, Derek said, “It was 100 percent because of the guys that I was with. Over the three days I was in the hospital, I saw five of my buddies come in with wounds from combat and it was absolutely a motivator to return. I probably returned too early, but I believed it was a necessary thing to do. I knew exactly where my buddies were, what they were doing, and I knew that they were getting hurt while they were doing it. I had an important job within the group and if my buddies were out in combat, I wanted to be out in combat too. I had absolutely no hesitation.”

After a remarkable three-day recovery, Derek was back on the battlefield in Baqubah.

Derek would go on to serve for 5 more months there. In June 2007, he was a part of Operation Arrowhead Ripper. Derek described this by saying, “our goal was to walk into al-Qaeda’s last remaining stronghold and pull them out of hiding and into the open. This led to two more months of very intense and close-quartered fighting.” After a total of 15 months, Derek and his company were able to return home but it did not necessarily mean that he was able to leave Iraq behind. He explained that it took him multiple years to transition back into civilian life. Derek shared a story about a concert that he went to with three of his buddies in Seattle just a few days after they arrived in the United States. “We walked from our hotel to the concert venue, probably a total of six blocks, and we didn’t say a single word to each other because every single one of us was scanning every window on each building, looking at the cars around us, and watching for any suspicious people. We had just been in Iraq five days prior and it was such a foreign feeling to be able to walk in the middle of a city and not be shot at.”



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NO VETERAN LEFT BEHIND

James Olson

By Tim Engstrom

The American Legion has done a lot for the rehabilitation of veterans like James Olson of Mankato Post 11, and he wants to do the same for other veterans. Olson was wounded in combat, but you never hear him bring it up. The Legion played a major role in helping Olson transition to civilian life, by being with veterans who could relate to what he went through. “Whether they know it or not, it has helped me out a lot over the years,” he said.

The kid from Amboy, MN graduated from Blue Earth High School in spring 2003. On July 21, 2003, he left Minnesota for San Diego’s Marine Corps Recruit Depot. It was the first time he had ever flown on an airplane. “I never have cared for flying,” he said.

He did basic training, then a month at Camp Pendleton, another month at San Diego, then it was to infantry school at Camp Pendleton, where he and a handful of others were stuck over the holidays and had to perform the duty of camp guards. After infantry school, he was assigned to India Company, 3rd Battalion, 1st Marine Regiment at Camp Horno, part of Camp Pendleton. Olson was a machine gunner.

It was February 2004. Everyone in the battalion thought they were headed to WESTPAC — Western Pacific. However, by March they learned they were going to Iraq. They were set to deploy in mid-June 2004, and until then, they trained nonstop.

They flew to March Air Reserve Base in California. However, the “bird” he was on was too heavy, and they went home.

“Man, did we get drunk that night. There wasn’t a drop of beer left at the PX,” he said. Because they all had prepared the barracks for deployment, all blankets or pillows were at supply. And their fart sacks were with their rucks still loaded on the plane. “We had to leave all of our junk on there so they could figure out weight distribution,” he said. They slept on bare mattresses.

The next day, hungover, the Marines of India Company went back to the air base, got back on the bird, took off on a commercial flight that brought them to Bangor, ME, where they slept overnight in a terminal. The airplane, he said, had a rare problem of some sort, so the Marines had to wait for a repairman to fly to Bangor to fix it. They then flew on to England,

down to Budapest, and finally to Kuwait.

It was the middle of the night and the middle of nowhere when they landed combat style — by dropping quickly out of the sky. Sergeants told them the strip faced the danger of mortar fire. Be prepared! Whether true or not, saying that gets the desired results. The Marines unloaded rapidly, then waited in a nearby hangar for trucks to arrive to take them to Iraq.

The convoy went on “forever,” Olson said, before reaching Karma, a city in central Iraq sometimes also spelled Al-Karmah, Karmah or even Garma. Ten miles northeast of Fallujah, Karma is a spread-out city of canals and no walls, with a population of 95,000.

Olson’s battalion was taking over for the 1st Battalion 5th Marine Regiment. “They were ready to go home,” Olson said.

A chemical plant was going to be their firm base — in this case, a company-sized camp — and within one hour of arriving, they received mortar fire. All the combat-experienced enlisted tried to get the new guys under cover. “It hadn’t dawned on us that it was a real-life thing,” he said. After a day and a half at the plant, they moved out because chemicals remained on the site, and they went to a five-story schoolhouse. It was summer; school was out. That would be their firm base.

The larger context in Iraq at the time was that a power vacuum existed after the capture of Saddam Hussein in December 2003 and the ouster of a strong central government. Insurgents grew to oppose the international occupation. In June 2004, the new government of Iraq took over. It aimed to keep the peace between Sunni and Shiite sects. Many of the insurgents, at the time, were Sunnis dissatisfied or impatient with the international forces, or they were Shiites drawn into religious radicalism. Examples of each are the Mujahideen Army and Mahdi Army. Joining their numbers were Islamic fighters from other countries.

This was a time between the two Fallujah battles. The catalyst for the First Battle of Fallujah, fought in April and May 2004, was the killing of four U.S. contractors and five U.S. soldiers and came after the declared end of major hostilities. The Second Battle of Fallujah, in November and December, was the first major campaign against just insurgents—and it turned out to be the bloodiest battle of the war.

Things were extremely unstable in central Iraq in the summer of 2004.

Machine gun posts were placed on the school roof. The Marines performed four-day rotations, as in four days on guard duty, four days on patrol, four days with quick reaction force (QRF) and four days of rest—but they never received the four days of rest because intel reports would result in them being taken away.

The Marines were seeing enemy fire from time to time. The enemy regularly fired mortars at India Company's schoolhouse and at Kilo Company, holed up at a cement factory. On patrol duty, after the city's curfew, Marines would check cars looking for IEDs. One night on patrol, insurgents fired rocket-propelled grenades at them from a mosque but missed.

One bright day, a convoy went tearing out of the firm base, kicking up dust, headed to another firm base. When they arrived, they were one Humvee short. The convoy could not figure out what happened.

Olson and other Marines on patrol had to walk out and around to search for clues. One of them happened to peer over a bridge and spotted the truck in a canal. There had been so much dust the driver couldn't see, hit the bridge and flipped into the water. All five—a driver, a gunner and three passengers—died.

“And from the school rooftop, no one could see them, even though it was just the length of a football field away. Too much dust,” he said.

The waterlogged Humvee was dragged out and away. Some equipment was recovered, and Olson cleaned the MK-19 grenade launcher that had been on the gunner turret.

On the morning of July 20, 2004, some of the Marines on rooftop duty were eager for daylight so they could have a cigarette. The sun finally rose, and Olson and Ken Fisher of Nebraska went to the smoke deck. They chatted about deer hunting, comparing Nebraska to Minnesota.

“Out of nowhere there was a big explosion, and the building shook a little bit,” Olson said. Missiles hit the roof, a direct strike on sandbags of a guard point. The sandbags landed on Justin DeMarandille and hurt his arm. He was OK otherwise.

Olson and Fisher put on flak jackets, got DeMarandille off the roof and in the back of a

truck. They drove him to the regiment aid station at Camp Fallujah.

This took about 20 minutes, and they raced back to the Karma firm base. Marines had found other missiles that had failed to detonate.

And they found where the rocket came from.

A car with a very homemade missile launcher hooked to a luggage rack was found abandoned in a nearby market parked just off the road. Olson, a 20-year-old private first class, was sent to a T-intersection in the middle of the market, to stand there alone about 40 feet from the car. The Marines had checkpoints outside the market, cordoning off the place. Meanwhile, they waited for EOD — explosive ordnance disposal.

“It was hot,” Olson said. “The sun was out, and there wasn’t a cloud in the sky.”

The 3rd Battalion commander and the sergeant major looked inside the car. Hours go by. Finally, Cpl. Matthew Piano pulled up.

“Why I am here?” Olson asked.

Piano said the car was full of mortars.

EOD rolled up. While they donned their gear, their staff sergeant walked over to the car to look inside, and the car exploded, killing him.

Those mortar rounds, none of them exploded. They just scattered. What caused the explosion was 155 mm artillery projectiles daisy-chained together inside the car.

“It went from being sunny to being darkly cloudy out,” Olson said. “I hate to put it like this, but it was kind of like in the movies. I woke up, on the ground. Everything was quiet. I tried yelling at the corpsman who was by the platoon commander. I stood up to walk and figured out something was not right. I could feel all the blood running down my sides.” Metal shrapnel had struck the entire back of his body.

Olson took a few steps, and Doc Allen MacAfee, who was from Arizona, saw him. Marines often give corpsmen the nickname “doc,” even though they aren’t doctors. MacAfee himself had been thrown up against the Humvee and hit his head hard. He was out for a few seconds.

MacAfee and Doc Jesse Calugcugan of California lifted Olson by each arm and moved him across the street. Olson is big—6 feet 4 inches. MacAfee is about 5 feet 10 inches tall and Calugcugan is 5 feet 6 inches, so it was like a “Mutt and Jeff” moment.

They laid him on the ground and applied first aid. They ripped up his pants and shirt, opened his flak jacket.

Olson had one question for Doc Cal: “Did my tattoo get messed up?”

“No,” he replied.

Olson sustained a concussion, so things get fuzzy at this point in the retelling of the tale. He doesn’t know how long he was on the ground. They put him in the back of a truck to go to Camp Fallujah. The medical team cleaned up wounds, went in to inspect the shrapnel.

Fisher, his friend from Nebraska, suffered shrapnel in his forearm.

Then Olson was on a helicopter to Baghdad. However, the chopper had to land at an aid station on the way because his blood pressure dropped. It was dark when he arrived at the distinguished 31st Combat Support Hospital in Baghdad. The 31st CSH is an Army unit based out of Fort Bliss, Texas.

Fisher was there, too, but his wounds weren’t serious enough to go home. He eventually was sent back to India Company.

Olson, as best as he can recall, said he was taken to an exam room, then doctors stuck him in a hospital room for a spell. He then was on an airplane, where he kept waking up.

“It felt like my stomach was going to explode,” he said.

A nurse came to give him morphine. He looked out the window of the aircraft, and it was raining, then he fell asleep. He woke up in an ambulance in Germany.

“It looked like northern Minnesota to me anyway. I didn’t know if I was dreaming,” he said. He touched the window. It was cold.

He was at the Army's Lundstuhl Regional Medical Center, the largest American military hospital outside the continental United States. Olson doesn't recall it, but doctors performed surgery on him. He does remember that one day a guy came up to him and asked: "What size underwear do you have?"

The man went on to ask about other clothes sizes. He came back with a suitcase of clothes, purchased by the Semper Fi Fund.

Olson doesn't know how long he was there. Maybe 1 1/2 days, he estimates.

Finally, the military flew Olson to Bethesda, Maryland overnight, where the pilots rested, then flew again to Northern California, then to Marine Corps Air Station Miramar, north of San Diego, where the pilot and copilot themselves carried him on a stretcher off the aircraft.

"That was the only time two officers had called me 'sir,'" Olson said.

They were pilots with the Alabama Air National Guard. They took him to an ambulance destined for Naval Hospital Camp Pendleton (NHCP), where he underwent another surgery. He was placed in isolation because he was positive for a form of antibiotic-resistant Iraqi bacteria. The medical staff had to wear extra personal protective equipment. Finally, after a time span Olson can't recall, it was safe for his parents to see him.

Everyone was in shorts during the first visit, but Olson was shivering. This was still July 2004.

"I was trying to stay warm with extra blankets, sweatshirts, sweatpants," he said.

The shrapnel. What happened? He later learned a big chunk was taken out of his left ankle and his right leg. A big chunk on the right side of his abdomen went just beneath the bottom of his flak jacket and left him with a 6-inch scar.

"It's like a big slice through my right side. There's still a chunk in there they don't want to take out," he said.

Since then, he has found shrapnel in the back of his head and in his right knee. The Minneapolis VA has X-rays of shrapnel still in his right side.

While at NHCP, a corpsman said something was waiting for Olson on the quarterdeck. Olson's father went to get it and returned with a black trash bag. Inside was Olson's flak jacket, and the back was covered in shrapnel. It had saved his life. He still has it.

One day, the staff had taken Olson off painkillers, so he requested something to ease the pain. A corpsman came in with two Percocets. Soon, another corpsman came with two more. Later, another came with two more. Then yet another corpsman gave him a shot of morphine.

That's when someone Olson recalls as "Brig. Gen. Williams," the acting Pendleton base commander, arrived to award him his Purple Heart.

"Man, I was loopier than hell when that general came in," Olson said. "If you look at my pictures of when I got my Purple Heart, one of my eyes is looking straight ahead and the other is looking off to the side."

The Navy was not ready for the numbers of injured service members arriving from Iraq. The Marines put Olson on 30 days of convalescent leave, and he returned to Amboy.

The Minneapolis VA Medical Center performed a skin graft, and Olson had to be away from the Marines for three months, pretty much journeying from Amboy to Minneapolis daily for appointments. Because he was an outpatient, his parents couldn't stay at the hospital's guest house.

"That got old. I had a hell of a time sleeping. The only time I could sleep was in the car while Mom or Dad drove," he said.

In the beginning of November 2005, he returned to Camp Pendleton. He was put on the Temporary Disability Retired List, then on terminal leave March 2006, receiving his discharge papers in April as permanently disabled retired. His time in service was two years, nine months and 10 days.

Olson joined The American Legion in 2006. He lived in Mankato, and one night he told a buddy he was thinking of joining Post 11. His grandfather had belonged to Post 96 in Hutchinson.

"It took me a while to join because I couldn't find the place," he said.

He found VFW Post 950 in downtown Mankato, so he joined and got to know George Young and Lenny Fritz, among others. One night, when the bar closed, he asked where they went. “Oh, we go to the Legion,” they replied.

It was there all along. He just couldn’t see it. He signed up with Post 11 that night. Young and Fritz each paid half of Olson’s first-year dues.

One evening, a bunch of guys suddenly went to the back room. They invited Olson to join them, and he went to his first post meeting. He eventually became the 2nd vice commander, then the 1st vice commander, then post commander for 10 years. In 2021, he was 2nd District vice commander and is district 1st vice commander this year, on track to become district commander.

Olson, 38, makes his living as a real estate agent. He has no wife, kids, or pets. He reads a lot, he said.

In addition to his shrapnel wounds, the VA diagnosed him as having “unspecified anxiety.”

He serves on the Americanism Council at the national level. He is on the Legionnaire Insurance Trust Committee at the department level. For his district, he is the chairman of the Children & Youth Committee.

“Being in the Legion is great,” he said. “I wish there were more people excited about it. Some people get jaded by one bad experience, or they encounter the wrong person, but I think they should just give it another shot.”

He said he wants young veterans to learn that, through The American Legion, they can get to know the state, regional and national veterans community. There are many opportunities waiting.

“I was in my first Minnesota Legion College. It was super worth it. The camaraderie was there. I urge people to get involved. I wish I had been involved sooner,” Olson said.

Scott Glew

By Jack Baumbach

Lakeville Resident Scott Glew has never been an individual who needs the spotlight to relentlessly serve the needs of those around him. Whether it was leading the finance detachment for the 82nd Airborne Division during his deployment in Iraq, becoming a Social Studies educator to improve his students understanding of the consequences of war, or pursuing a PhD in Social Studies education, it is evident that Scott is less concerned about uplifting himself, but instead uplifting those around him. This selflessness can be seen through Scott's response to the terrorist attacks on September 11th, 2001. Scott had just begun his senior year of high school in Aitkin, Minnesota. He recalls, "the same patriotic fervor that took over the country also took over me, and I enlisted in the Minnesota Army National Guard." Scott was willing to answer his Nations call and lay down his life for his county; even before he had officially graduated high school. After his high school graduation, Scott worked diligently to earn a bachelor's degree in social studies education while simultaneously serving in the MN National Guard. After earning his bachelor's degree in 2007, Scott was swiftly deployed with the 82nd Airborne Division to the Balad Airbase in Iraq, just 40 miles north of Baghdad.

As the Sergeant for the finance attachment of the 82nd Airborne Division, Scott's military experience proved to be much different than what is commonly assumed by the American public. Scott said, "I think a lot of people immediately think that everyone is always running around with guns just shooting and getting shot at. When I look back on my personal experience, I don't have any crazy war stories to tell." While Scott explained that there were individuals who courageously put themselves in immediate danger of combat each day, Scott was never in that position. Instead, Scott was responsible for leading a finance team that would handle the financial issues that his fellow service members were experiencing either in Iraq, or back home. Scott explained, "The people that I worked with the closest were those who had issues with things such as not receiving correct payments, or a family member back home taking advantage of the fact that their significant other was overseas. In some ways, it was really hard because I was dealing with people that were experiencing immense financial struggle and stress, yet at the same time, I could go to bed each night knowing that I helped solve problems for these people each day." Scott's job wasn't exactly glorious, acclaimed, or exciting, but it was critical in ensuring that those on the frontlines could do their job to the best of their ability. Regarding the fact that his job was often repetitive and not highly acclaimed Scott recalls, "I just knew there were other

people on the base that were dependent on me. They needed me to show up each day and do my best so that they could do their best. We just had to be strong for each other regardless of our jobs.” Although Scott did not experience an abundance of combat stress, he described various things that were still extremely emotionally draining throughout his 8 month deployment; such as being a 23-year-old newlywed.

When Scott was deployed in 2007, he had just recently gotten married a few years prior; making him constantly concerned for his wife back home. He said, “I think that missing family was the hardest for all the guys on the base. A lot of guys would involve themselves in extra missions throughout the deployment that were much more intense and dangerous to distract themselves from thinking about home. On one hand, this really appealed to me because it would give me the opportunity to get out on the battlefield and get busy each day. On the other hand, I struggled with voluntarily putting myself in a dangerous situation that might cause me to never return home to my family all for the reason of ‘simply being bored.’”

In addition to worrying about his family, Scott was also constantly worried about the Army Guardsmen that he was leading in his finance attachment. Scott's finance team was responsible for bringing the necessary resources to smaller bases throughout Iraq. This task often required them to travel in military convoys that would be targets for roadside bombs. Scott explained, “When my guys would go out with various convoys to smaller bases around Iraq, they would fall under the command of whatever convoy they were attached to. It was sort of a helpless feeling for me because they were miles away and I was rarely able to communicate with them. Every time they took off, I remember eagerly waiting for them to return safely. I remember being constantly worried and concerned for their safety.”

Although not involved in direct combat, Scott gained first-hand experience of the consequences of war throughout his 8 years of service in the Guard. This experience and understanding of the true consequences of war caused Scott to experience some internal turmoil. Scott recalls, "On a personal level, I didn't believe in the reasoning behind why we [The United States] was in Iraq. I thought that it was wrong for us to be there, but the policy decisions were something that I had no role in. Ultimately, all I could do was to perform my job to the best of my ability to take care of those around me.” Scott did not let his circumstances determine the way in which he approached his work while in Iraq, but he has let that experience inform the way he teaches history now. When teaching military history in his classes, Scott focuses on what he calls the “Humanity of War”. He explains, “Serving in Iraq helped me understand the stakes of citizenship. For example, in the United States, I

was concerned with the fact that people were not really paying attention to the reality that we were at war. I took that extremely seriously and I have implemented that concern into my approach to my teaching methods today. When I talk about the history of various wars in the classroom, I put a lot of emphasis on the different consequences that different groups of people experience.” Instead of simply talking about wars and warfare in his class, Scott now explains the consequences of wars can have different effects on groups of people such as the government, the soldiers, the families of soldiers, and the citizens involved.

In 2015, Scott began to garner the attention of the Minnesota Humanities Center and he received the Veteran Voices Award, recognizing him, as a former veteran, for his commitment to the field of social studies education. Scott said, “This was really meaningful to me because it put me in a position where I was thinking more deliberately about how I was using my previous role of serving in the military to continually improve education.” Scott would humbly include that while he was getting recognized for his service in the military, he always acknowledged that he didn’t sacrifice nearly as much as many men and women who he served alongside. Scott explains, “The more recognition that I get for my service in the military, the worse I feel about the fact that I know other people sacrificed so much more than I did. On one hand, I want to leverage my military experience in a way to try to get more people to pay attention and understand current military affairs. On the other hand, I get hesitant about the recognition that comes with my service because I don’t want it to be centered around me. I don’t want to get credit for something that I didn’t do. I struggle with the fact that I often get lumped into the same group as people who received Purple Hearts for their service.”

Scott’s humble attitude would continue to serve him well just two years later when he received the 2017 Bush Foundation Grant that allowed him to pursue a PhD in Social Studies Education. Instead of using this PhD to pursue a career in educational administration, Scott is committed to continue his career as a middle school Social Studies teacher in hopes of “promoting the importance of having highly educated teachers in K-12 classrooms across the state of Minnesota.” Scott would go on to become a finalist for the 2018 Minnesota Teacher of the Year Award, which is considered the most prestigious teaching award in the state of Minnesota. Amid all this recognition, Scott explains, “When I am given an award, I am also given a public platform. With this platform, I am constantly making sure that I am using it not to enrich myself, but to positively impact and enrich the experiences of my students and surrounding community.”

It is evident that throughout Scott's military and educational career, he is constantly striving for ways to improve the lives of those around him. Whether it was signing up for the MN Army National Guard before graduating from high school, leading the finance attachment for the 82nd Airborne Division in Iraq, using his military experiences to shape the way that he teaches war in his classroom today, or embarking on the journey of earning a PhD in Social Studies Education, Scott Glew is an exemplary example of what it looks like to answer his Nations call; both on and off the battlefield.

Anthony Hunter

By Brian Leehan

The 34th Infantry Division Band was formally organized on the last day of April 1990, bringing ceremonial and popular music to the US Army and the public through two world wars and multiple other military operations, including the Global War on Terrorism. The band accompanied other elements of the division on the 2009 Iraq deployment. First Sergeant Anthony Hunter was a sergeant first class for this deployment, armed with a trumpet and love for playing and entertaining. "Our mission was to support the troops and the diplomatic efforts in the country by providing musical support. We did a wide variety of missions, mostly for soldiers that were activated and for the civilian population. We performed at hospitals and orphanages," he said.

They made a special effort to be inclusive of the Iraqi civilians. "We learned their national anthem and performed it for them," he said, "even though many didn't know it and had never heard it." Of the multiple groups that perform within the band, while stateside, the deployed band focused on five varieties of music. They had a saxophone quintet called M-Saxteen, a rock punk band known as Hesco Jerks, and a brass quintet dubbed North Star. For lovers of country music, there was Dusty Lanyard and the Red Bull Riders. And the more staid ceremonial 15 member ensemble was called Echoes of Liberty.

Hunter confided with chuckles, "The rest of the band referred to this group as yesterday's Meatloaf. Riffing on the actual name Echoes of Liberty, the more consistent joke name was Echoes of Labor. Don't get me wrong, these were excellent musicians," he was quick to point out. The thing they had working against them while in-country was the size of the group, both the number of personnel and the instruments and the need, or in any case, the requests for their specific kind of music.

Hunter explained, "Every time we were called to do extra duty on a FOB, they got stuck with a job. They didn't have the outlets for playing that some of the other groups did, so they got stuck with it, plus, they were really big. Keep in mind, the way we traveled, we were perpetual hitchhikers the entire time we were in-country. We operated on a spoke and hub kind of operational concept, for the smaller groups would catch a helicopter to one of the outer FOBs."

"Say we were in Basra, we'd get a helicopter ride to Talil and then we'd talk to the various

supply companies or security detachment companies, and we'd get them to let us go along to all of the satellite FOBs in the area. We're smaller groups, and their instruments could all fit in on two helicopters because the helicopters always had to fly in pairs. It was not unusual for the various groups to experience being stuck for days in a FOB while waiting to secure transport out." One time Hunter's group spent a week at Camp Adder gearing up daily and lugging their instruments to the flight line, the requisite hour ahead of time, only to be bumped for more pressing cargo or personnel. It was a constant struggle to get together for rehearsal when their sound geared instruments were locked up in some secure area to which they had no access.

