



Jim Wilson

Objects for Deployment

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veteransbookproject.com

DEDICATION

This book is dedicated to those classmates from the United States Military Academy Class of 2004 who made the ultimate sacrifice in Iraq and Afghanistan. We continue to grip hands with you from the shadows. Well done men, be thou at peace.

FOREWORD

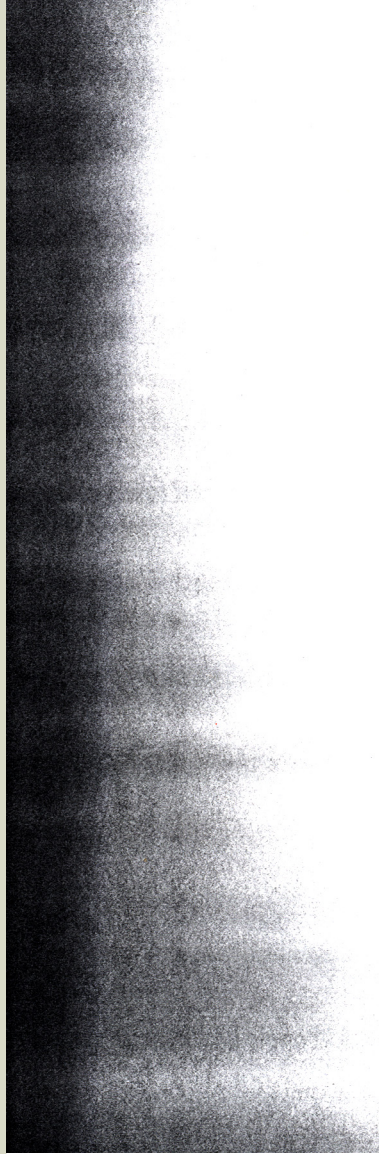
I have thoroughly enjoyed the opportunity to be a part of the Veterans Book Project in San Jose, California in September 2010. As I continue my transition from active duty to the civilian world, the workshop has provided me the opportunity to catalogue my career and reflect back upon these past few years spent in the U.S. Army.

This book combines personal stories and anecdotes from my time in the military, which includes periods at West Point, Fort Rucker, Fort Hood, Pakistan, Iraq, and Korea. I try to include historical background on certain places, locations, and events, but do so based on the context of how and why I remember them. The writings come from a point of reflection and are not based on journals written in real time.

I have tried my best to ensure that facts are accurate. The views put forth are entirely my own, not those of the U.S. Army or the Department of Defense. If you have further questions, please contact me at jimwilson@west-point.org.

FAMILY

FAMILY



First, I want to begin with some quick snapshots of family members who have also served in the military. I had three grandpas who served in World War II and a step-father who served in Vietnam. While I did not grow up a military brat, there was strong support in my family for the military and those who serve.

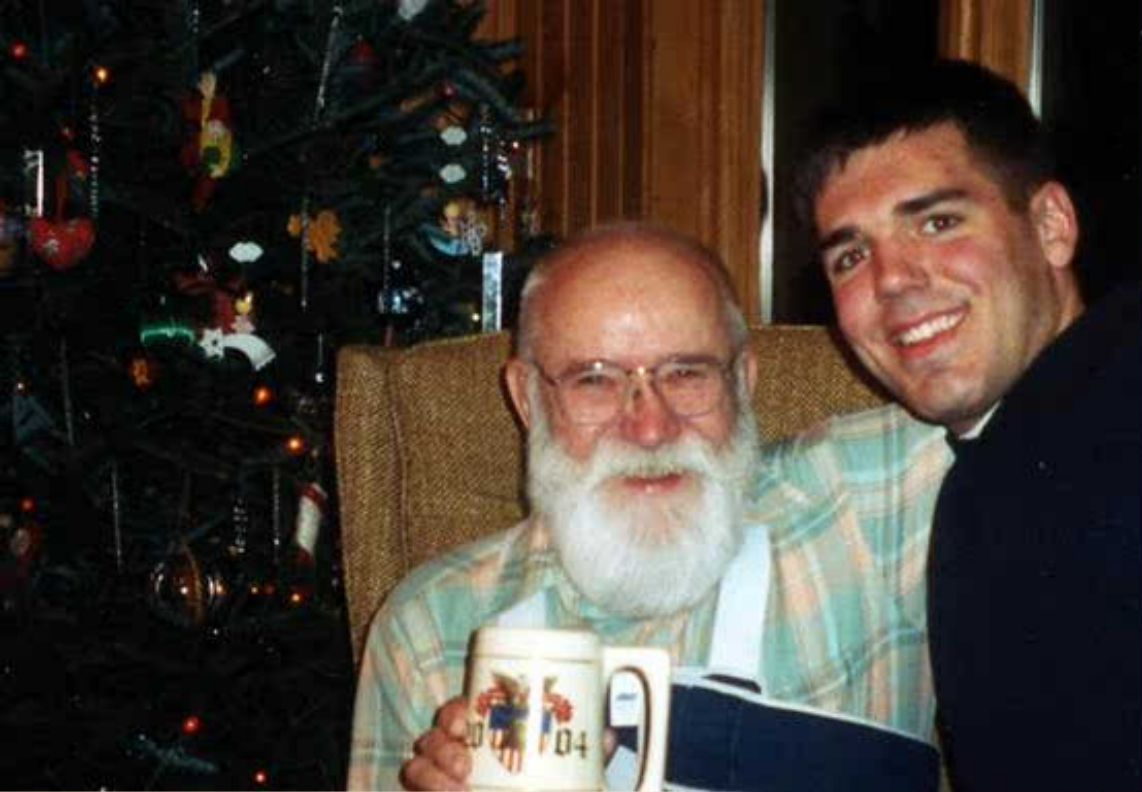
GRANDPA WALTER KLEIDON

Grandpa Kleidon served in the Army Air Corps towards the tail end of World War II, arriving in Germany after combat operations had already concluded. Upon returning from overseas, he married my grandmother, Marvel, in June 1948, after having met on a blind date in which my grandmother was a late replacement.

While I don't have many memories of speaking with him about his service, we shared a love for the game of baseball. Grandpa Kleidon turned me into an avid Chicago Cubs fan at an early age, and I have many fond memories of attending Cubs games with him at Wrigley Field every summer.

Grandpa Kleidon left us in January 2009, never getting to see the Cubs win a World Series. I know he continues to watch them closely.





GRANDPA FORREST STUEMPGES

Grandpa Forrest Stuempges served with the Utility Squadron 13 "Odyssey" from 1944 to 1945, after enlisting in the Navy in March 1944. His father, Eddie Stuempges, had served in the U.S. Army during World War I. He married my grandmother, Teresa, in October 1944 before departing with the Navy. Utility Squadron 13 trained in Shelton, Washington before departing out of San Francisco at Treasure Island for Guadalcanal, Hollandia, Samar, Okinawa, and finally, Los Angeles. He was honorably discharged in March 1946 after having obtained the rank of Seaman First Class. He went on to work for Kimberly Clark before co-founding Converting Incorporated.

I have many fond memories of spending time with Grandpa Stuempges: fishing and playing Boggle with him at the lake near his home in Osceola, Wisconsin, and his particular visit to see me in Colorado, when I was at the United States Air Force Academy.

Grandpa Stuempges left us in December 2006, while I was deployed to Iraq.



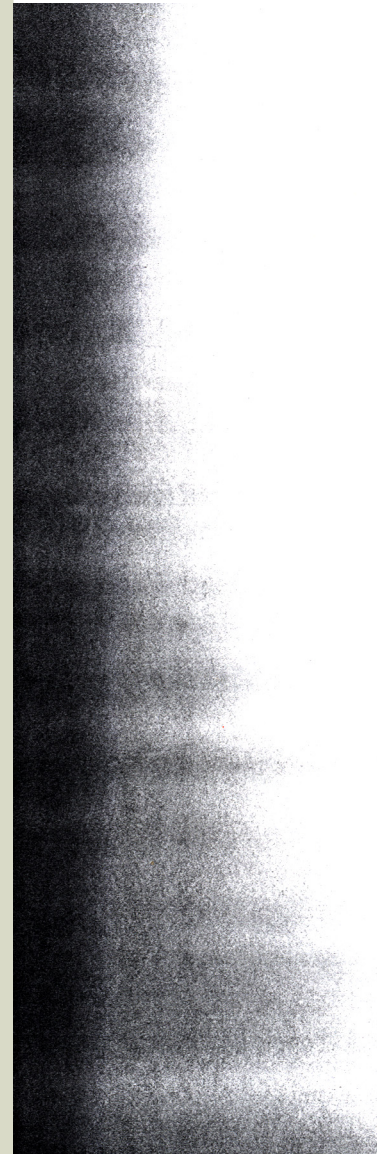
JAMES STUEMPGES (STEP-FATHER)

My step-father, James Stuempges, served in Vietnam with the 2nd Battalion of the 47th Infantry (Mechanized) "Panthers" in 1969 as part of the maintenance section. He was awarded 2 Bronze Stars, including one with valor, for actions on 8 April 1969.

The unit served in Binh Phuoc, Vietnam, among other locations.



WEST POINT



I first became interested in attending a military academy when I was in middle school and one of my teachers, Mrs. Joan Schultz, introduced me to the opportunity. In high school, I focused a lot of my attention on making myself competitive for admission to an academy. My first choice was the Coast Guard Academy, as I had more interest in a law enforcement role, rather than a military role. West Point always had appeal though - you can't help but be captured by the beauty of the campus and the history of the institution.

During my sophomore year of high school, I was diagnosed with spondylosis, a degenerative osteoarthritis of joints in the spinal vertebrae, and spondylolisthesis, an anterior displacement of a vertebrae. In laymen's terms, I am susceptible to lower back pain and problems. The following year, I tore the anterior cruciate ligament in my left knee while playing basketball. Together, these conditions/injuries almost cost me the opportunity to attend a service academy; they would later impact my military career.

I received conditional appointments to West Point and the Coast Guard Academy in the fall of my senior year of high school. Soon thereafter, I received a nomination from Wisconsin Senator Russ Feingold, but I failed the initial medical exam due to back problems and ACL reconstruction.

The Coast Guard Academy did not grant medical waivers, but West Point did. However, the waiver process was lengthy and I lost my conditional appointment in May of 2000.

My waiver went through in mid-May, and I went on the qualified waiting list. A few weeks later, a spot opened up, and I was offered a full appointment. The rest, as they say, is history.

For the section on West Point, I try to weave in a number of things that are particular to cadet life, from famous quotes and knowledge that plebes (freshmen) must memorize to explanation of events that are particular to the experience of a West Point cadet.



WASHINGTON, DC 20510

(202) 224-5323

(202) 224-1280 (TDD)

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THE UNITED STATES MILITARY ACADEMY AT WEST POINT

West Point's role in our nation's history dates back to the Revolutionary War, when both sides realized the strategic importance of the commanding plateau on the west bank of the Hudson River. General George Washington considered West Point to be the most important strategic position in America.

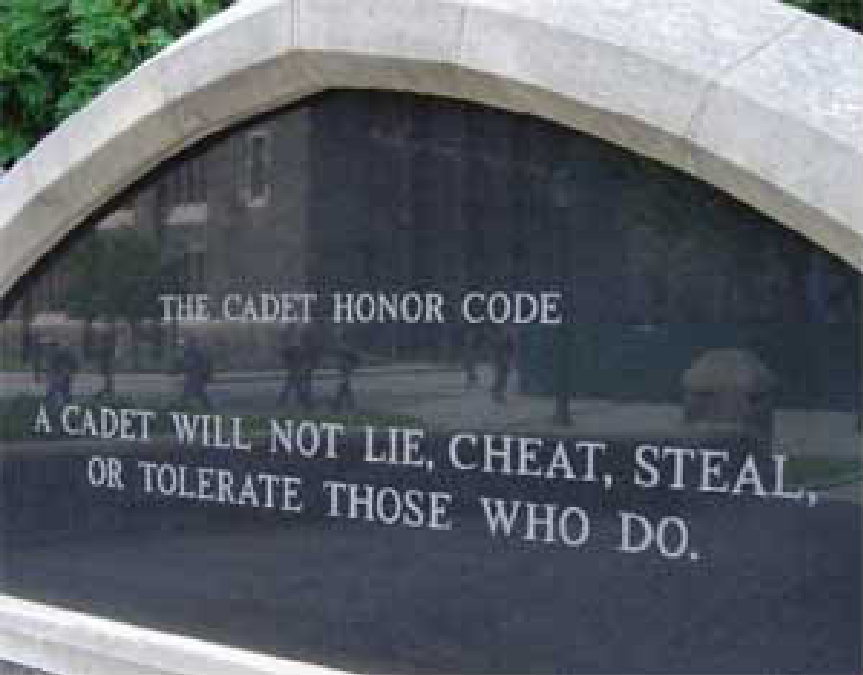
President Thomas Jefferson signed legislation establishing the United States Military Academy in 1802. He took this action after ensuring that those attending the Academy would be representative of a democratic society.

Colonel Sylvanus Thayer, the "father of the Military Academy," upgraded academic standards, instilled military discipline and emphasized honorable conduct. Aware of our young nation's need for engineers, Thayer made civil engineering the foundation of the curriculum. For the first half-century, USMA graduates were largely responsible for the construction of the bulk of the nation's initial railway lines, bridges, harbors and roads.

West Point graduates dominated the highest ranks on both sides during the Civil War. In World War I, Academy graduates again distinguished themselves on the battlefield. Eisenhower, MacArthur, Bradley, Arnold, Clark, Patton, Stilwell and Wainwright were among an impressive array of Academy graduates who met the challenge of leadership in the Second World War.

The postwar period again saw sweeping revisions to the West Point curriculum resulting from dramatic developments in science and technology, the increasing need to understand other cultures and the rising level of general education in the Army.

In 1964, President Johnson signed legislation increasing the strength of the Corps of Cadets from 2,529 to 4,417 (more recently reduced to 4,000). In recent decades, the Academy's curricular structure has markedly changed to permit cadets to major in any one of more than a dozen fields, including a wide range of subjects from the sciences to the humanities. ~ Source: USMA Website



THE CADET HONOR CODE

The honor code dates back to the founding of the Military Academy in 1802, though the code was not formalized until the 1920s.

A big part of the cadet honor code is the "toleration clause," in that cadets pledge intolerance for lying, cheating and stealing. Therefore, it is also an honor code violation to be aware of an infraction and not report it.

Cadets own the honor system at West Point. When cadets are accused of an honor violation, cadets conduct the investigations and a jury of peers determine whether an infraction has occurred.

An honor code violation can lead to dismissal from the Academy, or it can result in the cadet having to repeat a year at the Academy and/or perform other remedial activities.



GENERAL DOUGLAS MACARTHUR

"Duty-Honor-Country. Those three hallowed words reverently dictate what you ought to be, what you can be, and what you will be. They are your rallying points: to build courage when courage seems to fail; to regain faith when there seems to be little cause for faith; to create hope when hope becomes forlorn." ~ Speech Upon Receiving the Sylvanus Thayer Medal, United States Military Academy, May 12, 1962

"Upon fields of friendly strife are sown the seeds that upon other fields, on other days, will bear the fruits of victory."

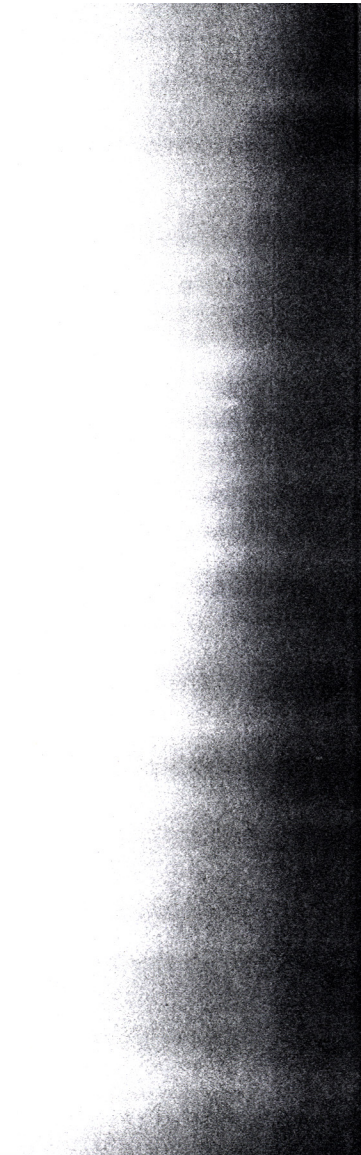
"From the Far East I send you one single thought, one sole idea -- written in red on every beachhead from Australia to Tokyo -- There is no substitute for victory!"

GENERAL DWIGHT D. EISENHOWER

"I hate war as only a soldier who has lived it can, only as one who has seen its brutality, its futility, its stupidity."

"If men can develop weapons that are so terrifying as to make the thought of global war include almost a sentence for suicide, you would think that man's intelligence and his comprehension... would include also his ability to find a peaceful solution."

"The eyes of the world are upon you. The hopes and prayers of liberty-loving people everywhere march with you." ~ Address to his troops, D-Day 1944





GENERAL GEORGE S. PATTON

"If you tell people where to go, but not how to get there, you'll be amazed at the results."

"No bastard ever won a war by dying for his country. He won it by making the other poor dumb bastard die for his country."

"Wars may be fought with weapons, but they are won by men. It is the spirit of men who follow and of the man who leads that gains the victory."



RECEPTION DAY (R-DAY)

Many of us have limited memories of 29 June 2000, or "R-Day" for the West Point class of 2004. In retrospect, it's a logistical miracle as the cadre takes 1000+ civilians and issues their new clothes and equipment, gets them haircuts, gives them shots, teaches them to march, gets them "settled" into their rooms, and prepares them for a parade and oath ceremony - all in less than a day.

It began in the football stadium -- Michie Stadium. After a nice welcome you hear the dreaded words, "please say your final goodbyes as you will be moving out in 90 seconds." After a final hug from your parents, you set forth on the long walk across the field, carrying the one bag of possessions you are allowed to bring. Life will never be quite the same.

The bulk of the day is spent in our new uniform: low quarter shoes, black socks hiked up, Army shorts (with guys wearing "the duke"), and a white t-shirt. You carry around your blue laundry bag for almost the entire day. It gets heavier with each additional piece of clothing or equipment issued.

At one point, we report to the "cadet in the red sash." Here, it is important to step "up to the line," - not over the line, on the line, or short of the line, but up to the line. And you have to do it with your head and eyes straight forward being careful to not drop your large blue bag on the cadet's shoes. The red sash denotes a senior cadet, or "firstie," and stems from an old uniform piece used to clean an officer's saber.

If you haven't already done so, you proceed to the barber shop to have your head shaved. Soon you're in formation for the parade and oath ceremony. Due to rain, ours was held inside at Ike Hall.





For the oath ceremony, we took our first oath of allegiance to support and defend the constitution of the United States.

CADET OATH

"I, James Wilson, do solemnly swear that I will support the Constitution of the United States, and bear true allegiance to the National Government; that I will maintain and defend the sovereignty of the United States, paramount to any and all allegiance, sovereignty, or fealty I may owe to any State or Country whatsoever; and that I will at all times obey the legal orders of my superior officers, and the Uniform Code of Military Justice."

CLASS PROFILE

The Class of 2004 "new cadets" included 1,179 U.S. citizens from every state in the nation plus 8 foreign cadets for a total of 1,187 new cadets. There were 195 females, 103 African-Americans, 92 Hispanics, and 9 Native Americans. The foreign cadets were from Cameroon, the Philippines (2), Jordan, Dominican Republic, Honduras, Kazakhstan and Taiwan.

As "new cadets," (we don't officially become cadets, or plebes, until we make it through the first summer of cadet basic training, or "beast") there are only four responses we are allowed:

1. Yes sir/ma'am!
2. No sir/ma'am!
3. No excuse sir/ma'am!
4. Sir/ma'am I do not understand!

We are given a book called Bugle Notes, or the "plebe bible." Any free moment is spent reading and memorizing the "knowledge" contained in this book. The "knowledge" includes famous quotes, military rank and structure, historical Academy trivia, Academy songs, and guiding principles. We are also required to read and memorize news stories from the New York Times, know the number of days until the seniors graduate and what was for dinner.

In the following pages, I include a number of the more memorable pieces of cadet knowledge we had to know as new cadets and plebes.

SCHOFIELD'S DEFINITION OF DISCIPLINE

"The discipline which makes the soldiers of a free country reliable in battle is not to be gained by harsh or tyrannical treatment. On the contrary, such treatment is far more likely to destroy than to make an army. It is possible to impart instruction and to give commands in such a manner and such a tone of voice to inspire in the soldier no feeling but an intense desire to obey, while the opposite manner and tone of voice cannot fail to excite strong resentment and a desire to disobey. The one mode or the other of dealing with subordinates springs from a corresponding spirit in the breast of the commander. He who feels the respect which is due to others cannot fail to inspire in them regard for himself, while he who feels, and hence manifests, disrespect toward others, especially his inferiors, cannot fail to inspire hatred against himself."

-MG John M. Schofield, August 1879

THE DAYS

"Sir, there are # days until Army beats the hell out of Navy in football. There are # days until graduation for the class of 2001."

WORTH'S BATTALION ORDERS

"But an officer on duty knows no one -- to be partial is to dishonor both himself and the object of his ill-advised favor. What will be thought of him who exacts of his friends that which disgraces him? Look at him who winks at and overlooks offenses in one, which he causes to be punished in another, and contrast him with the inflexible soldier who does his duty faithfully, notwithstanding it occasionally wars with his private feelings. The conduct of one will be venerated and emulated, the other detested as a satire upon soldiership and honor."

~ Brevet Major William Jenkins Worth

SCOTT'S FIXED OPINION

"I give it as my fixed opinion, that but for our graduated cadets, the war between the United States and Mexico might, and probably would have lasted some four or five years, with, in its first half, more defeats than victories falling to our share; whereas, in less than two campaigns, we conquered a great country and a peace without the loss of a single battle or skirmish."

~ General Winfield Scott

How many lights in Cullum Hall?

~340 lights

How many gallons in Lusk Reservoir?

~78 million gallons when the water is flowing over the spillway

How many names on Battle Monument?

~2,230 names

What do Plebes rank?

~The Superintendent's dog, the Commandant's cat, the waiters in the Mess Hall, the Hell Cats, the Generals in the Air Force, and all the Admirals in the whole damned Navy!

DEFINITION OF LEATHER

"If the fresh skin of an animal, cleaned and divested of all hair, fat, and other extraneous matter, be immersed in a dilute solution of tannic acid, a chemical combination ensues; the gelatinous tissue of the skin is converted into a nonputrescible substance, impervious to and insoluble in water; this is leather."

HOW'S THE COW?

"She walks, she talks, she's full of chalk, the lacteal fluid extracted from the female of the bovine species is highly prolific to the nth degree."

