Duane:

Here's an edited version of your latest missives. I tried to handle the NYT story in a way that would be self-contained. If you link to their site, the story will go offline at some point. But the whole this is so long, so I just included some excerpts. Readers with access can look it up from info given, don't you think? See if you think it works this way. Also, I left out our really personal stuff—sad kids. Just seemed too personal; breaks my heart, too. If you want it in there, let me know. Just an assumption on my part that you wouldn't. Where I left things out, I sometimes had to create segues, so I'm putting words in your mouth. So make sure those are okay with you.

I do have a few questions, of course:
First, I don't think I ever got photos of you in the muck. Need that.
Did you end up having to get out there and fix those pipes yourself?
What exactly are you doing out there waist deep in the water?
Do you at least have waders or something to wear for protection from the scum germs?
I'm getting a little squeamish just thinking about this—how do you handle it?
What's the status? You said it was approaching your living quarters. What happened?
More on the raid?
If they blew up your humvee, how do you get around? (Why don't you get a tank—that sounds good—a big one with lots of armor! Or just stay inside—that sounds even better.)
What happened during the Night of Power?
I read your letter to Carolyn. I hope she’s up to it!! And what do YOU want for Christmas?

Let me know if the following is okay, and we’ll go from there.

Take care,
Meg

P.S. (Baylor gossip on the street says the university will have a new president tomorrow. Another version is that the regents are just meeting tomorrow about a new president. I heard from definitely good and named authority that it will be “soon.”)

October 23:

What an emotional rollercoaster the last few days have been. An October 23 story from the New York Times, "Unseen Enemy is at its Fiercest in Sunni City," may give you an idea of what it’s like in Ramadi. Here are a few excerpts:

. . . Here in Ramadi, the capital of Anbar Province, Sunni Arab insurgents are waging their fiercest war against American troops, attacking with relative impunity just blocks from Marine-controlled territory. Every day, the Americans fight to hold their turf in a war against an enemy who seems to be everywhere but is not often seen.
The cost has been high: in the last six weeks, 21 Americans have been killed here, far more than in any other city in Iraq and double the number of deaths in Baghdad, a city with a population 15 times as large.

. . . The deputy governor of Anbar was shot to death on Tuesday; the day before, the governor's car was fired on. There is no police force. . . . American bases are regularly pelted with rockets and
mortar shells, and when troops here get out of their vehicles to patrol, they are almost always running.

... Snipers are a constant plague. In one area of the city, snipers have hit four Americans since late August, and soldiers were obliged to set up blast walls for security for a polling center there last week in the dark. A law school in eastern Ramadi had to be shut down because sniper attacks were coming from it at night.
"It's like everyone in this town is a sniper," said Muhammad Ali Jasim, an Iraqi soldier who has been stationed here since May. "You can't stand in one place for long."
"You get a workout," Corporal Rosener said. "It's all running, running from building to building."

So you can see my job is not the most dangerous, but the region certainly is. The attached photo shows my latest struggle. The water is where our parking lot is supposed to be. Somebody parked a seven-ton truck on top of a water spigot, and cracked the 3-inch main, and the 1-inch spigot pipe. With all the infrastructure issues, and bombs being planted in the road, it is a difficult two-fold task to get things fixed: 1) get the workers to come out in an environment in which an insurgent will probably kill him, 2) find the person or people who will own responsibility for getting the job done. In the photo's background is a burn pit—the Iraqi way of dealing with garbage. The EPA would be having fits with garbage handling in Iraq. (Rarely do we consider how much we rely on refuse workers to make our lives comfortable.) The burn pit is now under water, and our garbage is stacking up. Already we're getting a steady flow of rodents and cats.

The water is threatening to leak into our living quarters, and once it hits that, it will be able to flow into our sewage cisterns. I can't imagine having to wallow into the fetid murk. It turned cold two days ago, and the water will sap the heat right out of you. If equipment doesn't roll in tomorrow, then I'll be out there chipping concrete with a breaker bar to build a French Ditch out to the street. This is the same street that has sewage flowing through it because insurgent bombs have collapsed the sew lines further down the road. It can't flow, so it percolates up into the street. My/our endgame is the rainy season—some time in December.

I ran another convoy this morning. They are short by comparison to the long cross-country ones from city to city, but every moment in the open is less than safe. I will tell you that my having been on thirteen convoys already with no incidences is a testament to the power of prayer, and faith in Jesus. Several of us pray over the convoys before we leave. There is an old euphemism, "There are no atheists in foxholes." We have our share of them around here, but many are rekindling their faith, and at least praying now, when prior to being here they weren't putting their faith into action.

AS the convoy commander I ensure that all the logistics, communications, and personnel rosters are in order. I then brief the convoy routes, danger areas, threat assessments, and plans of actions in the event of any number of attacks—small arms fire, RPG's, IED's, and complex ambushes. This is where prayer plays a major part for me. Don't get me wrong. I am not approaching God with mantras or platitudes. I really begin to sense what David was feeling when Saul was chasing after him. It really runs me through the emotional wringer. I get charged for the mission, and then when it's over, I crash. I don't sleep well the night before out of concern for everybody. I frequently pray myself to sleep.

I had an old Baylor friend write to me. She is not necessarily a pacifist, but definitely not a strong supporter of the American mission in Iraq. I do understand the woes of those opposed to our mission, but I would be hard set to shift my views after what I have seen here. This country and the people were molested by Saddam, his sons, and their cronies. I am not at liberty to address US policies, nor conjecture on motives. That will play out in the arena of debate during elections. But I know that the
vast majority of the Iraqi people are better off today than they were under Saddam. Democratic processes are relatively new to this country, and it is understandable why a minority would fear the majority. By the way, overall turn-out by the registered Iraqi voters was better than what we see back home. Franchisement means something to a people that have never had a choice in voting.

Good things are happening here.

I received a new batch of photos of the children yesterday. What a high; what a heartache. It was a different time, and war was viewed much differently then, but I can’t imagine what it was like for GI’s to be gone for up to four years during WWII. Men left pregnant brides and came home to 2-4 year olds. That is sacrifice. I am not diminishing the actions of today’s service personnel. I just think it a little different to be able to write like I am now, or to be able to get on a tactical phone (DSN), get hooked up to an AT&T operator, and then call my wife on a calling card donated by an unknown caring supporter back home. To those that give me the opportunity to hear my wife’s voice, I say thank you.

To the Baylor family I have a prayer request. So many Marines, sailors, soldiers, and airmen do not know the Lord. They need your prayers. Pray that God will work in their hearts that they would seek after Him, and call Him Lord. People pass away around us everyday. I found that one of my favorite professors died while I was training in North Carolina. People die here and in your neighborhoods. Do they know Christ? I have to ask myself about my witness to those around me constantly. I fail pretty frequently. It’s tough. Over here, there is an opportunity to catch Marines in moments of self-contemplation. Pray that these Marines would hear the prompting of the Spirit on their hearts, and that all Christians would be emboldened to share the message of salvation with them.

Ever onward,

Duane

October 26:

I’m still dealing with the water issue, and I’m at the point of sheer exhaustion. I’ve been up to my waist in sewage-laden water. I have duty (phone watch) form 0300 – 0500, then get a few more hours of sleep, and then go do it some more. This is tiresome.

I really can’t write much, now. My hands are cut up, and raw. My mind is numb. After getting inside—and still wet—a raid was made on our compound. Just as I’m trying to wind down, I had to go into mental overdrive and be alert. A ten pound rifle will wear you out when you’re supporting it in the off-hand around a corner. My Humvee got hit by an RPG while it was parked in a lot 100 meters away. It really messed up the paint job. One can’t call Macco out here.

I have a bottle of water next to me. I keep thinking about how much I can’t wait to walk up to the tap in my home, turn it on, and be able to drink it. The water here comes straight out of the Euphrates. The further down the river one lives, the more filtration the water goes through—through human kidney filtration, that is. You can’t imagine a country with as much wealth as oil has brought in being so horribly unhygienic.

I can’t think too well right now, so I’m going to sign off.

Looking to come home,

Duane
Duane:

You’re not imagining things—or not imagining things on the web. Someone had moved you from the main Line page on the web, but I put you back where you belong. And I told her not to move you again until you get home! I don’t think you were gone for long, because I checked on it not too long ago. But if you ever notice anything like that or have a question about it, let me know. You actually were still up there, but to find you, someone would have had to go to the archive of the fall issue with the Iraq stories. We’ll archive you there when you’ve finished your saga.

I hope you get to feeling better, and I hope you’re not coming down with anything other than anxiety. Huge, deep breaths that I learned in Yoga class work for my anxiety, but I’m in Waco, Texas, USA, where it’s pretty easy to find serenity—at least during school hours. Ramadi may call for something a little stronger. Heck, you’re a pharmacist! Can’t you come up with something?

And don’t you worry about aging. Men just get “distinguished”!

The weather is dreary and cloudy and not at all glorious here today, if that makes you feel any better.

Sorry I didn’t recognize your German. It’s been a while, and I don’t think I ever actually wrote that word down. I checked (fixed!) your spelling and gave you an umlaut. Check it out!

And I even have a funny story for you about that word. I took German at Baylor and went to Baylor in Vienna many many moons ago. The summer of 1980 to be exact. We had this nerdy know-it-all in our group, if you can imagine such a combo of personality—not a good thing. Whenever he left the room, instead of “tschüss,” he would wave and say the rhyming word “dusche”! So, imagine waving and saying “Shower!” when you leave the room. Not to mention the English homonym for that word that is an even stranger thing to say loudly while waving! Perhaps he was kidding, but I don’t think so—and I’m not sure that would make it any better, either.

Keep in touch and take care of yourself.

Meg

On 1/31/06 11:54 PM, "Fish CWO2 Duane G (GCE 6th CAG CA Officer)" <FishDG@gcemnf-wiraq.usmc.mil> wrote:

Meg,

Never mind, just after I sent the last letter I went to the web site and it’s back up.

Couldn’t sleep last night. Feeling bad this morning. I think there might be a little anxiety going on. I hung a picture of me and the family up in the passageway. Everybody says I look like I’ve aged 15 years. I guess that makes me almost 60 now.

Have a good day,

Duane
You’re on the web. I put you up there yesterday. Nice to hear so much from you. I was just on the verge of checking up on you when I got your e-mail.

Sorry about the cold weather there. It’s unbelievably gorgeous here today and yesterday. Not to worry—it will be gorgeous in 60 days, too. One of the guys from the Line story told me how much he loved coming home to the bluebonnets of Central Texas. I think you’ll be right on time.

So, do you need Neosporin?

And what is “Tchuss”? (Your sign-off)

Take care,

Meg

On 1/29/06 9:45 AM, "Fish CWO2 Duane G (GCE 6th CAG CA Officer)" <FishDG@gcemnf-wiraq.usmc.mil> wrote:

Hey Meg,

22 Jan - I have found my groove! I know it’s a sad state of affairs when the success of a day is measured by how quickly I can pump the cisterns, but 3 truckloads in 1 hour makes this a banner day. This is opposed to the 5 hours it once took. We have a contractor lined up to dig out the plumbing, lay pipe with the proper grade, and install a pump that will move the sewage around the building to the pump station. It probably won’t happen before we leave, so I see 9 more opportunities to improve my pump time. (What will I do when I get home?)

The picture is of our makeshift BDAR (Battle Damage Assessment and Recovery) towing job. We were taught that “Like-tows-Like-or-lesser”. I don’t think I’m doing this right. Capt Moen will probably revoke my completion certificate for this one.

I would be remiss if I didn’t acknowledge the devil dog that has provided all but one of the pictures I have included in these letters. Gunnery Sergeant John Daldalian (a.k.a. “D”) has documented more of what’s happened here than anybody else. He is an Active Reserve Marine out of Kansas City, MO. He has been an inspiration, and a motivator to many of us. He volunteered to come on this excursion showing up at Camp LeJeune two months prior to our deployment. Just as things have been difficult for my family, so they have been for his. His positive attitude and enthusiasm has shown his mettle in spite of the difficulties. Kudos to all our wives for the things they continue to endure in our absence.

While writing this letter, I found out that “D” has been selected for Master Sergeant, as well as another very close friend David Galliano. Way to go Marines. I’ll be submitting my package to the promotion board for CWO3 this next week. The board convenes 22 Feb. I’ve learned to not get my
hopes up too high, even with great packages. Hopefully, I'll have some good news prior to my signing off on this letter series.

The days here are definitely colder. The wind is blowing hard on some days. The newer cold weather gear that we have been given is good. We have a diesel generator outside of our sandbagged broken window. We had been using a sleeping bag to hold back some of the draft/exhaust, but the wind shifted and started blowing the fumes into the room with force. I spent several hours last weekend winterizing with duct tape and thick plastic. Now the room is warmer, quieter, and the air less acrid.