Still, Hunter had no complaints. "I get paid to do my hobby," he said with a smile. Every element of a team does its part. And the division band was no exception, comprised of a highly trained and talented cadre of soldiers, the 34th ID Band did not only serve to enhance the morale of coalition troops and to serve as a diplomatic capacity for the coalition's mission. They added to the permanent face of COB Basra. "We worked together as a team and we served honorably," said Hunter, "there wasn't a band hall when we moved to Basra. They had a stage built, but the intention was to build a band hall. We thought it was going to be there before we got there, but it wasn't, so the people in the band got together and cleared the field where the hall was going to be built, and one of our guys helped with the engineering of the band hall, laid out all of their rehearsal rooms and all of the band members assisted with the construction of the band hall. That band hall lived as long as the Army Camp in Basra did."

Operation Inherent Resolve



Introduction

By Randal Dietrich

In March 2016, General Joseph Votel became commander of U.S. Central Command, better known as CENTCOM. That's the command that oversees the American military in the Middle East, leading the War on Terrorism. It is the same command that first entered the American media spotlight in 1990-91 with Gen. Norman Schwarzkopf Jr. and the Persian Gulf War. Votel's command notably led implementation of Operation Inherent Resolve, the successful fight of a global coalition against the Islamic State in Iraq, often abbreviated as ISIS, and the coalition's involvement in the Syrian and Iraq civil wars.

He retired five days after the decisive Battle of Baghuz Fawqani, which marked the collapse of ISIS in Syria and the end to their controlled territories.



Charlie Dietz

Charlie's dad was a 20-year Air Force veteran and retired as a Chaplain's assistant. As a result, Charlie lived in Texas, Nebraska, Hawaii and Okinawa, Japan before returning to Minnesota, where his parents were from, to attend a prep school in Collegeville and then college at St. Cloud State.

He watched the events of 9/11 unfold in his 10th grade biology class.

I remember the teacher wheeled in the old VCR and we watched what was going on there and it's so unique, something that was unfathomable to, was impossible to understand. And I never thought that I would ever be in the military, never thought that I would play any kind of role in the effects of that attack. Of course, with my father in the Air Force, people would always assume I would go into the Air Force. I would say that I had no real interest in the military. But as it played out, I was obviously wrong. I think we Millennials have kind of grown up with. We're used to the global war on terrorism. That's what we train for, that's what we think about, and it kind of consumes you. And really the thought of not having that happening is just something that I don't think many of us would be able to comprehend until seeing that it's possible.

I was attending some high school classes at St. John's University and someone had mentioned that they were doing ROTC application processing that day and suggested that I should just go down there and check it out. I did. It was just kind of like a casual conversation. I had no idea what I was getting myself into. And then one day at school I got a call and they said, 'Hey, we have a four-year scholarship we can offer you at St. Cloud State if you do ROTC. You just have to let us know basically now because we have to get the stuff rolling.'

And I said yes, but honestly I had no clue. It turned out to be probably the smartest decision I've ever made. Paid for all my school, gave me a job right away and it's something now that I just can't imagine not doing.

The Army offered him a chance to attend graduate school at Georgetown University in Washington D.C. After 18 months there, he was off to Fort Knox, Kentucky, and then to the Command General Staff College at Fort Leavenworth for a year.

I was in Iraq from August 2019 to May 2020. When we first got there, we were switching out with the first Brigade of the 101st Airborne Division. Through our replacement process with them, they were telling us we had nothing to worry about. 'You guys probably brought too many people, you're just going to be manning these areas,' and things like that. But then in October the protests against the Iraqi government by the Iraqi people literally came right to our door in Baghdad next to the International Zone, the Green Zone. That brought a lot of political tension and we had to stay back as much as we could because we're like: 'We are here to fight ISIS and that's all we're going to do. We don't want to get involved in your politics.' We refused to assist in any way. They would even ask us for supplies that would go to their forces, which would kind of try to control the protests. And we would just be like: 'No, we don't have any of that. We're not going to give you any of that,' which is definitely the right thing to do because their use of force is much different than what you would see in the United States. They had the ability to really attack if they felt they needed to. Where it really got messy is that Iran had their militia groups called the Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF) who fell into the Iraqi army.

As a U.S. Army Public Affairs Officer in the middle of this dangerous, politically charged environment, it was important to have a clear sense of oneself and the mission.

My belief, and I think really the belief of U.S. Public Affairs, is: 'Strength through truth' and that you want to give the truth to them quickly. My goal was not to waste people's time. So if we thought something interesting was going to happen, we would want people to come along. There would be times where we would invite people to come and see. 'Hey, this is about to happen. Stay with us for a while, because this is going to go down and we'll have you witness it so you can see the process.'

We tried as hard as we could to open ourselves up and have that transparency. I was lucky that my commander there had been the media chief for the Marine Corps at the Pentagon.

In the very early morning hours of January 3, 2020, Charlie started getting calls from reporters saying, 'Hey, what's the deal with the rocket strike in Baghdad?' While reporter inquiries about rocket strikes were routine, the late hour was not. It turned out that American drones had killed Qasem Soleimani, a powerful and controversial military figure from Iran, who had



Charlie Dietz

Gen. Seely



just landed in Iraq on a mission supposedly to improve relations between the two countries.

I go in the next day and I have all these messages: 'You guys killed Soleimani. Soleimani is dead. Did the U.S. really do this?' And I walk into our headquarters building, our Iraqi Coalition Operation Cell, which is literally a large room with a bunch of TVs monitoring everything. Half of the room is Coalition staff and the other half is Iraqi. And it's just quiet and you can just tell something was not right. We started having briefings on what's going on, but we really had no idea anything like this had been planned.

I truly believe that General Seely, a Marine general and the commander of Task Force Iraq, didn't know either. We had many candid conversations and I think he really felt the effects from the assassination because part of his job was to serve as advisor to the Iraqi Army Commander. They met daily as a small group, one-on-one. Iraqi General Abdul Amir said to him, 'Now's not the time for us to be friends.' And everything just felt strange.

I think everybody was so caught off guard and the NATO forces started leaving

right away. You could see people everywhere just packing up stuff and getting ready to go. And we're just like: 'What is going on?' Everything has changed so fast. This was also a few days after Hezbollah led a very large group of protestors. They were somehow allowed into the international zone and that in itself was quite the event because we're in a building having a meeting and the alarms start going off at 10:00 AM, which is odd because they always would rocket us at night. We just thought maybe it was some kind of error. And then someone came into the room, they said, 'Oh, there are protestors at the gate of the international zone.' I'm like, that's weird. And then we carried on with our meeting.

At the end, I went downstairs and the quickest way to find what's going on was to go to Twitter. I went to Twitter and there was a local reporter showing, at the gate, people just walking by. They were not being stopped at all. And then our unit found out what was going on. So we had to put people all over security. And we had honestly no idea. All we knew is all these people were here waving these Hezbollah flags and they were setting up these tents.

They set up these tents. It's so interesting. They would be 40 feet long and what they would do is they would drive trucks in and then you'd have no idea what's going on in those tents. And then they'd say, 'Oh, we're going to be here for a while.' And then they started attacking the embassy. Our guys got up on the guard towers and a lot of the protestors were throwing rocks at people. They were trying to set fuel points on fire, especially at the embassy. They were really close to achieving that. And I don't know how that didn't happen. There were small fires all over the place and what we believe is they wanted us to shoot somebody so that way they could broadcast that. What's really crazy is even the members, some of the members of the Iraqi army, were with them in uniform attacking the embassy itself.

We are in this small group in Union III of Baghdad, and there's maybe a thousand people on the base. And we're just thinking, 'All right, what's going to happen next?'

Our engineering unit was our security forces and they were guarding the base and kept minimal overwatch on the embassy and could see what was going

on. In my same office was the Provost Marshall, so she's listening to everything that's going on, telling them where to go. And she's constantly telling them, 'Please don't shoot anybody if you don't have to. Just stand strong.' And we hear them on the radio freaking out, 'Hey, they're coming at us, they're throwing stuff at us.' They would use those really bright laser pointers and try to get in people's eyes. They just didn't really know what was going on. Luckily, our security forces held strong and the protestors didn't really attack anyone.

They eventually packed up all their stuff later that night and left. And coincidentally, it was Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis [leader of the PMF] who was killed in the attack with Soleimani on January 3rd. So when people say that Soleimani was there to talk about a peace agreement, I personally don't believe that at all. I don't think anybody that read in on the situation really believed that because we knew that Muhandis hated us and we knew that Soleimani obviously hated us. So Soleimani being there, they were planning something more. Because this was really when we were really getting attacked a lot, and especially when they infiltrated into the Green Zone, that was our warning.

So when Soleimani was killed, it was a somber time. Everyone was really processing it and I think that the Iraqi army was having a hard time with it too. The Iraqi Army people that I knew didn't like Soleimani. They didn't like Kata'ib Hezbollah [a radical insurgent group] or the Popular Mobilization Forces because those groups looked at the Iraqi Army as traitors because they were working with us, with the Coalition. They didn't feel safe going out because they would be threatened. We could never have pictures with them or anything because then either the Iranians or the PMF would take that, figure out who they were, and then threaten them.

They didn't seem too worried about Soleimani being killed, but they were, I think, very surprised that Mahdi al-Muhandis was also killed because he was technically part of the Iraqi Army and it took place in Baghdad. They knew that that was going to cause a rift between at least the Iraqi Army and the Coalition forces.

Linsey Williams

Linsey Williams (Coon Rapids, MN) was born in 1990 and reported to be confused and sad as she walked home from the bus stop on September 11, 2001. Her siblings were already in the service and she followed suit with her first deployment ten years later.

My first deployment (Sept 2011 – May 2012) was with the first armored brigade combat team of the 34th Infantry Division. We were located in Arifjan, Kuwait.

I was just private first class. I didn't know a lot, and yet it was my job to tell our story. I went places with a camera, I conducted interviews, I put together video packages, all to share that with the folks at home and tell them what their troops were doing. I got to meet people and was forced to start understanding what's going on.

On first tour, I embedded with a unit in Oklahoma. This was the time where we were drawing down everything out of Iraq and so I was there that day we closed the gate in December 2011.

A second deployment was August 2018 to July 2019.

We went over there and we stayed at the airbase over there, Al Udeid, I believe it was. And so it was refreshing being on an airbase, because they're just a little nicer and it was a little more established. But it was interesting being out in the desert with the Qataris and just seeing how they operate a little bit.

Qatar was only about four days. And then Oman, that was about two weeks, a whole exercise. It was just a company from one of our subordinate battalions. They were there to conduct infantry tactics, techniques, procedures, just side-by-side with the Omanis. And being out in Oman was amazing because it's a beautiful country. And just seeing the way the teams worked together. The whole operation was really exciting. And for me, it was great because for that whole culminating event. I had the good fortune of just being able to go and actually run the mission with them. It was a fun place to be with a camera, to gather all of that imagery and just feel like I'm not here for nothing. I'm part of it too. So as a soldier, I really appreciated that opportunity.

I think my time overseas allowed me to see how we operate in the US, and how as a military, we have methods of doing things, and that's what makes us the greatest fighting force in the world. But it's also interesting to just see the cultural differences and how other militaries do things and just engage with that. And even if you think your techniques and tactics and procedures are superior, it's still worth understanding what other people are doing, whether they're a peer or adversary. So as I reflect on it, there's a lot to think about and to propel the things I'm going to learn in the future.

My mom's gone through seven deployments between her three children. And at the time, she'd never experienced what it was like to be a military.

Lowell Laudert

Far from home in 2014, Lowell Laudert crossed paths with his brother while deployed in the Global War on Terrorism. His brother was deployed with an Army Reserve unit and Lowell with 34th Infantry Division at Camp Buerhing in Kuwait.

Both are members of the White Earth Nation of the Minnesota Chippewa tribe. During the deployment they were interviewed by the military media and able to get a picture with the White Earth flag. Lowell noted with pride:

We were able to fly the White Earth flag over brigade headquarters. The flag was then gifted back to White Earth.



Operation Freedom's Sentinel



Roger Reinert

Chris Stroner

By Brian Leehan (excerpt from *Roaring Bull*)

One detachments of 20 soldiers from the Minnesota Guard from Company B, second Battalion 211th General Support Aviation Battalion, were in Afghanistan in support of Operation Freedom's Sentinel, with the end of the US Combat Mission in Afghanistan on December 31st, 2014, Operation Enduring Freedom gave Way to Operation Freedom's Sentinel on January 1st, 2015. The focus of OFS was the same as the earlier NATO mission called Resolute Support to train, advise and assist the Afghan security institutions and the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces. This was a continuation of building the capacity and capability of the Afghan forces to enable them to function effectively in the long term against lawless elements and terrorist cells within their country.

Given the history of the 34th ID deployments, it was little surprise that of the 20 Minnesota Guard soldiers in this Afghan deployment, 16 are on at least their second deployment and nine are on their third or more deployments. That attachment provided aerial movement of troops, supplies and equipment, as well as support for combat and combat service operations as needed.

The 34th ID continued to do its part in support of the multinational force and observers that rotated through deployments on the Sinai Peninsula of Egypt. Command Sergeant Major Chris Stroner explained the mission assignments and duties of soldiers, "We were neutral arbitrators. Our mission was to observe, verify, and report any violations of the treaty. If we saw an Egyptian tank in the area we were to report it. It would be investigated and the final findings would be reported to both Egypt and Israel. We're basically guarding the traditional egress and regress points in the wars between Egypt and Israel. "The Sinai is pretty restrictive as far as the terrain goes. Lots of mountains. There's only so many passes you can get through. So pretty much back in 1979, they decided this is the place where we're going to put these Ops (observation posts) as an example, at the only place that Israeli armor can get through if they're going to attack Egypt proper.

Stroner said that the chance to meet people and soldiers from other cultures is one of the appealing aspects of his military life. He finds the Fijian culture very interesting and enjoyed the opportunity to spend time with Fiji's president when he visited on November 11th for Remembrance Day, "We got to hang with him and he got a signed picture to hang in the hallway back at the Battalion headquarters when we get back." He noted. The mission is

straightforward and has historically not been overly dangerous to MFO personnel until 2011. With the fall of the US ally, the Egyptian strongman, President Hosni Mubarak. Mubarak kept the peace with Israel, as well as keeping any internal dissent in check. The conservatively religious Sinai region had been kept in line. Once he fell, many of the fundamentalist Islamic factions who had been detained or jailed by Mubarak Security forces returned to the Sinai. Local Bedouin people held up MFO convoys and did not allow them to pass until relatives imprisoned by the Mubarak government were released.

Egyptian police stations were burned and large sections of the Sinai were cleared of Egyptian security forces by the local residents. Insurgent groups began cross-border raids into Israel. On October 31st, 2015, a Russian Airbus A321 charter jet, took off from the airport and crashed in the Sinai 23 minutes later, killing all 224 passengers and crew on board. A relatively new Islamic state affiliate group called Wilayat Sinai, Arabic for Sinai Province, claimed responsibility for the downing of the plane. The main focus of the armed violence has been against the Egyptian forces, but has increased. Instances of violence, intimidation and harassment have not missed MFO soldiers. In March, 2012, one of the central MFO bases was held under siege by Bedouin tribesmen for nearly a week. No troops were allowed to leave and no supplies were allowed to enter. In May, 2012, 10 soldiers from the Fijian contingent were held hostage for two days. In 2014, 45 Fijian MFO soldiers were held as captives in Syria, by an al-Qaeda splinter group called Nusra Front. The soldiers were eventually released unharmed.

Roger Reinert

By Tim Engstrom

Not all military service members get a big ceremony when they deploy. Some units, for instance, leave immediately, with no time for fanfare. Others might have a covert mission. Navy Reservist Roger Reinert, however, didn't get a display of pomp because he deployed alone.

"An individual augmentee is a team of one," he said. "I know that it's something that exists in the Army and Air Force, but it is the primary way that you deploy as a Navy Reservist. ... There's also no welcome home."

Reinert served as a member of the Minnesota House of Representatives from January 2009 to January 2011, then the Minnesota Senate from January 2011 to January 2017; both times representing Duluth. Before serving in the Legislature, he served on the Duluth City Council, starting in 2004. His hat is in the ring for mayor in the 2023 election.

Reinert grew up in Dawson, a small town in west central Minnesota in Lac qui Parle County. "We used to kid — and I lived west of town — that you could see South Dakota from there, and it wasn't a pretty picture," he said.

Growing up on the prairie of Minnesota leaves kids with a desire to see hills, lakes, mountains. Reinert fell in love with Duluth, Lake Superior, Gordon Lightfoot's "Wreck of the Edmund Fitzgerald" and the view from Thompson Hill. He graduated from Dawson-Boyd High School in 1988 and finally got up to Duluth in 1998.

Coming out of high school, the Navy was on his mind. His great-grandfather served on a vessel in World War I. His grandfather snuck into the Navy at 17 to fight in World War II and was among the original Seabees. He saw combat in Korea and Vietnam, too, then retired to the Gulf Coast. Reinert's uncles were sailors, too.

But Reinert didn't think he could make it and took a different path.

At an airshow in Duluth, he met the "top gun," who was wearing the Navy summer whites with the short sleeves. He explained the Navy Reserves to Reinert.

“And I’m like, dude, I’m 35. He’s like, ‘It’s not too late.’”

The man explained the Navy’s direct commission program for officers who already have a graduate degree. However, to get the commissions is a very competitive process. Reinert said one in a hundred get selected.

Between his family’s history and the 9/11 attacks, he was motivated and received the commission. However, the first two years were not easy. He went through training in Pensacola, and nothing seemed to make sense.

“And then somewhere around Year 2, I drank the Kool-aid and, like, now I’ll stay as long as they’ll keep me. Even after a difficult deployment and a difficult re-entry, I’m still proud to be serving and really proud of wearing the Navy uniform,” Reinert said.

He spent 20 years of his day job teaching undergraduate and graduate political science and public policy classes. During the time in the Legislature, he knew he was going to seek something else, and he pursued a law degree bit by bit over four years with Hamline University.

Many of his fellow sailors had deployed, but Reinert stayed behind because he was a legislator. He left politics and asked the Navy to let him finish law school first. However, he only got half of his request. He graduated and, 10 days later, deployed. He would have to take the bar exam upon his return.

He had been eager to go, however.

“I always felt like a single mom with kids was being deployed before I was, and that never sat well with me, especially as I watched lots of shipmates go and do their turn, and maybe a second turn, and yet I hadn’t gone. So when I knew I wasn’t running again, and my term was coming to an end, I called our detailer at the Pentagon and said you probably don’t know this, but I’m not longer in elected office. I’m in perfect health, everything’s good. I’m fully deployable.”

The detailer said, yep, he’s at the top of the list.

Reinert found out he was being sent to Guantanamo Bay. There was a mixup where he thought he agreed to those orders, but the Pentagon never received the reply. So, in December

2017, he found the Navy Reserves ordered him to Afghanistan for a one-year deployment, beginning June 2018, as a public affairs officer.

He tried to show the detailee that, yes, he did agree to Gitmo. But the detailee invoked the “Needs of the Navy” clause.

He went to the Navy Reserve Center in Minneapolis, then to Fort Jackson, S.C. for a month of training learning combat skills not taught in the Navy.

“I will say the Army did a really great job of giving us the skills I think that were needed to be in a combat environment,” Reinert said.

Then it was off to the Middle East for 10 months. For much of the War in Afghanistan, the Navy and Navy Reserve held down the public affairs side of the mission. It and intel affairs are Navy missions not tied to ships. After 17 years, the Navy was handing the job over, and Reinert was the last of the sailors in the role.

“There was some struggle with that,” Reinert said. “As the Army took that mission over, they weren’t really sure what to do with this Navy Reserve guy. We talked different languages and do things different ways.”

The site was a NATO command in the Kabul area, and there were troops from many NATO countries. Reinert reported to a three-star active-duty Army general, and he interacted with him and other active-duty Army generals daily.

In addition to admiring the mission, Reinert marveled at the all-volunteer military.

“Now, back at home, I get concerned about the hyper-political nature, and we’re tearing ourselves apart. I’m like the one place that’s not happening is in the military. People from really diverse economic backgrounds, ethnic backgrounds, geographic backgrounds, can make this work, figure out how to get the mission done.”

Americans were not the most populous people at the base. About half the personnel at the base were from Turkey. Many from other European countries, and, occasionally, there would be rocket fire and ground fire.

Two times there were explosives magnetized to vehicles in Taliban-led attempts to blow a hole in the perimeter of the base. In one case, it was a dump truck. In another, it was a fuel truck.

As part of his job, he would meet the media. He went unarmed and out of uniform, and in one case, he was with a reporter from the Wall Street Journal and had just re-entered base when a warning sounded that the base was under attack. He was without his weapon and had no means to defend himself.

Later, after returning home, he told this story and laughed and sobbed at the same time.

“All the fear, it just came back out,” Reinert said.

Coming back wasn't easy. Within months of returning, he found himself going through a divorce, which is a common aspect for many servicemembers of returning from a deployment. He gave thanks to the Vet Center in Duluth for readjustment counseling and to the county veteran service officers for helping him understand how the VA works.

“I think about the family members that are lost, the relationships that are broken, the jobs that came and went, the taking, in my case, almost a year to recover from a year deployment. I mean, that's the sacrifice that I think of when someone says thank you for your service.

Operation Allies Refuge



Jacob Helgestad

Rachel Cochran

Jacob Helgestad

By Randal Dietrich

Kabul, Afghanistan

As conditions deteriorated in advance of the American withdrawal from Afghanistan at the end of August 2021, more than 400 members of the Minnesota National Guard were rushed to Kabul's Hamid Karzai International Airport (HKIA). Under the command of LTC Jacob Helgestad, the troops had been stationed in several countries throughout Central Command's area of responsibility.

LTC Helgestad recalled:

On August 12th at 23:18, my Ops Sergeant Major said "Sir, we have to be in Afghanistan in 24 hours. This is not a drill. This is for real." It was, as many people as you can need to go now. My statement to the commanding general was, "Sir, you will never wait on us." We had a responsibility to be able to put people anywhere within 18 hours. We were already postured to go, and this was our mission.

We all 12 MREs [meals ready to eat], bottled water, ammunition. And they kept calling me like, "Sir, do you want this?" I'm like, "Listen, I want grenades. I want everything that an infantry soldier is authorized. I want all of it." Because at that point, we didn't know, we're fighting our way in and we're fighting in Kabul.

Appreciating that 80% of his force had never deployed before and understanding that they might be fighting the Taliban in Kabul, Helgestad elevated his final message prior to departure by standing on a chair:

"Listen, you have to trust yourself. You have to trust each other. We are ready."

1LT Carl Swanson landed at 3:30 am local time in Kabul on August 18 and remembered just looking around and being in awe of the giant valley and the 10,000-foot mountains.

 WELCOME TO KABUL 

ARRIVALS



Rachel Cochran

CPT Rachel Cochran would have welcomed the boredom that accompanied her role as a physician's assistant:

For me, over there it was, fortunately, I think 95% of the time we were very bored, which is what I wanted. And I kept having to tell my medics, "I don't want you to be busy. I want you to have the most boring time here possible because I don't want anyone to get hurt on our team." But there's always this pit in your stomach, a sense of dread of, when is it going to happen, when is the ball going to drop? When are all these threats of rocket attacks or ISIS-K, when are those going to manifest and where?

So for me, it was never really fully resting easy. For me, it was how can we get our people to safety and how can we treat them effectively and get them to where they need to go if, and God forbid, when it would happen.

The daunting task of processing thousands of evacuation requests, amidst the Covid-19 pandemic, fell to the U.S. State Department. Leading this effort on the ground in Kabul was Minnesota native Ross Wilson.