While some of this knowledge seems a bit weird, there is a reason why cadets are required to memorize it. Many of the quotes have a meaning behind them, and there is hope that cadets will inculcate the values and lessons expressed in these quotes. For things like "The Days," the requirement is largely meant to facilitate teamwork amongst groups of new cadets/plebes. We often had to recite "The Days" in a group, so it was important to make sure everyone was on the same page.

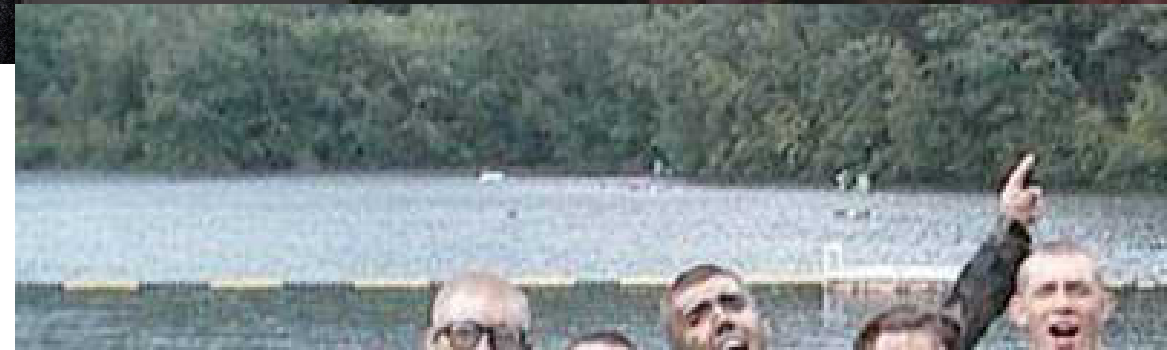
We now turn to looking at cadet basic training, or "beast," as it is better known. This happens the summer prior to your freshman academic year and it seeks to push people to new limits.



On the previous page, you see photos from a events we endured during beast: pugle stick competitions, rope bridges (where your buddy behind you losing his/her balance could really screw you), the gas chamber, and performing small-unit tactics under simulated chemical attacks.

Cadet basic training is run largely by upperclassmen who serve as the primary cadre. For beast, I was in 3rd platoon, F Company. Our cadre for the first half of the summer included CDT SGT Michelle Bridgegroom, CDT SGT Paulo Shakarian, and CDT LT Mitroka (picture on top). For the second half, we had CDT SGT Whittmer (pictured on bottom). A culminating event for beast is the completion of Warrior Forge - a 24-hour operation that tests new cadets' will and endurance.

It was interesting for my squad because we went from the short, petite Michelle Bridgegroom for a squad leader to the big, burly Luke Whittmer. Needless to say, we were all a bit nervous when we first encountered him!





During beast, I roomed with Thomas Dirienzo, a wrestler from New Jersey. Beast lasts for about 6 weeks, with the last week being held at Lake Frederick on the West Point training reservation.

The week at Lake Frederick was among the most miserable ever -- it rained relentlessly. And when it wasn't raining, the sun and humidity beat down on us. Tom and I had a river running through our shelter for most of the week and spent it in wet and damp clothes -- it made us really appreciate what many past soldiers had gone through in WWI, WWII, and Vietnam. It is very hard to imagine dealing with this for months on end, with cold added in.

At the conclusion of the summer, we completed a 15-mile road march back from Lake Frederick. Many old graduates completed the march with us, though most of them were dressed in shorts and polos with no ruck sack! As we approached West Point, the streets were lined with people cheering. We unveiled our class banner with our new class motto - "For Country and Corps - 2004."



TRANSITION TO PLEBE (FRESHMAN) YEAR

Upon the completion of beast, we were put into our academic-year companies. I was a member of H Company, 3rd Regiment, or the H3 Hurricanes.

While the completion of beast felt like an accomplishment, in many ways, it was only the beginning of what would be a very long year. A few days after returning to campus, we were officially accepted into "The Corps" during the Acceptance Day parade. At that point, we were no longer "new cadets," but "plebes." Really, it was a difficult promotion to appreciate. We maintained many of the hassles (duties, knowledge, etc.) of new cadets, and assumed the further hassles of discrete dynamical systems, boxing, gymnastics, and introduction to computer science.

H3 was known as one of the "hotter" companies – no, that doesn't mean we were all good looking (though, we did have two very attractive senior females - Hamilton and Frymier). It meant the upperclass enjoyed "hazing."

While the Academy has banned most hazing rituals, upperclassmen still retain some power over the freshman. While many upperclassmen prefer not to spend the time "developing" the plebes, the upperclassmen of H3 took a particular interest in our development. This was extremely annoying at many points, but it did bring our plebe class closer together. We really needed to bond and work together in order to make it through the year. Thanks to them, we did, and for that, we're grateful.

Company H-3





PLEBE DUTIES

One of the main parts of plebe year is the duties we performed: taking out the trash, delivering laundry, performing table duties at meals, and calling minutes.

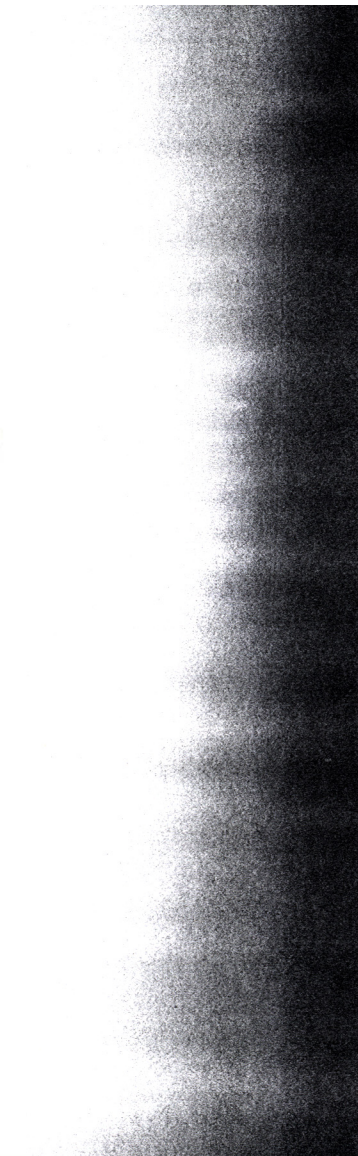
Every morning, we had to empty the trash cans of the upperclass cadets. We then "called minutes" for breakfast formation. After the lead cadet let out a loud "Go Hurricanes," five or six cadets chanted in unison, "Attention all cadets, there are 5 minutes until assembly for breakfast formation. The uniform is as for class, under parka, wearing skull cap. Five minutes remain."

During mealtime, we made sure the tables had all necessary condiments. We were also responsible for cutting the dessert into the correct number of pieces: maybe five, six, seven or eight.

Additionally, every week we had to deliver the laundry to upperclass cadets, and it had to be done in rank order.

There is one person who remains particularly engrained in my memory from my first year: Cadet 1SG John Morris (picture on top), who was in charge of accountability and discipline for the Hurricanes. One Friday evening, I was instructed to turn in an essay to him. Deciding I wanted to be a smart ass, I reported in full-dress, under arms, our most ceremonial uniform. This did not please him at all and we were soon involved in a series of uniform drills. He would give me a uniform and we would race to change into that uniform and then he would quiz me on cadet knowledge. Despite having the help of my three roommates, I never beat him at dressing, but I did manage to perform fairly well on the knowledge quiz, so he finally ended it. While that year with 1SG Morris was difficult, John did turn out to be a good guy and a trustworthy friend once I was no longer a plebe!

The following is a picture of me with my high school sweetheart, Ashley, at my Plebe Parent Weekend formal.





As previously mentioned, the year was very difficult. Yet, me and the other members of H3 grew close and managed to have a lot of fun together.

Every Thursday evening, we had mandatory dinner. Most of the dinners were considered "spirit dinners," and cadets were encouraged to dress up in spirit uniforms. At top, I am pictured with first semester roommates Nathan Strickland and Adam King, prior to one of our spirit dinners.

Given West Point's close proximity to New York City, we often had the opportunity to take the train from Garrison Station, located directly across the Hudson River from the Academy. At the end of plebe year, following our finals (called term end examinations, or TEEs), a large group of us ventured to the city for a weekend of fun. Over the years, we particularly enjoyed the Bleeker Street area with Red Lion Pub and Peculiar Pub.

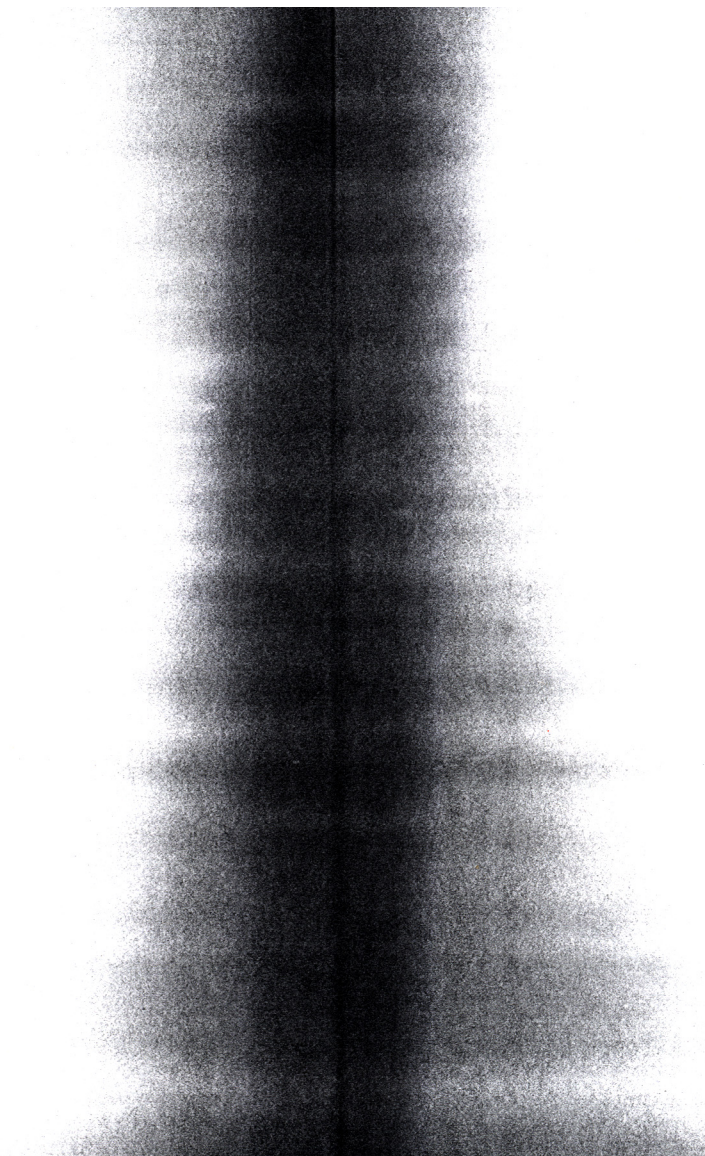




THE INDOOR OBSTACLE COURSE TEST (IOCT)

On the previous page, you see a photo of Hayes Gym. Built in 1910, it is the oldest part of the Arvin Physical Fitness Center and home to "gymnastics" class and the infamous indoor obstacle course test (IOCT).

The IOCT has been an infamous rite of passage for cadets since WWII. It begins with a low crawl under a series of low bars, followed by a shuffle through some tires. After jumping a vault, cadets must pull themselves up on an eight-foot shelf before maneuvering back across the pull-up bars and down to the floor. We then jump feet-first through a tire, cross three balance beams, climb up over an eight-foot wall and cross some monkey bars. The course concludes with a trip up the rope and three laps around the track. Men need to complete this in three minutes, 19 seconds to pass and two minutes, 48 seconds to "tab" it.



PLEBE PHYSICAL EDUCATION COURSES

As plebes, we had to complete three physical education courses: boxing, gymnastics (a.k.a. military movement), and survival swimming.

The first course I took was boxing, where the instructor guaranteed us an 'A' if we broke anyone's ribs. While not my favorite class, I was able to manage a 3-1 record in my graded bouts.

The second course was military movement, better known as gymnastics. To this day, I am not sure what the military application is of the reverse-summersault-dismount-off-rings! Instructors graded us on a scale from zero to five for each event, with "High 0" being a popular grade to receive.

The final course was survival swimming where we learned to bob and travel in case we ever found ourselves in eight or ten feet of water with a nice solid bottom. We also had to complete "the jump" off of the tower platform.



TRANSITION TO YEARLING (SOPHOMORE) YEAR

Our second year, "yearling" or "yuk year," begins at Camp Bucker for cadet field training. Cadet field training is much more laid-back, compared to cadet basic training. It, too, is led primarily by upperclass cadets.

Over the course of the summer, we learned a few vital things: how to fire many types of army weapons, the branches of the Army and their distinct roles, and how to operate with small-unit tactics in a variety of exercises. We even got to spend a week playing with tanks at Fort Knox, Kentucky.

I was a member of 4th Platoon, 8th Company during cadet field training and was bunkmates with Cassidy Dauby.

I spent a majority of cadet field training with a cast on my right wrist. I broke the scaphoid bone in my right wrist while playing intramural rugby in the spring. While given the opportunity to take the summer off for medical recovery, I decided to push through and perform with the cast. I wanted to go through training with my classmates and I wanted to be promoted to cadet corporal, which required the completion of cadet field training.

I often had to tape plastic bags around the cast, and occasionally, I had to have it prematurely changed when it got wet. While I sat out of some events, like combatives, I completed most requirements and was promoted to cadet corporal with the rest of my class.

At the end of our freshman year, we "scrambled" into new companies. This helped those who may have performed poorly under the plebe system and needed a new start. I became a member of the B Company, 3rd Regiment or the B3 Bandits.





9/11

Having entered the Academy during the summer of 2000, war seemed very much a distant possibility. That all changed one sunny September day during my sophomore year.

I received an e-mail from CNN News Alerts that a plane had hit the World Trade Center. I didn't think much of it, figuring it was likely some single-engine plane with a drunk pilot, or something. I left my room for physics class without any concern.

Once I got to class, it quickly became apparent that something was not right. As we watched the first tower burn on TV, we saw the second plane hit the second tower. Not sure what to do, our professor turned off the TV and said, "we need to drive on - our mission now is more important than it was a few hours ago, and our mission here is to learn physics." And so, we pushed on with the lesson for the day.

It was a surreal moment at the Academy. Being only a short distance from the city, many of us felt we needed to be a part of the recovery effort. The administration told us we needed to sit tight and be ready, in case we were called for help. Finally the call came; they needed socks.

While it seemed a bit underwhelming at the time, the Corps of Cadets responded and gathered as many extra socks as it could.

Meanwhile, we all realized how much things had changed. We were now a nation at war. Previously, we dreamed of graduating and heading on a peacetime European tour. Now, we prepared to enter active-duty.

In October 2001, U.S. military forces launched operations in Afghanistan to remove the Taliban from power and deny Osama bin Laden's al-Qaeda network a sanctuary to train and plan future attacks.

Soon after, a lunchtime announcement from the First Captain (the head cadet) revealed that a member of the long grey line had been killed in combat. We all paused for a moment of silence in remembrance.

The war gave new meaning and focus to our training and purpose at the Academy. But, it was a stressful time. I entered the Academy with little idea of what I really wanted to do in the military. Having initially wanted to attend the Coast Guard Academy and pursue a law enforcement career, I hadn't given much thought to what I wanted to do in the Army and up to that point, nothing had particularly inspired me. I was in search of purpose, for how I could best contribute once commissioned as an Army officer. It would be some time before I found inspiration.

As a member of the B3 Bandits, I lived on the third floor of Eisenhower Barracks, which overlooked the Academy's famous plains.

As yearlings, we became mentors and trainers to one or two plebes. I had Cadet Jason Kinsley, a football player from Florida.

I also became friends and roommates with Brian Finley, a prior enlisted soldier who grew up in Ohio. Brian and I both became economics majors and truly enjoyed our time as roommates. I often considered his girlfriend (now wife), Mel, our third roommate.

One highlight of the year was the Army-Navy game (see next spread). My yearling year was the only year that Army won the game. It was a beautiful, sunny day in Philadelphia. After the win, we charged the field!



B A N D I



That year, I left traveled outside the country for the first time. A good friend, Adam King, and I spring broke in Cancun, Mexico. Cancun is often called "Cadet-cun" because it's a popular spring break destination for army cadets.

While many spring breakers never leave the beach, pool, or bar, Adam and I traveled to the nearby ruins of Chichen Itza. It was during this trip that I was bitten by the travel bug. I came home knowing I wanted to travel more. Fortunately, the military afforded me the chance to do the type of international travel that I'd never done before – though not always to the nicest places!



TRANSITION TO COW (JUNIOR) YEAR

Following my yearling year, I went off to cadet troop leadership training (CTLT) at Fort Irwin, California where I job-shadowed a platoon leader in a military intelligence unit at the National Training Center (NTC). I spent a month helping him train members of the 278th Armored Cavalry Regiment from the Tennessee National Guard. Some said they were training for deployment to Iraq. This was the first I had heard of operations expanding to Iraq.

I spent the second part of the summer in Chicago, working with a program called "Service America." As a cadet, I worked with students who needed additional help with math and grammar. The program was sponsored by the McCormick-Tribune Foundation and run by BG(R) Dave Grange (pictured bottom), a former commander in Delta Force.





FREE FALL & SOAR

As an exchange cadet at the Air Force Academy, I had participated in two cool programs: Air Force Free Fall and SOAR.

I was kicked out of Air Force Free Fall School after two jumps due to pulling the shoot when I was on my back (trust me, not intended). I was never able to handle the free-fall part of the jump. This was my first major failure as a cadet and it was difficult to deal with. In the end, though, I survived two solo, free-fall jumps - so I was thankful for that!

Flying the glider planes was much more pleasant. I preferred flying to humping around a rucksack and jumping out of airplanes. And just like that, I'd found my inspiration: I wanted to fly. This meant one of two things: either cross-commissioning into the Air Force, or becoming an Army helicopter pilot.





SQUADRON 30 - DIRTY THIRTY

My roommate while at the Air Force Academy was Brandon Cole (left). Brandon was a good friend of Chad Richards, my former high school classmate in Waupaca, Wisconsin.

Brandon has proven to be a lifelong friend. Following graduation from the academies, we traveled to Hawaii for a couple weeks to enjoy our graduation leave. Brandon ended up crossing into the Army and also served as a military intelligence officer.

Also in the photo is Occy, another good friend from my time at the Academy. He normally roomed with Brandon.

I was a member of Squadron 30, or the Black Knights of Dirty Thirty. We lived in Sijan Hall (named for Wisconsin native Lance Sijan, a Medal of Honor pilot in Vietnam).

EXCHANGE CADETS

As a cadet, you do not incur military obligation until your first day of class during your junior year. This is when you take your Oath of Affirmation. There were eight "exchange" cadets who transferred to the Air Force Academy from West Point with me: Mike Powell, Matt McKee, Chane Jackson, Eleanor Gillis, Derrick Yohe, Sara Matthews, Martin Peters, and Joe Wells. We took the Oath of Affirmation together.

When cadets get in trouble, they often have to "walk hours." This involves walking back-and-forth (or possibly in a circle) with your weapon on your shoulder. As exchange cadets, we decided to have an "exchange cadet meeting" during one of our many uniform inspections. We got caught and had to walk 12 hours one weekend during an inter-service joint hours operation.





ARMY-AIR FORCE WEEK

One of the most exciting weeks at the Academy is Army-Air Force week, the week leading up to the football game between Army and Air Force.

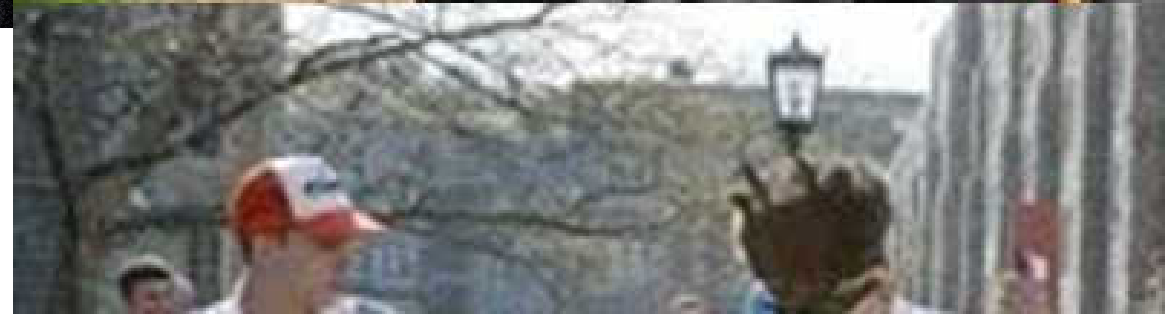
As is tradition, I was attacked that Thursday evening by the plebes in Dirty Thirty. While I put up a fight, it was difficult to take on 15-20 plebes at one time. They taped my hand and poured spoiled milk all over me. That was one of the worst smells I have ever smelled.

After covering me in rancid milk, they taped me to the F15 on the Academy's terrazzo like I was a missile.

SOSH RUN

During the second semester, I participated in the traditional "SOSH Run" at West Point (SOSH stands for social sciences). During "SOSH Run," cadets dress in costume to turn in their final reports for international relations class. As a student at West Point, I had never previously participated. The semester I was enrolled in the class, a scheduling conflict forced me to turn in my paper a day early.

This time around, the paper was due at 1700. As the clock approached the hour, cadets transitioned from uniform to costume and sprinted across the field, final reports in hand. It was quite a sight!





500TH NIGHT

Junior year at the Academy is called "cow year." The term is thought to be based on the days when cadets were not allowed to leave campus until they were juniors, at which point the phrase, "the cows are going home," was frequently used.

One of the major events of cow year is 500th Night, a formal weekend that celebrates 500 nights until graduation.

My date to the formal was the lovely Katy Burfield (Robinson), a childhood friend from Waupaca. It was a delightful weekend in which we saw "The Producers" on Broadway and enjoyed the formal dinner and hop.

I want to take a moment to share cadet slang terms that cadets use during their time at the Academy.

BEAST, n. - "Old Corps" slang for Cadet Basic Training.

BOODLE, n. - Cake, candy, ice cream, etc.

BOODLER'S, n. - The cadet snack store.

BUTT, n. - The remains of anything, as the butt of the month.

BUTTER BAR, n. - A new Second Lieutenant

CIVVIES, n. - Civilian clothing.

COM, n. - The Commandant of Cadets

COW, n. - A member of the second class.

D.P.E., n. - Department of Physical Education

THE DAYS, n. - Required knowledge for Plebes; signifying the time period until the next major event for the upperclass

FIRSTIE, n. - A member of the First Class.

GOAT, n. - A cadet in the lower sections. A cadet near the bottom of the class.

GREEN GIRL, n. - Comforter.

OLD CORPS, adj. - The way things used to be at USMA, (i.e., "when dinosaurs roamed the plains..."); In reality, when the Firsties were Plebes...

PLEBE, n. - A cadet of the Fourth Class, a freshman.

PMI, n. - Afternoon Inspection, a state less than SAMI.