We've poked fun at the PCMOC by comparing it to a Simian House, dormitory, and even describing it as a crack house (money exchanged during the day, and gunfire at night.) But, my roommate called the place a Petri dish. How appropriate. Scapes, scratches and cuts do not heal easily over here. I cut myself on razor wire back in Oct while working on the water pipe. It finally healed completely a few weeks ago. What would normally just be a red irritation at home just keeps on giving over here. Sure, triple antibiotic ointment would make things heal faster, but it diminishes the experience. Oh, another name we have for this place – FeCeMOC. I was just reminded that if we were fed more rice, and beatings were thrown in, this would be more like a Stalag, than a berthing area. Oh, and don’t walk outside of the wire or you’ll get shot.

The day after I sent my last letter a suicide (homicide) bomber explosion occurred at the Iraqi Police recruiting site. One soldier and one Marine were killed, along with 50-60 Iraqis. I knew the soldier in passing. His name is LtCol McLaughlin from the Pennsylvania National Guard. Every place he went he was known for his cordiality and uplifting humor. He visited the PCMOC twice each week. This is the closest that death has come to me over here. It is interesting to deal with one’s mortality in the face of such events. LtCol McLaughlin was a good man, and will not be soon forgotten. He will be missed.

26 Jan - It was 20 years ago this last week that I went to boot camp. It’s amazing looking back and considering all that has transpired since then. During the summer of ’04, I was telling our Admin Chief about my Senior Drill Instructor. He suggested we look up whether he was still in the Corps. I figured no way, but why not. He typed in his name, and found a Master Gunnery Sergeant out at 29 Palms. I shot him a message but heard nothing back. In February ’05, I received my warning order for activation. A few days later I received a response from my Senior telling me he had just returned from Iraq. Long story short, he is back over here about 40 miles away. I will do everything I can to hook up with him.

I’m at the Government Center right now. I’m listening to dueling banjos while I watch 5 Iraqis try to figure out how to use a vacuum cleaner. I hate to be so cynical, but the humor is not lost in watching this. We are literally having to instruct people how to keep things clean over here. It’s my understanding that cleaning is beneath the men here. It is relegated to the women and mentally challenged. We have swept, cleaned their bathrooms, moved furniture, and a litany of other activities of daily cleanliness. Now that we have shown them that men can do the cleaning, we’re attempting to turn over that responsibility. Unfortunately, it requires oversight and monitoring. This goes along with the concept of “inspect what you expect.” The emphasis is on trying to get them to take pride in the facility in which they work.

I can finally give an example of things moving forward however slowly. When the pipe was broken last Oct, the DG of water came out after a week and confirmed that the pipe was broken offering no further assistance except to turn the water off. Last week a mortar round cracked a water line in the front lot causing water to accumulate much like my back lot experience. Yesterday, the Water Dept came out and fixed it. Success is slow, but this is an indicator that mindsets are shifting. The DG of Sewage called this morning and was attempting to get fuel to a pump station. We made it happen -
another success. Electricity is starting to be a little more reliable. Roads and bridges are being rebuilt, fuel is being supplied a little more fervently, and shop owners are chomping at the bit to open up there shops around the Government Center. Attitudes are changing. It’s glacial, but encouraging.

Rumor has it that the CO wants to get a coffee shop opened up by the GC, really. It’s not the Starbucks’s kind of coffee, but a thick concoction of syrup consistency. Now I’ve gone and worked my mind into a frenzied desire for a good frozen coffee drink. Great, and there’s not even one in Jacksonville, NC. 10 more weeks.

The Commanding General of 2nd Marine Division, General Huck, has formally announced that troop draw down is beginning to happen. Yesterday we had a meeting at the PCMOC with over 10 DGs. The meeting was to emphasize the need for them to take a stronger role in leading their departments, and to discuss transition expectations. The impetus was placed on making the whole works project process a purely Iraqi endeavor with monetary oversight by coalition forces until final withdrawal. In my portion of the presentation on Assertive Leadership, I mentioned the Machiavellian concept of “fear is a great motivator.” This was juxtaposed to the mentorship/encouragement form of leadership I was proposing that is necessary for Civic Leaders. After the meeting, the Governor asked me if The Prince was available in Arabic. I wonder if I inadvertently opened Pandora’s Box.

Several of the Marines in 6th CAG had homes in the New Orleans area. All but one had only major flooding: the one’s home was completely flattened. I can only imagine how hard it has been for their families to deal with the repairs without them around. A close friend and retired Marine lives in Slidell. He has informed me that electricity is sporadic or non-existent for several hundred thousand customers, water has not been available for who knows how long, and mail delivery is a rare occurrence. He describes the gut wrenching emptiness of having lost everything. Although things are difficult here at times, I know that friends and families back home continue to suffer at some level much more than I do here. My heart and prayers go out to them. Stay strong Steve.

27 Jan - We convoyed back to BD in the last 24 hours. It is always a harrowing drive: not necessarily the barricades, but all the traffic, and potential IEDs or RPGs. The last convoy back we passed an IED in the road, and it wasn’t caught until the last 2 vehicles. We passed without incident, but EOD (Explosive Ordnance Disposal) did confirm it and blew it in place shortly after our passing. Over the last few weeks 2 RPGs have been shot at convoys as they were coming into the Government Center. One was at a CAG convoy. It hit one of the barriers, but it really shook some people up. On our most recent run, my HUMVEE was stopped on a bridge with an inordinate amount of traffic. Our path was blocked and the opposite lane was bumper to bumper with autos, tankers, large hauling trucks, and animal tenders. One tends to remain calm during this, but the potential for disaster is in the fore of everyone’s mind. God continues to shadow us with His hand.

I have started packing to send things home. The day is coming soon. I’ll be sending about 1/3 of my gear home, plus various books and items sent to me by friends, and family. We’re at 61 days until hopping on 46’s and beginning the ride home. I continue to get pictures of and by the kids. I cannot wait to get home to being a father, husband, and friend. I have watched the kids grow from a distance via two dimensional images and static laden phone calls. My son wants to go fishing as soon as I get home. My daughter wants to go eat ice cream or doughnuts, and my baby wants me to do raspberries. I’ve got a spool of line, a pocket full of change to visit Baskin Robins or Dunkin Doughnuts, and a whole patch full of raspberries. At times I feel I’ll implode from the emptiness of missing my family. I’ll make it; I just really want my family to hang on.

I received 2 packages today. I got to read about the excitement happening in Temple, and surrounding areas. I can’t wait to get back to the exhilaratingly slower pace of life in Central Texas. I
guess I have to start planning for my PFT in May, swim qual in Sept, a field op in Oct, the Birthday Ball in Nov, and the Toys-for-Tots campaign in Dec. Oh, and then there’s trips to Galveston, Kansas City/Omaha, Colorado, and a cruise or two. Get the docket!

Tchuss,

Duane

******************************************************

Okay, you’re up there on the web!! Go to Baylorline.com. You’ll see “Letters from Iraq” listed on the left under Web Exclusives. Or you can get there by clicking the Marine. Or by clicking “Behind the Story: Iraq”

I’d like to add the newer stuff too that you’ve written the last couple of times. I’ll work on shortening it a bit and send it back to you. I won’t post anything that you don’t see again and double check.

I hope you’re sleeping. Sounds like some awful times over there. And I couldn’t quite tell if it was over. Sounds like the raid on the compound was over, but the water issue still ongoing. How do you fix that exactly? I’m sure I don’t really want to know.

You delivered a pretty clever Waco water joke for a person with a numb mind! Memphis has fabulous-tasting well water, and it does give me a small thrill when I’m there to drink water straight from the tap—free! I don’t do that in Waco, at least not without a deep diagnostic sniff first. Sounds like your former roommate went to Briarcrest Baptist in Memphis. My older sister graduated from there. I went to St. Mary’s Episcopal School for Girls, as did my younger sister. My little sister might know Billy. She’s an ’87 Bu grad. We all came to BU with no cars, so if Billy had a car and he drove it to Memphis on holidays, I bet she knew him.

If Elaine is coming to the Homecoming football game, I’ll be at the Alumni Reunion Picnic beforehand in Touchdown Alley and I’d love to meet her. There will be big tents set up for about a thousand people. I’m not sure exactly where, but last year they were out on the edge by Dutton St.—probably a better spot this year. They’ve moved the game up to 11:30 for TV, so we’re all having barbecue at 10 a.m. I tend to wander around and I think I have to take some pictures, but if she finds the ticket table for the picnic, just ask for Meg. I’m the only one.

Please be careful.

Meg

On 10/26/05 8:08 PM, "Fish CWO2 Duane G (GCE 6th CAG CA Officer)" <FishDG@gcemnf-wiraq.usmc.mil> wrote:
Hey Meg,

Yes, you may print the story. I corrected the Psalm from 29 to 91, and changed to “oil profits” from “profits from oil” (in red.)

I’m still dealing with the water issue here. I’m at the point of sheer exhaustion. I’ve been up to my waist in sewage laden water. (It sure would be nice to have had a few adult beverages after a day like this.)

I have duty (phone watch) form 0300 – 0500, then get a few more hours of sleep, and then go do it some more. This is tiresome.

I really can’t write much, now. My hands are cut up, and raw. I like the joke. I sent my wife what I wrote to you below. Oh man did I blow it. She was furious for my having let her know how bad it is here.

My first roommate was from Memphis (Collierville.) Billy Godwin 85/86: went to some private school that sends lots of kids to Baylor.

I hope homecoming is great. It’s been a long time since I missed a parade. My wife even made it to 2 of them with two newborns. What a trooper.

I was saddened deeply by Dr Wivagg’s death.

My kids are really having a hard time with me gone. My son who is a pretty deep thinker, and an emotionally sensitive kid is crying more about missing me. My daughter wakes up crying every night at about 3 and crawls into bed with my wife. The youngest continues to look and ask for me. It’s so hard to know that I’m putting my wife and the kids through this. I guess it would be easier to rationalize if the US had an invading force land on her shores.

My mind is numb. After getting inside, and still wet, a raid was made on our compound. Just as I’m trying to wind down, I had to go into mental overdrive, and be alert. A ten pound rifle will wear you out when you’re supporting it in the off-hand around a corner. (no, I didn’t fire any rounds, but many others did.) My Humvee got hit by an RPG while it was parked in a lot 100 meters away. It really messed up the paint job. One can’t call Macco out here.

(It’s taken me 30 minutes to write this much.)

I have a bottle of water next to me. I keep thinking about how much I can’t wait to walk up to the tap in my home, turn it on, and be able to drink it. The water here comes straight out of the Euphrates. The
further down the river one lives, the more filtration the water goes through – through human kidney filtration, and other human processes. You can’t imagine a country with as much wealth as oil has brought in being so horribly unhygienic. Anyway, I was going to suggest you go to your tap, pour a glass, and just hold it up to consider the wonder of being able to drink your water. Then I remembered where you live – hold your nose while you drink it.

I can’t think too well right now. I’m going to sign off and try to read some diatribe about the faltering US dollar, and how the soon to be new Fed Chairman Bernanke believes that “controlled inflation” is good.

Looking to come home,

Duane

PS: Was what I wrote below okay?

From: Meg_Cullar [mailto:Meg_Cullar@baylor.edu]
Sent: Wednesday, October 26, 2005 11:44 PM
To: Fish CWO2 Duane G (GCE 6th CAG CA Officer)
Subject: Re:

Duane:

Sorry so slow to respond. I was out of town and didn’t get back to the office until this morning. We took a trip up to Memphis, Tennessee, where I grew up and where my parents live. My parents decided to move to the high-rise independent living place, so we were hauling away stuff, packing them up, helping them decide things. It’s a hard thing, but they’re pretty chipper about it. My dad can’t wait to get there (the actual move was today), but my mom’s reluctant to leave her house. But she was also reluctant to leave the last house and move into this one 21 years ago. And she was also reluctant to use a microwave, so you can tell what’s going on here! My dad’s a social butterfly and great joke teller, so he’s eager for an “all new audience” as my mom says.

But now I’m back and have to get my own house in order for BU Homecoming this weekend! But alas, my trials are so trivial, aren’t they? To have concerns that are only trivial is a good thing, I realize, and I’m grateful.

I missed seeing my older son from the University of Texas this weekend too. He came home while we were in Memphis. He came to see his high school friend who went into the army. This weekend the friend was home for the first time since he left in the summer. I’m not sure what he’ll do next, but of course it worries me. He’s such a kid and has the sweetest dimples you’ve ever seen.
I finally did view the video. The first PC I sent it to wouldn’t play it, but the second one did. By then I had a group of four or five watching. They liked it too. We loved the donkey getting wanded. And the very last photo was something, too. Since you’ve read your Line stories, you know that Steve Gventer told me a pretty good story on the January elections. I thought it was a great way to end his article, and he really liked it. If you want to see what I’m going to do with you, go to baylorline.com and click on the Marine at the bottom. That’s Sam. He’s the other Purple Heart guy. Then you’ll see a list of two more stories. One that’s more on Steve and one on Sam. I’d like to add yours to that list.

But the one thing you didn’t tell me was if what I sent you was okay to post!!! LET ME KNOW. The web traffic will slow down as the magazine gets older, so I want to put it up as soon as I can.