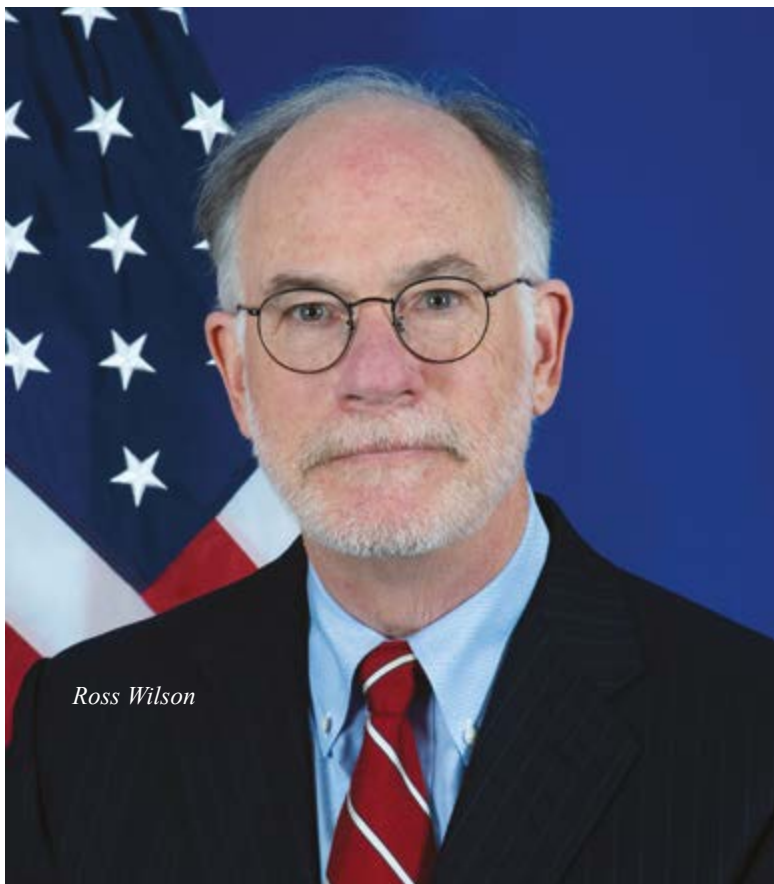
The embassy was one of the largest in the world, both in size and in personnel. When I arrived, we were well over 5,000 people, which is a order of magnitude bigger than anything except maybe Baghdad in the peak years, in the late 2000s. It was a big place, occupying both sides of a principal thoroughfare that ran roughly from central Kabul and the Presidential Palace to the airport.

We looked at our own numbers, at our own embassy footprint, and what could be reasonably sustained. We drew down and went on to what the State Department refers to as ordered departure status, which drastically limits the inflow of people and gives the Chief of Mission the authority to direct the departure, the withdrawal, from the country.

A big pivot point is August 6th. The capital of a remote province on the southwestern border with Iran, Nimroz, fell. That fall had an impact, and then a cascading series that came from that.

In consultation with Washington, we decided on a very big draw of personnel that basically involved our leaving the chancery. Moving many people out of the country and leaving a kind of a rump presence at facilities, at the airport, ride out the storm. And also be in a position that would be easy to leave the country altogether, if that became necessary.

And it was on August 15th that we accelerated that plan, which had been expected to take a number of days, if not longer, and completed its implementation over the course of about 18 hours, on the 15th and 16th.



On August 15, Afghan President Ashraf Ghani fled the country as the Taliban entered Kabul. That same day Ambassador Ross Wilson was one of the last to leave the embassy for the relative safety of the Kabul Airport.

When I boarded, some of the helicopter crew told me that they had seen three or more helicopters leaving the Presidential Palace about a half an hour earlier; that they believed were carrying the president and unknown numbers of others of staff or aides, government officials. We had no real insight into that. We learned later that those helicopters took the president to a location somewhere in the north of the country from which he was able to cross into one of the countries north of Afghanistan and Central Asia, and then make his way to the UAE. At that point, the government had collapsed.

From that point forward, all evacuee processing had to happen at the airport. The orders to LTC Jacob Helgestad were clear.

Our job was a response force and we were ready to go. We were the last ground combat unit in, and then we were given our section of the airport to secure, and then a few days later between North Gate and Abbey Gate, that's when they started processing. We were the last piece to start the actual evacuation out of Afghanistan.

CPT Rachel Cochran described the mindset of the medical team.

We went there with minimal things. Like we had anticipated getting more medical supplies flown to us, but they were saying, "Whatever you bring, you might not be able to bring back. Depending on how many planes are flying out at the end of this, we don't know when the end of it will be or what will happen."

We packed very light and we improvised. We had no vehicles, but we ended up with a fleet of vehicles by the end of it because we acquired some, as the military calls it. We got a truck from somewhere, the guys found it, and they somehow ratchet-strapped a litter to the bed of the truck for an emergency evac vehicle. But it was a stick vehicle, and I had never driven one, so I was like, "Well, better learn now." So I learned how to drive a stick at the airport in Kabul to evacuate casualties, which not a lot of people can say.



We found, an abandoned street sweeper, and one of our personnel knew how to drive it, so he actually cleared the runways of all the trash left behind by thousands of refugees going through. Think water bottles and food and like whatever. So he was keeping the runways cleaned for the airplanes to be safe.

They were all playing with the kids and hanging out with the kids, which they love doing. And the kids came up to me and were like, "You're a doctor?" And I was like, "Yep." He's like, "I want to be a doctor." I'm like, "Well, in America, you can do whatever you want to do. You'll be going there if you're in this compound." They were all very excited to be going to America.

From the beginning, 1LT Carl Swanson viewed it as a humanitarian mission and demonstrated a willingness to bend over backward in the chaotic final days of American forces in Kabul.

'Sammy' first approached us and had asked one of my squad leaders for help, and my squad leader kind of went right to the company commander, and the commander was just kind of like, "We don't know." No one knows how to evacuate anyone out of here. We didn't know the process because it was, "Hey, go sit on the perimeter and go make sure people aren't breaking in."

He came back a couple of days later and one of my team leaders was outside, walks him over to me. And he's like, "Hey, sir, this is Sammy. He needs some help." I was like, "All right, yeah, let's see what we can do." I remember just talking to the guy. I mean, he had very good English, had worked for us way back in 2011, 2012, had this big stack of paperwork, had his passport, and just started listening to him talk about the process of trying to get out. Yeah, you know, six-week lead time for you to get your letter. You have to get in contact with this person via email and you need a professional reference and all this stuff. And I looked at it, I'm like, "Yeah, we don't have six weeks." And I remember him looking at me and just being like, "Do you have a laptop? Do you have a computer? Do you have a printer? Can you write me a letter?" I don't even have working electricity in my building.

I had to actually turn him away that day and agreed to meet up a day later. And it was kind of like, unfortunately, the same thing. We didn't control any of the gates. We had no power over who came in, who left. His wife and child

KABUL | POPULATION 4.4 MILLION



were outside the airport. I remember personally feeling very almost boxed in and just helpless because I couldn't do anything for this guy.

I think there's this idea in our heads of, "We're the US military, we have all these resources, how can we not, like help one dude?" And I don't know how to help him, and it frustrated me for probably a good day and a half. We got rotated off the perimeter one day and kind of back to local guard duty at the building we were living in, and one of my squad leaders came in. He said, "Hey, sir, I met someone that you might want to meet." Guy was an Afghan colonel working with their National Defense Forces. And we sat in the middle of a street on two office chairs and had a conversation.

We more or less talked about what was going on in the area because we were living in very close proximity to a lot of Afghan refugees from the National Defense Forces and their families. And just kind of set some ground rules of, "Hey, you don't need to patrol this area. We've got it covered." And eventually I kind of asked him, I said, "Hey, I've got this guy that has all of his paperwork, as far as I can tell. I'd like to get him out. What can I do?" And he was like, "Oh, well, my boss works over by the Marines and does X, Y, Z, and yeah, he could probably get him out if we coordinated time." I was like, "Oh, well, how does 16:00 tomorrow work?" He was like, "Yeah, sure. We'll see what I can do." And I talked a little bit and he was like, "Yeah, I could use some food and water. My family's coming in tonight." And so I kicked a group of guys out with a pickup truck and we went and grabbed a bunch of bottles of water and a couple boxes of MREs and brought them back over, after we talked.

I remember leaving this conversation and I was in tears. I mean, I remember literally turning and walking back to my building and finding the squad leader that had talked to him initially, and I literally looked at him and I was like, "We're going to get him out. Sammy's going to leave. He's going to the US."

And the really funny thing was Sammy was the electrician for the part of the base that we were on. And so all of a sudden that night, like clockwork, all the power came up. I don't know what he did. To this day, I have no clue.

Next day rolls around and all of a sudden it's 16:00. I can't find Colonel Jackie



anywhere. What are we going to do? Sammy actually rolled up, he had his own little Toyota hatchback. We just had to tell him to sit tight, and we went and talked amongst ourselves a little bit. I think we just need to go for it. And so we grabbed the keys to one of the club cars that we had, and I remember driving up, seeing him in the front seat. He was just crying, bawling. He was on his cell phone, and I'm sure it was some sort of call to his wife and his kid, saying goodbye. He may never see either of them ever again.

We walked over and just told him. I was like, "Sammy, we're just just going to go for it. We're going to see if we can get you on a plane." And he looked at me and he just hands me the car key. And he goes, "Here, it's your car now." And as we drove out along the runway, I remember just saying, "I hope no one stops us." We found a marine lieutenant. I was like, "Hey, man, got this dude. What do I do?" He's like, "Oh, hey, there's a two-story brick building behind you. Go in there, go upstairs." Walked in, it was like, "Hey, sir, what can we do for you?" I'm like, "I need to get this guy out of here." Like, "Oh, okay. Come on over." Pulls out a little barcode bracelet, slaps it on Sammy's wrist, asked him for his passport. Sammy pulls it out, hands it to him. Does a little bit of typing, scans the passport, scans his barcode on his wrist and goes, "Yeah, you're all set." "Are you serious?" He's like, "Yeah, you're good to go."

So they walked his bag over, started walking him up to the Marines, towards the flight line, and I remember he stopped and he looked at me and he shook my hand and he says, "Thank you," and that was it. And I remember while I was still in Afghanistan, he sent me a message and he had made it to Germany, and he made it to the US Embassy.

That right there made the entire experience worth it for me, and it was one of those things where I think it was just human decency, in my opinion, of, you take care of people. Doesn't matter what they look like. Doesn't matter who they are, they deserve the same treatment and care and dignity and respect that we give to everyone else.

Ambassador Ross Wilson and the Minnesota forces that now worked alongside him at the airport were tracking the increasingly dramatic warnings about plans by ISIS to carry out an attack.

On the morning of August 26, CPT Rachel Cochran's dad, who was stateside, texted her an article warning of an imminent airport attack. She dismissed it and texted back with assurance to not worry about that.

And one of the next texts he sent, I was in a field ambulance on my way to Abbey Gate to respond to the attack. And I felt my phone go off as I was stuffing my pockets with tourniquets, because I didn't know what I was walking into. And I like quick pulled out my phone and it was my dad again, but he had sent an article that says, "Attack at Abbey Gate, one dead, many wounded." And he's like, "Are you okay?" And I was like, "I don't know if I'm okay yet."

I was with a physician from the 82nd and I remember telling him, "I'll be honest with you, I've done a lot of trauma in my civilian job, but I've never dealt with military trauma." He's like, "It's no different. Just remember your training." But it was still just absolute chaos at Abbey Gate.

The attack at Abbey Gate killed 170 Afghan civilians and 13 U.S. service members.

Quite a few civilians, mostly children, were injured. I took care of a little girl with, I think, just gunshot wounds, but she was shot several times on her legs and hip. And just I was told, "Go to triage," that's where I met that little girl and then they brought her into the main treatment area and another team took over. And then I went and helped our doc at the time, Colonel Borden, he was with us in Afghanistan and he was taking care of a marine with big shrapnel wounds on his arm. And fortunately he had gotten pain medicine, so he knew he was comfortable and almost cracking jokes because pain medicine makes you do that. But I couldn't help but just have, again, that gut feeling of he doesn't know what's happened to his friends yet. This is going to hurt when he wakes up from this.

When I went back after that to quarters, Lt. Fleming came and grabbed me. He's like, "I need you or Colonel Borden to come back because we have to reset and be postured in case our team takes a hit." Because our only two providers had gone to help with this mass casualty, and so I went back to our hangar.

And I just walked in and that's when all of the feelings that you compartmentalize

kind of hit. And then I was just kind of sitting there shell-shocked. And then I was looking at my hands and I realized I had a bunch of blood from the little girl on my arm and uniform shirt. So I went and cleaned up and changed, and then we went into one of our unit briefs and it's back to steady operations.

1LT Carl Swanson reported the increasingly erratic behavior of those trying to enter the airport.

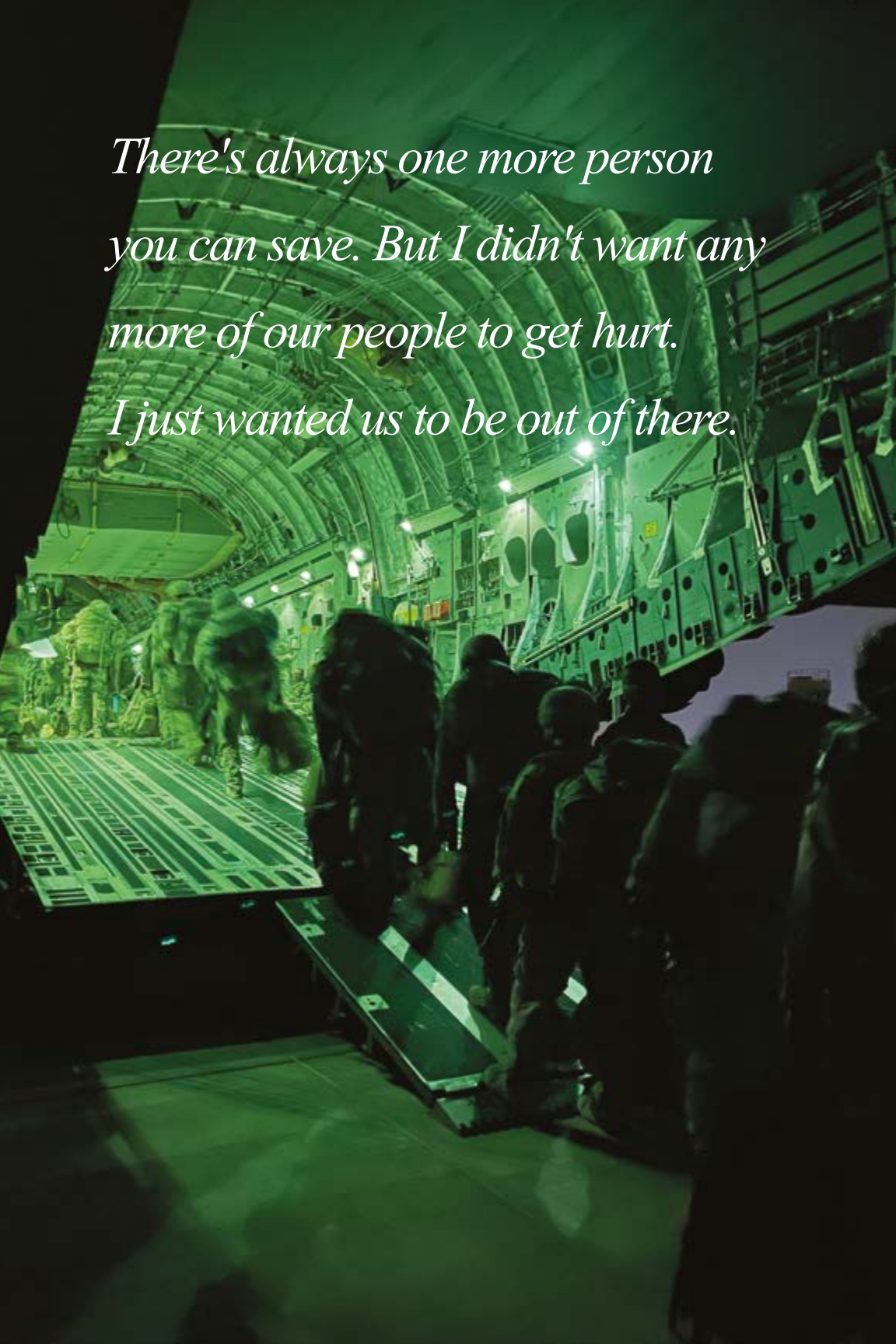
We saw more erratic behavior, really desperation, start to come out from these folks that wanted to leave. I mean, eventually at one point we had people climbing up a tower that was just outside the perimeter, jumping over the fence from 30 feet up onto a blacktop road and breaking their legs, just to try and get out. So just the level that people were willing to go to. I mean, even the last couple nights we were there. I mean, we had people actually scaling the wall, dragging themselves through concertina wire, getting all cut up and then flopping out on the other side and begging for help.

CPT Rachel Cochran witnessed similar events.

People were climbing over these 20 plus feet jersey barriers, sneaking through to jump down, and we had ladders set up on the sides of them for them to climb back over because what do you do? We don't have papers for you. There's like no screening process. And so people had the option of climbing back over themselves, or we'll bring you to the gate and turn you over to the Taliban. It's not my story to tell, but I know one of our platoons had to do that with somebody and it hit them very hard because the guy didn't understand the option of climbing over or going to the Taliban. And so he ended up turning, bringing him to the gate and the guy just collapsed in tears, realizing what was going on. And who knows if he's alive. But it hit our mortar platoon very hard to have to do that.

The last night we were there, we ended up going to an area of the airport in the far east corner, to pull security along that area because the Marines had already left. I think there were three infantry battalions with the 82nd left, plus us, that were pulling security for the whole airport. So most people had already gone. So we were spread thin and we just pulled security overnight there and then got on a plane.

*There's always one more person
you can save. But I didn't want any
more of our people to get hurt.
I just wanted us to be out of there.*



In all, more than 80,000 were evacuated from Kabul airport. Dramatic images of the final days of America's longest war were broadcast around the world as commentators made comparisons to Saigon nearly 50 years earlier.

LTC Jacob Helgestad commanded his forces through the organized chaos, forces that proved invaluable as evacuations didn't begin until the airport was secured.

Like many, CPT Rachel Cochran reflected on her thoughts in this troubled time.

I wanted to leave. It was a black hole. There's only so much you can do in that situation. And we didn't know how many people we left behind, the American citizens, and the Afghans that were deserving to get out because they helped us so much. We didn't know the bigger picture until after we got out. I don't know what the right answer would've been. I don't think staying longer. I mean, it's a black hole. There's always more. There's always one more person you can save. But I didn't want any more of our people to get hurt. I just wanted us to be out of there.

US Ambassador Ross Wilson was on the last flight out of the country on the night of August 30th or just a few seconds after midnight on the 31st. Wilson wanted to be there to do what he could with the time that he had.

Everybody who was there in that period, and probably everybody who served in Afghanistan over the course of 20 years, everyone looks back at what got done, what they were able to do and what was undone. We have to live with that. There's no place I would've rather been.



Katie Lunning

Katie Lunning

By Tim Engstrom

Maj. Katie Lunning, a resident of Urbandale, Iowa, received her nursing degree from Bethel University in 2012 and is the chief critical care nurse at the Minnesota Air National Guard's 133rd Medical Group.

Lunning was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross in front of family, friends and the entire 133rd Airlift Wing at Fort Snelling. The medal was for her actions on Aug. 26, 2021, as a nurse with a Critical Care Air Transport Team (CCATT) in support of Operation Allies Refuge — the evacuation of Kabul, Afghanistan.

It was a day when she was just trying to get some rest after another long shift. But a suicide bomber changed everything.

Less than a month after arriving, the transition of power in Afghanistan was announced, and all personnel at the base were briefed on the deteriorating situation, according to a news release from the 133rd Airlift Wing.

“Around the same time, the CCATT teams assigned to the 379th AES decreased to one. Lunning was now the only CCATT nurse in the region and thus assigned to every medical mission,” the release states.

Al Udeid Air Base in Qatar played a critical role in the Kabul Airlift, from ambassadors to regular citizens. One famous image from the news at the time was a record 823 people packed into a C-17 Globemaster at the Hamid Karzai International Airport. The old record was 640. That plane eventually landed at Al Udeid. The airport and the air base were intertwined.

Imagine flying on six missions a day for two weeks out of Hamid Karzai International Airport. Lunning would push a stretcher three blocks through Taliban-controlled streets to the Kabul Coalition Hospital up to 36 times a day and return to the airport with nothing more than an M-9 to protect her.

“After the day's missions were complete, she caught a couple hours of sleep and within hours was flying again. Her nursing heart was overflowing, but her body was exhausted,” the release states.

The team doctor called Lunning on Aug. 26 as she was about to fall asleep.

“We need to report for duty in 20 minutes. Get dressed and go.”

A suicide bomber had attacked the airport, killing dozens and injuring dozens more. They flew to the airport and were facing danger. There was the possibility of chaos or other attackers.

She returned to her three-block route through enemy streets and occasional small arms fire.

“She performed patient triage and intake for 22 patients before they embarked on an eight-hour aeromedical evacuation flight to Landstuhl, Germany,” the release states.

For example, Lunning, a mother, was able to insert an IV into an 18-month-old boy without any pediatric supplies. The boy’s sister was with him.

“At one point, I took her hand and placed it on the baby’s and held it there. I wanted her to know that we cared and were doing our best to save her brother,” Lunning said.

She also managed a life-saving blood resuscitation of a post-operative patient. All 22 patients aboard that flight survived.

She watched with the rest of the world as the Afghanistan government collapsed and the Taliban took territory, encircling Kabul. Thousands rushed to the airport to escape.

“We had no idea who were going to be picking up, what the patients were going to be like, how many patients. We had no clue. It was really flying in blind,” she told Iowa Public Radio.

While servicemembers are busy doing their duty, they often are less aware of what’s in the news. Finally, a liaison on the ground informed her crew that 13 servicemembers (11 Marines, a soldier and a sailor) were killed in the suicide bombing, along with scores of civilians.

That bombing was planned by ISIS, aka Islamic State, and, in April 2023, news media announced the Taliban had killed the mastermind behind the explosion. The number of Afghans dead was about 170.

In January 2023, Air Force Lt. Gen. Michael Loh, director of the Air National Guard, flew

to Minnesota from the Pentagon to present Lunning with the honor for her work during the six-month deployment. With her were her parents, her husband, Josh, and their daughter, Addie. The family lives in the Des Moines suburb of Urbandale.

“Thank you, Major Lunning, for your dedication to the mission, for your bravery under fire, serving our nation with your medical expertise, and your care for humanity. You make us all very proud,” Loh said.

The Distinguished Flying Cross, established in 1926, is awarded for acts of heroism or extraordinary achievement while in flight. Lunning is in the company of many famed recipients. Some are Col. John Glenn, Col. Buzz Aldrin, Capt. Mark Kelly, Lt. Col. Gus Grissom, Rear Adm. Alan Shepard, Orville and Wilbur Wright, Amelia Earhart, Lt. George H.W. Bush, Capt. John McCain, Brig. Gen. Chuck Yeager, Gen. Jimmy Doolittle, Capt. Gary Francis Powers, Gen. Norman Schwarzkopf, Gen. Douglas MacArthur and Capt. Gene Roddenberry.

And among the famed recipients is Aleda E. Lutz, a USAAF flight nurse during WWII. She was from Michigan and was the first American servicewoman killed in the war. Lutz, killed during a medevac flight in France, was the first military woman to receive the Distinguished Flying Cross.