POOP, n. - Information to be memorized.

POOP-DECK, n. - The Balcony in the USMA Cadet Mess from which orders are published.

POP OFF, v. - Sound off in a military manner.

ROCK SQUAD, n. - Remedial Swimming, an additional class for Plebe non-swimmers. (Derivative - ROCK, n. - An individual that struggles in academics and "sinks" to the bottom of the class. "ROCK MATH" is the lowest section in Plebe Math.)

RACK, n. - Cadet Candidate bed, also SACK, v. - To sleep.

R.H.I.P., - Rank Hath Its Privileges.

ROGER, v. - I understand.

RD-FC, - "Rough Draft Equals Final Copy". The art of completing a paper or project in one sitting.

SAMI, n. Saturday Morning Inspection.

SLUG, n. - A special punishment for serious offense. Also SLAM, v. - To impose a special punishment on someone.

S.O.P., - Standard Operating Procedure.

SPAZ, n. - Someone who functions improperly.

SPAZ, v. - To function improperly.

SQUID, n. - One who attends the Naval Academy.

STAR MAN, n. - An academically distinguished cadet candidate.

SUPE, n. - The superintendent.

TAC, n. - A tactical officer.

T.E.E., n. - Term End Examination, finals.

TOUR, n. - One hour's walk around a designated area (punishment); a period of duty, such as a guard tour.

TROU, abbrev. - Trousers.

UNSAT, abbrev. - Unsatisfactory performance.

W.P.R., - Written Partial Review.

WRIT, abbrev. - A written recitation, an examination.

YEARLING, n. - A member of the Third Class (also Yuk).

YOU FLY, I BUY, phrase. - You pick the food up, and I'll pay for it.

ZOOMIE, n. - One who attends the Air Force Academy.





TRANSITION TO FIRSTIE (SENIOR) YEAR

Building on my new-found passion for flying, I enrolled in a helicopter flight training program at the University of North Dakota the summer before my senior year. The program included classroom and flight instruction in a Schweizer 300 helicopter. At the end of the course, we each took a solo flight (see next spread). The summer convinced me that I wanted to fly, and I began to set my sights on a career in aviation.

For the second half of the summer, I ran summer training for the younger cadets. I served as the lead personnel officer for Operation Highland Warrior (OHW), a training event that introduced the cadets to small unit, light infantry tactics in a two-week exercise in the woods around Camp Buckner.





CADET RANK & INSIGNIA

Finally, I was a Firstie at West Point. Each class has a shield to signify their class year (top of photo). For Firsties, the shield is black, for cows it is gray, and for yearlings it is gold.

Cadets also wear rank insignia (bottom of photo). A cadet corporal (sophomore) has one bar, a cadet sergeant (junior) has two bars, a cadet lieutenant (senior) has three bars, and a cadet captain (senior) has four to six bars.

DISCOVERING MEDEVAC PILOT OPTION

As we started our firstie year, the military was knee-deep in war with operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. Early in the year, I researched the option of becoming a medical evacuation pilot, and was immediately hooked. I had finally found something I was passionate about and that gave me purpose in the military.





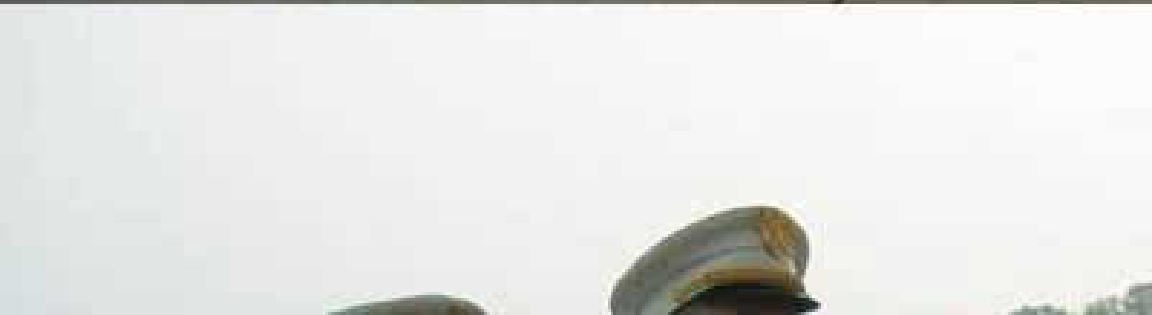
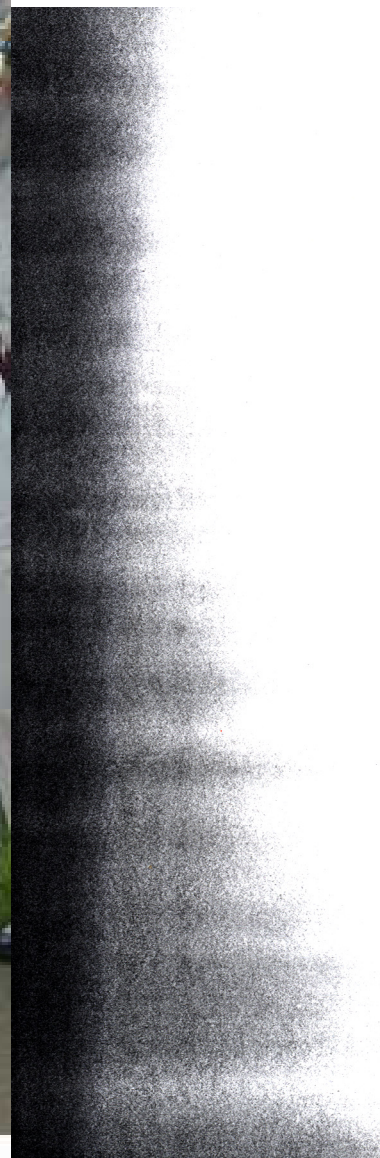
RING WEEKEND

The tradition of class rings began with the West Point class of 1835. The Class of 1836 had no ring, but each succeeding class has had one - except the Class of 1879, who chose cuff links.

Before 1869, each person designed his own ring. In 1869, the ring committee was instituted to adopt a uniform design. Today's ring is designed by the Ring and Crest Committee. It varies from year to year, but always includes the Academy Crest and the Class Crest.

The ring is worn with the Class Crest towards the heart before graduation and the Academy Crest toward the heart after graduation.

We received our rings in August 2003, at the beginning of our Firstie year. We received the rings in a ceremony held at Trophy Point, which overlooks the beautiful Hudson River.



My date for Ring Weekend was the lovely Rachael Murray, a childhood friend from Waupaca.

Rachael and I are pictured at top with my roommate Brian Finley and his girlfriend (now wife) Melanie Finley (Crevier).

At bottom, we are pictured with good friend James Jablonsky and his date, Kate.

Ring Weekend is one of the few opportunities we have to wear our India Whites uniform – seen here along with our red sashes.





THE RING

While there is a fairly standard design for the class ring, we were able to customize the rings individually. For mine, I chose white gold with diamonds around a fire blue spinal and two embedded rubies on the sides. I wanted to create a unique red, white, and blue look.

RING POOP

The plebes have a tradition of mobbing the upperclassmen right after they've received their rings and reciting the "ring poop":

"Oh my god, sir/ma'am! What a beautiful ring! What a crass mass of brass and glass! What a bold mold of rolled gold! What a cool jewel you got from your school! See how it sparkles and shines? It must have cost you a fortune! May I touch it, may I touch it please, sir/ma'am?"

Plebes enjoy this because it is an opportunity to hassle the upperclassmen who are in a hurry to get changed and head into the city with their dates.



BIRTHDAY PARTIES

On the previous spread, you see an example of a traditional birthday party at the Academy. It does, you might notice, look similar to the events of Army-Air Force week. When it's an upperclassman's birthday, he or she is attacked and tied up by a freshman (with help from the upperclassman's buddies). The upperclassman is tossed into a laundry cart, wheeled into the mess hall and covered in condiments. Since my birthday is in early August, I had the good fortune of never having a birthday party. My friend Andy Chung was not as fortunate.

EXPERIENCED LEADERSHIP

As cadets, we have the opportunity to hear and learn from top military leaders. I was fortunate enough to have a class with GEN (R) Barry McCaffrey, one of the most decorated soldiers from the Vietnam War and a former 4-star general. We also heard from GEN John Abizaid, then-commander of U.S. Central Command.







100TH NIGHT

Much like 500th Night, we mark 100 nights until graduation with a banquet during our Firstie year.

Our banquet's speaker was then-Major General David Petraeus, a little-known, but rising star who commanded the 101st Airborne Division during the initial invasion of Iraq. General Petraeus went on to become a household name as the face of "the surge" in Iraq (covered later).

The 100th Night Show is a longstanding tradition. Members of our class perform a collection of skits and performances that make fun of the administration and cadet life.

I went stag to the event, but nonetheless enjoyed the weekend with my friends.

In the spring, our Association of Graduates hosted a mixer. It was a perfect opportunity for us to turn out in our finest suits. I am pictured on the next page with fellow Bandits.





One of the privileges of being a Firstie is the right to drink at the Firstie Club, a great pub built into old horse stables on campus. Many nights were spent throwing back beers with boys. Included below is "Benny Havens," a traditional cadet drinking song.

"BENNY HAVENS"

"Come fill your glasses, fellows, and stand up in a row. To singing sentimentally we're going for to go; In the Army there's sobriety, promotion's very slow. So we'll sing our reminiscences of Benny Havens, Oh!

"Oh! Benny Havens, Oh! Oh! Benny Havens, Oh! We'll sing our reminiscences of Benny Havens, Oh!

"To our kind old Alma Mater, our rockbound highland home, We'll cast back many a fond regret as o'er life's sea we roam; Until on our last battlefield the light of heaven, shall glow. We'll never fail to drink to her and Benny Havens, Oh!"

GRADUATION

At West Point, they say the days are long but the weeks are short. It is so true. While it seems like an eternity at times, graduation was soon upon us. I had received medical services corps as my branch and had been selected for flight training to become a medical evacuation pilot (aka 67J).

Most of my family was able to make it out to graduation and it was a wonderful time. The weather was lovely on graduation day and our speaker was then-Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld. He cited a quote from Teddy Roosevelt in the commencement speech that I found particularly befitting of West Point: "of all the institutions in this country, none is more absolutely American; Here you come together as representatives of America in a higher sense than can possibly be true of any other institution."

The end of graduation is marked by the traditional hat toss (you can see me front and center in the photo). After the hats are tossed, young children run to claim them. I grabbed my hat for my grandma.

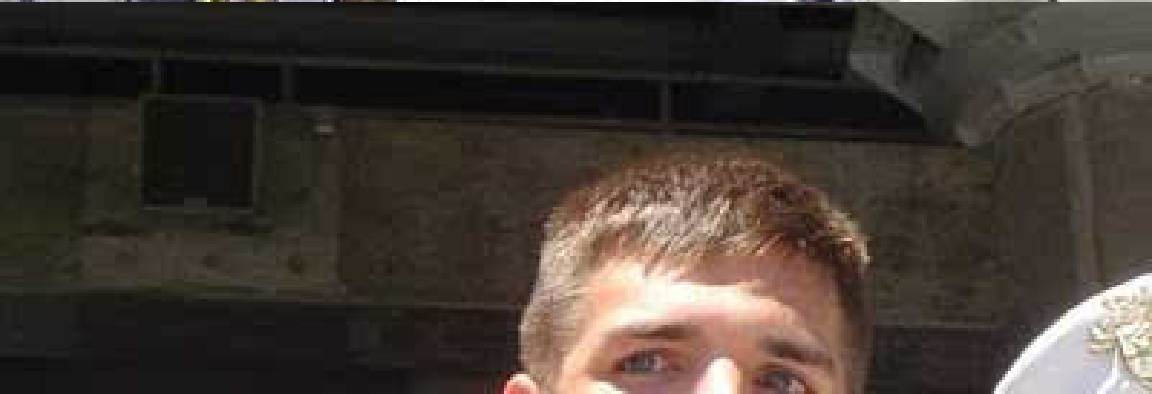












I was able to recover my hat after the hat toss and gave it to Grandma Kleidon.

Graduation day is a very hectic day for many. Following the graduation ceremony, we changed into our Army green uniform for commissioning as second lieutenants.

Many others add a wedding to the slate of events too. As cadets, we are not allowed to marry, so after graduation, there are usually a slew of weddings. Many choose to get married that day, or in the days following, as families are already gathered together. I had the good fortune of being in my roommate Brian Finley's wedding to fellow classmate Melanie, and also in my good friend Ryan Cleary's wedding to Sarah.

COMMISSIONING

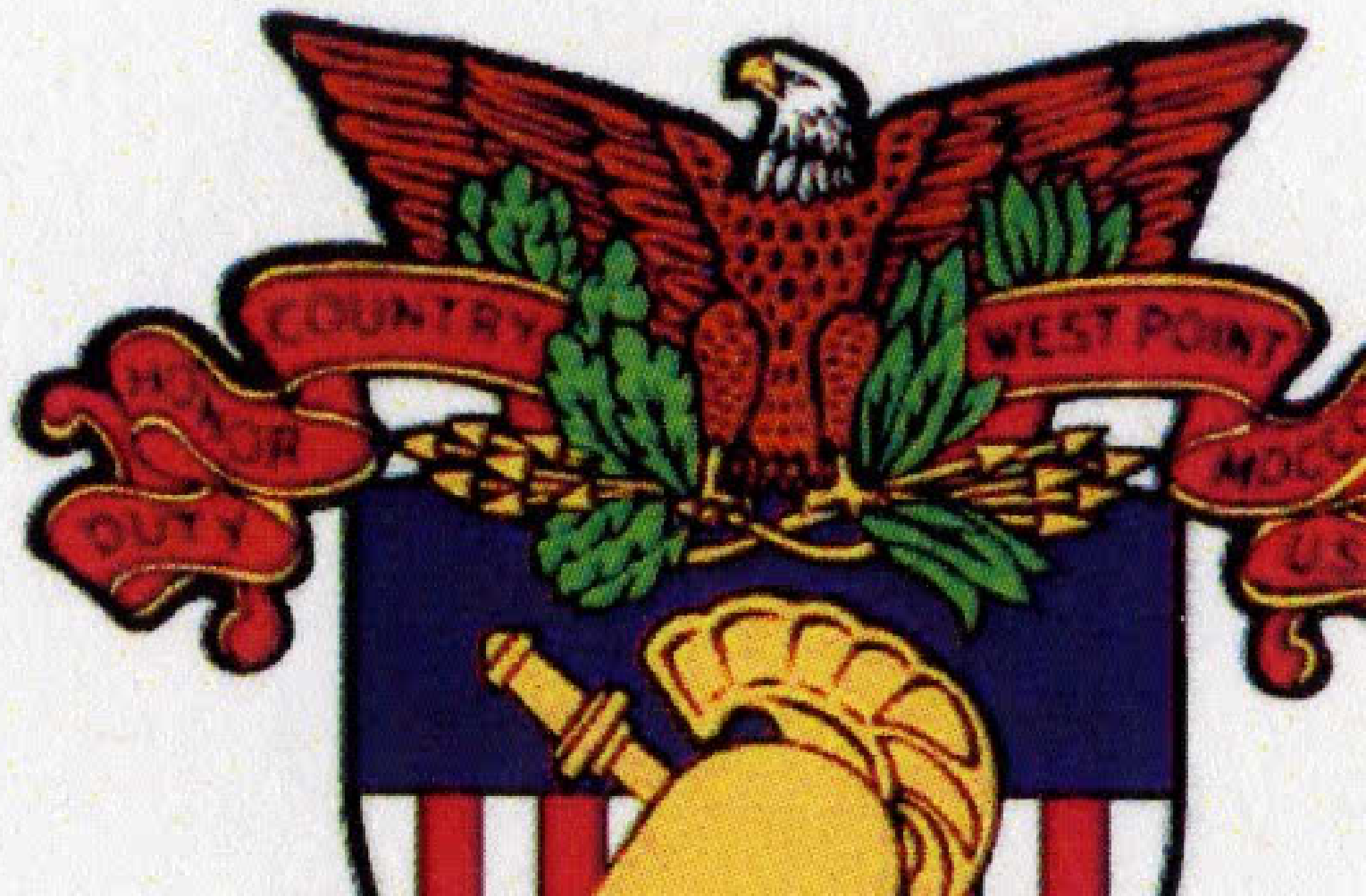
A commission in the military gives an officer authority derived directly from the authority of the commander-in-chief, who in our case is the President.

I commissioned with other Bandits near the old cadet library on campus. MAJ Goertemiller, our company's active-duty supervisor and mentor, performed the commissioning ceremony, while my family was available to pin the bars.

Commissioning was the last event required of us at the Academy. Soon thereafter we departed - forever "old grads." Little did my class know what we were getting ourselves into at that point.









WEST POINT CADET GLEE CLUB

I am going to take a moment here to deviate a little from my chronological organization of events to talk a bit about my time with the West Point Cadet Glee Club.

I had the great fortune of joining the Glee Club as a plebe, when there was a real need for basses. I was grandfathered in from then on. The Glee Club provided many wonderful opportunities to travel and perform. On the previous page is a picture from our performance at a banquet for GEN (R) Norman Schwarzkopf, the Commander of troops from the first Gulf War.

My sophomore year marked West Point's bicentennial. We got the chance to sing at a multitude of exciting venues because of it. Shortly after 9/11, we were in Boston performing with the Boston Pops. Patriotic fervor was high and we received a five-minute standing ovation after our introduction (ironic, because as cadets we had done nothing - the real heroes at that point were NYC rescue workers). Later that year, we performed at Carnegie Hall.





WE WERE SOLDIERS

We also had the opportunity to record a song for the soundtrack of the Vietnam War movie "We Were Soldiers," starring Mel Gibson.

We performed "Mansions of the Lord" which plays during the closing credits. Recorded in the Cadet Chapel, it has become an instant Glee Club classic.

"Mansions of the Lord
To fallen soldiers let us sing,
Where no rockets fly nor bullets wing,
Our broken brothers let us bring
To the Mansions of the Lord.
No more bleeding, no more fight,
No prayers pleading through the night,
Just divine embrace, eternal light
In the Mansions of the Lord.
Where no mothers cry and no children weep,
We will stand and guard though the angels
sleep,
Oh through the ages safely keep
The Mansions of the Lord."



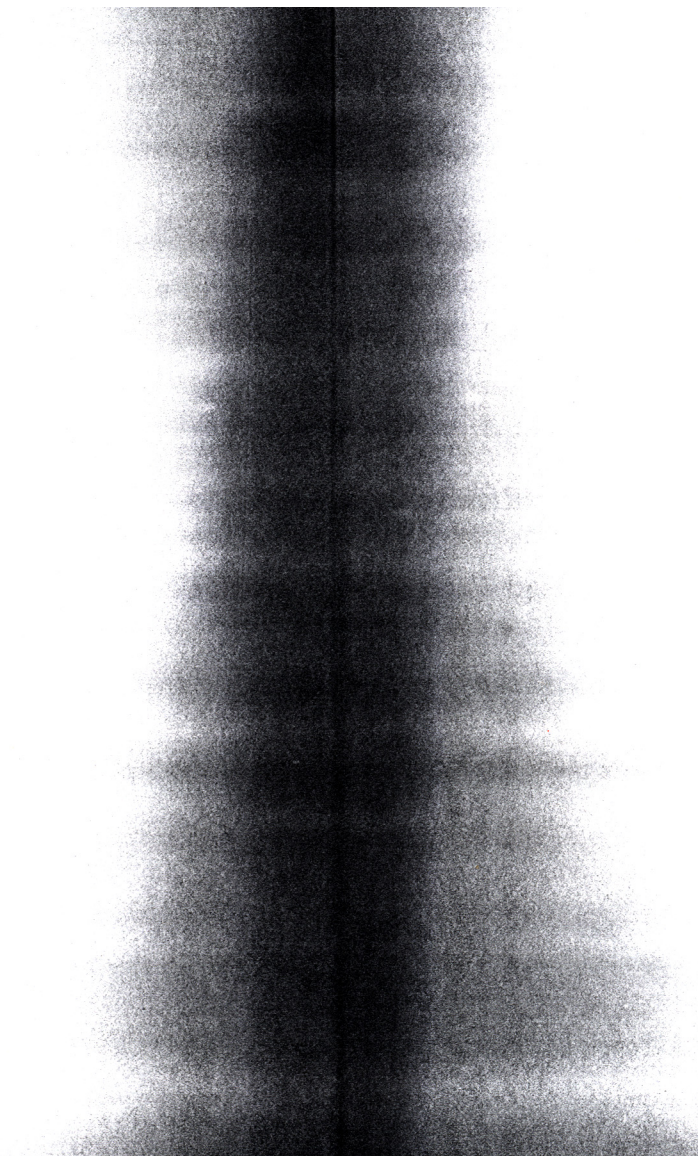


OTHER EVENTS

On the previous page, I have included photos from a banquet for President Bush Sr, for which famed author, Stephen Ambrose, served as Master of Ceremonies.

Also included, a U.S.O. Awards Dinner for BG Vincent Brooks. BG Brooks served as the first African-American First Captain at West Point and would later be one of my commander's in Iraq, when he served as the Assistant Division Commander for Support (ADC-S) for 1st Cavalry Division.

My time in the cadet Glee Club provided many fond memories. To this day, I believe I am the LEAST talented person to have performed with the Boston Pops, in Carnegie Hall, at Yankee Stadium, at Madison Square Garden, and for a major motion picture.



WEST POINT CLASSICS

The next three pages include West Point's three most sacred songs:

First, "Alama Mater," the most beloved West Point song. It was composed in the Fall of 1908 by Cadet Reinecke as he walked the area (on punishment) and attempted to compose a furlough song. The song died a quick death, but was soon revived, making its first appearance at the 1912 Baccalaureate Service.

Second, "The Corps," - almost equally beloved. The words were written by Chaplain Bishop H.S. Shipman around the 1902 centennial. Music was added in 1920 and the song debuted at the Baccalaureate Service of the Class of 1911.

Third,, "On Brave Old Army Team," or OBOAT. OBOAT was written in 1910 by LT Egner and is the Army's classic fight song.

Obviously, between 1910 and 1912, Army was in search of songs to build tradition on. Not much of an opportunity since then ...

"Alama Mater"

Hail Alma Mater dear,
To us be ever near.
Help us thy motto bear
Through all the years.
Let Duty be well performed.
Honor be e'er untarned.
Country be ever armed.
West Point, by thee.

Guide us, thy sons, aright,
Teach us by day, by night,
To keep thine honor bright,
For thee to fight.
When we depart from thee,
Serving on land or sea,
May we still loyal be,
West Point, to thee.

And when our work is done,
Our course on earth is run,
May it be said, "Well done;
Be thou at peace."
E'er may that line of gray
Increase from day to day
Live, serve, and die, we pray,
West Point, for thee.

"The Corps"

The Corps! Bareheaded salute it,
With eyes up, thanking our God --
That we of the Corps are treading
Where they of the Corps have trod --
They are here in ghostly assemblage,
The men of the Corps long dead,
And our hearts are standing attention
While we wait for the passing tread.