We couldn’t get the Baylor game in Memphis, so we just had to watch scores. So close! My parents are big Tennessee fans, and they keep losing close ones this fall, too. Thank goodness we have one at Texas! Here’s a football joke to entertain you:

After Texas coach Mac Brown passes away and enters the Pearly Gates, God takes him on a tour. He shows Mac a little 2-bedroom house with a faded U of T banner hanging from the front porch.

“Well Coach, this is your house. Most people don’t get their own house up here,” God explains.

Mac looks at the house, then turns around and looks at the one sitting on the top of the hill. It’s a huge 2-story mansion with white marble columns and little patios under all of the windows. Baylor Bear flags line both sides of the sidewalk with a huge green and gold BU banner hanging between the marble columns.

“Thanks for the home, God, but can I ask you one question? How come I get this little 2-bedroom house with a faded University of Texas banner, and Guy Morris gets that big mansion with new Baylor Bear banners and flags flying all over the place, What’s up with that?”

God looks at him seriously for a moment and then replies,

“Coach, that’s not Guy’s house. That’s my house.”

Amen, and Amen!!

Let me know if I can post the story!!!

Take care,

Meg
On 10/23/05 12:57 PM, "Fish CWO2 Duane G (GCE 6th CAG CA Officer)" <FishDG@gcemnf-wiraq.usmc.mil> wrote:

Hey Meg,

What an emotional rollercoaster the last number of days have been. Elaine sent me the Baylor line, with the troop stories. I don’t rate a story like that, and I’m almost embarrassed/shamed by the attention you’re giving me.

Here is a story from my area. Half the names in this story I’ve been in touch with or seen in the last 5 days.

The New York Times

Unseen Enemy Is at Its Fiercest in a Sunni City—New York Times—By Sabrina Tavernise—October 23, 2005 (Embedded with 2nd BCT)

RAMADI, Iraq, Oct. 22 - The Bradley fighting vehicles moved slowly down this city’s main boulevard. Suddenly, a homemade bomb exploded, punching into one vehicle. Then another explosion hit, briefly lifting a second vehicle up onto its side before it dropped back down again.

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American marines patrolling in downtown Ramadi on Thursday with a robot used to detonate the homemade bombs planted by insurgents.
Two American soldiers climbed out of a hatch, the first with his pant leg on fire, and the other completely in flames. The first rolled over to help the other man, but when they touched, the first man also burst into flames. Insurgent gunfire began to pop.
Several blocks away, Lance Cpl. Jeffrey Rosener, 20, from Minneapolis, watched the two men die from a lookout post at a Marine encampment. His heart reached out to them, but he could not. In Ramadi, Iraq's most violent city, two blocks may as well be 10 miles.
"I couldn't do anything," he said of the incident, which he saw on Oct. 10. He spoke quietly, sitting in the post and looking straight ahead. "It's bad down there. You hear all the rumors. We didn't know it was going to be like this."
Here in Ramadi, the capital of Anbar Province, Sunni Arab insurgents are waging their fiercest war against American troops, attacking with relative impunity just blocks from Marine-controlled territory. Every day, the Americans fight to hold their turf in a war against an enemy who seems to be everywhere but is not often seen.
The cost has been high: in the last six weeks, 21 Americans have been killed here, far more than in any other city in Iraq and double the number of deaths in Baghdad, a city with a population 15 times as large.
"We fight it one day at a time," said Capt. Phillip Ash, who commands Company K in the Third Battalion,
Seventh Marines, which patrols central Ramadi.
"Some days you're the windshield," he said, "some days you're the bug."
Ramadi is an important indicator of just how long it may be before an American withdrawal.
The city has long been a haven for insurgents, but it has never fallen fully into enemy hands, as Fallujah did last fall, when marines could not even patrol before an invasion in November. Senior commanders here will not rule out a full invasion, but for now, the checkpoints and street patrols continue.
Because troop levels have stayed steady here, Ramadi also differs from Tal Afar, a rebel stronghold near the Syrian border, where Americans laid siege only to have to return later because they were unable to leave enough troops to secure it.
Still, more than two years after the American invasion, this city of 400,000 people is just barely within American control. The deputy governor of Anbar was shot to death on Tuesday; the day before, the governor's car was fired on. There is no police force. A Baghdad cell phone company has refused to put up towers here. American bases are regularly pelted with rockets and mortar shells, and when troops here get out of their vehicles to patrol, they are almost always running.
"You can't just walk down the street for a period of time and not expect to get shot at," said Maj. Bradford W. Tippett, the operations officer for the Third Battalion.
Capt. Rory Quinn, a Bronx native who majored in international relations at Boston University, used a mixed analogy: "It's kind of like playing basketball: short sprints. Everything we do here is a minefield."
Commanders remain hopeful that Iraqi soldiers will soon be able to take full responsibility for the city. The number of Iraqi Army soldiers here has doubled in recent months. A city council has begun to work, and a local police force is being trained. But the relentlessness of the insurgent violence here ties the American units to the streets, forcing them to focus on the fight.
"We've never given them the chance to breathe, but it continues to be one of the most violent places," said Lt. Col. Roger B. Turner, commanding officer of the Marine battalion, which is attached to the Army's Second Brigade Combat Team.
The vast majority of Americans killed here since September have been victims of homemade bombs, what the military calls improvised explosive devices, or I.E.D.'s. Sgt. William Callahan, a member of the bomb disposal team stationed with the Third Battalion, estimated that troops hit four such bombs a day in Ramadi. Most do not result in death or serious injury. Almost all are remotely detonated, which means someone is hiding in wait for coming vehicles.
Besides the two soldiers who died near Corporal Rosener's post, seven soldiers, including two Iraqis, in a Bradley were victims of homemade bombs in eastern Ramadi a week ago. Bombs killed one marine in a Humvee on Oct. 4, and five soldiers were killed in a Bradley on Sept. 28. Skip to next paragraph
Gunnery Sgt. Jose C. Soto, the bomb squad's leader, said insurgents in Ramadi were highly trained, making bombs by linking several large artillery rounds together. They use fuel enhancements, like gasoline mixed with sugar, to cling to a victim's body and make a bigger fire, said First Lt. Bradley R. Watson, 27, of the battalion's Company L.
The Oct. 4 attack is an example. The area was rarely traveled by troops and was laced with explosives. Sergeant Callahan said 10 I.E.D.'s went off in the area that day. At 7:18 a.m., insurgents set off three explosives from holes in the road under a convoy, flipping a Humvee onto its back. Fuel gushed, making
a pool on the ground, and a marine trapped under the vehicle was barely able to keep his mouth above
the rising fluid. A Navy medic riding in the Humvee lost his leg but still gave first aid. The driver was
killed instantly.
"It's like being caught in the undertow of a wave," said Lieutenant Watson, who was slightly hurt in the
attack - the third time he has been wounded in Iraq. "Everything flips around. Everybody is shouting."
Snipers are a constant plague. In one area of the city, snipers have hit four Americans since late August,
and soldiers were obliged to set up blast walls for security for a polling center there last week in the
dark. A law school in eastern Ramadi had to be shut down because sniper attacks were coming from it at
night.
"It's like everyone in this town is a sniper," said Muhammad Ali Jasim, an Iraqi soldier who has been
stationed here since May. "You can't stand in one place for long."
"You get a workout," Corporal Rosener said. "It's all running, running from building to building."
But closeness to the insurgents - a popular sniping position is in the hotel across the street from the
marine camp in the governor's office - has given the Americans a better look at their enemy. The
marines of Company K have seen arms pulling dead or wounded insurgents away from the hotel's
windows.
Insurgent groups appear to be numerous and fractious. Religious and militant graffiti are scrawled on
walls. Colonel Turner said he saw a man on Thursday giving out leaflets exhorting citizens to ignore any
mujahedeen literature that did not bear the symbol of the Islamic Army militant group - two crossed
swords draped with a black flag.
Ansar al-Sunna, another militant group, claimed to have killed four Iraqi contractors here on Friday.
Many of their techniques directly involve Ramadi residents. One is to use telephones to track American
raids: Captain Quinn said he had heard the phone ring in houses along a block they were searching, and
when the owner of the house they were standing in did not pick up, the calls stopped - the insurgents
had found them.
The line between civilians and insurgents is blurry in Ramadi. In a twist that sets it apart from other
violent cities, insurgents usually do not attack civilians in large groups. There have been no suicide
bombings in recent memory, and I.E.D.'s are rarely placed close to houses. Insurgents have left alone
American projects that deliver services that locals want, like the installation of 18 transformers last
month for more power. And when the streets empty out, the Americans know an attack is imminent.
"The population clearly gets the word - there's a network out there," Colonel Turner said at the Third
Battalion's camp, in an old palace on the Euphrates. "The average population has to go against them" or
the fighting will continue, he said, referring to the insurgents.
Maj. Daniel Wagner, a civil affairs officer with the battalion, spends his days trying to draw in locals. But
progress in Ramadi is measured in inches. Much of his time is spent patching and paving roads to
prevent bombings, and planning demolitions to take away sniper nests - work he has sardonically
referred to as urban renewal. Two parks are planned, as is a new police station. But the violence is a
major hindrance.
"I should be able to just drive over," he said. "You need a four-vehicle convoy, you're out of breath,
you're sweating, you sit down and say, 'Do you feel safe here? O.K., I've got to get out of here now.' "
The task is more difficult in that Anbar is one of Iraq's three poorest provinces, according to a survey
conducted by the United Nations in 2004. Impoverished locals are easily recruited by insurgents. Captain
Quinn said bomb makers usually carried $500 in their pockets - half the fee, he estimated, for the job, the rest being paid after detonation.

So far, reaching out to locals and persuading them to shut out insurgents seems a distant goal. Among the obstacles is the very armor that the troops so badly need for protection: on Ramadi's streets, marines in Humvees might as well be astronauts in orbit.

On one patrol last week, a marine from Florida smiled through several inches of bulletproof glass at a tiny boy in blue pants and a dinosaur shirt. The boy solemnly stood beside the Humvee, motioning with his arms - perhaps asking for a treat. The marine shook his head and shrugged, unable to understand.

The most immediate way forward, military commanders here agree, is training and deploying more Iraqi soldiers. Of the seven battalions in Ramadi, three are in eastern Ramadi with their own territory to patrol, said Maj. William R. Fall, the Iraqi Security Force coordinator. Still, only about a company and a half is based inside the central and western parts of the city.

Officers said Iraqi soldiers had vastly improved over the past year. The day of the referendum here was violent, with mortar and rocket-propelled grenade attacks raining down on many of the stations. But Iraqi soldiers stayed at their positions and returned fire when under attack, marines near the sites reported.

"I see incremental progress every single day," Captain Quinn said. "It's working, but it's not a three-month affair."

As you can see, I'm not necessarily the best subject, but all this activity is happening around me. The attached photo shows my latest struggle. The water is where our parking lot is supposed to be. Somebody parked a 7 ton truck on top of a water spigot, and cracked the 3” main, and the 1” spigot pipe. With all the infrastructure issues, and bombs being planted in the road, it is a difficult 2 fold task to get things fixed: 1) get the workers to come out in an environment in which an insurgent will probably kill him, 2) find the person or people who will own responsibility for getting the job done. The burn pit in the background is the Iraqi way of dealing with garbage. The EPA would be having fits with garbage handling in Iraq. (Rarely do we consider how much we rely on refuse workers to make our lives comfortable.) The burn pit is now under water, and our garbage is stacking up as fast as it did during the NYC garbage strike in the late 70’s or early 80’s. Already getting a steady flow of rodents and cats.

The water is threatening to leak into our living quarters, and once it hits that, it will be able to flow into our sewage cisterns. I can’t imagine having to wallow into the fetid murk. I spent several hours last week trying to get this taken care of. It turned cold 2 days ago, and the water will sap the heat right out of you. If equipment doesn’t roll in tomorrow, then I’ll be out tomorrow chipping concrete with a breaker bar to build a French Ditch out to the street. This is the same street that has sewage flowing through it because insurgent bombs have collapsed the sew lines further down the road. It can’t flow, so it percolates up into the street. My/our endgame is the rainy season. That starts some time in December.

The water leak is a blessing. We know now while the weather is fair that there is a drainage problem. How would it feel to be fixing this in the cold winter rain? It’s amazing what has caused this. The parking lot behind our building is like a bowl. Perhaps there is a drain in the middle of it, and
it’s shaped like bowl to drain to the pipe. Nobody knows. As a matter of fact, it wasn’t until I went out last week to start breaking ground that I found there was concrete and asphalt under the dirt. It literally looked like a dirt field since the day we got here. Who’d a thunk?

I ran another convoy this morning. They are short by comparison to the long cross-country ones from city to city, but if you read the Times article, you’ll find that every moment in the open is less than safe. I will tell you that my having been on 13 convoys already with no incidences is a testament to the power of prayer, and faith in Jesus. Several of us pray over the convoys before we leave. There is an old euphemism, “There are no atheists in foxholes.” We have our share of them around here, but many are rekindling their faith, and at least praying now, when prior to being here they weren’t putting their faith into action.