Operation Allies Welcome



In late August 2021, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security deployed personnel to Bahrain, Germany, Kuwait, Italy, Qatar, Spain, and the United Arab Emirates to conduct processing, screening, and vetting in coordination with the Departments of Defense and State and other federal agencies, and to conduct interviews as needed, with the goal of bringing to the United States Afghan nationals who worked for the United States, as well as other vulnerable Afghans.

The Defense Department provided temporary housing facilities for Special Immigrant Visa (SIV) applicants and other vulnerable Afghans at eight installations: Marine Corps Base Quantico, Virginia; Fort Pickett, Virginia; Fort Lee, Virginia; Holloman Air Force Base, New Mexico; Fort McCoy, Wisconsin; Fort Bliss, Texas; Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst, New Jersey; and Camp Atterbury, Indiana.

Jeff Patton

Ramstein Air Base, Germany

Colonel Jeff Patton's call sign was "Tank." Originally from Bloomington, Minnesota, he graduated from Jefferson High School in 1990 and then went on to the U.S. Air Force Academy, graduating in 1994. He flew F-15 C models in Operation Southern Watch and Operation Northern Watch over Northern and Southern Iraq. Later, he transitioned to the F-15 E model when his unit was the first to deploy to Afghanistan for Operation Enduring Freedom.

After that, he flew the MQ-9, the drone known as the Reaper, primarily in an educational training command role. As a commander, he also had four different staff tours in three different commands. From August to October 2021, he was stationed at Ramstein Air Base, Germany, where he served as deputy director for the 589.

Patton shared his understanding of conditions on the ground in Kabul.

I was told that the Taliban agreed to protect the HKIA [Hamid Karzai International Airport] airfield until the end of August. And by protect, I think that's an interesting word because people reported being prevented from getting to the airport. It also kept the traffic away from the airport, which had some obviously mitigating effects, both pros and cons.



From the August 17 to 31, 2021, American forces evacuated over 124,000 people, on 778 flights, over those 14 days. It's roughly about 50 aircraft a day.

This included processing people, loading them, getting the equipment, getting the weight and balance correct so they were safe to fly, getting everything strapped down and then launching those airplanes. Most of those airplanes went to other airfields in the region. Some of them flew directly to Ramstein because German authorities allowed Ramstein to be the central entry point for processing on the base. That's what the U.S. State Department worked out.

On August 13, the State Department ordered the NEO to start and that's about the time we stood up our crisis action team or "CAT." That is an additional duty, and we do that for many things. Usually when things go bad, when there's an airplane crash or when there's a conflict or something like that, we'll sign up this crisis action team. We can really focus 24/7 operations on the emergency at hand.

My role was the 589 and the A-3. The operations staff primarily took responsibility for running and manning the CAT, but obviously with 24/7 operations, they can't do that all the time. They need breaks. I filled in as a CAT director on August 20, and that happened to be a pretty significant day because that was the first day that we got authority from the State Department to move aircraft into Germany. So when I was the acting CAT director, I was able to coordinate the very first flight out of the CENTCOM Area of Responsibility (AOR) and into the United States European Command's AOR.

I didn't realize that the waves were going to be happening at the time. I got a recall from my boss and he said, "Hey, call the unit. They need all hands-on deck to help host and help prepare for the Afghans that are going to be coming through Ramstein Air Base."

I went out there and I brought my son with me, who was 14 years old at the time. And we started constructing a tent city for the travelers. We built cots, we put sleeping bags on them, we put blankets on them, we built porta-potties, we put up fencing for security.



And this was intended to be a staging holding area for security of the personnel as well as security of the base, because they're actually on the flight line, but that was meant to be there for 12 to 24 hours, almost like a flight terminal. Let them get some rest, get some food, and then move on to the next flight to the United States.

In some regards, that happened. Obviously, there were some complications where it got backed up for a little bit.

They started coming wave after wave after wave. There were volunteers from the Red Cross and spouse clubs. The local community brought food, blankets and baby formula. Incredible support. It would not have happened without individuals working really hard in those initial stages.

But then, it goes on for several months.

From August 22 to September 13, operations were pretty much normal. We got up to about 10,000 people at Ramstein at any one point.

On our staff we had about 30 individuals working on Operation Allies Refuge full-time for two months.

I was a night shift volunteer. I was able to serve dinner to the Afghans and deliver baby food and blankets. I picked up trash. I talked to several of them.

I went to an elder meeting. Every pod had a kind of organizational structure where the Afghan elders could bring issues in a formal setting to our team. Whether it was more water or temperature issues or the need for more blankets. It was a really great process to see.

I would say about a third of the people in the camp were adult males. a third were adult females, and about a third were children.

A lot of children were involved, playing soccer and singing songs. We had some schools set up to start teaching English which was really great.

It was only meant to be for a couple days. The overall feel was very positive. There were a lot of high-fives and fist bumps and saying thank you in perfect English to all the military people and all the spouses at the Red Cross. It was a really significant event for me and kind of brought home the impact we were having. We had a lot of people working there for two months straight, and it was very stressful.

About that time a smallpox case was reported in the United States and a stop-movement order was issued because there was a fear that some of the travelers were going to bring smallpox into the States.

The people coming in didn't stop, but the people going to the U.S. did. We were growing beyond our capacity. It was maybe 6,000 to 8,000. We got to 10,000 and eventually we had 13,000. Obviously it's no longer a terminal. It was a holding area. I mean, people were going to be there for a while. We didn't know how long.

The order came down to give everybody MMR, varicella, polio, and COVID shots, which was all good. We were able to source that, and I helped work that with the EUCOM staff and with Homeland Security and with everybody else that had to be involved. The only challenge was that they needed two shots before they could travel and there were 21 days in between the first shot and the second shot.

This turmoil turned into really a hotel extended-stay arrangement as we had to start preparing for more long-term care. Things like the Internet became a big deal. We had prepared to provide the Internet to the Afghans, but [only] for a day or two but after 21 days it was more of an issue. Also, the temperature from August to October changes quite a bit in Germany. We went from 90-degree days to 40-degree nights. We had to add heating elements into the tents. We eventually got everybody vaccinated within the three-week span, the stop-movement order was lifted and we were able to start moving the travelers on to the United States.

Once this happened, it took about 20 days to dwindle down our numbers and

get everybody safely to the United States. We processed 35,000 travelers in all.

I say 'travelers' because they didn't have a status. They were not refugees, they were volunteers. They didn't have legal status, if you will, which was pretty interesting.

There were a few that requested asylum, but they were on a U.S. air base in Germany. So they had to go to the German government to request asylum if they wanted to stay in Germany. Though it was very few and far between.

More than 7,000 personnel at Ramstein were supporting this effort for over two months and other people back in the office, mostly civilians, had to pick up the military people's job that were told to help out this mission. It lasted a lot longer than we thought it would.

By The Numbers

- 22,000 meals served per day
- 38 Afghan babies delivered while at Ramstein
- 552 tents spread across 52 acres
- 33,000 vaccines administered
- 37,000 blankets distributed
- 41,000 sleeping bags distributed



Dan Gabrielli

By Randal Dietrich

Holloman Air Force Base, New Mexico

Holloman Air Force Base in New Mexico was one of eight temporary stateside facilities to house SIV applicants and other vulnerable Afghans after the August 2021 evacuation of Hamid Karzai International Airport in Kabul.

Dan Gabrielli was Assistant Adjutant General for Air for the State of Minnesota but would have the distinction of being commander of Task Force Holloman which later became the 487th Air Expeditionary Wing (AW).

Gabrielli described the significance of the patch and how it was developed.

Our airmen designed this patch. We all wore our 487th AW proudly. They designed it. It's got the two national birds, the golden eagle of Afghanistan and our American bald eagle. Below it has the Dari and Pashto wording from right to left, because that's how they write. I let the Afghans name the village we created for them and they wanted to name it 'Hope and Peace.' We've got the Lady Liberty torch in the middle. We were like an Ellis Island out in the middle of the desert.

When the opportunity to support Operation Allies Welcome presented itself, Gabrielli didn't hesitate.

On August 23, 2021, an email went out to all the guard general officers that they wanted a guard commander for Holloman and McGuire Air Force bases. I think maybe because of the direct support of the civil authority nature of it, which the guard is very familiar with. It was going to be a two-star command. I put my name in a hat for the deputy position one-star. The next day a two-star called me, said we'd be working together. Then the following day I found out the two-star had to drop out and General Glen VanHerck, the NORTHCOM commander, was okay with a one-star running the task force.

So all of a sudden it was, like, I don't think I wait for orders, I just get out

there. And within a day I was out. At first I visited Fort Bliss where General Sean Bernabe, their two-star commander, invited me out in the helicopter to see his task force, to see how he'd done it. And getting eyes on that really helped me to comprehend what I was in. I was down at Holloman on the 24th. Within a day, about 400 airmen from Seymour Johnson Air Force Base came down, I call them my cavalry.

The 49th Wing down at Holloman set us up for success by starting the process of building an Airman's Life Support Area (LSA), since there was not enough hotel space for our 900 airmen, 1,700 over two rotations, to live in hotels in Alamogordo or even Las Cruces and that area.

We literally built within a three-day period, started by the host wing and then we weaned them off of us so they could do their mission.

We built a life support village for 1,200 airmen to live in while they were supporting a 5,000 person Afghan village out five miles into the desert on the base on Holloman.

What was to be 60 days of order turned into a six-month deployment (August 24 to March 15). Gabrielli credits the airmen for the success of the operation and contractors were brought in to erect large (30 x 90 meter) circus tents. The first plane, loaded with Afghan travelers, arrived on August 31 and continued through September 10th when a measles outbreak at one of the 'lily pads' (Bahrain, Germany, Kuwait, Italy, Qatar, Spain, and the United Arab Emirates) halted incoming flights for two days. The last flights, via charters on Southwest, American, Delta and even Hawaiian Airlines, arrived on October 27.

Gabrielli described how American and Afghan families worked together.

Our airmen were away from their families and the Afghans were obviously away from their families and their country. We had some sort of a shared experience and a singular focus, which I think really allowed our airmen to go deep with these people with trust. Our airmen really bought into it and being there solely for that purpose and not having anywhere to go at night except back to their tents or possibly off base, they spent a lot of time in the village after hours as well.

I would also say we had a very healthy task force compared to the others. We were supposed to designate 15 percent over and above our capacity for isolation and quarantine. And we literally had about 10 people that ever got sick, over six months with 7,200 resettled Afghans.

Only three cases of COVID because our airmen were sort of living in a bubble with them. And that actually created a very healthy atmosphere. They're more in danger of getting COVID from us as we were from them. They're a very healthy population. So we had 140 Air National Guardsmen, 140 reservists, and the rest were active duty. A lot from Air Combat Command, which is a force provider, and many from Seymour Johnson Air Force Base. We had a hundred plus federal partners and non-governmental and governmental organizations, the Department of Homeland Security, Department of State, U.S. Customs and Immigration Service, International Rescue Committee, and International Office of Migration. They handled a lot of the processing. We were in direct support of these civil authorities. And their job was to get them through the process to a two-year parolee status in the United States.

Our mission as Air Force was the care, feeding, housing and morale for this extremely resilient and amazing population. And so we built that trust with them. We had a lot of Air Education and Training Command folks because there was an air education training wing. General Webb talked to me on the first day and said his main goal of our education training command is making our task force successful on that base. And they really came through with all the support they needed.

Gabrielli stressed stability as a key to their success.

One of our main catalysts for stability we had in the village was that the Air Education and Training Command had five American Muslim chaplains who are in the Air Force. One of them is a female imam. And she was brought to our task force by the wing commander of Holloman. And she was my right-hand person as a cultural advisor and part of our chaplain staff. With her in-depth Muslim background, she was key to the stability of the village. As an Air Force chaplain, she couldn't minister to the Afghans, only to the airmen. But she could, as my cultural advisor, interact and socialize with the Afghans.



Dan Gabrielli



She went miles with the female population then, empowering them, having female shuras. I think she was singularly the most responsible for setting the tone for the really high stability we had in our task force. I think we're the only task force that never had any arrests. I'm not saying there weren't incidents. Unlike other bases that had federal jurisdiction law enforcement, we had State of New Mexico law enforcement. I didn't want any impression that they were being detained, contained or held against their will, because they could leave at any day, at any moment. And I wanted to let them know we were there for their health, safety and protection.

Medical licensure issues, related to the portability licenses with our contractors, forced Gabrielli's medical airmen to stay there for almost the duration. In all, 7,200 Afghans were processed with 700 taking 'early departures' (people that leave early on their own) from the post. Their legal status was something he and his team were always sensitive to:

We called them evacuees and guests because we couldn't call them refugees. It was a designation because we brought them out of the country, they didn't flee, much like the Somali and Hmong populations. And that makes a big difference as far as their ability to get green card status and legal permanent residence. So that Afghan Adjustment Act will go so far in that respect.

Besides stability, Gabrielli also cites humility and a shared sense of humanity as key factors for their success.

I want to also point out that the magic of this whole operation was the fact that there were no egos among us leadership because there was no playbook.

Nobody could say, 'I've done this before.' It was a hyper-revolutionary thing where there was a lot of failure and a lot of learning and a lot of success that built out of it. It was a huge learning curve where you failed, learned and succeeded in the end. And that was the greatness of this. No ego, we were all just out there trying to figure this thing out. And with no ego and a lot of people just putting in a lot of hard humble effort, it really worked well. And again, the airmen were the key here.

Our Afghan guests did their part with U.S. Customs and Immigration Service biometrics and medical exams. They each got six vaccinations. In phase two,



they got their work authorization. The card that enables them to work. It was like gold for them, but it still doesn't get them legal permanent residence. And then came the assurance where they're assured to be put out into a resettlement agency, one of 240 resettlement agencies around the country. Phase three is when their departures were pending. The International Office of Migration arranged the travel and processed their departures.

When the arrivals were coming in, I made sure that we got as many airmen as we could at the bottom of the ladder of that airplane. And we gave them rounds of applause. We really made them feel welcome. And then again, when the departures, I think we all wanted to set that tone that we wanted to build that trust with these folks. And then when we left, I was at every arrival and leadership team was at most of the departures.

Capable airmen helped to create a community in the New Mexico desert.

This was your absolute example of capable airmen that we talk about these days, doing everything but what they're trained for: As the commander, I quickly realized the need to set up a safety shop. We dodged some bullets right off the bat. While the construction of that village was going up, keeping the kids safe was key, since half of these folks were kids.

We built a club there. We built a big deck. We had a lot of morale events. So many community people came out and volunteered and served us meals. We had bands come out. We had an American Idol performer come out. We had two Air Force bands, the Air Force Academy Band, the Air Force Band in the Midwest. We had a talent show among the Afghans.

We learned from Fort Bliss that you needed to have a single male tent, single female tent, family partition tents. You needed them to be partitioned for a lot of reasons, social, cultural. You could not have an open bay for these folks. We wanted dignity throughout. The contractors didn't have enough materials to partition these tents. So our airmen, our contractors, went out and bought up all the vinyl and plywood in the five state area and our airmen worked 24/7 partitioning these tents out. You got to realize these people were working 35,000 man hours partitioning these tents and the Afghans are moving in while they're being partitioned.



We laid concrete for four basketball courts. We made four sand volleyball courts. They were into cricket. Who knew? Because of the Indian connection, these folks are huge cricket players. We had a nine-team cricket tournament. On Amazon, we bought all the cricket equipment they needed. They had a huge tournament. The World Cup of Cricket was going on at the time. I was sitting in a tent with 400 of the guys watching the cricket tournament. They were crazy for cricket. We had 'teach and learn' on Saturdays where the airmen came and they taught us all. We learned how to play and played games. Our builders kept building. When they ran out of things to build, they built.

There's not a person that did this mission that didn't think it was the greatest thing they ever did.

We had security forces. I said, 'Hey, I don't want any long guns in the village. In fact, I only want two people armed in the village. I don't want any of the other airmen armed. These people respect us. They love us. They'd show us nothing but respect. I don't want them to feel there's a presence of us containing them or being a threat to them. We are there to protect them.' We formed a perimeter outside because we don't want them wandering onto the runway or wandering into the desert. We made that clear. Then when the New Mexico Police came in, I thought, "Well, if I had a new city of 5,000 people in America, I'd want to feel some security of law enforcement." So we did have the New Mexico Police there and everybody felt very safe.

A lot of our airmen were human jungle gyms for these Afghan kids. It was like they stole our hearts. These kids are going to be the most resilient, independent, fiercely independent kids in America because they don't have the helicopter parents we have. These parents just go out in the village, play with the airmen, and all our airmen have to do is keep them happy and healthy and safe.

White Sands National Monument is just outside the base. So as we got more creative, we learned how to make fun for these people. I call it the Shiny Objects Program. If you keep them happy, playing sports, doing events, and being entertained, they're going to be distracted from their less than ideal living conditions. So we'd take them out with sleds by the busload out to White Sands and they'd go sliding down the hills.

They'd have an airmen soccer tournament with the Afghans once a week. Like I said, cricket all the time, a lot of sports going on. Once we started to play the adhan, the call to prayer on the loudspeakers, man, it was a comforting feeling for them. You could see the whole village. A lot of them would tell me it was a game changer.

We had a lot of non-governmental organizations and our airmen volunteers doing education in the education tents. We had the Defense Language Institute come out and teach English as a second language. Constant education. We also had an Afghan talent show. We let them tell stories, poems, music and a thousand of them showed up in a tent that night. It was such a big hit. We were going to have another one on New Year's Eve and our airmen were entertaining them as well. But COVID started to kick up. Even though we had a super safe task force, we were sort of told by DHS, "Do what you want, man. But if you get some of these quarantines as we're trying to shut down with a target date of the end of January, it's not going to look good." So we did cancel that second talent show.

Every person had their posse of kids. I, by name, requested a second rotation to get some Minnesota leadership out with me. Crystal Kirchner, lieutenant from the one 48th Fighter Wing was my exec, wing exec. I handpicked my second command chief, Amy Goossen from the 133rd, game changers, heavily female leadership team, which I think this is demanded, a lot of female presence.

I told them when they see a strong female leader walking through, it sets the tone for how we do things in America. Everywhere we go it's total equality. We had the most diverse group of Afghans living among themselves. We had Kabul folks who were about as cosmopolitan as we are. They identified us more within the very cultural, rural, cultural and religious conservative folks. So you had a very wide diaspora of people within the Afghan community that were in there.

Shane Hudella, who runs United Heroes League. He called me halfway throughout and said, "What do you need?" I said, "I need a bunch of cleats. I need a bunch of soccer balls." He sent 40 four by four boxes out via mail, just gigantic huge amounts of stuff. He said, "Hey, you want some roller blades?" I first

said, "Well, these kids don't skate." I said, "Hey, you know what? These kids will do anything. They're fearless." So we got roller blades out there and I had my roller blades because I was always rollerblading out there, Minnesota hockey player. We had a tent that was empty with a big hardwood floor and we'd have skating with the general on Saturdays. These kids, these airmen were like hockey players in Minnesota. There're about 15 pairs, but there's like 50 kids that wanted to skate. So we'd give them like 10 minutes a shot. Our airmen were changing out to skates as the kids were doing the skating. But they just hit it just like they do. They're fearless.

Incredibly artistic population of people. They created murals and we let them go crazy, creating murals all over the village, just incredibly artistic, creative folks.

The city of Alamogordo gave us a 25-foot screen, an inflatable screen. We put that inside of one of the tents. You can see the kids just vegged out to movies all day long. That's how we greeted the folks when they came in.

The last Afghans left on the 26th. I said, "Let's finish strong. We build till they leave." So within the last couple weeks the task force, our airmen built this sort of city center with covered picnic tables and gardens and everything. When it came time to start taking it down, our CE guy said, "Hey, it's going to be cheaper to get a burn permit than to requisition this." So it was a way to have a last therapeutic blowout.

After the Afghans all left the village, we took all that wood from that city center we had and we had a tremendous bonfire with pizza and refreshments. It was just one way to walk around the village after they'd all left and really reflect on how it all went.

I'll end by saying my seven desert deployments flying C130s, three to Afghanistan. This was the most rewarding command I had and the most rewarding deployment I had because of the human element and doing so much, trying to do so much with our airmen, for those people who've done so much for us. It was just an incredible honor to be able to do it. We're all still very connected, more than any other team I ever deployed with. Our leadership team is still very connected because of this whole experience. It's the airmen.



Senator Amy Klobuchar

By Randal Dietrich

Afghan Adjustment Act

Minnesota Senator Amy Klobuchar introduced Senate File 4787 on August 7, 2022 to address the permanent legal status of our Afghan guests. She spoke to many of the issues raised by Brigadier General Dan Gabrielli when she briefed members of the Minnesota Military & Veterans Museum on April 24, 2023.

More than 80,000 Afghans who sought refuge in our country are currently in limbo, including many who risk their own lives and their family's safety to protect our service members in Afghanistan, among them are translators and humanitarian workers who worked alongside our military, and for the majority of them, their temporary status is set to expire this summer.

After their sacrifice and after we help them to relocate to the US, I believe it is our responsibility to provide them with stability and security. People are watching around the world, how we treat those who helped us, how we treat those who are vouched for by our military. That's why it has been one of my top priorities to build a bipartisan coalition to pass the Afghan Adjustment Act, a bill that I lead with Senator Lindsey Graham, and why I am committed to getting it done this Congress. By setting up a more efficient and better system for newly arrived Afghans to apply for permanent legal status, this bill is about showing that our country is committed to standing with the people who stand with us.

To be clear, this legislation does not just make the process faster and provide people with stability. It also makes it more thorough. Our bill requires applicants to go through vetting that is just as rigorous as the vetting they would've gone through if they came to the US as refugees. That includes an in-person interview, a standard that eight former Trump and George W. Bush administration, national security officials called the gold standard of vetting. Senator Graham and I worked closely with Republicans. We also worked with the Department of Defense to strengthen the bill's vetting provisions, and to add language that responds to concerns that have been raised.

Our bipartisan bill has earned the support of more than 40 organizations, including the Veterans of Foreign Wars and the American Legion, as well as some of our nation's most revered military leaders, including Admirals Mike Mullen, William McRaven and Generals Richard Meyers, Joseph Dunford, and Stan McChrystal. Part of the reason we were able to build so much support is that this bill is modeled after other bipartisan legislation that Congress passed after previous conflicts. After the Vietnam War, Congress passed a law that allowed thousands of people to resettle in the US, including many Hmong refugees who we all know call Minnesota and Wisconsin home.

You know what happened? They became teachers and police officers, farmers and bakers, nurses and doctors, builders and inventors. They started families, they launched businesses, they enriched their communities, and they made this country better. Our states welcomed thousands and thousands of these immigrants, and we have benefited immeasurably from their contributions. If we act to help our Afghan allies, just as we helped other allies, I know they will join in that great tradition of those who come to this country in search of a better life. Because time and time again, our nation's history has shown that immigrants don't diminish America, they are America.

Homefront



Governor Pawlenty

General Nash

Homecoming

By Randal Dietrich

Soldiers of the 34th Red Bull Infantry Division were celebrated by elected officials and members of the community in a ceremony April 11, 2010 at the Minneapolis Convention Center. When the 34th Red Bull Infantry Division left Minnesota for their deployment to Iraq, Tim Pawlenty, the governor of Minnesota presented the unit with a state flag. That flag was returned April 10 at a return ceremony at the Minneapolis Convention Center. "Sir, this flag was proudly flown at the division headquarters in Basra, Iraq for the duration of the tour," said Maj. Gen. Rick Nash, commander of the 34th Infantry Division "It is a privilege to return it to you and the citizens of Minnesota."

Kevin Olson

Colonel Olson was assigned as a Public Affairs officer at Joint Force Headquarters in St. Paul in March 2003, and oversaw the emergence of social media and increased demand for public information during overseas contingency operations. He served as the Director of Communications for the Minnesota National Guard for more than 14 years, and led the organization's public affairs efforts during a period of sustained overseas deployments. He was the primary spokesperson for the Minnesota National Guard and the Strategic Communication Advisor to three Adjutants General from 2003 to 2017. Colonel Olson is co-founder of the Minnesota Military Radio Hour.