We, sons of to-day, we salute you --
You, sons of an earlier day;
We follow, close order, behind you,
Where you have pointed the way;
The long gray line of us stretches
Thro' the years of a century told,
And the last man feels to his marrow
The grip of your far off hold.

Grip hands with us now, though we see not,
Grip hands with us, strengthen our hearts
As the long line stiffens and straightens
With the thrill that you presence imparts.
Grips hands tho' it be from the shadows --
While we swear, as you did of yore,
Or living, or dying, to honor
The Corps, and the Corps, and the Corps!

"On Brave Old Army Team"

The Army team's the pride and dream
Of every heart in gray,
The Army line you'll ever find
A terror in the fray;
And when the team is fighting
for the Black and Gray and Gold
We're always near with song and cheer
And this is the tale we're told;
The Army team
(Band accompaniment)
(Whistle)
Rah Rah Rah BOOM!

CHORUS:

On, brave old Army team,
On to the fray;
Fight on to victory,
For that's the fearless Army way.
(Whistle Chorus)





CLASS CREST

Here, I am pictured with our class crest in the hall of Ike Auditorium at West Point. Of note on our class crest is the thunderstorm in the upper part. This signifies the rain that hit us on R Day and while we were at Lake Frederick during our beast.

In many ways, the thunder cloud stands for the pain our class faced as we started to lose members in combat in Iraq and Afghanistan.

CLASSMATE TRIBUTE

On Reception Day for my West Point class, it rained and the cadre told our class that meant we were going to war. The rain came again in droves, much like it had at Lake Frederick during beast barracks. But, in the summer of 2000, war seemed like a very distant possibility. However, the terrorist attacks of September 2001, the October 2001 beginning of Afghanistan Operations, and the March 2003 invasion of Iraq solidified the fact that my class was entering an army at war.

And we very much went to war. By September 2010, the West Point class of 2004 has lost 12 members to combat operations in Iraq and Afghanistan – the most of any class. A 13th soldier, Jacob Fritz, was originally a member of our class but graduated with the class of 2005.

My classmate, TJ Root, captured things perfectly in a Facebook status message following the death of classmate Paul Pena:

"After all we endured at West Point, it seems sadly fitting that the Class of 2004 has borne the brunt of the losses in these wars. It is eternally humbling to take account of those who are absent from our ranks, and realize that they were truly our very best. They will always be counted among us, though they will now grip hands with us from the shadows. Well done, men. May we all live lives worthy of your sacrifice." ~ TJ Root, 4 February 2010.

1



2



4



5



7



8



MEMBERS OF WEST POINT CLASS OF 2004
WHO HAVE BEEN KILLED IN COMBAT

1. Garrison Avery – Baghdad, Iraq, 1 February 2006
2. Benjamin Britt – Baghdad, Iraq, 22 December 2005
3. Amos "Camden" Bock – Baghdad, Iraq, 23 October 2006
4. Michael Cerrone – Samarra, Iraq, 12 November 2006
5. John Ryan Dennison – Baghdad, Iraq, 15 November 2006
6. David Fraser – Baghdad, Iraq, 26 November 2006
7. Jason Holbrook – Tsagay, Afghanistan, 29 July 2010
8. Paul Pena – Arghandab River Valley, Afghanistan, 19 January 2010
9. Robert Seidel III – Baghdad, Iraq – 20 May 2006
10. Adam Synder – Balad, Iraq – 5 December 2007
11. Dan Whitten – Zabul Province, Afghanistan – 2 February 2010
12. Dennis Zilinski – Bayji, Iraq– 19 November 2005

DENNIS ZILINSKI

Dennis Zilinski was the first member of our class to be killed in combat. Dennis was a member of the Bandits with me, and I will always remember him for his infectious smile and great sense of humor.

His death really hit me and my fellow Bandits hard. For the first time, the wars were a reality. At that point, many of us had not yet deployed.


I was unable to attend Dennis' funeral in November 2005, but I did visit his grave at West Point in the summer of 2009.

Dennis' family and friends plan an annual running event to raise money for his foundation. In 2009, they started a world tour where friends and family throughout the world ran satellite events to show their support. I had the good fortune of running an event at Stanford University. Over 20 folks showed up to run!



Run With Dennis W
Stanford, Ca



A portrait of a young man, Jason Holbrook, in a formal military uniform. He is wearing a dark blue tunic with gold buttons and a white sash. A sword with a black plume is visible on the left side of the frame. The background is a mottled blue-grey.

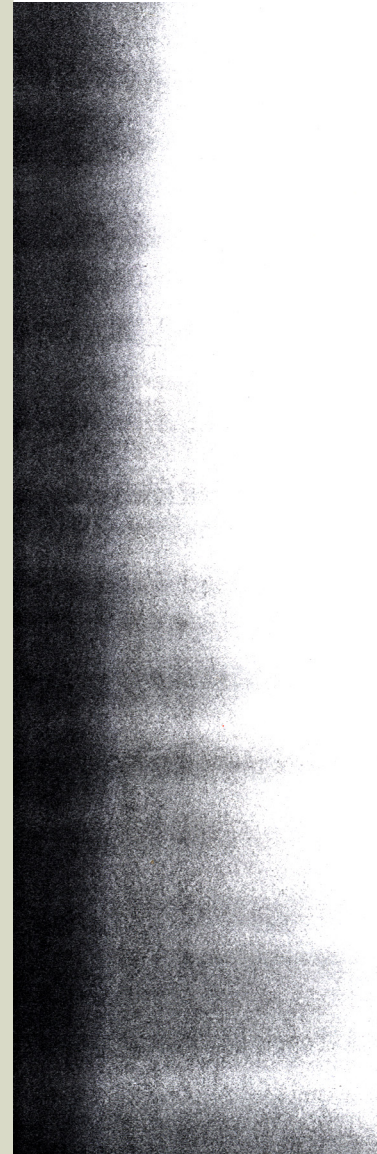
JASON HOLBROOK

In July 2010, I lost a second close friend, Jason Holbrook, when he was killed in Afghanistan.

Jason was one of my plebe year roommates, and was a newly-minted special forces team leader. He assisted me during the uniform drills with 1SG Morris (mentioned earlier). Jason loved to invent games for us to play as a way to lighten the mood. He knew how hard it was for four guys to share a three-person room during an already-intense first year.

I was able to attend Jason's memorial service in Texas. Like me, he was from a small town. The turnout from the local community was nothing short of astounding - in a town of only a few thousand, the streets were lined with thousands of folks. Married only about a year to his young wife Heather, Jason was truly one of our nation's best.

OFFICER BASIC COURSE & FORT
RUCKER



Following graduation, I went on 60 days of graduation leave. I enjoyed some time with family in Wisconsin, and I also spent a few weeks in Hawaii with my roommate from the Air Force Academy, Brandon Cole.

This time provided me the opportunity to rest, relax, and recharge after four very demanding years at the Academy.

I would soon head to a medical services corps, Officer Basic Course at Fort Sam Houston, Texas. Then, I planned to head to Fort Rucker, Alabama for flight school training.

The image is a composite. On the left, there is a dark, vertical strip showing the back of a person's head and shoulders in a military uniform. To the right of this strip, the name 'WILSON, JAMES A.' is printed in white, bold, sans-serif capital letters. Below the name is a solid black rectangular redaction box. Underneath the redaction box, the text '05 05 05' and '2LT, MS' is printed in the same white, bold, sans-serif font. The background of the entire image is a dark, textured grey.

WILSON,
JAMES A.

05 05 05
2LT, MS

I was commissioned in the Army as a second lieutenant in the medical services corps. The medical services corps is the branch of the Army that provides many of the administrative and support functions to the Army's health care system. Members of the medical services corps often do not have medical training, unlike those of the medical, nursing, dental, and specialty corps branches.

One of the career fields within the medical services corps is aeromedical evacuation, coded as a 67J or 67-Juliet. These officers are medical services corps officers, not aviation branch officers, but they receive the same flight school training to fly UH-60 Blackhawk helicopters. They spend their careers specifically working on medical evacuation missions, a job I found truly rewarding and exciting.

Medical evacuation (MEDEVAC) pilots are often referred to as DUSTOFF pilots. DUSTOFF is an acronym that stands for dedicated, unhesitating service to our fighting forces.

(Left) My official photo as a 2nd lieutenant.

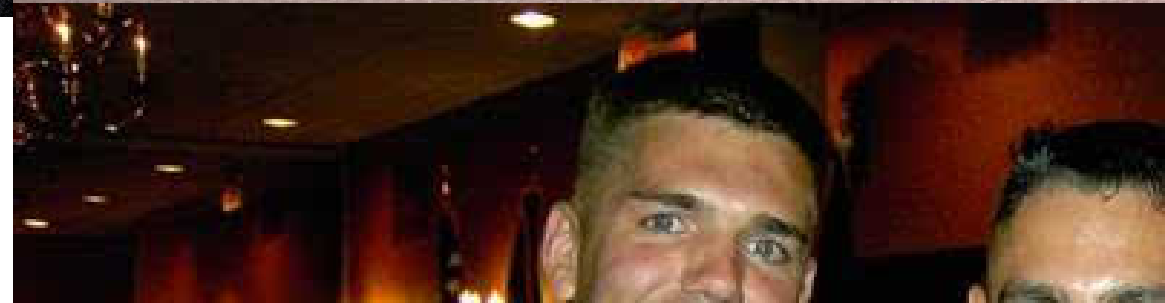


OFFICER BASIC COURSE

Each second lieutenant must attend the Officer Basic Course for his or her specific branch. For me and other medical services corps officers, this meant heading to Fort Sam Houston, Texas for a 10-week course in the summer of 2004.

There were 10 of us from West Point, but the whole class totaled over 400 - most of them doctors and nurses who had recently graduated. In many ways, this course was very easy. Many students had no background in the military and the instruction was basic. We enjoyed the chance to see local sights, like the Alamo, and enjoy each other's comradery during free time.

Ironically, the one challenging aspect of the course was physical training, where the cadre worked their hardest to ensure that we were smoked.



RECORD OF STUDENT

(For use of this form, see USAAVNC Reg

RANK	STUDENT NAME	SSN
2LT	WILSON, JAMES ARTHUR	

PART I - RECOMM

TO: COMMANDER, Company D 1-145th Avn

(Company

1. Pursuant to provisions of USAAVNC Reg 350-20, request appropriate action
the IERW

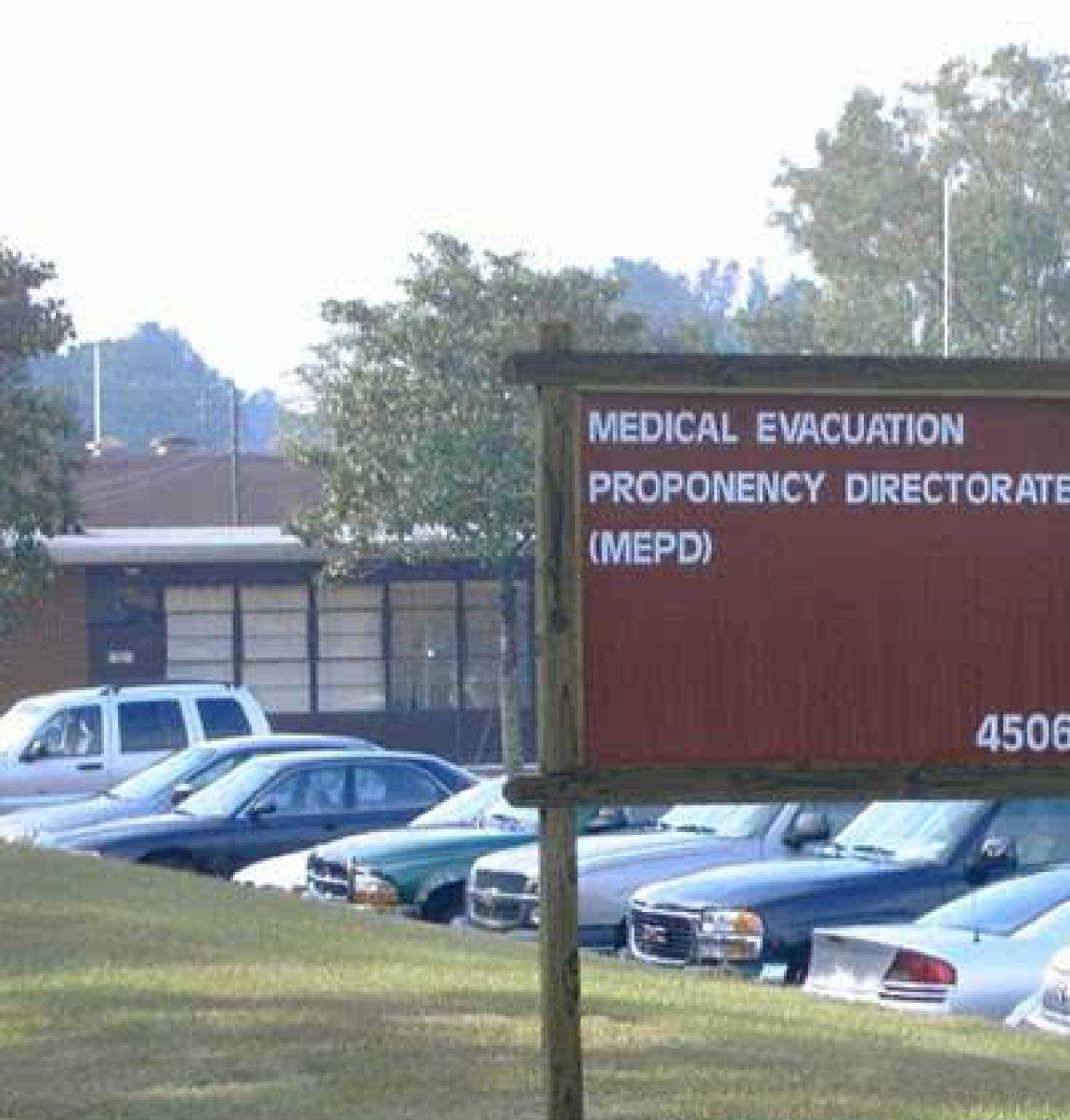
2. The specific reason for the proposed elimination is as indicated below

☐ Academic Deficiency

☐ Adm

☐ Failure to Progress

☐ Hono



FLIGHT SCHOOL ELIMINATION & TRANSITION TO MEDICAL EVACUATION PROPONENCY

About two weeks after arriving at Fort Rucker, Alabama, we went to get our "up slips," or medical clearance, to begin flight school. Moments after reviewing my records, the doctor looked at me and said "I don't know how in the hell you got here, but there is no way you're going to be flying." My back conditions (spondylosis and spondylolisthesis) had come back to get me.

These conditions made me ineligible to fly. For one reason or another, this part of my file was overlooked by Fort Rucker doctors when they initially approved me for flight training. Unfortunately, this time it was not.

It was a rough couple of months for me following elimination from flight training (with no real chance to appeal). I had finally found something in the military I felt I could be passionate about and now it was gone. And there was nothing I could do about it.



I was transferred to the office of Medical Evacuation Proponency Directorate (MEPD) where I served as an operations officer, working for a lieutenant colonel. Our office developed medical evacuation doctrine and interfaced with the aviation branch on issues pertaining to medical evacuation.

In many ways, this job was a vacation, but in others, it was a major let-down. I spent four years at West Point learning how to be a platoon leader, and there I was, making Powerpoints and running errands for a lieutenant colonel.

Because of this, I decided that I did not want to make the military a lifelong career. Then, I was faced with an interesting choice: stay in the military under a different career field, or apply for a medical discharge.

While I knew I was unlikely to make the military a career, I felt I had a duty to at least complete my service obligation. The doctors agreed to not medically discharge me but placed some medical restrictions (called a profile) on me to limit potential strains on my back.

While there were many opportunities to work in other areas of the Army medical system, I did not see myself working in medical administrative positions, so I asked for a transfer to the military intelligence branch.

The Army wasn't going to move me until I had been at Rucker for a year, so I settled in and made the most of my time.

(Next Page) My first apartment at 815 East Lee Street in Enterprise, Alabama.





While at MEPD, I worked with wonderful people: MSG Clark Chaprentier, one of the finest non-commissioned officers I have ever met. He took me under his wing and mentored me as he mentored a platoon leader when he was a platoon sergeant.

There were also Colonels Mike Thorton and Dave MacDonald. COL Thorton was a reserve officer who worked with us part-time, while COL MacDonald was the office director for the last part of my time in Alabama.

While it wasn't the ideal opportunity for a young second lieutenant, I tried to make the most of it.

On the following page, I am pictured with two classmates from my officer basic course: Nick Spangler and Jason Fogarty. Both were becoming MEDEVAC pilots. Here, they're at the wing pinning ceremony which marks the end of flight training.





FUN IN ALABAMA/FLORIDA

One of the few good things about the upper corner of lower Alabama is its proximity to Florida's beaches.

I spent many fun weekends down in the Destin/Fort Walton Beach area, primarily with my good buddy, Jim Jablonski (pictured top).

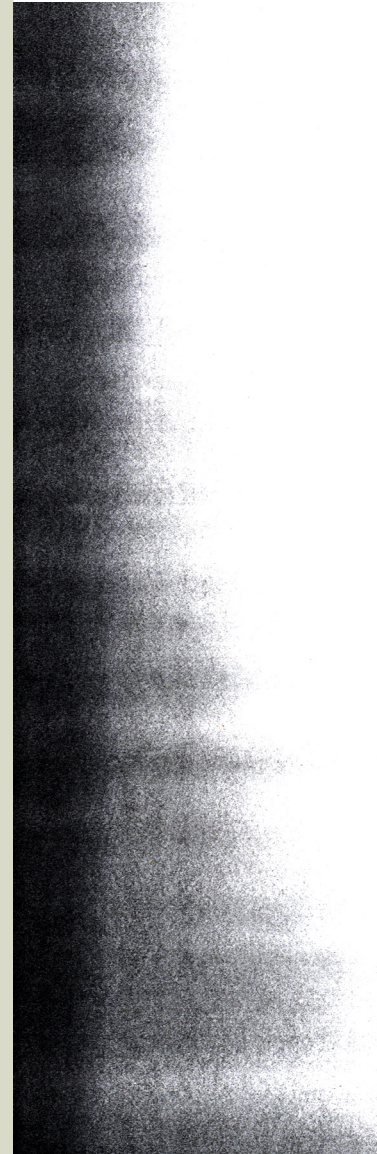
One weekend, COL Thorton took me and classmates Grace and Andy Chung out on his boat. We enjoyed the crystal clear waters of the Gulf.

With many classmates and friends with me at Fort Rucker for flight school, there was never a shortage of fun. On the following page, I am dressed as Napoleon Dynamite for Halloween. My friend Andy is dressed as Napoleon's companion, Pedro.

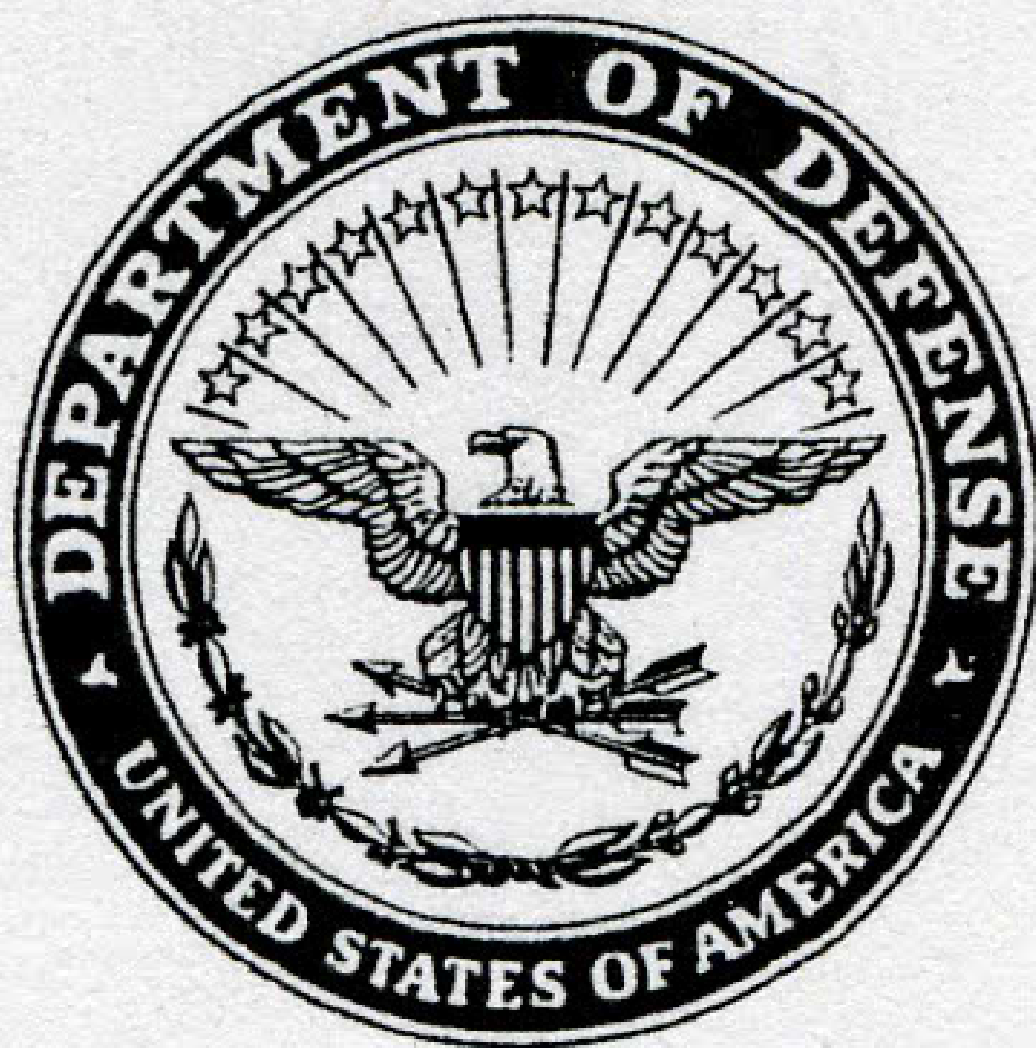




BRANCH TRANSFER & FORT HOOD



Finally, my branch transfer to military intelligence was approved (see next page). I attended the Military Intelligence Office Tactician Course, a two-week course at Fort Huachuca, Arizona, en route to my first assignment with 1st Cavalry Division at Fort Hood, Texas.



AIRC ORR D

WILSON, JAMES A.

06 04 20

1LT, MI

PROMOTION TO FIRST LIEUTENANT AND
ARRIVAL AT FORT HOOD

This is my official 1LT photo, showing me as a military intelligence officer. In November 2005, while at Fort Huachuca for the course, I was promoted to 1LT along with the rest of my class. Also while there, Dennis Zilinski was killed in Iraq.

Upon arriving to Fort Hood, I received orders to serve as the assistant battalion intelligence officer for 2-227th Aviation Regiment, the General Support Aviation Battalion (GSAB) for the 1st Air Cavalry Brigade (ACB).