AS the convoy commander I simply ensure that all the logistics, communications, and personnel rosters are in order. I then brief the convoy routes, danger areas, threat assessments, and plans of actions in the event of any number of attacks – small arms fire, RPG’s, IED’s, and complex ambushes. This is where prayer plays a major part for me. Don’t get me wrong. I am not approaching God with mantras or platitudes. I really begin to sense what David was feeling when Saul was chasing after him. It really runs me through the emotional wringer. I get charged for the mission, and then when it’s over, I crash. I don’t sleep well the night before out of concern for everybody. I frequently pray myself to sleep.

I had an old friend write to me (one of the names the Alumni Center gave me.) She is not necessarily a pacifist, but definitely not a strong supporter of the American mission in Iraq. There have been discussions about war, and aggression between us in the past. I would take a very strong hawkish stance on anything – the good ole “Kill a Commie for Mommie” thing from the Cold War. Age has a way of tempering that. (This is where you have to know me better to understand – I could write pages on this in order to help you understand, but I won’t.) Consider a see-saw, and the see-saw represents understanding, or world view. Now take all the views of the people and center the mass of those ideas evenly in the middle of the totter (around the fulcrum.) The see-saw would balance, but the full range of understanding is not considered – centrism breeds mediocrity, and mediocrity leads to decay. Now, take the masses’ ideas and spread them evenly along the length of the board, and you still have balance. This holds true in the full spectrum of issues. In regard to the hawk vs dove balance, those in the middle are required to shift as a result of open dialogue.

Frequently action must be taken quickly, and the best course of action might not get chosen. I will say, however, a good plan executed today, is better than a great plan executed tomorrow. Time kills. I am not a centrist. I do understand the woes of those opposed to our mission, but I would be hard set to shift my views after what I have seen here. This country and the people were molested by Saddam, his sons, and their cronies. I am not at liberty to address US policies, nor conjecture on motives. That will play out in the arena of debate during elections. But, I know that the vast majority of the Iraqi people are better off today, than they were under Saddam. I will say it again, the drive of the mission of Civil Affairs is to develop self-determinance, and self-governance. Democratic processes are relatively new to this country, and it is understandable why a minority would fear the majority in such a process. That
is beauty of representative government it helps dilute majority rule. By the way, overall turn-out by the registered Iraqi voters, was better than what we see back home. Franchise means something to a people that have never had a choice in voting (were you able to view the video?)

Good things are happening here.

Another week has past. Baylor lost in overtime. Coach Morris is doing a great job. I’m proud of him and his team. Hard core Aggie, Texas and OU Marines are looking at Baylor now and seeing a contender.

I received a new batch of photos of the children yesterday. What a high: what a heartache. It was a different time, and war was viewed much differently then, but I can’t imagine what it was like for GI’s to be gone for up to 4 years during WWII. I wish I had spent more time with that generation of men. So much is being lost every day - the stories, tales, and sagas of men in the trenches. Men left pregnant brides and came home to 2-4 year olds. That is sacrifice. I am not diminishing the actions of today’s service personnel. I just think it a little different to be able to write like I am now, or to be able to get on a tactical phone (DSN), get hooked up to an AT&T operator, and then call my wife on a calling card donated by an unknown caring supporter back home. To those that give me the opportunity to hear my wife’s voice, I say thank you.

To the Baylor family I have a prayer request. So many Marines, sailors, soldiers, and airmen do not know the Lord. They need your prayers. Pray that God will work in their hearts that they would seek after Him, and call Him Lord. People pass away around us everyday. I found that one of my favorite professors died while I was training in North Carolina. People die here, and in your neighborhoods. Do they know Christ? I have to ask myself about my witness to those around me constantly. I fail pretty frequently. It’s tough. Over here, there is an opportunity to catch Marines in moments of self-contemplation. Pray that these Marines would hear the prompting of the Spirit on their hearts, and that all Christians would be emboldened to share the message of salvation with them.

I’ve written enough for now. It has been relatively quiet around here today. I hope it is a harbinger of things to come.

Ever onward,

Duane

PS: Got some great pics of me by the sewer pump truck – forthcoming. WHAT A JOB!!!!
Duane:

See what you think. As soon as my editorial colleague gets hold of it, she’ll want to cut it in half, but I like everything in it. And I think with it broken into different dates, it works okay. I’ll use your photos too.

If you have changes/corrections/additions/deletions, please mark in bold, all caps, colors, or something so I can see it. Otherwise, I have to go through line by line and compare to see what you changed. Don’t be shy—like that’s a problem for you! If I cut something that’s dear to your heart or if I left in something that’s not appropriate, just say so.

Sooner the better!

Take care,

Meg

Letters from Iraq

October 2:

Dear Baylor Line:

I am currently serving in Iraq in the Ramadi area as a Civil Affairs Officer. I’ve been activated from the Marine Reserves since June, and will continue until approximately March or April. My wife, Elaine ‘86, and three children--Marshall (6), Kara (4), and Savannah (2)--keep my heart longing to come home. I’d like to correspond with some old classmates and dorm friends while I’m out here. You can write to:
CWO2 Duane Fish
6th CAG Det 1
Unit 72066
Blue Diamond
FPO AE 09509-2066
or e-mail to FishDG@gcemnf-wiraq.usmc.mil, dgfish@vvm.com
I think Elaine would like to hear from some old friends, also.
Pray for the people of Iraq and that peace would engulf their land.

October 3:

I’m writing on the eve of Ramadan, so tonight we were put on high alert, and I’m armed to the teeth. There are many questions that go through one’s mind, and then all of a sudden there is a calm peace about what you are doing. It’s hard to explain. Right now I don’t know whether to go to sleep or drink coffee to stay awake--adrenalin lasts only so long, and then you crash. I also hate to be jarred from my sleep. Stay awake, or go to sleep--a conundrum. Perhaps writing will take my mind off of things.

At home I am a pharmacist at Scott & White Hospital in Temple, and I work in the operating room. It is a fantastic job, with a phenomenal staff of nurses, physicians, and fellow pharmacists. I miss all of them--family and friends--so much. I don’t need to be here by all financial and family calculations--I’m 42, have a great job, a beautiful house, and a family filled with joy and happiness--the American dream. But I’m also a Marine. Despite the enormous difficulty of leaving behind my family, at the very core of who I am, I know that what I am doing is the right thing to do. I have prayed and asked to have my eyes opened if I have made the wrong choice, but God continues to assure that I have chosen correctly.

I have the 91st Psalm hanging over my rack (bed). David was a warrior and a man after God’s own heart. People sometimes have a difficult time reconciling the two concepts of being a warrior and a child of God. I don’t. But I do see the difficulty in this whole process.

God has given me a heart of compassion for the people of Iraq. I pray for them. I pray for peace in this country. I even cry for them. This is a land that has known strife for thousands of years. Peace has been elusive here. But, there exists a greater peace--the peace of Jesus. I’m limited in my ability to speak openly about my faith, but I can pray, and I pray that God will rain His peace upon this people, and this country. My wife and I have begun looking at this as a round-trip all expenses paid mission trip.

I’ll try to write often. There is always something to tell--how dirt gets into everything, the training, the gunfire. How I miss certain foods. How I miss coming to Waco for football games, which we started as a family tradition two years ago. My son is starting to understand a little. I miss going to the games with him; he likes to wear his corduroy Baylor hat. I watch the scoreboards over here as best I can. The TAMU game kept me up until almost 2330--what a heartbreaker! Then up a few hours later to travel by dark of night. But I know the Bears will do great this year.

Duane

October 6:

Haven’t had much time to write. Work in progress. The other night wound up being quiet, but every
sound inside our compound had all of us jumping out of shallow slumbers.

I am a Chief Warrant Officer 2 (CWO2) in the U.S. Marine Corps Reserves. I returned to the Reserves in ’95 as a sergeant, and became an armorer. In 2001 I was appointed a Warrant Officer, and commissioned as a CWO2 in 2003.

I’ve only been here four weeks, so what I do is hard to define. I am responsible for working with the Provincial Director Generals for Health and Sewage, who are Iraqis. The biggest problem with working with sewers is that this is where IEDs get placed. Not a whole lot of sewer projects moving forward right now.

The Iraqi directors of each of these departments are very elusive. It has much to do with their lack of trust, so we spend time coaxing them to participate in the process and to be self-sufficient and self-determinant. This country’s economy has been soured by the oil profits and dictatorial despotism. Initiative would get a man killed. Adhering to the status quo meant life. It’s hard to break through the decades, if not centuries, of this attitude.

I live in the Provincial Civil Military Operations Center (PCMOC), a one-story government building, for part of the week. Where I sleep was probably somebody’s office. There are eight of us packed in there. Many more in another small building (can’t give exact numbers). Then I live in a trailer for another part of the week. Let’s say one is more secure than the other. Green Zone? Ha, I live in the brown zone. Short of the blue sky, and the orange sun, I don’t see too many other natural colors. I live, work, eat, and sleep inside when I’m not on base: too dangerous to do too much else. In order for us to do our job best, we must take a diminutive posture (very contrary the training we receive from the Corps in general.) I must be available and open to the people who come to the PCMOC. Way too much to write about at the moment.

Gotta go,

Duane

October 17:

I have stayed up way too late (0105), but I wanted to tell you more about my job here. Sometimes I feel like I’m leading an adventurer’s life, and then sometimes I’ll sit in the same room and wonder how boring can this get.

As the director of health and sewage, I have been assigned to work with the Iraqi Directors General (DG) of both Health and Sewage. Health because of my background in a medical setting, and sewage because it is so closely linked to health. My day is odd-- the PCMOC is open 0900 to 1500--banker’s hours.
However, our mornings are filled with planning meetings and preparation. I spend an inordinate amount of time on the computer sending messages back and forth in an effort to coordinate projects and consolidate information. Lines down, cell phone towers blown up, and any number of other obstacles impede the flow of information. Let’s just call them opportunities to overcome. I spend time in meetings with the governor (sounds more important than my role is) and attempt to unravel so many of the crossed information streams coming in through my section.

Here’s a for instance of how things go: Insurgents use the sewer system to place improvised explosive devices (IEDs). When these go off the sewer system collapses in on itself. There are funds available to assist in the procurement of materiel to get the job done. You have money from the UN, non-governmental organizations, the US, governmental organizations, international organizations, plus CERP funds, IRMO funds, IRRF funds, Marine Corps funds, and a handful more. But the project must go through certain levels of US and Iraqi bureaucracies to get the funding (talk about trying to herd cats). Once the funding is there, how do you secure the safety of the workers, the work sight, and ultimately the sewer system once it is repaired? This is the toughest aspect of the job. Sewage is running in the streets, the people are living with their effluence in the road, but the insurgents prevent the rapid repair of the system they broke. This causes the Iraqi people such heartache.

We also facilitate the funding to build or rebuild clinics and the movement of medications/material to augment and resupply them. Several other Marines are involved in electrical infrastructure, fuel distribution, education, telecom, roads/bridges, irrigation, dams/barrages, and water to name most of them. My unit also handles claims for reparations from Iraqis. They are called Solacium or condolence payments. From the Latin Solacium – comes solace. The Solacium or condolence payments were established by the US military to defray some of the economic loss associated with kinetic operations (the business of war). Unfortunately, collateral damage occurs.

We are under fire every day--more by mortar fire than rifle fire. While I’ve been writing this we have been hit nine times by mortars. I’m so glad I live near Ft Hood. The blasts don’t surprise me outside of 100 meters. When they get closer than that, then my startle reflexes start responding. Boom! There’s another one.

Despite that, my role here is peaceful. My job is about relationship and the kindling of trust. We will go home when the Iraqis embrace their own self-determinacy. I would say my combat is mostly with ideas and bureaucracies.

I’ll tell you about my best day here so far when an Iraqi father and daughter came into the PCMOC. She was so scared. I could see in her eyes: “Who is the big man with a gun that wants to help me?” But, with the compassion of a father that so desperately wants to see his own children, I got down on the floor and began talking to her. The translator would talk with her and her father. Before I knew it, she was letting me look at some papules (bumps) on her arms and face. Talking with the father, I was able to get the medication names, looked them up and suggested the therapy regime the doctor may be taking. The
father said that it was exactly what the doctor had told him, and that his heart was happy that his child was being treated correctly. Conjoined with this event could be the worst possible day, also. Interaction with Coalition Forces has cost civilians their lives. I feared for the father and daughter. Although I reached out to them, that very event could have been devastating. A Marine website ran a photo of the two of them leaving the PCMOC; it’s an image I will not soon forget. (Photo, left, by Cpl. Jeremy Gadrow)

I see God’s hand in so many things each day. A visit from the Sewage DG this morning was a direct answer to prayer. He came just as I was finishing a meeting, and he had many things to talk about, with plans for restoring services to the people. Now that’s exciting. (I can’t believe I just called sewage issues exciting.) Anyway, God is good.

Boom.

More is to come. Ramadan lasts 30 days, with potentially the worst night yet to come. It is called the “Night of Power” and will fall on October 30th or 31st, depending on when the moon phase is defined. (There is no correlation with Halloween.) Some insurgents/radicals can misconstrue the Quranic meaning of this night, and use it to legitimize increased efforts against their enemies. It is my personal belief that the threats exist daily because there are a few who do not want to give up the control they once wielded against the Iraqi people.