In 2005, Colonel Olson deployed to Iraq and was assigned as Media Operations Officer for a Multi-National Core Iraq. He coordinated international media visiting military forces throughout the 140,000 person multinational coalition. In 2009, he deployed a second time, serving as the Public Affairs officer for US Division South, and Major General Richard Nash, commander of the 34th Red Bull Infantry Division. The area of operations was the bottom half of Iraq, nine of Iraq's 18 provinces and the 16,000 member US military force responsible for transitioning security and establishing civil capacity in Iraq.

As the guy who answered the phone for the National Guard from 2003 until 2017, I was often the first point of contact for a variety of civic or charitable groups or concerned citizens that wanted to do things for our service members. It made my job a lot easier to be able to direct them to so many established

organizations that were already out there. Many people want to start their own foundation or start their own organization, and they were just astonished at the infrastructure that Minnesota has for our service members. All of these home front efforts, it sure made my job easier.

Minnesota Military Radio Hour

By the Numbers

Number shows since inception (as of 10/1/23)	700
Number of stations broadcasting statewide	65

When the 34th division returned from Iraq in 2010, General Nash had an opportunity to speak to Tom Lyons. Tom had been doing a number of 'Military Minutes' on a couple of radio networks or radio stations in the Twin Cities



Doug Wortham

Buddy Winn

Tom Lyons

and had just started a partnership with iHeartRadio, which was then called Clear Channel. One of the producers, Drew Lee, had come to Minnesota from a larger military market. He challenged Tom to find a way to consider doing a radio program and that would be a public affairs show.

He brought that to General Nash and introduced me to Tom and kind of thought about the structure of that, and it was important to have a lot of stakeholders. It couldn't just be about the Minnesota Army and Air National Guard. I was the director of public affairs for the entire National Guard then, which was about 14,000 soldiers and airmen operating in 62 communities. It had to include the other 6,000 or so reservists. In addition to the military component, telling the story of our veterans was equally important. The Minnesota Department of Veterans Affairs and all of their programming to inform veterans was a gateway to the larger federal VA. Also important were Beyond the Yellow Ribbon communities around the state who were very committed because we had so many soldiers and airmen deployed. We consulted Drew Lee and came up with an hour-long radio format. Our volunteer host, Tom Lyons, has been an incredible advocate for everything military and veteran-connected in our state.

It is a clear indication that local radio is not dead. Many of the communities rely on their local broadcasters for farm news, farm commodities, and weather news in addition to hyper-local high school sports. Through Minnesota Military Radio, families and communities throughout the state get a public service, and find out about Veteran programs. It also gives them a sense of the history of our service branches in Minnesota. I'm also very proud that it shows in real-time the operational tempo of the Minnesota National Guard and affiliated units affiliated by doing remote broadcasts.

Through the Department of Military Affairs, we've been able to coordinate broadcasts from combat zones. We've gone to Kuwait and have generated broadcasts from there, talking to soldiers in the field, what they're doing. We've generated shows from Norway. We generated a show from the bridge of the USS Minneapolis St. Paul, LCS-21 as they were getting ready for their commissioning ceremony in Duluth in 2022. Then we also did a show from the USS Minnesota submarine that received a great deal of publicity and a lot of support from Minnesota.

Serving Our Troops

For 20 years, the Minnesota National Guard has partnered with a St. Paul civic group called Serving Our Troops (SOT) . In 2003, Pat Harris and John Marshall got to thinking: 'If we can enjoy a steak at an iconic restaurant that's been around for nearly a hundred years in St. Paul, why can't we just send a little bit of St. Paul to help our soldiers?'

They wanted to know if they could physically travel with steaks and with restaurateurs, not only from popular St Paul restaurants that had been around for decades. They actually wanted to go to Iraq but it was unprecedented for civilians to travel to a combat zone. In 2003-04, Minnesota Army National Guard's 34th division had a commitment to provide support for our peacekeeping troops in Bosnia and Kosovo.

The commanding general of the Kosovo Mission, Major General Rick Erlandson, believed that we could figure out a way for these Minnesota civic leaders to travel to Kosovo and link-up with a robust group of Minnesota soldiers. He thought that it would be a great idea to boost morale and showcase support. The group wanted to not only feed those soldiers who were stationed in a hostile zone, but they wanted to connect them with their families in real time. In 2004, there was no FaceTime and Skype barely existed. It was a complicated affair that required broadcast satellites and required taking some of the internet capacity away from the military at a pretty austere base.

Through SOT's efforts, they were able to get steaks for more than 700 Minnesota troops, and then gathered all their families at the Xcel Energy Center. We coordinated a satellite between the service members and their families so that they could actually talk to their families in real time. That was unprecedented and it made a real impression on the National Guard and it really captured Minnesota's attention. Since then, the group has done a total of 14 different missions and served more than 110,000 Minnesota soldiers and their families, and they've done that when they were deployed, again, in places like Kosovo, and Iraq and Kuwait numerous times.

Twins, Vikings, Wild & Timberwolves

Minnesota's professional and collegiate sports were eager to partner with our service members, their families and with veterans.

Twins were the leader of the pack. They approached us in 2003 to help them find a way to do something special for their opening game. We were able to coordinate the first ever live first pitch from a combat zone to a major league stadium.

It established an Armed Forces Appreciation Day that became a model for Major League Baseball. This year, they'll be celebrating the 20th anniversary of the Armed Forces Appreciation Day, where they set aside an entire game to provide tickets to a certain number of veterans.

The Minnesota Vikings weren't far behind. The National Football League did not always have a 'salute to service' game that you see now across the league. The Vikings were among the first to make sure that there was military programming throughout the season. The Minnesota Wild soon followed suit. They're partners with the Minnesota Army National Guard and their recruiting effort.

The Timberwolves have a 'hero of the game.' All of the sports teams in Minnesota, including minor leagues and collegiate sports recognize that this is an important way to connect with fans who want to show their support. I never considered it to be a 'pay for play' patriotism sentiment. I don't believe that that's the case in Minnesota.

Beyond The Yellow Ribbon

I was really inspired by First Lady Mary Pawlenty and how she took on the importance of supporting not only our service members, but their families during deployment. It was really elevated, the effort that Minnesota put forward in the Beyond the Yellow Ribbon program. In my mind, she was the one who initiated it and brought the attention to get it to somewhere where it could be a form of legislation. I believe that our Senator at the time, Mark Dayton, was the one who got the first funding for Minnesota to spearhead a national

Yellow Ribbon Network throughout the state.

Mary Pawlenty had an empathy or level of involvement for every single deploying unit. She participated in family readiness groups and expressed that the full weight of the State of Minnesota was behind her, something that was a prelude to the governor's messaging when the actual deployment or return ceremony came around. It was the full level of involvement and commitment that she had that was pretty inspiring, especially because she was also a full-time district judge in Dakota County.

Minnesota Military Family Foundation (MMFF)

Bill Popp, the founder of Popp Communications and a major force in Twin Cities philanthropy, had a good relationship with the Pawlentys, and that was a very positive force for getting the Foundation to be such a premier charitable organization that really helps our service members.

Tim Kennedy

Brigadier General (Retired) Tim Kennedy serves the Executive Director and secretary of the Minnesota Military Family Foundation (MMFF).

The Minnesota Military Family Foundation, a community-supported fund, was founded in November 2004. Contributions are made by people who understand that there are many sacrifices that military families make and want to help soften the financial hardships that may occur, especially when a family member is deployed, by providing a financial safety net. The men and women that serve in our military have given up their freedom to protect the freedom of American citizens and to proactively pursue people who have attacked or plan to attack America and Americans. Contributing to the Minnesota Military Family Foundation is how many citizens show their thanks and support to our troops and their families. The Minnesota Military Family Foundation is an all-volunteer board with zero overhead.

The Minnesota Military Family Foundation distributes money through grants and loans to Minnesota military families that need a little help. The Foundation works closely with the Soldier and Family Readiness Centers (SFRC) and Chaplains. The SFRC and Chaplains communicate with the MMFF and provide details of the financial need and direct requests to the Foundation.

The foundation stood up in 2004 with the intent of trying to help the currently serving side of things. Not if you're out, that's, that's the Department of Veterans Affairs. But if you're currently serving and you have a financial crisis, that's what the Minnesota Military Family Foundation was created to do.

When you think about the Vietnam-era, you'd write a letter and it probably two weeks before you got anything back. If the water heater broke back home, by the time you heard about it, it was two weeks later and somebody probably took care of it.

With today's technology and the ability to connect, which is a great thing, but problems at home can move to where you're serving. If you're thinking about that, you might be distracted from your mission. Let us (MMFF) take care of the home mission. Let's take, let's support the home front so that you don't have to worry about the need to call Joe's Plumbing.

The whole idea was let's take care of the families so that the soldiers don't worry about their families. They can focus on what their mission is and not be distracted. So not just be free from distraction but to take pride knowing that their family is being taken care of. It is about two things obviously:

- 1. Take care of military members and their families so that they can continue to serve.*
- 2. Assist military members with see money issues so we don't see families start to fall apart.*

Sometimes the sacrifices that come with serving can be too much and a service member has to make the hard choice:

I'll just stop serving to take away that pressure that, that I have on me. We're trying to communicate to the those who are serving, that there is support out there. We're here to help you if you need it. We thank you for wearing the uniform. You have to be wearing the uniform, currently serving to get this assistance. The idea is not only can I do the mission, but also can I keep wearing the uniform.

By the Numbers:

MINNESOTA MILITARY FAMILY FOUNDATION

2023 Grants Awarded:	149 totaling \$795,000
Grants awarded since inception:	2,288 totaling \$5,800,000

Joe Bennek

Minnesotans' Military Appreciation Fund (MMAF)

MMAF was founded in 2005 by Eugene Sit. The simple goal was to say “thank you,” with a cash grant, to Minnesotans who have served in combat since September 11, 2001.

It is the only private organization in the country that has done this.

Joe Bennek, Project Director, shared background about the organization.

Gene Sit was a Chinese immigrant who arrived in the United States at age 10 after being kidnapped by gangsters in China. He was in captivity for about six months. His family raised the ransom that was demanded for his release. Once freed, he was sent to live in the United States with family members. Gene is the epitome of the American dream. He went through ten years of school in eight years and went to work for IDS Financial Services. Then in 1981, he started Sit Investment Associates. Gene witnessed what Vietnam Veterans had to face when they came home. Fast forward to 2001, he wanted to make sure that current veterans did not receive the same welcome home, or lack of welcome home, that the Vietnam era veterans had.

He understood the sacrifices that military families were making and wanted to do something to show support for them. With his friendship with John Vessey, Jr., the former chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, they came up with this idea to give grants to Minnesota service members to show their appreciation.

When Gene passed away in 2008, his son Roger, a veteran, continued the mission of the organization.

By the Numbers

MINNESOTA MILITARY APPRECIATION FUND

Cash grant to say thank you for your service	\$500
Cash grant to Purple Heart recipients	\$2,000 - \$10,000
Cash grant to Gold Star families	\$5,000
Approximate number of grants since 2005	20,000
Total amount of grants awarded	\$13,300,000

Roy Mokosso

An annual dinner, with keynote speakers, serves as the highlight of the grant program year after year. John McCain spoke at the inaugural dinner. In 2022, Major Roy Mokosso was the MMAF speaker.

Major Mokosso enlisted in the United States Marine Corps in October of 1992 and served as an enlisted Marine, attaining the rank of sergeant. Following a mobilization in 2003, he pursued a commission through the Reserve Enlisted Commissioning Program and attended Officer Candidate School in Quantico, Virginia in 2004, where he graduated as the honor graduate of his class. Second Lieutenant Mokosso then completed the basic school and the military police officer course.

In 2005, he was attached to a military police company and deployed to Camp Fallujah in Iraq as part of Fifth Battalion 14th Marines Provisional Law Enforcement Battalion, serving as a platoon commander conducting convoy security, personnel security details, and security missions throughout Iraq. In 2009, then Captain Mokosso deployed to Iraq once again, this time serving as the assistant operations officer for Third Battalion, Third Marines Provisional MP Battalion. He has had the distinct honor of holding three company commands during his career and takes great pride in his time in service to our nation as both an enlisted Marine and as an officer. Major Mokosso retired in 2016 and currently serves as deputy chief, public information officer, chief fire investigator, and fire marshal for the St. Paul Fire Department.



These are excerpts from Major Mokosso's 2022 keynote speech:

I served first as an enlisted Marine and later as an officer. Nine of my 23 years of service were in peacetime. I was serving the reserves when our country was attacked on 9/11. I think everyone knows where they were at that time, when the planes struck. I was in San Antonio, Texas. I was there for training as a sales rep for some medical imaging software for medical records. Doesn't seem that important now, but at that time, we were stuck in San Antonio, Texas. As you remember, there were no flights for a solid week. So finally by Friday, another guy and I decided to rent a car and drive back to Minnesota, and it was really interesting. Our drive home, everywhere we stopped for gas or rest stations, you had people in business attire, kind of four people jammed in a vehicle, kind of hodgepodge, people thrown together, just trying to figure out how to get to that end destination. It was kind of an unreal time.

During the 12 years of my service until retirement, our nation was at war. Between mobilizations and deployment, life continued. I got married, I had two

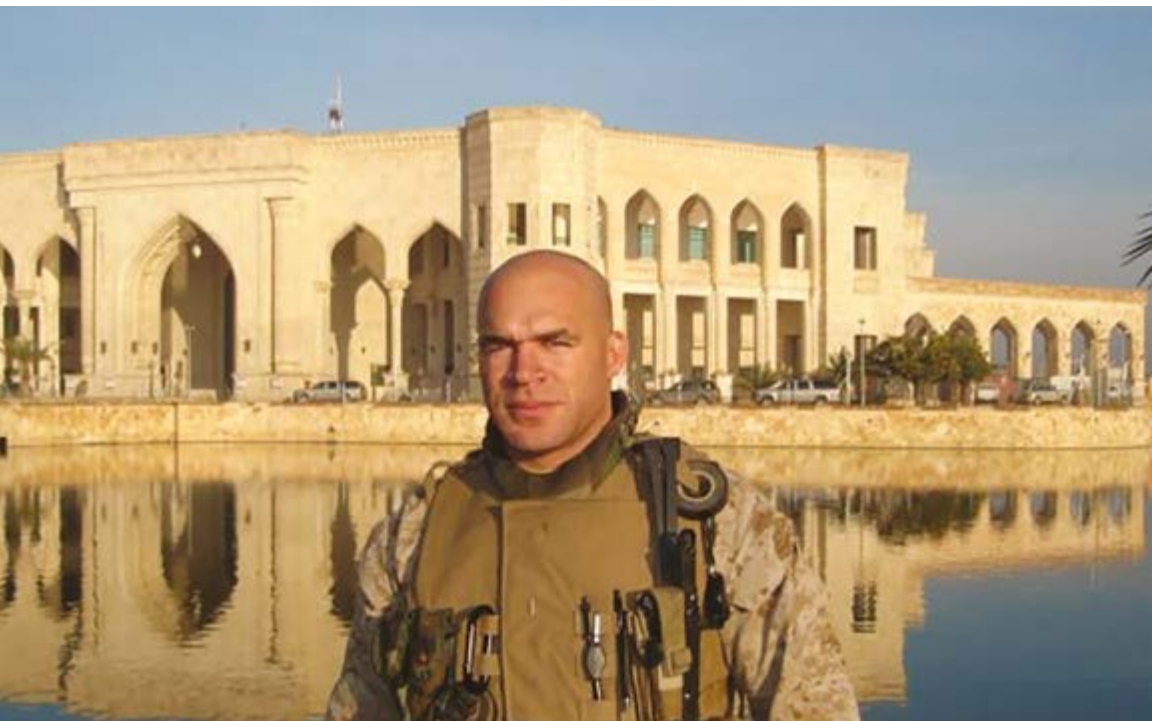
children, started a new career, moved three times, and lost both of my parents. In spite of everything service members are dealing with in forward deployed areas, life at home continues to go on. Anniversaries, weddings, funerals, reunions, holiday gatherings, missed children's birthdays. Missing an entire year of a child's life is something that you never get back. I deployed in 2005 to Fallujah as a platoon commander. It may have been one of the best years of my life, and I can say that because my wife isn't here. Conducting convoy security missions, personnel security details, running around Iraq, doing all these missions, and taking care of the wellbeing of my 42 Marines and sailors, it seemed like what I was put on this earth to do.

My table over there is full of Marines from that deployment in 2005. Marines activated and deployed from the military police unit, the Marine Reserve Unit, just down the road here at Fort Snelling. This has been great for us because when you're looking at a platoon of 40 Marines and being able to get 10 together; that's 25 percent of our platoon and serves as a great opportunity and kind of mini reunion. So, I say that we were ordinary guys and I truly do mean that. We're guys just kind of cobbled together and thrust into a combat zone and given all these missions. You get to know each other during a two or three month work-up and then you go deploy together. So, I'm eternally grateful for that time together with them.

I'm proud of having served in Iraq, especially during the time of their first Democratic elections. It's something I can always say that I was a part of. Nearly 60 percent of the population showed up to vote. The voter turnout was amazing, and they feared the risk of death. Voter turnout there was higher than our elections at that time. They feared threats of death from al-Qaeda. They traveled great distances. They stood in long lines and they waited and they made their mark with ink, because literacy rates were very low in the country. So then that mark was on their hands for days after, marking them as people who had voted, further risking their lives and putting their lives in peril.

It was amazing to see democracy come to a country and happen for the first time, and again, I will forever remember being a very small part of that. Later deployments, I had an opportunity to deploy, and I was in charge of military working dogs in the Anbar province. I had 45 dogs and 45 handlers throughout

Anbar that conducted all kinds of different missions. These special dogs were able to sniff out drugs, people, and explosives. Seeing them work operationally in the field was amazing, so just another unique opportunity. As much as I've gained from my experience in the Marines, I've also tried to pay it back a little. At some point, you realize you have an opportunity to influence others, mentor others, help people along the way, kind of help the Marines that are coming up behind you. That pride, sense of belonging and esprit de corps contributes to our all voluntary US military being the best and most dominant fighting force



in the world, and that's amazing.

Coming home. Only those that have been gone for a long period of time truly experience what it's like to come home. There's nothing better than it in the world. Riding in on the buses, the signs, people tearing up before you even step off the bus, the hugs and just that warm embrace and just realizing that

you've been missed. That son or daughter that just spent a year without you doesn't know you, doesn't want anything to do with you. I dreamed of giving my daughter a hug. I left when she was one. I came back, she was two, and she wanted nothing to do with me. So, sad and unfortunate. We've kind of worked things out now, so that's good.

The events of 9/11 kind of shaped my career path or direction in different ways. I was inspired by the 420 emergency service workers that perished in New York trying to help or save others. It inspired me to serve both at home and abroad. I joined the St. Paul Fire Department in between deployments in 2007. Why the fire department, you ask? That's a good question, but my wife said, "You've got a couple things going." I had some opportunities with federal law enforcement and had a couple things going and she said, "Just apply for one job where you don't have to carry a gun." And so I did, and I got on the fire department and fell in love with the job. An ax and a hose, still pretty cool. So, it truly has worked out.

Following the murder of George Floyd in 2020, the city of St. Paul experienced 72 hours of civil unrest. The scenes there on the street were difficult to watch. I was unsure of where I was. During my time in the Emergency Operations Center, our operational briefing seemed like those in a forward deployed area. Many military members go on to serve in public service, and that was very much noted during that time. That strong network of veterans within public safety ranks, along with our community partnerships, was one of the reasons I believe civil unrest in our capital city was controlled after 72 hours, with the first 12 hours being the most violent. Our veterans, our military service members, they go on to serve in our communities and a lot of them do so in public safety and they continue to make just an astounding impact.

I use the word ordinary not to make fun of these guys over here, but it does describe us, right? People unfamiliar with the military will often ask, 'Oh, okay, that's cool. What's that tattoo about?' I was like, 'Oh, I was in the Marines.' And they're like, 'Oh, okay. What SEAL team were you on?' If you are not laughing, come see me later. And I'd have to explain some of these things. Some of the things that people see, or just their understanding of the military comes from TV, right? Or movies or things of that nature. In reality, Special Forces

accounts for maybe 3 percent of our armed services. The rest of it is ordinary folks doing extraordinary jobs both domestically and abroad to keep our nation safe. My 2005 deployment was the most dangerous deployment that I have ever been on. And of the 42 Marines and sailors that I had during that deployment, I never lost one. Since coming home, we have lost two to suicide. Larry Tyler, also known as Boogie, was lost to us in June of last year. Robin Soman had been a grant recipient from the Minnesotans' Military Appreciation Fund. He was lost to us in August of last year. Veterans have an over 50 percent higher risk of suicide than those who have not served.

Thank you for supporting the Minnesotans' Military Appreciation Fund. This organization makes a difference in the lives of Minnesota service members. The grants they receive allow them to do things like pay for school, fix a car, take a trip, pay a bill, and help out their families. I'm just one of many that has served. Thank you to the many veterans and service members, active and retired in the room tonight. Thank you all for your support with the men and women who voluntarily accept everything that comes with military service. Thank you.



Minnesota Department Of Veteran Affairs (MDVA)

MDVA message from September 3, 2020



Suicide has claimed the lives of more than 100 Minnesota Veterans per year during the past five years. Suicide is a national public health problem that disproportionately affects those who serve in our nation's armed forces. For Veterans, the suicide rate is 1.5 times higher and the female Veteran suicide rate is 2.2 times higher than the general population.

As this rate continues to increase, especially among younger Veterans, the Minnesota Department of Veterans Affairs (MDVA) is collaborating with others to identify the root causes of Veteran suicide and create an innovative, cooperative way to reverse this trend. We are working toward zero Veteran deaths by suicide in Minnesota.

To support this effort, Minnesota is participating in the "Governor's Challenge" to eliminate Veteran death by suicide, a collaborative effort with the United States Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), Veterans Health Administration (VHA), and the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA). For several years, SAMHSA has partnered with the VA to bring the "Governor's Challenge to Prevent Suicide Among Service Members, Veterans, and their Families" to states and communities across the nation. This collaboration uses a public health approach – meaning we all can help – to reduce suicide. We are confident that using a collaborative approach – like our work to end Veteran homelessness – will position us to make a similarly positive impact in the area of preventing Veteran suicide," said Larry Herke, MDVA Commissioner.

The Governor's Challenge team from Minnesota recently articulated a four-pronged plan:

- Identifying and screening currently serving military, Veterans and families (SMVF) for suicide risk
- Promoting connectedness and improve care transitions
- Conducting lethal means safety planning
- Taking a comprehensive approach

Nathan Burr



Nathan Burr

Nathan Burr was born in Lakefield, MN, moved to Alexandria, New Richmond and then graduated from Cold Spring High School in 2000.

I went to college to be an elementary education teacher: Loved education, loved kids. That's the path I was going down. I had no thought of the military at that time though I came from a very military proud family. Absolutely love my grandfather's service, my uncle's and my father's.

I was attending Saint John's College when 9/11 happened. I got off the bus early that morning and there was a TV set up in the commons area that was showing the twin towers. I knew at that moment that I needed to serve. So, I walked into that commons area and went, 'Someone attacked us. I can't stand for that. I'm going to serve,' and started looking at my options for serving.

I think, in that moment for a lot of people, 9/11 put a lot of things in perspective, and you got to see something in real time that made you go, 'Hey, don't take this for granted. Don't take what we have for granted because it can be gone pretty quick.'

I started out in a unit out of Camp Ripley, the 434th Main Support Battalion, where I cut my teeth in the military, learned a little bit about classes of supply and all the things that we do.