This was a particularly exciting assignment for me because the GSAB had the medical evacuation mission, so I was going to at least be involved with the MEDEVAC mission.

The insignia selected for the 1st Cavalry Division (First Team) patch was designed by Colonel and Mrs. Ben Dorsey. The colonel was then-commander of the 7th Cavalry Regiment at Fort Bliss, Texas.

On a "sunset" yellow, triangular Norman Shield with rounded corners 5 1/4 inches in height, a black diagonal stripe extends over the shield from upper left to the lower right. In the upper right, a black horse's head, cut diagonally at the neck, appears within 1/8 inches of an Army Green border. The traditional Cavalry color of yellow and the horse's head is symbolic of the original organizational structure of the Cavalry. The color black symbolizes iron, alluding to the organizational transition from mounted horses to tanks and heavy armor. The black stripe, in heraldry termed a "Sable Bend", represents a "baldric" (a standard Army issue belt worn over the right shoulder to the opposite hip - sometimes referred to as a "Sam Browne belt"), which retains either a scabbard to sheath the trooper's saber or a revolver holster.





2902 BACHELOR BUTTON BLVD & PAKISTAN ORDERS

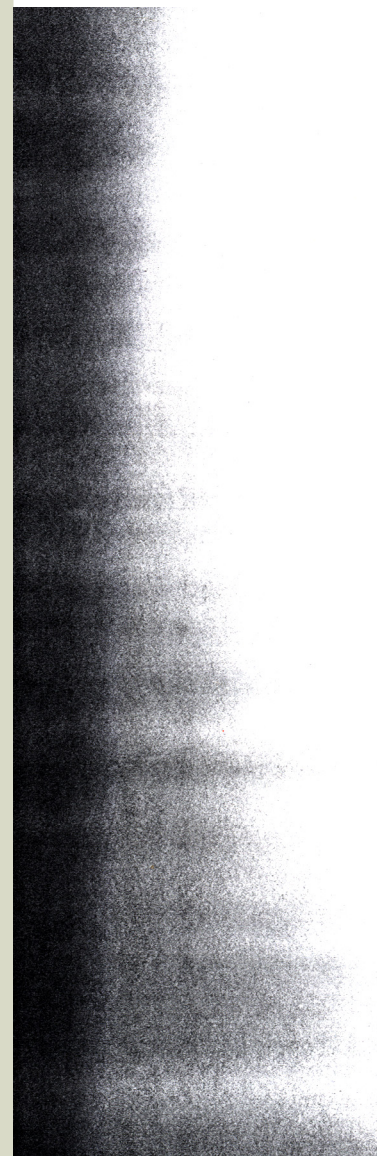
Expecting to remain at Fort Hood for a while, I decided to buy a house: 2902 Bachelor Button Blvd in Killeen. It was a short drive to work in the morning, but a long one if you hit traffic the wrong way!

Over the years, I enjoyed working on the house - painting all the rooms, adding crown molding, trying to keep the lawn looking nice.

I always had roommates. First, there was Casey Baker, and then Aaron Kearney and Dana Dreeke.

I didn't have much time to enjoy my house initially, though, because I was soon on a plane bound for the other side of the world.

OPERATION LIFELINE
QASIM AIRBASE
RAWALPINDI, PAKISTAN



Our unit received about 48 hours' notice before we were on a plane heading overseas.

The ironic thing is this was not my unit's first time in Pakistan. The army was undergoing restructure in its aviation units and Chinook helicopter units were coming down under a battalion headquarters. Our Chinook company started out in Korea, where originally they had packed their aircraft for deployment to Indonesia following the tsunami, but instead headed to Fort Hood. Shortly after arrival, they supported rescue efforts following Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. In November 2005, they deployed to Pakistan for two months to support relief efforts in the wake of the devastating earthquake, but were soon replaced by a National Guard unit so they could return home and continue preparation for approaching Iraq deployment. Well, the National Guard unit's time for deployment ran out. The mission was not done and the commanding officer did not want a third crew of pilots. He wanted the Blackcats of B Company, 2-227th Aviation back. And so we went.



**REPLY TO
ATTENTION**





I went as an intelligence officer in support of the aviation task force. Having recently arrived to the unit, my commanders felt this was a good opportunity to get my feet wet in intelligence. They sent Staff Sergeant Michael Keser, our battalion's experienced intelligence analyst, to make sure I knew what I was doing. In total, our task force numbered about 120 people.

The trip to Pakistan was a long one - probably the longest of my life. We departed from Fort Hood, stopped in Germany, moved to Manas Airbase in Kyrgyzstan, and then arrived in Bagram, Afghanistan. We had to in-process at Bagram before taking a flight to Islamabad.

The mountains around Bagram were absolutely beautiful!

On 8 October 2005, a major earthquake measuring 7.6 struck Pakistan's Kashmir region near Muzaffarabad, killing over 80,000 people and leaving millions homeless and devastated. Many roads in the northern mountain valleys were considerably damaged, making it impossible for trucks to deliver relief supplies to hard-hit villages. The only way to reach them was with helicopters.

Crews flew supplies in and people needing medical attention out. The damage was heartwrenching.

One shiny spot in it all was the children. Pakistani children always appeared happy and full of spirit. Kids across the world all seem filled with the same hope and spirit.







By the time I arrived in February 2006, relief operations were four months old. We were evacuating far less people because those with the most life-threatening injuries had already been treated. We also had a mobile surgical hospital operating up in the hardest-hit area, though we were preparing to close it.

Going in, we knew that we were there to finish U.S. military support of relief operations, though they would continue long after we departed. Before we left, we were told we would be there two to seven months and that it would not impact our upcoming deployment to Iraq! Had we been in Pakistan for seven months, we would have returned only a few weeks before heading to Iraq. Fortunately, we were back home after about two months.





THE BOEING CHINOOK CH-47 HELICOPTERThe Chinook helicopter is an amazing piece of machinery. It is a twin engine, tandem rotor heavy lift helicopter. It's one of the few able to perform effectively at high-altitudes – important for delivering supplies to remote villages.

The Chinook was designed, and initially introduced, by Boeing in the early 1960s and today costs around \$35 million. The current model is a CH-47F, which features many major upgrades to reduce maintenance, has digitized flight controls, and two 4733-horsepower engines.

The Chinook was first utilized in Vietnam and has become a mainstay in the US Army, used to transport troops and supplies (like mail!).





While in Pakistan, we worked alongside the Australian Army at Qasim Airbase in Rawalpindi.

The two Aussies I worked closest with were Corporal Baz Collatey and Captain Jada Bendall, who were the intelligence professionals for the Australian contingent.

Jada graduated from Australia's Defense Academy, their equivalent to West Point, so we had many interesting conversations about the similarities and differences of our programs.

Two days after I had arrived in country, the Marine lieutenant colonel, serving as lead intelligence officer, and his staff, left Iraq. This left SSG Keser and myself as acting senior American intelligence professionals for the operation. This meant either him or I had to travel to the Embassy on a regular basis in order to interact with headquarters staff operating there. Not a bad deal because they had great food!



The beauty of Pakistan's northern mountains is absolutely breathtaking. There was a time when this area was a popular destination for backpackers and hikers, primarily from Europe. However, in recent years these areas have become much more dangerous for Westerners and tourism has declined significantly.

I hope one day to be able to return to this part of the world so I can again enjoy the vast, open beauty of these mountains.

On the following spread, you see a photo of Rawalpindi near Qasim airbase. Rawalpindi is a city right next to Islamabad (much like the twin cities of Minneapolis & St. Paul) and is the military headquarters of the Pakistani Armed Forces. The town is known locally as "Pindi."







On the previous spread, you see two photos. The left is a photo of some of the Pakistani guards who were responsible for our security while we were in country. On the right is a photograph of a Pakistani jingle (or jinga) truck. Jinga trucks are akin to semis at home, only they are painted with intricate patterns and designs using bright colors – meant to reflect the personality of the owner. They are considered moving pieces of art. The name comes from the thousands of chimes that dangle and ring when the truck moves.

To the right, we see some of the river valleys of the Pakistani mountains.

On the next page, you see a formation of the coalition formation consisting of a German CH-53 Sea Stallion, a US CH-47 Chinook, and an Australian UH-60 Blackhawk. Together these three services provided the coalition aviation support that augmented Pakistani and United Nation relief efforts.







KAGHAN

After being stuck in an office for most of the first month, I got out on a flight in mid-March. That day, we took supplies to Kaghan, a small town in the Kaghan Valley. The Kaghan Valley (named after the village) is known for its natural beauty and is a popular tourist destination in Pakistan.

That day, we carried an internal load (as opposed to the external sling loads), so we had to land and unload the aircraft. The local people were out helping move the boxes as fast as we could unload them.

I remember seeing one of the children wearing a Chicago Bears sweatshirt. As a Packer fan, I had to tell the kid through an interpreter that the Bears were a bad football team! The kid laughed and replied that he liked the picture on the sweatshirt.





As seen on the previous page, we normally would "sling load" materials as opposed to carrying them externally. We would fly to a forward base near Muzzafrabad where a team of Marines were loading sling load operations. Sling loading, where you attach a prepared load to the bottom of the aircraft, allowed the crews to deliver far more supplies than if they were carrying all the loads internally and having to land and unload each time. To the left, you see scenes from Qasim Airbase. On the top is a view from the air. You can see the flight line of parked Chinooks. We lived in these two hangers while we worked at the airbase.

The efforts in Pakistan were fairly high-profile. We hosted a number of visitors over the course of operations.

In March, President Bush visited as part of a trip to India, Pakistan, and Afghanistan. While he did not visit us out at Qasim Airbase, he did take a moment to speak with the folks working at the Embassy headquarters. One of our pilots, Lauren Leftin, heard the President speak, and even met him.

Brad Pitt and Angelina Jolie also visited the area prior to my arrival. The bulk of their visit was spent at the forward deployed hospital area.



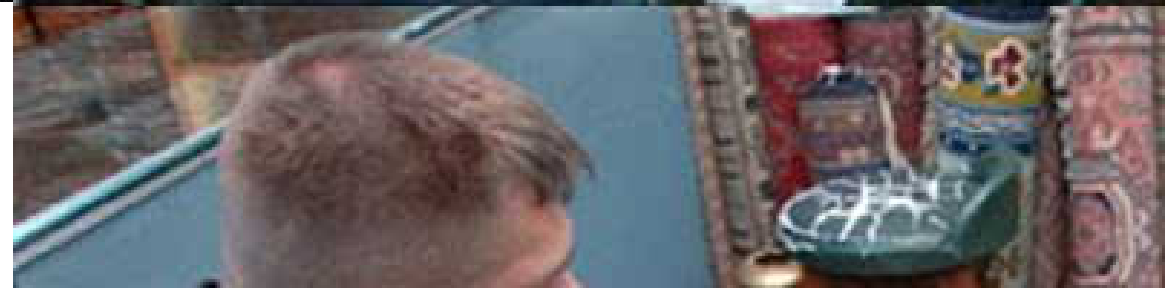


Here are a few more images of Rawalpindi. The top photo, obviously taken from the air, demonstrates how spread out the city is.

The photo on the bottom was taken on one of the many rides from Qasim Airbase to the Embassy in Islamabad. As you can see, the streets are very crowded. We would normally get a ride in the Embassy's armored, white van with diplomatic plates. The route took us past the place where an assassination attempt on President Musharaff had occurred a few years prior. Our commander, COL Johnson, on the other hand, had a driver who would drive him to the Embassy in an old car that looked much like the local cars.

Towards the end of our time in Pakistan, we were allowed one day to visit the local markets. The place we visited was bustling and one of the more commercialized places I saw in Pakistan. There was a store similar to Best Buy, but everything in the store was obviously pirated!

There were many rug shops. Pakistan produce many rugs, though not as high-quality as Turkish and Persian rugs. I ended up purchasing a black rug (as seen in photo).





In two short months, we were quickly at the closing ceremonies. There was quite a bit of energy around the closing ceremonies - many dignitaries from Pakistan, the U.S. and other places.

At the closing ceremonies, I had the opportunity to read the invocation - always good to be an intelligence officer reading an invocation on Al-Jazeera!

The closing ceremonies were quick. Ambassador Ryan Crocker, who I would cross paths with again in Iraq, went around and thanked everyone for their contributions and efforts. Rear Admiral LeFever, the commander for all coalition relief efforts in Pakistan, also thanked each of us. Admiral LeFever later returned to Pakistan as Commander of the Office of Defense Representatives, which operates out of the Embassy.



My time in Pakistan ranks as one of the more enjoyable and fulfilling parts of my military service. I truly enjoyed being able to help others in need by supporting relief operations. It was wonderful to work in a joint (multiple military services) and coalition (multiple nations) environment. It proved to be a valuable learning experience, as I really got my feet wet as an intelligence officer for an Army aviation unit.



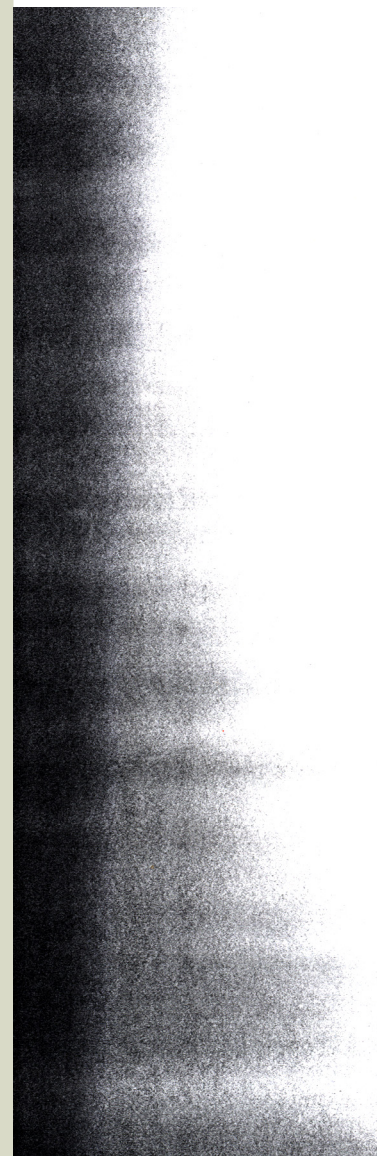


When we left Pakistan, we flew the Chinooks back to Bagram, Afghanistan where they were broken down and flown back to the U.S. for maintenance.

Our route took us past Peshawar, a historic city in the tribal lands of western Pakistan. We continued on through the famed Khyber Pass, crossing into Afghanistan. The Khyber Pass has long served as an important trade route between Central and South Asia and has been a strategic military location. Many military invasions have occurred through this pass. Today, it is unwise to travel through the route without armed guards.

We continued on into Afghanistan, where it was surprisingly green for much of our flight to Bagram. For a country that often gets painted as a big rock, I was surprised at the agriculture we saw. I had the opportunity to sit off the back ramp of the Chinook when we were flying, which was awesome!

OPERATION IRAQI FREEDOM 06-08
CAMP TAJI, IRAQ

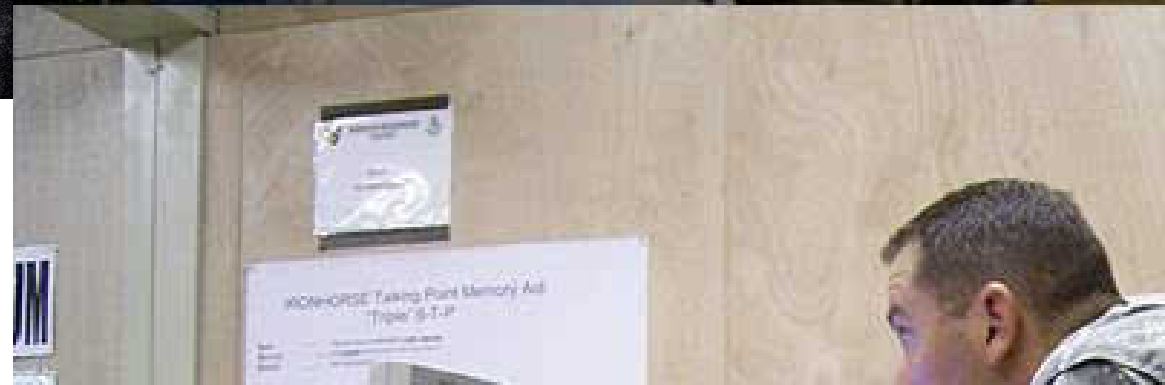


As soon as we returned from Pakistan, we immediately began preparing for deployment to Iraq. It was late April 2006, and from what we knew, we would deploy in September of that year. There was a lot to take care of before we deployed. We reported to the training center in June, packed up all our gear and shipped it off. We also had to prepare our personal affairs so they could be easily managed over the coming year. Oh, and it would probably be smart to learn something about Iraq too before we headed there! We were deploying with the rest of 1st Cavalry Division for OPERATION IRAQI FREEDOM 06-08 (06-08 represents the time span this phase. The next phase was 07-09. They overlap to keep a constant cycle of folks in rotation). We took over the Baghdad area from the 4th Infantry Division (4ID). 4ID was also a Fort Hood-based unit and we had historically traded Baghdad with them for the past few rotations.

JOINT READINESS TRAINING CENTER (JRTC)

In preparation for deployment, we had to complete a training rotation at the Joint Readiness Training Center (JRTC) at Fort Polk, Louisiana. JRTC is one of three Army Combat Training Centers, the others are the National Training Center (NTC) at Fort Irwin, California and the Joint Multinational Training Center (JMTC) in Hohenfels, Germany.

The training center affords units the opportunity to train on their deployment operations (we had to move all our necessary equipment and gear from Texas to Louisiana). While there, we have established and refined all our battle drills and operating procedures during 7-10 days of simulated, force-on-force, warfighting exercises. In short, the warfighting companies play a large game of laser tag, while the staffs work on their process for coordinating their subordinate units.





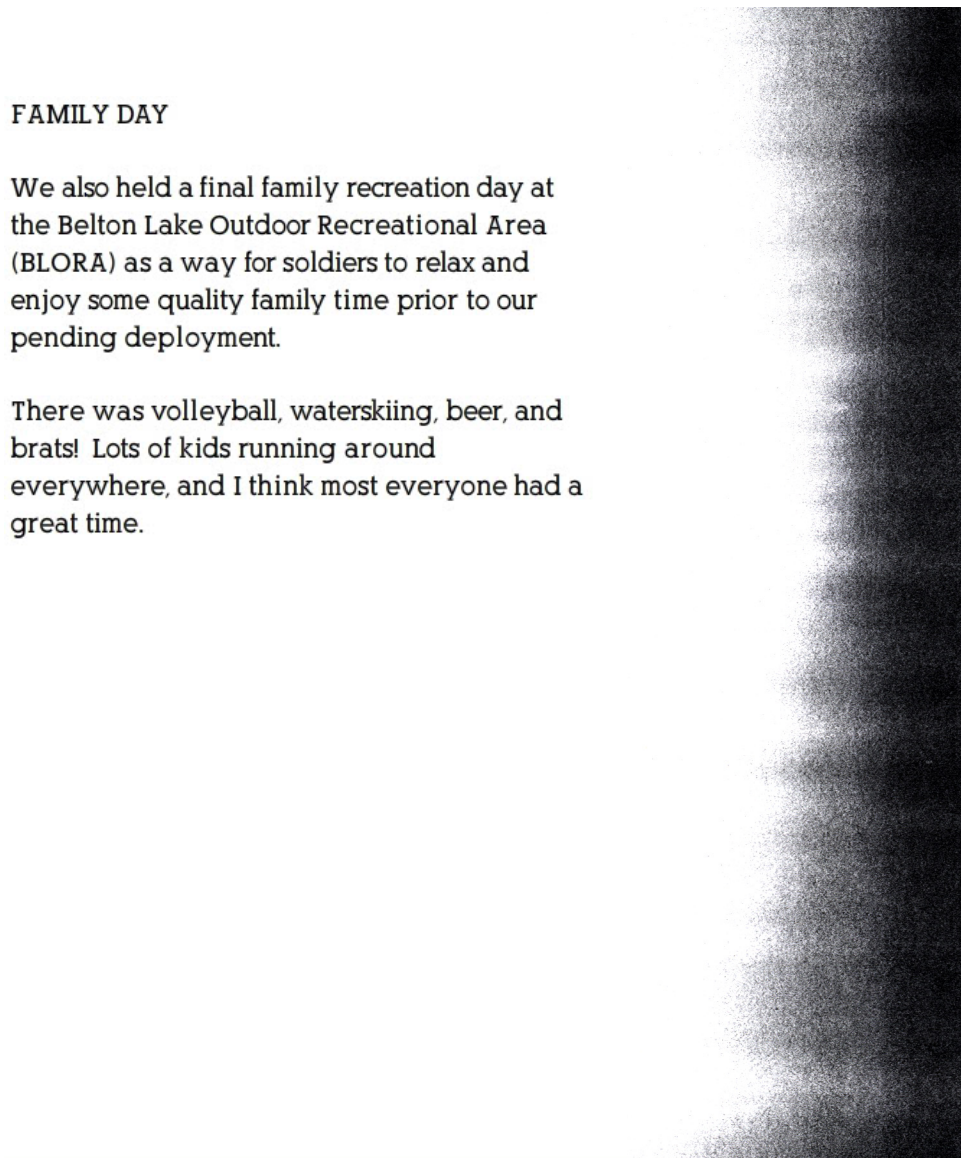
FLAG CASING

As is tradition, a week or so before we board flights to the Middle East we hold a flag casing ceremony. The units case their flags, a symbolic gesture that we are about to deploy. The whole ceremony brings with it the additional fanfare of aircraft flyovers and the Cavalry troop charge.

FAMILY DAY

We also held a final family recreation day at the Belton Lake Outdoor Recreational Area (BLORA) as a way for soldiers to relax and enjoy some quality family time prior to our pending deployment.

There was volleyball, waterskiing, beer, and brats! Lots of kids running around everywhere, and I think most everyone had a great time.





ARMY VERSUS TEXAS A&M

The weekend prior to our departure, we also had the good fortune of watching West Point (Army) football team play Texas A&M in San Antonio in a Battle of the Corps. Texas A&M is well known for its large ROTC Corps of Cadets.

I, along with many classmates who were stationed at Fort Hood, headed down for the game which turned out to be great, though Army came up short in the closing minutes. Texas A&M President Robert Gates congratulated Army on a fine performance. Little did I know he would soon be my boss.

The following page is a photo of our three flight companies: A Company, B Company, and C Company.





We arrived at Camp Buehring, Kuwait on mid-afternoon of 30 September 2006. Such a lucky arrival time because by signing in on the 30th, we all got combat pay and had to pay no taxes for the whole month of September.

Camp Buehring itself was a expanse of tents and sand - there wasn't much more to it. I can't imagine spending a whole year here - fortunately we stayed only a few weeks.

