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From:

Sent: Tuesday, December 18, 2007 11:52 PM

To:

Subject: A little bit about the team, thanks again

I would like to personally thank Kimberly Steele, Nancy Johnson Kevin McMullens, Lynda Ogilvie, Renae' Quon, Ruth McCullers, and the rest of the team, for your wonderful words of encouragement and again the phone cards that you all so graciously sent to us. I am proud and honored, and to be honest with you, a little choked up, that there are still concerned and thoughtful citizens such as yourself that still support the troops as this war carries into it 5th year.

As you already know my name is Major David Sandvold. I joined the Marines when I was 18, now I am 43 scratching my head, still trying to figure out what happened to my youth, my 68 Cougar, and my hair. I digress only because most of the Marines on the team are in their 20's.

I have been married for over 18 years, to this wonderful, beautiful, and God fearing woman, by the name of Christina, who for some strange reason does not seem to age. This will be our 7th deployment apart from each other, and our last. I do believe it is time for me to retire. Also, I have two wonderful, beautiful, and very special daughters, Sarah who is 12 (all most) and Hannah who is 14 (just turned). Both are ambitious and have plans to someday take over the world, or so I am told.

I am the Team Leader of the brave Men of MiTT (Military Transition Team) 0731. We have been in country going on 50 days. We are stationed north of Al Qaim along the Syrian border. I really can not release any more information without endangering the security of the team. We are a Team of 15 Marines, 1 Navy Corpsman, and 4 civilian interpreters. All of us were plucked out of various units within 1st Marine Division, all possessing the unique and separate skills in various fields that is designed to enable the Iraqi Army, while all the time we advising and mentoring.

What is our purpose?

Our purpose is to embed with an Iraqi Army battalion in order to advise and assist in the execution of anti insurgent operations north of, and along the Euphrates river valley towards the Syrian border. Most of our logistical needs are either trucked in, or picked up on a weekly basis. We rely on diesel generators for all electrical power needs. We communicate via radio, and satellite communications, to include internet. Trash and sewage collection, probably has not changed too much since the U.S. was in Vietnam (bagged, tagged and burned in a pit).

For further explanation on this topic, I encourage you to speak with a Vietnam vet. Below I have listed what I see are my major responsibilities;

- Advise, mentor, and direct Iraqi Army (IA) Battalion Commander and his staff to fight their battle space by developing proficiency in mission essential tasks for counter insurgency operations.
- Supervise the development & compilation of tactics, techniques, and procedures for Warfighting functions and staff requirements.
- Advise and mentor the IA Bn Cmdr in the effective communication and cooperation with other Iraqi Security Forces including local Iraqi Police (IP) and Border Forces.
- Supervise the MiTT members in the daily execution of their duties including training, operations, logistics, intelligence, administration, and communications.
- Conduct effective coordination between the partnered unit, CAG, PiTT, BiTT, and other Coalition Forces within the IAs AO.

What is it like over here?

The sun rises with a sizeable amount of heat. The extreme intensity of the sun quickly reminds me of why the land is so barren. The terrain out here is filled with rolling hills with little or no vegetation.

Lately, the camels walk by our tents, almost on a daily basis, snorting and bellowing like a creature of the movie "Star Wars". The weather out here is getting cooler, with the highs in the mid 70's and the lows in the high 30's. We, on occasion, get intense dust storms that fill the air with particles that are the consistent to that of ash. This stuff really can cause breathing problems if masks are not worn. The Euphrates river valley is filled with date palms and grassy fields separated with sections of corn, radishes, potatoes, and carrots. The Euphrates River is beautiful with it swaying palms, 8 ft cattails, and winding banks. The local villagers mainly raise sheep, goats, chickens, and turkeys with one or two cows in the mix. The animals are still kept in mangers just like the one described in the bible.

The kids mainly ride donkeys around to herd the sheep. This is truly the land that time forgot. God has me truly blessed me with the opportunity to walk upon the land that has been the named the cradle of civilization and I am in ah.

Many of you ask questions about the war. I can only speak from my own experience. I constantly get questions like; is the war winnable? I say yes, the war is winnable.

However, the question is how much blood, money, and time is America willing to sacrifice? Also, how hard is the Iraqi government willing to work to resolve its short comings? Keeping in mind that violence in Al Amber is down 60% from this time last year. Do the people want us to stay or go? What I can tell you is that the adult people here seem to welcome us, with a somewhat distant/ reluctant acceptance. However, the Iraqi Army battalion that we have embedded with appears to have fully embraced us. The children love us because we give them happiness wrapped in candy. Which is fine by me, really not interested in growing another generation of insurgents. **From time to time we will throw them a soccer ball (or any kind of ball) if we get one in the mail, (hint, hint.)** Is progress being made? In our Area of operation new houses are being built, kids are playing in the fields, and going to school. The women are shopping in the markets. The electric power in Iraq is the highest it has been since the 1980's.

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Even those who do not believe that we can win this war are finding it extremely difficult to argue that the "Surge" is not working. IEDs (Improvised Explosive Devices) are still our number one threat. However, knock on wood, since our arrival, not one Marine from our team or one soldier from the Iraqi Army battalion has hit an IED. A few IEDs have been found, all ending in a happy story. There are plenty of places were the insurgents continue place IEDs. They are placed in holes along the roadside, in dirt, rock, and trash piles. They even use dead animal bodies. One method that has been used is to burn a tire on an asphalt road, peel the road back, bury the IED, and replace the asphalt. Whenever any convoy departs the wire, every person in the vehicles secondary job is to constantly visually scan the road and surrounding area for anything that looks out of place. If it sounds boring and monotonous, it is. However, when considering the alternative, you will tend to take that kind of task very seriously.

Thank you, God bless and Semper Fi,
Maj Dave Sandvold