Did my first annual training up at Camp Ripley and met an individual that really changed the course of my career by meeting him. We were in a mass casualty exercise out in the woods at Camp Ripley. He was acting as a psychotic patient and people were supposed to figure out how to deal with him. I was an observer; and he was doing quite well. So, there was some laughing and there was definitely some joking going around with him on what he was doing.

It was disruptive to the unit that was training, but that's the role he was supposed to be playing, to get them stressed and to make those quick decisions. He saw my patch on my uniform and we had both gone to Saint John's, and he asked me what route I was going. At that time I was looking at armor.

He said, 'How come you don't want to do aviation?' I said, 'I've always wanted to do aviation, but I joined too late. There was no chance for me to make it high enough on the order of merit list because I joined at the end of my sophomore year of college rather than right away.'

He goes, 'Well, that's funny. I've got a piece of paper in my office that says you can go aviation.' I met with him. I had to pass a physical and an exam and then met with the aviation brigade officer in charge, and the rest is history from that point. Got accepted into aviation, graduated college two days later, was at flight school at Fort Rucker, Alabama, and spent just over a year down there.

Came back to Minnesota, prepping for a deployment with the Aviation Brigade. I had been moved to the medevac unit at that time. So, I got to deploy with the medevac as a lieutenant, as a section leader. We started off in Iraq and then a small portion of us, halfway through our tour was the surge in Afghanistan. In a matter of 36 hours, there were 20 of us and four aircraft that had moved from Iraq to Afghanistan, and we started flying medevac missions in Afghanistan, which was an unbelievable deployment for someone that definitely wanted to serve, someone that had trained as an aviator. Medevac is the best mission there is. We save lives, and we take people from their worst moments, and hopefully bring them to their best moments.

That deployment was the full spectrum of medevac operations from Iraq. Very routine mission set, very little danger at that time when we were there, to the full out war in Afghanistan when we were there.

From that, I came home and knew that the military was the route for me. I absolutely loved it. I loved the camaraderie, I loved the leadership, I loved the opportunities that it had, so I did what I could to get a full-time position. Started off working some projects up at Camp Ripley and then got hired on as the medevac officer in charge, in St. Cloud.

Then from there, I have had multiple positions across the full-time spectrum in the Minnesota Guard. My last deployment in 2018, 2019, I had the honor of being the commander of that same medevac unit that I first deployed with, and took them over to Kuwait, Iraq, Syria, and Jordan.

We had locations in all of those countries to do medevac. Again, it was the full gamut of medevac coverage. Again, you're in Kuwait, very routine, very civilian-like medevac coverage. Then we had individuals in Jordan and Syria as well, which was at that time, a much more intense situation.

Then I came back from that and have spent some time in recruiting command to help share my story to others and try to get them to have the same passion for the Minnesota Guard, as well as time at the 34th Infantry Division, and then now at our state headquarters.

Veterans Memorial Park of Blaine

The mission of the Veterans Memorial Park of Blaine, is to pay tribute to the service and sacrifice of our nation's Service Members, Veterans and their families, to honor their bravery, courage, and sacrifice, and to educate about the cost of freedom so that time will not dim the glory of their deeds.

I first was exposed to it in late 2019, early 2020 as a member of a VFW Honor Guard Rifle Squad. Our VFW was on the verge of closing its doors, and we were looking for a veteran service organization to help support so we could continue to do the services for veterans that had passed.

We connected with the Blaine Yellow Ribbon Team, which introduced us to Steve Guider, the President of Veterans Memorial Park. He had grand ideas for the park and said, 'Hey, I want an Honor Guard Rifle Squad that is permanently assigned here, to the park for the events that we do.'

That really started my relationship with the park.

I've seen the park open its arms to any service member, to any community member that wants to learn, or wants to just have a little time to reflect. I've driven past it quite often, to and from work, and it's amazing how many times you can pull up and just see someone sitting on a bench.

They may be at that bench at the moment, but they definitely are not there in their mind. You can tell that they're someplace else, remembering, honoring and just being part of it.

The park has opened up for me the opportunity to build relationships with people I never thought I would have, local politicians, other veterans from multiple eras. Meeting World War II veterans that were on the first landing at D-Day. Not having to talk about the experience, but just seeing the experience in his eyes and just knowing that, what he did, to allow us to continue to serve, it solidifies why I do what I do, to be able to see those things.

Both my son, Tucker, and my daughter, Tegan, have been to the park. Every once in a while it's a planned stop because of a ceremony or a service, but sometimes if we're just driving by, it's a quick stop to walk through and see how things are.

Every time it stirs a question. 'Hey, what's that? Why is that gentleman holding that item in one of the pictures?' Then you can explain it. More so for me it's, 'Hey daddy, have you been there, have you seen that?' To be able to talk through some of those things. It has that atmosphere. It can be as peaceful as you want it to be, but it also can have energy. It has the flowers, it has the trees, it has the flags flying.

Then it's also a place where family and children can see the emotion. It doesn't necessarily have to be crying or breaking down, but they can see that things matter when you're there.

Annette Kuyper

By Al Zdon

Wars are not just fought on the battlefield, they are fought in every hometown in the nation.

In 21st-century wars, the National Guard and military Reserves provided a significant portion of the person power needed to get the job done. When it was all regular army or Marines or Navy, most of the deployed came from military bases and thus had a built-in support network of sorts.

In the case of the National Guard, each soldier comes from his or her own city, town, and neighborhood. It was necessary to create a support group that made sense and made a difference.

Annette Kuyper was a major player in developing organized support for Minnesota's deployed soldiers.

Kuyper grew up in Bloomington, married and had two sons. Both sons and her husband are peace officers. She was training and development manager for Target Corporation.

The Kuypers' son, Jared, joined the National Guard in 2003 right out of high school. He had been told, pre-9/11, by a recruiter that Minnesota Guard units never deployed.

“So he deployed with the 34th Red Bull Battalion in 2005, which was the group that was deployed for 22 months.”

Sergeant First Class Jared Kuyper had just moved to Mankato, where he was going to college, when he got the letter he would be deploying in October. “The night before they deployed, they brought all the families together, and he had volunteered me to be his Family Readiness Group Leader. I didn't even know what that meant. I didn't know anything about it.”

Annette Kuyper found herself in charge of helping the 170 families for his signal battalion out of Rosemount. Plus she was dealing with the absence of her own son.

“The feeling of putting your 19-year-old son on a bus to fight in a war never leaves you. I remember one of the last sights when his bus was leaving a soldier just handing his baby

down to his wife at the door of the bus. Being raised in Minnesota, you never think how war can impact a family.”

Why did he volunteer her? “Because he knew I would be organized and would be a bossy leader.” A week later she was in New Ulm for group leader training. “We had to learn how to take care of the families left behind.”

Kuyper’s first duty was to get to know the families, which were spread all over Minnesota. “It was a learning experience. For one, I didn’t know how isolated our families were during a deployment. Many of them didn’t know their churches or their neighbors. They were really alone.

“So we were gathering the families and seeing what kind of resources I could get for them, which in 2005 weren’t very many. We didn’t have a military base here in Minnesota. We didn’t really have the support structure we do now. It was a matter of finding the VFWs and the American Legions and the churches that could help a family that was in crisis.”

Communication with the soldiers was difficult in those days. The soldiers could call out, but the families couldn’t call them. The families had little clue what their sons and daughters were doing in Iraq.

Kuyper later learned that Jared was helping escort the food and fuel convoys, and that he and his team would also head out into the desert to set up a radio relay station.

Families could set up times to see the soldiers on the screen, but they would have to type their conversation.

“It shocked me how ill-prepared they were for deployments and how ill-prepared they were to have support systems. I said to my husband that I feel like I grew up in a bubble because we always had family support, church support, neighbor support, and now I was meeting families that had nothing. They just didn’t know people that could help them.”

The great need helped Kuyper and others to form a strong family readiness group. “We got mothers and fathers involved and we really surrounded those young, married spouses, most of them female, with a lot of support.”

The Guard at this time began some preliminary talk about some kind of yellow ribbon support group that would help the soldiers before, during and after their deployments. “So in addition to my family readiness group leadership, I started volunteering with the Minnesota National Guard. Kuyper was able to bring in her Target Corporation team to develop training for the Yellow Ribbon program.” It was a reintegration program.

Kuyper became a speaker around the state talking about what it’s really like to be a mother with a son deployed in a hostile situation.

“One day my son’s convoy was attacked and we all knew that no one was killed, but we didn’t know anything else. That day I went to a meeting at Target where people were fighting over the size of their cubicles for an hour. I just remember thinking, ‘You people have no idea what’s going on.’

“I’m worried about how my son is, and you’re fighting over your cubicles. I just remember that disconnect of not being supported in my workplace.”

She left that meeting and called another mom and they set up a military mothers’ support group at Target. The group is still going.

That led to Target beginning an employee resource service group, an idea that soon spread around the state with employers.

Kuyper gives great credit to state Guard Chaplain John Morris who traveled around the state telling communities how they could support their Guard members. Kuyper would speak from the perspective of a parent.

“We’d get the community all fired up but then we would just leave. We weren’t giving a blueprint to the communities as to how they could really, really help. From that came the process of going into a community and showing them a black-and-white way they could become a Yellow Ribbon community. The University of Minnesota was involved.”

The VA Medical Center was also studying Red Bull soldiers, the ones who had been on the Long Deployment, and tried to find ways for these men and women to better fit back in with their families and with their workplace.

“It was simple, simple things. Like community leaders showing support. Like faith-based organizations sharing resources. Like schools supporting their children.”

Kuyper lived in Farmington, and that city became a kind of guinea pig for the Yellow Ribbon approach. They advertised in the local newspaper and 50 people showed up for a meeting. Farmington became the first official Yellow Ribbon community, declared by Governor Tim Pawlenty.

“I had seen how isolated some of those families were, and I had seen how effective a community network could be when we all worked together.”

One example she remembered was when a soldier came home to a broken refrigerator and no money to buy a new one. “I reached out to the Yellow Ribbon networks across the state, and in 17 minutes, I had six brand new refrigerators willing to be delivered. We knew we had something good then.”

Kuyper defined Beyond the Yellow Ribbon. “It’s a grassroots program which asks communities, counties, and companies to synchronize efforts with military support groups to support all Minnesotans who are military-connected and who all work together.”

The group, for instance, found out about a military veteran who was isolated in his room. In one day, they had set up people to visit him regularly, including fellow Navy veterans from the community.

The veteran was invited to be a special guest at an all-star softball game, but the hot weather prevented him from attending. Instead, the whole team went to his room to visit. “There’s no service member or veteran of a military family that could be isolated or alone if the Yellow Ribbon network knows about them and can connect them to services.”

Kuyper also talks of how General Bill Leader of the Minnesota Guard helped her form company support groups. Again, Target was the guinea pig, establishing, for example, a company policy that Guard members on deployment would not be penalized in any financial way.

In 2010, Kuyper became Director of Military Outreach for the Minnesota Department of Military Affairs. “They got sick of me as a volunteer and decided to hire me.”

The Guard now partners with 84 companies in Minnesota who have achieved Yellow Ribbon status. The companies try to improve recruitment of veterans, retaining those veterans, and supporting them when they are deployed.

The community and company Yellow Ribbon groups meet at least once a year to share best practices and to learn.

Kuyper sees the network of Yellow Ribbon companies and communities as a key to bringing people together. “We’re all working together and we are able to educate everybody about what it’s like to go through a deployment.”

Now that deployments are fewer and the call on Guard and Reservists is less, does that mean an end to the Yellow Ribbon network? “There will always be new people moving in, there are elderly veterans to help. It’s going to be a never-ending opportunity for us to support our communities.”



Tom Lyons

Annette Kuyper



Ashley Barber

Katie Morsch

Takisha Hunt

Mahsima Alkamooneh

Jessica Stiffarm



Charles Kapsner

The composition of the Minnesota National Guard continues to change. This is reflected in Charles Kapsner's recently completed painting entitled "Women on Guard." The painting is on display at the Minnesota Military and Veterans Museum at Camp Ripley.

"Women on Guard" highlights five women - Hispanic, African, Iranian, European and Native American descent - serving as citizen Soldiers and Airmen in the Minnesota National Guard.

The painting is an expansion of Kapsner's Veterans monument at the MN State Veterans Cemetery – Little Falls.

The women, who serve as models for these paintings, are the focus – and their stories show their multi-layered, multi-modal identities as service members of the Minnesota National Guard and their roles aside from the Guard – not separate from one another but melded together.

The painting blends their Guard life and other elements of their life with props chosen by each model.

"People are paramount to our success and are the most significant reason your Guard has the recognition as a premier organization. We continue to focus on diversity, inclusion, and equity continuing to make significant strides in this area. In 2011, women comprised 16.2 percent of the Minnesota National Guard, and now females fill our ranks at more than 20 percent. Diversity in our organization lends to a diversity of thought, yielding innovative and creative solutions for complex problems."

—Army Maj. Gen. Shawn Manke
Minnesota National Guard's Adjutant General

"I look around the room and I see other women like me. We are at the table. It is our turn to ensure we make room at this table for others."

—Air Force Command Chief Master Sgt. Lisa Erikson
Minnesota National Guard's Command Senior Enlisted Leader



Tom McKenna

By Tim Engstrom

Tom McKenna's promising college baseball career in New York ended when his overhand curveball damaged his arm. His next stop was the United States Marine Corps.

He trained in close combat battle techniques and in 1994 became part of a Marine Corps team at Patuxent River Naval Air Station in Maryland and then later on a "Take Charge and Move Out" unit.

In March 1995, he was part of a six-man detail to provide security in Erbil, the capital of the Kurdistan region of Iraq. Rival Kurdish factions were fighting it out in what is now called the Kurdish Civil War, and the conflict drew in Kurds from neighboring countries. In Baghdad, Saddam Hussein and his large army were in power, providing supplies and forces to perpetuate the conflict. The United States had pledged to protect the Kurds from Saddam.

Just two weeks earlier, McKenna had been part of the withdrawal of Marines from Somalia. His Recapture Tactics Team (RTT) could be called in anywhere, but for defensive roles, not offensive. McKenna was the squad leader by now.

In Erbil, they encountered Army Rangers who were there to conduct evacuations for Kurds who had helped the United States.

The Marine RTT was there for a different mission—to protect an Iraqi politician who the CIA thought was worth protecting. McKenna's team provided security for a meeting in a small conference room off the lobby of a hotel. During the meeting, the civil war came to them.

A grenade broke the big glass window of the lobby and exploded.

"They likely didn't realize we were there," McKenna said. The blast killed one of McKenna's Marines who had been posted outside the conference room door. The Iraqi politician and everyone in the conference room survived.

When McKenna got back to Maryland, he began to notice health problems.

"I was a squad leader, and I was falling behind on runs. I couldn't figure out why or what

was going on,” he said. Supervisors made him go to Bethesda Naval Hospital, and doctors determined it wasn’t asthma. They found he had scarring in the bottom lobes of his lungs. They asked him if he smoked. He did not.

Meanwhile, he also suffered from post-traumatic stress disorder, or PTSD. “As a squad leader, to lose someone was difficult,” McKenna said. The Marine Corps prepared him for the loss of a fellow Marine during combat, but he wasn’t prepared for the actions of his chain of command.

“The executive officer blamed me for the incident. It left a wound that was really hard to take,” McKenna said. He and his Marine team drank heavily after that. One attempted to kill himself by crashing his car into a tree.

“We had practiced that drill a thousand times, then to get told it was your fault. We had to live with that blame, and it was the ’90s. We were not really allowed to ask for help,” McKenna said.

The drinking never affected work hours—but when they were off-duty, it was full-on self-medication. “There was no recognition that someone may be feeling something. You are just supposed to go back to your job,” he said.

The situation spun him pretty good. That and the health problems led to a medical discharge. He didn’t want to leave the Marines. “I fought it the entire way,” he said.

His best guess at the cause of his lung damage was white phosphorus from the grenade blast. A doctor at Bethesda mentioned seeing that kind of injury before. The incident at Erbil came at the exactly wrong time for McKenna. He had been approved to enter the Enlisted to Officer Program.

His final day in the Corps was March 15, 1996, just a year after he returned from Iraq. “Everyone I love and care about is in the barracks, and I am out, and I can’t even go inside.”

McKenna worked various jobs, and then moved to Minnesota with his wife at that time, who was pregnant. In the little town of Stewart in central Minnesota, he found work.

“I was still fighting and drinking and being a general idiot,” McKenna said. When his wife was in labor, there was concern in the delivery room about the birth. McKenna threw a

doctor up against the wall and told him to make sure the kid got out safely or there would be a problem. Security removed him from the room and made him wait outside for 30 minutes.

“It was during that 30 minutes I just locked up—put away all that PTSD, drinking. It was an important moment.” His son was born just fine.

McKenna split with his wife in 2000, but generally he was getting his act together. He moved to Bloomington and began working daily as a route driver for Coca-Cola in Eagan, then as a distribution supervisor. In 2005, he married Jessi, and they bought a house in Apple Valley.

By 2010, McKenna wanted to do something more. He wanted to help veterans. In 2011, he went to work for Disabled American Veterans of Minnesota. He was the department service officer for one year, working out of the Minneapolis VA Medical Center. Then he was a national service officer working at the Whipple Federal Building until 2016.

It was then that he and Jessi started Every Third Saturday (ETS) as a formal nonprofit organization. They had been setting up every third Saturday at the VA parking lot for years. They handed out clothes, footwear, toiletries, sleeping bags, duffel bags, backpacks, coats, socks, and underwear to veterans who needed it.

They began serving lunch, too. “It just kept growing and growing. We would get donations, and all of a sudden, our basement was full. Our garage was full,” McKenna said.

One of the Every Third Saturday initiatives is called Warrior’s Path. It focuses on “post-traumatic growth.” McKenna said it teaches veterans and their families to take their trauma and become stronger for it and to turn it around to help others.

There are 34 people who speak over the course of five weeks: experts, doctors, professionals, first responders, even an NFL strength coach. It challenges participants to grow.

“The Warrior’s Path is not a program. It is a course of study to learn how to drop labels such as ‘broken,’ ‘damaged’ and not be anchored to diagnoses such as PTSD,” says the ETS website.


He credits God and many great helpers for getting the nonprofit to where it is today. In the past, ETS received some Support Our Troops license-plate grant funding, but right now, it operates solely from private donations, such as the ones from charitable gambling conducted by Legion posts.




FRAGMENT FROM THE WORLD TRADE CENTER

The collapse of the World Trade Center towers on 9/11 resulted in an immense pile of twisted steel debris. The US Army used tons of WTC steel to build the US New York, searched December 25, 2001. Nearly 1,000 remaining steel fragments were stored with other artifacts in Truist II at John F. Kennedy International Airport in New York. The Port Authority of New York launched a program in 2010 to distribute the fragments to police and fire departments, other museums, and other organizations for use in memorials.

All local law enforcement in Minnesota, mostly fire and police departments, received fragments of WTC steel.

 The State of Minnesota
The state of Minnesota is the only state to receive fragments of steel from the World Trade Center towers.



34th Division Headquarters
Arden Hills

World Trade Center Steel Memorials

By Linda Cameron

The collapse of the World Trade Center's Twin Towers on September 11, 2001 created an enormous pile of twisted steel girders. Some of the steel was sold as scrap, but about 1,200 pieces were reserved and distributed to all fifty states and some foreign countries for use in memorials to honor those who perished in the terrorist attacks. At least ten locations in Minnesota received fragments of WTC steel that have been incorporated into memorials.

The 9/11 terrorist attacks left the 100,000 tons of steel used in the construction of the World Trade Center Twin Towers in a pile of twisted rubble. Steel manufacturers in China purchased 50,000 tons of the scrap metal for \$120 per ton. Additional scrap was sold to recyclers in the US and other countries, including India, Japan, Malaysia, and South Korea. The US Navy used ten tons of WTC steel to build the USS *New York*, launched December 20, 2007.

1,944 remaining steel fragments were stored with other artifacts in Hangar 17 at John F. Kennedy International Airport in New York. The Port Authority of New York launched a program in 2010 to distribute the fragments to police and fire departments, cities, museums, and other organizations for use in memorials. Guidelines for requesting artifacts were published in police and fire trade journals, among other resources. Pieces could not be used to create souvenirs to generate income. Fragments under 150 pounds could be shipped; those requesting larger pieces traveled to New York City to pick them up.

At least ten locations Minnesota, mostly fire and police departments, received World Trade Center steel artifacts. Some pieces were collected before the Port Authority's official program began. All of them are incorporated into memorials of some kind, most on public display, others as part of a department memorial.

Blake School

The Blake School in Hopkins, Minnesota has a strong connection to the 9/11 attacks. Blake graduate Gordy Aamoth, class of 1988, died in the collapse of the World Trade Center. The memorial, set in Spirit Plaza on the school grounds, centers around a 500-pound beam that came from the South Tower where Aamoth's office was located. The beam, believed to be one of the first to hit the ground, was donated for the memorial by the Aamoth family, who received it as a gift from the City of New York.

The beam stands amid large Kasota limestone blocks whose unfinished surface recalls lives cut short by the attacks. Those that died in the attacks are remembered in the spiral of granite pavers surrounding the memorial. From the 9/11 Memorials Registry, “Spirit Plaza provides us with a tangible reminder of our nation's collective strength and resolve. Though loved ones died and a nation was profoundly altered, our spirit remains intact. In the face of loss, we carry on; following destruction, we remember and build anew.”

Blake School held a dedication ceremony for both the memorial and the naming of the Gordy Aamoth Stadium on September 11, 2002.

Chanhassen Fire Department

When Chanhassen Fire Chief Roger Smallbeck read about the opportunity to request a piece of steel from the World Trade Center for use in a memorial in Fire Engineering in 2008, he sent in the request. It took months to receive an answer, but after about eighteen months of correspondence the request was granted, and a few months later the fragment of steel arrived. Smallbeck kept his request a secret to prevent any disappointment should his request be denied, so it was a surprise for the department when he unveiled the fragment in a staff meeting.

In October 2011, the piece was dedicated during a Chanhassen Fire Department open house event. It was later moved to its current location inside Fire Station 1 on Laredo Drive in Chanhassen.

Coon Rapids Fire Department

Fire Chief John Piper requested a piece of World Trade Center steel from the New York Port Authority in 2011, and received a 122-pound piece of an I-beam, twisted and burnt from the attacks.

On the tenth anniversary of 9/11, a ceremony was held on the high school football field for the beam, followed by a procession with a fire engine that carried the beam wrapped in an American flag to the memorial located at Fire Station 1, where a second ceremony was held. The memorial reflects the Twin Towers of the World Trade Center with two uprights, one inscribed with the words “NEVER FORGET,” the other with “9.11.2001.” The steel artifact rests at the base of the uprights, a silent reminder of the devastation of the terrorist attacks.

The memorial was funded by the firefighters union and the Coon Rapids Arts Commission. The metal cutting was donated by the Minnesota Waterjet Company. The Coon Rapids Fire Department is planning a commemoration to mark the Twentieth anniversary of the 9/11 attacks.

Grand Rapids Fire Department

In 2009-2010, Steve Flaherty, Fire Chief in Grand Rapids at the time, requested the WTC steel fragment through the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey program advertised in Firefighting journals. The department received a piece of an I-beam measuring about three feet in height. A local trucker, in New York City with a delivery, picked up the fragment and brought it back to Minnesota.

The fire department displayed the piece in its old fire station until June 2021, when it was moved to the new firehouse. It is part of a larger 9/11 display and includes a memorial wall featuring the famous photograph of New York firefighters raising the American flag at Ground Zero.

Gustavus Adolphus College (Mankato memorial sculpture)

Sculptor Greg Mueller, a native of Mankato, created his “#G-0048” sculpture while working as sculptor-in-residence at Gustavus Adolphus College in St. Peter, Minnesota. The sculpture incorporates two fragments of World Trade Center steel, embracing a bench fashioned from Kasota limestone from a nearby quarry. The sculpture provides a place for quiet reflection about world peace.