Our time in Kuwait is mostly a blur - we worked long hours on staff because our commanders were getting very anxious about the situation in Iraq (rightly, I suppose) and wanted to know everything that was going on. Unfortunately, we did not have good communications established with the units we were replacing and limited access to information on the networks in Iraq, plus our connections were painfully slow.

We flew on a C130 to Balad Airbase and then on a Chinook helicopter down to Camp Taji, just north of Baghdad. It was 17 October 2006 when I arrived.











I, and other members of 2-227th Aviation Regiment (the Lobos), were stationed at Camp Taji, which lies about 20 miles north of Baghdad near the town of Al Taji.

Taji was a former airfield for the Iraqi Republican Guard during the Saddam era and was a center for the manufacturing of chemical weapons and the maintenance of tanks.

Baghdad is the capital of Iraq and has an estimated population of 7 to 7.5 million people. It dates back to the 8th Century.

The intelligence section (S2) for the Lobos included myself, SSG Michael Keser, PFC Tucker Nelson, PFC John Parker, and PFC Kaziska (pictured on previous page, Kaziska missing). Until a week prior to deploying, we had been led by CPT John Geffert, but he was moved to division headquarters to work in the aviation cell. So, we began our time in Iraq short one officer in the S2 section. We would later add CPT Aaron Kearney and 2LT Malissa Moughon.

The intelligence section is referred to as the S2 section, with the "S" designating a staff role and the "2" designating "intelligence" and "security." Other staff numbers include 1: personnel, 3: operations, 4: logistics, and 6: signal.

As the S2, my section had to always be available to provide the enemy situation to flight crews. While many of our flights were predictable and scheduled, we always had the MEDEVAC mission that could come at any time. We would brief day crews around 0800 each morning, evening crews around 1700, and the MEDEVAC crews with each MEDEVAC mission we received. Our briefings would include recent enemy activity and recommendations for approach direction and necessity of escort. MEDEVAC helicopters, by Geneva Convention, are unarmed, so we often escorted the MEDEVAC helicopters with either an AH-64 Apache or a UH-60 Blackhawk armed with M240B machine guns.



A Co, 2-227 Aviation - Vultures

The Vultures were the command aviation company, meaning they flew around the commanding general and other commanders of the 1st Cavalry Division.

They flew UH-60 Blackhawk helicopters and were commanded by CPT Braden Camp.

I often flew with this company because we always had to fly in pairs, and often times the trail aircraft was empty. I tagged along to learn more about the operational side of aviation and to better understand how we could support the pilot with intelligence.



B Co, 2-227 Aviation - Blackcats

As previously mentioned in the Pakistan portion of the book, the Blackcats of B/2-227 were the cargo helicopter company and flew the CH-47 Chinook helicopter.

They flew almost exclusively at night in Iraq for safety reasons. With its large engines, Chinooks have a large heat signature that makes them vulnerable to surface-to-air missiles. Given they often are carrying full loads of soldiers, it makes sense to fly only at night when they are a much tougher target.

They were commanded by CPT Marc Dalziel.



C/2-227 Aviation - Witchdoctors

Bringing the MEDEVAC aircraft under control of the aviation branch was a new organizational structure for us when we deployed. We didn't actually meet our MEDEVAC company until we arrived in country. They were previously stationed at Fort Carson, Colorado but would return to Fort Hood with us following deployment.

As mentioned previously, MEDEVAC aircraft fly unarmed. In the photo to the left, you see a MEDEVAC helicopter (a version of the UH-60 Blackhawk) being escorted by a UH-Blackhawk that is not a dedicated medical evacuation aircraft and, therefore, can be armed with the M240B machine guns. This helped provide extra security to the MEDEVAC aircraft when they were going into areas with a higher threat of enemy action.

They were commanded by MAJ Guy Gierhart.



WARRIOR



PAD



TACTICAL OPERATIONS CENTER (TOC)

The S2 section usually operates out of the tactical operations center, or TOC. The TOC is the command post for a unit and is always aware of the current tactical situation and status of all elements of the unit. The TOC for 2-227 Aviation battalion was located in the same building as the TOC for the Air Cavalry Brigade and sister battalions.

It was in this building that I and the other members of the S2 section spent most of our days in Iraq.

Every unit tries to make a TOC personal, and in this case we had a wonderful mural painted on one of the walls by a talented soldier.





THE BATTLE CAPTAIN

The lead person in a TOC is the battle captain. He/she is in charge and acts with the authority of the unit's commander in the absence of the commander. We worked closely alongside the battle captain, who would look to us for the current enemy situation and for recommendations when executing operations.

Our battle captains were CPT Josh Madlinger, CPT Brent Emery, and CPT Brian Major. CPT Aaron Kearney also served as a battle captain later in the rotation.

The battle captain had a particularly rough job in trying to keep track of everything that was going on with our unit's aircraft, and they often had to deal with last-minute changes and on-going MEDEVAC requests.

For them, the creed on the following page was created ...

BATTLE CAPTAIN CREED

I AM A BATTLE CAPTAIN

I STAND READY TO ENGAGE AND DEFEAT ALL
STUPID QUESTIONS DIRECTED MY WAY

I AM THE BLAME LINE IN THE SAND

ALL HEAT ROUNDS GO THROUGH ME

AMBIGUITY IS MY TOUCHSTONE

I WILL ALWAYS PLACE THE MISSION PACKETS
FIRST

I WILL NEVER ACCEPT CORRECTIONS

I WILL NEVER BE ALLOWED TO QUIT

I WILL NEVER LEAVE AN UNCOMPLETED TASK,
UNLESS IT IS THE END OF MY SHIFT.

I UNDERSTAND THE CPOF IS A CPORN

IN THE FACE OF ACRONYMS I WILL SMILE
AND NOD, OBLIVIOUS TO THE TRUE MEANING

MONOTONY WILL ENCAPSULATE MY HEART
AND MIND

I UNDERSTAND EVERYONE ELSE'S PROBLEMS
COME FIRST, BECAUSE I OBVIOUSLY HAVE
NOTHING TO DO WHEN YOU BRING YOUR
TROUBLESOME ASS IN THE TOC AND EXPECT
ME TO PUT DOWN EVERY DAMN THING I'M
DOING TO ENTERTAIN YOUR TRIVIAL
QUESTIONS,

I WILL ALWAYS BE COMPETENT IN MY EXCEL
TASKS AND POWERPOINT SKILLS.

I WILL BE EXPECTED TO COMPLETE MULTIPLE
TASKS FOR WHICH I HAVE NO CONTROL OR
GUIDANCE; THUS ABSORB ALL BLAME IN ANY
FAILURE

THERE ARE MANY SCREWED UP TOCS BUT
THIS ONE IS MINE

I WILL NEVER CARE WHAT HAPPENS WHEN
THE CAT IS AWAY

12 HOURS ON 12 HOURS OFF, I AM CAPTAIN
OF THE BATTLE TO THE CORE!!!!



The weapons portrayed on the previous spread were on display around our brigade's headquarters at Camp Taji.

On the left is a ZPU-1, a Soviet Army weapon introduced after World War II. Originally a single, towed weapon, enemy combatants in Iraq would use these weapons, which fired 14.5mm bullets, to target aircraft - often mounting them on pick-up or bongo trucks.

In the background, you see another ZPU-1 and a ZPU-4, which is basically a four-barreled version of the ZPU-1. On the right is a ZPU-2, which, you guessed it, is a two barrel version of the weapon.

The weapons, along with another Soviet weapon - the 12.7 DSHK - were among our chief concerns as threat to our aircraft.



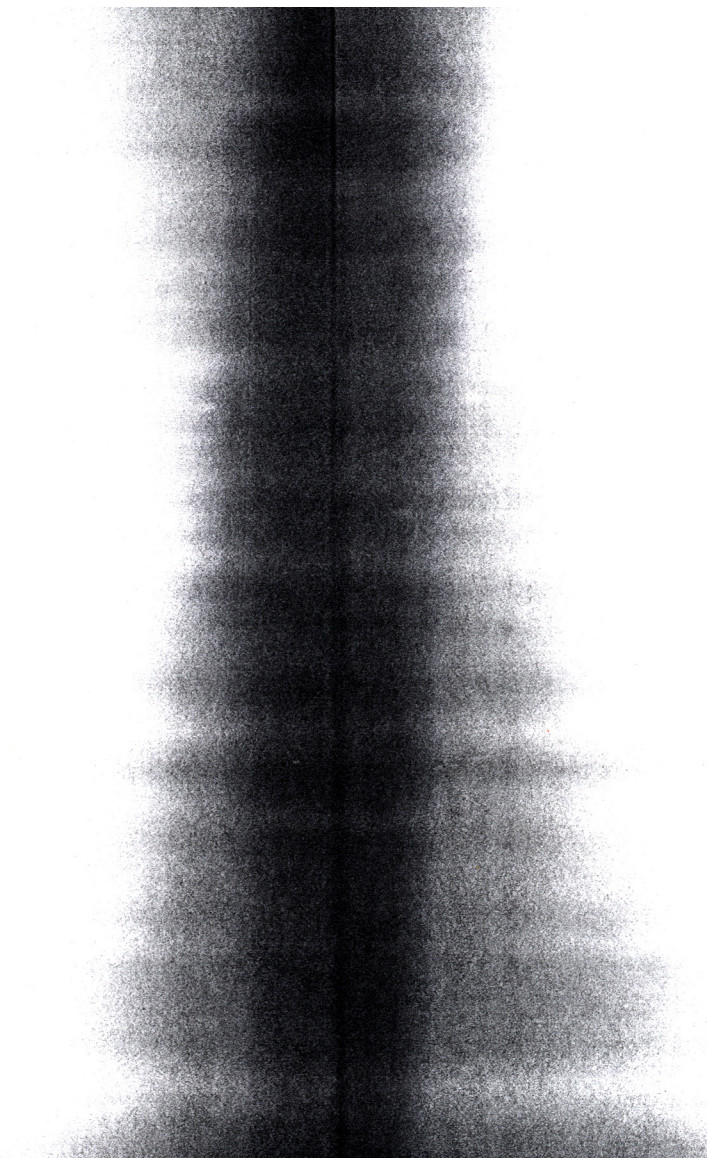








The photo on the previous page is representative of the fact that operations never stop - our units worked 24 hours a day, seven days a week for the entirety of our deployment.



Nighttime was merely an opportunity to perform maintenance on the aircraft.



WAUPACA REPRESENTED

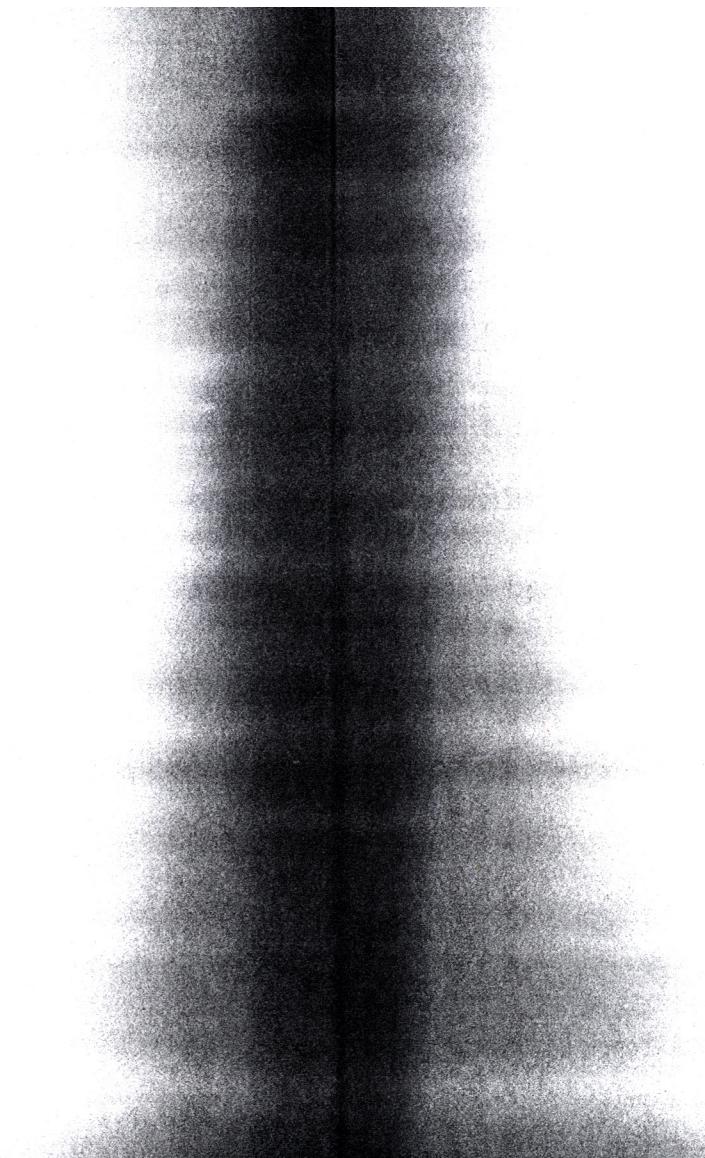
By chance, there were four of us at Camp Taji who had grown up in Waupaca, Wisconsin and graduated high school together. This was pretty cool given that Waupaca is a town of just over 5000 people.

There was Katy Werginz, a year behind me and was a transportation specialist in the Wisconsin Guard/Reserves. She had been activated for a year.

Jerry Wanty, who was a few years behind me and was serving on active-duty with a tactical interrogation unit in Iraq.

And, Jeff Wanty, who was a member of the 615th Aviation Maintenance Battalion and helped provide maintenance to our brigade's helicopters.

We were able to get together for dinner on one occasion and took a photo for publication in our hometown newspaper, The Waupaca County Post.



This photo was taken shortly after a fire had destroyed the bazaar (market where locals would come and sell stuff to soldiers), which you can see in the background.



I tried to get out of the office and onto flights as much as possible. Not only did this break up the monotony of daily life in Iraq, but it helped make me a better intel officer. I understood what pilots could see while flying and how aviation operations worked. I was also able to see and understand the terrain better.

In the images that follow, I am going to try and capture some of the places we flew to while in Iraq.

The first photo is from our initial flight into a U.S. base on the edge of Sadr City shortly after it was built. Sadr City is a large neighborhood that had largely been neglected by Saddam and was home to nearly 1 million Shiite muslims.





AL ASAD AIRBASE, AL ANBAR PROVINCE

Al Asad Airbase was the second largest military airbase in Iraq and is located in the Sunni western province of al Anbar, approximately 100 miles west of Baghdad. Once you head west of Baghdad, you quickly run into a vast expanse of desert, with nothing for miles around.

Al Asad was where President Bush, along with SECSTATE Condi Rice, SECDEF Robert Gates, and Chairman of Joint Chiefs General Peter Pace visited in September 2007.

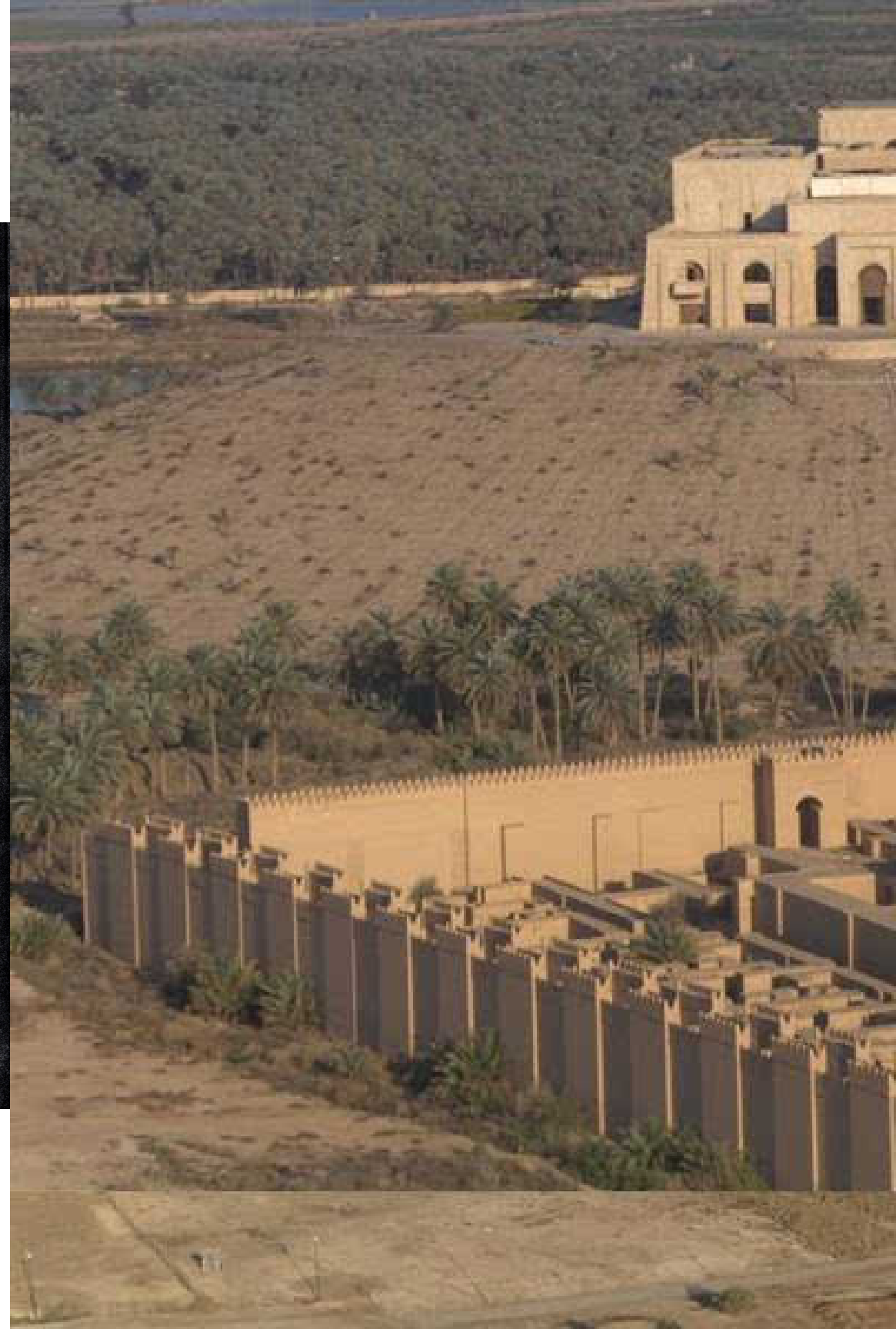


BABYLON

Babylon was a city-state in ancient Mesopotamia. The remains are found today near present-day Al Hillah, Babil Province, Iraq, which lies about 85 miles south of Baghdad.

This was the site of the Hanging Gardens of Babylon, one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World.

Little remains of the original construction of Babylon, but in 1983 Saddam began rebuilding the city on the top of the old ruins in order to "glorify Iraq."







CROSSED SABERS

The Crossed Sabers are one of the most prominent locations in Baghdad. They serve as an old war memorial for the Iran/Iraq War of the 1980s.

The hands are fashioned after Saddam's hands and multiple Iranian Army helmets are embedded in the cement around the structures. This used to be the site of military parades and formations, in which they were able to walk over their enemy. Saddam was often photographed shooting a shotgun from the parade reviewing stand - I took the opportunity to recreate the moment on one visit to the grounds..

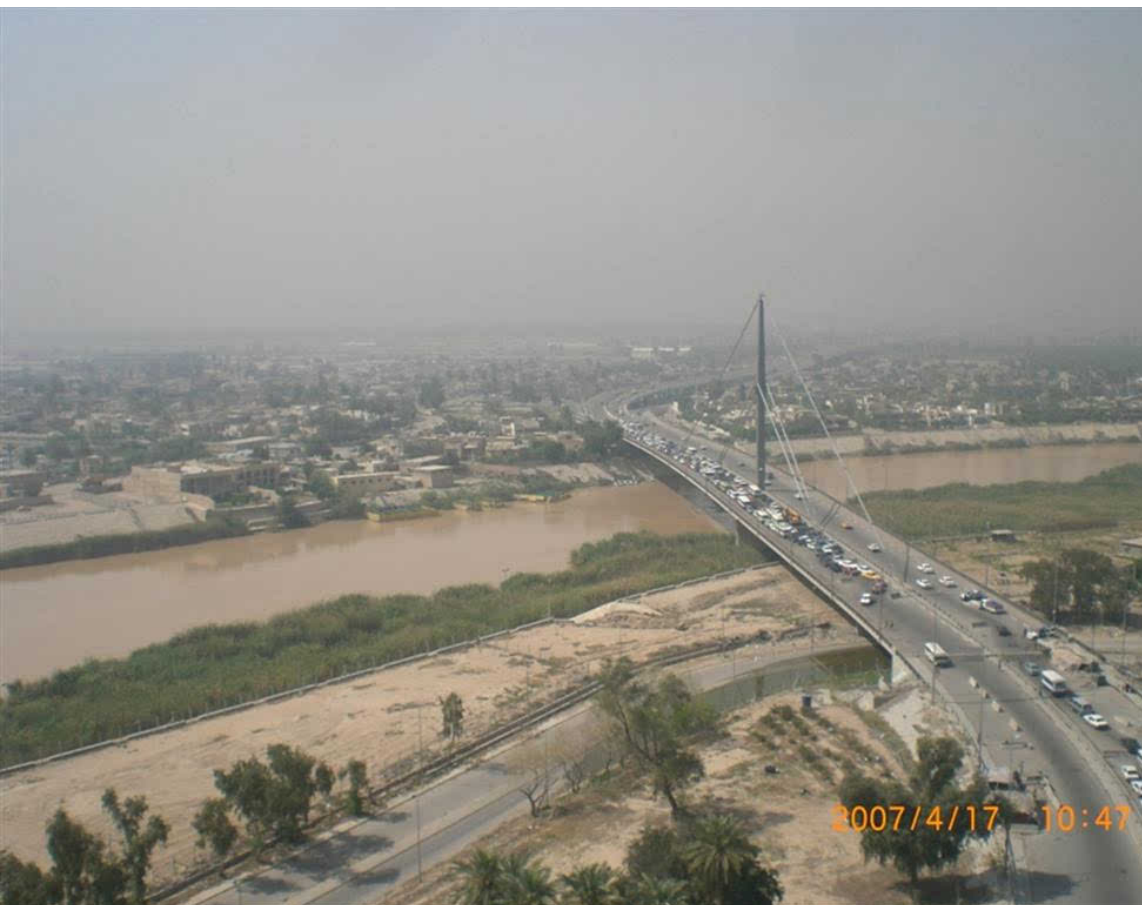


BAGHDAD'S ABU HANIFA MOSQUE

The Abu Hanifa Mosque is one of the most prominent Sunni mosques in Baghdad. It is located in the Adhamiyah district of Baghdad, a relatively upscale and predominately Sunni neighborhood. Imam Abu Hanifa, the founder of the Sunni Hanafi School Islamic Jurisprudence, is buried at the Mosque.

Despite the importance of this religious location, U.S. forces had a number of conflicts with combatants in and around the Mosque, which was often utilized to store weapons.