I encourage you to go home and embrace your family: so many of us are aching for our loved ones.

Ever onward,

Duane BOOOM!! Bye

Duane:

Did I say curiosity itch? I hope not. Surely I was a bit more delicate that that! I just had the feeling that you would be reticent to tell me about any “fire fights” or “bad guy” encounters if I didn’t ask you directly. (Quotes are because these are the words used by other BU soldiers I’ve talked to.) How do you think I should ask?

I’ve talked to two soldiers—one a marine—who received Purple Hearts, and it can take some prodding. One of them I got to meet in person at Fort Hood (amazing place) and the other on the phone, but that one I knew from when he was a student. And both of them were already home when I talked to them. They didn’t mind telling me about battle experiences, but they didn’t tell until I asked specifically. And of course they kept saying it was no big deal, it wasn’t about them, and they gave all the credit to the men under them. Both are kind of loquacious guys, and both had been stung by the media, so there was some reassuring needed there too. (They also got to approve copy.)

I know you don’t want it to be about you. But, for the Baylor alumni who will read this, it is about you.
And to them, you will represent all the other marines and soldiers. Many of our readers may not have anything in common with most soldiers, but as BU grads they have something in common with you. I’m grateful that you’re willing to share some experiences with them.

I will pass along your hellos. But I’m afraid I have some sad news about Dr. Wivagg. He passed away in August. I never had him in class, but I got to meet him a few years ago when he was featured in a Line story on professors with messy offices. His office was a doozy, and he was quite fun to work with. Here’s the link to the Baylor website story about him:


I couldn’t get the election movie to open, but I’m on a Mac, and it sometimes doesn’t work for that kind of thing. I’ll try sending it to someone in the office with a PC and see if it works.

I hope it’s okay that I gave your info to the freshmen. They contacted me because of the Line story and wanted to know if I knew of anyone serving in Iraq now, and you’re it. Since you’d sent in stuff for Line publication, I figured it was alright. I hope you get some good stuff!! I think they know they’re clueless about how to send things and they’re counting on you to tell them.

I will send you a story to approve. Hopefully tomorrow.

Meg

On 10/18/05 2:11 PM, "Fish CWO2 Duane G (GCE 6th CAG CA Officer)" <FishDG@gcemnf-wiraq.usmc.mil> wrote:

Classification: UNCLASSIFIED

Hey Meg,

I am not offended by anything you have asked me. I too, am frequently up front and honest with what I’m thinking and feeling. No problem with asking me the questions, but I would really like to know what curiosity itch is being scratched by asking if I have ever had to shoot my rifle (quid pro quo Clarice.)

I received a message from Caroline Key (a freshman) with some freshman council group. I’m doing things I know most 40+ year old men would only wish they could still do. (The problem is the recovery time is much longer than when I was younger.) But, she was born after I joined the Corps in 86. Now that’s hard to handle. Anyway, she and the council are interested in writing letters and sending packages to service personnel as a project. Unfortunately, she doesn’t understand the logistics, and gave me no numbers on how many people they’d like to send packages too. I wrote her back and gave her a sense of how large certain sub-units of the Corps are. We have plenty of Marines around. She’ll
just need to let me know some specifics.

Boom.

BTW, if all I had was a big stinky 14 year old to go home to, I’d go home and get all stinky too, and give a big hug. My wife on the other hand would make me take a shower.

Were you able to view the election video? As long as you have a good server at Baylor, you should have gotten it.

You can choose your story format. I still have to be very careful. This is not about me. I have a small story relative to the story of those Marines and soldiers that have given their lives, and those that continue to live putting their lives in harm’s way to protect my unit.

Boom.

I’m so glad I live near Ft Hood. The blasts don’t surprise me outside of 100 meters. When they get closer than that, then my startle reflexes start responding.

I’m storied out right now. I think things will start getting a little redundant. Send a hello to Drs Sorrel (sp) in history, and Dr Wivag (sp) in biology for me. I had some pretty patient professors. Most of them don’t know how positively they impacted me. Names are starting to slip, but when I walk around campus, I’ll see some of the old guard. Oh, I forgot, Kevin Sedatole, Director of Bands, was one of my classmates. Say hello to him for me, if you can.

Have a great day.

Ever onward,

Duane   BOOOM!!  Bye
instead of an adorable little person like your kids. My husband smelled pretty good, though. My older son is at college. Sweet picture with your kids.

I hope I didn’t offend you with question 5, part 2. I guess the words of the chaplain, who said your group hoped to be peacemakers, made me wonder if you’d been able to do that so far. I understand that just moving from one place to another can turn into something rather unpleasant--and life-changing, as you say.

Also, I have a tendency to ask very specific questions to try to get people to tell me their story. Sometimes I ask people the same thing over and over (like questions 5 and 6) and they think I’m nuts, but every time they tell it, they add in another detail. It is those details that make people who’ve never been in such a place--and never will be—grasp a tiny inkling of what it means to be there and what you’re doing there.

All this is very hard by e-mail. You don’t ever have to answer anything you don’t want to, of course. I’ll send you everything to approve before posting anything for public consumption.

At this point, I’ve got a lot of information. I mainly want to let people know that you’re there, what you’re doing, how you feel about it. I can rework what I sent you before, trying to make it all one piece. Or we can stick with the sequential thing and keep adding to it.

You tell me.

Take care,

Meg

On 10/17/05 5:29 PM, "Fish CWO2 Duane G (GCE 6th CAG CA Officer)" <FishDG@gcemnf-wiraq.usmc.mil> wrote:

Classification: UNCLASSIFIED

Meg, I have stayed up way too late (0105), but I wanted to get this done for you. I will tell you that I have had bad experiences with the press in the past. I have tried to be as honest as I can with you about things below. I ask that you please honor the context in which they are provided to you, and that you maintain the spirit in which these questions were answered. I’m not one to say what is good prose, or not. You have to edit, and make stories interesting. Sometimes I feel like I’m leading an adventurers life, and then sometimes I’ll sit in the same room and wonder how boring can this get. I encourage you to go home and embrace your family: so many of us are aching for our loved ones. The Marine Corps has been very good at trying to keep its overseas deployments at 7 months. The Army is keeping
soldiers over much longer than that. It’s hard to explain in detail, but the bottom line is I could get sent back pretty quickly. That is definitely something my wife and I don’t want to think about.

Have a great day. I have got to get some sleep.

Ever onward,

Duane

PS: I copied this and it did not transmit. I would have been sick.

1. What exactly do you do? I mean, what’s your job description? What is your day like?
I have been assigned to working with the Directors General of both Health and Sewage. Health because of my background in a medical setting, and sewage because it is so closely linked to the health of the people. My day is odd, if you look at the hours of operation for the Provincial Civil Military Operations Center, you’d think that we keep better than banker’s hours – 0900-1500. However, our mornings are filled with planning meetings, and preparation for the things to come. Figuratively, I not only sharpen my pistol, but I must keep my knife sharp, too. I will spend an inordinate amount of time on the computer sending messages back ad forth to several other CAG Detachments in an effort to coordinate projects, and consolidate information that we take for granted back home. Lines down, cell phone towers blown up, and any number of other obstacles exist to impede the free flow of information. Let’s just call them opportunities to overcome. I spend time in meetings with the governor (sounds more important than my role is), attempt to unravel so many of the crossed information streams coming in through my section, and make plans for the next day.

2. What kind of place do you live? Tent? Building? Secure area like a Green Zone? I live in a government building called the PCMOC (Provincial Civil Military Operations Center) for part of the week, and then in a trailer for another part of the week. Let’s say one is more secure than the other. Green Zone? Ha, I live in the brown zone. Short of the blue sky, and the orange sun, I don’t see too many other natural colors. I live, work, eat and sleep inside when I’m not on base: too dangerous to do too much else. Taking from the chaplains comments I sent earlier, in order for us to do our job best, we must take a diminutive posture (very contrary the training we receive from the Corps in general.) So, I must be available, or open to the people that come to the PCMOC

3. What’s your exact job title and rank? I am a Chief Warrant Officer 2 (CWO2) in the USMC Reserves. I returned to the Reserves in 95 as a sergeant, and became an armorer. In 2001 I was appointed a Warrant Officer, and commissioned as a CWO2 in 2003. My primary MOS is a Small Arms Repair Officer, but I have now been trained for a secondary MOS as a Civil Affairs Officer. When in Waco, I last filled the billet of Executive Officer.

4. Describe the ways you do these things listed by the chaplain:
help with elections: that is a moving target description. We will probably not know what our job
descriptions are until the night before. Again I cannot discuss specifics, but if it is time to roll-out, we
will take positions that are hidden, yet protect the people well away from the polling sights. It's called a
cordon. In retrospect, I didn’t have to participate in any of the electoral events. Now that the elections
are over, perhaps energies can be spent on reconstruction.

aid local governments: Where to start? You have UN $’s, Non-governmental organization dollars, US
$’s, Gov’t Org $s, International Organization funds, CERP funds, IRMO funds, IRRF funds, Marine Corps
funds, and a handful more. I have not been able to decode that labyrinth, and fortunately it is not my job
to do that. Here’s a for instance of aid: Insurgents use the sewer system to place improvised explosive
devices (IEDs). When these go off the sewer system collapses in on itself. There are funds available to
assist in the procurement of materiel to get the job done. The project must go through certain levels of
US, and Iraqi bureaucracies to get funding (talk about trying to herd cats). Once the funding is there,
how do you secure the safety of the workers, the work sight, and ultimately the sewer system once it is
repaired. This is the toughest aspect of the job. Sewage is running in the streets, the people are living
with their effluence in the road, but the insurgents prevent the rapid repair of the system they
broke. This causes the Iraqi people such heartache. We also facilitate the funding to (re)build clinics,
and the movement of medications/materiel to augment and resupply them. Several other Marines are
involved in electrical infrastructure, fuel distribution, education, telecom, roads/hwys/bridges, irrigation,
western projects, dams/barrages and water to name most of them.

take reparations and damage claims from Iraqis: From the Latin Solacium – comes solace. The
Solacium or condolence payments were derived by the US military in an attempt to defray some of the
economic loss associated with kinetic operations (the business of war). Unfortunately, collateral
damage occurs.
It is far beyond my purview to discuss this in depth. I know that they come to the PCMOC to place their
claims, and then there is a review process for determining compensation. For any further details I’d have
to direct you to our PAO Liaison to get further information. Her name is Major Julie Chelkowski and can
be reached at chelkowskijr@gcemnf-wiraq.usmc.mil. (she’s an Aggie so type slowly.)

I find this one particularly interesting. I don’t guess it had occurred to me that the military would need
to do this, but it makes perfect sense. Can you tell a specific story about reparations needed and
granted? What are the reparations for? Is there a place that Iraqis come to file a claim? Or do you go out
and find them?

Have you come under fire? Have you had to fire your weapon? Under fire? Yes, every day. more by
mortar fire than rifle fire. While I’ve written this we have been hit 9 times by mortars. Have I had to
fire? By the grace of God, no. I pride myself on my marksmanship skills (not perfect, but more than
adequate.) I understand, in part, that once I pull the trigger, my life changes. I also know that failure to
pull the trigger could permanently change my life. I do not want to have to cause life to cease, but I will,
if I must defend my position or fellow Marines. I will tell you that you are the first to ask me this
question. I have never asked another man if he has had to fire at somebody. It is an uneasy question to
ponder, but reconciled by the role I fill. Would you answer me this question, “Why would you want to know this?” I consider the loss of life a pretty heavy burden. Have you thought about what it would take to kill an intruder in your own home? I have 6 more months here. Who knows what will happen?

6. The chaplain described your role as more peaceful than combat. Does that work? Or are you in combat too? I think my musings above have answered most of this, but I’ll take a passage from Sun Tzu’s Art of War to best describe this concept: “When you are weak, appear strong; when you are strong, appear weak.” From the Bible we are told “He that shall be first, shall be last, and he that shall be last, shall be first.” I am neither trying to appear weak, nor strong: neither last, nor first. My role is peaceful. My job is about relationship and the kindling of trust. We will go home when the Iraqis embrace their own self-determinacy. I don’t want them to fear the process, and I want to go home – two mutually supporting ideas. I would say my combat is mostly with ideas, and bureaucracies. I have not “walked the wall” or stared off into the distance for hours looking for an enemy to engage. Have I been rattled out of my rack and had to stand at the ready for engagement? Yes. Nobody needs to experience that. I understand some of the adrenaline addiction issues that some service personnel manifest when they get home. Your senses come alive – I know the football players understand that exhilaration. Do I look forward to it – no, not with the potential consequences!