Originally installed as part of the 2014 Walking Sculpture Tour in Mankato, All American Foods purchased the sculpture in September of 2014 and gave it to the City of Mankato. It is permanently installed on the lawn of the Civic Center Plaza. A dedication ceremony was held on September 11, 2015 with local first responders in attendance.

Maple Grove Fire Department

The Maple Grove, Minnesota Fire Relief Association raised money for a firefighter memorial after receiving a donation from the family of a former MGFDF firefighter. In 2009, Department Chief Scott Anderson requested a small fragment of World Trade Center steel

to be included in the memorial.

The original memorial was dedicated in 2010 and included a granite boulder donated by the CS McCrossen company, a local construction firm, and engraved pavers honoring retired firefighters after their deaths. The department received the steel fragment in 2011. Two benches and the World Trade Center steel fragment, have been added to the memorial, which was rededicated in 2019.

City of Marshall

While in New York City on a work-related trip for the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency, Marshall resident Craig Schafer learned that pieces of the debris from the World Trade Center attacks on 9/11 would be given to cities across the nation for use in memorials. He and Steve Lee returned in 2002 to pick up a piece of steel destined for a memorial in Marshall. Ground was broken for the \$40,000 9/11 Memorial designed by landscape architect Gene F. Ernst in the spring of 2011. On September 11 of that year, the tenth anniversary of the attacks, the city held a day-long dedication ceremony that culminated in a fireworks display. The ten-foot box beam weighing more than 1,000 pounds leans at a one-to-two-degree angle toward New York City. The beam is surrounded by a circle of Minnesota Kasota limestone columns, one carrying a statue of a firefighter. A 1,000-watt light flashes into the sky at night. Three thousand pavers featuring red, blue, and black stars recall those who perished in the attacks; the blue stars for police officers, red stars for firefighters, and black stars for all others.

Minntac Mine, Mountain Iron

The 9/11 memorial at the Minntac Mine in Mountain Iron, Minnesota is the product of teamwork on the part of US Steel employees at the mine. They raised \$75,000 to cover the cost. Staff member Anthony J. Yeley contacted the Emergency Management Office in New York City to request two World Trade Center steel artifacts, and Minntac employee, Dean Malenius, designed the memorial. Minntac staff welded and polished the steel.

The pentagonal wooden base of the memorial measures five feet wide by five feet deep by six feet high. A pole with the American flag and stainless steel towers rise from the base. The steel rising from the center of the memorial bears the words “We Will Remember” and the debris at the base represents the rubble left after the attacks. High-powered lamps beam

light up 250 feet into the air from the center of the memorial. One piece of World Trade Center steel holds plaques and the other is part of the base.

Mound Fire and Police Departments

Mound Fire Chief Greg Pederson and Mound Police Chief James Kurtz requested a fragment of World Trade Center steel that was received on February 15, 2011. It is on public display in the small Fire Museum at the Mound Fire Department during regular business hours.

Rockville

Rockville, Minnesota resident Rosie Steil initiated the drive to build a veterans memorial and had the idea to request a piece of steel from the collapse of the World Trade Center. She and Rodney Schaefer chaired a committee consisting of members of the Rockville Lion's Club, Sportsman's Club, and Police and Firefighters that raised the funding for the combined memorial honoring veterans, law enforcement officers, firefighters, and first responders. Rockville's 9/11 memorial features one of the last pieces of World Trade Center steel to be given to a community and has been incorporated into a combined veterans and first responders memorial. The jagged piece of a beam, measuring six feet in height and weighing 988 pounds, is set between two pieces of black granite from Babbitt, Minnesota. The edges of the beam show where crosses were cut from it to be given to the families of the victims. The memorial features a flag donated by the Cold Spring VFW Post 6915 and Auxiliary. The City of Rockville held a ceremony marking the dedication of the combined memorial on September 11, 2016. The program featured patriotic music, tribute to the military, firefighters and law enforcement officers, a military flyover, and the Legion Riders motorcycle group.

Lake Crystal Fire Department

When Captain Mike G. Hawker of the Lake Crystal Fire Department learned that fragments of World Trade Center Steel were being offered to organizations for display, he requested a piece for his department. Piece number I-0077H arrived on February 4, 2011.

The piece was on loan to the Minnesota Military & Veterans Museum for inclusion of their traveling Post-9/11 exhibit.



Twenty-Year Remembrance



9/11 Day of Remembrance: 20th Anniversary

The “9/11 Day of Remembrance” featured participation in the national Tolling of the Bells, a reading of names of those killed on 9/11/01 and in-action during the Global War on Terrorism, along with a commemorative ceremony that included an aircraft flyover, guest speakers, musical performances and military honors. Other elements of the day included a documentary screening of *Resolute: MN Stories of 9/11 & the War* and museum display.



In recognition of the 20th Anniversary of the 9/11 attacks and subsequent Global War on Terrorism (GWOT), the Minnesota Department of Veterans Affairs (MDVA) created a commemorative coin as an expression of appreciation to Minnesota Veterans who have served since that fateful day.



The mission of MDVA’s 9/11 and Global War on Terrorism Remembrance Task Force was to honor and remember Minnesotans, Minnesota veterans and their families whose lives were forever changed by the event of 9/11/2001 and the Global War on Terrorism and to educate current and future generations about the sacrifice and high cost of maintaining freedom.

Roster of Task Force Members: Larry Herke, Rob Ecklund, Andrew Lang, Curtis Anderson, Randal Dietrich, Daniel Ewer, Allen Garber, David Hopkins, Mariah Jacobsen, Todd Kemery, Roger Reinert, Jill Stephenson, David Bellefeuille

Post-9/11 Veteran Service Bonus

Minnesota Department of Veterans Affairs (MDVA) had a long history of awarding service bonuses to Minnesota Veterans who served in America’s wars. Starting in 1919 after World War I, through World War II, the Korean War, Vietnam War, Persian Gulf War, and finally the Global War on Terrorism. MDVA recognized the sacrifices and courage Minnesotans took to defend our country.

The 2022 Legislature passed and Governor Walz signed the first-ever Veterans Omnibus Bill that included funding for a service bonus payable to eligible Veterans who served from 9/11/01 to 8/30/21. MDVA was honored to facilitate this program for eligible Veterans, currently serving service members, or Veterans' beneficiaries.



Joseph Votel

Remarks at the Minnesota 9/11 20th Anniversary Commemoration

September 11, 2021

State Capitol

Thank you for the opportunity to be here this morning.

I grew-up in St. Paul, served for 39 years in the military, and returned home to Lake Elmo afterward.

Along the way I had an opportunity to serve our nation in a variety of ways, – to including include in the intensified period since the attacks of September 11, 2001.

On that fateful day I was serving as the Commander of the Army's 75th Ranger Regiment— an elite, commando-like force of triple volunteers who represented the cutting edge of our national military response capability.

I was fortunate to lead our initial operations into Southern Afghanistan which commenced with a pParachute aAssault into the Registan Desert of Helmand pProvince on the evening of October 19th, 2001.

I still remember the feeling as we boarded our aircraft, with still fresh memories of the images of that very bright morning in September.

Each of us was filled with an element of trepidation because we knew what was at stake— the honor of our Nation and protection of our citizens. But with that trepidation was a healthy dose of pride and patriotism knowing that what we were about to do was right and just.

A lot has happened since then, ... and as we have seen over the last few weeks, ... it has not all been good. There are literally thousands of stories that can be told about this 20-year period.

I would like to talk about three of them this morning.



Joseph Votel

First, there is the story of the beginning, the horrific attacks that killed over 3000 of our fellow citizens in their workplaces or as they went about their normal daily activities.

This story is the cornerstone of why we gather here this morning. It is an important one to remember because it reminds us that despite the many blessings of our country, – our citizens can be vulnerable in the most benign settings.

It teaches us that we must always be vigilant and prepared to defend ourselves and our way of life.

It also reminds us that the world is an incredibly complex, dynamic, and small place. Things that happen in seemingly far off locations can impact us here at home. We can choose to engage or not engage, but it is clear that whatever that decision we take, we must have a national strategy that each and every American citizen can understand and support.

Second, there is the story at the end, punctuated by the sad events of the last several weeks in Afghanistan which have played out once again in tragic images that we have all witnessed.

This story seems to be a conclusion but I am not so sure. We still have American citizens and Afghan partners in peril who require our assistance. We still have concerns with terrorist groups who mean to do us harm. And, Afghanistan is again poised to be a platform from which terrorist organizations can attack us and our friends, cause instability, and perpetuate their toxic narrative.

This, too, is an important story because it reminds us that best intentions do not always lead to best outcomes.

It also reminds us that as powerful and capable as our military and Nation is, it is often the intangibles that determine strategic outcomes.

And, it highlights to us that with power comes responsibility and the need to understand, to choose wisely, to persevere when necessary and endure when it is appropriate

And it teaches us that in the complex world of 2021 winning will more often have a different connotation than we may have applied in the past.

But in between these two stories of the beginning and the end – is a third story that I believe is the most important one. It is the story about those who stood up and played their role when the nNation called.

They fought back aboard hi-jacked aircraft.

They willingly plunged into an inflamed Pentagon to rescue their comrades.

They dug with their hands in the wreckage of the Twin Towers to recover their neighbors.

They lined up to give blood in the hope that they could contribute to saving a life.

They formed citizen cordons for firemen, police, and service members making their final journey home and then cared for their grieving families and helped raise their children.

They greeted soldiers returning from long deployments.

They served honorably and nobly in far flung locations on multiple occasions.

And, in situation after situation, they stepped forward and did their duty, – often at the cost of their own lives.

These are the “in-between” stories.

It is here that we learn about the heroism of a young Ben Kopp who willingly advanced into enemy fire to protect his team, – becoming mortally wounded in the process.

It is here that we see the values of empathy, integrity, selflessness and sacrifice for the common good that we all embrace here as Minnesotans and midwesterners.

It is here that we see the better angels of ourselves rising to the challenge that the moment presents.

And, it is here that I hope you will spend most of your time when commemorating this solemn event.

I think it is essential for all Americans to appreciate this point. Especially now against a cacophony of voices suggesting that these sacrifices may have been in vain. They have not been.

We cannot allow the story of the beginning or the ending to overtake or diminish the stories “in between.” I think we must always view service and sacrifice in the context in which it is rendered.

I am proud to be a Minnesotan standing here among many Minnesotans, especially on this anniversary as we hear more and more about the “in-between” stories of our friends and neighbors as they stood up and answered the nation's call.

We have learned much over the last 20 years, and undoubtedly, we will learn more as Americans we always do, even if it takes us time to do so. But I hope the lessons we internalize and replicate the most are the stories “in between.” They are certainly what I am thinking about today.

Thank you.



Mariah Jacobsen

Mariah Jacobsen

Remarks at the Minnesota 9/11 20th Anniversary Commemoration

September 11, 2021

State Capitol

Good morning. My life changed on September 11th, 2001. I didn't know it at the time, but I felt it. You see, while I sat in my high school classroom, my father was engaged in a fight for his life and a fight for the future of our nation. At the time, however, I had no idea that the deep ache I was feeling in my heart was for a man I'd met as an infant, but would never again see a man whose blood pumped through my veins, a man who would change the way I live my life forever. I was born to Tom Burnett Jr. and my birth mother on January 31st, 1985, that my father was present at my birth and visited me in foster care. He and my birth mother decided they were not ready to be parents, and I was adopted through a close process by two loving parents and grew up here in St. Paul. But from that date on, my father and I thought of each other, often, though we were physically separated and did not know each other's names. Regardless, in my heart of hearts, I knew we were destined to connect one day. Unfortunately, however, our physical connection was not meant to be, at least not in this lifetime.

When I finally learned my father's name, I gained him and lost him all over again; in an instant. On my birth certificate was the name Thomas Everett Burnett Jr. Not only a brave man who had along with several other passengers, heroically thwarted a fourth attack on September 11th, but also my long lost, long loved father. In that moment, the ache I'd felt in my heart on September 11th returned. In fact, I realized in an instant that the ache in my heart was actually a hole, one that would be there for the rest of my life. I began to desperately rack my brain, hoping I'd miraculously recall a fleeting moment from my infancy in which he had held me, just so I could remember his face looking at mine. It's probably no surprise then that in the days, weeks, and months, immediately following my discovery, I felt lost. I felt connected to my father, but in a strange grief stricken way that I could not easily articulate.

How could I honor my father's formidable legacy? How could I ensure that

when we eventually met again, he'd be proud of the life I'd lived? Most especially, how could I possibly keep my father's memory alive when the only memories I had of him were secondhand memories? The answers to these questions were not immediately apparent to me, so I set out to learn as much about my father and his final moments as possible. And over time, I realized that I could memorialize my father and his fellow United 93 passengers by living a purposeful life inspired by their actions on September 11th. To that end, I would like to share three lessons learned from the United 93 passengers that I hold close to my heart today.

The passengers on United 93 were mostly strangers when they boarded their ill-fated flight on September 11th. However, when faced with certain death, they banded together to avert a bigger crisis. Politics, religion, race - none of that mattered when lives were on the line. Lesson number one: The people in your life are there for a reason. Be kind. We are all stronger together than we are divided. During the hijacking, the United 93 passengers quickly deduced that they were part of a larger calculated suicide mission. Rather than waiting for others to intervene, the United 93 passengers took immediate action. They began gathering information from loved ones, and they began assembling any weapons they could find. On one of his last phone calls to my stepmother Deena, my father said not to worry that he and a group of passengers were going to do something.

Lesson number two: it's up to us to change course when necessary. When a wrong needs to be righted, we must act swiftly and decisively. Lastly, although there were many acts of bravery on 9/11, the heroes aboard United 93 punched back at a moment when many of us feared that perhaps our country had been knocked down for good. The United 93 passengers did whatever was necessary to ensure their plane never reached its intended target.

Lesson number three: Even in our darkest hours, there is light. Even when things seem hopeless, there is hope and our country is never knocked out of the fight.

20 years ago, 19 murderers robbed nearly 3000 families like mine of opportunity, the chance to explore connections and celebrate milestones. But the terrorists on 9/11 could not steal our resolve. They could not steal our hope.

They could not steal the legacy of our Minnesota heroes who did us proud on 9/11 and in the 20 years that followed. I still ask God to send Tom to me in a dream just so I can see him again. I still look for signs of him and myself and my kids, but even if I can't see him, I can feel him. Each time I need to muster an extra ounce of courage, or whenever I'm struggling to find light in the darkness, I feel his encouraging hand on my shoulder. Whether you knew any of the brave Minnesotans who perished over the last 20 years or not, I hope you'll leave here today. Inspired to be a beacon of light on our country's darkest days. I hope you're able to find the humanity in your fellow citizens, and when faced with the choice, I hope you'll choose to do something. Thank you.



Jill Stephenson

Jill Stephenson

Remarks at the Minnesota 9/11 20th Anniversary Commemoration

September 11, 2021

State Capitol

If you would've told me 20 years and one day ago that I would be speaking to a crowd at the State Capitol about my son in the year 2021, I would've been hard-pressed to wonder why. But the 24 hours that transpired from September 10th to September 11th, 2001 altered my life and stole away a future I couldn't see.

September 11th, 2001 would become the driving force behind my only child's destiny. Coupled with the death of his great-grandfather five months earlier, the terrorist attack on America lit a directional beacon in Ben that would become his true north, something that he would never look away from.

My grandfather was a World War II veteran who served with the 34th Infantry Division Red Bulls right here in Minnesota. Because I was a single mother to Ben, my grandfather was the strongest male role model that Ben knew. They were very close. We were fortunate that the two of them got to spend a lot of time together. Ben idolized him and truly worshiped the ground that he walked on. He wanted to grow up and be just like him, and he told my grandfather that.

My grandfather in his infinite wisdom told Ben, "That imitation is not flattery, kid. That one day you're going to get a gut feeling of your own, that's going to give you the direction of where you want to go and what you're meant to be." Ben said, "Okay, Grandpa, when I grow up, I still want to be just like you."

I've done a lot of public speaking over the last 12 years, and I learned over time to not write speeches. I felt it was more appropriate to speak from the heart, but I write myself notes and bullet points and quotes that I don't want to forget, and I had everything done last night until I watched the documentary that was on, called Resolute. It was very wonderfully done. For those of you that watched it, I have no doubt that you agree with me. But what watching that documentary did to me last night is it wrecked my heart all over again. It brought me back to the point in time when I sat with my-13 year-old son in

his bedroom glued to the television and watching the horror that was taking place on American soil, listening to the death count go higher and higher.

Those memories and those pictures are burned into my brain as they are for many of us. I happen to have a little bit of a photographic memory. When I see things, I can't un-see them. I felt Ben's pain. I watched my 13-year-old teenage boy change from being incredibly sad and lost in the deep sorrow of losing his great-grandfather five months earlier, to becoming full of anger and a strong sense of revenge. 9/11 was personal to him. It mocked his great-grandfather's service to America. He made a vow on that day that he was going to make someone pay and that he was going to protect the world from that ever happening again.

Standing here 20 years later, the big question is, have we forgotten? I haven't. 9/11 stole my son's future. His life book ended at year 21, but not before he gave up his future to make the world better for people halfway across the globe and for the six men that were fighting the Taliban at his side, who would credit Ben with saving their futures.

I always supported Ben joining the military despite people questioning my willingness to allow him to do that since he was my only child. He spoke with such conviction on 9/11 that I knew it was his destiny and I could not stand in the way of what he was meant to become. Even now, 12 years later, I am more proud of him than I ever thought possible, and I still miss him terribly.

On the very first Memorial Day at Arlington National Cemetery in 1868, future President James Garfield spoke of the dead who had paid the ultimate price for freedom. He said, "For love of country, they accepted death and thus resolved all doubts and made immortal their patriotism and virtue." I know this to be true of my son, and I can't imagine it's not the same for each of the other Minnesotans killed in action whose names we have spoken today.

While our American forces were officially withdrawn from Afghanistan just under two weeks ago, tragically 13 more names were added to the list of casualties who died defending freedom and democracy in this 20-year war. To all of those families, please accept my condolences. Additionally, my condolences go out to every other Gold Star and 9/11 surviving families that are here with us today.

Thank you each and every one of you. We are a part of a group that no one ever wanted to become a part of, but because we were brought together by the sacrifices of our loved ones, we've become a new family. And their family I wouldn't trade for anything. I will never stop praying for any of those families, for any of us that have suffered losses because of 9/11, and I will never, ever forget. I can't. My heart won't let me. God bless every one of you here, and God bless these United States of America. Thank you.



Gov. Tim Walz

Governor Tim Walz

Remarks at the Minnesota 9/11 20th Anniversary Commemoration

September 11, 2021

Minnesota State Capitol

To our distinguished guests, to the Senators and Congresswoman McCollum, thank you for being the servant leaders, for serving the people, standing up and for making sure that Minnesota's values are taken to Washington. General Votel, you're a treasure. You are a son of Saint Paul. We are proud, and your time and service and your words today echo to our better angels. To Commissioner Herke and to the entire team, and our legislators, I want to thank you for this endeavor to make sure that we remember, we learn, we spend the time necessary to understand what September 11th meant, both in the moment, individually and collectively, and what it means going forward.

Today is the beginning of a year-long exploration of that. The vision and foresight and creating this space for us to gather as a community is critically important for understanding what happened. And to those families who lost loved ones on 9/11 and to our Gold Star Families, it's a fundamental truth of this nation that no one holds a more honored place in our society. Whenever you are present, everyone else is present.

To our first responders: Each and every day there are people who go to work in jobs that put them in harm's way, simply so that we can enjoy peace and the freedom that billions of people around the world can never even dream of having. And they do it without expectations of parades. They do it without expectations of anything. They do it out of the sense of being the best of who we are. So for each and every one of you, thank you.

Like most of us, I spent this last week thinking about what has happened in these past 20 years. And while it's natural to think about your own personal journey, it's also something broader. We are not an island. We are among others. We're among our fellow Minnesotans and our fellow Americans.

And I think of all those emotions I went through when our country was attacked:

fear, anger, confusion, hope, pride, a desire for revenge, guilt. As for me, I was sitting in room 114 at Mankato West High School right before school started. And in a typical high school, there was the noise in the halls, and it was a new school year. But then kids started coming in and sitting in classrooms and the TV was on, and those events started to unfold, and that room got fuller and quieter and there were tears and fear and confusion.

In the years after that classroom, I had the privilege of serving in this state's national guard. I stood one night in the dark of night on the tarmac at Bagram Air Base in Iraq and watched a military ramp ceremony—a soldier's body being loaded onto a plane to be returned home. And if you've seen it, you don't leave the same. It makes you wonder, what are we doing? What are we trying to get to? And then watching as all of you have been, the confusing last few weeks with the Taliban takeover of Afghanistan.

As we've been reminded today, it was this state that volunteered first when the nation was most in peril. From Gettysburg to Kabul, Minnesotans have been there and they've done what was asked of them. Ahead of this day of remembrance, I spoke with former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff George Casey, who served during this time. He and I reflected on the horrors of what happened. I think General Votel was right: It was more than the beginning or the end, it was the middle. It was the middle that mattered. It was the sacrifices that mattered.

I'm going to encourage all of you to understand this, lest we even for one minute believe that these sacrifices were in vain. These service members, those 40,000 Minnesotans, changed the world for the better. Some in small ways, some in profound ways. And they learned from the generation before them, especially our Vietnam Veterans who said, 'Never again.' It was because of that commitment that America learned to separate the war from the warrior. You don't have to agree with the political decisions that were made, but you better understand that those folks who raised their hand will do what's asked of them.

In Lincoln's second inaugural address, he made it clear we have a sacred responsibility for care for those who had 'borne the battle' and the families they had left behind. Because of that, they transformed care for Veterans. And right

here in Minnesota, there is the flagship of the VA Healthcare System, one of four polytrauma centers. Not only is it the best VA system in the country, it is one of the best hospital systems in the world. That is because Veterans deserve nothing less, and this generation made it happen.

But what I would leave you with today is that whatever brought you here to this remembrance ceremony, you came to do it in community. And many of us remember all the horror and the tragedy and the confusion that happened in the days after September 11th, but we also remember seeing neighbors who never put a flag out, put their flags out. We were united. I'm not saying we all thought the same. I'm not saying we all agreed on everything, but we understood that the things that united us were far greater than those that divided us. And today, you've chosen to come down here and maybe get that feeling back.

To honor the sacrifices that have been made from Gettysburg and beyond by Minnesotans, it's our responsibility to live our lives with dignity, with empathy, with passion, with commitment, not just in our own personal journey, but to our neighbors. As we reflect over this year, we can focus on the positives, on the many things that have made us stronger and better. Let's continue to work towards that one unified place. To our Gold Star Families, no words will ease your pain, but you have the gratitude of all Minnesotans. To each of you who came, thank you. So may God bless each of you, the great state of Minnesota, and the great United States.

John Harrington



71021

Commissioner John Harrington

Remarks at the Minnesota 9/11 20th Anniversary Commemoration

September 11, 2021

Minnesota State Capitol

Good morning. Those of us of a certain age can remember where we were and what we were doing on the day that President Kennedy was killed, or for me, in 1968 when Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King was assassinated. Since that time, there are so many other events that have brought us together as a nation, in awe or in tears. We become one during those events. All of those events, though, were eclipsed exactly 20 years ago on what would be America's darkest day. On that day, Americans of all types, white and Black, men and women, Jews, Muslims, Christians, forgot their differences and became one.

Today we feel what President Franklin Roosevelt called the warm courage of national unity. This is a unity of every faith and every background. It is evident in services and prayers, candlelight vigils, and American flags displayed with pride. We gather here today to honor and remember the fallen and the heroes whose names are written forever in the history of that terrible day, and to express our gratitude to their families for their sacrifices.