AL-AAIMMAH BRIDGE

The Al-Aimmah is a bridge over the Tigris River that links the areas of Adhamiya, a Sunni neighborhood, with Kadhimiyah, a Shia neighborhood.

In August of 2005, there was a deadly stampede wherein hundreds of Shiite pilgrims, who were on pilgrimage to the Kahimiyah Shrine, were crushed after panic struck. It happened on a day when many pilgrims had already been killed or wounded in attacks.

We watched this bridge closely on days when there were Shiite holidays and expected pilgrim travel across the bridge.

HAIFA STREET APARTMENTS

Haifa Street is a two-mile long street in Baghdad. It was named Haifa in the 1980s by Saddam Hussein in honor of the port city of Haifa in Israel, and it is lined with many high-rise apartment buildings.

Primarily a Sunni neighborhood, this area was the site of many clashes between U.S. forces and combatants, including major operations to clear Baghdad in January of 2007.





IRAQ PARLIAMENT

The Council of Representatives is the main elected body of representatives in Iraq. It is currently composed of 325 seats, with each representative elected for four years.

In April 2007, the canteen of the parliament building was attacked by a suicide bomber, killing one military policeman and wounding 23 civilians.

AL-RAHMAN MOSQUE

This was a large mosque that was under construction in Baghdad and was an attempt by Saddam to be the world's largest mosque.





MOTHER OF ALL BATTLES MOSQUE

The Mosque's towering minarets are built to resemble ballistic missiles sitting on launch pads and its 605-page Koran has been written, the Iraqi propaganda machine boasts, with Saddam's own blood. Its name comes from his famous description of the Gulf war.

After the Gulf war, Saddam Hussein, a Sunni Muslim, suppressed a revolt led by the majority Shi-ite groups in the South. Then in 1994, the president, looking to bolster his image as a good Muslim, banned alcohol and encouraged more mosque building. The Mother of All Battles Mosque was one of the main projects.

This was another mosque that often served as a weapons cache for enemy combatants.



MAHMUDIYAH

Mahmudiyah is a predominately Sunni city south of Baghdad often known as the "Gateway to Baghdad."

This city was the location where five soldiers raped a 14-year old Iraqi girl and then killed her and her family in March 2006. While four of the soldiers were later convicted of the crime, the event had a lasting impression on U.S. forces' ability to win over the residents of the city.

U.S. forces worked very hard to repair the relationship with leaders and residents in this key location throughout 2006 and 2007 because Mahmudiyah was a key trafficking route for weapons and fighters moving to Baghdad.



KADHIMIYA SHRINE AND DEATH OF 7TH IMAM

Kadimiyah is a primarily Shia district on the north side of Baghdad and home to the Kadimiyah Shrine, which contains the tombs of the 7th and 9th Imams.

Shia Muslims will go on pilgrimage to the mosque every year to celebrate the death of the 7th Imam. Many will travel hundreds of miles, and mostly on foot. The streets of Baghdad become lined with hundreds of thousands of people for a few days.





KIRKUK AND MOSUL

I had the opportunity to ride along on a flight to Mosul, through Kirkuk, in northern Iraq.

As you can see from the photos, the landscape is much different in the north. We flew over some beautiful lakes.

As you approach the Iranian border, the landscape open into vast, rolling, and desolate mountains. On the return flight, we flew close to the edge of where we were allowed to fly at the request of the General.

Kirkuk is the cultural capital of the Kurdish Iraqis. It remains a key location today because of the extensive oil reserves in the area and the unsolved issues of how to spread the revenues.

Mosul lies approximately 400 miles to the northwest of Baghdad and has a predominant Sunni-Arab population. It has been a key location in the fight against "al-Qaeda in Iraq."

MERCHANT'S TRIANGLE

This was the name given to the area northwest of Camp Taji and was based on the historical trade routes here. It was a place with little Coalition force presence and served as a major area of operations for the Sunni insurgency in Iraq.





QAQA WEAPONS FACTORY

This was an abandoned Iraqi weapons factory to the south of Baghdad, and was the site of most of Saddam's efforts to build an atomic bomb.

This place served as a significant weapons cache and operation site for the Sunni insurgency and had to be cleared on several occasions by Coalition forces.

SALMAN PAK

Salman Pak is a city approximately 15 miles south of Baghdad on the banks of the Tigris River. Near here was one of Saddam's weapons facilities that had produced chemical and biological weapons.

Also located in Salman Pak is Ctesiphon, the imperial capital of the Parthian Arsacids and Persian Sassanids and one of the great cities of ancient Mesopotamia. Today, some of the ruins still lie near Salman Pak (see photo).





YUSUFIYAH

Yusufiyah is a village about 25km south of Baghdad. Along with Mahmudiyah and Latifiyah, this area was known as the "Triangle of Death" due to the large numbers of improvised explosive devices, sniper and indirect fire attacks.



EUPHRATES RIVER VALLEY

The Euphrates River Valley to the south of Baghdad was an impressive agricultural location. I was always amazed at how green things were down there in comparison to much of the rest of the country.

BAGHDAD'S TOMB OF UNKNOWN SOLDIER (Previous Page)

Iraq, like the U.S. and many countries, has a Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, which serves as a memorial to those soldiers who remain unaccounted for.



THE SURGE

The surge refers to United States President George W. Bush's 2007 increase in the number of American troops deployed to Iraq, specifically in Baghdad and the Al Anbar Province.

Bush ordered the deployment of more than 20,000 soldiers and five additional brigades. The majority were sent to Baghdad. He also extended the tour of most of the Army troops in country and some of the Marines already in the Anbar Province area.

The major element of the strategy was a change in focus for the U.S. military "to help Iraqis clear and secure neighborhoods, to help them protect the local population, and to help ensure that the Iraqi forces left behind are capable of providing the security."

The President stated that the surge would then provide the time and conditions conducive to reconciliation among political and ethnic factions.

Counterinsurgency strategy in Iraq changed significantly after the 2007 troop surge. The newer approach attempted to win the hearts and minds of the Iraqi people through building relationships, preventing civilian casualties and compromising with and even hiring some former enemies. The strategy's chief engineer was General David Petraeus.

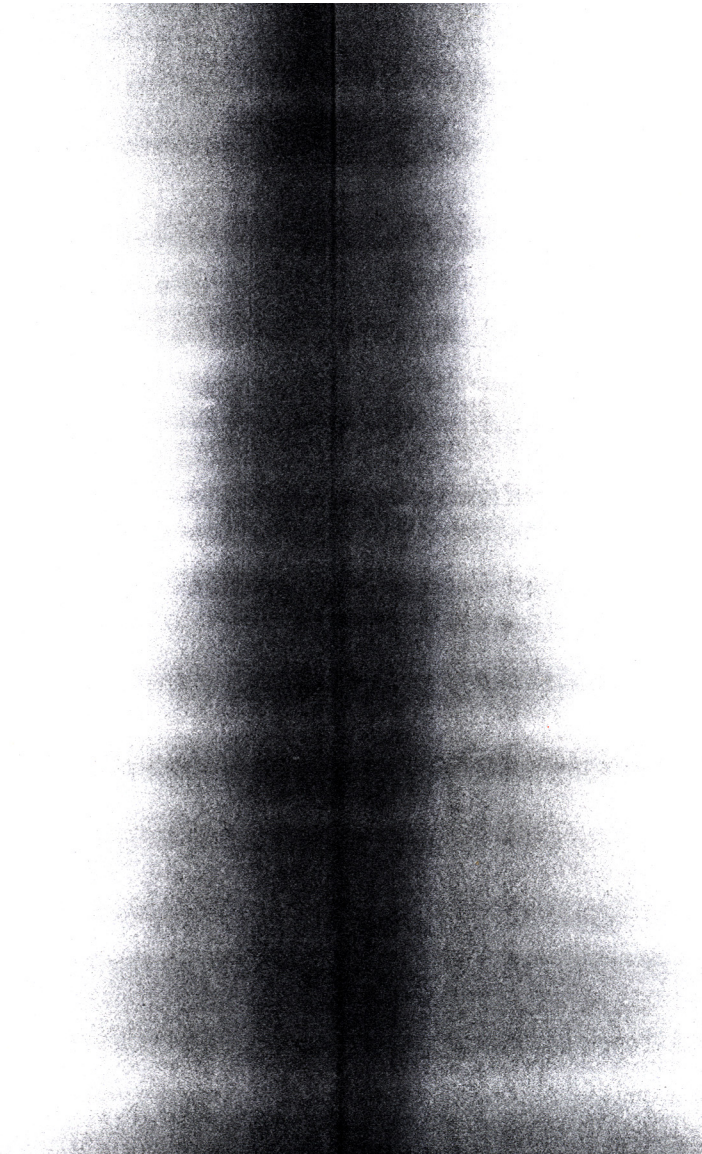
Instead of seeing every Iraqi as a potential enemy, the COIN strategy focused on building relationships, getting cooperation from the Iraqis against Al-Qaeda, and minimizing the number of enemies for U.S. forces. The belief was that a long-term presence of troops in a community would improve security and allow for trust to develop between the locals and the military. Civilian casualties were minimized by carefully-measured use of force. This meant less bombing and fire power, and more soldiers using restraint, even if it required more risk in the process. [60]

Another method of gaining cooperation was by paying locals, including former insurgents, to work as local security forces.

We found out that we were extended when we heard Secretary of Defense Gates announce it on CNN. Our commanders had not been warned of it ahead of time, though the rumor had been circulating. We actually lived in denial of our extension for many months, assuming that the sky was only so big and there was no need for additional aviation forces. We were wrong, though, and spent 15 months deployed, much like everyone else.

Having arrived in Iraq in late 2006, at the height of ethno-sectarian violence following the bombing of the Golden Dome Mosque in Samarra, we saw a real change in the situation.

By mid-June 2007, all the "surge brigades" were in place, with our Chinooks responsible for having moved most of these soldiers.



We started by clearing Baghdad and then went on to clear the beltway around Baghdad.

Our daily attacks maps went from barely readable because there were so many attacks to almost completely blank. Civilian deaths declined considerably, too, as some of the ethno-sectarian violence decreased. Over the course of the year, we found over 4400 caches, nearly 1700 more than were found in 2006.

"In closing, it remains an enormous privilege to soldier again in Iraq with America's new "Greatest Generation." Our country's men and women in uniform have done a magnificent job in the most complex and challenging environment imaginable. All Americans should be very proud of their sons and daughters serving in Iraq today." ~ General David Petraeus in testimony to Congress, September 2007.



CONCERNED LOCAL CITIZENS

One of the biggest parts of the surge, in my opinion, was the development of local security forces, often called concerned local citizens. In essence, Coalition forces hired, supported, and paid local men to provide security for their neighborhoods. Many of the men were former insurgents who had previously targeted U.S. forces.

While many people were outraged and skeptical of this program, I think it was one of the most important changes made. In a society based so heavily on honor, many of these men were forced for economic reasons to take money from insurgent leaders to plant roadside bombs or fire rockets at Coalition forces. By providing them with an honorable way to earn the money they needed to support their families, we were able to identify those who did not have an ideological opposition to us and reduce the number of attacks on our forces. The amount of intelligence we were passed soon rose too, leading ultimately to better targeting of the hardline insurgents.

CHECKPOINTS

This is an example of an additional checkpoint that was set up on the periphery of Baghdad. Many of these checkpoints helped control the movement of fighters and weapons into Baghdad.





COMBAT OUTPOSTS (COP)

We started to set up combat out-posts in the city and on the periphery of Baghdad. Here is one used by 2nd Brigade of the 82nd Airborne Division in northern Baghdad.

COPs allowed our soldiers to be embedded into communities, not holed up on large bases. This helped increase our presence around the city.

JOINT SECURITY STATIONS (JSS)

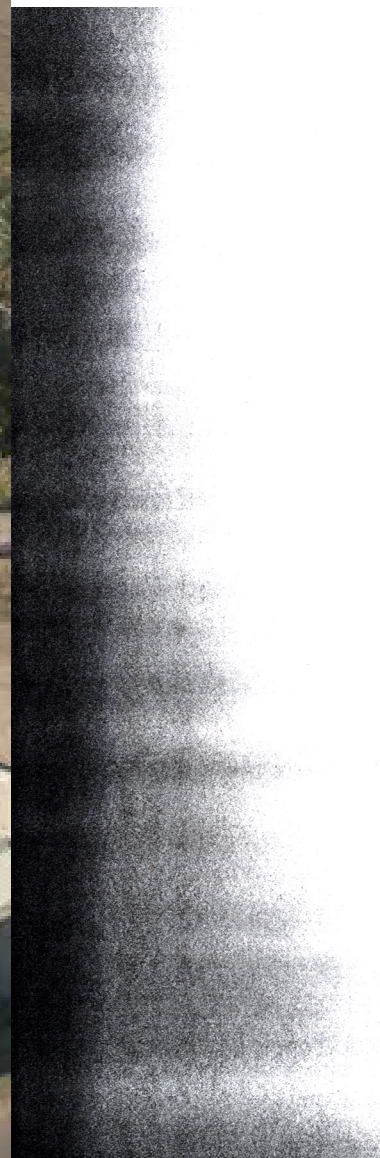
We also started establishing joint security stations, which were similar to combat outposts, but had both Coalition forces and Iraqi security forces operating out of them.





COPs on PERIPHERY

Not only did we put COPs in the city, but we had many on the periphery of Baghdad in order to deny the enemy the ability to freely operate in the belts around Baghdad.



ASSAULT ON AIRCRAFT

In January 2007, just as the surge was in its infancy, there began a difficult time period for aircraft in Iraq. Between late-December 2006 and mid-April 2007, there were a number of attacks against aircraft.

While the media painted a picture of a major coordinated effort, a number of the incidences were in fact unconnected. That said, there was an increase in the targeting of aircraft by enemy combatants operating in the beltways around Baghdad.

The first coordinated attack on an aircraft in this series came against an Apache helicopter south of Baghdad with a combination of heavy machine guns.

The first loss came on 20 January 2007, when a UH-60 helicopter was downed by heavy machine guns to the east of Taji.

In late January, our brigade lost its first aircraft in the Battle of Najaf, an unrelated incident involving a Shia extremist cult.

A few days later, we lost another Apache and crew north of Taji to heavy machine-gun fire.

In April, a Blackhawk flown by my friend and classmate, Kenny Doleac, was shot down south of Baghdad, but they were able to land the aircraft and only minor injuries resulted.

By May, the attacks on beltways subsided but soon gave way to an increased threat from Shia militia groups in and around the Sadr City area of Baghdad.

BATTLE OF NAJAF 2007

The battle took place on 28 January 2007 at Zarqa, near Najaf. It began as a fight between Iraqi Security Forces and about 200 members of the Shia Islam cult Soldiers of Heaven. Soon, it included support from Coalition forces.

In the days leading up to Ashura, when many Shia go on pilgrimage to the holy city of Najaf, the Soldiers of Heaven planned to assassinate the Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, which they felt would be about the return on the 12th Imam.

The battle raged for hours, and Apaches from 4-227 Aviation were called in to support the fight against the cult members who were operating out of large ditches. Our brigade lost one aircraft and two pilots to heavy machine gun fire that day. Air Force planes and Army helicopters continued to target the ditches for hours until the U.S. called in ground forces from the 3rd Stryker Brigade Combat Team.



KARBALA KIDNAPPINGS

On 20 January 2007, five GMC SUVs carrying English-speaking gunmen with American uniforms and weapons conducted one of the boldest and most sophisticated attacks against American forces when they kidnapped four U.S. soldiers from the Karbala Provincial Joint Coordination Center. All four soldiers were executed soon thereafter, bringing into question the intent behind the raid which some believe was to capture/erase data on a computer that the Americans had.

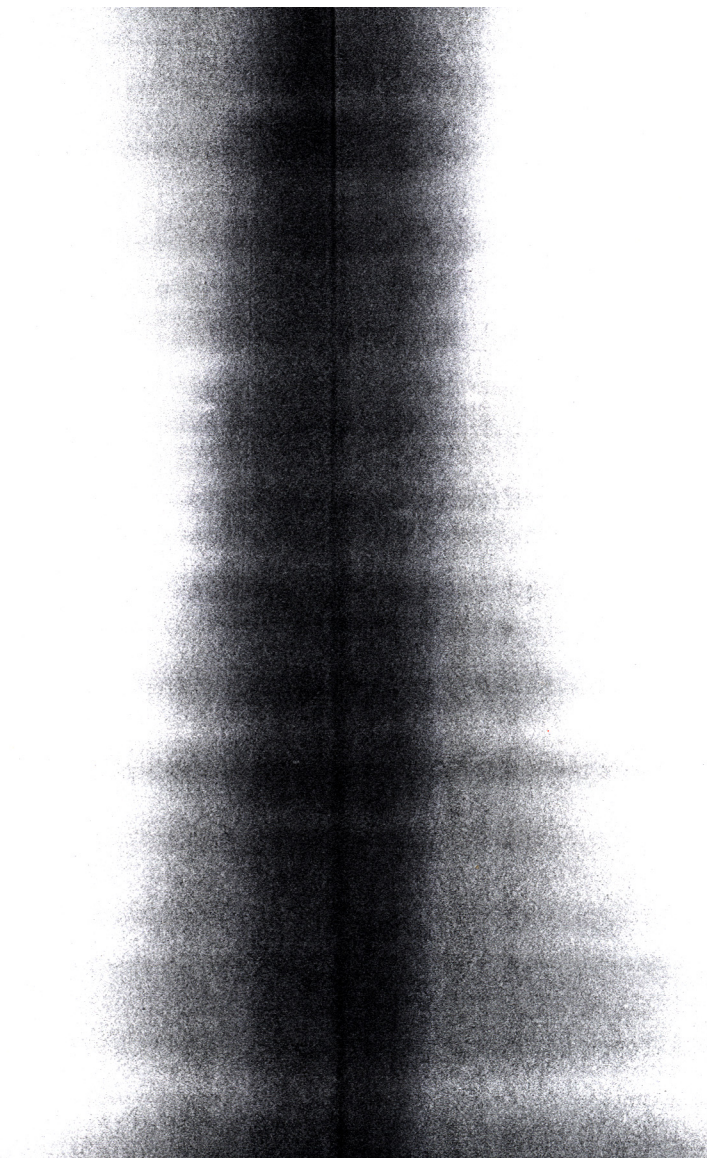
The attack is believed to have been carried out by Iranian-backed and trained militia members.

One of the servicemen captured and killed in the attack was Jacob Fritz. Jacob was originally a member of my class at West Point, but graduated with the class of 2006. While we weren't particularly close, Jacob and I were in the cadet Glee Club together and had come to know one another well through the years. Well done Jacob, be thou at peace.



MASCAL in Tarmiyah

Tarmiyah was a small village to the north of Taji that was a constant thorn in the side of Coalition forces. A predominately Sunni village, it was the center of operations for many Sunni insurgent cells operating north of Baghdad.



As part of the surge, members of 2-8 Cavalry had built a joint security station in the town that was not too popular. In February of 2007, insurgents drove multiple vehicle-borne improvised explosive devices into the structure and tried to overrun it, resulting in a mass casualty event for our MEDEVAC forces.

The photo on the following spread is one of my favorites from our deployment and depicts MEDEVAC aircraft on the ground waiting to evacuate soliders. At this time, there is still small arms fire going on and one of the medics returns fire with his personal weapon to help provide cover for one of the casualties.





While I spent a majority of the deployment safe in the office, it was important to remember that danger was still a distinct possibility.

Prior to my arrival, our MEDEVAC company had a number of soldiers wounded in a mortar attack on Camp Taji.

We had three helicopters hit with small arms fire over the course of the 15 months, one taking bullets through the front windshield.

We did have one rocket land near our TOC, but our TOC was well protected with concrete barriers and the only damage was to our commander's, LTC Joslin, truck.

We lost one member of the Lobo team when he was killed by indirect fire while performing a pre-flight check on an aircraft. A short tribute to SGT Brown follows on the next page.



SGT William Brown

25, of Phil Campbell, Ala.; assigned to the 2nd Battalion, 227th Aviation Regiment, Air Cavalry Brigade, 1st Cavalry Division, Fort Carson, Colo.; died June 23 in Taji, Iraq, of wounds sustained when insurgents attacked his unit with indirect fire.

Survivors include his wife, Rachel, who moved to Enterprise earlier this year to prepare for his homecoming, and two children, Ethan, 6, and Tyler, 2.

Brown's mother, Theresa Kyser of Daleville, said her son and two other soldiers were doing a routine check on a helicopter when the mortar fire hit.

"One of the other soldiers sent word to Rachel that when the mortar hit, that William pushed him out of the way," Kyser said. "He said he was alive because of William. That's the way William was, always caring for others. "

~ Source: <http://militarytimes.com>



PROMOTION TO CAPTAIN

I had the honor of being promoted to captain while in Iraq. Promotion to captain was fairly automatic at this point in time, as most of my class was promoted on 1 July 2007.

One of the advantages of being in an aviation unit is that we are able to move around a bit and five of us were promoted that day on Saddam's old parade grounds at Crossed Sabers.

MAJ Price, my immediate boss and our operations officer, pinned me.



Others promoted that day were Eric Boenitz, Ross Schuchard, Aaron Kearney, and Norvell Taite.

We had a rather large crowd that flew down to attend the ceremony, all-in-all a wonderful day.





SPC TUCKER NELSON

I had the honor of re-enlisting one of my soldiers, then-SPC Tucker Nelson, at Crossed Sabers as well.

As of September 2010, Nelson has been promoted to sergeant, has gotten married, and has a beautiful little daughter. He is still with the Lobos and deployed a second time to Iraq, but will be departing the unit soon.



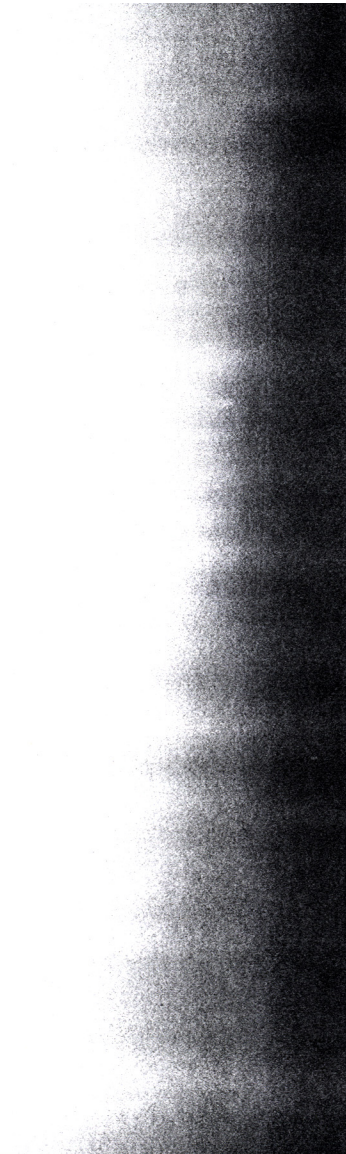


FUN IN IRAQ

We did have fun while in Iraq.