7. What’s the worst thing that has happened to you so far or worst day you’ve had? See below.

8. What’s been the best experience or day? The day with the father and his daughter. The picture of the 2 of them leaving the PCMOC is an image I will not soon forget. She was so scared. I could see in her eyes, “Who is the big man with a gun that wants to help me?” But, with the compassion of a father that so desperately wants to see his own children, I got down on the floor and just began talking to her. The translator would talk with her and her father. Before I knew it, she was letting look at some papules (bumps) on her arms and face. Talking with the father, I was able to get the medication names, looked them up and suggested the therapy regime the doctor may be taking. The father said that it was exactly what the doctor had told him, and that his heart was happy that his child was being treated correctly. Conjoined with this event is the worst possible day, also. Interaction with Coalition Forces has cost civilians their lives. I feared for the father and daughter. Although I reached out to them, that very event could have been devastating. I see God’s hand in so many things each day. A visit from the Sewage DG this morning was a direct answer to prayer. He came just as I was finishing a meeting, and he had many things to talk about, with plans for restoring services to the people. Now that’s exciting. (I can’t believe I just called sewage issues exciting.) Anyway, God is good.

9. Can you send a picture of yourself over there? Done

10. Or you can just tell me about one specific day or time. Like last night on “high alert.” What is that? What are the threats? Doesn’t Ramadan last quite a while? Ramadan lasts 30 days, and potentially the worst night is yet to come. It is called the “Night of Power” which will fall on Oct 30th or 31st, depending on when the moon phase is defined. (there is no correlation with Halloween – ours is a solar calendar, theirs is a lunar one.) Some insurgents/radicals can misconstrue the Quranic meaning of this
night, and use it to legitimize increased efforts against their enemies. It is my personal belief that the threats exist daily because there are a few who do not want to give up the control they once wielded against the Iraqi people. As an historical note, I will remind you that it took several years to quell sabotage, and efforts against Allied forces in the post-WWII years of Germany. Several islands in the Pacific continued to harbor small groups of Japanese soldiers who refused to believe their emperor had surrendered.

**********************************************************************************

Duane:

Hi. Sorry not to get back to you yesterday, but I thought I should let you get some rest after all that writing! I left a message for your wife, but now that I look at my watch, it’s probably carpool time. I might just call again to hear your child sing “Amazing Grace” on the message! How sweet.

I live less than a mile from your Waco training grounds, and I used to live right next door—my "second home," that is, at the Lake Air Little League. Otherwise known as the Center of the Universe. But now my kids are too old for Little League. One’s a freshman at UT (My motto: It's better than bein’ an Aggie!) and the other is a freshman at Waco High—also around the corner.

I didn’t notice your grad year at first, but I’m an 82 grad. Maiden name was Powell. My little sister, Lea, graduated in 87. Neither of us were talented enough to play in the BUGWB, though. What did you play?

You don’t have to be on the record about your Iraq experiences if you don’t want to. But if you’d like to share some of your story, I’d be happy to help you put it all together. Our newly published story in the magazine includes a tagline asking for other alumni who have served to let us know what they are doing. I’m sure some responses will be quite to the point, but others will be longer. Either is okay. We may use some in the “Letters” section of the winter issue of the Line, and, as I mentioned, we will use some as sort of additions to the magazine story on our fancy new web site.

So, if you want to do that, we can use a lot of what you wrote yesterday. But here are some specific questions to get you focused, because I’m not sure I understand exactly what you do.

1. What exactly do you do? I mean, what’s your job description? What is your day like?


3. What’s your exact job title and rank?

4. Describe the ways you do these things listed by the chaplain:

   --help with elections

   --aid local governments

   --take reparations and damage claims from Iraqis

(I find this one particularly interesting. I don’t guess it had occurred to me that the military
would need to do this, but it makes perfect sense. Can you tell a specific story about reparations needed and granted? What are the reparations for? Is there a place that Iraqis come to file a claim? Or do you go out and find them?)

5. Have you come under fire? Have you had to fire your weapon?

6. The chaplain described your role as more peaceful than combat. Does that work? Or are you in combat too?

7. What’s the worst thing that has happened to you so far or worst day you’ve had?

8. What’s been the best experience or day?

9. Can you send a picture of yourself over there?

10. Or you can just tell me about one specific day or time. Like last night on “high alert.” What is that? What are the threats? Doesn’t Ramadan last quite a while?

You don’t have to answer them all specifically. It’s just a way to get you thinking and telling me the basic details like: this is my job, this is what I do all day, where I live, etc.

Thanks.

Meg

Meg Cullar
News Editor
The Baylor Line
Baylor Alumni Association
254-710-6435
Meg_Cullar@baylor.edu

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—Samuel Palmer Brooks

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On 10/3/05 3:43 PM, "Fish CWO2 Duane G (GCE 6th CAG CA Officer)" <FishDG@gcemnf-wiraq.usmc.mil> wrote:
Meg,

Thank you for the consideration. I must say that it was not my intent to do an interview, or write my experience. I’m still struggling with “this is not about me” stuff. I was just hoping to get some letters, or e-mails. You have no idea how important news, or messages from home, family, and friends is when you are so far away. Mail delivery is horrible out here; short of e-mails from my wife and a few friends, I have little contact with folks back home.

Tonight we were put on high alert. I’m armed to the teeth right now on the eve of Ramadan. There are many questions that go through one’s mind, and then all of a sudden there is a calm peace about what you are doing. It’s hard to explain. Right now I don’t know whether to go to sleep, or drink coffee to stay awake – adrenaline lasts only so long, and then you crash – I also hate to be jarred from my sleep. Stay awake, or go to sleep – a conundrum. Perhaps writing will take my mind off of things – so I guess you can get a partial story.

Here’s a small part of my background. As I stated in my message, I have 3 beautiful children, and a wonderful wife. I am a pharmacist at Scott & White Hospital. I work in the operating room. It is a fantastic job, with a phenomenal staff of nurses, physicians, and fellow pharmacists. I miss all of them – family and friends – so much. I don’t need to be here by all financial and family calculations – I’m 42, have a great job, a beautiful house, and a family filled with joy and happiness – the American dream. (sheesh is this getting schmaltzy?) I’m also a Marine. The greatest struggle for me has been trying to explain to my wife that at the very core of who I am, I know that what I am doing is the right thing to do. Her thoughts have been (and note specifically past tense) that I chose the Corps over her and the family. For me it has been both/and; for her it had been either/or. (BTW I think that you would be getting a better story by asking for her side of the struggle - a mother [Baylor Grad] struggling with 3 children under six, and a deployed husband. Give her a call 254.933.0514)

Today I received a forwarded letter from another Marine. The letter was written by a Navy Chaplain who rode over with the advanced party of my unit – 6th Civil Affairs Group. Here is the text of his letter, written to a senior officer of CAG explaining his experience on the plane ride over, which probably best explains why it is what we – what I do:

Sir...got to understand just a bit of your mission as I flew over with you all and then have seen you leaving on a couple of convoys while I’ve been temporarily assigned to CLB-2 at Al Asad...reflections on your mission from a Chaplain’s perspective. You all have a crucial, noble, and difficult job...

It says in the 11th verse of the 29th Psalm..."The Lord gives strength to his people, the Lord blesses his people with peace."

I flew from Cherry Point, NC to Iraq with a group of Marine Reservists from all over the country who have formed a group call the Sixth Civil Affairs Group (6th CAG). The mission of the 6th CAG is to help with elections, aid local governments, take reparations and damage claims from Iraqis and a host of other duties. Like all Marines they are armed with M-16s and 9mm pistols.

Here we see the juxtaposition of strength and peace the psalmist mentions. The difficult part of the 6th CAG’s job is not being USMC warriors, but rather making peace - winning the
"hearts and minds" of the Iraqis. I know that sounds like a propaganda but it is a very real, very difficult, and very dangerous mission. These men and women are headed for places like Ramadi and Hit and other towns throughout Iraq. Many of these places are sites of recent and intense fighting. Due to this location they are ready to defend themselves at all times. In reality they would love to keep their weapons at their sides. When they have to use their "strength" as warriors their mission is at its weakest point. In fact, the use of force greatly detracts from their mission. Only when their weapons remain holstered and on safety can they show their real strength - creating peace and hope amidst the chaos of a war zone where women and children live. As I talked with them over the past few days there was an excitement in their voices that they could really be ambassadors of good will who could make a difference in a war that is often confusing - yes, confusing even to the troops.

Peace, hope and love - real strengths may come harder to us in life. In fact, we are a nation and humanity that has always known war. Winning the hearts and minds of others takes courage against failure, criticism and ridicule. It is easy to criticize. It is easy to fight. It is another matter to make things right. It is another matter to be blessed peace makers in a war and terrorist torn country.

Pray for the 6th CAG. I don't know how many of them are religious, but they are the embodiment of the 11th verse of the 29th Psalm - people given strength whose true blessing is peace. They are in a war zone trained as warriors, but their strength is creating peace. Pray for them - men and women of the USMC's 6th Civil Affairs Group in dangerous places. They come with the most powerful force known to all of humanity...Peace.

May God be with the Marines of the 6th CAG and the people of Iraq who want to live and raise their children in peace.

I have thought about the 6th CAG and hope that you are all well. As the elections draw near in the next two weeks I know the danger level goes up exponentially. Stay safe. Feel free to share any of this you like – I know you may be without direct Chaplain support at times, but know you all are being prayed for each day.

V/R
Chaplain Pat McLaughlin, LCDR, USNR
CLR-25/SSTP

I have the 29th Psalm hanging over my rack (bed). David was a warrior and a man after God’s own heart. People sometimes have a difficult time reconciling the 2 concepts of being a warrior, and a child of God. I don’t. My wife on the other hand struggles with the 2 truths that I am a Marine, and that I am a husband/father. I see the difficulty in this whole process. I see that for her it is a matter of allegiance and commitment to either her or the Corps. I do not fault her. Believe me, I've had to question my motives for remaining in the Corps. I have prayed and asked to have my eyes opened if I have made the wrong choice, but God continues to assure that I have chosen correctly.

God has given me a heart of compassion for the people of Iraq. I pray for them. I pray for peace in this country. (I even cry for them.) This is a land that has known strife for thousands of years. The Assyrians,
Persians, Medes, Macedonians, Romans, Ottomans, Britains, and many others have fought over this land. Peace has been elusive here. I have no intimation that it will come easy. But, there exists a greater peace – the peace of Jesus. I’m limited on my ability to speak openly about my faith, but I can pray, and I pray that God will rain His peace upon this people, and this country. My wife and I have begun looking at this as a round-trip all expenses paid mission trip.

(can’t believe it’s 2315 right now.) Not the typical Marine story you were looking for, eh?

I could describe how dirt gets into everything, how it’s hot, how I miss certain foods, training, gunfire, or a litany of other things. I don’t know what you’d like. I can’t necessarily journal, but I can get around to writing pretty often, I think. I cc my wife, because I somehow pull the dumb husband routine and act like it’s just another day at the office until I start talking with someone else. It keeps her in the know. I also have to cc my PAO.

I really would like you to talk with my wife. She is half of who I am, and my decision to remain in the Corps has affected her in a dynamically different way. She is a wonderful woman. I met her 23 years ago in BUGWB. That’s its own little novelette. We married in 1990. I could do a biographical sketch, but not now. I am getting tired.

My Reserve Center is on New Road behind the HOT cow sheds. It’s great coming to Waco at least once a month. I started buying season tickets 2 years ago through Bear Force One. I wanted to start a family tradition of going to football games. My son is starting to understand a little. I miss going to the games with him. He likes to wear his corduroy Baylor hat. I watch the scoreboards over here as best I can – I can’t believe the Sports Center took the live cast off the internet so they could provide “better services” to paying customers. I watched the play-by-play against TAMU the other night – what a heartbreaker - up until almost 2330, and then up a few hours later to travel by dark of night. The Bears will do great this year.

Hope I was able to give you something here.

Sincerely,

Duane

From: Meg_Cullar [mailto:Meg_Cullar@baylor.edu]
Sent: Monday, October 03, 2005 7:59 PM
To: Fish CWO2 Duane G (GCE 6th CAG CA Officer)
Subject: Baylor Line

Duane:

Lisa Asher just sent me your class note e-mail, and I wanted to touch base with you to let you know about our current Iraq coverage in the Baylor Line. Our new fall issue, which is online at www.baylorline.com, includes a feature story on alumni—and one student—who served in Iraq. I had the honor of writing the story and talking to these Baylorites, who were all fascinating and amazing
people.

In connection with that story, we'd like to hear stories from more alumni serving in Iraq. We'll use those stories as "Web Exclusives"—you can see on the web site what those are. All the people profiled in the magazine are out of Iraq now, and their tours of duty spanned various time frames. A couple went in with the initial wave, and a couple returned just this spring. So it would be really interesting to hear from someone who is there now. And we didn't have anyone in the Ramadi area, either, so we'd really love to hear more from you.

So if you've got time to relate some of your adventures, please do so. You can e-mail directly to me if you like, and I'll edit for length, etc. and send back to you for approval.

Thanks so much for letting us hear from you.

Take care.

Meg Cullar
News Editor
The Baylor Line
Baylor Alumni Association
254-710-6435 (my desk) 254-710-1121 (front desk)
1-800-BAYLOR-U, option 6, to get Alumni Association from 8-noon and 1-5
Fax: 254-710-1096
Meg_Cullar@baylor.edu

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—Samuel Palmer Brooks

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How many days now? Does “activated” mean going back to Iraq? Training events around the country or world don't sound too bad if they don't last very long. I think you might be doing way too good of a job over there. If someone notices that sort of thing, they'll want you to keep working!