Today, we pay tribute to the soldiers, to the firefighters, to the sailors, to the peace officers, to the airmen and the medics who gave their lives in the line of duty. Colors have been presented, wreaths will be laid, candles lit, and black bands appear across badges. The reason for these ceremonies is so simple. It's written on the hearts of all of us who've ever worn the shield or the star who has lost someone, and it can be summed up in three simple words, lest we forget. Lest we forget their smiles, lest we forget their passion, lest we forget their dreams, lest we forget their devotion.

On 9/11, 74 cops and 343 firefighters made their final run. Their names shall never be forgotten. They're the names of people who faced death and in their last moments called home to say, 'Be brave and I love you.' They're the names of passengers who defied their murderers and prevented murders of others on the ground. They're the names of men and women who wore uniforms and

died doing their duty. There are so many stories of heroism from 9/11. EMS personnel, firefighters, peace officers, and ordinary citizens pitching in to save others. Firefighters rushing to the scene. Heat from the flames so hot that literally the earth and the girders of the building turned liquid.

And yet they went up. Up 10 flights of stairs and the heat's rising. Up 20 more flights of stairs into a darkness, and yet they rose. Searching for that next victim, searching for those survivors until that awful moment when the foundation gave way and all was lost. I remember hearing from a Port Authority cop who I knew in New York who told me the story of Father Michael Judge, the New York fire chaplain, who, kneeling on the ground in the tower, took his helmet off to minister to one of the fallen and then lost his own life as the towers came crashing down.

If 9/11 had a motto, it would probably be, "Let's roll." That's what Thomas Burnett, Jr. and Todd Beamer—husbands, fathers, and heroes—said to the others aboard Flight 93 that crashed in Pennsylvania. They decided to act. They decided that they would fight even if their own lives would be forfeited. It's sobering to think that when Thomas Burnett, Jr. and his fellow passengers boarded Flight 93 that morning they had no idea that the bell had sounded and that they would be called upon to be heroes. And yet they rose to the occasion as ordinary Americans have always risen.

In closing, I call upon all of us to remember the ones who were taken from us by 9/11, and to never forget the sacrifices they made. To my brothers and sisters in service, I challenge each of you to live each day as if it were your last one without fear, prepared to leave nothing on the field but the legacy of your bravery, your honor, and your love for those we serve. These heroes and all the other casualties of 9/11 gave us the ultimate gift and we are better for having known them and their sacrifices.

And for those of us who stand here today, let us celebrate the life of these heroes by carrying on their legacy in our lives. Let us commit ourselves to take action. As the poet Horace once put it, "Carpe diem."

Or more fittingly as Thomas Burnett, Jr. put it: 'Make something happen. Let's roll.' May God bless all of you, the State of Minnesota, and the United States of America. Thank you.



Larry Herke

Commissioner Larry Herke

Remarks at the Minnesota 9/11 20th Anniversary Commemoration

September 11, 2021

Minnesota State Capitol

I'm honored today to represent 312,000 veterans who call Minnesota home. In our state, more than 40,000 veterans have served since September 11th, 2001. The generations before us remembered where they were when learning of the attack on Pearl Harbor, the assassination of President John F. Kennedy, or the Space Shuttle Challenger explosion. On September 11th, 2001, most of us can recall where we were, who we were with, and what we were doing when the unbelievable happened. The world has not been the same since that fateful day. For thousands of Minnesota veterans, their peacetime military service was suddenly thrust into something called the Global War on Terrorism. I am one of those veterans. Like many who were serving during that time, I realized that my military service would now include defending my country against an enemy that was described by then President George W. Bush as a radical network of terrorists.

In support of Operation Iraqi Freedom, I was deployed for 15 months during a period of 2006 to 2007. I will never forget the smells of the desert, the extreme heat and the fine sand that made it into all your equipment, your vehicles, your billets, and sometimes actually into your food. I was fortunate to return home and to continue my service in the Army National Guard until I retired in 2016. Not all of my fellow Minnesotans were as fortunate. Since 2001, , 109 Minnesota service members have died in hostile action during the Global War on Terrorism. We come together today to remember these heroes. Let us never forget their sacrifices. About a year ago it came to me that we needed to do something on the 20th anniversary of 9/11, and I was authorized to put together a task force. The purpose of the task force was to preserve, educate, recognize, remember, commemorate and engage the public about Minnesota's history and sacrifices during 9/11 and the Global War on Terrorism.

The task force not only planned today's event, but they're committed to continuing their work throughout the next year to write the definitive history of

the war's impact on Minnesotans and to educate the public about their state's contributions. In light of recent events in Afghanistan, it's even more important to recognize that we accomplished our mission there. We went to Afghanistan after 9/11 to go after those who attacked us. We were successful in that mission. There have been no attacks on the United States in the last 20 years. Al-Qaeda is no longer a threat to us and Osama bin Laden and most of his leaders are dead.

Today, we honor and remember the sacrifices that the service members have made on behalf of our country. Thank you to my fellow Minnesota veterans for your service during the Global War on Terrorism. To everyone else, I ask that you take time to connect with other veterans who've served in this war or in previous conflicts. We become more resilient when we take time to connect with each other.

Larry Herke

By Al Zdon

Minnesota Department of Veterans Affairs Commissioner Larry Herke called together a task force aimed at preserving the Minnesota experience in the first 20 years of the Global War on Terrorism.

Herke knows a little bit about that experience. He was there.

He, like most Americans, knows exactly where he was when terrorists attacked the nation on Sept. 11, 2001. He was training at the Whipple Federal Building in Minneapolis when he saw two people standing outside the door signaling for him to come out of the classroom. He looked around. "I thought there must be someone else standing in the back of the class." But it was Herke they were after, and they brought him to an office where a television was showing news coverage of the first jet hitting the World Trade Center. Just then the second jet hit the center. "I told them I think you need to be ready to evacuate this building." Ten minutes later, the federal building was evacuated.

Fast forward to 2006. Herke had worked his way up from company commander to battery commander to troop commander to the executive officer of the 34th Division Minnesota National Guard 1st Brigade Combat Team. The brigade was sent to Iraq in 2006 with the enormous job of protecting the convoys bringing food and fuel across southern Iraq to the American troops in the rest of the country. The brigade was then extended beyond its mission year and served longer than any other Guard unit in the GWOT.

Herke retired from the Guard in 2016 and in 2019 was named commissioner of the MDVA and in 2020 formed the GWOT task force. "The Red Bull units were always among the top units that were ready to deploy. It's been 20 years now for this conflict. It's taken us to a lot of different places around the world."

The deployments have been tough on the Guard people, but perhaps good for the National Guard. "I think it's just created a much more professional National Guard, both on the Army and the Navy side. And it's really integrated the National Guard into the national defense, and the way the Department of Defense feels. They need to be maintained and utilized."

Minnesota is home to very few active duty forces, but the Guard presence in the state stands

at just over 13,000 soldiers. “As a home force, we are always ready to respond, and I think what we’ve found is most units were able to stand up quite quickly and respond to the need.”

Herke thinks that Minnesota is a patriotic state. “I think we work a little harder on the training than other states, so we’re more ready to go. I remember doing the readiness reports for the Red Bull units and we were always amongst the top units that were ready to deploy. I think we’ve got really good leadership in Minnesota and I think that plays into us being more prepared and ready to go and respond when needed.”

Herke also paid major tribute to the Yellow Ribbon and Family Support Groups that sprang up across the state. “They helped make this a success for the state and for the nation.”

There’s a challenge to collecting the historical materials to document Minnesota’s contribution, Herke said. “I think, unlike other wars, there’s not as many materials available. There’s not as many people writing home.” In the electronic age, soldiers and families communicated most often by phone and the internet, leaving no written record. “But I think it’s time to probably look at what was the contribution for the service members of Minnesota.”

That will mean capturing individual stories, first-person accounts, in addition to the historical materials. And, Herke said, the taskforce must also look at the role of employers in the state, and in the contributions of the communities, family support groups and service organizations. “The time is now. I think at this time it’s appropriate that we capture what’s been done over the last 20 years. There will be many different aspects to this so that we don’t forget the contributions of those service members from Minnesota.”

Conclusion



Final Thoughts

By Randal Dietrich

The 9/11 attack was our Pearl Harbor. Millions of Americans watched events unfold on live television and witnessed sights that cannot be unseen. In the aftermath, many were shocked, saddened, and scared. Many were motivated “to do something,” as Thomas Burnett had done on United Airlines Flight 93.

As uncertain as everything seemed on September 12, few of us could have envisioned a military response that has lasted more than 20 years. It is a response that has fallen disproportionately on service members and their families, who have often endured multiple, and sometimes extended, deployments.

Within these pages, General Votel implored us to not lose sight of the “in-between stories”-those stories of Minnesota’s 40,000 veterans who served between 2001 and 2021. There are lessons to be learned from their tenacity and teamwork.

On the homefront, our Vietnam Veterans deserve much of the credit for ensuring that those serving in the Global War on Terrorism were supported while deployed and welcomed when they returned. Minnesota companies and communities banded together to create the Beyond the Yellow Ribbon program.

With time, and amongst friends and family, we grew more resolute, but that resolve was to be tested time and time again: the anthrax scare, the scandal at Abu Ghraib prison, the Iraqi insurgency, the financial crisis and Great Recession, the rise of ISIS, the Covid-19 pandemic, the murder of George Floyd and resulting unrest, the January 6 attack on the U.S. Capitol, the evacuation of U.S. troops and Afghan nationals from Kabul.

Challenges persist for our Afghan allies, for Veterans who were exposed to burn pits, and for those dealing with post-traumatic stress and suicide ideation.

The story of Minnesota’s post-9/11 experience continues to be written. As such, this publication is not an end but the beginning of a systematic, on-going effort to chronicle stories in order to learn from them.

Locally, there are plans to open a new Minnesota Military & Veterans Museum at Camp Ripley. Nationally, planning is underway for a Global War on Terrorism Memorial on the National Mall in Washington D.C.

Drawing again from Dr. James G. Breckenridge, Army War College Provost:

When it comes to Middle Eastern politics and military affairs, we've struggled with problem identification. We typically don't ask ourselves what has not worked? We don't really have a grand strategy for the region. And because we don't, our policies are inconsistent at best.

We diagnose incorrectly. Too often we resort to simplistic answers to very complex problems.

There's been a Western over-confidence that we can solve Middle Eastern problems, typically through the use of force. And a lack of acknowledgement that there are revolutionary forces afoot. And those revolutionary forces are of long standing. These don't just go back to 1979. These extend back to the late 19th century and the final collapse of the Ottoman Empire in the wake of World War I.

We have to recognize that if we're going to use military force, it has to be historically informed. There are deep roots here and you ignore them at your peril. The insertion of an adequate military or transnational police force to secure space requires deep thought.

At key points over the last 20 years, it can be argued that our national leaders may have failed to give the military forces the deep thought it deserves. What is not up for debate is the fact that Minnesotans stepped up when called upon and, together, we will continue to face the challenges before us.

Acknowledgements

We wish to thank Brian Leehan for his authorship of *Roaring Bull: The 34th Infantry Division in the Global War on Terror*. Upon its publication by the 34th Infantry Division Association, the Museum hosted Mr. Leehan for a public forum in Bloomington, Minnesota. Since that time, it has proven a reliable reference for Post-9/11 National Guard history. By written agreement with the 34th Infantry Division Association, portions of *Roaring Bull* re-appear in this publication. The files from Brian Leehan's incredible scholarship are part of the archive at the Minnesota Military and Veterans Museum at Camp Ripley. Copies of *Roaring Bull* are available in the Museum library and gift shop.

Between Al Zdon and Time Engstrom, the *Minnesota Legionnaire Newspaper* has reported on Minnesotans in the Global War on Terrorism for 256 consecutive months. Their work as tireless editors of the newspaper serves as our first draft of history since September 11, 2001. Their depth of knowledge in writing about earlier wars enabled us to compare and contrast this conflict with others. More than contributing authors, they are valued partners in chronicling the veteran experience.

Dr. Kyle Ward, Brian Horrigan and Jon Van Amber have been instrumental in making this publication better and we are eternally grateful.

The dedicated team at the Minnesota Military and Veterans Museum works daily to gather and share the stories of Post-9/11 Veterans.

Sophia Kluschar, Jack Baumbach, Braxton Kerr and Benjamin Greshowak served as college interns throughout this process. They instill confidence that the next generation of public historians will be the best yet.

Thanks to Doug Thompson for his outstanding photography and image organization and to Linda Cameron and Sandy Erickson for their careful research and writing.

A special thanks to Deanna Germain for sharing her story as a nurse at Abu Ghraib prison and to the Minnesota Historical Society Press for having the foresight to publish it: *Reaching Past the Wire: A Nurse at Abu Ghraib*.

The Minnesota Department of Veteran Affairs and Commissioner Larry Herke led the effort to document this story of Minnesota’s more than 40,000 Post-9/11 Veterans. The volunteer Task Force he enlisted provided a diversity of perspectives that helped to provide a more complete and accurate account.

The story of these Veterans is made possible by their families who support and love them to the ends of the earth. This is a chapter that remains unfinished but from which all selfless acts of Veterans originate.



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Minnesotans Who Perished In The 9/11 Attacks

Gordon Aamoth
Max Bielke
Sandra Conaty Brace
Charles Burlingame

Thomas Burnett
Gary Koechler
Cheryle Sincock

Minnesota Service Members Killed In Hostile Action Since September 11, 2001

Sgt. Chad Allen
Spc. Joshua Anderson
Lance Cpl. Levi Angell
Master Sgt. Brett Angus
Staff Sgt. Travis Atkins
Cpl. Taylor Baune
Staff Sgt. William Beardsley
Sergeant 1st Class William Bennett
Cpl. Jonathan Benson
Cpl. Travis Bruce
Spc. Emilio Campo
Spc. George Cauley
Pfc. Eric Clark
Spc. Ryane Clark
Staff Sgt. David Day
Lance Cpl. Roger Deeds
Sgt. Nicholas Dickhut
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Spc. Daniel Drevnick
Cpl. Caleb Erickson
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Pfc. Edward Herrgott
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Spc. James Holmes
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Spc. Kedith Jacobs Jr
Spc. Matthew Johnson
Sgt. 1st Class Matthew Kahler
Cpl. Andrew Kemple
Spc. Joseph Kennedy
Spc. Brent Koch
Cpl. Benjamin Kopp
Pfc. Moises "Moy" Langhorst

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Sgt. Jesse Lhotka
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Matthew Lourey
Spc. James Lundin
Cpl. Conor Masterson
Chief Warrant Officer 2
Jonah McClellan
Cpl. Anthony McElveen
Spc. Sean McDonald,
Sgt. Bryan McDonough
Spc. Dwayne McFarlane
Lance Cpl. Dale Means
Spc. James Miller
Sgt. Kyle Miller
Lance Cpl. Scott Modeen
Sgt. Jacob Molina
Sgt. Darby Morin
Spc. William Mulvihill
Pfc. Andrew H Nelson
Staff Sgt. Andrew P Nelson
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Lance Cpl. Daniel Olsen
Sgt. Bryan J Opskar
Sgt. Kyle Osborn
Cpl. Sean Osterman
Staff Sgt. Dale Panchot
Sgt. 1st Class Matthew Pionk
Lance Cpl. Robert Posivio
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Staff Sgt. Patrick Quinn
Sgt. Greg Riewer
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Spc. Corey Rystad
Spc. Justin Schmidt
Sgt. Joshua Schmit
Sgt. Jason Schumann

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Sgt. 1st Class Paul Smith
Petty Officer 2 Nicholas Spehar
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Cpl. Curtis Swenson
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Staff Sgt. David Textor
Staff Sgt. Adam Thomas
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Capt. Ian Weikel
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Spc. Carlos Wilcox
Spc. Andrew Wilfahrt
Chief Warrant Officer 3
Philip Windorski
Staff Sgt. Kevin Witte
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Pfc. Jonathan Yanney

RESOLUTE: Post-9/11 Traveling Exhibit

By Kyle Ward, Director of Social Studies Education

Last spring, I was struck by how young the prospective new class of college students looked as they toured the campus. Talking with my current students and seeing this potential batch of new ones, it dawned on me that almost every traditional student on our campus had little to no recollection of the events of 9/11. What they know of 9/11 comes textbooks, Hollywood movies or family and friends who are old enough to recall that fateful day. While their personal memories are almost non-existent, every one of these students are living in a world defined by the tragic events of that day and the world it created.

With this appreciation, it was an easy decision to bring the Military & Veterans Museum's Post-9/11 exhibit to the Mankato Campus. I wanted to help our student body learn more about these events and Minnesota's connection to them. While this initial decision was simple, the remarkable ripple effects it had for our university would have been difficult to predict:

MSU has a number of majors connected to the events surrounding 9/11. We were able to specifically target programs such as our Social Studies Education, History, Criminal Justice, Law Enforcement, the ROTC, Political Science, International Relations, Psychology, Sociology, Ethnic Studies, K-12 Education, and the list goes on. This exhibit experience gave academic programs the opportunity to teach our students as well as to have discussions that are relevant to their fields of interest.

In preparation for the exhibit's arrival, MSU reached out to the New York 9/11 Museum. This was done with the hope that they might send some curriculum materials that could be shared with future Social Studies teachers. Instead (to our surprise) the 9/11 Museum Education Team offered to test run a new pre-service (college) program at MSU. This resulted in an educators' workshop in which a number of future teachers from campus and educators from our area, showed up and participated. During their time on campus, the 9/11 Museum representatives suggested that Mankato apply to be a test site to premiere their new film which featured survivors and explained to a new generation of Americans what happened that day and the impact it has had on our world. Through a partnership AMC Theaters, the university was able to host area high school students to view the film and explore the traveling exhibit on Friday, September 9.

An additional connection was made when the Minnesota Humanities Center reached out with an offer to organize a panel discussion (on campus) to coincide the exhibit in the Centennial Student Union. The panel, introduced by Larry Herke of the Minnesota Department of Veterans Affairs,

was a diverse group who focused on various perspectives on 9/11 and the Global War on Terror. One of the panelists was Mariah Jacobsen, whose father, Tom Burnett, was on the United Flight #93 that crashed into the Pennsylvania countryside.

The Minnesota Military & Veterans Museum and MSU, Mankato also screened the film, *The Outpost*, which was released in 2020 and depicts the 2009 Battle of Kamdesh in Afghanistan. This film was chosen because the uniform and artifacts from one of the main characters is part of the traveling exhibit, giving students a more personal connection to the museum artifacts and the movie.

Finally, one of the biggest reasons we wanted to bring this exhibit to our campus was that it gave us the opportunity to reach out to our current and former veterans. Not only those who were actual students at MSU, but those from the surrounding community as well. The MSU Library Archives and History Department is now working with the Minnesota Military & Veterans Museum to capture and preserve the stories of the men and women who remember 9/11 and those who served in the Global War on Terror.

With various university departments getting involved, the campus theater, the Minnesota Humanities Center, area high schools and the New York 9/11 Museum, this ‘simple’ program quickly grew into something we could not have imagined last spring when I watched those new underclass students get their first tours of our campus. The museum’s traveling exhibit, about one of the most significant days in world history, was of enormous benefit to our college students, the veterans who served from Minnesota and the community as a whole.



Beyond the Yellow Ribbon

Minnesota's Beyond the Yellow Ribbon program began with a vision to synchronize community resources in support of service members and military families. It was an extension of Minnesota's innovative Yellow Ribbon Reintegration program which provided training and resources to Minnesota National Guard and Reserve service members returning from deployment and their families. The objective was to create community networks capable of providing the same resources, services, and support that returning service members and their families would receive on an active-duty installation. Could a cross-community network provide a synchronization of effort to provide support to its residents experiencing deployment?

In 2007, the City of Farmington offered to partner with the Minnesota National Guard and the University of Minnesota's Humphrey Institute to identify ways in which key areas within a community could coordinate and synchronize resources to support, honor, and recognize veterans, service members, and their families. Farmington documented their processes, created procedures and submitted a commitment of support to the State of Minnesota. The City of Farmington was recognized by then Governor Tim Pawlenty as the first Beyond the Yellow Ribbon city in December 2008.

From the initial process documentation, the Minnesota National Guard developed minimum requirements for each key area within communities. Key areas include city leadership, public safety, education/youth, business community, veteran organizations, and faith-based and social service/medical organizations. To become a formal BTYR community, the community would submit an action plan commitment of support in each area that is approved by the State of Minnesota. Minimum requirements for each community area maintained the high standards of commitment and support required to be officially proclaimed a Beyond the Yellow Ribbon community.

In 2009, BTYR expanded to not only provide support throughout a deployment cycle but also to meet the needs of service members, all age and era of veterans, and all military families. Throughout 2009, similar state requirements were developed to form the BTYR company and county program. BTYR companies connect key internal organizational areas to synchronize support and resources to service members, military family members, and veteran employees, as well as connect company resources to local BTYR community networks. BTYR counties connect county level key areas to synchronize support and resources

as well as connect any BTYR community networks within the county. In 2010, the BTYR program was elevated as a key Minnesota Department of Military Affairs Leadership Priority.

Mission

The mission of Beyond the Yellow Ribbon is to establish and sustain a comprehensive community and corporate support networks that connect and coordinate agencies, organizations, and resources to meet the needs of Minnesota's military veterans, service members, and families in all military branches.

Through its community and corporate partnerships, Minnesota's Beyond the Yellow Ribbon program, known as BTYR, provides Minnesota's military community a wide range of support, including deployment readiness, family assistance and resources, youth programs, educational and career opportunities, and more. These partnerships are invaluable and work hand in hand to raise awareness, recognize, celebrate, and meet the needs of Minnesota's military community.



Companies & Organizations (as of June, 2023)

3M

ALLETE/Minnesota Power

Allianz Life

Ameriprise Financial

Anderson Windows & Doors

Best Buy

Blue Cross Blue Shield of Minnesota

Boston Scientific

Capella University

Capital One

Cargill
Center Lakes College
Cliffs Natural Resources
Dakota County Technical College
Deluxe Corporation
Donaldson Corporation
Ecolab
Experis
Faelon Partners
General Mills
Great River Energy
Hennepin Technical College
Hibbing Community College
Hiway Federal Credit Union
Hormel Foods Corporation
Inver Hills Community College
Land O'Lakes
Mall of America
Marvin Windows & Doors
Mayo Clinic
McGough Construction
Medtronic
Metropolitan Council
Metropolitan State University
Mille Lacs Corporate Ventures
Minneapolis Community & Technical College
Minnesota Department of Corrections
Minnesota Department of Employment & Economic Development
Minnesota Department of Natural Resources
Minnesota Hiring Center for the U.S. Dept. of Homeland Security's Customs & Border Patrol
Minnesota Sports & Entertainment
Minnesota State Building & Construction Trades Council
Minnesota State College Southeast
Minnesota State Colleges & Universities
Minnesota State University Moorhead
Minnesota Twins Baseball Club

Minnesota Vikings
Minnesota West Community & Technical College
Minnesota Wild
Normandale Community College
North Hennepin Community College
Northwestern Mutual-Bohannon Group
Prime Therapeutics, LLC
Prudential Financial Inc.
Rasmussen College
Regions Hospital
Rochester Community & Technical College
RSM US LLP
Ryan Companies US, Inc.
Securian Financial
South Central Community College
Southwest Minnesota State University
St. Cloud State University
St. Cloud Technical & Community College
St. Cloud VA Health Care System
St. Paul College
St. Paul River Centre
Super America
Target Corporation
The Goodman Group
The Legendary Roy Wilkins Auditorium
Thomson Reuters
Tokyo Electron Ltd.
Twin Cities Habitat for Humanity
U.S. Bank
UPS
USAA
Wells Fargo
Xcel Energy Center
YMCA of the North

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