On the previous page, you see me having fun on an AH-64 Apache helicopter during one of our officer development sessions. On the bottom photo, I am trying to imagine what it would feel like to have a "spur ride," which happens in the event an Apache tries to evacuate a wounded soldier. They will throw the wounded soldier in the front seat of the Apache and the pilot will strap himself/herself to the outside for the ride to the nearest safe location.

On the right, you see a photo from West Point Founder's Day (birthday) celebration we had in Iraq, as well as a photo from above of Freedom Rest - a pool in the Green Zone where soldiers go to rest and relax. To the right, you see LTC Chris Joslin jumping off the platform dive. Legend has it that Saddam often made officers walk off this same platform - he just didn't always have water in the pool.





On top, I am pictured with classmate and friend Kenny Doleac on the day he was able to safely land his Blackhawk in a field after coming under heavy machine gun fire south of Iraq.

Below is our crew that used to enjoy band night at the Mudhouse, a Camp Taji coffee shop.

On the following spread, you will see the famous Dr. Pepper bike that Warrant Officer Michael McDonald crafted over the course of the tour - a true beauty! You also see myself with some of the lovely WWE ladies who visited through a USO tour.

On the right, you'll see what many deployed soldiers get plenty of - girl scout cookies! Below that are SGT Hitt's best Michael Jackson impersonation and the aftermath of a joke played on Josh Bare while he was on leave (his room was filled with empty water bottles for two weeks).





HOLIDAYS IN IRAQ

While they do their best to make the holidays bearable in Iraq, I think the low point of morale for our unit was when we spent our second straight Thanksgiving in the mess hall of Camp Taji. While we knew we would be returning home soon, it became very real just how long we had been there.

In the end we didn't have it that bad, however, as most of us made it home in time for Christmas 2007. Many other soldiers were stuck spending two straight Christmas holidays deployed.



CASING CEREMONY

Soon again, we were casing our colors for re-deployment back to Fort Hood.

By this point, while we were proud of our contributions to an improving situation in Iraq, most of us were worn down and tired from the previous 15 months. I am not quite sure how the soldiers who constantly patrolled were able to do so for such an extended period of time. Truly a remarkable generation of fighting men and women.

The following spread contains the achievements of the Lobos during OPERATION IRAQI FREEDOM 06-08. The unit was awarded the Meritorius Unit Commendation for our efforts during the rotation, and I received the Bronze Star Medal.



Lobo Success Stories

CH-47 Totals

- 20,413,366 lbs cargo weight
 - Increased survivability for support units
- 119,942 PAX moved
 - Keeps soldiers off the road
- 9,701 Pallets

Total Flight Time

6,933 UH Hours
6,483 MED Hours
8,069 CH Hours

MONTHLY FLTH

495 UH HOURS
463 MED HOURS
576 CH HOURS

MEDEVAC Totals

5,027 Missions
5,435 Patients
454 Roadside missions

Total Fuel Issued

2,989,412 Gallons

CH-47 MONTHLY AVE

CLIX AND MAIL PALL
TOTAL VEHICLES OF
TOTAL SOLDIERS OF
TOTAL CLPS OFF MS

MEDEVAC MONTHLY AVERAGES

359 Missions
388 Patients
32 Roadside Missions

LOBO MONTHLY AVERAGES

3 separate/distinctively different missions
(Heavy Lift, VIP, MEDEVAC)
AVG FLTHOURS: 1,534
AVG PAX: 8,567







THE STETSON

The most distinctive uniform item worn by cavalymen is the Cav Stetson. The hat was adopted in an effort to increase esprit de corps in the cavalry squadron and was meant to emulate the look of the 1876 pattern campaign hat worn by cavalry troopers past.

Stetsons are constructed of a high-grade fur felt. The type of hat cord worn varied according to rank: general officers wore gold braid; officers wore gold and black intertwined braid; warrant officers wore silver and black intertwined braid; enlisted men wore yellow wool or nylon. On the Cav hat, most officers and warrant officers wore some combination of officer rank insignia and crossed cavalry sabers.

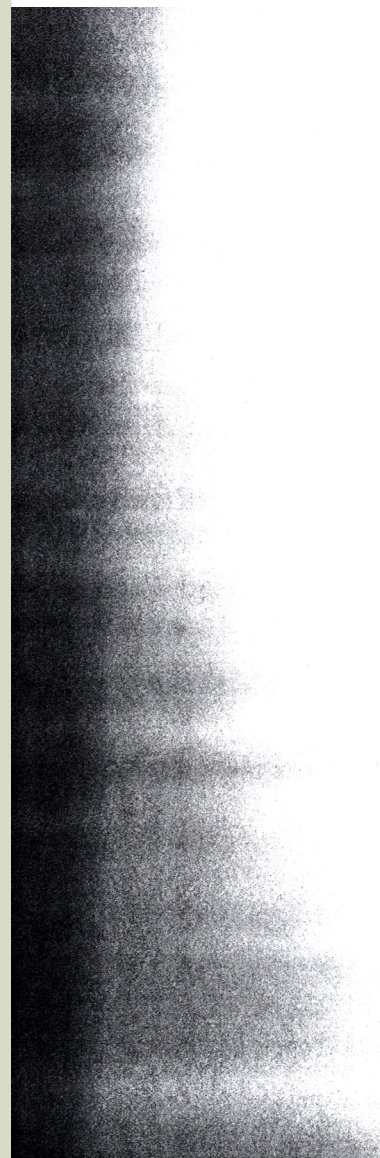
The tradition of "Breaking in a Stetson" has many various forms - most consist of pouring some form (or forms) of alcohol in it and having the new wearer drink. This is actually an old tradition which began when riders, upon reaching a steep river bank, would dismount and fill their hats with water for their horses to drink!

THE SPURS

The Order of the Spur is a Cavalry tradition within the United States Army. Soldiers serving with Cavalry units (referred to as Troopers) are inducted into the Order of the Spur after successfully completing a "Spur Ride" or for having served during combat as a member of a Cavalry unit. Traditionally, each Trooper is presented spurs by his sponsor at a ceremonial dinner commonly referred to as the "Spur Dinner".

Spurs and Stetsons will be worn at all cavalry functions, otherwise, they will not be worn outside of the cavalry footprint. Stetsons and spurs may be authorized by the local command, but are not authorized for wear at Army functions not specifically dedicated to cavalry. Wear with civilian attire may be restricted by a local commander, but otherwise the spurs and Stetson may be mixed with civilian attire when rank has been removed.

APACHES OVER IRAQ



The following photos are those from Army Warrant Officer Dan McClinton, a talented photographer and veteran Apache pilot.

He took many photos over the course of our deployment in Iraq and the following are a few of my favorites.









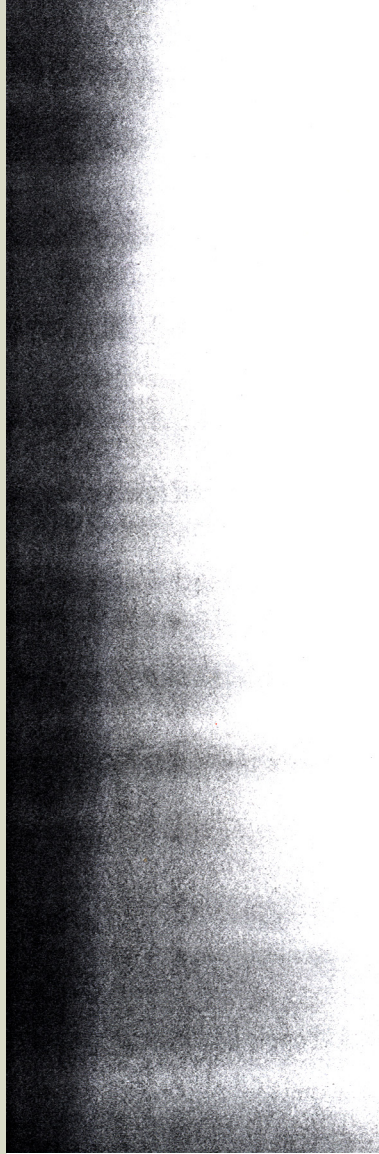








KOREA



Following my return from Iraq, I left departed Texas for duty with the 2nd Infantry Division in Korea.

I had decided to take the Korea opportunity because it would allow me to transition off active duty when my commitment was complete in May 2009.

By this point, I had decided that a military career was indeed not for me. As an intelligence officer, I would spend a majority of my career as a staff officer. But, I wanted to be a commander, to be my own boss. Instead, I looked into applying to business schools to pursue an MBA.







大漢門

Walking History View

국립경주박물관

National Gyeongju Museum

Walking History View

I arrived in Korea in April 2009. I in-processed through Camp Stanley before receiving my assignment with the intelligence section of the 2nd Infantry Division staff at Camp Red Cloud.

Camp Red Cloud is located in Uijeongbu, Korea, about 25km north of Seoul. The base was small, but nicely kept. It has a 9-hole golf course, a Starbucks, and a nice gym.

I had to live on post, as was customary for single officers. The room was by no means spectacular, but it got the job done.





2ND INFANTRY DIVISION

The 2nd Infantry Division "Indianhead" patch is one of the most recognized unit emblems in the U.S. Army because of its distinctive design and 78 years of proud service by warriors.

The origin of the patch goes back to the earliest days of the division's history. While training with the French in 1917, Col. Herringshaw of the Service and Support Supply of the 2nd Infantry Division noticed that the French trucks were marked with symbols representing the unit to which they belonged. He sponsored a contest among his men to design a symbol for his trucks. There were three winners: first prize winner was a design featuring an Indianhead; second prize went to a plain white star and the third prize is lost in history.

The Colonel was not completely satisfied and it is believed that, by chance, he combined the two symbols of the white star and Indianhead and liked what he saw. Some theories say that the single star represents the state of Texas, while others claim the star is from the American Flag.



The Demilitarized Zone (DMZ)

The Korean Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) is a strip of land running across the Korean Peninsula that serves as a buffer zone between North and South Korea. The DMZ cuts the Korean Peninsula roughly in half, crossing the 38th parallel on an angle, with the west end of the DMZ lying south of the parallel and the east end lying north of it. It is 160 miles long, approximately 2.5 miles wide and is the most heavily militarized border in the world.

Inside the DMZ, near the western coast of the peninsula, is a place called Panmunjeom, home of the Joint Security Area (JSA); it was originally the only connection between North and South Korea. There are several buildings on both the north and the south side of the Military Demarcation Line (MDL), and a few of which are built right on top of the MDL. The Joint Security Area is the location where all negotiations have been held since 1953, including statements of Korean solidarity, which have generally amounted to little except a slight decline of tensions.

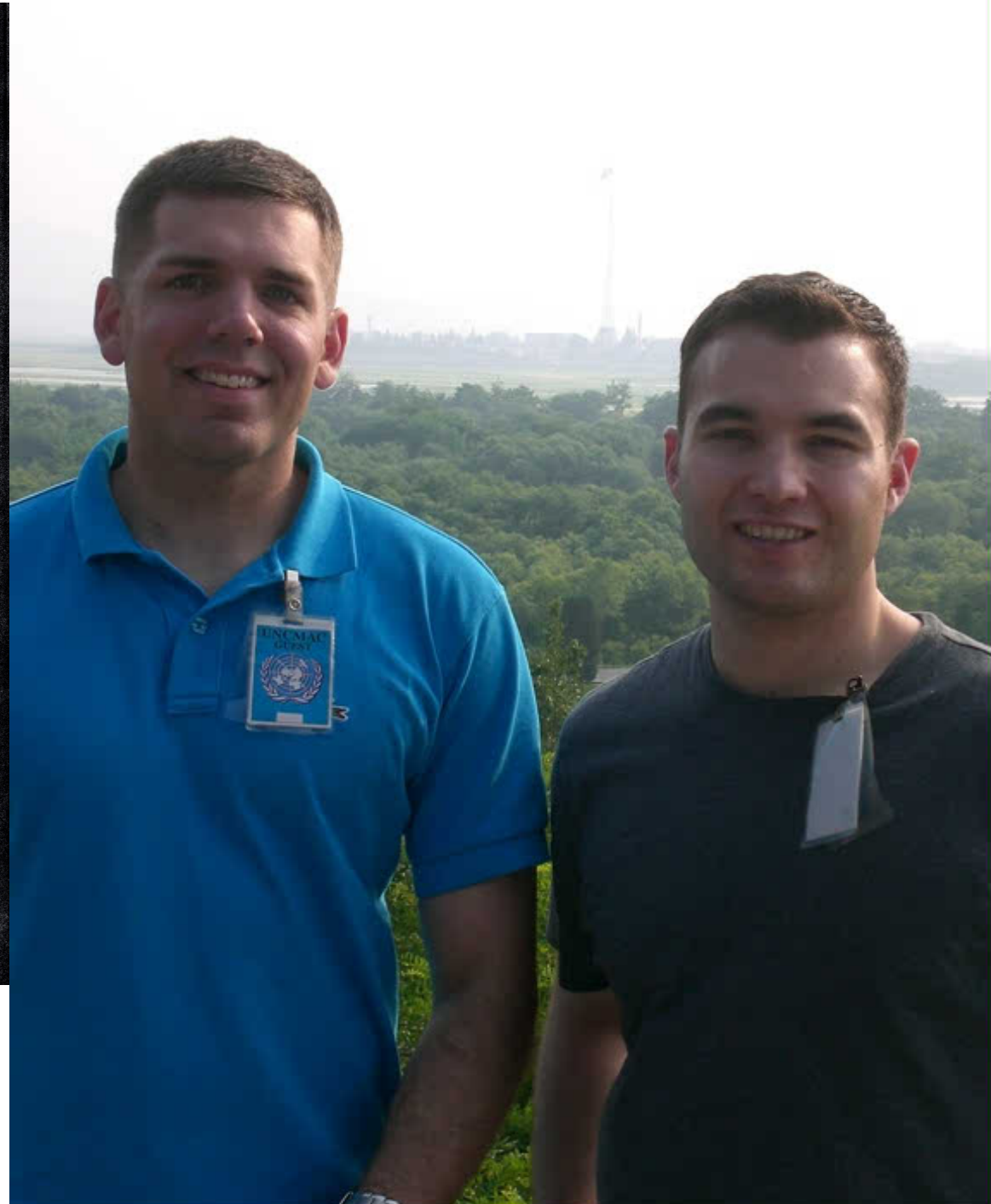
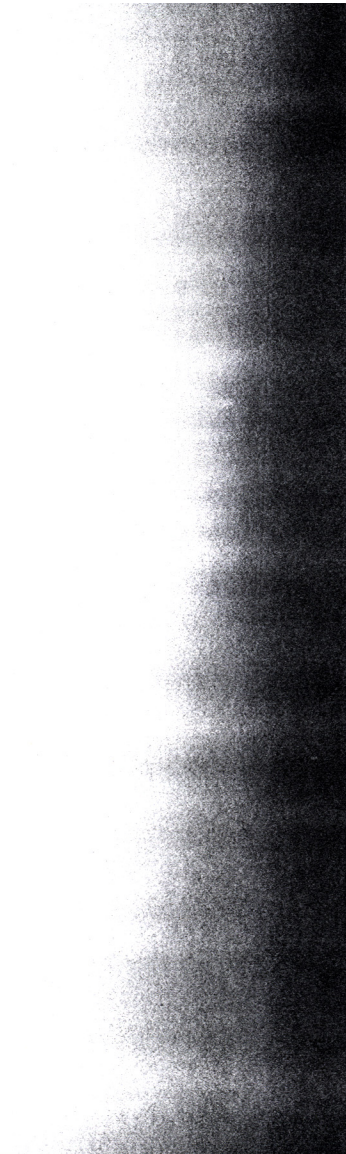


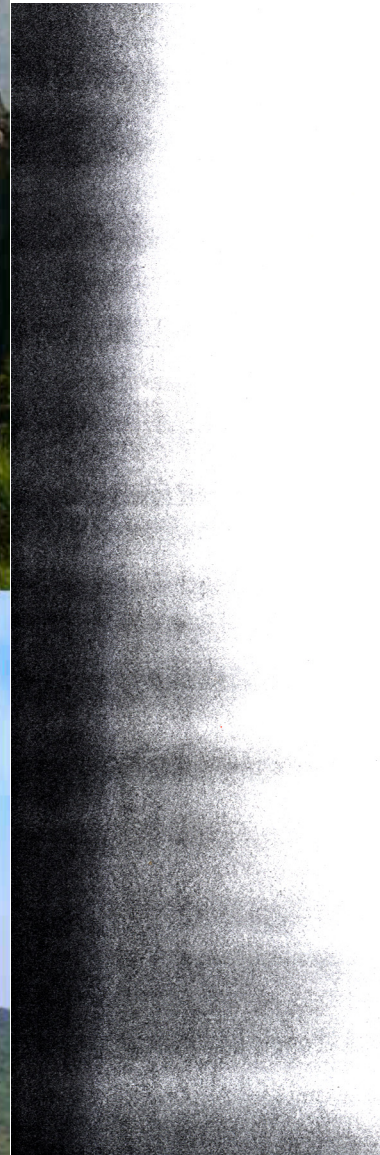
Kijong-dong

Kijongdong is a village situated in the North's half of the DMZ. Also known in North Korea as Peace Village, it has been widely referred to as Propaganda Village.

The official position of the North Korean government is that the village contains a 200-family collective farm, serviced by a childcare center, kindergarten, primary and secondary schools, and a hospital. However, observation from the south suggests that the town is actually an uninhabited Potemkin village built at great expense in the 1950s in a propaganda effort to encourage South Korean defection and to house the PRK soldiers manning the extensive network of artillery positions, fortifications and underground marshalling bunkers that abut the border zone.

The world's highest flag tower stands at the entrance of Kijongdong, 525 ft tall and flying a 600 lb North Korean flag. In what some have called the "flagpole war", a brief battle of one-upmanship saw the creation of the shorter South Korean flagpole at Daeseong-dong.





There were a lot of beautiful hikes available in Korea, particularly in the Fall when all the leaves were turning colors.

We also had the chance to enjoy Seoul, a bustling city in one of Asia's miracle economies.

Less than 60 years after being devastated by the Korean War, Korea's economy had topped \$1 trillion and ranks in the top 15 in the world.

The spring cherry blossoms were gorgeous too! (As picture on the following page.) I would meet Yoomi Hong at an admit event for Chicago Booth Business School and we soon started dating. It was helpful to have a guide in Seoul!







I completed in team triathlons while in Korea.

My team consisted of Alex Glade on the swim, Paul Lashley on the bike, and myself on the run.

We placed first in the 2nd Infantry Division mixed-team competition and then 2nd in the 8th Army mixed-team competition.

While in Korea I served as the Special Security Officer (SSO) for the 2nd Infantry Division. Yes, you read that correctly, "special" security officer.

While the job was a bit boring, I worked with some wonderful folks in Korea, including LTC James L Wilmeth IV, CPT Brad Rice, CPT Tae Kim, MAJ Rob Zanca, and MAJ Jonathan Mayhew.

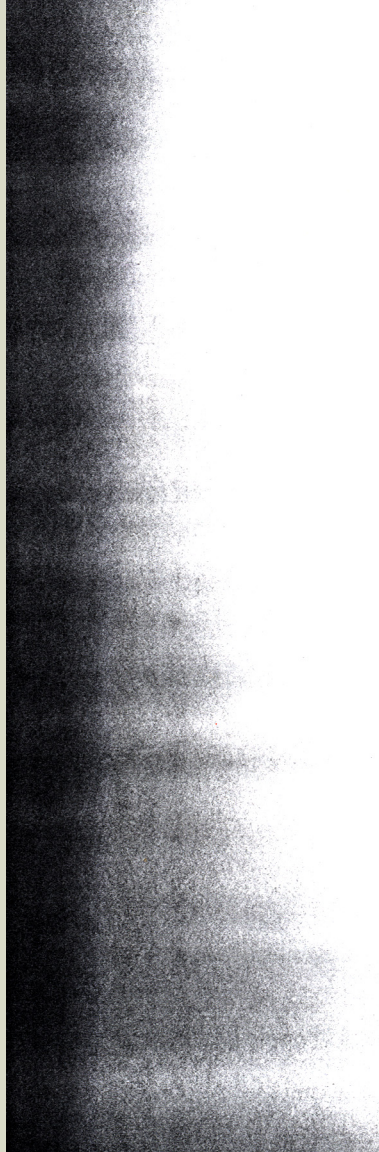
From SSG McFarland and SSG Williams to PFC Curry, PFC Dover, and PFC Handley, my colleagues were all great soldiers and great professionals who made the best of a tough assignment in the SSO office.

While Korea's rise has been amazing, it faces many challenges and questions about the future - namely will it ever reunify or somehow eliminate the tensions that continue to exist on the peninsula? One can always hope so ...





TRANSITION OFF ACTIVE DUTY TO RESERVES



On 1 July 2009, I transferred off of active duty and into the reserves. I was admitted to the Stanford Graduate School of Business, where I began a dual-degree MBA and MS in Environment and Resources. I'm not sure what my future holds, but I know I wanted to run my own business someday.

I worked as an assistant professor of military science with the Santa Clara and Stanford ROTC Programs. Stanford University does not have a ROTC program, so cadets are a part of the Bronco Battalion at Santa Clara University. It was a rewarding way to serve out my reserve time and to help prepare the Army's next generation of leaders.

I also became involved with the Veterans Club at the Stanford Graduate School of Business, helping plan and coordinate the Club's annual dinner to honor military service. The dinner seeks to bring together the Stanford veterans community along with other members of the Stanford community in hopes that we can help bridge some of the gap that has grown through the years.



As I look at what to do in the future, I can't help but think of the words of my classmate TJ Root as he wrote about our classmate's death: "May we all live lives worthy of your sacrifice." Whatever I decide to do in the future, may it be worthy of the sacrifice that twelve of my classmates, and thousands of other American soldiers, have made in service to our nation. Well done, be thou at peace.

"Be the change that you want to see in the world." ~Mohandas Gandhi

TO BE CONTINUED ...

COLOPHON

A PROJECT BY
Monica Haller

BOOK BY
Jim Wilson

PHOTOS
Jim Wilson; Nathan Hoskins; Dan McClinton;
Academy Photo; West Point Public Affairs; US Air
Force Academy Public Affairs; 2-227 Aviation Battalion
and 1st Air Cavalry Brigade Share Drives; Family
Archives; Utility Squadron 13 Yearbook; 2nd Battalion,
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West Point Bugle Notes; Text, General Petraeus
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Clare Beer

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Matthew Rezac, Monica Haller

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Jim Wilson grew up in Waupaca, Wisconsin before heading east to attend the United States Military Academy. After graduation from West Point in 2004, Jim served most of his time as a military intelligence officer in the U.S. Army. He deployed to Pakistan for Operation Lifeline and Iraq for Operation Iraqi Freedom as an intelligence officer for 2-227 Aviation of the 1st Cavalry Division. Jim then spent a year on division staff with the 2nd Infantry Division in Korea. In 2009, Jim transitioned from active duty to the reserves and is currently a graduate student at the Stanford Graduate School of Business in Palo Alto, California.