I forgot...How long have you been in the reserves? Was this your first activation? And I've just been assuming that your pharmacy job will be here when you get back. True? Getting a job at Baylor is the only sure fire way I know of getting cheap football tickets. They used to have a family package for four, and it was a good deal, but I don't know if they’re still offering it.

The Baylor basketball men, you know, didn’t get to play any pre-conference games, so they started out a little cold. I think they've won two games, which is two more than a lot of people thought they would. I don't keep up too well with them, I'm afraid.

The Lady Bears have lost a few too many. Can't seem to beat Oklahoma, but nobody can. By the way, go to this website and vote for Sophia Young as Big 12 player of the year.

http://www.big12sports.com/sports/w-baskbl/big12-w-baskbl-body.html

It only lets you vote once from each computer, so see if you can get a few hundred Marines to vote too! We don’t want that freshman from Oklahoma to win.

Send me the letter whenever you can. And a new photo if you have a pertinent one. One where I can SEE YOU is always good.
Take care,

Meg

On 2/16/06 3:13 PM, "Fish CWO2 Duane G (GCE 6th CAG CA Officer)" <FishDG@gcemnf-wiraq.usmc.mil> wrote:

Hey Meg,

I’ve started another letter. It’s really hard to concentrate enough to do anything right now. I’ve got all these thoughts of coming home, blah, blah, blah. It’s just hard to stay motivated. To top it all off, there is an outside chance that I could be activated again after getting home, or tasked to do annual training events around the country, or the world. I think some folks are just jerking my chain, but I’m not taking it playfully.

Hope you are doing well. How did the men’s basketball team do this year? Got a line on any cheap season football tickets?

Take care,

Duane

From: Meg_Cullar [mailto:Meg_Cullar@baylor.edu]
Sent: Thursday, February 16, 2006 11:50 PM
To: Fish CWO2 Duane G (GCE 6th CAG CA Officer)
Subject: Confirmation

Duane:

Just to remind you of what an Aggie is, my photographer friend sent this photo of an A&M fan that he took last night at the Lady Bears stomping of the Lady Ags in College Station. Just a wild guess, but I’m bettin’ this guy ain’t in the Corps.

Hope you’re doing okay.

Take care,

Meg

------ Forwarded Message
From: Rod Aydelotte <raydelotte@wacotrib.com>
Date: Thu, 16 Feb 2006 10:53:38 -0600
To: Meg_Cullar Cullar <Meg_Cullar@baylor.edu>
Subject: mom nightmare
not your so typical aggie fan from last night game

Duane:

Okay, you’re updated. I added it on to the end of the other story. I put the NYT stuff in italics. See if you think that makes it differentiated enough. There are very few layout options in web coding. For instance, if there’s a way to indent that whole section, you’ve got to be some sort of computer science genius to know how. The only other thing I could do is make it some kind of boldface. Let me know if you think it needs that, and I’ll do it.

You can answer my questions if you want, or you can just keep sending updates — whatever makes it easier for you to explain things. If you get a chance, give me a more detailed description of the resolution of the water problem. Not sure I understand it all. Timeframe too. And knowing what happened on the Night of Power would be interesting. Just whatever you feel like doing. If you’re tired of it, you can quit whenever you want, and I’ll just send you jokes and inspirational messages and other things to distract/entertain you. Or you can continue as long as you want. I think it’s important to hear from someone actually there, but I don’t want to add any burdens for you.

Having new duties sounds exciting or at least like something that will occupy you. But I hope you won’t be near the rats in the garbage in carrying out your “veterinary care” duties! Cats are a whole different thing; they will save you from the rats. Roads, bridges, and municipalities — plus the water issues — sounds like you’re running the whole place! Not that that’s a good thing.

Take care,

Meg

On 11/9/05 11:57 AM, "Fish CWO2 Duane G (GCE 6th CAG CA Officer)" <FishDG@gcemnf-wiraq.usmc.mil> wrote:

Classification: UNCLASSIFIED

Hey Meg,

I’ve been pretty distracted lately. Having a hard time focusing. I’ve been told that there is a point a few months in where one hits the doldrums. I think I’m there. Anyway, I like the write-up below. I did get the pipe fixed, and most of the water pumped out of the lot. God answered prayer. I had gotten to the end of my rope, and was really frustrated with the lack of support and the difficulty in getting 3 factors to line up to get the pipe fixed. The next morning, a US Corps of Engineers civilian showed up and offered a hand (here for a completely different reason), the water got turned off, and the pumps that were brought in a few days earlier worked (2 of 4 that is.) I was going to wait on the Seabee’s to show up, but said let’s go and 2 hours later it was done. Wow. It’s hard to imagine victory being measured as an 18” length of pipe.

I have taken on additional duties working with Roads and Bridges, Veterinary Care (not quite sure on this one), and Municipalities. I’m ramping up very quickly in these areas. It’s like someone hit the reset button for me, and I’m learning new systems just like when I showed up here.
Regarding the story, I ask that you make sure to differentiate more strongly between what I write and what Sabrina from the NYT writes.

You wanted a picture of me mucking – this ones the best. I have a few shots with pumps and all, but they just don’t capture the moment.

I’ll get around to your questions soon.

Take care,

Duane

From: Fish CWO2 Duane G (GCE 6th CAG CA Officer)
Sent: Friday, November 04, 2005 1:28 AM
To: 'Meg_Cullar'
Subject: RE: Latest stuff

Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Here’s some pictures. I’ll send more, but these are big.

I’ll write back to you tomorrow.

Thanks,

Duane

From: Meg_Cullar [mailto:Meg_Cullar@baylor.edu]
Sent: Thursday, November 03, 2005 10:57 PM
To: Fish CWO2 Duane G (GCE 6th CAG CA Officer)
Subject: Latest stuff

Duane:

Here's an edited version of your latest missives. I tried to handle the NYT story in a way that would be self-contained. If you link to their site, the story will go offline at some point. But the whole this is so long, so I just included some excerpts. Readers with access can look it up from info given, don't you think? See if you think it works this way. Also, I left out our really personal stuff—sad kids. Just seemed too personal; breaks my heart, too. If you want it in there, let me know. Just an assumption on my part that you wouldn't. Where I left things out, I sometimes had to create segues, so I'm putting words in your mouth. So make sure those are okay with you.

I do have a few questions, of course:
First, I don't think I ever got photos of you in the muck. Need that.
Did you end up having to get out there and fix those pipes yourself?
What exactly are you doing out there waist deep in the water?
Do you at least have waders or something to wear for protection from the scum germs?
I’m getting a little squeamish just thinking about this—how do you handle it?
What’s the status? You said it was approaching your living quarters. What happened?
More on the raid?
If they blew up your humvee, how do you get around? (Why don’t you get a tank—that sounds good—a big one with lots of armor! Or just stay inside—that sounds even better.)
What happened during the Night of Power?
I read your letter to Carolyn. I hope she’s up to it!! And what do YOU want for Christmas?

Let me know if the following is okay, and we’ll go from there.

Take care,
Meg

P.S. (Baylor gossip on the street says the university will have a new president tomorrow. Another version is that the regents are just meeting tomorrow about a new president. I heard from definitely good and named authority that it will be "soon.")

October 23:

What an emotional rollercoaster the last few days have been. An October 23 story from the New York Times, "Unseen Enemy is at its Fiercest in Sunni City," may give you an idea of what it’s like in Ramadi. Here are a few excerpts:

. . . Here in Ramadi, the capital of Anbar Province, Sunni Arab insurgents are waging their fiercest war against American troops, attacking with relative impunity just blocks from Marine-controlled territory. Every day, the Americans fight to hold their turf in a war against an enemy who seems to be everywhere but is not often seen.
The cost has been high: in the last six weeks, 21 Americans have been killed here, far more than in any other city in Iraq and double the number of deaths in Baghdad, a city with a population 15 times as large.

. . . The deputy governor of Anbar was shot to death on Tuesday; the day before, the governor’s car was fired on. There is no police force. . . . American bases are regularly pelted with rockets and mortar shells, and when troops here get out of their vehicles to patrol, they are almost always running.

. . . Snipers are a constant plague. In one area of the city, snipers have hit four Americans since late August, and soldiers were obliged to set up blast walls for security for a polling center there last week in the dark. A law school in eastern Ramadi had to be shut down because sniper attacks were coming from it at night.
"It’s like everyone in this town is a sniper," said Muhammad Ali Jasim, an Iraqi soldier who has been stationed here since May. "You can’t stand in one place for long."
"You get a workout," Corporal Rosener said. "It’s all running, running from building to building."

So you can see my job is not the most dangerous, but the region certainly is. The attached photo shows my latest struggle. The water is where our parking lot is supposed to be. Somebody parked a seven-ton truck on top of a water spigot, and cracked the 3-inch main, and the 1-inch spigot pipe. With all the infrastructure issues, and bombs being planted in the road, it is a difficult two-fold task to get things fixed: 1) get the workers to come out in an environment in which an insurgent will probably kill him, 2) find the person or people who will own responsibility for getting the job done. In the photo’s background is a burn pit—the Iraqi way of dealing with garbage. The EPA would be having fits with garbage handling in Iraq. (Rarely do we consider how much we rely on refuse workers to make our lives comfortable.) The burn pit is now under water, and our garbage is stacking up. Already we’re getting a steady flow of rodents and cats.

The water is threatening to leak into our living quarters, and once it hits that, it will be able to flow into our sewage cisterns. I can’t imagine having to wallow into the fetid murk. It turned cold two days ago, and the water will sap the heat right out of you. If equipment doesn’t roll in tomorrow, then I’ll
be out there chipping concrete with a breaker bar to build a French Ditch out to the street. This is the
same street that has sewage flowing through it because insurgent bombs have collapsed the sew lines
further down the road. It can’t flow, so it percolates up into the street. My/our endgame is the rainy
season--some time in December.

I ran another convoy this morning. They are short by comparison to the long cross-country ones from
city to city, but every moment in the open is less than safe. I will tell you that my having been on
thirteen convoys already with no incidences is a testament to the power of prayer, and faith in Jesus.
Several of us pray over the convoys before we leave. There is an old euphemism, "There are no
atheists in foxholes." We have our share of them around here, but many are rekindling their faith, and
at least praying now, when prior to being here they weren’t putting their faith into action.

AS the convoy commander I ensure that all the logistics, communications, and personnel rosters are
in order. I then brief the convoy routes, danger areas, threat assessments, and plans of actions in the
event of any number of attacks--small arms fire, RPG’s, IED’s, and complex ambushes. This is where
prayer plays a major part for me. Don’t get me wrong. I am not approaching God with mantras or
platitudes. I really begin to sense what David was feeling when Saul was chasing after him. It really
runs me through the emotional wringer. I get charged for the mission, and then when it’s over, I
crash. I don’t sleep well the night before out of concern for everybody. I frequently pray myself to
sleep.

I had an old Baylor friend write to me. She is not necessarily a pacifist, but definitely not a strong
supporter of the American mission in Iraq. I do understand the woes of those opposed to our mission,
but I would be hard set to shift my views after what I have seen here. This country and the people
were molested by Saddam, his sons, and their cronies. I am not at liberty to address US policies, nor
conjecture on motives. That will play out in the arena of debate during elections. But I know that the
vast majority of the Iraqi people are better off today than they were under Saddam. Democratic
processes are relatively new to this country, and it is understandable why a minority would fear the
majority. By the way, overall turn-out by the registered Iraqi voters was better than what we see back
home. Franchisement means something to a people that have never had a choice in voting.

Good things are happening here.

I received a new batch of photos of the children yesterday. What a high; what a heartache. It was a
different time, and war was viewed much differently then, but I can’t imagine what it was like for GI’s
to be gone for up to four years during WWII. Men left pregnant brides and came home to 2-4 year
olds. That is sacrifice. I am not diminishing the actions of today’s service personnel. I just think it a
little different to be able to write like I am now, or to be able to get on a tactical phone (DSN), get
hooked up to an AT&T operator, and then call my wife on a calling card donated by an unknown caring
supporter back home. To those that give me the opportunity to hear my wife’s voice, I say thank you.

To the Baylor family I have a prayer request. So many Marines, sailors, soldiers, and airmen do not
know the Lord. They need your prayers. Pray that God will work in their hearts that they would seek
after Him, and call Him Lord. People pass away around us everyday. I found that one of my favorite
professors died while I was training in North Carolina. People die here and in your neighborhoods. Do
they know Christ? I have to ask myself about my witness to those around me constantly. I fail pretty
frequently. It’s tough. Over here, there is an opportunity to catch Marines in moments of self-
contemplation. Pray that these Marines would hear the prompting of the Spirit on their hearts, and
that all Christians would be emboldened to share the message of salvation with them.

Ever onward,
Duane

October 26:

I’m still dealing with the water issue, and I’m at the point of sheer exhaustion. I’ve been up to my
waist in sewage-laden water. I have duty (phone watch) form 0300 – 0500, then get a few more
hours of sleep, and then go do it some more. This is tiresome.

I really can’t write much, now. My hands are cut up, and raw. My mind is numb. After getting inside--and still wet--a raid was made on our compound. Just as I’m trying to wind down, I had to go into mental overdrive and be alert. A ten pound rifle will wear you out when you’re supporting it in the off-hand around a corner. My Humvee got hit by an RPG while it was parked in a lot 100 meters away. It really messed up the paint job. One can’t call Macco out here.

I have a bottle of water next to me. I keep thinking about how much I can’t wait to walk up to the tap in my home, turn it on, and be able to drink it. The water here comes straight out of the Euphrates. The further down the river one lives, the more filtration the water goes through--through human kidney filtration, that is. You can’t imagine a country with as much wealth as oil has brought in being so horribly unhygienic.

I can’t think too well right now, so I’m going to sign off.

Looking to come home,

Duane

I can’t keep my terminology straight—government center is the same thing as PCMOC. Got it.

Have you worked with the same governor since you’ve been there? What happened to his son who was kidnapped? Did he get him back? Where do the governor and his family live? If not in the government center, how does he get safely back and forth from home?

Do you want me to run this as part of an entry? You could pen a quick intro. I don’t think the AP will mind as long as we give proper credit. You haven’t told me much lately about your work with the governor. Do you have a photo with him?

Whenever you have time.

Take care,
(stay away from windows and roof)

Meg

On 2/21/06 7:14 AM, "Fish CWO2 Duane G (GCE 6th CAG CA Officer)" <FishDG@gcemnf-wiraq.usmc.mil> wrote:

Meg,

This is where I live. The Rasheed hotel looms over us out front. The governor and I are on a very familiar footing - hugs/kisses Iraqi style. Yes gotta run...
Scary. Is this the government center where you go? Is this the governor that you visited in earlier postings? The office where you were when the big IED hit?

Nice letter from the mayor of Tal 'Afar. I’m sure it means a lot to every soldier who has been there. And the mayor has better English than most Baylor students!

Meg

On 2/20/06 3:41 PM, "Fish CWO2 Duane G (GCE 6th CAG CA Officer)" <FishDG@gcemnf-wiraq.usmc.mil> wrote:

> Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
> > Meg,
> > Thought you might like to read this.
> > > Duane
> > > Marines defend one of main targets in Iraq ANTONIO CASTANEDA Associated
> > Press RAMADI, Iraq - In a carpeted office filled with oversized gold
> > embroidered chairs, the governor of troubled Anbar province talked about
> > his region's sagging infrastructure - over the rattle of machine-gun
> > fire and the thud of grenade launchers reverberating from the roof.
> > Gov. Maamoun Sami Rashid al-Alwani seemed almost oblivious to the
> > commotion as U.S. Marines in firing positions lined with sandbags and
> > bulletproof glass blasted away at an insurgent trying to plant a
> > roadside bomb nearby.
> > The government center is a favorite target in this city at the center of
> > Iraq's insurgency and dozens of Marines from the 3rd Battalion, 7th
> > Regiment live in one wing to fend off the frequent attacks.
> > Four Anbar governors have served in less than three years. One was
> > assassinated, another resigned after surviving an attack and two,
> > including the current one, have had sons kidnapped. Recently, local
> > tribal leaders who have met with U.S. commanders have been killed.
> > Marines posted on the roof have to stay sharp.
> > When their lieutenant approaches, they immediately pause and shout out
> > five
> > things: their name and rank, their gun's lateral limits, the direction
> > their gun is facing, guidelines to fire, and any nearby friendly units.
> > The idea is to make sure they are alert at all times.
> > "Honestly, sir, it's kind of a pleasure because it's not something that
> > everybody can say - that they helped build a government," Lance Cpl.
> > Brandon Crusha of Yukon, Okla., told a reporter as he glanced away from
> > a desolate street.
> > Marines said the pace of combat around the building has slowed since the
> > beginning of their tour last summer, but it can flare up at any moment
> > and wears on them.
> > "I'd be happy to go home and not shoot one more round. You can't go home
> > and talk to your buddies about shooting people. It's not a subject that
most people talk about," said Lance Cpl. Jeff Barrient.
"To see people die, your friends get hurt over seven months, it can't be explained unless you've been here," Barrient, 21, of Salinas, Calif., added, speaking in a cold, tiled room filled with bunkbeds as the Muslim call to prayer echoed from mosques down the street. "The actual price we've paid to help this country out - it's unexplainable."
Barrient spoke just minutes after a Marine radioed that a man had managed to elude fire and sprint away after dropping off a black backpack. Later it was found to contain an anti-tank mine.
An hour later, another report came in about a man with a rocket-propelled grenade launcher who had jumped out and tried to fire at the government center.
"There's a lot of foot traffic and civilians running around," said Lance Cpl. Ruben Valles, 21, of San Jose, Calif., who periodically volunteers to work shifts on the roof. "Sometimes they'll try to be discreet and throw a box down and move it in place with an attached string."
The neighborhood around the government center in central Ramadi is testament to the combat between U.S. troops and insurgents. Virtually every shop on the adjacent street is closed, alongside abandoned multistory buildings where insurgent snipers often lurk. Thousands of bullet holes pepper buildings, and several nearby structures have the walls of entire floors blown out, exposing support beams.
The nearby Rashid Hotel, once a favorite spot for gunmen, was recently destroyed by a U.S. airstrike.
A health complex to the south, another common post for insurgents, exhibits heavy damage.
"There's a lot of good people and doctors out there, but the insurgents go in there and bully them around," said 2nd Lt. Jordan Reese of Rockfield, Ill. He said Marines often have to search the hospital when pursuing gunmen.
Some aspects of life for townspeople continue near normal. Insurgents took note of a school to the west of the government center and rarely fire there.
A few blocks away, the narrow streets of the local market are busy with customers.
Only one man, nicknamed "Mr. Wilson" by the Marines who watch from the rooftop day and night, still lives near the government center. Marines said he stops his car as he approaches the building, waves to signal he is coming through, then proceeds to his house.
The adjacent streets have suffered. A nearby intersection, known as checkpoint 295, is a common spot where roadside bombs are laid. A police station abandoned last year by Iraqi officers amid a wave of insurgent attacks is now manned by Marines.
The U.S. military has started a program to clean up the neighborhood, but Iraqi workers who pick up rubble and trash work only in the gloom of night and still need U.S. guards. Gunmen fired on them recently but caused no injuries.
"We try to help the Iraqi people out as much as we can. We wish they'd help us out a little more," Barrient said.
Inside offices once used by municipal workers, Marines sleep on bunkbeds
> in dimly lit rooms. During a reporter’s afternoon visit, Marines cleaned
> their weapons in a murky hall while listening to Credence Clearwater
> Revival songs.
> > Marines manning rooftop posts stands shifts that last from four to 12
> > hours.
> > Some said they have grown to know the Marines they share roof duty with
> > so well that they can predict their movements and identify them by their
> > silhouettes.
> > Other spoke of night shifts where they fought to stay awake.
> > "Getting complacent is the wrong thing to do up there - you close your
> > eyes and you could be dead," Barrient said.
> 
> I put your new photo on the main "Letters from Iraq" page for now. I can repeat it on the new page
> when you send stuff, if you don't send me any more photos. I guess if I had to wear that flak jacket and
> all that other stuff all the time, I might like the weather to be cooler too.

Now, let me get this straight. Your mom makes everyone their OWN pie? Cool.
Do you get to choose the flavor? My husband would love that idea, because he has to compete with his
brothers for pecan pie. We’re going to his mom’s house on Friday, so I think I’ll tell them this idea. I’m
more of a pumpkin pie person, too. But I make an awesome lemon chess pie that’s my mother’s recipe.
That would be my choice.

There’s some Drano in the bottom of your box, if you haven’t made it to the bottom yet. It says not to
put it in toilets, but that’s for America, not Iraq. You do what you want--you’re the sewage expert! My
plumber (I’m an old-house person, so I’m buddies with the plumber) loves to tell stories about what
people put down their toilets. He has a maintenance contract with a few nursing homes, and those
stories are great. Lots of underclothes seem to go down the toilet in the nursing home. Handkerchiefs
too.

Sounds like you’re in the middle of a dangerous project. I didn't understand everything you said, like this
half-sentence: "because I had no intel on what his concept of ops was." Got lost in that Marine lingo. But
I do get that two guys have been hit while overseeing sewage projects, and I know that overseeing
sewage projects is what you do. I’m glad the foot-patrol message was wrong, too.

I probably won’t be back at my computer to post anything until next week, but I can read mail from
home.

Take care,

Meg

On 12/28/05 4:31 AM, "Fish CWO2 Duane G (GCE 6th CAG CA Officer)"
<FishDG@gcemnf-wiraq.usmc.mil> wrote:
Meg,

I did receive the box from the Alumni Center on Christmas. We were so busy that I forgot to open any of my presents until the 26th. Thank you for the socks, gloves, and the large t-shirt. I'm behemothine, so I re-gifted (Seinfeld) it to one of the Marines in my room. He appreciated it and sends his thanks.

We did have a meal, but all I ate was pumpkin pie. My mom makes a pie for each person that is in for the holidays, and then we graze on it for the days that we're there. No disappointments that way.

I'm exhausted. I'm not getting to bed because of all the things bouncing around in my head. Once I hit the rack I'm out, but I keep thinking there is something else to do. I had to oversee the logistics for getting the sewage workers onto the main rd here. The Major that was doing it got hit by a mortar while standing inside a hardened building. Shrapnel pierced the door, and caught him between his helmet and neck guard. It cut his neck deeply, but missed the carotid, and jugular. No nerve damage as best anybody can tell. I didn't get much sleep, because I had no intel on what his concept of ops was. A Marine showed up this morning and I was able to get things coordinated. This op is going on a kiss and a prayer.

Another one of the CAG Marines was hit by an IED this morning while overseeing another project about 1 mile NE of the GC. He took shrapnel in the check and calf.

I really don't know how I'm going to decompress when I get home. I'm handling things okay here, but this is taking its toll. I was misinformed this morning that I was to head up a 4 man foot patrol to provide over-watch for the sewage workers. All I could think is, "here I go into the fray." It was nice to find out that the messenger was wrong.

There are so many things going on, yet it seems like a cross between Catch-22, and Groundhog Day. We'll call the movie Catch 22 Groundhogs (The Art of Herding Cats.) We had the worst nightmare problem with the toilets yesterday. We still continue to have visitors that bring in baby wipes and flush them down the pipes. - EVEN WITH NOTICES POSTED!

Please don't post this. I'll have to get some of the details cleared for print. I'll incorporate what I can into a larger missive.

I'm glad you had a good time with your family. Yes it is very brisk here, and if it was raining, it would be bone-chilling. I like it.
Have a good day, flush a toilet for me, and smile.

Ever onward,

Duane

-----Original Message-----
From: Cullar, Meg [mailto:Meg_Cullar@baylor.edu]
Sent: Wednesday, December 28, 2005 3:09 AM
To: Fish CWO2 Duane G (GCE 6th CAG CA Officer)
Subject: RE: PLEASE PROOFREAD

Duane:

Everybody at my house it doing well--thanks. We had a pretty relaxed Christmas, with my best friend and her husband over for dinner. Their 20-year-old son had a coughing virus thing, so he didn't come. With our sons 15 and 18, it was a fairly adult affair--except, of course, for the 15-year-old's refusing to eat the potato casserole because it had onions in it. Horrors. Could there be anything worse than onions? This weekend we'll go see my husband's family, with many small ones running around and screaming and not eating onions.

How was Christmas in Ramadi? (My spell-checker would like to believe that you are instead at a "Ramada," which I'm sure would also be your choice.) I guess it's cold there. I don't know much except what's on the news, and I've noticed that not a lot of reporters go to Ramadi. They seem to prefer the Green Zone in Baghdad. Go figure. No more IEDs in your neighborhood, I hope. The bombs are huge now, aren't they?

It was about 78 degrees here on Christmas day, which I' sure you know. Not very Christmas-like, but I don't care. We had appetizers out on the back porch, and it was lovely. That is precisely why I don't live in Minnesota, so I never complain about balmy December weather. There are worse things. I save my complaining for cold rain.

The folks at the alumni association sent you a big box of stuff. Did it come? I think it went out on the 12th or 13th. Let me know when (if) it arrives, because I'm worrying about it. The guy at the post office was a little nuts, and I'm not too sure I did everything correctly or that everything he told me was accurate.

I might be in the office this week, and if so, I'll post your latest photo. I like it. Finally, you're sending me pictures where I can actually see you! If you send me a new installment, I'll get up there and post it.
Take care,

Meg

______________________________

From: Fish CWO2 Duane G (GCE 6th CAG CA Officer)  
[mailto:FishDG@gcemnf-wiraq.usmc.mil]

Sent: Tue 12/27/2005 11:01 AM

To: dgfish@vvm.com; Cowart SSgt Duane D; Jon & Annie Herrington; Cullar, Meg

Subject: FW: PLEASE PROOFREAD

Classification: UNCLASSIFIED

I think I'll take on a new MOS - combat correspondent.

Hope everybody is doing well.

Another installment will be coming soon.

Duane